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FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY  
& MINISTRY

## Salvation AND Sovereignty

A MOLINIST APPROACH

Kenneth Keathley

A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism

## WHOSOEVER WILL

Edited by  
DAVID L. ALLEN and STEVE W. LEMKE

REFLECTIONS FROM  
THE JOHN 3:16 CONFERENCE

### Baptists and the Doctrine of Salvation



A RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# THE JOURNAL

## FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: BAPTISTS AND THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

DR. STEVE W. LEMKE

No doctrine is more central to the Christian faith than the doctrine of salvation, and issues related to this doctrine has been debated through the years from a variety of perspectives. This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* focuses on a couple of recent books which center on soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), although they both address numerous theological issues. Authors from diverse perspectives have been sought to evaluate each of these books, both published by Broadman and Holman, from their own perspective.

***Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five Point Calvinism: Reflections on the John 3:16 Conference***, ed. David Allen and Steve Lemke

The Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, along with Jerry Vines Ministries and five other Baptist seminaries and colleges, helped sponsor the John 3:16 Conference several years ago at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia. The speakers at the conference included four former presidents of the SBC, three SBC entity heads, and the deans of three of the largest SBC seminaries. Flowing from that conference is a book entitled *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five Point Calvinism: Reflections on the John 3:16 Conference*, co-edited by David Allen and by Baptist Center Director and John 3:16 Conference speaker, Steve Lemke. The contributors included nine different faculty members from four Baptist seminaries and colleges. Because I serve as Editor of the *Journal*, I had some reluctance to give our book this amount of attention. However, *Whosoever Will* has been something of an instant success, ranking number 1 at various times in four different categories in the amazon.com sales rankings (“Baptist,” “Systematic Theology,” “Calvinism,” and “Other Denominations”). Although more technical theological works rarely sell widely, *Whosoever Will* has ranked as high as in the top 8,000 of the hundreds of thousands of books sold on amazon.com. Furthermore, on the christianbooks.com website, *Whosoever Will* was ranked 19th out of 2,166 books in the area of “Doctrinal Theology,” and has been ranked first in the “Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom category. A copy of *Whosoever Will* has even been included in a time capsule dedicated at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Therefore, I believe it has drawn attention sufficient to validate a multiperspectival response.

The first section of *Whosoever Will* highlights the plenary speakers at the John 3:16 Conference, each of whom addressed a key component of the traditional five points of Reformed soteriology flowing from the Synod of Dort. This section is introduced by a sermon by Jerry Vines (Director of Jerry Vines Ministries, former SBC President, and former Pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL) on the soteriological implications of the John 3:16 text that was the namesake of the conference. Paige Patterson (President, Professor of Theology, and L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, former SBC President) provides a biblical and theological critique of



“Total Depravity.” In “Congruent Election: Understanding Salvation from an ‘Eternal Now’ Perspective,” Richard Land (President of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission) critiques “Unconditional Election” and proposes an alternative of “Congruent Election.” David L. Allen (Dean of the School of Theology, Professor of Preaching, George W. Truett Chair of Ministry, and Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a carefully documented examination of the Calvinists who reject the doctrine of “Limited Atonement,” and challenges the scriptural basis for the doctrine. Steve Lemke (Provost, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, McFarland Chair of Theology, Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, and Editor of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) questions the biblical foundation and theological adequacy of the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace. Ken Keathley (Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) affirms the security of the believer while providing a critique of the view of perseverance held by some Calvinists.

In the second section of the book, five new chapters are added on theological and ministry issues arising from Calvinism that were not addressed in the conference. In “Was Calvin a Calvinist?: Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement,” Kevin Kennedy (Assistant Professor of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) questions whether Calvin himself held some of the views advocated by some modern Calvinists. Malcolm Yarnell (Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Center for Theological Research, Director of the Oxford Study Program, and Editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a richly documented assessment of a number of ecclesiological issues for Baptists in regard to Calvinism. R. Alan Streett (Professor of Evangelism and Pastoral Ministry, W. A. Criswell Chair of Expository Preaching, and Editor of the *Criswell Theological Review* at Criswell College) addresses the issue of the appropriateness of offering public invitations or altar calls in churches, which are rejected by some Calvinists. Jeremy Evans (Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) raises questions about whether the kind of determinism held by some Calvinists is consistent with Scripture, logic, and human experience. Finally, in “Evil and God’s Sovereignty,” Bruce Little (Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) challenges the adequacy of the answer to the problem of evil proposed by some varieties of Calvinism, especially in regard to the glory and holiness of God

This book has evoked many responses from across the theological spectrum. In this issue of the *Journal*, we have invited authors from three perspectives to critique the book – Greg Wills (Associate Dean for Theology and Tradition, Director of the Center for the Study of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Professor of Church History at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) will provide a response from a Calvinist perspective; Matthew Pinson (President and Professor of History, Free Will Baptist Bible College) addresses the book from a Reformed Arminian perspective, and Fred Smith (Associate Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School) evaluates the book from what might be described as a mainstream/majoritarian Southern Baptist perspective (more on this in the next paragraph).

One of the interesting aspects of the reactions to *Whosoever Will*, at least to those of us associated with the book, is that our reviewers have tended to label us as being either of

two extremes: Arminians or Calvinists. One book from an Arminian perspective described the perspective in *Whosoever Will* as “moderate Calvinist.”<sup>1</sup> Another Arminian labeled the contributors to *Whosoever Will* as “anti-Calvinist, and that “all the authors are Arminian in the classical sense,” while at the same time questioning why the authors were at “so much distance from Arminianism” and objecting to their criticism of Arminianism.<sup>2</sup> However, in an issue of the *Founders Journal* dedicated to critiquing *Whosoever Will* from a Calvinist perspective, one article sought to answer the “Arminian objections” presented in the book,<sup>3</sup> while another opined that the authors should “accept the judgment that they defend a classically Arminian, or openness, position.”<sup>4</sup> That is quite a range – from moderate Calvinist to anti-Calvinist, from critics of Arminianism to rank openness of God Arminians!

In response to this tendency toward extremist labeling in some of the early reviewers, some of the contributors to *Whosoever Will* issued a joint statement called, “Neither Calvinist Nor Arminian, But Baptist.” Our position is neither fully Arminian nor Calvinist, but intentionally maintains the tension between divine sovereignty and human freewill which we see affirmed in Scripture. It is frustrating to us that others would try to force us into either of the more extreme positions (i.e., *reducio ad Arminian* or *reducio ad Calvinian*). Indeed, we would prefer expressing our soteriological beliefs directly from Scripture rather than through a filter relevant to Reformed theology, but this five-point grid is where soteriological positions tend to be compared. We understand our “Calminian” perspective to be a strong majority within the Southern Baptist Convention. Indeed, LifeWay Research statistics indicate that five-point Calvinism is a small minority (roughly 10 percent) among Southern Baptists as a whole.<sup>5</sup> *It is surprising, then, that some recent multiviews books addressing issues* such as election include Calvinist perspectives and Arminian/Openness of God perspectives, but ignore the majority view of America’s largest Protestant denomination, not to mention other Baptist traditions. This response, “Neither Calvinist Nor Arminian, But Baptist” is included to reiterate claims made repeatedly in *Whosoever Will* itself, as a clarification of the mainstream/majoritarian position we defend in the book.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Matthew Pinson, “Introduction,” *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*, by Leroy Forlines (Nashville: Randall House, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Roger Olson, review of *Whosoever Will*, on the Baptist Theology website at <http://www.baptisttheology.org/WhosoeverWill.cfm>. See also Olson’s additional review, “A Good, New, Non-Arminian, Arminian Book,” available on the Roger Olson website at <http://rogereolson.com/2010/09/02/a-good-new-non-arminian-arminian-book>.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Barrett, “Is Irresistible Grace Unbiblical? A Response to Steve Lemke’s Arminian Objections,” *Founders Journal* 82, rep. ed. (Fall 2010), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Nettles, review of *Whosoever Will*, in *Founders Journal* 82, reprint issue (Fall 2010), 4.

<sup>5</sup> See L. Lovelace, “10 Percent of SBC Pastors Call Themselves 5-Point Calvinists,” *Baptist Press*, September 18, 2006, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=23993>.

***Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, by Ken Keathley**

*The second book addressed in this issue of the Journal is Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, by Ken Keathley, who serves as Vice President for Academic Affairs at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. This volume has an interesting history, having been begun in response to the encouragement of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Chuck Kelley. It was initially a coauthored project with Baptist Center founder and NOBTS Theology Professor Stan Norman when Keathley was also a faculty member at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, but circumstances led to Keathley completing the book alone. Keathley was the only person to make a presentation at both the Building Bridges Conference and the John 3:16 Conference, and traces of these presentations can be found both books relating to these conferences, as well as to *Salvation and Sovereignty*. Echoes of Keathley's presentation at the Building Bridges conference, "A Molinist View of Election: How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian"<sup>6</sup> are seen in *Salvation and Sovereignty*, and Keathley's chapter on perseverance is foundationally the same in both *Whoever Will* and in *Salvation and Sovereignty*.

Four thinkers were asked to evaluate this significant contribution of *Salvation and Sovereignty*, which proposes Molinism as a compromise approach to resolve the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom, particularly with regard to soteriology. First, Dr. Keathley offers a brief introduction to the book. Then Deidre Richardson, a student of Keathley's at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, evaluates the book from an Arminian perspective. Steve Lemke (Provost, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, and McFarland Chair of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) and Steve Ladd (Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) provide a response to in *Salvation and Sovereignty* from the mainstream/majoritarian Baptist perspective. A Calvinist critique was sought from another author, but unfortunately because of other pressing writing assignments he was not able to complete his review essay in time for publication in this issue. We hope to publish his article in a later issue. However, our prayer is that this issue of the *Journal* will be of help to Baptists in assessing these two recent Broadman and Holman books and the profoundly important issues they address.

***Future Issues of the Journal***

The editorial staff of the Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry apologize that the Spring 2010 issue has been so delayed. We had to delay to provide our busy contributors time to complete their assignments, or in some cases to take up assignments on fairly short notice that others simply did not have time to complete. However, we hope to catch up over the next six months with an issue on Christian Ethics and another issue on theological issues. We also intend to produce a *feestschrift* in honor of longtime NOBTS Church History professor Dan Holcomb. We invite contributors to submit articles on these themes, as well as book reviews in any area of theology and ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> Ken Keathley, "A Molinist View of Election: How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. Brad Waggoner and Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008), 195-215.

### *Upcoming Baptist Center Events and Resources*

We look forward to two events co-sponsored by the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry in the next few months. We will be hosting a **Baptist Center conference** in association with the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum on the New Orleans campus on Friday afternoon, February 25<sup>th</sup>. Matthew Pinson, President and Professor of History at Free Will Baptist Bible College, is presenting a paper entitled “*Thomas Grantham's Theology of Atonement and Justification*,” in which Pinson contrasts the Reformed or Classical Arminian soteriology of General Baptist Thomas Grantham from the Wesleyan Arminian John Goodwin. A panel of scholars will interact with Pinson on this subject.

We are also pleased to announce that the Baptist Center is co-sponsoring the **Power in the Pulpit Conference** at Metro First Baptist Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, on March 3-4. Initiated by Jerry Vines Ministries, the conference features four of the best-known expository preachers in the SBC: Jerry Vines, Jim Shaddix, David Platt, and David Allen. Vines, Shaddix, and Platt are all graduates of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, with Shaddix and Platt having served as professors of Preaching and as Dean of the Chapel at NOBTS. Vines and Shaddix published the excellent text on expository preaching from which the conference draws its name, *Power in the Pulpit*. David Allen is Dean of the School of Theology and Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Allen is also a co-editor and contributor to *Whosoever Will*.

Steve Lemke and David Allen are also co-editing another book flowing from the Acts 1:11 Conference, sponsored by Jerry Vines Ministries the year after the John 3:16 Conference. Entitled ***The Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective***, the book will feature the presentations made at the conference by former SBC President Jerry Vines, Liberty Seminary professor Ergun Caner, Southeastern Seminary President Danny Akin, Southwestern Seminary President Paige Patterson, Southwestern Seminary Dean David Allen, ERLC President Richard Land, and evangelist Junior Hill, as well as new chapters by Stan Norman (Provost at Oklahoma Baptist University and former Director of the NOBTS Baptist Center), Craig Blaising (Provost and New Testament professor at Southwestern Seminary), Lamar Cooper (Provost and Old Testament professor at Criswell College), Steven Cox (Research Professor of New Testament and Greek at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary), and Michael Vlach (Professor of Theology at the Master's Seminary and Director of the Theological Studies website). We anticipate the book will be released in summer 2011.

The Baptist Center also hopes to announce our partnership with a well-known **Baptist blog** in the near future. Our desire is that this blog could be a vehicle for Baptists communication with other Baptists about issues of interest and importance. We hope to be able to announce this partnership within the next few weeks. Thanks for your interest in and support for the work of the Baptist Center!

Steve Lemke,  
Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, and  
Editor of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*



SECTION 1

**RESPONSES TO *WHOSOEVER WILL*: A  
BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF  
*FIVE-POINT CALVINISM***

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE  
GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT  
WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT  
PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.”

JOHN 3:16

# WHOSOEVER WILL: A REVIEW ESSAY

GREGORY A. WILLS<sup>1</sup>

Calvinism has grown in popularity among Southern Baptists in the past generation, just as it has among evangelicals broadly. Most Southern Baptist ministers and laypersons however do not consider themselves Calvinists. It is unsurprising then that as Calvinism grows in popularity in the denomination, it should meet with some opposition. Non-Calvinist Southern Baptists believe that Calvinism is in error in some of its core beliefs, and many fear that it undermines commitment to evangelism and missions.

In 2008 a number of non-Calvinist Southern Baptist leaders decided that the time had come to offer a public response to Calvinism. They organized the “John 3:16” conference and designed it to offer an alternative to five-point Calvinism. This book derives from that conference. The first six chapters were presented at the conference. The final five chapters were added subsequently.<sup>2</sup>

Five-point Calvinism refers to the five positions affirmed by the Synod of Dort in 1619 in response to the objections of the new Arminian movement against the confession of faith of the Dutch church. In the twentieth century these five points have been conveniently remembered in English by the acronym TULIP, standing for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

In the interest of full disclosure, I believe that Calvinism represents a generally correct interpretation of the Bible. Many of my heroes in the gospel ministry have been Calvinists—such men as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Leland, Adoniram Judson, Jesse Mercer, Basil Manly, James Boyce, James Gambrell, and Charles Spurgeon. Although I care little for TULIPs and find the name Calvinist rather distasteful, these are the commonly accepted terms and I generally will employ them.

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory A. Wills (PhD, Emory University) is Professor of Church History, Associate Dean, Theology and Tradition, and Director of the Center for the Study of the Southern Baptist Convention at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>2</sup>This book continues a public discussion concerning Southern Baptist Calvinism that began when a number of Southern Baptist leaders and pastors convened the “Building Bridges” conference in 2007. See Brad J. Waggoner and E. Ray Clendenen, eds., *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

### Southern Baptists, Calvinism, and the Sandy Creek Tradition

Southern Baptist discussions regarding Calvinism usually involve some discussion of how much Calvinism existed in the Southern Baptist past. History does not establish truth, but historical precedent lends credibility to claims of legitimacy. Calvinists and non-Calvinists both have claimed that the denomination's theological heritage endorses their position. In this volume, Richard Land and David Allen for example suggest that the prevailing theology of Southern Baptists has been the "neither Calvinist nor Arminian" beliefs of the Separate Baptists, sometimes called the Sandy Creek tradition (46-51, 104-5). "The Separate Baptist Sandy Creek tradition has been the melody for Southern Baptists," Land wrote. "Southern Baptists are immersed in Sandy Creek" (50, 105).

The Separate Baptists, who originated in New England's Great Awakening, zealously preached the gospel in the South from the 1750s to the 1790s and established a movement that shaped Southern Baptists deeply. With a few exceptions, however, Separate Baptists were Calvinists.<sup>3</sup> Land cites Yale historian Sydney Ahlstrom to support his claim that the Separates were not Calvinists, despite Ahlstrom's assertion that the "Baptist tradition was distinctly Reformed" and that the Separate Baptists generally agreed with the Calvinistic Philadelphia Confession.<sup>4</sup> John Taylor, one of the most celebrated of the Separate Baptist preachers, recalled that the church covenants of Separate Baptist churches were "truly Calvinistic."<sup>5</sup> The first Baptist church in Georgia, for example, was planted by Sandy Creek evangelist Daniel Marshall and adopted a covenant that committed members to support "the great doctrines of election, effectual calling [now called irresistible grace], particular redemption [now called limited atonement]," among others, while explicitly "denying the Arian, Socinian, and Arminian errors, and every other principle contrary to the word of God."<sup>6</sup>

James Ireland, another celebrated Separate Baptist preacher, said that both Separate and Regular Baptists "were Calvinistic in their sentiments."<sup>7</sup> The Dover Baptist Association,

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<sup>3</sup>E. Brooks Holifield, in the most recent scholarly discussion of early Baptist theology, concluded that "Calvinism became the predominant Baptist dialect." See E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 273-90 [quote on 279].

<sup>4</sup>See Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 320-1.

<sup>5</sup>John Taylor, *A History of Ten Baptist Churches*, 2nd ed. (Bloomfield, KY: Wm. H. Holmes, 1827), 10.

<sup>6</sup>Church Book, Kiokee Baptist Church, Columbia Co., Ga., microfilm, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>7</sup>James Ireland, *The Life of the Rev. James Ireland* (Winchester, VA: J. Foster, 1819), 136. Ireland was convinced of the doctrine of unconditional election from the time of his conversion, and remembered that he concluded then that "there was such a thing as God's electing love in Christ, and of grace being given to such before the world" (ibid., 92-3).

which was the largest of the Separate Baptist associations in Virginia, adopted a statement in 1811 acknowledging that “it is well known that the Baptists of Virginia generally hold the doctrines commonly called Calvinism.”<sup>8</sup> Early Baptist historians said the same.<sup>9</sup>

Land references the Separate Baptist preacher John Leland as especially significant in establishing the non-Calvinist character of Separate Baptist doctrine, due to his “enormous influence” (46). John Leland was influential, but he was in fact a five-point Calvinist. After preaching the gospel for fifty-seven years, Leland told fellow preacher James Whitsitt that he still believed the doctrines which he had learned in his youth, including election, “that Christ did, before the foundation of the world, predestinate a certain number of the human family for his bride, to bring to grace and glory,” and particular redemption, “that Jesus died for sinners, and for his elect sheep only.”<sup>10</sup>

The book’s chief interest however is not history. It seeks rather to establish the unscriptural character of the five points of Calvinism.

### Total Depravity

Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, affirms the doctrine of total depravity but explains it in a Wesleyan fashion at some points. He affirms that “humans are totally depraved” and that the depravity is the result of God visiting the sin of Adam upon his posterity (43). He endorses Augustus H. Strong’s view that Adam’s sin passed on to all humans not by virtue of imputation, but by virtue of their “natural” or real union with Adam—all humans were united organically to Adam in seed though not individually (37). The depravity renders all persons, Patterson explains, spiritually blind and deaf, and “unable to do anything to save themselves” (36).

Traditional Wesleyans and Calvinists agree that prevenient or preregenerating grace is necessary to the conversion of any sinner. Without it, because of depravity, no one can turn from their love of sin to receive the gospel. They differ however in the character and extent of that grace. Calvinists believe that the Holy Spirit visits prevenient grace upon the

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<sup>8</sup>Dover Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1811, 7. Separate Baptists and Regular Baptists in Virginia agreed in the 1780s that they believed the same doctrines and practices, announced their full ecclesiastical fellowship with one another, and no longer called themselves Separates and Regulars.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America*, vol. 2 (Boston: Lincoln and Edmands, 1813), 61, 237; J. H. Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: n.p., 1885), 107, 482.

<sup>10</sup>John Leland, “Anonymously to Elder James Whitsitt,” in John Leland, *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), 625. Leland argued at some length elsewhere in favor of total depravity, limited atonement (“If therefore the atonement is proved to be universal, it follows of course that salvation is universal.”), and effectual calling in opposition to the innovations of New Divinity Calvinism (Appendix, “The First Rise of Sin,” in *ibid.*, 161-70).

elect alone and that it is always effective in turning a sinner from the love of sin to love of Christ and reception of the gospel. It is a grace that brings about conversion. They traditionally refer to it as effectual calling or irresistible grace.

Patterson argues in favor of the Wesleyan view that prevenient grace extends to all persons alike. The Holy Spirit gives to all sinners sufficient grace to turn them from their love of sin to love of Christ, if only they choose to cooperate with rather than resist the Spirit's work. Quoting Arminian scholar Robert Picirilli, Patterson affirms that this preregenerating grace "opens the heart" of the unregenerate" and "enables them to respond positively in faith" (43). He seems to argue that the Spirit has removed the blindness and opened the hearts of all sinners equally.

Calvinists reject this view of prevenient grace. The tenor of scripture seems to run in the opposite direction, inasmuch as so many passages speak of the blindness and hardness of unbelievers. In the Wesleyan view, prevenient grace has removed the blindness, but the Bible says that it is still there because of the heart's corruption. Paul for example asserts that the gospel is veiled to the lost, since Satan has "blinded the minds of the unbelieving" (2 Cor 4:4).<sup>11</sup>

The strongest argument in favor of the Wesleyan view is philosophical. It is the argument that since God commands all sinners to repent and believe the gospel, therefore all sinners are fully able to respond. Calvinists believe that all sinners have the real *natural ability* to repent of their sins and believe the gospel. They believe that the Bible teaches that sinners however lack the *moral ability* to repent and receive the gospel. They do not want to confess their sins, abandon their autonomy, and submit to their Creator. They have the power to choose and are not coerced in their choice. They choose as freely to reject Christ and his gospel as they do in all other decisions. The problem is not a lack of power but a lack of will. They do not want to repent.

God required Adam to love and obey him. When Adam disobeyed, the cosmic fall was the result, which rendered it impossible for humans to obey God, since part of the punishment of sin was deliverance of Adam and his posterity to a corrupt nature. Adam chose to rebel, so God punished him by giving Adam's heart over to love of rebellion. Moral inability is not unjust—it is rather the just punishment of Adam's sin. Adam chose the path of rebellion. God allowed Adam to give his heart to it. All persons since Adam have endorsed his rebellion by their own voluntary sin.<sup>12</sup>

If the American command had ordered a battleship in World War II to cross the Atlantic to bombard enemy positions, and the sailors decided instead to mutiny and to scuttle the ship, they could not subsequently excuse their disobedience by pleading they were unable to obey the command, since they had no ship. Their inability was a result a voluntary course of disobedience. So it is with human moral inability. The inability to repent and

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<sup>11</sup>See also such passages as Matt 11:20-27; 13:11-15; Jn 3:19; 6:37-39, 44-45, 65; 7:17; 8:43-47; 9:39; 10:25-28; Eph 5:8; 1 Pet 2:9; I Jn 2:9-11.

<sup>12</sup>See for example, Rom 3:9-20, 5:12-21, and 7:13-25.



believe derives from fallen humanity's inveterate love of sin and is the result of Adam's voluntary course of disobedience.

And what if the sailors' mutiny hardened into a hatred of their commander that was so great that they preferred to perish in the North Atlantic rather than to be rescued and returned to naval duty? Though in great peril, the sailors would refuse to cooperate with their intended rescuers. Sinners according to scripture are in a similar condition. They are not clamoring to return to the Lord's service, and prefer suffering and death to submission to God through repentance and faith in Christ. Jesus told the disciples that the world cannot receive the Spirit (Jn 14:17) and that the world hates them because it hated him (Jn 15:18-19), in order that the scripture might be fulfilled: "They hated me without a cause" (Jn 15:25). Their inability resides in their perverted desires.

### Unconditional Election

Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, argues for a unique form of conditional election that he calls "congruent election." He argues that God elects those who respond to God's offer of grace, but the election is simultaneous to the human response. When the Bible speaks of election in terms of foreknowledge and predestination, God is using phenomenological language, because human beings experience time—a before and an after. But God, Land argues, does not experience time: "God lives in the Eternal Now." God has therefore always experienced the believer's own acceptance of the gospel as a present experience, and this is the basis of God's election. "God's experience of my response to, and relationship with, Him has always caused Him to deal differently with me than He does with a person with whom God's eternal experience has been rebellion and rejection" (58-9).

This interpretation of biblical election leans heavily on the speculative philosophical notion that God does not experience time. One does not find this notion in scripture. God repeatedly speaks of before and after, not merely in dealing with human history, but in dealing with his own activities. The Holy Spirit reveals at the beginning of the Bible that "In the beginning, God created." There was a *when* with God. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth," God asked Job. Jesus is called the Ancient of Days and the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He appeals to *before* as evidence of his deity, "Before Abraham was, I am." The Holy Spirit testifies that God knows things before they happen, not that he experiences them as always happening in his experience of an eternal now.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The idea is also epistemologically problematic. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for human minds to form a meaningful conception of an eternal now. It is like trying of conceive of a state in which nothing exists—the mind is powerless to conceptualize such a state and rebels against the endeavor. Human experience, consciousness, and thought seem to require the element of time. If God does not experience time, I do not see how humans have the capacity to discover the fact. For a defense of the concept of God's timelessness, however, see Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). See also the critiques of Alan Padgett, William Lane Craig, and Nicholas Wolterstorff in Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

The appeal of the speculative notion of a divine “eternal now” is that when the Bible speaks of God electing persons to salvation, it would mean that God did not elect persons unconditionally in advance of birth. Instead, his election of individuals would be “simultaneous” and logically “consequent” to a sinner’s choice to receive the gospel. But in the doctrine of conditional election, in which God chooses as a result of a person’s reception of the gospel, it is hard to see how this can be called election in any meaningful sense. It is even harder to see how it is consistent with the New Testament’s use of the concept. Land does not address the New Testament texts except to suggest that Romans 9-11 teaches that national election is unconditional but individual election is conditional (53-55). Romans 9-11 indeed addresses the issue of Israel’s national election, but it does so in order to explain the fact that most Jews individually rejected the gospel and many Gentiles received it. National election did not result in the Jews’ individual acceptance of the gospel, but individual election led to individual faith and salvation. Paul explains that the rejection of Jesus by national Israel does not discredit the gospel, for among national Israel were many who were not individually elected to salvation.<sup>14</sup>

But Paul in fact spoke throughout Romans 9-11 of individual election. God’s election of Isaac, Paul says, was “not because of works” (Rom. 9:11). This makes little sense in terms of an eternal now. Paul’s point is that before Isaac or Esau had done anything, God chose Isaac and did not choose Esau, “though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad” (Rom 9:11).

The basic objection against unconditional election and against Calvinism generally, is that it makes God unfair. Calvinism holds that the Bible teaches that God chose some persons before the foundation of world to receive eternal life, not based on foresight of the individual’s faith but on God’s mere mercy in Christ. Many feel that it would be unjust for God to choose to give saving grace to some which he chooses to withhold from others.

God’s justice is impartial. But his grace is particular and discriminating. He shows favor and undeserved kindness to some that he does not show to others. There is no unfairness with God if he deals justly with all persons, and at the same time shows kindness to some more highly than they deserve. J. Newton Brown, a nineteenth-century Baptist leader, reminded the Baptists of his day that non-elect persons had no ground of complaint. “The condition of those not chosen,” Brown wrote, is “no worse than if there had been none chosen.” All persons deserve eternal judgment. God is generous toward some by bestowing grace and is fair to others by rendering justice. “If you are lost,” Brown wrote, “it will not be because you are not elected, nor because others were, but because you preferred your sins to the Savior, and then your eye was evil because God was good.”<sup>15</sup> I concur with Brown, who was also the chief drafter and promoter of the New Hampshire Confession.

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<sup>14</sup>For a helpful discussion of these issues, see Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election?,” in Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 89-106.

<sup>15</sup>J. Newton Brown, *Objections against Election Considered* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), 6.

### Limited Atonement

David Allen, dean of the school of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, argues against the doctrine of limited atonement principally by construing it as a marginal or extreme position within historical Calvinism. Many Calvinists, Allen argues, rejected limited atonement in favor of universal atonement, among them Calvin, Cranmer, Bunyan, Ursinus, Edwards, Hodge, as well as many of the delegates to the Synod of Dort and to the Westminster Assembly. “All were Calvinists, and all did not teach limited atonement,” Allen asserts. “Such a claim often shocks Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike” (67).

To sustain this claim, Allen defines limited atonement strictly in terms of John Owen’s double-payment argument for it. The key point for Allen is that Owen argued that if Christ died for all persons, it would mean that God unjustly and illogically punished the sins of unbelievers twice, once in Christ’s death, and again in their eternal torment. Owen did indeed argue that the “second payment of a debt . . . is not answerable to the justice which God demonstrated in setting forth Christ to be a propitiation for our sins,” and that is not “probable” that “God calls any to a second payment” for whom Christ made a full satisfaction of their sins.<sup>16</sup> But Owen places little weight on this point.

Owen placed the burden of his argument for limited atonement upon the meaning of such terms as reconciliation, ransom, and satisfaction. He believed that the Bible’s descriptions of the atonement in such terms as ransom, redemption, and propitiation did not refer to its sufficiency but to its efficiency. The Bible, for example, did not teach that the atonement made ransom possible, but that it was an actual ransom. Ransom thus did not mean that a sufficient price was paid, but that the payment was effective in actually securing the ransom of all for whom it was intended.<sup>17</sup> That is why Owen believed that it was a logical absurdity to affirm that the atonement was a ransom for all persons. Under the doctrine of universal redemption, Owen said, “a price is paid for all, yet few delivered; the redemption of all is consummated, yet few of them redeemed; the judge satisfied, the jailor conquered, yet the prisoner enthralled. If there be a universal redemption of all, then all men are redeemed.”<sup>18</sup> Universal redemption, Owen held, was therefore unscriptural.

Arminians replied that lost persons are not pardoned because of their unbelief. Owen answered that unbelief was one of the chief offenses for which Christ died. If he atoned for all the sins of all persons, then unbelief was among the sins for which he made atonement. If Christ made atonement for unbelief, then why should it hinder the release of the captive more than other sins?<sup>19</sup> If Christ atoned for all the sins of all persons, Owen

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<sup>16</sup>John Owen, *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu, Or, the Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 3d ed. (Falkirk: T. Johnston, 1799), 194-5.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 228-9.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

concluded repeatedly, all persons should be redeemed. Owen's argument relied not so much on the double-payment argument as on the Bible's teaching that Christ's death secured actual ransom, reconciliation, and satisfaction.

Much of the rest of Allen's argument consists in quoting various Calvinists asserting universal aspects of the atonement. Allen has more than two pages of quotes from Calvin in which Calvin affirms that God calls all persons to faith in Christ and offers grace to all persons, and that Christ redeemed all persons by his blood. This is followed by similar quotes from more than a dozen other prominent Calvinists from Ursinus to Dabney.

Allen is right that most Calvinist preachers have held that Christ died for all persons in some sense. Calvin believed this. So did Edwards and Hodge and Boyce and Dabney. His death for all was such that any person, even Judas, if he should repent and believe the gospel, would not be rejected but would receive mercy. Most Calvinists have held that Jesus' sacrificial death was universal in that it made all men salvable, contingent on their repentance and faith in Christ.

But Allen is incorrect to argue that such a position is not limited atonement, for these same theologians affirmed that the atonement was in important respects particular to the elect.

Take Calvin for example. Calvin nowhere affirmed explicitly a limited atonement, and in places affirmed universal characteristics of the atonement. But in a number of places Calvin affirmed that the atonement was particular to the elect. Calvin held that I John 2:2 did not teach that Christ made propitiation for all people without exception but rather that propitiation extended "to the whole Church." Calvin held that propitiation was limited to those who received the gospel. "Under the word all or whole, he [John] does not include the reprobate, but designates those who believe."<sup>20</sup> Calvin similarly said that "all men" in Titus 2:11 "does not mean individual men," but rather "classes or various ranks of life." Calvin interprets "ransom for all" in I Tim 2:6 in the same manner: "The universal term *all* must always be referred to classes of men and not to persons, as if he had said, that not only Jews, but Gentiles also, not only persons of humble rank, but princes also, were redeemed by the death of Christ."<sup>21</sup> This kind of interpretation has little appeal from a general atonement point of view.<sup>22</sup> It also reveals a complexity in Calvin that is not always recognized by those wishing to locate him in their camp. Naturally, this cuts in both directions. In this case, Allen does not take notice of such passages in Calvin and does not attempt to square them with Calvin's affirmations of universal aspects of the atonement.

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<sup>20</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), vol. 22, second part, 173 [I Jn 2:2].

<sup>21</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, second part, 57, 318 [I Tim 2:5, Tit 2:11].

<sup>22</sup>For a particularist discussion of Calvin's views, see Roger Nicole, "John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985).

Charles Hodge and Robert Dabney argued that Owen's argument against double punishment was invalid to establish the truth of particular redemption, and they argued for universal aspects of the atonement. Both however taught that particular redemption was scriptural. Dabney appealed to the Bible's teaching on unconditional election as one of several "irrefragable grounds on which we prove that the redemption is particular."<sup>23</sup> He held that certain aspects of the atonement were general, satisfaction and expiation, for example, but that others were particular, redemption and reconciliation. "Christ died for all sinners in some sense," Dabney summarized, but "Christ's redeeming work was limited in intention to the elect."<sup>24</sup>

Even John Owen, who for Allen represents the most objectionable form of particularism, affirmed universal aspects of the atonement. Owen held that Christ's death was sufficient to save all sinners whatsoever, but that it was efficient for the elect alone, for whom it was intended. Owen asserted that it was God's "purpose and intention" that Christ should "offer a sacrifice of infinite worth, value, and dignity, sufficient in itself for the redeeming of all and every man, if it had pleased the Lord to employ it to that purpose." The atonement was sufficient "for the redemption of the whole world, and for the expiation of all sins, of all and every man in the world."<sup>25</sup> The gospel's free proposal to save all who seek mercy, Owen said, is "grounded upon the superabundant sufficiency of the oblation of Christ in itself, for whomsoever (fewer or more) it be intended."<sup>26</sup> And it was effective to save all who believe: "Whosoever come to Christ, he will in no ways cast out."<sup>27</sup> The atonement was sufficient to save whosoever willed.

What distinguishes Calvinists from Arminians on this point is that Calvinists hold that Christ died in a fundamental sense particularly for the elect. He intended that his propitiatory sacrifice, which was sufficient for the sins of the world, should be effective for the elect alone. The key difference relates to the question of intent, not to the question of its universal sufficiency. Non-Calvinists affirm that God intended that Christ should make an

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<sup>23</sup>Robert L. Dabney, *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology* (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing, 1878), 521. Dabney appealed also to the "immutability of God's purposes" (if God ever intended to save any soul in Christ, that soul will certainly be saved); to the fact that Christ's intercession was limited (Jn 17:9, 20); to the fact that the Spirit gave gifts of conviction, regeneration, and faith to some but not to others; to the fact that God made saving faith conditional upon hearing the gospel when he providentially established also that so many would never hear it; and to the power of Christ's love to accomplish the salvation which he purposed in his atonement (Rom. 5:6-10; 8:31-39). See *ibid.*, 521-3.

<sup>24</sup>Dabney, *Syllabus*, 527-8.

<sup>25</sup>John Owen, *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu, Or, the Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 3d ed. (Falkirk: T. Johnston, 1799), 227-8.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 235.



atonement that secures the possibility of salvation equally for both the elect and the non-elect. Calvinists affirm that God intended that Christ should make an atonement that not only makes salvation possible for anyone who should believe, but that actually secures the salvation of the elect. Allen did not address this fundamental point.

### **Irresistible Grace**

Steve Lemke, provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, argues against the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace, which Baptists traditionally called effectual calling. Lemke defines irresistible grace in a way that Calvinists explicitly reject. He describes it as God “forcing one to change one’s mind against one’s will” (114) and as God “forcing people to choose Christ” (114). Indeed, Lemke argues that if the doctrine of irresistible grace is true, then sinners do not need to respond to the gospel, and are saved without any response or commitment. He refutes his version of the doctrine easily enough by quoting scripture passages where a response is demanded in order to be saved (119-22).

Calvinists uniformly have insisted on the necessity of human response to the Spirit’s work in drawing sinners to faith in Christ. John Calvin, for example, held that God did not save sinners against their will, but rather made them willing to be saved. God goes before the unwilling will to make it willing. Calvin taught that God worked in the hearts of men “in wonderful ways” to draw them to Christ, drawing them by giving them a will to come: “not that men believe against their wills, but that the unwilling are made willing.”<sup>28</sup>

Calvinists agree with non-Calvinists that God deals with humans as moral creatures, and so the gospel invites sinners to choose, to exercise the will, in following Christ or refusing him. God commands all persons everywhere to love him, to trust him, and to obey him. Calvinists believe that everyone resists the will of God. That is why the special work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for conversion. Apart from the Spirit’s special work, none will respond to the gospel. But it is not because they are unable to choose, it is because they do not want to abandon their sins and submit to God. They do not lack the ability, they lack the will. If irresistible grace means that God saves sinners apart from or contrary to their wills, then it is unscriptural. But that is not what Calvinists mean by it. It means that God produces a change in the will, so that the will is made willing.

The difference between Calvinists and non-Calvinists is how much help that Spirit must render to draw sinners to faith. Evangelical non-Calvinists agree with Calvinists that the human heart and will were perverted by the corruption ensuing from the fall of Adam. They agree also that without the aid of the Holy Spirit, none would be saved. They differ with Calvinists however in teaching that the Spirit’s main work in drawing sinners is to remove the damaging effects of that corruption equally for all persons, sufficiently to permit a “free” choice for or against the gospel. The Spirit removed the blindness of corruption and places all sinners on more or less neutral ground.

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<sup>28</sup>John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 1961), 84. For an extended discussion of divine sovereignty and human freedom, see Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.xv.6-I.xviii.4, II.ii.6-II.vi.4.

This view falls under the same criticism however as the Calvinist view. If it is correct, then the Holy Spirit irresistibly placed persons back on this neutral ground without giving them a choice in the matter. God did not seek the consent of the will of any sinner prior to accomplishing this work for each and every sinner. By Lemke's definitions, God compelled them to this higher ground.

Calvinists however believe that the scriptures do not portray unbelievers as standing on more or less neutral ground. They have chosen their ground, and it is the ground of rebellion against God. It is the ground of willing service of Satan's desires. They love sin. While they love sin, they cannot simultaneously hate it, abandon it, and love the Savior. It requires the special work of the Holy Spirit changing the heart and working a new desire, taking away the heart of stone and giving a heart of flesh.

In John 8:31-47 Jesus explained that most Jews could not believe in him because they were corrupt, deaf, and blind. "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word." And they could not believe in him because they wanted to serve Satan. "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father." Their hearts loved sin and served Satan's desires, which blinded their eyes and shut their ears so that they could not hear: "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."<sup>29</sup>

Unbelievers cannot acknowledge the truth of the gospel without crucifying their sinful desires. Six different times the New Testament repeats Isaiah's prophecy concerning the rejection of the gospel (Isa. 6:9-10). John cited it to explain why the Jews were unable to believe: "For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 'He has blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them'" (Jn 12:39-40).<sup>30</sup> Their problem was not that they needed a free will, but that they needed a new heart.

Most Christians believe in irresistible grace when they pray. We pray for this very kind of irresistible grace when we ask God to save persons, to convict them of their sins and draw them to faith in Christ. We ask the Spirit to give them willing hearts because of themselves they are unwilling. When we pray this we do so from a belief that the Spirit can make them willing.

Many in the days of the apostles opposed their teaching of election because it included the notion of inability. They complained, as Paul says, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" If the non-Calvinist view were true, Paul could easily have dispensed with this objection by pointing out that all persons have the ability to resist God's will. Instead, Paul replies that God's will is irresistible but he is perfectly just: "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" (Rom. 9:19-20). God's will in election

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<sup>29</sup>See similarly Jn 5:44, 6:41-45, 10:26-28.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Mt 13:13-15; Mk 4:10-12; Lk 8:9-10; Jn 12:39-40; Acts 28:25-27; Rom 11:8.

does prevail in the human heart, but humans are nevertheless responsible for their choices, since when they sin, they do precisely what they will to do.

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

Kenneth Keathley, dean of the faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, does not seek to refute the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, the fifth point affirmed by the Synod of Dort. He agrees with the doctrine. Instead, his chapter addresses the doctrine of assurance. Keathley argues that the doctrines of unconditional election and limited atonement could potentially undermine the scriptural basis of assurance of salvation and invite a theology of salvation by works. The Calvinist insistence on unconditional election, Keathley says, could leave believers without any basis of assurance, since no one could know whether God had elected them or not. He establishes his case largely by arguing that the Puritans, who insisted strenuously on election and predestination, were preoccupied with the problem of assurance, and urged believers to look to their good works and gain assurance by trusting in the evidence of their good works.

This is an incomplete reading of Puritan history. Puritans did discuss assurance at some length. Sometimes believers doubted based on fears that they were not elect. But the more common problem was doubt concerning the genuineness of one's conversion.

The Puritans furthermore believed that the evidence of good works was insufficient to overcome doubts about salvation. They generally argued that since good works always accompanied saving grace, they afforded a kind of presumptive evidence. But good works could do little more than corroborate—they were insufficient to afford true assurance. The Westminster Confession of Faith, the most important statement of Puritan doctrine, did not ground assurance in good works. Assurance of salvation, the confession said, is “an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God.” The basis of genuine assurance was the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit mediated through the gospel promises.

Keathley distinguishes his position on the role of works in assurance from the traditional Calvinist approach, but the difference does not seem particularly great. Keathley rightly rejects the once-saved-always-saved doctrine of the Grace Evangelical Society. He recognizes that true believers must have good works, and even if good works do not produce assurance, they afford warrant of it. “Good works and the evidences of God's grace do not provide assurance,” Keathley concludes. But they can play a subordinate role: “They provide warrant to assurance but not assurance itself” (186). In traditional Calvinism, the Holy Spirit produces assurance by means of the gospel's promises, not by means of good works, but good works necessarily accompany assurance. Works are not the source of assurance, but they cannot be separated from it. The differences are difficult to discern.

Keathley's position on perseverance seems inconsistent with the book's critique of irresistible grace. Keathley holds that those who genuinely repent and believe will not be permitted to reject the gospel and be lost. “God is infinitely more dedicated to our salvation than we are, and He will not fail to finish that which He has begun” (187). If we affirm that

the Holy Spirit has this prevailing power to save persons after conversion, on what basis shall we deny Him this power before conversion? Does not the Spirit have the same power to save before conversion as after? Or do persons have power to reject the gospel before they accept it but not afterward? If we affirm perseverance and at the same time reject irresistible grace, then sinners have more freedom before they receive grace than afterward. Calvinists hold that the Spirit exercises prevailing power both in converting and in keeping those who believe.

### Additional Points of Calvinism

The final five chapters criticize various other aspects of Calvinism. Kevin Kennedy, assistant professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that Calvin was not a Calvinist by arguing that Calvin taught a general atonement.<sup>31</sup> Like David Allen's similar argument, Kennedy adduces many quotes in which Calvin affirms the general character of the atonement. This is all salutary. Kennedy does not however discuss Calvin's affirmations of particularist aspects of the atonement, and so does not show how they relate to Calvin's affirmations of general aspects. In the final analysis, whether Calvin believed in three, four, or five of the canons of the Synod of Dort can be a helpful discussion, but Calvin was not inspired. Calvinistic Baptists find Calvin helpful in some areas, but judge that he was in error concerning infant baptism, the relationship of the old and new covenants, ecclesiology, and the relationship of church and state.

Malcolm Yarnell, associate professor of systematic theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, argues that it is "impossible" to be both a Baptist and a Calvinist (234). Calvinism, he explains, leads to antinomianism, intolerance, diminished evangelism, and a tendency to abandon scripture alone in favor of speculative doctrine. Since Baptists have always opposed these principles, Yarnell concludes, efforts to combine them with Baptist principles always prove unstable.

Yarnell appeals to James B. Gambrell, an early twentieth-century Texas Baptist leader, as an example of the true Baptist approach and apparently as evidence that "Calvinism is incompatible with the Baptist outlook" (231). Gambrell was however both a Baptist and a five-point Calvinist. He taught that "God hath predestined whatsoever doth come to pass" and that "the number of the elect, their names, persons, the time and means of their conversion are known and fixed in the Divine mind." He believed that Christ made atonement for the elect only: "When offered before the Father it [the atonement] did, or will actually save all for whom it was made. . . . It makes the salvation of all, for whom it is offered, certain." Gambrell even taught that Baptists held to Calvinist theology before Calvin did, since they were "preaching election and predestination ages before Calvin was born."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>See Kennedy's extended discussion of this matter in his published Southern Seminary dissertation, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>32</sup>James B. Gambrell, "Calvinism and Arminianism, or Predestination and Free Agency," *Baptist Record*, 20 June 1878, 2; Gambrell, "Bro. Everett on the Atonement," *Baptist Record*, 9 Jan. 1879, 2; Gambrell, "Editorial Notes and Comment," *Baptist Standard*, 28 Aug.

Yarnell appeals also to B. H. Carroll, founding president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as his other example of a true Baptist. Carroll however was also Calvinistic. He held that God decreed to save specific individuals before the foundation of the world, which “could not be according to anything in us” but was “according to the good pleasure of His will.”<sup>33</sup> It is not necessary to be a Calvinist in order to be a true Baptist, but to judge by Yarnell’s examples and by Baptist history, it is at least possible to be both.

Alan Streett, professor of evangelism and pastoral ministry at Criswell College, argues that “most Calvinists oppose the use of a public invitation” (233). He cites Erroll Hulse, an English Reformed Baptist, and Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary and not a Baptist, as evidence of this opposition. But Streett’s argument is largely directed at Hulse and Martin Lloyd-Jones. Streett appeals to such Calvinists as Asahel Nettleton and Charles Spurgeon as examples of Calvinists who used invitations. Some Calvinistic Southern Baptists are critical of public invitations, in particular “altar calls,” but what they criticize are the abuses. Calvinistic Southern Baptists will have little objection to Streett’s position on invitations. Gospel ministers must invite—they must urge, direct, and command sinners to repent and to come to the Savior by faith.

Jeremy Evans, assistant professor of philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers a wide-ranging critique of Calvinist views of the relationship of God’s sovereignty and human freedom. He advances objections similar to those that Steve Lemke raised in his critique of irresistible grace. Neither Evans nor Lemke accepts the Calvinist view that God is sovereign even over the free decisions of his moral creatures. Evans, like Lemke, believes that if God is sovereign over moral decisions, then they are by definition not free decisions. This is a “libertarian” understanding of human freedom. But scripture teaches that God is sovereign over moral decisions and that humans are at the same time responsible for their decisions. This is a “compatibilist” understanding of human freedom. Judas, Pilate, the Sanhedrin, and the people of Jerusalem freely decided to deliver Jesus to be crucified and were all guilty of the most horrid crime in the history of the world. Yet Luke recorded that the apostles praised God for his sovereign rule in their decisions: “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28). Peter affirmed that the people of Jerusalem delivered Jesus by their own choice and convicted them of their guilt in the matter: “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:22-23). Peter affirmed both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in their decisions.

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1913, 8. Gambrell thought that Arminianism was “imbecility” (Gambrell, “Predestination in a Storm,” *Baptist Standard*, 3 Oct. 1912, 1).

<sup>33</sup>B. H. Carroll, “Election, Foreordination, Adoption, Grace: Salvation Cornerstones,” in B. H. Carroll, *Baptists and Their Doctrines*, ed. Timothy and Denise George (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 122.



Evans suggests that Molinism, a philosophy grounded in libertarianism that originated in Jesuit reactions to Augustinian compatibilism, offers a more scriptural explanation than Calvinism. Molinism, in my view, poses some grave theological problems. Explanations can be helpful, but we must reject any explanation that either diminishes human responsibility or diminishes God's sovereignty over all things, even the free decisions of human beings.

Bruce Little, professor of philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, raises an objection similar to the one Evans raised. He argues that if God is sovereign over human decisions, then when humans decide to sin, they are doing God's will (even if they are held responsible for their part in it). This would mean that God ordained sin and that God was the author of sin. Calvinists reject such a reprehensible conclusion, but Little urges that they cannot legitimately evade it. Little claims that the view of sovereignty involving libertarian freedom resolves these problems. He suggests that God does not in any sense will or ordain the evil that humans suffer. God's compassion and goodness do not permit it. But humans do suffer such evil. If Little's arguments are valid, they prove too much and suggest that God is in some measure powerless in the face of what Little calls elsewhere "gratuitous evil."<sup>34</sup> The scriptures show that God permits demons and humans to do evil, and that when they do evil they do it voluntarily and with full responsibility. The scripture in some instances reveals God's purposes in doing so—the selling of Joseph, the evils inflicted upon Job and his household, and above all the crucifixion. God is perfectly just in exercising this sovereignty and is not the author of sin.

Although I disagree with some points in this volume, I also find warm agreement at many points. Above all I agree with its emphasis on *Whosoever Will*. The Calvinists whom I know, love, and respect are whosoever Calvinists. The Calvinist preachers and theologians of generations past whose sermons and books inspire Christians today to sacrifice their lives for their Savior were whosoever Calvinists. The Baptists whose Calvinist preaching spread the Baptist movement in America and in the South were whosoever Calvinists.

May all Baptists, Calvinist and non-Calvinist, preach the whosoever-will gospel with all their hearts. Let us be about the business of urging sinners to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. Bruce Little, *A Creation-Order Theodicy: God and Gratuitous Evil* (Lanham, MD: University Press of American, 2005).

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**“THOMAS GRANTHAM’S  
THEOLOGY OF  
THE ATONEMENT  
AND JUSTIFICATION”**

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*A Paper by J. Matthew Pinson*

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**PAPERS FOR RESPONDENTS**



**Clint Bass**

*Church History professor at Southwest Baptist University who wrote his D.Phil. dissertation at Oxford on Grantham*



**James Leonard**

*Visiting Cambridge scholar at the NOBTS Center for New Testament Textual Studies*



**Rhyne Putman**

*Instructor in Theology at NOBTS*



# WHOSOEVER WILL: A REVIEW ESSAY

J. MATTHEW PINSON<sup>1</sup>

**I**t was interesting growing up Free Will Baptist in the religious culture of the South in the 1970s and 80s. It was dominated by the Southern Baptist Convention, which Martin Marty has called the “Catholic Church of the South,” owing to its ubiquity in Southern religious life. If you were an intellectually curious and theologically oriented Free Will Baptist, the finer points of soteriology were always forced to the forefront of your thinking. There was no way to avoid it: When a Southern Baptist asked you what church you were a member of and you said “Free Will Baptist,” it was unremarkable. The Southern Baptist said, “Everybody believes in free will. What makes you different?”

You braced yourself, because you knew what was about to happen. Before you could blurt out all the words “Free Will Baptists believe Christians can fall from grace,” your Southern Baptist friend would react in horror at the prospect that there were people who actually believed in the possibility of apostasy from the faith. But no Southern Baptist would react negatively to your belief that God had granted all people—including the reprobate—the freedom to resist his gracious, universal calling in salvation.

In those days, at least in my neck of the woods, Southern Baptists didn’t mind being called Calvinists. They just said they were “mild” Calvinists. Some joked about being “Calminians,” but it was unsurprising that “Missionary Baptists” had moderated their Calvinism. But they would never have thought of themselves as Arminian. After all, Arminians believed—horror of horrors—that a believer could apostatize!

So when I read *Whosoever Will*, it seemed uncontroversial. It seemed very familiar to me—much like the “mild” Calvinism of the “Catholic Church of the South” in whose theological shadow I grew up—and from whom I was a friendly but persistent dissenter.

*Whosoever Will* is a fascinating and thought-provoking book. Of course, like many such works that arise out of church conferences, there is some unevenness both in style and scholarly perspicuity. Some of this seems to be by design, with some of the authors, for example Paige Patterson and Richard Land, taking on a more pastoral and conversational tone, and others, for example David Allen and Steve Lemke, tending more to utilize scholarly conventions. However, it appears that the whole book is designed to be read by pastors and other church leaders who are interested in Christian theology, not just professional scholars. So while I think some of the chapters could have gone into more depth, on the whole the work strikes a good balance between practical and scholarly, especially given its intended readership.

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In this essay I do not intend to give a summary or systematic analysis of the book. Rather, I would like to contemplate the general tenor of the book, emphasizing certain features of chapters that stood out to me. The first three chapters—the sermon on John 3:16 by Jerry Vines, and the chapters on total depravity and election by Paige Patterson and Richard Land respectively—represent a pastoral sort of interaction with these themes that will no doubt create interest among younger Southern Baptist scholars to probe more deeply the doctrines they discuss. Vines preaches the sort of universal-grace sermon one would hear in most evangelical Protestant pulpits, expounding the text of John 3:16. He emphasizes, through winsome exposition and exhortation, that God’s love is global, sacrificial, personal, and eternal.

I appreciate Patterson’s appeal to a basic Augustinian-Reformed framework for understanding original sin and depravity, as represented by the late nineteenth-century Baptist thinker Augustus Strong.<sup>2</sup> Despite Patterson’s espousal of Reformation approaches to original sin and total depravity, I wish he had gone to greater lengths than he did to articulate a consistent Reformed approach to these crucial doctrines. For example, at one point Patterson asks, “Are humans born guilty before God?” to which he replies, “That cannot be demonstrated from Scripture. Humans are born with a sin sickness—a disease that makes certain that humans will sin and rebel against God.”

In another place, Patterson tells the story of a World War II sailor, blinded from an explosion on a sinking ship. Floating in the water, and nearly deaf, the soldier faintly heard the sound of a helicopter and began to cry for help. The helicopter dropped the collar, but the sailor was too weak to put it on. A corpsman took the initiative to go and save the sailor. The disoriented sailor began fighting off the corpsman, but eventually the corpsman overcame the sailor and rescued him. Patterson says, “The Heavenly Father is the Admiral who saw our hopeless condition and sent that helicopter. That helicopter with the whirring blades is like the Word of God. The Lord Jesus is like the corpsman; He came to earth and leaped into the water to save us even while we resist him” (43).

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<sup>2</sup>Strong is joined in his Augustinian naturalism by his late nineteenth-century Presbyterian colleague William G. T. Shedd, who goes to great lengths to demonstrate that federalism is a later development in Calvinism and that the “elder Calvinism” was naturalist/realist (see William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, esp. 2:39-40).

Strong exerted a commanding influence on subsequent Baptist evangelical thought, mediated through the work of the influential Wheaton College professor Henry Clarence Thiessen. Yet Thiessen moderated Strong’s four-point Calvinism considerably. His 1949 book *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, which was used widely in Bible Colleges and seminaries as an introductory text, had a strong influence on many evangelical theologians and preachers and is perhaps the most outstanding example of the sort of Baptist *via media* between Calvinism and Arminianism represented in *Whosoever Will*. Curiously, after Thiessen’s death, the book was revised to teach four-point Calvinism. Thus the original work’s original mediating position has had less influence on recent generations. The first edition can be found only in libraries and used bookstores.

The problem with this story is that the sailor was injured and not so incapacitated as to not be able to cry out for help. It might be helpful to note that this is an internecine debate among Southern Baptists who are not strong Calvinists. For example, Kenneth Keathley, in his excellent new book, *Salvation and Sovereignty* (for which Patterson wrote the foreword), provides what I think is a much better illustration of the biblical approach. He cites Richard Cross's "ambulatory model," according to which the sinner is like an unconscious person who is rescued by EMTs and wakes up in an ambulance and does not resist the EMTs' medical actions to save his life.

Incidentally, Jacobus Arminius himself would have liked Keathley's illustration better than Patterson's. Several Free Will Baptist scholars (including Leroy Forlines, Robert Picirilli, Stephen Ashby, and myself) have been attempting in their teaching and writing to revive many of the views of Arminius, especially on depravity, atonement, and justification (this viewpoint is often dubbed "Reformed Arminianism"). They argue that it is possible to subscribe to a genuinely Augustinian-Reformed approach to original sin and depravity while still maintaining the resisibility of divine drawing grace.

Arminius espoused the Augustinian view of original sin and taught that "the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and (*nuatum*) weakened; but it is also (*captivatum*) imprisoned, destroyed, and lost: And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such are excited by divine grace."<sup>3</sup> Fallen humanity, Arminius argued, has no ability or power to reach out to God on its own. Arminius explains that "the mind of man in this state is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God, and, according to the apostle, incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to discuss "the utter weakness of all the powers to perform that which is truly good, and to omit the perpetration of that which is evil."<sup>5</sup> Arminius's approach to depravity and inability is the sort I would commend to Baptists who affirm the sort of *via media* soteriology this volume espouses.

Richard Land's brief chapter on "congruent election" is interesting, interpreting divine foreknowledge of individuals as being in Christ or outside of Christ as a result of belief, in terms of an eternal-now sort of approach to God and time. In essence, Land is arguing that God has an omniscient grasp on what *is* in ontological reality, and part of that is his knowledge of those who are his by faith and those who have separated themselves from him through unbelief. His election and reprobation are based on this knowledge. Land presents some interesting ideas here about the relation of divine foreknowledge to election (which seem to me to have more fruitful possibilities than the avant-garde approach Keathley takes to divine knowledge in *Salvation and Sovereignty* with his Molinist approach to *scientia media*). One wonders if Land has to embrace an "eternal now" approach to God and time to articulate the kind of perfect knowledge that is demanded by his "congruent election" approach. At any rate, Land's ideas are far too brief and need to be expanded on by a doctoral student at a Southern Baptist seminary.

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<sup>3</sup>Arminius, 2:192.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 2:193.



Perhaps most compelling about Land's chapter are his historical remarks, which seem to be an attempt to rebut the arguments of classical Calvinists in the Southern Baptist Convention that true, historic Southern Baptist theology is Calvinist theology. I have long found convincing the views of Tom Nettles and others that historic Southern Baptist theology is really Particular Baptist theology brought over from England and later institutionalized by people like John Leadley Dagg and James Petrigru Boyce. Yet a more developed account similar to Land's has the potential to give non-classical Calvinists in the SBC a historical grounding that challenges the formidable Particular Baptist historiography of scholars such as Nettles and Michael Haykin. I am not yet convinced, but there are the makings of such an argument, for example, in Land's discussion of John Leland, whom he quotes (in a statement made as early as the 1790s) as saying, "I conclude that the *eternal purposes* of God and the *freedom of the human will* are both truths, and it is a matter of fact that the preaching that has been most blessed of God and most profitable to men, is *the doctrine of sovereign grace in the salvation of souls, mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism*" (46).

Chapters four and five—Allen's defense of universal atonement and Lemke's critique of irresistible grace—constitute the heart of the book. The most important part of Allen's chapter is his historical consideration of Calvinists who believed in some form of universal atonement, whom the vast majority of his readers would assume were five-point Calvinists. Allen makes a cogent case for the fact that many Calvinists most people would assume were adherents of limited atonement actually held some form of universal atonement. His readers will be shocked to hear that people like Calvin, Bunyan, and Edwards, as well as many of the members of the Synod of Dort, did not support limited atonement. Some of the arguments Allen employs regarding Calvin's views on the extent of the atonement are dealt with at greater length in Chapter Seven, Kevin Kennedy's "Was Calvin a Calvinist?"

Allen makes a convincing case for unlimited atonement without ever appealing to any non-Calvinist or Arminian writers. He probes the doctrine of the extent of the atonement utilizing both exegesis and systematic theology, and argues convincingly for universal atonement. Especially helpful is his handling of the objection of five-point Calvinists—best represented by John Owen—that for Christ to atone for the sins of all people, and then for the reprobate still to be punished for their sins, would constitute a "double payment" for sins. Allen handles this argument well, and strongly supports a penal-satisfaction view of atonement at the same time.

Interestingly, most Arminian theologians reject the penal-satisfaction account of atonement in favor of some other theory of atonement (most often, historically, the governmental view), using the same double-payment argument. They simply choose not to believe that Christ paid the penalty for sin on the cross and safeguard the atonement's universality, whereas Owen's and other Calvinists' way of dealing with the problem is to safeguard the penal-satisfaction nature of the atonement and reject its universality. In this regard, Reformed Arminians like me would agree with Allen's view that the universality of atonement is consistent with a full penal-satisfaction view of Christ's atonement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Arminius would concur. See J. Matthew Pinson, "The Nature of Atonement in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (forthcoming).

Lemke's chapter on the resistibility of divine grace in salvation is thought-provoking and, all-in-all, cogent. I deeply appreciate his commitment to the Remonstrants' notion that "the only way for anyone to be saved is for God's grace to come before, during, and after justification, because even the best-intentioned human being can 'neither think, will, nor do good' apart from God's grace" (110). For Lemke, libertarian free will does not detract from human beings' utter depravity and inability to save themselves, nor from God's utter graciousness in salvation. "Humans do not do anything to earn or deserve salvation. Humans are too sinful in nature to seek God independently or take the initiative in their own salvation. Humans can come to salvation only as they are urged to by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and they are drawn to Christ as He is lifted up in proclamation" (157).

Libertarian free will for Lemke is not a human-centered concept that makes man the author of his own salvation. Instead, it is set in opposition to meticulous sovereignty, whereby God ordains all things that come to pass. In other words, to say that "man has free will" is simply to say that God gives humans creaturely freedom to make significant decisions as personal beings made in God's image who think, feel, and make authentic decisions. But such freedom does not imply absolute free will: the ability to desire God or to think, will, or do good apart from divine grace. According to Lemke, God graciously draws and enables human beings, without which they would never yearn for God. But he graciously gives them the ability to resist that gracious drawing. This is what I see as the drift of Lemke's account, although at times some of the things he says (for example, his allusion to Patterson's floating-sailor illustration) seemed unclear and inconsistent with his overall anti-Pelagian line of thought.

I believe that Calvinists need to take Lemke's reflections on the definition of divine sovereignty seriously. He argues that Calvinism's view of divine sovereignty arises more from philosophical than biblical considerations, and that sovereignty from the Bible's point of view is more about God's reign and submitting to it or risking negative consequences by one's lack of submission. This, Lemke argues, is how the Bible views sovereignty—not as God's "micromanaging creation through meticulous providence . . . [ruling] in such a way that nothing happens without His control and specific direction" (153). Lemke shows that Calvinists do not have a corner on God's sovereignty and glory. He extols John Piper's emphasis on the sovereignty and glory of God, but he asks,

Which gives God the greater glory—a view that the only persons who can praise God are those whose wills He changes without their permission, or the view that persons respond to the gracious invitation of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to praise God truly of their own volition? So the question is not, Is God powerful enough to reign in any way He wants? Of course, He is. God is omnipotent and can do anything He wants. As the Scripture says, "For who can resist His will?" (Rom 9:19, HCSB). But the question is, What is God's will? How has God chosen to reign in the hearts of persons? If God is truly sovereign, He is free to choose what He sovereignly chooses. So how has He chosen to reign? (155).

I believe young non-Calvinists need to come to grips with the sovereignty and glory of God and articulate a more robust doctrine of them. Non-Calvinists can stand to learn from Piper's Edwardsean emphasis on the "God of grace and glory," but they must find a more biblical way to affirm those beautiful truths that avoid the deterministic tendencies of Piper

and the New Calvinists. I hope Lemke's account of these things will spur some of them on in that direction.

I was intrigued by Lemke's discussion of R. C. Sproul's view that God "woos" and "entices" people to come to Christ. Sproul says that this wooing and enticing is a necessary but not sufficient condition for salvation, "because the wooing does not, in fact, guarantee that we will come to Christ." Sproul argues that the term "draw" in John 6:44 is more forceful than "woo" and "entice" and instead means "to compel by irresistible superiority." (113). The question in the Arminian's mind is akin to the question why God would offer free grace to people he does not enable to appropriate it (i.e., the general call as distinguished from the effectual call). The question is: Why does God woo and entice people to come to him if he has determined that they are among the reprobate and will hence be unable to come to him? This concept involves, not just an external Word-based call to the non-elect—a general preaching of the Word of the Gospel to all—but rather the Holy Spirit working diligently with people, convicting them, wooing them, enticing them to come to him. Yet he does this realizing that they will never come, because he has eternally foreordained them to damnation to the praise of his glory. This is a rather difficult concept for modern-day Calvinists. It was discussed a great deal in Puritan literature, and especially in Jonathan Edwards, but it is not dealt with openly by most contemporary Calvinists.

Lemke's discussion of Jesus's lament over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37 is illuminating. That text reads: "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, yet you were not willing!" Lemke correctly comments that the Greek verb *thelo* (to will) is used twice in the verse: "I willed . . . but you were not willing." He notes that Jesus is not referring only to the elect within Jerusalem but for all Jerusalem over many generations. Thus Jesus's will (*thelo*) is for all the children of Jerusalem to come to him, yet they frustrate his will and do not come because of their will (*thelo*). This is difficult to square with the Calvinistic concept of irresistible grace. I also think it is more than a curiosity when Lemke points out about the use of "all" (*pas*) in "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16), "All things were made by Him" (John 1:3), and so on, cannot submit to the same use Calvinists place on "all" when describing God's salvific will. This is a stock non-Calvinist argument, but Calvinists need to be reminded of it.

Another important argument Lemke makes concerns placing regeneration prior to faith. F. Leroy Forlines argues in his book *The Quest for Truth* and his forthcoming book *Classical Arminianism* that there is a problem for the coherence of Calvinism when it places regeneration before faith, because, as the Calvinist theologian Louis Berkhof states, "Regeneration is the beginning of sanctification." It is a problem, logically, to place regeneration prior to faith in the *ordo salutis*, because, if regeneration is the beginning of sanctification, and if justification results from faith, then logically Calvinism is placing sanctification prior to justification. Lemke parallels Forlines's argument when he quotes Lorraine Boettner as saying, "A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved," to which Lemke replies, "Clearly, being saved before believing in Christ is getting 'the cart before the horse.' This question can be divided into three questions about which comes first: Regeneration or salvation? Receiving the Holy Spirit or salvation? Salvation or repentance and faith? Many key texts make these issues clear" (136, 138). Lemke asks, "When does the Spirit come into a believer's life? . . . What do the Scriptures say about the order of believing and receiving the Spirit?" (137). This is

particularly poignant, Lemke argues, in view of Peter's statement in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (NASB). If Berkhof and Boettner are correct, and regeneration is the beginning of salvation and sanctification, then the Calvinist *ordo salutis* which places regeneration prior to saving faith, which is prior to justification and the gift of the Spirit, is problematic.

Arminians will agree with Lemke when he argues that the two callings God gives, according to Calvinism ("outward and inward, effectual and ineffectual, serious and not serious") necessitate two wills in God, a secret and a revealed will, and this dichotomy presents problems for people's knowledge of the will of God. For example,

The revealed will of God issues for the Great Commission that the gospel should be preached to all nations, but the secret will is that only a small group of elect will be saved. The revealed will commands the general, outward call to be proclaimed, but the secret will knows that only a few will receive the effectual, serious calling from the Holy Spirit. The God of hard Calvinism is either disingenuous, cynically making a pseudo offer of salvation to persons whom He has not given the means to accept, or there is a deep inner conflict within the will of God. If He has extended a general call to all persons to be saved, but has given the effectual call irresistibly to just a few, the general call seems rather misleading. This conflict between the wills of God portrays Him as having a divided mind. In response to this challenge, Calvinists appeal to mystery. Is that a successful move? (144-5).

Lemke's concerns are encapsulated by some quotations he provides from the early Remonstrants, who he says were concerned that the perspective of the Synod of Dort "portrayed God as riddled by inner conflict" (145):

8. Whomsoever God calls, he calls them seriously, that is, with a sincere and not with a dissembled intention and will of saving them. Neither do we subscribe to the opinion of those persons who assert that God outwardly calls certain men whom he does not will to call inwardly, that is, whom he is unwilling to be truly converted, even prior to their rejection of the grace of calling.

9. There is not in God a secret will of that kind which is so opposed to his will revealed in his word, that according to this same secret will he does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom, by the word of his Gospel, and by his revealed will, he seriously calls and invites to faith and salvation.

10. Neither on this point do we admit of a holy dissimulation, as it is the manner of some men to speak, or of a twofold person in the Deity (145).

Lemke is right to argue that the most coherent, biblically consistent theodicy is provided by the doctrine of libertarian freedom. Determinism, whether in a hard or soft (compatibilist) sense, provides a troubling solution to the problem of evil—why there is so much evil in the world if there is a loving God. Lemke invokes a form of the classic free will theodicy—that evil results largely because God created people free so that they could

genuinely love him, freely, not because they are caused or determined to love him. Lemke quips,

Babies do not come home from the hospital housebroken. They cry all night. They break their toes, and they break your hearts. But when that child of his or her own volition says, “Daddy, I love you,” it really means something. The parents are more glorified with a real child than with a doll that could not have praised them had they not pulled its string. So, then, which gives God the greater glory—a view that the only persons who can praise God are those whose wills He changes without their permission, or the view that persons respond to the gracious invitation of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to praise God truly of their own volition? (154-155).

Regarding compatibilism, Lemke is right to argue that someone’s merely *willing* (wanting) to do something does not constitute a free action. There are too many examples in human life of people being willing to do something but not having the choice to do otherwise. Indeed, the way human freedom is normally defined, even when compatibilists use it of everyday human circumstances, is as the power of alternative choice. Furthermore, “the human analogies that come to mind about God changing our will in irresistible grace, whereby others change our minds irresistibly and invincibly, are unpleasant phenomena such as hypnotism or brainwashing. Obviously, these are not pleasant phenomena, and are not appropriate when applied to God” (150).

Lemke’s chapter is not without its problems. I think Lemke is stretching when he is appealing to David Engelsma’s hyper-Calvinism and avers that irresistible grace might make conversion unnecessary and infant baptism might result (p. 132). Engelsma is not representative of Calvinism on the necessity of conversion. Lemke also erroneously conflates the issue of infant baptism and salvation with the issue of Calvinism vs. Arminianism (133). I think the following statement is unnecessary and somewhat beside the point in a work on Calvinism and Arminianism:

Hopefully, very few Calvinistic Baptists are tempted to practice nonconversionist Calvinism in the manner of Engelsma. When Baptists go out of their way to organize fellowship with such Presbyterians rather than fellow Baptists, or when they push to allow people christened as infants into the membership of their own church without believer’s baptism, or when they speak of public invitations as sinful or as a rejection of the sovereignty of God, seeing much difference between them is difficult (134).

Also, Lemke’s reasoning is fallacious when he cites John Calvin’s view that some people can be saved without preaching and then conflates it with Terrence Tiessen’s views, which are certainly unrepresentative of Calvinism.

I think Lemke goes too far in trying to paint Calvinism with the brush of hyper-Calvinism. This will do more to rally the non-Calvinist troops than to win over Calvinists. Still, I think he is onto something in pointing out the inconsistency of mainstream Calvinism in affirming irresistible grace and a distinction between a universal, ineffectual calling and a particular, effectual calling—and the resultant distinction between God’s revealed will and secret will—while at the same time affirming the free offer of the gospel. What he is trying

to do, like Engelsma, is get mainstream Calvinists to see the inconsistency of their particularistic soteriology with a general call of the gospel. I think he is right. Both Arminians and Calvinists have errors that they are liable to, and Lemke, even though he takes his rhetoric too far in places, is right to remind Calvinists of the peculiar errors to which they are liable, errors that Calvinists have sadly repeated at various points in their history (hyper-Calvinism).

Chapter six by Kenneth Keathley argues a position on perseverance and assurance that is Calvinist in its assertion that genuine believers cannot cease to be believers and hence fall away from a state of grace. However, Keathley is critical of post-Reformation Reformed (especially Puritan) views of assurance that predicate it on sanctification rather than justification. He argues that “good works and the evidences of God’s grace do not provide assurance. They provide warrant to assurance but not assurance itself” (184).

Keathley spends much of his chapter critiquing the view of Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Canaday, which holds that the warning passages in the New Testament are genuine warnings that God uses as a means of helping the elect to persevere. Keathley rightly sees the difficulty with saying that God is threatening people with the possibility of apostasy—which is not in reality a threat since it cannot occur—to help them persevere—which they cannot keep from doing.

Yet in his critique of Schreiner and Canaday’s misuse of the warning passages, Keathley fails to provide his readers with an understanding of how they are to treat the warning passages. I assume this is because his Southern Baptist audience is not an Arminian one (i.e., believing in the genuine possibility of apostasy), and so he sees no need to do this in the context of this book. Still, it would have been helpful if Keathley had provided a brief explanation of how someone who argues for unconditional perseverance should explain warning passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6. In other words, how can a Southern Baptist say “Amen” to a responsive reading in church, without comment, on, say, Hebrews 6:1-12?

It is gratifying to see that Keathley explicitly eschews the easy-believism views of Charles Stanley, which are shared by Zane Hodges and the Grace Evangelical Society. This is what I believe SBC people who are not classical Calvinists need to be on vigilant guard against: “preaching people into heaven” just because they walked the aisle one time decades ago, even though their lives have been characterized by the consistent practice of sin and not progressive sanctification. Thus, it was refreshing to hear Keathley say:

The genuinely saved person hungers and thirsts for righteousness, even when he is struggling with temptation or even if he stumbles into sin. In fact, I am not as concerned about the destiny of those who struggle as I am about those who do not care enough to struggle. Indifference is more of a red flag than weakness.

The absence of a desire for the things of God clearly indicates a serious spiritual problem, and a continued indifference can possibly mean that the person professing faith has never been genuinely converted (184-85).

I would add, of course, that it could also possibly mean that the person has ceased to believe in Christ, is no longer in union with Christ, and thus has apostatized from saving faith.

However, I believe that Keathley's approach can help Southern Baptists avoid the ever-present temptation of an easy-believism that places all the emphasis on a one-time, past decision—a sinner's prayer—and not on hungering and thirsting for righteousness in the here and now.

All the chapters I have just discussed comprise Part One of the book. Those were chapters that were plenary sessions at the conference from which these essays originated. Part Two of the book consists of five additional essays that complement the general argument of the book. I will spend less time discussing these well-written essays. I have already made reference to Kevin Kennedy's excellent discussion of Calvin's views on the extent of the atonement.

Chapters eight and nine—Malcolm Yarnell's discussion of the potential impact of Calvinism on Baptist churches and Alan Streett's consideration of Calvinism and public invitations—raised more questions in my mind than they answered.

Yarnell argues in his chapter that embracing Calvinism lays Baptists open to Calvinist ecclesiological tendencies—things like moving away from *sola Scriptura* toward an exaltation of the ancient church, specifically Augustine, and an aristocratic-elitist church polity. Malcolm Yarnell is one of the brightest evangelical scholars writing today. What he is doing in his writings and the journal he edits is brilliant. I look forward to his future writings and have learned a great deal from his writings to date. However, I have a disconnect with him that seems to arise from historiographical differences: He tends to exaggerate the Anabaptist influence on Baptist thought and radically discount Reformed and Puritan influences. I exalt the Reformed and Puritan influence on Baptist thought while believing that the continental Anabaptist movement did exert modest influence on early Baptist thought.

It is ironic that I am a full-fledged Arminian who comes from a faith community that has always seen itself as self-consciously and integrally connected with Arminius and with the General Baptist tradition. Yet I have far more appreciation for the Reformed tradition and the Puritans than Yarnell does. I think this arises from the fact that I see "Reformed" as being not chiefly a soteric word but an ecclesial one.

The English General Baptists of the seventeenth century claimed to be "reformed according to the Scriptures" every bit as much as the Particular Baptists. Both General and Particular Baptists were radical Puritans who inherited the Puritan desire to reform and purify the church according to the Scriptures. Just as there were both Calvinist and Arminian baptistic puritans (Baptists) who wanted to reform the church according to the Scriptures, there were Calvinist and Arminian (e.g., John Goodwin) paedobaptist Puritans who wanted to reform the church according to the Scriptures. There were also Calvinist and Arminian (e.g., Jacobus Arminius) paedobaptist continental Reformed churchmen. Neither do I think "Reformed" is about church government.

I view being "reformed," as my ancestors did, as being about (1) the reformation of the church along New Testament lines and (2) the gospel—atonement and justification, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Some of the people I think are doing more than anyone else for ecclesial renewal and the gospel are "Reformed." I think it makes more sense to see Baptist identity as having developed out of a

Puritan-Reformed sensibility—albeit with important influences from continental Anabaptism—than as an Anabaptist movement.

I am not as concerned with Calvinist tendencies on Baptist churches as Yarnell is, unless by “tendencies” one is referring to unconditional election, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints as conceived by Calvinism. I am not worried about Calvinism in the Kuyperian sense having a negative influence on Baptists, or Calvinist theological method having a negative influence on Baptists. The only thing that worries me is that Baptists will become Calvinists in the soteriological sense. I am not any more worried that Southern Baptists are going to become non-baptistic in polity and baptismal theology by reading Calvin than I am that Free Will Baptists will do the same by reading Arminius. What I am hoping to see is more people who are reforming the church according to the Scriptures in ways similar to John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius, John Owen and John Goodwin, Hanserd Knollys and Thomas Grantham.

Yarnell raises two other issues on which I feel the need to comment. First, He says that Calvinism is guilty of ecclesiological antinomianism, not holding closely enough to the scriptural pattern in polity and other matters. I am sympathetic to Yarnell, and believe that this can be said of many of us modern evangelicals. However, I think much of Reformed confessional ecclesiology forms the basis for Baptist views on the sufficiency of Scripture for the life of the church, including its polity, worship, and other practices. This explains why both the Orthodox Creed of the General Baptists and the Second London Confession of the Particular Baptists relied heavily on the Westminster Confession for many of their statements on the sufficiency of the Scripture, and of the divinely ordained means of grace, for the life of the church. Second, Yarnell argues against the concept of the worldwide, invisible church. Yet many historic Baptists have shared this commitment (I subscribe to it because of my own Free Will Baptist confessional commitments). Thus, I do not believe that subscription to the idea of a universal, invisible church is a problem of non-Baptist Calvinists.

Streett has done a great deal of work defending the idea of a public invitation biblically, theologically, and historically. His fear is that the reason for Calvinists’ rejection of the public invitation is that they don’t really believe in the free offer of the gospel—that there is a tension in their thought on the free offer of the gospel that keeps them from thinking that people can respond to that free offer in a public invitation.

I am not opposed to non-manipulative public invitations for people to come forward for prayer and counseling with the hope that they will be converted. However, I do not see this as a Calvinist-Arminian issue. There are many Arminians who argue against the use of public invitations because they think it does not have warrant in Scripture or that it is manipulative and goes against the free human response to the offer of the gospel and the mysterious conviction of sin that is taking place between the Spirit and the individual. For example, Wesleyan writer C. Marion Brown writes in *The Arminian Magazine*, “Gospel preaching at its best is aided and abetted by the Holy Spirit convicting and convincing men of sin. When men are shown their sins and convicted of the same, they need not be begged,



cajoled, or subjected to second rate psychology to induce or entice them to prayer.”<sup>7</sup> Joseph D. McPherson, in a later issue of the same magazine, pointed out some similar concerns in an article entitled “Modern Altar Methods: An Inadequate Substitute for the Methodist Class Meeting.”<sup>8</sup> (These perspectives remind me of fundamentalist Wesleyan author Jeff Paton’s indictment of “Decisional Regeneration.”<sup>9</sup>) I also know Arminian Anglicans, synergistic Lutherans, and traditionalist Mennonites who would never dream of offering a public invitation.

At the same time, I must admit that I am intrigued by the reasons my Calvinist friends sometimes give for not offering public invitations. I have often wondered the following: Calvinists all admit that the Spirit uses means to convert the elect. So why could the Spirit not use the means of a public response to an invitation to receive prayer and counseling with the hope that one will be converted? How is inviting people to respond publicly during a church service and have someone pray that they will be converted, with the hopes that they will, any different from doing the same thing in another location? I can understand if there are other reasons—similar to the Wesleyan Arminian brothers I cited above—that Calvinists would want to do things differently, but why all the concern over offering public invitations *per se* to respond to the gospel? In the end, however, I do not think this is a Calvinism-Arminianism issue. I know too many Calvinists who offer public invitations and too many Arminians who do not.

Along with the chapters by Lemke and Allen, those by Jeremy Evans and Bruce Little represent the most substantive and incisive chapters in the book. If the Southern Baptist Convention produces young scholars along the lines of Evans and Little, then it is sure that the *via media* soteriological approach of this book will experience a renaissance.

Jeremy Evans’s chapter contains some penetrating reflections on determinism and libertarian free will that attempt to remain biblical and anti-Pelagian. In that vein, Evans makes approving reference to Richard Cross’s excellent article in *Faith and Philosophy*, “Anti-Pelagianism and the Resistibility of Grace.”<sup>10</sup> He cites Keathley’s book, which goes into much more detail biblically and theologically than Cross’s article. Cross asks, “Suppose we do adopt . . . that there can be no natural active human cooperation in justification. Would such a position require us to accept the irresistibility of grace?” (Evans, 260). Cross and Evans think it would not, and Evans calls this “Monergism with resistibility of grace.” Evans reminds me of Arminius’s desire to maintain “the greatest possible distance from

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<sup>7</sup>C. Marion Brown, “Some Meditations on the Altar Call,” *The Arminian Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Fall, 1983), <http://www.fwponline.cc/v4n1/v4n1cmbrown.html>.

<sup>8</sup>See also Joseph D. McPherson, “Modern Altar Methods: An Inadequate Substitute for the Methodist Class Meeting,” *The Arminian Magazine*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall, 1997), <http://www.fwponline.cc/v15n2/v15n2joemac.html>.

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.biblical-theology.net/decisional\\_regeneration.htm](http://www.biblical-theology.net/decisional_regeneration.htm).

<sup>10</sup>“Anti-Pelagianism and the Resistibility of Grace,” *Faith and Philosophy* 22:2 (2005), 204.

Pelagianism.”<sup>11</sup> Evans remarks that this approach means that “the only contribution the person makes is not of positive personal status, as strands of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism hold,” because salvation is “wrought by God (Eph 2:8-9). So people do not “pull [themselves] up by [their] own bootstraps.” Instead, saving faith is a “gift freely given from above and does not reside in any natural capacity of the person (Phil 1:28-29).” Furthermore, Evans maintains, affirming monergism together with resistible grace “helps explain how God desires that none perish (1 Tim 2:3)” (261).

Expanding on some of the themes in Lemke’s chapter, Evans explains that this account of saving grace helps deal with the logical problem of placing regeneration before faith as Calvinism does. So, instead of new life leading to saving faith, saving faith brings about new life. This seems to accord better with straightforward scriptural statements about salvation and new life: “Jesus provides forgiveness of sins for those who believe in Him (Acts 13:38); the one who hears the words of Christ and believes passes from death to life (John 5:24). Notice that the verse does not say ‘the one who passes from death to life believes’ but ‘the one who believes passes from death to life.’ The New Testament is replete with other instances where new life is brought from faith (John 20:31; 1 Tim 1:16)” (261).

Evans is most helpful at the intersection of the disciplines of theology and philosophy of religion, and this comes to bear in his clear discussion of determinism and free will. He gets to the heart of the difference between libertarian freedom and various forms of determinism—whether hard or soft (compatibilism)—in his argument that we can be held responsible for something only if it is a genuinely free action. He explains: “I concur with Robert Kane, that ultimate responsibility . . . resides where ultimate cause is. If I am *never* the original force behind my choices, then I am not responsible for the contents of my choices. At some point in the causal chain, I must have contra-causal freedom (the ability to do otherwise)” (263).

In fleshing out his argument, Evans does a superb job of exposing the problem of classical Calvinism’s views of the will. For example, he states, “The strong Calvinist’s claim hinges on the notion of complete psychological determinism—that humans *always* act on their strongest desires or motives” (263). However, this perspective seems to be contradicted by passages like Romans 7 (regardless of whether it is interpreted as pre- or post-conversion): “Rather than taking Paul as saying, ‘I have the desire to do what is right,’ he must have meant, ‘But I have a greater desire for something else.’ Clearly, however, Scripture does not make this statement but provides the opposite one—he does the things he hates.” (263-64).

No matter how much softening modern Calvinists do of their determinism, what they are still left with is the fact that God causes all things that come to pass. “Anyone who wants to grant God the type of sovereignty proposed by strong Calvinism, which is a causal account of human willing and acting, yet wants to say that the world is not as it should be (sin) is under a particular burden to explain how they can make these claims in conjunction with one another” (267).

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<sup>11</sup>*The Works of James Arminius* (Nashville: Randall House, 2007), 1:764.

Another problem with Calvinism is that it necessitates that the present world is the “Best Possible World.” Yet, if the best possible world is the one we are in, how can the Calvinist say that many of the things that are, ought not to be (i.e., sin)? If God foreordains all things, therefore being causally responsible for all things, “and we say the world is not as it ought to be (which is conceptually entailed by sin, and in this case the rejection of Jesus [by human beings]), then we are explicitly saying that God should not have caused the world to be as it is.” These ideas are not merely mysterious, Evans insists, “they are contradictory” (269).

The most difficult-to-understand section of Evans’s chapter is also perhaps one of the most fruitful lines of argument he presents, on speech-act theory and problems it presents for Calvinist soteriology. Calvinist theologians and philosophers need to wrestle with this argument, because most conservative Calvinists ground their theory of plenary-verbal inspiration in speech-act theory.

In speech-act theory, an *illocution* is a speaker’s intent revealed in what he speaks—his speech. The *perlocution* is the effect the speech has, or is intended to have, on the speaker or the hearer. Evans applies this construct to the statement that God “commands all people everywhere to repent.” Evans says that the command is morally binding on everyone. However, when one follows the Calvinist line of reasoning, every detail of reality is determined by God for his purposes, “including the damnation of some for His good pleasure,” then how are individuals to understand the command to repent? “It seems God has commanded something (repentance and faith from everyone) that He has not willed.” This seems to drive a wedge between God’s commands and His will, “and human beings are morally accountable for the content of God’s will and not His commands.” (270).

Thus it appears that God has no intention for his speech (his command) to change the reprobate. In Calvinism, God’s intention was that the elect repent and be saved, but his intention for the nonelect was that they not repent and be damned. Yet he commanded them all to repent. “The same message, but two divine perlocutions, was given,” Evans concludes (271).

Why is this problematic? Evans asks. His answer is that, if God gives the command to repent to inform people and direct them away from sin, he “*intends* to command human beings for the purpose of change” (271). However, this proposition cannot be true for Calvinists. It means that

God will still hold persons accountable for patterns of thought and action that He never intended to correct by His command. Indeed, if God knew that He had not elected many, then His intention in the illocution for the non-elect would not be for a corrective course of action. If divine commands are not intended to correct a course of thought and action, then the non-elect are not morally obligated to that course of action (God never intended them to change their status) (271).

In his conclusion, Evans states that he moved away from classical Calvinism while in seminary, despite the fact that most of his professors were Calvinistic. He felt he needed to do this “to avoid what I considered to be problems bigger than those faced by non-Reformed views of the will” (274). He believed that both deterministic and libertarian views

entail difficulties, but the difficulties with libertarian views of freedom dealt more with mystery regarding the infinite attributes of God, not problems with God's character as just, righteous, and holy. Many of us have made the same choice, and I think we have been right to do so.

In the book's final chapter, Bruce Little presents an incisive study of the implications of Calvinist views of determinism and free will for the problem of evil. He opens his essay with two illustrations of gratuitous evil. He refers, for example, to John Piper's statements surrounding the crash of US Airways flight 1549 on January 15, 2009, in which Piper said that God can take down a plane anytime he pleases and wrong no one because we're all guilty and deserve judgment (279). Piper said that the entire event was "designed" by God (288). Little remarks, "This assertion can only mean that God in His sovereignty designed it before the world began to fit His purposes. If that is so, God does not merely *allow* this; God designs and executes it. . . . God is responsible but not morally culpable" (288).

Little refers to the case of a young Florida girl named Jessica whom a convicted sex offender abducted, tortured, raped, and buried alive. According to the meticulous account of sovereignty and determinism of strong Calvinism advocated by Piper, Little argues, because this child was guilty before God, God did not owe her anything and thus had the right to ordain the state of affairs that led to and entailed her abduction, torture, rape, and burial alive (279).

Little rightly says that "Piper seems to confuse suffering in time with suffering in eternity" He argues that it does not follow that God would ordain Jessica's torture because she is a sinner. Furthermore, he argues, according to this Edwardsean-Calvinist account, Jessica's torture and death are the only way things could have turned out, because they were ordained by God. He makes it clear that this "means more than simply saying God allowed it to happen" (279).

Little explains that, according to Calvinists such as Piper, God is not blameworthy even though he caused the chain of events to occur. This necessitates God operating under two categories of moral order—one for himself and another for people created in his image. This makes God the author of the evil he commands people not to perform. If all events are ordained by God, Little argues, then not only is Jessica's torture and death ordained, but also her murderer's motives and actions. Still, however, he points out, according to the Edwardsean view, her murderer is still fully responsible for the act, even though he could never have done otherwise because the act was divinely pre-planned. "Understand the logical force of this view: there is no way for Jessica to be raped except for *someone* to rape her. If the rape is ordained, then so is the *rapist* ordained to act" (279-80).

Little is concerned that Calvinism of this sort does not achieve the proper balance between God's right to do what he pleases and his commitments or promises by which he constrains himself (which self-constraint does not detract from his sovereignty). "Christians are commanded to do good to all people, especially those of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Should God do less—especially the sovereign God?" (280).

Little is quick to point out that all except perhaps open theists would agree that all that happens in the world happens either because God ordains or allows it. He argues that

the purpose of allowing evil will never be the greater good, because this would entail consequentialism, or an ends-justifies-the-means mentality. Some Arminians and other advocates of libertarian free will would not join Little in this assertion. However, the important point is that the sort of determinism he is considering does not simply have God allowing evil but ordaining it, being the causal agent of it, yet still holding individuals responsible for the evil.

According to this strong Calvinist view, Little stresses, God's purposes cannot be obtained unless he controls every aspect of reality. If he does not, then he cannot achieve his purposes. It is all or nothing. Either every aspect of reality has a purpose or all is chaotic. A core part of God's purpose in bringing about evil, according to this view, is to glorify God. In response to these notions, Little poses two questions: "(1) Does divine sovereignty require this strong view in order to maintain a biblical view of sovereignty? (2) If God ordains or wills all things, in that way do persons, not God, stand morally responsible for their acts?" (283). Little distinguishes between purpose and reason. There is a reason why all things happen, because God has ordered his universe in a careful way. But that does not mean God has a purpose in every event that occurs. (285).

Little's distinction between the Calvinist view of sovereignty and the biblical view is compelling. He suggests that exhaustive control or determination of every act in reality is not the biblical view of how a sovereign maintains control of that over which he is sovereign: "Another way to understand God's control is that of the man who is in control of his family. He ensures that everybody follows the established rules. This form is called *simple sovereignty* and is the one displayed in Ancient Near Eastern texts referring to the suzerain and his vassal." (287).

So why, according to Calvinists like Piper, does God ordain every evil that comes to pass? It is "to make the glory of Christ shine more brightly" (289). But Little, in classic libertarian fashion, points out that, if this is true, "then it seems that people need the ugly in order to appreciate beauty. That would mean that the beauty and glory of God could not be fully appreciated until there was the ugly—evil. So Adam in the garden could not appreciate the beauty and glory of God. Does that not necessitate the fall in the garden?" (289). This is one of the most common reasons people have left Calvinism in the past—because they think it necessitates a supralapsarian approach to the divine decrees or a "fortunate fall." This is precisely why Thomas Helwys left Calvinism, as seen in his work, *A Short and Plaine Prooffe*, the first Baptist treatise on predestination.<sup>12</sup>

Little avers that "the logic of this argument says that the more evil there is, the brighter Christ's glory will shine." But he points out that this seems to contradict Paul's statement, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Rom 6:1-2). According to this system, Little argues, it appears that "God not only ordained evil but actually needs evil if Christ is to get the greater glory. In fact, it makes

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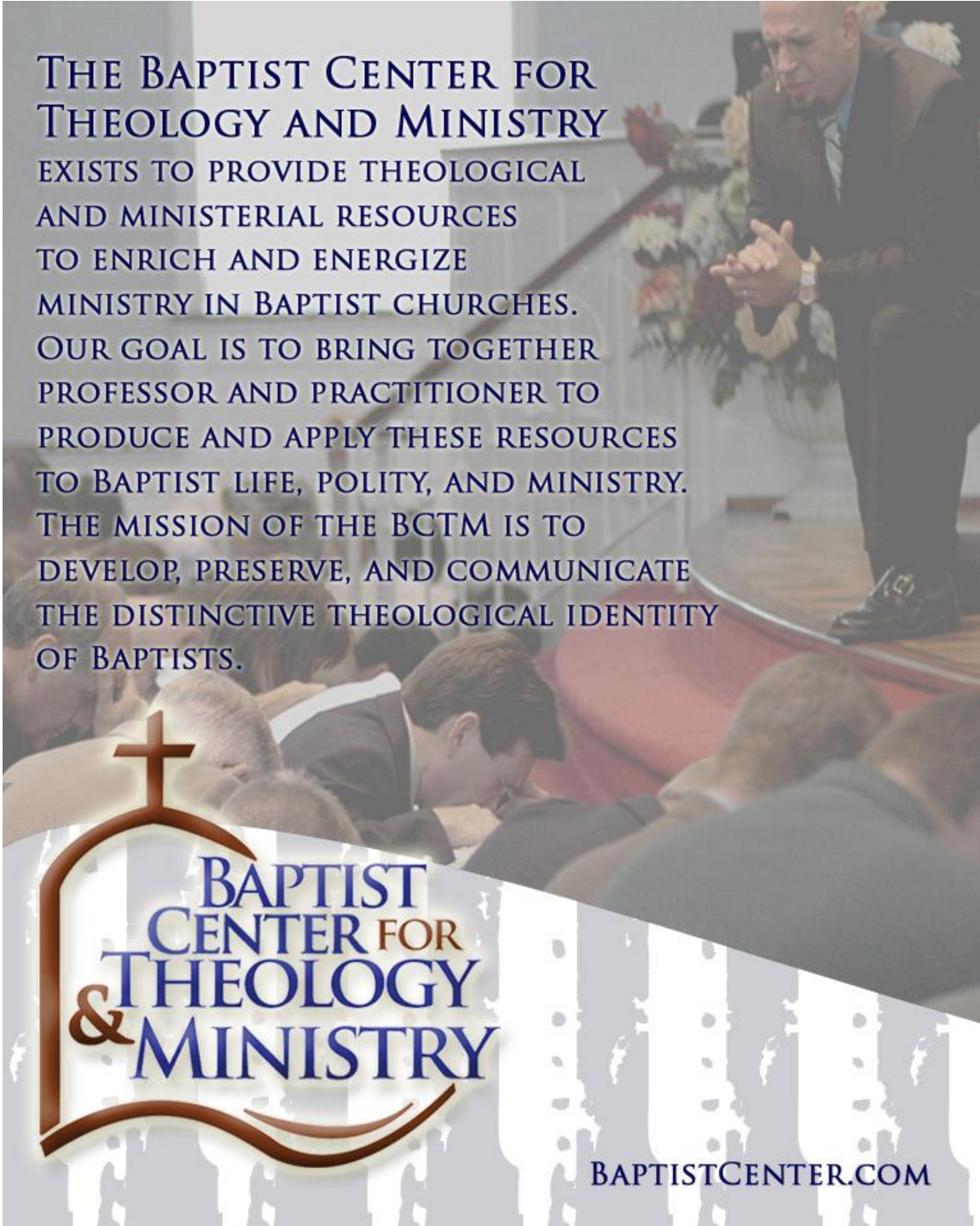
<sup>12</sup>See J. Matthew Pinson, "The The First Baptist Treatise on Predestination: Thomas Helwys's *Short and Plaine Prooffe*," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 6 (2009): 139-51. [http://baptistcenter.com/Spring\\_09\\_Journal\\_PDF.pdf](http://baptistcenter.com/Spring_09_Journal_PDF.pdf).

the fall in the garden necessary, which in the end means Adam had no choice. So why is God not the one morally responsible even if for a good cause—the glory of Christ?” (291-92).

Finally, according to Little, the Scriptures make it look as if people can make significant free choices and are then solely responsible for those choices. He refers, for example, to Deuteronomy 28, where God discusses his blessings and curses on his people because of their obedience and disobedience. I think we must reckon with his observation that, “if it was not a free choice, then moral responsibility cannot be imputed. . . . To say they chose but were not free is to void the meaning of ‘to choose,’ and then language means nothing. Not only that, but it destroys the entire notion of justice. The man who raped Jessica and buried her alive could not have chosen to do differently. In the plain sense of language, that choice means he should not be held accountable” (297). His logic is compelling: If God ordains all evil actions and is not considered morally responsible for them, but rather the person whom he determined to perform the action is considered solely morally responsible, this presents a problem that cannot be solved simply by appealing to mystery.

Little concludes that “The logical end of the Calvinist position on the question of sovereignty leads to a strong form of determinism, which is not the necessary outcome of biblical sovereignty. In addition, moral responsibility for sin must find its final causal agent to be God.” (296). His reasoning is consistent with classic, non-determinist accounts of God’s action in the world.

*Whosoever Will* is an absorbing book that needs to be read by Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike, not only in the Southern Baptist Convention, but also in the broader evangelical community. It is ironic that sometimes debate on important differences can bring people together on other important issues. I believe that healthy debate on this issue can bring Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals together by clarifying the essence of the gospel and the importance of theology in the life of the church and its proclamation. This volume has the potential to further such healthy debate so that evangelicals on both sides of it can unite for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ’s kingdom.



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# WHOSOEVER WILL: A REVIEW ESSAY

C. FRED SMITH\*

## INTRODUCTION

Calvinism has become an increasingly important but divisive issue among Baptists. Churches have divided over it, and it has led to no end of “bull sessions” among seminary students, who endlessly debate divine sovereignty and human free will, limited atonement, irresistible grace and related issues. It is in order to set forth a biblical as well as theologically sound perspective on these issues that David Allen and Steve Lemke offer this book based on papers delivered at the John 3:16 Conference held at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia in November 2008.

After an excellent sermon by Jerry Vines, the book is divided into two parts. Part One offers a critique of each aspect of the TULIP, the “Five points of Calvinism.” Sometimes an alternative way that the doctrine may be understood is offered, but other writers demonstrate why a specific doctrine is unbiblical and should be rejected. Part Two considers various doctrinal and practical questions that Calvinism raises. These are considered in light of theology, biblical teaching and concern for the life of the churches.

Jerry Vines’ sermon on John 3:16 sets a tone for the series as a whole. Like the essays that follow, the sermon is theologically and biblically rich. It is a solid exposition of the passage, chosen because of the “*Whosoever Will* believe in Him” clause. Thus, it is indicative of the direction of the essays themselves which will challenge the Calvinist idea that the offer of salvation is not made genuinely to everyone. The idea is challenged in this collection from biblical, historical, and theological directions, and the reader is left in the end with no doubt that, according to the solid testimony of Scripture, the offer of salvation is to everyone, the offer of salvation is genuine, and the offer of salvation is to be presented to everyone by Christians everywhere.

## PART ONE: TAKING ON THE TULIP

### Paige Patterson

Paige Patterson takes on the doctrine of total depravity and recasts it in the light of the biblical teaching. A wrong understanding of total depravity led to the misunderstanding that created the TULIP. By correctly setting forth what the Bible does and does not teach about depravity, Patterson highlights the host of problems that extreme Calvinism inevitably encounter when the doctrine of depravity is falsely construed.

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His contention is not that total depravity is a false teaching, only that the Scripture on it has been misunderstood. He goes to Romans 1-3, focusing on Rom. 3:10-17 as the linchpin Scripture on this doctrine. He shows that, while total depravity is scriptural, it is not quite the doctrine that Calvinism teaches. The main problem lies with the idea that total depravity means that the individual is completely unable to respond to God. Many Calvinists believe that this is true. God must do something in the soul of the sinner, who otherwise not only will not but cannot respond to God. God creates faith or he regenerates the soul so that the sinner can exercise faith. This leads to extreme ideas such as that regeneration can precede faith sometimes by days or even months. Patterson points out that nothing in the Bible necessitates this, and total depravity may be understood apart from the idea that the soul is totally incapable of responding to God.

Patterson ends with a story from WWII in which a sailor was left stranded in the water after his ship was destroyed. Blinded from the detonation and partially deafened, he could do nothing to save himself. However, he heard the sound of a rescue helicopter and was able to call out for help. They successfully lowered a rescuer and harness to him and got him out of the water. The sailor, like the soul, could do nothing to save himself and yet he was able to respond to the sound of the rescue helicopter. So also the human soul, upon hearing the call to repentance and faith, can respond, or not, even in a condition of total depravity.

### **Richard Land**

Richard Land's article, which he calls Congruent Election, is an effort to explain God's election in terms of His eternal perspective outside of time rather than in terms of the pre-temporal divine decree to choose who shall be elect and who shall not. He locates his discussion in the context of traditional Southern Baptist understandings of God's eternal purposes and human free will. Land recognizes that most Southern Baptists have been "neither fully Calvinists nor remotely Arminian" (49). Biblical authority necessitates belief in election for it is a biblical teaching just as is the teaching of human responsibility and free will. Land proposes a "congruent election model" which differs from unconditional election and which he believes is in line better with Scripture. Land sees two kinds of election: Abrahamic election and Salvation election. Calvinists, he contends, formulated their doctrine of election based on Abrahamic election, which is election of a whole people, because Calvin failed to distinguish properly between Israel and the church. Abrahamic election is corporate election of God's people. Salvation election is individual election of people from every nation and tribe and tongue for the purpose of their eternal salvation. How this works is difficult to see for election in Calvinist thinking has always been of specific individuals and that before the beginning of time. Land seems to locate election in God's eternal perspective outside of time. He believes that the elect are called to salvation and receive a solicitous call not an irresistible call. That is, they are called to salvation by God, who knows that they will accept. Land bases his argument on God's eternal—and therefore eternally present—experience of each human being and his or her response to the call to repentance and faith.

It appears that Land is locating election, how people will respond, in the foreknowledge of God. This is altogether biblical. It is not necessary, however, to differentiate this from an election that is unconditional. The proper focus of unconditional election should be on the fact that it is unconditional. Calvinists and their opponents have

focused too deeply on the problems of election (the location of election, the justice of predestination, whether there is double predestination, etc.), when the focus properly should be on how God's election (however it happens) is unconditional. It is the unconditional aspect of it that is significant. That is what is essential to Grace—which is the Calvinist concern.

Unconditional election stands as testimony to the fact that salvation is given apart from any merit whatsoever on the part of the recipient. It is the “unconditional” in unconditional election that emphasizes grace. Election as Land correctly points out arises from God's foreknowledge; not from some kind of arbitrary “good pleasure” on the part of God. It is not necessary to give up or modify the unconditional aspect of the doctrine to relocate the election aspect of it in God's foreknowledge and experience of the eternal now.

### David Allen

David Allen's challenge is to deal with a question that must be answered with a “yes” or a “no.” This one cannot be recast or modified; it is whether Scripture teaches limited atonement. He answers this question with a resounding “no” and makes the reason clear. Three major areas, he says, comprise the subject of atonement: intent, extent, and application. Intent relates to Christ's purpose, whether Christ desires equally the salvation of everyone or not. Extent asks: For whose sins was Christ punished? Was it for the whole world or just certain people? The application asks: When is it applied to the sinner? Is it in the eternal decrees of God, at the cross, or at the moment the sinner exercises faith in Christ? Allen begins with an extensive historical survey, piling up dead theologians like cordwood. He points out that not only Calvin but other reformers, some of the Westminster divines, and Puritans such as Richard Baxter, John Bunyan and Jonathan Edwards rejected limited atonement in their writings.

Allen, then, turns to exegetical considerations—a comparative examination of Scripture. He rightly points out that three key sets of text are important here: “the ‘all’ texts, the ‘world’ texts, and the ‘many’ texts” (78). These affirm an unlimited atonement, he says, although some Calvinists make much of the “many” texts. These texts are juxtaposed with texts that “Jesus died for His ‘church,’ His ‘sheep,’ and His ‘friends’” (78). The question is how these different sets of texts are to be reconciled. Allen properly affirms that the “church,” “sheep,” and “friends” texts are best seen in the light of the “all,” “world,” and “many” texts.

Allen takes on the Puritan John Owen, a defender of limited atonement, and demonstrates that Owen arrived at limited atonement apart from a careful consideration of the totality of Scripture and then read his theology into such passages as John 3:16-17. Contra Owen, Allen affirms that “no linguistic, exegetical, or theological grounds exist for reducing the meaning of ‘world’ to the ‘elect’” (80). Reading John 3:16-19 in the way that Owen does distorts John's purpose, says Allen. He sets Owen's understanding of John 3:16 against Dabney, who is a moderate Calvinist. Dabney's refutation of the high Calvinist position affirms, Allen points out, the clear meaning of John 3:16-19. Allen correctly points out that “the strength of any theological position is only as great as the exegetical base upon which it is built. Limited atonement (strict particularism) is built on a faulty exegetical foundation” (83).

Allen moves on to theological considerations. Here he takes on Owen again; critiquing his “double payment argument” (83), which states that it is unjust to require that the same sin be paid for twice. In other words, if Jesus paid for the sins of all people, then all people must be saved because they should not be required to pay for sins Jesus has already paid for. Since obviously not all people are saved, then Jesus did not pay for the sins of all people; therefore, these Calvinists argue, the atonement is necessarily limited. Jesus pays for the sins of the elect. The non-elect pay for their own, and are not required to pay for sins already paid. Thus there is no “double payment” for sins. Allen points out that this doctrine is not taught anywhere in the Scripture and most importantly “it negates the principle of grace in the application of the atonement—nobody is owed the application” (83).

One wishes that Allen had made more of this last argument, as it is a most telling criticism. The Calvinist error is to assume that specific sinners were purchased at the cross, rather than that a general opportunity for redemption was purchased for all. An analogy will help here. Many communities contract with a cable television provider. The community provides the right of way for the cable to be installed and offers tax breaks or other incentives for the company selected to provide cable services. The service is available to everyone in the community, but not everyone has cable. Cable service has not been purchased for every address but has been made possible for every address. By analogy, the local government is like Christ, making cable service (like salvation) available to everyone. The service is advertised—which is like the general call—and some choose to buy the service—like exercising faith in Christ. The fact that not everyone buys the cable service does not mean that the local government failed in its endeavor to provide the cable service. In the same way, if Jesus died for everyone but not everyone was saved, then that does not mean that the atonement failed. Jesus provided a service (eternal salvation) for every soul, if some do not buy in (exercise faith), that is no reflection of the success or failure of the provision.

Allen moves onto another argument by Owen: the so-called “treble choice argument” (86). This argument states that there are only three possible ways to look at the atonement: Jesus either died for all the sins of all men, for some of the sins of all men, or all of the sins of some men (86). Owens asserts that if Jesus died for all of the sins of all men, then all are saved; if he died for some of the sins of all men, no one is saved since some unatoned sins are left. Owen concluded that the only conclusion possible is that Jesus died for all of the sins of some men. Allen points out that the big problem with this is that Scripture nowhere teaches that anyone goes to Hell because no atonement was provided for them. They go to Hell because they refuse to believe and they reject the atonement that actually was provided for them: “The limitation was not in the provision of his death, but in the application” of that provision (86). The atonement Christ provided for all is applied to those who repent and trust Christ; it is not automatically applied to all men. The problem, as Allen correctly points out, is seeing the atonement as a payment made for specific people when Scripture itself does not treat it that way.

Logically, Allen points out, that those who hold to limited atonement commit the negative inference fallacy; they infer from some restricted statements in Scripture that Christ died only for the elect, when even those restrictive statements do not necessarily limit the atonement of Christ to the elect.

Allen ends with practical considerations. This is the weakest section of Allen's discussion, for whether a doctrine may be troublesome to some practices or to some other cherished doctrines has no bearing on whether the doctrine is true. If a doctrine is true, we must adjust our understanding of other doctrines and adjust our church practices to that reality. If it is not true, it naturally will have a negative effect on other doctrines and practices. The answer, in that case is to teach the truth and let practice fall in line with it.

Still, an awareness of the practical implications of a doctrine has some value. Allen is not alone in discussing practical matters and, in fact, anticipates some of the discussion in part two. The first problem he mentions, that limited atonement creates the problem of diminishing God's universal, saving will, is not really a problem at all. It would not be a problem at all if limited atonement were true, for in that case God's will to save would not be universal and this would be clear to everyone. The clear teaching of Scripture, however, is that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." This necessitates that we reject the doctrine of limited atonement and interpret other doctrines including the work of Christ on the cross in light of God's universal will to save all men and in the light of how all men clearly are not saved.

Several of the other practical problems Allen raises really are aspects of the problem of the doctrine's impact on evangelism—evangelism, preaching, and altar calls. All three are really the same problem: if some people's sins are atoned for and others' not, we honestly could not call all men to repentance. It would be disingenuous to do so knowing that some who hear the call have no opportunity to be saved.

Allen also rightly points out that Calvinism is not the gospel, and we should not confuse the two. Problems of fellowship emerge when some people equate being Southern Baptist with being Calvinist (or equally, its opposite, equating being Calvinist with NOT being Southern Baptist).

Allen's theological and exegetical reasoning are difficult to refute. Limited atonement is often a sticking point for non-Calvinists and Allen shows us clearly why. In fact, many moderate Calvinists call themselves "four pointers" because they reject limited atonement as foreign to the Scriptures and foreign to our sense of justice. It is a much stronger position than affirming all five points of the TULIP.

### **Steve Lemke**

Irresistible grace is critiqued by Steve Lemke in the next article. It is a logical consequence of the first three doctrines in five-point Calvinism. If total depravity means we cannot respond to God, unconditional election means that God elects me to salvation despite my lack of ability to respond, and limited atonement that Christ specifically and directly purchased my redemption at the cross, then logically, I have no option of finally refusing the grace of God that is offered to me. By analogy – if certain specific cattle are loaded into a cattle trailer that is being driven to El Paso, then all of the cattle in that trailer will end up in El Paso. They really have no choice in the matter. If like cattle we are chosen, separated from the herd, and loaded on to the heaven-bound trailer, then we cannot resist the heavenly journey predestined for us.

Lemke sets forth to critique the doctrine from both biblical and theological perspectives. He points out in numerous Scripture passages that grace is treated as resistible. In an effort to bring the whole Bible to bear, Lemke begins with a discussion of Israel's election and their refusal to obey the Lord and uphold the covenant that God had made with them. This, however, is very different from the grace of God offered in salvation, something Land made clear in his article on election.

Lemke then turns his attention to examples from the New Testament. In Acts 7 Stephen rebukes the Jews who had rejected Jesus, accusing them specifically of "resisting the Holy Spirit" (118; citing Acts 7:51). Lemke's position is less strong when he deals with Saul's conversion. "Obviously," Lemke says, "Saul had resisted the conviction of the Holy Spirit . . . but now [on the Damascus Road] God broke through Saul's resistance in a dramatic way (119, citing Acts 9:17). This, however, is not an argument against irresistible grace. Calvinists gladly will affirm that many people are resistant initially and may refuse to trust Christ many times before finally repenting and turning to Christ. The examples of people being resistant, even for some time, before believing, do not count for them as evidence against the doctrine. The problem for the Calvinist, however, is why such a thing as resistance to conversion—on the part of those who eventually believe—even happens at all. It would make more sense for one who is predestined to salvation if they immediately embraced the gospel upon first hearing it.

Lemke's position is strongest when he turns to the ministry of Jesus. First, he cites Matthew 23:37: Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. This makes no sense at all if grace were irresistible. Jesus would have no reason, Lemke asserts, to lament over the hard-heartedness of people for whom the offer of salvation had never come (120). Turning to Luke 13, Lemke focuses on Jesus' statement that for a rich person to enter heaven is as hard as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Lemke says, "If Jesus were a Calvinist, he never would have suggested that it is harder for rich persons to be saved by God's irresistible grace than poor persons. Their will would be change immediately and invincibly upon hearing God's effectual call . . . but the real Jesus was suggesting that their salvation was tied in some measure to their response and commitment to his calling" (121).

Lemke supports his argument with word studies; pointing out first the Scriptures that reference God's desire to save all or to save whosoever. Thirty references are given; seven references are of Jesus himself giving an all-inclusive invitation. Four references are found in the epistles and finally, two references in John's Gospel. Lemke sums it up, "The Scriptures contain significant evidence against irresistible grace. The Bible specifically teaches that the Holy Spirit can be resisted" (129).

Lemke, then, offers a theological assessment of irresistible grace. He raises a series of concerns; for example, that irresistible grace reverses the biblical order of salvation. That is, it leads to the idea that one must be regenerated in order for repentance and faith to become possible; whereas the biblical teaching is that repentance and faith lead to regeneration. Again Lemke brings numerous Scripture passages to bear, showing that repentance comes first and then the receiving of grace.

Like Allen, and later, Streett, Lemke points out that this doctrine can weaken the significance of evangelism and missions and even damage the idea of the necessity of

conversion itself. Anticipating articles by Evans and Little, Lemke also points out that serious problems arise with this doctrine because it teaches that God forces the human will. If the human will is not free, then God becomes the author of evil.

In a surprising argument, Lemke counters the contention that irresistible grace is part of a high view of the sovereignty of God, one which maximizes his sovereignty and his glory (153-62). Arguing both from logic and Scripture, Lemke defends the idea that God's greater glory is best shown when salvation is freely offered and freely accepted: "We should understand sovereignty and glory from God's perspective, not from a human perspective" (162).

One problem with either refuting or defending the doctrine of irresistible grace is that it is not falsifiable. Calvinists can contend that anyone who rejects the gospel was never elect and that everyone who repents and believes received an effectual call. There is no test case that can be set up by which it could be actually determined that someone resisted a genuine offer of the grace of God. However, when we resort to both Scripture and experience, as Lemke has done, we find ground to reject the doctrine. It is noteworthy that such a significant doctrine, if it were true, is nowhere explicitly taught in Scripture. Second, while it cannot be disproved, it is contrary to our own experience of how people respond to the gospel. Therefore, we have no warrant to regard it as anything other than false. If the doctrine were true, then our experiences are false and Scripture is false. This simple fact has been made clear to us in Lemke's article.

### **Kenneth Keathley**

Kenneth Keathley's essay, "Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints," is a bit puzzling at first read. Clearly, two different topics are in view here, not just one. Perseverance either is or is not an ontological reality in the life of believers and in the teaching of Scripture, while assurance is a subjective state of mind for the believer. At times it appears that Keathley regards the two as one in the same. The two should be regarded as separate. Many people know of situations where an individual claims absolute assurance of their salvation even though there is no evident manifestation of faith in their lives. Others struggle with doubt, while manifesting a lifestyle of love and service to Jesus Christ. Clearly assurance of one's salvation is not the same thing as perseverance of the saints, and it would have been helpful if Keathley had focused on the objective biblical teaching rather than the believer's subjective experience.

Having linked assurance and perseverance though, Keathley attempts to defend his own variation of the evidence-of-genuineness position that he believes resolves the tension between those biblical texts that speak of assurance of the believer's position in Christ and those texts that warn of judgment and admonish the believers to persevere. He begins his proposal with the matter of present certainty, which he says traditionally has been answered in three ways: 1) Roman Catholicism says assurance is not possible. 2) The Reformers treated assurance and genuine salvation as essentially the same thing. They believed that if you had genuine faith you also must have assurance. 3) The Puritans and most modern evangelicals have believed that assurance is logically deduced based on the changed life of the believer. In other words, for the Puritans and modern evangelicals "the basis of assurance . . . is sanctification, not justification" (169).

Keathley believes that the second option is the best one. Assurance of salvation is founded “on Jesus Christ and his work for us—nothing more and nothing less” (171). However his outworking of this moves away from a strict understanding of it as he presents it.

Keathley’s major focus is on eventual certainty. He says that knowing that one is presently saved is not the same as knowing one will be saved ultimately, and sets out three possible views: 1) apostasy is possible, the Arminian view; the view that current certainty is no guarantee of future salvation; 2) apostasy is not possible, which is the Calvinist and free grace view; and 3) apostasy is threatened but not possible. It is this third one that Keathley wants to focus on and modify. As he understands it, the warning passages are a part of what preserves believers in their faith; guaranteeing that their assurance is genuine.

What Keathley offers is a variation on the evidence-of-genuineness position. It has four parts:

- 1) Objectively, assurance is founded on the work of Christ on the cross, not on the subjective experience of the believer. Keathley is on solid ground here. Assurance is a form of faith. Believers should trust what God has said, not their experience or the quality of their faith, or any other factor in their lives. God’s word, and only God’s word is a certain basis for truth, and for faith that one is genuinely saved.
- 2) Subjectively, when one exercises saving faith, there is absolute assurance of salvation at the time. Doubts may come later—and for many certainly they do—but “a core conviction remains” (185). It is not quite clear what Keathley means by this. Does he mean that believers have doubts while maintaining assurance, and they hold assurance and doubt in tension in their minds? Does he mean that believers doubt their own salvation while the core conviction about the saving work of Christ remains? Or does he mean that believers may doubt but they will always return to a state of assurance? He never clearly states his position.
- 3) Perseverance is promised to the believer and guarantees that one’s faith will remain. However, if this is the case, it is hard to see why the warning passages matter at all. If perseverance is a promise (something the believer holds to by faith), then the warning passages in Scripture have no real place. If the warning passages are part of what preserves the believer, by (in a sense) scaring the believer into faithfulness, then perseverance is not promised, but is secured by works.
- 4) Finally, judgment and reward for the saved is based on the quality of the life they live. This is a traditional position, based on numerous scriptural promises of rewards in heaven.

Keathley’s proposal has the strength of basing assurance on what Christ has done, not on the believer’s subjective experience. He rightly recognizes that good works themselves do not provide real assurance. One’s good works relate to the past and help confirm that one has been saved but are no substitute for the promises based on the work of Christ on the

cross. At best, they play a “supporting role” (186). They merely help confirm objectively what the believer already knows subjectively: that he is the object of God’s love. He sees the warning passages in Scripture as “pointing out the obvious: genuine belief will not turn back” (186). It is hard to see how this is the case. Had the purpose of these passages been to point out that apostasy is impossible, would not the authors simply have said apostasy is impossible. Also, it is hard to see how he reconciles this with his earlier affirmation that the warning passages somehow work to keep the believer in the faith. We must look elsewhere for an understanding of these passages while affirming that “eternal life” really is eternal and that anyone who is genuinely saved is saved forever. Keathley is seeking to make good sense of a thorny issue and portions of his proposal are helpful. It, however, needs further development especially on the place of the warning passages, and he needs to distinguish more clearly between objective and subjective aspects: perseverance and assurance.

## PART TWO: RELATED QUESTIONS

### **Kevin Kennedy**

Part Two raises some theological and practical concerns inherent in Calvinism and in some respects covers ground previously covered in the other essays. The first essay is Kevin Kennedy’s “Was Calvin a ‘Calvinist’?: John Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement.” Kennedy echoes some of David Allen’s essay but focuses specifically on Calvin. He cites numerous passages where Calvin emphasizes the universal language of Scripture related to the atonement and even where he interprets the “many” passages in universal terms. As one reads Kennedy’s clear and lucid essay, one can almost imagine Calvin sitting in on one of the perennial “bull sessions” that happen in seminary student lounges, where limited atonement and other aspects of Calvinism are hotly debated. One imagines Calvin himself arguing against the contentions of the most ardent Calvinists in the room, using language very similar to that used by opponents of Calvinism today.

Kennedy points out that unbelievers who hear and reject the gospel are held doubly culpable; first, for the sins that have condemned them; and second, for rejecting the offer of salvation. If the offer was not genuine, one would not be culpable for rejecting it; so implicitly, even in these passages, one sees that Calvin was no proponent of limited atonement. What is the value of an essay like Kennedy’s? After all, whatever Calvin may have believed, Calvinism today is what it is. Does it matter whether Calvin held to one of the most controversial aspects of Calvinist doctrine? In fact it does matter, and Kennedy has given much help to serious students and inquirers on this point.

First, Kennedy’s essay corrects a serious misunderstanding of Calvin’s theology; a misunderstanding held by Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike. No longer can ardent Calvinists say with more zeal than knowledge “Calvin held that . . .” While this fact alone does not disprove limited atonement, it does make it clear that the doctrine is itself a misunderstanding of its supposed source.

Second, for those whose confidence in their Calvinist faith is based on a misapprehension that Calvin is at one with popular Calvinism, and are sure that, if Calvin really were here participating in that seminary bull session, he would argue unequivocally for



the whole TULIP, Kennedy's essay destroys that misplaced confidence. Hopefully, this will drive the ardent Calvinist to a fresh consideration of his own theological position and a humble recognition that his zeal should go no further than his own personal and careful perusal of primary sources. Those who are considering Calvinism should take warning to avoid depending on what they hear or read until they too have read the primary sources. Many have been led to accept or reject something they understand only through hearsay and Kennedy has given these Christians solid help.

Finally, Kennedy's essay serves as a reminder to us all that Calvin himself was a serious Bible scholar willing to allow his theology to be shaped by the teachings of Scripture and not by any set system or dogma. The criticism that Calvinism is a matrix or filter between believers and their Bibles is well apt. The fact that Calvin himself let the Bible shape his theology is a methodological challenge to re-examine our own theological biases with Scripture.

### **Malcolm Yarnell**

Malcolm Yarnell discusses "the Potential Impact of Calvinist Tendencies upon Local Baptist Churches." His is one of the clearest and most lucid of the essays. Still, the warning "adopt this teaching and these bad consequences will follow" is difficult to prove, and Yarnell's success in the endeavor is mixed.

Calvinism, he believes, will wreak havoc on traditional Baptist polity and practice due to certain ecclesiological tendencies inherent in the teaching. For one thing, whereas Baptists have emphasized the New Testament church as the basis of their practice, Calvin emphasized "the ancient church." The ancient church is a more hazy (217) concept than the New Testament church and brings in traditions and beliefs that depart from the New Testament practice. The ancient church includes, for Calvin, Old Testament believers (his commentaries refer to Moses and David leading "the church," which is a startling idea to most readers today), the New Testament church, and the early church up to the early middle ages. Thus Calvinism permits a broad range of practices and doctrines that completely are foreign to the New Testament.

A major problem for Baptists in this regard is that in Calvin's conception even Christ was "a participant in and subject to the ancient church's forms" (218, citing *Institutes* 4.11.4). This inherently undermines biblical authority and allows for a host of ideas and innovations completely foreign to the New Testament, such as infant baptism and a structured hierarchy over the congregation. Some Baptist churches have adopted some of these innovations while eschewing others. Clearly the warning is apt and churches that adopt Calvinism should be careful to distinguish between Scripture and Calvin's way of treating Scripture.

Yarnell says that Calvin found a basis for religious intolerance in his reading of both Scripture and Augustine, which led him to agree to the burning of Servetus, for example. Yarnell, while believing that Baptists today would not ever go that far, sees Calvinist theology as a threat to liberty of conscience, which is foundational to Baptist life. It is hard to see how this would happen. Calvin exercised both secular and religious authority in Geneva, something few, if any Baptists today would have opportunity to do.

Yarnell also sees Calvinism as a threat to congregation polity. He believes that adopting some kind of hierarchy within church life is an inevitable result of holding to a Calvinist doctrine. Many Baptist churches have adopted elder rule. The creation of a church hierarchy, however, is not inevitable, and Yarnell would have done well to have developed this further showing why elder rule is wrong and how Calvinism has influenced this shift in polity. Instead, feeling pressure to cover broader ground, he presents this problem in general terms and in just a few sentences.

An interesting threat that Yarnell sees is an antinomian tendency in Calvinism. Calvin, he says, believed that maintaining moral purity among church members was not necessary for the church, which exists anywhere the sacraments are administered and the Bible is preached. Nothing else was necessary. Calvin believed that the Anabaptists were wrong for insisting on regenerate church membership and separation from worldly people and practices. While Calvin believed that ideally the church should be holy, he did not see it as realistic, and he did not think it was proper to insist up on it. Yarnell believes that these tendencies explain why Reformed churches are willing to innovate with regard to the church whereas Baptists have been reluctant to do so. In his discussion, he does not get specific but leads one to think of the recent struggles of some Presbyterian denominations over such matters as the admission of homosexuals into the ministry and their willingness to established doctrine and practice well outside the boundaries of Scripture.

One wishes that Yarnell had tempered his warning here with recognition that this antinomian tendency is not inevitable for every church that adopts Calvinist doctrine. Many Presbyterian and Reformed churches have maintained their doctrinal and moral foundations even in the face of significant pressure to change. The “old evangelical” tradition in American Christianity was driven largely by the Presbyterian and Reformed wings of the church. Until recent years, Baptists have done very little in the larger evangelical world. It has been Presbyterians, such as those at Princeton in the nineteenth century and Westminster in the twentieth who have upheld and defended the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and who have insisted upon building doctrine squarely on the Bible in areas of Christology, Soteriology, and Theology proper. This presents a challenge to those who would say that a liberalizing tendency is inevitable in Calvinist doctrine. It is not.

Another matter that Yarnell overlooks is that when many Baptist churches adopt “Calvinism” they are adopting the TULIP, which essentially is a soteriology with broader theological implications, not the full range of Calvinist doctrine. A church can embrace the TULIP, if they believe it is fully scriptural—admittedly a difficult thing to do after reading this volume—without adopting every aspect of Calvin’s thoughts. As Calvinism recently has grown among Southern Baptists, the usual departure from Baptist doctrine and practice has been the adoption of elder rule by some. Other departures have been far less common. Still, Yarnell’s warning is worthy of our attention. Churches embracing the TULIP need to be aware and intentional about what they are rejecting as much as about what they are adopting.

### **R. Allen Streett**

R. Allen Streett’s essay, “The Public Invitation and Calvinism,” highlights some critical and practical issues previously discussed by Lemke and Allen. Streett contends that a public invitation in worship and in evangelism is thoroughly biblical and proper. He

examines even the Old Testament, in which he finds numerous examples where God, Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Josiah called publicly for commitment and action on the Word of God. For example, Joshua called the people to make a commitment, “choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 1:15). Josiah had the Law read aloud; and he made a public commitment to do according to what the Lord had said, and the people followed him in it (2 Kgs. 23:3).

In the New Testament, Jesus called people to public and personal commitment at various times. It was not enough simply to hear the word. Paul, Peter, and Philip made direct appeals for people to exercise faith. Streett points out that baptism was the response to the invitation to trust Christ. One’s profession of faith upon baptism was not separate from one’s baptism.

Streett points out that throughout the history of the church, with the exception of Roman Catholicism, there has been a public invitation to repentance and faith as an integral part of the church’s life and evangelistic practice. Clearly, the public invitation was not an innovation born out of revivalism and the Second Great Awakening.

Streett devotes a great deal of attention to Martyn Lloyd-Jones who vigorously spoke against the giving of public invitations. Streett makes it clear that Lloyd-Jones’ concern was with the invitation as a form of coercion or psychological manipulation and that sometimes people respond to public invitations for wrong motives. He also was concerned that people get the idea that it is walking forward in response to the invitation that actually saves people rather than the finished work of Christ. Streett acknowledges these concerns and points out that proper and the careful preaching of the gospel coupled with a right motive on the part of the evangelist will correct these problems. The public invitation should not be abandoned merely because it is sometimes abused.

Finally, Lloyd-Jones was concerned that the public invitation supplants “the work of the Holy Spirit” (249). Streett answers this one by pointing out that the evangelist and the Holy Spirit work together in issuing the call to nonbelievers. He quotes Revelation 22:17, “the Spirit and the bride say come.”

In response to Calvinists and some Baptists who have abandoned the giving of a public invitation, he turns to a point of Calvinist doctrine: the outer, universal call and the inner, specific call. The evangelist issues the outer call while the Holy Spirit issues the inner or effectual call. Streett recognizes that not everyone who responds to the outer call is regenerated; only those who respond to the inner call experience genuine salvation. Streett fails to recognize, though, that this is no solution to committed and doctrinaire Calvinists. It is the reality of the difference between these two calls that biases many Calvinists against issuing what they see as a useless and ineffectual call. Streett is on stronger ground when he shows that this outer general call is both biblical and historical.

### **Jeremy Evans and Bruce Little**

The last two articles are by Jeremy Evans and Bruce Little and deal with the matter of human freewill and God’s sovereignty. Evans focuses on the question of whether free decisions and actions are possible. Contra high Calvinism, that all of our decisions and

actions are determined, Evans defends the idea of libertarian freedom; even though my actions may be determined by antecedent conditions, I am still free with regard to my decisions and resulting actions.

He directly applies this to the concept of irresistible grace, which he sees as an unnecessary doctrine. If my decision is free—even the decision to trust Christ—even though antecedent conditions have led me to that decision, then there is no need for a doctrine of irresistible grace or effectual calling. He rightly points out that if our decisions are not free, these doctrines are necessary; but if they are free, then they inherently would interfere with free will.

Evans' essay addresses a host of questions that do not seem directly pertinent to this issue, such as the place of divine aseity and the question of whether this is the best possible world. He rightly recognizes that it does not matter whether sin is necessary for the best possible world to be actualized, because the argument sets up a bizarre relationship between God and the world, one in which God both requires sin and opposes sin in the process of actualizing the world as we have it. In other words, God is divided against himself and reveals himself in ways contrary to his true nature. Evans does not deal with Scripture that are troublesome for this issue, and one wishes that he had. The classic example involves how God "hardened the heart of Pharaoh," as well as passages in the Prophets that indicate that God chose and used Assyria for His purposes before judging them.

Bruce Little's essay, "Evil and God's Sovereignty," raises the question of whether we commit free acts or whether God causes us to commit sinful acts. Little recognizes that it is incoherent to say that God is the author and ultimate cause of every sin we commit. He cites Deuteronomy 28 to show that the Bible treats human beings as free agents who have the capacity to make significant moral choices. If God's word sees it this way, we can do no less. Little seeks to bridge theological and pastoral concerns in answering these questions; and his commitment to letting the Bible have the last word is refreshing.

Still, the issue of God's relationship to sin remains; Both Evans and Little specifically reflect on how, if God causes us to act, are we responsible for the sins we commit? However, can we maintain the goodness of God if we believe that he somehow requires evil for greater goods to come? Evans especially has helped us see that God is not required to cause evil. Further consideration of the matter is necessary. The world God actualizes is one to which he relates contingently. This is because of human free will, which both Evans and Little have defended. In a perfect (i.e. unfallen) world, the problem of evil does not emerge. In a world where God sovereignly decrees all things that happen, the problem is that God is both the author and opponent of evil. In a world such as the one in which we live, God does not cause evil but human beings freely choose to commit evil acts, and God acts for his purposes in the world that results. Thus, God both condemns the king of Assyria for his evil, and uses him for His own purposes (Isaiah 10). While God is not responsible for evil and honestly reveals his opposition to it in Scripture, he relates to a world in which evil exists in order to actualize such goods as He chooses for His own purpose.

## CONCLUSION

Allen and Lemke's collection of essays offers a valuable corrective to the excesses of both Calvinists and Arminianists. Both extremes fall into unbiblical understandings of ultimate reality, including how God relates to the world and to his church. This is not to say that both are utterly wrong. Truth lies somewhere else entirely. Clearly, such Calvinist concepts as total depravity and divine election, if construed carefully, are taught in the Bible. However, other concepts such as limited atonement and irresistible grace clearly are not there, as the Arminians contend. Perseverance, the saved truly are saved forever, is biblical as well, and yet the warnings against apostasy must be given closer attention than has been the case in the past.

While the practical consequences of Calvinism may or may not emerge in every church that adopts the system, they are issues about which Baptists should be aware. As we seek to be thoroughly biblical in our theology, especially as it relates to our great salvation given to us in Christ, we must all give careful attention to Scripture, to the primary sources of every theological system that offers itself for consideration, and to how certain doctrines may affect church practice. *Whosoever Will* has gone a long way in making this possible and will be invaluable in the years ahead to help churches avoid the excesses of Calvinism without rejecting the clearly biblical teachings found there. Let us all hope that these writers will expand upon their reflections in future writings, and that churches and pastors will take to heart, not only the viewpoints expressed here, but the examples of careful thought, attention to primary sources, and the proper use of Scripture, when future theological controversies and questions emerge.

# NEITHER CALVINISTS NOR ARMINIANS BUT BAPTISTS

## Are You Calvinists or Arminians?

There is a question that many professional theologians, pastors and students, as well as theologically-minded Christians in the local churches, are being asked these days: Are you Calvinists or Arminians? More specifically, in our case, are the authors who have contributed to *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* to be identified with Calvinists or Arminians? Because that book is specifically intended to address the type of Calvinism that measures theology according to the five heads of doctrine promulgated in the canons of the Synod of Dort, the idea may arise that the authors themselves are, therefore, Arminian. This idea has been clearly promoted by Roger E. Olson, an articulate advocate of Arminianism, author of a significant text on Arminian theology, a self-proclaimed “classical Arminian,” and a recent reviewer of *Whosoever Will*. In an academic book review at [www.BaptistTheology.org](http://www.BaptistTheology.org) and on his personal blog, Dr. Olson identified the authors as both “anti-Calvinist” and “Arminians.”

Although we might variously appreciate Professor Olson’s claims that the book “contains 11 mostly excellent chapters by Southern Baptist leaders and scholars absolutely demolishing key Calvinist doctrines,” and that it “stands as *the* scholarly argument against Calvinism by evangelical authors,” we would unanimously, though respectfully, disagree with his characterization of us as “Arminian.” As he notes, the editors do not claim to be Arminians. Here, the relevant words from the book’s introduction seem appropriate to repeat: “none of the authors in this project is Arminian or a defender of Arminianism. None of the authors is a five-point Arminian, a Pelagian, a semi-Pelagian, or a strong Calvinist. . . . Instead, our contributors try to keep the two more extreme positions in balance, learning from both, counting themselves as being in the mainstream of the Baptist theological tradition” (*Whosoever Will*, 5).

If you were to read more broadly in their works or hear each of them speak in both private and public settings, the contributors themselves occupy a spectrum of views on the controverted points of Calvinism. Some of the authors in *Whosoever Will* would occupy a position closer to five-point Calvinism while others would occupy a position closer to Arminianism, but none would identify himself with either extreme. Yet other contributors would adamantly maintain that the common practice of measuring theology according to a flawed instrument created by a gaggle of baby baptizing, state church theologians in the seventeenth century is by degrees anachronistic and unhelpful. The purpose of each author in contributing to the book was to provide a critique of some aspect of Dortian Calvinism from a majoritarian Baptist perspective rather than to promote a particular version of Calvinism or Arminianism.

So, why did these theologians address Calvinism? Note these factors: First, a major task for any theologian is to reflect critically upon the proclamation of the church. Second, many of our churches have recently been proclaiming Calvinism with the encouragement of sectors of the Southern Baptist academy. Taken together, these factors require responsible theologians to address an issue that is of growing concern among many of our churches. We are servants of the churches, and when we are constantly bombarded with well-meant queries regarding biblical

interpretation in our classrooms, churches and homes, we are compelled to deliver a reasonable response. We addressed Calvinism because we were asked to help our people think through the important subjects that Calvinism raises. For this, we have no regret but a sense of duty.

Logically, because the authors are providing a critique of Calvinism from a biblical-theological perspective, it might be assumed that they are the ideological opposite: Arminians. However, had the authors provided a critique of Arminianism from a biblical-theological perspective (a critique we have not attempted nor perceived the need to address at this time), they would doubtless be identified by some as Calvinists. Indeed, we understand yet another forthcoming book has referred to us as “moderate Calvinists.” While some of the contributors might be comfortable with that designation, yet others would disagree with the characterization of being “moderate” with regard to any theological position, including Calvinism. The same discomfort with regard to certain labels applies to the description of the authors as “anti-Calvinist.” Again, a citation from the book would be helpful: “The contributors are not ‘anti-Calvinist’ and therefore are interested in dialogue, not diatribe. We have no desire to sweep the SBC clean of Calvinism” (9).

### **So, Then, Who Are We?**

So, then, the authors claim they are neither Calvinist nor Arminian, nor anti-Calvinist. Because the authors have been clear as to what they are not and what their agenda is not, we would ask our readers to honor our claims. However, since these claims have apparently left a sense of conceptual vacuum for many readers, we would like to remind our readers of who we are and of what our agenda consists. Rather than allowing others to define us according to a construction not of our own making, we would prefer to fill the ideological space created by certain reactions to the book with our own meaning.

(Please note three qualifications: First, the book itself was not intended to provide a full statement of the way forward but to provide a critique. Please respect the stated purpose of the book alongside the narrow purposes stated for each essay to stand, and please judge them on those self-identified bases. Second, as the writers of this particular response, please note that the undersigned are not the totality of the eleven. We believe the other contributors to *Whosoever Will* would not disagree with much, if any, of our assessment. Third, in this essay we are not attempting to provide a complete systematic statement of our theology but merely an outline of the focus we believe should provide the way forward for all Baptists, especially Southern Baptists.)

Are we Calvinists? No. Are we Arminians? No. So, then, who are we? We are Baptists. We are majoritarian Baptists in the Sandy Creek tradition, who formulate theology according to the authoritative, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God so that we might better proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all human beings. We are neither Calvinists nor Arminians; we are Baptists! Please give us a moment of your time to unpack the meaning of this important position. We believe that almost anywhere you stand on the ideological spectrum of Calvinism and Arminianism, or even if you refuse to take a stand on the spectrum itself, you could and should join us in affirming, as some of our leaders have said before: “The primary focus of Christians should be to carry out the Great Commission under the lordship of Jesus Christ according to the guidelines found in the inerrant Word of God” (8). In summary, we are neither Calvinists nor Arminians, but Baptists!

### Neither Calvinists

Let us address the negative side of this position statement, “We are neither Calvinists nor Arminians.” The book itself outlines many reasons why we are not Calvinists, but three of those bear repeating in light of our own priorities. First, we do not believe that Dortian Calvinism properly represents the gospel of Jesus Christ in its simplicity and profundity according to the Bible. We are uncomfortable with Dortian Calvinism because we believe its rigid structure is imposed upon Scripture and that it does not allow Scripture to form theology. As philosopher Steve Lemke queried about the Calvinist belief in irresistible grace, “Is Scripture being shaped to make it agree with one’s theological system, or is one’s theological system being shaped according to Scripture?” (127). Malcolm Yarnell was similarly concerned that an exemplary Reformed theologian’s methodological approaches to Scripture “reflect a thoroughgoing rationalism that is prior to and formative for his treatment of Scripture” (*The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 50).

Second, we are not Calvinists because we do not believe certain Calvinist doctrines can be found in a gospel-ruled, canonical reading of Scripture. This is why the authors of *Whosoever Will* repeatedly refer to the plain sense of scriptural passages according to the grammatical and historical context. From the detailed expository approach to John 3:16 by Jerry Vines (*Whosoever Will*, ch. 1), to the commonsense contextual reading of Ephesians 2:1ff by Paige Patterson (ch. 2), to the canonical approach to defining biblical language utilized by both David Allen (78–83) and Steve Lemke (117–29), the authors repeatedly demonstrate a necessary return to Scripture. Scripture is sufficient for the substance and structure of our preaching, and though we seek to address those living in contemporary cultural contexts, we call our listeners to begin with hearing the Bible in its own context and end with contemporary personal submission to that Word. As a result, most of us are convinced, against Dortian Calvinism, that Scripture does not teach that man is totally unable to respond to the call of God to believe, or that grace does violence to the human will, or that Jesus Christ’s death failed to propitiate for the sins of “the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

Third, we are not Calvinists because we are genuinely concerned about the impact of Dortian Calvinism upon evangelism. As David Allen asserted, “Christians must evangelize *because God wills all men to be saved* and has made atonement *for all men*, thus removing the legal barriers that necessitate their condemnation” (97). How could God offer salvation to all people with integrity if Jesus did not die for all (2 Corinthians 5:20)? Since the Calvinist doctrine of limited or particular atonement “provides an insufficient motive for evangelism by undercutting the well-meant gospel offer” by God to all men, as well as by us to all men, Southern Baptists should reject five-point Calvinism (107). We decry the efforts of Calvinist professors of limited atonement who argue the evangelistic altar call is unbiblical or that it somehow represents an attempt by those who deliver altar calls to “manipulate the sovereignty of God” (101). We are motivated to offer the gospel to all, and to invite all to respond, even in a public fashion, because Christ died for all.



Moreover, as the evangelistic preacher Jerry Vines argued, the crisis behind our understanding of Christ's offer of "*Whosoever Will*" comes down to the type of God we are worshipping: "It is the design of the sovereign God to make the salvation of all people possible and to secure the salvation of all who believe. What kind of God would not make salvation possible for all?" (25). We do not ask such questions in order to score rhetorical points against our Calvinist Baptist brethren, but because we believe that the God revealed in Scripture is a God who loves all men, desires their salvation, and has made salvation possible for all by Christ's death for all.

We say such things because we perceive grace when we hear the gospel verbally and enthusiastically offered to all men freely through personal repentance toward God and faith in Christ. With the first Baptist pastor in England, we believe that Christ died for all men. This is a "comfortable doctrine," because "every poor soul may know that there is salvation for him by Christ and that Christ hath shed His blood for him, that believing in Him he may be saved, and that God wants not the death of him, but that he should repent and live" (Thomas Helwys, *A Short and Plain Proof by the Word*, 1611). This is our passion: that every sinner, without qualification, may hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, believe in Him and be saved! With regard to this God, who loves all people, we can agree with Roger Olson, who claims that Arminians "are in love with God's goodness and unwilling to sacrifice that on the altar of divine determinism."

### Nor Arminians

And, yet, neither are we happy to receive the name of "Arminian." Although we respect Professor Olson's scholarship and passion for God's love, we disagree with his assessment of where we are. Our understanding from the five Arminian articles of 1610 is that classical Arminians are unsure as to whether Christians may lose their salvation. As the Remonstrants' fifth article states, they did not reach a conclusion regarding the perseverance of the saints "*cum plerophoria animi nostri*", with full assurance in their minds (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, III, 549). On the other hand, unlike classical Arminians, we are absolutely sure that Scripture teaches that a born-again Christian will be saved. This is why our Baptist Faith and Message affirms, without equivocation, "All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end" (art. V, "God's Purpose of Grace"). Some have referred to Southern Baptists as moderate Calvinists, because our confession clearly affirms this one point addressed by the heads under contention between Calvinists and Arminians. In our churches, this belief is more popularly identified as "once saved, always saved." On this point, confessional Southern Baptists may never be said to be Arminian, and we are indeed confessional Southern Baptists.

We could also raise other concerns about Arminianism. Among those would be concerns about the tendency of some Arminians to fall into the trap of Open Theism, a doctrine with which we are in adamant disagreement. In response, we would point out that, according to the Baptist Faith and Message, "God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures" (art. II, "God"). The specter of Open Theism arises when we begin to speculate with regard to the doctrine of human free will and proceed to oppose human free will stridently against divine sovereignty. Ken Keathley (*Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*) and Jeremy Evans (*Whosoever Will*, ch. 10) have provided some crisp theological reasons for where we might be headed with regard to these issues.

As mission-minded and evangelistic Baptists, we are uncomfortable with moving too far beyond scriptural revelation into speculative theological models. Jerry Vines referred to “simple biblicism” in his sermon and this describes where we have additional difficulties. Arminians and Calvinists too often seem to be involved in a harsh intramural discussion that begins with a few scriptural texts and then transitions too quickly toward theological speculation. This propensity to move beyond the biblical text is where we see the problems of both Hyper-Calvinism and Open Theism arising. Over against these efforts, we prefer to set aside distracting theological speculation and focus on teaching the gospel clearly and compellingly to our students and churches, both modeling and encouraging the development of personal and professional lives that keep gospel proclamation at the center of our and their efforts.

Moreover, please note that we see many things to appreciate in Calvinism, important things that keep us in fellowship with our Calvinist Baptist brethren. As Paige Patterson pointed out several years ago, there are six reasons why non-Calvinist Baptists fellowship with Calvinist Baptists. We reproduce those here for your benefit, with the caveat that even more things that keep Calvinist and non-Calvinist Baptists together could be listed:

Calvinists, Patterson said: “usually lead very pious lives”; believe theology is important; generally are “very clear about the dangers involved in the charismatic movement”; “understand the purpose of everything is to glorify God”; “never question the inerrancy of Scripture or the substitutionary atonement of Christ”; and “are crystal clear about the fact that salvation is by grace alone” (Baptist Press, 13 June 2006).

Therefore, our claims that we are neither fully Calvinists nor fully Arminians are deeply held and do not arise because of political reasons but issue forth from genuine theological convictions that have ecclesiological ramifications.

### **But Baptists!**

At this point, we would like to affirm more clearly who we are from a positive perspective. Please note that as we make these affirmations we are not saying that Calvinist Baptists and Arminian Baptists are not truly seeking to be Baptists. We certainly believe that Baptists can be Calvinists and they can be Arminians, but we prefer not to allow ourselves to be defined by either of those great positions, because we see something even greater, something that deserves more attention and requires a higher allegiance. Likewise, theologians open to Molinism, such as Bruce Little and Ken Keathley, do their work with a firm commitment to evangelical Baptist convictions. What we are saying is that our own passion for God’s Word, for Christ and for His Great Commission necessarily places every desire for settling the long-running and seemingly intractable Calvinist-Arminian debate to the side. We recognize this is a debate that will continue to be held and should be held in certain restricted venues. However, the debate itself is trumped by our need to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, to proclaim Scripture, and to obey His Great Commission. Moreover, we believe our position is the mainstream Southern Baptist position, as Richard Land said in his chapter, “the Separate Baptist Sandy Creek Tradition has been the melody for Southern Baptists, with Charleston and other traditions providing harmony” (50). Here are our thoughts about these interwoven, mutually reinforcing and majoritarian priorities:

### **1. The Lordship of Jesus Christ**

We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. Salvation consists of this fundamental and profound affirmation in heart and mouth. To believe and say that Jesus is Lord is to affirm that God in Christ took upon Himself human nature. True faith is impossible apart from the work of the Spirit of God with the Word of God. Born of a virgin, the Word became flesh. Jesus Christ taught us and worked great miracles, and then he died on the cross to atone for the sins of all humanity. He then arose from the dead on the third day, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and will one day return to judge the living and the dead. As our Lord, He saves us now through faith in Him. As our Lord, He has the right to command us and we have the responsibility to obey Him entirely and according to His order. As our Lord, He preserves us as we carry the cross He has given us through this world. As our Lord, he reigns over us even through death itself and brings us victoriously into eternal life with Him. We come to God the Father through God the Son in God the Holy Spirit. Jesus is Lord!

### **2. Biblical Proclamation**

We believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, including every word in the entire canon of the Old and New Testaments. As a result of divine inspiration, the Bible is the Word of God and is without error and sufficient for every aspect of the Christian life, from regeneration to proclamation. The Word of God is living and active and will accomplish that for which the Lord sent it. As a preacher proclaims the Word of God, the Spirit opens the ears of the hearer to listen and perceive the Word. The preacher of the Word has been chosen as a necessary instrument by God to proclaim His Word and that Word may not be separated from Scripture; therefore, the Christian minister's powerful task is to proclaim the Bible in its depth and its fullness. As a result of these truths, we believe that expository preaching of the Bible is the means God has revealed to bring about the salvation of new believers and the growth and comfort of all Christians.

### **3. The Great Commission**

We believe that the Great Commission is the commandment of Jesus Christ. As the Lord's final and all-encompassing command to His disciples, the Great Commission must be heard and obeyed with utmost seriousness. The Great Commission is primarily focused upon the making of disciples and is inclusive also of going to the nations, baptizing new believers and teaching them all that Christ commanded. The Christian's entire life and the church's entire effort must be submitted to obeying this commission. This entails the effort to evangelize everyone in our hearing through bringing our voice to everyone, everywhere, at all times. This entails following the order of His commission through baptizing people only after he or she has truly become a disciple of Jesus Christ. This entails baptizing a person in the name of the one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This entails teaching all of Christ's commands, which means teaching all of Scripture. The Great Commission will not be completed until all nations have been reached and all people have been confronted with the call to follow Jesus, until He comes again. Baptists view the conundrum of divine sovereignty and human responsibility through the lens of the Great Commission. As we wrestle to apprehend the Bible's simultaneous affirmation of both truths, whether we lean toward Calvinism or Arminianism or neither, we do so in such a way as to always promote the great work of evangelism and missions.

With these three positive Baptist affirmations in mind, we ask that people identify us neither as Calvinists nor as Arminians, but as Baptists. We know this may not provide a certain

intellectual satisfaction for solving theological conundrums, but we really think there is a greater question than, “How do you reconcile divine sovereignty with human freedom?” This greater question needs to be answered because it is more important than any other. There is no greater question for the Christian to answer at this point in God’s plan for His creation, and it has to do with His redemption of creation. That question is, “How are we, His chosen instruments, going to obey our Lord and proclaim the good news of His Word—the gospel of His death for the sins of the world and His resurrection for our sakes—to everyone, everywhere and at all times, until He comes again?” This question defines us. This is why we want to be known simply as “Baptists.”

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*Director of the Center for Theological Research and Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology  
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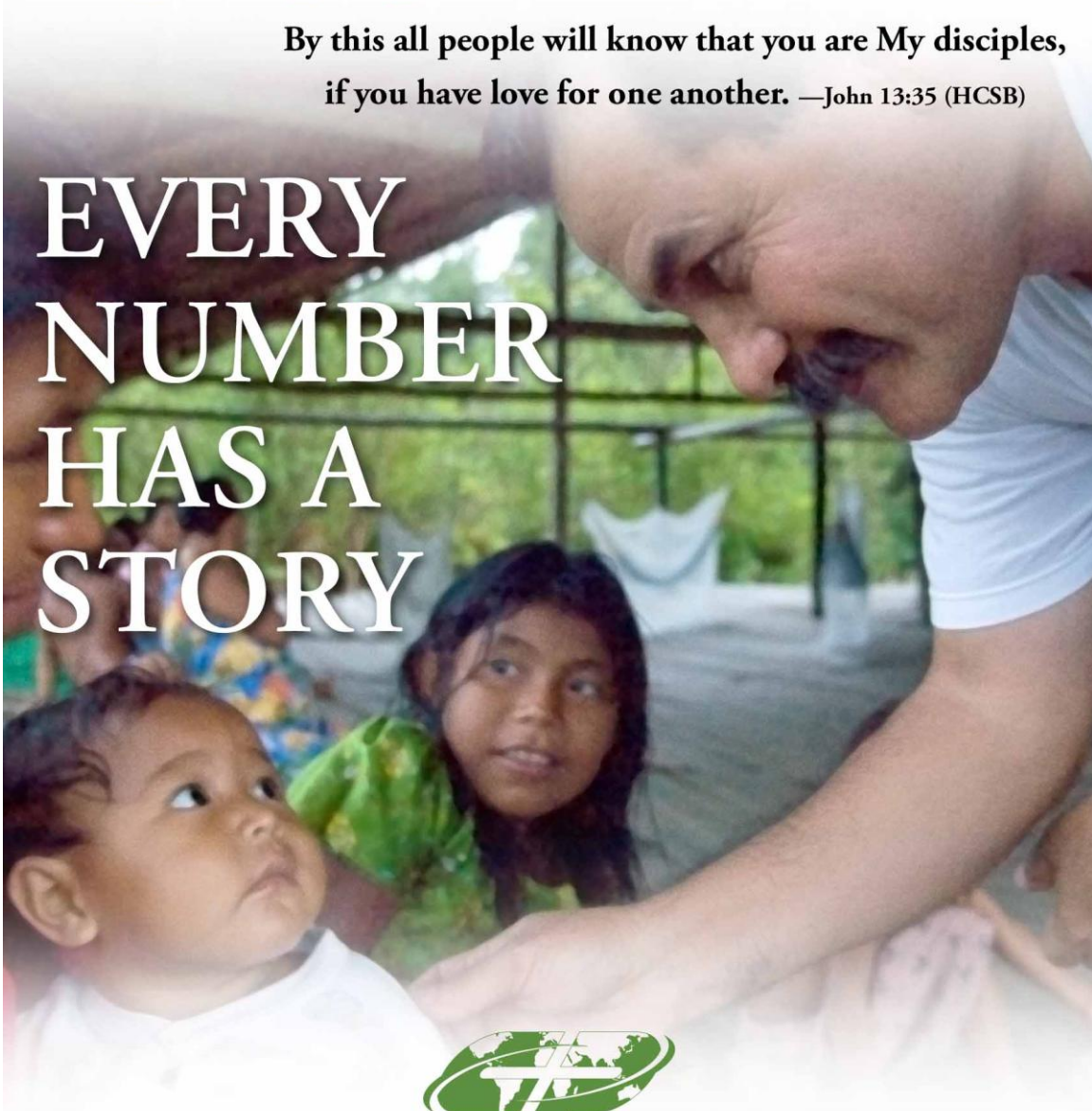
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- David L. Allen
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# 13:35

By this all people will know that you are My disciples,  
if you have love for one another. —John 13:35 (HCSB)

## EVERY NUMBER HAS A STORY



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SECTION 2

RESPONSES TO  
*SALVATION AND SOVEREIGNTY*

“WATCH YOUR LIFE AND DOCTRINE  
CLOSELY. PERSEVERE IN THEM,  
BECAUSE IF YOU DO, YOU WILL  
SAVE BOTH YOURSELF AND YOUR  
HEARERS.”

1 TIMOTHY 4:16

# AN INTRODUCTION TO *SALVATION AND SOVEREIGNTY*

KENNETH D. KEATHLEY.<sup>1</sup>

Last November at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Gerry Breshears of Western Seminary presented a paper on Calvinism and Arminianism in which he asked, “Why do so many Christians try to be some sort of ‘Calminian?’” He provided his own answer: “It’s because they read their Bibles.” I agree with his observation. Calvinists rightly note that Scripture declares that salvation is completely a gracious and sovereign work of God. And Arminians correctly emphasize the biblical teaching that a hearer of the gospel is called upon to choose, that the ability to choose truly is in his power (via a work of grace), and that he will be held accountable for his choice. Many Calvinists and Arminians argue that their respective positions are mutually exclusive, so they conclude no mediating position is possible. Yet serious students of the Bible cannot help but notice that it seems to teach many elements of both systems in the very way that supposedly is impossible.

This is where Molinism steps in. Molinism is a theological model that demonstrates it is reasonable to affirm simultaneously divine sovereignty and human choice in a way that does justice to both concepts. I wrote *Salvation and Sovereignty: a Molinist Approach* in the hope of encouraging the typical Baptist, who generally is a Biblicist, and of helping him or her realize that he or she can hold to a mediating position between Calvinism and Arminianism without sacrificing logical coherence. In 1791, the great pastor John Leland is reported to have declared, “I conclude that the eternal purposes of God and the freedom of the human will are both truths, and it is a matter of fact that the preaching that has been most blessed of God and most profitable to men is the doctrine of sovereign grace in the salvation of souls, mixed with a little of what is call Arminianism.” (Quoted in Allen and Lemke: 2010, 46) In *Salvation and Sovereignty*, I have endeavored to strike the balance that Leland promoted.

I wish to express my gratitude to the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* for devoting the space it has to reviews of *Salvation and Sovereignty*. I do not think the book gives the last word on the subject; nor do I think Molinism unlocks all divine mysteries. But it is a very fruitful model that seemingly does justice to disparate biblical themes. A Molinist can throw himself into the task of fulfilling the Great Commission while holding to two biblical truths that at first seem contradictory. The Molinist can preach and witness with the confidence that the Lord of the harvest will accomplish His perfect work (Acts 18:9-10) while simultaneously realizing that his decision to obey (or disobey) will have eternal consequences (Ezek 3:17-18). For the glory of God alone.

Ken Keathley  
Wake Forest, NC  
New Years, 2011

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth D. Keathley (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) Senior Vice President of Academic Administration, Dean of the Faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.



MOST OF THE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES OF THE BAPTIST CENTER ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE AT [BAPTISTCENTER.COM](http://BAPTISTCENTER.COM). AMONG THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BAPTIST CENTER FOR THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY ARE THE FOLLOWING:



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Access articles on topics of interest written by Southern Baptist leaders and scholars with healthy sense of Baptist Identity. You can access every issue through the online Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry archive.

### ANNUAL EVENTS

The Baptist Center sponsors annual events which give attention to topics of interest to Baptists, particularly concerning issues impacting Baptist identity and Baptist distinctives. Conferences were held in February 2004 on "Issues in Baptist Polity," in February 2005 on "The Mission of the Church," and in March 2007 on "What Is a Baptist? Marks that Separate Baptists from Presbyterians." Many of the papers from these Baptist Center events are posted on the [baptistcenter.com](http://baptistcenter.com) web site. The next Baptist Center conference is April 4, 2007, in coordination with the NOBTS Baptist College Partnership Program and the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum. The next following conference will be on September 25-27, 2008, which will feature the inaugural James and Diann Davison Lectureship Series on Baptist Distinctives.

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The Baptist Center Blog on the [baptistcenter.com](http://baptistcenter.com) web site provides an opportunity for interaction with fellow Baptists on issues relating to Baptists. Read interviews and interact with key Southern Baptist leaders as they tackle the important issues facing SBC churches and entities today.

### CHURCHES OF EXCELLENCE

The Baptist Center, in coordination with the Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Health, recognizes outstanding Southern Baptist churches which are exemplary as healthy, growing churches. These churches meet at least the following five criteria as measures for healthy growing churches: (1) an increase of church membership of 10 percent over five years, (2) at least one baptism each year for the past five years, (3) a total membership-to-baptism ratio of no more than thirty-five to one, (4) at least twenty-five percent of the additions each year coming from conversions, and (5) in addition, the percentage of members involved in discipleship/Bible study and the church's contribution to missions are taken into account as well to indicate spiritual vitality in the congregation.

### RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

The Baptist Center web site has a number of articles and white papers posted on a number of topics, including papers delivered at the annual Baptist Center meetings. A number of Baptist confessions and doctrinal statements are also posted on the Baptist Center web site to assist Baptists to frame their theological convictions within historic Baptists parameters.

### BAPTIST CENTER RADIO

Also on the Baptist Center web site are downloadable MP3 audio files of sermons and papers delivered on topics of interest to Baptists.

# SALVATION AND SOVEREIGNTY: A REVIEW ESSAY

DEIDRE RICHARDSON<sup>1</sup>

**I**n *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, Dr. Ken Keathley presents his Molinist system with clarity and excellence to academia and the church of Jesus Christ at large. Since I have profited by studying theology under Keathley, and will study under him once more this coming semester, I can affirm that he is a man who not only demonstrates grace and humility in disagreement, but also demonstrates grace in the classroom. There is a need for more God-honoring theologians like him in the world. However, in this review, I will point out points of both agreement and disagreement from my perspective with his views as presented in *Salvation and Sovereignty*.

Keathley accurately points out many flaws in the Calvinist system. I strongly affirm Keathley's assertion that "God is not the Author, Origin, or Cause of Sin (and to say that He is, is not just hyper-Calvinism but blasphemy)" (7). In chapter one, Keathley provides a tenable, biblical case for Molinism. He articulates the three logical moments of God's activity in Molinism (17-18) and examines both God's absolute sovereignty and human freedom in the Scriptures.

One of the most compelling aspects of Keathley's presentation on creaturely freedom is his "The Foreknowledge Entails Necessity Objection" (31), in which he distinguishes between "necessity" and "contingency." He makes the case that God's foreknowledge of an event does not mean that the event is causally determined by God; rather, divine foreknowledge exists because of the contingent choices of humans. This is essential if God has given persons creaturely freedom, which He has. Not only does Keathley present a strong case for contingency philosophically, but he also uses scriptural evidence to arrive at his conclusion. Biblical passages such as 1 Sam. 13:13-14, in which Samuel said to Saul, "the Lord *would* have permanently established your reign over Israel," demonstrate the existence of contingency: that is, the word "would" indicates a possibility, not a determined outcome. God "would" have established Saul's reign longer, but Saul's own evil choices ruin him (37). Keathley's convincing evidence regarding God's sovereign control and creaturely freedom make Molinism a very appealing system. I was initially drawn to Molinism because of "middle knowledge." Middle Knowledge Calvinists, such as Bruce Ware in *God's Greater Glory*, make a good case for Molinism as well. Ware argues in his work that were it not for middle knowledge the open theists would be right. God can never know too much.

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However, with that said, there are problems within Keathley's system. One of the major flaws in his work is the presupposition of tension in the biblical text. In a footnote on page 44, regarding God's undivided essence, Keathley states, "This means there is no division, *tension*, or conflict within God" (44). Nevertheless, when he arrives at the concepts of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, Keathley labels the relationship between the two concepts as a "tension" (126-29). At this point, believers must question Keathley's assumption. How can God not have tension within Himself and yet, the Word, the Holy Bible, contain tension? After all, statements made about God apply to the biblical text. For example, Jesus says in John 14:6 that He is "the truth"; in John 17:17 Jesus states, "Sanctify them by Your truth. *Your word is truth*" (NKJV). From these two passages, believers deduce that God is truth, and thus, His Word (that which He reveals about Himself) is truth. Paul describes God as one "who cannot lie" (Titus 1:2); from this, believers deduce that the Word, which reveals God's character and nature, cannot lie. In 2 Tim. 3:16, Paul tells Timothy that "all Scripture" is "inspired by God" (*theopneustos*). The word is literally translated as "God-breathed," indicating that the Word of God, the Scriptures, records the very words God has spoken about Himself. If the Word reveals the character and nature of God, and God has no tension within Himself, then how can the Word (which reveals God) contain tension within its pages? To affirm tension in the text requires the believer to also agree that God spoke something that is contrary to His character and nature. But how then, could He be the one who cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13)? God cannot be other than who He is. This is why David could confidently write in Psalm 23, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness *for His name's sake*" (Ps. 23:3b). Because God is who He is, He cannot be anything but just, righteous, pure, true, holy, etc. If God contains no tension within Himself, a truth to which Keathley also attests, then God, who has no tension, cannot speak tension in His Holy Word.

There is also the issue of logical consistency within Molinism. Keathley is committed to logical consistency. In his section titled "The Similarities of Infralapsarian Calvinism and Molinism," Keathley writes that infralapsarian Calvinism "leaves little room for a logically consistent understanding of permission" (141). His reason is that if God is the cause of all things (infralapsarian Calvinism's thesis), then there is no permission in such a system. However, Keathley then inserts Molinism: "I am arguing that *what Calvinists want to achieve in infralapsarianism*, Molinism actually accomplishes" (141). But is not Molinism essentially the same at this point as infralapsarian Calvinism? Infralapsarian Calvinism posits that "election is unconditional but reprobation is conditional. God actively ordains the salvation of the elect, but He only permits the damnation of the reprobate" (145). Now examine Molinism: "Molinism provides a better model for understanding how simultaneously *God's decree of election is unconditional while His rejection of the unbeliever is conditional*" (154). If infralapsarian Calvinism struggles with logical consistency (141), would not Molinism bear the same problem since it holds to the *exact same thing* as infralapsarian Calvinism? If infralapsarian Calvinism is "rationally inconsistent" (147), and Molinism holds to unconditional and conditional decrees simultaneously, then would this not also make Molinism rationally inconsistent?

Molinism receives the same charge as infralapsarian Calvinism in Keathley's exegesis on Romans 9. In verses 22 and 23, he examines the two verbs used, *katartismena* (Rom. 9:22) and *proetoi masen* (v. 23). He argues that the verb in verse 22 is a verb in the passive voice, while the verb of verse 23 is in the active voice. For him, this leads to the conclusion that

“God actively elected the saved but passively allows the ruin of the lost” (160). If Molinism argues this, however, how in the biblical text is Molinism distinguishable from infralapsarian Calvinism?

Keathley’s only reply to the distinction of the two theological systems is that “God has actualized a world” in which Israel’s unbelief would amount to a “more glorious salvation for the Church (‘the objects of mercy’)” (160). But is there any biblical evidence that attests to the existence of multiple worlds that God chose from? No. On the surface, then, it seems that if infralapsarian Calvinism and Molinism are placed side-by-side, both can be affirmed based on Keathley’s interpretation of Romans 9. But if infralapsarian Calvinism is inconsistent, then isn’t Molinism infralapsarian Calvinism’s inconsistent twin?

A great contribution of Keathley’s work on middle knowledge is its affirmation of the scriptural basis that humans make contingent choices, leading to human responsibility. However, the problems for Molinism arrive when Keathley discusses divine sovereignty. He argues for “divine selection from multiple worlds,” which can only be inferred from philosophical reasoning. William Lane Craig claims that “it would be difficult to prove in any way [that God possesses middle knowledge] . . . for the biblical passages are not unequivocal” (Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 137). Another weakness in Molinism is that it as a system provides no answer for the problem of evil: “Molinism does not provide an explanation as to why God created a world in which it was possible for sin to enter, but it is not necessary to do so. Molinism is a defense, not a theodicy. A theodicy is an attempt to explain why God ordained the world He did” (163).

The purpose of a theodicy is to diagnose properly the problem of evil and provide a solution. A mechanic cannot repair a vehicle until he properly diagnoses the problem; in the same way, Christians cannot provide a solution to sin and evil until they properly diagnose the problem of sin (origin, etc.). How does sin enter the world? It entered through one man, Adam (Rom. 5: 12). Why does God allow sin to enter the world through humans? Because God is committed to the idea of human dominion over His creation, which He deemed “good” (Gen. 1:26-31). Christians cannot give a proper defense of Christianity if they have no idea why God would allow sin to enter the world. Believers have the responsibility of reasoning with atheists and unbelievers who grapple with the problem of evil. It may require that they grapple with the problem too, but shrugging one’s shoulders and saying “I don’t know” will not suffice.

I highly recommend *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. It provides an innovative look into a theological system proposed by Luis de Molina that has been overlooked in academia for too long. However, at the same time, it does have its flaws. There is a reason that Christendom has fought over Calvinism and Arminianism for so long: both are consistent systems (one point logically leads to the next), and both provide eligible answers to the problem of evil. If Molinism desires to compete with these two systems, it will have to become logically consistent and give not just a defense, but a theodicy. Until then, Calvinism and Arminianism will remain the two powerhouses of theological study.



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# SALVATION AND SOVEREIGNTY: A REVIEW ESSAY

STEVE W. LEMKE<sup>1</sup>

Ken Keathley, Vice President for Academic Affairs at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, proposes in this volume a compromise approach to resolve the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom, particularly with regard to soteriology. This book has an interesting history, having been begun as a coauthored project when Keathley was a faculty member at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, at the encouragement of NOBTS President Chuck Kelley. After Hurricane Katrina, circumstances led to Keathley completing the book alone, assisted by a Lilly Foundation faculty grant and a sabbatical leave at his new place of service.

Keathley employs two tools in the book to address these complex issues. As the book's subtitle suggests, Keathley proposes a Molinist approach to salvation and sovereignty. In addition, Keathley utilizes Timothy George's "ROSES" acronym<sup>2</sup> as opposed to the classical "TULIP" acronym associated with the Reformed Synod of Dort. ROSES provides an interpretive grid for the book, with a chapter dedicated to each letter of the acronym. Molinism provides the theological perspective that is brought to interpret the content of each letter in the acronym.

The book begins with some broader issues that are propaedeutic to Keathley's discussion of the ROSES paradigm. He first offers a biblical defense of Molinism. The author can be praised for perhaps the clearest explanation of Molinism that I have seen. Sometimes Molinists attempt to explain their position with such dense and opaque language that one wonders if they really understand the position themselves. However, Keathley's explanation is understandable, and he builds a tenable case from Scripture in support of this perspective. Keathley presents Molinism as a middle way between Arminianism and Calvinism.

Like Bohr's model of the atom, Molinism is a heuristic device, a plausible theological construct to help us conceptualize what appears from a human perspective to be inconceivable – how God can be absolutely sovereign and humans can have genuine libertarian freedom at the same time. Molinism is not demanded or required by Scripture, but as Keathley points out, it is consistent with Scripture at many points.

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<sup>2</sup>The ROSES acronym is spelled out in Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative, Our Response* (Nashville: Convention Press, 2000).

Keathley's affirmation, however, that God "perfectly controls all things" (20) and exercises "meticulous control over all things, including all big things, little things, and things done by other free agents (21-25), is difficult to reconcile with his affirmation that God is not the Author of evil (26-27). Keathley attempts to reconcile this apparent contradiction by asserting that God allows evil only by "permission" (27). While many would agree that God allows evil by permission rather than by ordaining it, that notion is not consistent with the claim that God controls every detail of everything. To say that God's sovereignty means that "nothing is outside of His control" is one thing; to say that "God's sovereignty entails that He controls everything that happens" is another. If God controls every small detail, it is hard to imagine how He could escape the blame for all sin, evil, and suffering.

Keathley's discussion of why foreknowledge does not entail freedom-destroying necessity, built on the distinction between contingency and necessity, is important and superbly written. Keathley crushes the confusion of theological fatalism that God's foreknowledge logically entails that those foreseen events must happen by necessity. The confusion between the modal status of contingency and necessity is the Achilles' heel of many Reformed thinkers, including Jonathan Edwards. Keathley builds a convincing case that God foreknowing the free choices of His creatures in no way destroys their libertarian freedom. God foreknows with certainty, but that imposes no causal necessity on the people involved. God simply foreknows which choice they will make, without causally forcing them to make that choice.

In discussing whether God desires the salvation of all people, Keathley explores four options: (a) Universalism – God is love and wills to save everyone; (b) Double predestination through Supralapsarianism or Infralapsarianism – God is sovereign and wills the salvation of only the elect; (c) God has two wills – hidden and revealed; and (d) God has two wills – antecedent and consequent. Keathley provides reasons why the first three options are not acceptable, and affirms the fourth option. God's antecedent will is the gracious desire for the salvation for all people; the consequent will is His just judgment of those who refuse put their trust in Him. Without going into the detailed arguments that Keathley presents, each is presented compellingly and expressed with clarity.

Having addressed these foundational issues, Keathley turns to address the five points of his ROSES acronym. The "R" stands for "*Radical Depravity*," in contradistinction from "Total Depravity." Keathley asserts that belief in universal and radical human depravity is a biblical belief affirmed by all evangelical Christians. However, he argues, the Reformed concept of total depravity is more aptly described as a version of determinism, including versions of what has become known as compatibilism or soft determinism. Keathley provides telling arguments from Scripture against determinism, and contrasts hard and soft determinism. He traces the influence that the determinism of atheist Thomas Hobbes had on Jonathan Edwards' Law of Choice (that we always choose whatever our strongest desire or inclination is at that moment).

As an alternative to determinism, Keathley advocates libertarian freedom, in particular the soft libertarianism, which, as he notes, I have advocated (69-70).<sup>3</sup> Keathley offers a minor quibble with my definition of soft libertarianism as “the ability to do otherwise in any given decision” (70). Instead, Keathley suggests that he does not agree that soft libertarianism extends to “any given situation” (70). Keathley apparently does not realize the fact that he has shifted from my word “decision” to his alternative word “situation.” His alternative proposal is that our libertarian freedom is limited to “will-setting moments” (70, 76). He illustrates that we cannot reverse our decision in midair after we have jumped over a cliff. Keathley evidently overlooked my assertion (immediately adjacent to the material he quoted) that soft libertarianism and concomitant agent causation exercised a “creaturely freedom to choose within limited alternatives.” In fact, the acknowledgement of limited options to be exercised in free choices is a defining characteristic that differentiates soft libertarianism from hard libertarianism. Therefore, Keathley’s distinction does not appear to have merit.

Keathley applies the four stages of human experience outlined in the Formula of Concord of 1577 (Adam as originally created, humanity as fallen, the present condition of believers, and the saints in glory) to the soft libertarian account of human freedom. In so doing, Keathley reveals correctly at least three foundational problems with the Reformed account of freedom: (a) since all human actions are the result of prior causes, God is the only remaining agent who is responsible for evil, (b) some Reformed determinists scandalously assert that God Himself is determined by His own nature and thus deny even that God has libertarian freedom, and (c) sanctification appears to be synergistic, requiring human participation.

The “O” of ROSES represents “*Overcoming Grace*” as an alternative to “*Irresistible Grace*.” Keathley applies what Richard Cross describes as an “ambulatory model” of Overcoming Grace to illustrate how grace can be monergistic but resistible. In this analogy, a sick or injured patient is placed in an ambulance and is taken to the hospital. The patient is incapable of aiding in his rescue; he is totally dependent on the EMT personnel to lift him into the ambulance. However, Keathley asserts, the patient can still refuse to be taken to the hospital. Applied to salvation, a person is saved entirely (monergistically) by grace, and yet could resist or reject it. The weakness of this illustration from both practical and biblical perspectives is that more is required of the patient. In a real ambulance/hospital situation, the patient must sign a consent form before receiving the salutatory life-saving care. Theologically, no evangelical Christian should question that salvation comes by grace alone from God (Eph. 2:8-10). However, the Bible does not say that God saves those who merely do not resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but requires in addition a positive affirmation of Jesus as Savior and Lord before the sinner is declared justified. Virtually every salvific formula in Scripture requires a positive response and affirmation by the believer, not merely

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<sup>3</sup>When I presented my paper “Agent Causation: How to Be a Soft Libertarian” in March 2005, I don’t believe I was aware that this nomenclature had previously been utilized (in reference to human freedom, as opposed to the political theory by the same name). I have since discovered that Gary Watson used the term as early as 1999 in his article “Soft Libertarianism and Hard Determinism,” in *The Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999), 351-65; and later by Albert R. Mele, *Free Will and Luck* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).



that the sinner refrain from refusing God's grace (Mark 16:15-16, John 1:12, 3:14-16, 20:31; Acts 2:36-40, 8:36-37, 16:30-31, Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 11:6; 1 John 5:1).

With strong scriptural support, Keathley effectively explodes the suggestion that some Reformed writers claim that non-Calvinist accounts of salvation make faith to be a work. In addressing the idea that faith is a gift given only to the elect, Keathley explores three alternative Calvinist models – the nonconversionist model, the conversionist regeneration precedes conversion model, and the conversionist effectual call model. Third, Keathley explains why the notion that faith is a virtue to be rewarded is also mistaken. Finally, Keathley provides twelve lines of argument to demonstrate that the Overcoming Grace model he affirms is superior to the Reformed accounts of election.

Keathley then turns to the “S,” which represents “*Sovereign Election*” as the alternative to “Unconditional Election.” Keathley contrasts the two major Calvinist perspectives on election – *supralapsarianism*, which affirms double predestination, in which God before creation ordains both the elect and the reprobate; and *infralapsarianism*, in which God ordains the elect but the reprobate are allowed only by permission. The asymmetrical relation of God to election and reprobation in the infralapsarian position is an attempt to avoid the accusation of God being the author of evil by consigning the overwhelming majority of the human race to eternal torment in hell. Although Keathley notes that Molinism has affinity with the infralapsarian position,<sup>4</sup> he asserts that in the final analysis one cannot affirm the infralapsarian perspective without denying key tenants of classical Calvinism. Infralapsarianism is logically incoherent, according to Keathley, because it asserts that God causes every event but is not accountable for every event. Keathley suggests that Molinism is superior to these two Calvinist approaches because it avoids these significant logical and theological problems. However, Keathley resorts to an appeal to mystery in addressing the logical problem of what philosophers call the “grounding objection” against Molinism. Additionally, since he insists that God is in “complete control” of all things (157) and exercises “meticulous control” over all worldwide events, all decisions of human agents, and even all minor things such as “every roll of the dice, every flip of the coin, [and] every seemingly random event” (22-25), it is difficult to separate Keathley's Molinism from these Calvinist views of sovereignty, their insistence on unconditional election, and the concomitant problems entailed in these affirmations.

The “E” of the acronym is for “*Eternal Life*,” as a revised nomenclature to “Perseverance of the Saints.” The material in this chapter was presented by Keathley at the John 3:16 Conference at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia in 2009, and is included in a chapter of the book *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*. In this chapter, Keathley addresses two key issues: how we can know we are genuinely saved, and how secure is one's salvation. In addressing the first issue, Keathley explores three options: (a) the Roman Catholic position that assurance of salvation is not available, (b) the position of the Reformers that assurance is an essential element within

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<sup>4</sup>Keathley made a similar point in a paper entitled “A Molinist View of Election, or How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian” at the Building Bridges conference in 2007, which was included in *Calvinism: A Baptist Dialogue*, ed. Brad J. Waggoner and E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 195-216.

saving faith, and (c) the Puritan position that assurance may be logically deduced, though in practice they struggled with assurance because perseverance must be proven out by good works. The confidence in assurance of salvation by many Calvinists was further undermined by the doctrine of temporary faith, as promulgated by Theodore Beza and William Perkins, which suggested that God tantalized the reprobate with a “taste” of grace without any intention of saving them, a view so cruel that one commentator described it as “divine sadism” (171). It is ironic the children of the theological reformation, who insisted on salvation by *sola gratia*, would evolve into a view of salvation by works. Keathley opts for the stronger assurance position affirmed by the original Reformers.

Keathley provides a more thorough discussion of the second issue of how secure is one’s salvation. He addresses several versions of three basic answers to this question: (a) the Augustinian and Arminian answer that apostasy is possible, (b) the Calvinist and Free Grace view that apostasy is not possible, and (c) the mediating views that apostasy is threatened but is not possible. The Augustinian position holds that God regenerates more than He elects, so ultimately God does not save some regenerate believers because they are not elect. The Arminian position is that only those who persevere will be saved, but believers could later renounce their faith.

Keathley lists three options within the Calvinist/Free Grace approach. First, Barthian Calvinist theology asserts implicit universalism – all people are ultimately saved through Christ. Second, the “once saved, always saved” doctrine of the Free Grace position asserts that salvation is provided by God’s grace alone. Good works are expected by the believer, but they are secondary and confirmatory of the irrevocable salvation granted by God. Third, the “evidence of genuineness” position asserts that good works confirm a genuine confession of faith, and those who never exhibit good works never had saving faith. Within the mediating views perspective, position, Keathley first addresses the “irreconcilable tension” view of Gerald Borchert and D. A. Carson, who appeal to mystery or “compatibilism” (which Carson unfortunately applies to the issue of assurance, further muddling a word which means different things when applied to several different issues). In the “means of salvation” approach that Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday voiced in their commentary on Hebrews,<sup>5</sup> the warning passages in Hebrews are interpreted as genuinely threatening believers with the loss of eternal life. One is not saved without maintaining good works, for “a transformed life is evidence of and necessary for salvation.”<sup>6</sup> With William Lane Craig, Keathley asserts that the “means of salvation” view abandons key beliefs of Reformed theology, and that the middle knowledge aspect of Molinism provides a more coherent account of perseverance. Keathley proposes a variant of the “evidence of genuineness” view which affirms four key tenets: (a) the only basis for assurance is the objective work of Christ; (b) assurance is the essence of saving faith; (c) saving faith perseveres as a promise rather than as a requirement; and (d) believers are rewarded according to their faithfulness and good works. Keathley’s approach seems to do justice to both the biblical assurances to the believer and the warnings to persevere to the end.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 283-84, cited in Keathley, 183.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Finally, Keathley addresses the “S” of “*Singular Redemption*” as opposed to “Limited Atonement.” The author surveys three perspectives on the extent of the atonement: the general atonement view, the limited atonement view, and Singular Redemption (or Unlimited Atonement) view. The general atonement view, held by Wesleyan Arminians, affirms the governmental view of the atonement in which salvation was obtained for all persons on the cross but is not secured for anyone until it is personally appropriated. The limited atonement view, held by high Calvinists such as John Owen and John Murray, holds that the atonement is “particular” in that Jesus died only for the elect. Keathley drives home the point that a shortcoming of the limited atonement view is that it is inconsistent with the “well meant offer of the gospel” to unbelievers. In fact, a person holding to the limited atonement cannot consistently say to an unbeliever that “God loves you” or “Christ died for your sins.” The singular redemption view, held by Amyrauldian Calvinists and Reformed or Classical Arminians, is (like limited atonement) based on the penal substitution view of the atonement. In this perspective (also advocated by Keathley), Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross provided atonement that is sufficient for everyone, but is efficient only for those who believe.

*Salvation and Sovereignty* is an excellently written work with the rare quality of dealing with complex theological issues with clarity. His survey of different options on the various theological issues is presented fairly and is particularly useful. Although I do not personally subscribe to Molinism, Keathley provides an interesting and attractive case for the Molinist position. He succeeds in at least making a strong case that Molinism is consistent with Scripture and with sound doctrine. Although as a non-Molinist I disagree with some of the tenets that Keathley asserts, I give this book my highest recommendation. This is a must read that every theologian and every pastor will want to think through and keep as a valuable resource.

# SALVATION AND SOVEREIGNTY: A REVIEW ESSAY

STEVEN W. LADD<sup>1</sup>

Ken Keathley's *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* addresses an amalgam of important issues usually discussed in connection with theology proper and theological anthropology, but here it is applied to soteriology. The issues on which the book touches are God's contemplative activity, the God/World relation, human decision making capacity, and the salvation process that can be said to occur in light of Molinist postulates. It is a tall order, indeed, especially in a relatively short 210 pages of text. Yet it is doubtful that many will say Keathley has failed to do justice to these issues, though many more will not agree with his conclusions. One must keep in mind his theological approach and that Middle Knowledge itself is not always the focus of the text. Molinism is at the heart of the work, though much of it appears to be little more than a critique and reworking of soteriological tenets that stem from Calvinism's TULIP.

Molinism presupposes human volitional capacity of a more libertarian sort than Reformed anthropology offers. Thus, in the eyes of many, Keathley's critique of Calvinism aligns him by default with Arminianism. His view of Molinism, however, admits to a far more robust notion of God's sovereign control over creation than many Arminians allow. In offering Molinism, Keathley's aim is to find a better articulated notion of God's omniscience than most Arminians express and a more palatable notion of man's freedom and responsibility than typically is offered in Calvinism.

The book is concise, almost uncomfortably so in light of the major issues taken on. Still it is clearly written, well documented, and, thankfully, published with footnotes, helpful tables, indices, and a selected bibliography. Keathley employs a theological approach to what is Molinism, why it is (re)appearing in the foreknowledge/free will debate, and why Timothy George's ROSES<sup>2</sup> reform of the TULIP is utilized. The work may be criticized for lacking the philosophical rigor of most works on Molinism, but such a critique is to ignore its self-imposed and refreshing theological approach. *Salvation and Sovereignty* should become required reading for seminarians in the field of theology, and advanced laity should welcome it as well.

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<sup>2</sup>Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative—Our Response* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), 71-83: Radical depravity, Overcoming grace, Sovereign election, Eternal life, and Singular redemption are adopted by Keathley based on George's own contrast of each point of the TULIP acronym: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. Keathley is clear to point out that George is not an advocate of Molinism.

Keathley's thesis is that the ROSES paradigm explained from a Molinist perspective is a cohesive presentation of evangelical commitments to the fullness of God's sovereign control over creation and the reality of God's design of humans who make real decisions with respect to their relation to God. Keathley's principle concern is that divine sovereignty be seen as God's *control* over creation not his *causing* of all that occurs in it. If God is the cause of all things that occur, then that impinges on God's goodness—it means he is the cause of sin. Keathley's co-concern is that humanity be seen as designed by God to have real decision making capacity yet not so as to cast God as unable to foreknow those decisions until they are made, for that ultimately impinges on God's omniscience if not his sovereignty. Molinism, Keathley says, allows for God's full sovereignty to be seen as his control over human agency of the libertarian sort, thus it provides a "Middle Way between Calvinism and Arminianism" (7). His hope is that Calvinists, accepting a Molinist perspective, can affirm that God controls all things; man contributes nothing to salvation since God is its Author and Completer, and thus individual election is both unconditional and eternally secure. He hopes that Arminians, accepting a Molinist perspective, can affirm that God is in nowise the author of sin yet controls all things without causing all things, especially with respect to human choices to receive what God offers in Christ's death for all, even if that means many will still reject it (7).

Keathley will be accused of a "bait and switch" here if Calvinists see him to offer Calvinist tenets which are non-Calvinistic. But, he is only asking for a reconsideration of basic theological positions from all sides in order that what Molinism says about the core issue under consideration might be adequately understood. The core issue is the contemplations of the divine mind (omniscience) with respect to God's creation of truly free human decision makers. Can the two components, the divine and the human, be described in a way that allows God's exhaustive foreknowledge of human decisions without imposing pre-determination on those decisions? The problem, Keathley says, is that Reformed theology over-relies on theological determinism to answer this question in an understandable effort to "protect" God's sovereignty. But, to strip the human component of its God-designed capacity for real decision making, if it exists, would be misguided. Furthermore, if the result is that all things *must* occur only as God sovereignly decrees, then God is the cause of sin and his goodness is impugned. Yet an over-reliance on human freedom to avoid this conclusion has led in recent years to the Open Theist proposal that is unpalatable for a similar reason—it impugns God's omniscience:

If one focuses on the electing decree of divine sovereignty to the exclusion of human choice, then the result is a type of Calvinism of the double-predestination variety. If one decides that human moral responsibility requires the absolute ability to choose to the contrary, then this results in a radical form of Arminianism called Open Theism, which denies that God always knows what free creatures will decide to do (9-10).

So, how does Molinism navigate between the theological Scylla and Charybdis?

The Molinist alternative, says Keathley, reconciles two biblical truths: (1) God exercises sovereign control over all of His creation, and (2) human beings are designed to make free decisions for which they are responsible yet which are fully known by God per divine omniscience. The sticking point for many is the second notion, that any libertarian

version of human choosing is Arminianism's idea that God looks down the corridors of time to be informed of what humans will do then abides by *their* choices. To protect both a robust notion of sovereignty and a biblical notion of human freedom is Keathley's goal—that God not be less than he must be, and that man not be less than God designed him to be:

Molinism teaches that God exercises His sovereignty primarily through His omniscience, and that He infallibly knows what free creatures would do in any given situation. In this way God sovereignly controls all things, while humans are also genuinely free. God is able to accomplish His will through the use of . . . His *middle knowledge*. . . a radical “compatibilism”—a Calvinist view of divine sovereignty and an Arminian view of human freedom (5).

What this proposal does is distinguish between the certainty attached to God's knowledge about human decisions (thus supplying what omniscience requires) without making God the cause of those human decisions (thus avoiding what determinism entails).

Keathley begins with a good attempt at defining Molinism, its middle knowledge component, and the biblical warrant for it (the introduction and chapter 1). He then applies Molinist commitments to the problems he sees arising from Calvinism's paradigm for salvation, which over-relies on theological determinism (chapters 3-7). In the introduction and chapter 1, Keathley proposes nothing really new if one is already familiar with the *scientia media* postulate of the sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina. For those unfamiliar with “middle knowledge” the idea is based on Molina's interaction with two theological categories of God's knowledge already discussed in the Middle Ages. Such thinkers as Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas argued for two categories or “moments” of divine knowledge: (1) God's exhaustive knowledge of all necessary truths and possible worlds and (2) God's exhaustive knowledge of *this* particular world, which he freely chose to instantiate. Keathley does not mention it, but Christian theistic proposals about divine contemplation at that time stood in contradistinction to those offered by classical pagan philosophers, such as Aristotle, who said that God's thoughts must exclude the possible or the mundane. The divine nature contemplates only pure actuality because, as Aristotle famously said, “it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks since it is the most excellent of things, and its thinking is a thinking on thinking” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lambda 9). This is hardly a biblical idea.

Thus, what Thomas and others proposed was that God's knowledge should be categorized as *natural* and as *free*. The first was termed *natural* knowledge because it must be the *nature* of divine omniscience to know all necessary truths and possible worlds, what Keathley describes as God's exhaustive knowledge of what *could* be. Keathley's brevity at this point may cause some to wonder why this first category alone does not account for God's knowledge of this actual world if he ever *freely* chose to create one. I would ask if it arises from biblical and theological commitments to creation as *ex nihilo*, for it seems this actual world exists by creative decree and for that reason is a kind of thing different from any “possible world” for God. And if created it is not logically necessary as something God must do or which cannot be otherwise for God. Keathley might have helped the uninitiated along these lines to express more of the theological reasons for these “moments” of God's knowledge. Also some may object that this world is logically necessary for God, but any statement that God needs some state of affairs in order *to be God* is fraught with theological dangers. Obviously, creation does exist, even if it need not. That it does exist is due solely to

God's free choice to have it for whatever purpose he has in mind. Given creation, God's knowledge of it as freely created is deemed, then, to be his "*free* knowledge." Keathley speaks of this as God's exhaustive knowledge of all that was-is-will be in this actualized or instantiated realm. Little real debate occurs about these two categories or "moments" of God's knowledge.

What Molina proposed was a third category of God's knowledge, and it applies to what free creatures *would* have done had they chosen differently. Here is where the contention is found. The issue is not that God has the capacity to know such a thing as middle knowledge describes; but Keathley is not as clear as he could be with his explanation as to why it is required. And, to be fair, here is where Calvinists are likely to reject Molina's and Keathley's proposal, for it hinges on the presupposition that God designs causal agents capable of *true* decision making. *Truly* operative decision making entails choices between *real* alternatives. Then, by God's design, reality would have something to "decide between," and the non-chosen alternative must have been an option as real as the one chosen. Only then is there a need for Molinism's middle knowledge postulate to account for God's exhaustive knowledge of what *would* have been had the human chooser chosen differently. And yet it is hard to imagine that Keathley minds being "caught" here. He can ask the objector what other option they would propose. It appears the most popular is that which he is critiquing, that all is predetermined at some level by God, thus what God does concerning our "choices" (chosen or not) is moot if they are merely apparent. All that occurs can be cached in either the *natural* or *free* "moments" of divine knowledge. But, what if humans are meant to be *true* decision makers by God's design? How do we categorize his knowledge of that which they could but do not choose? God would seem to know these things within his *natural* knowledge of all possible worlds, yet in this case God's knowledge of the real, actual, instantiated world is in view, for it is in *this* world that real options offered were never chosen. So, why not place these in God's *free* knowledge for that reason? They are not, simply because they never *do* occur. So, as things "counter-to the fact," Molina would place these objects of divine knowledge in the *middle* knowledge category.

Although Keathley mentions "the counterfactuals of human freedom," which are somewhat the "flip-side" of the facts that *do* occur (35-39), a more philosophical approach to Molinism may be in order for interested readers. Keathley's failure to "ground" the truth of these counterfactuals also leaves him open to the typical line of attack against the Molinist postulate that Calvinists frequently make. Those of us much more interested in theological considerations (especially regarding anthropology and soteriology) will be able to excuse this omission and accept that what "grounds" the truth of such counterfactuals appears to be reality itself *if* it is the case that God creates a world in which human agents make real choices between real alternatives. If God offers real options, even those for which no one opts, they are grounded in his offer of them. And the very nature of the world, our perception of ourselves, and the testimony of Scripture seem to agree that options do *in fact* lie before us as decision makers. It may be that Keathley himself will provide more direction in an article on this issue.

In Chapter 1, "The Biblical Case for Molinism," several highlights can be found. Keathley's account explains how Molinism identifies counterfactuals of human freedom in Scripture. In such cases, things that *could be* actually never occur, yet *would* have entailed certain things had they been chosen. Keathley explains a number of passages in this way:

Gen 19:2-3; 1 Sam 13:13-14; 2 Kgs 13:19; Isa 38:1-5; Amos 7:1-6; Matt 13:57-58/Mk 6:47-48; Matt 23:37; Acts 5:4; 1 Cor 10:13; and Jas 1:13-15. Yet this biblical case is not all that the chapter includes. Keathley provides more warrant for Molinism as a coherent alternative to Calvinism, notes God's allowance of contingencies, and maintains his freedom and righteousness even if human choices, even to sin, occur. Keathley's explanation of the relation between foreknowledge and necessity in this section should not be missed (31-34).

Chapter 2 asks, "Does God Desire the Salvation of All?" Keathley argues that in TULIP soteriology the doctrine of election by sovereign decree tends to exclude any notion of *real* human decision making in salvation. Molinism, of course, contains human agency as a premise—God's sovereign control of all things in creation includes the salvation of humans with *real* decision making capacity. Salvation can be divinely provided and genuinely universal as an offer to all who will receive it by faith, yet it is applied only to those who receive it by faith.<sup>3</sup> Calvinists are sure to point out that Keathley's question needs to distinguish between God's desire and will, but he is not drawn into this discussion, for even to admit the distinction does not alleviate the objector from the double-predestination lurking in it. He contends that God's desire must be to save all, and he marshals a host of Calvinists who join in opposing the usual definition of "Limited Atonement." He makes it clear that the alternative view, "General Atonement," is by no means *universalism*—the notion that all are saved. The more weighty issue for Keathley's thesis is the consideration of God's complex will. This is a fascinating discussion that is exactly why Molinism is employed in his argument.

If God's will is *simplex*, then God's creation of people as saved or condemned is a status necessarily pre-determined in accordance with that will. This is the basis for decretal theology (48-51). It can be nuanced to mean God's unfathomable plan to demonstrate his sovereignty *via* humans who he opts to choose to save or to choose to leave condemn, but humans in this case are not causal agents (designed with a capacity to choose between contraries). Fatalism looms. Keathley's key proposal is for a *complex* notion of God's will utilizing the terminology of God's antecedent and consequent wills (58-61).

Conditional propositions often are posed as "if . . . then" statements in which the "if" part is the *antecedent* and the "then" part is the *consequent*. Keathley describes the operation of God's will regarding salvation as having these two parts. God's *antecedent* will involves his lavish graciousness to supply Christ's all-sufficient death to atone for all sin for all time for all who trust by faith in this sovereign provision. Keathley is to be read to mean that it is *antecedent*, literally "standing before," for it involves God's sole work to provide an all-encompassing means to atone for human sin—only God can do this. But the proposition, as a conditional concept, is not fully stated without the consequent portion which still must follow: *then* those who so trust in Christ benefit from what was antecedently provided. In one sense, what consequently happens is based on the trust a person has in the thing that was offered yet only in terms of its individual application. What is more important is that *someone else*, the provider of the antecedent has acted antecedently regardless of any subsequent choice for or against the offer. Any choice that is made is possible *only because* that antecedent provision has been instantiated. Thus, the *sole work* of God is to set up this

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<sup>3</sup>Faith is defined in terms of decision making of a particular kind and prior to conversion (116-24).



entire conditional, which is in my mind Keathley's entire point. Referring to salvation as "monergistic" surely will rankle the Reformed, but Molinism warrants it. One cannot state as some critics have that he is unaware of or disingenuous about "monergism." He simply is explaining what Molinism would mean by it. Even if he opted for different terminology, the question remains whether human salvation is *only* God's simplex will to predetermine to whom it applies, or if a complex notion of God's will better accounts for what occurs: God antecedently provides and humans consequently must receive a provision for salvation by faith that only God could accomplish and only God could offer. Any other notion may account for God's *sovereignty*, but Keathley's contention is that Molinism provides a full notion of God's *goodness* as well.

Another highlight of the text is Chapter 3, "**R** is for Radical Depravity," which provides Keathley's description of Jonathan Edwards's notion commonly advanced in Calvinist circles as compatibilism. Here Keathley explains his own view of "soft-libertarianism." All of this forms the basis for the conditional approach to salvation in chapter 4, but already previewed in the paragraph above. He describes Reformed thought today as much more dependent on Edwards than Calvin, for Edwardsian compatibilism is the means for describing how God's unconditional election is fleshed out through human "free choice" (as Edwards defines it). The more mildly Reformed may hope that by this route they escape double-predestination (65-69). Keathley argues, however, that even if compatibilism were to explain God as sovereign, it commits to a deterministic notion of human existence. And though Edwards has many prominent followers, such as John Feinberg, John Frame, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, Bruce Ware, et al. (67, n. 9), the question remains whether God designed us to make *real* choices or merely apparent ones. If human agency is in play, one must consider divine sovereignty from another perspective that avoids any view of divine *causation* of all that occurs. Keathley says Molinism offers the perspective that maintains God's sovereign control while preserving God's holiness, righteousness, goodness, and love by properly defining humans as real decision makers in the soft libertarian sense. But this leads to the point that theological anthropology, not theology proper or soteriology, is in need of evangelicals' full attention.

*Salvation and Sovereignty* may not be the best resource for those unfamiliar with Molinism yet who wish to become fully conversant in it. This work is, however, the best place for those who wish to engage Molinism for the first time because of the theological perspective Keathley employs. This book probably will not persuade Calvinists to switch allegiances, or will it result in a groundswell of support for ROSES as the new soteriological acronym. However, his fine work likely will grow in influence as evangelical readers must engage its perspective in order to engage the full debate over sovereignty and human freedom. No better work is currently available on the theological ramifications of the Molinist postulate. It will be interesting to see if Keathley offers a more thorough explanation of Molinism itself via this theological focus, especially with regard to theological anthropology.

It would be well to note the author's concluding remarks:

The Molinist model of salvation and the sovereignty of God endeavors to maintain the biblical balance of certainty and contingency, confidence and urgency. Our sovereign God saves. Despite that God granted genuine freedom to us; despite

that we promptly abused that freedom to descend into darkness and death; despite that, as fallen creatures, we loved our sin and were without love for Him—despite all these things—God is perfectly accomplishing His plan of salvation. And He is doing so in a way that maintains His perfect integrity from evil and does not turn humans, who He created in His image, into robots. Salvation is of the Lord, all of grace and for His glory (210).

The *Abstracts and Principles* is one of Southern Baptists' founding documents for academic life. Its article on divine providence states: "God from eternity decrees or permits all things that come to pass and perpetually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not in any wise to be author or approver of sin nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures." I have signed that document with my colleague Ken Keathley; and with integrity, I concur that Molinism accords with it well.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Nettles, Thomas J. *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009. 616 pp. \$29.99.

Many Baptists possess no knowledge of James P. Boyce. Some might be able to identify him as the namesake of a college in Kentucky. Still arguably others could identify him as one of the past presidents of the seminary he helped found. Few, however, enjoy the familiarity with Boyce that Tom Nettles displays in this his latest book *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*, the first major biography written about Boyce in over 100 years.

Nettles's knowledge of and influence upon the Southern Baptist Convention are undeniable. In the 1970s, his seminal work, co-written by the late Russ Bush, *Baptists and the Bible*, provided the historical argument for inerrancy that the blossoming Conservative Resurgence needed. In the thirty years since, Nettles has taught generations of Baptist pastors and theologians, first at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, then Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Theological Seminary, and finally Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he currently serves as professor of historic theology.

The treatment of Boyce's life begins as he lived it, with Scripture. Citing 1 Corinthians 4:2 and Paul's admonition to live a life of faithful stewardship, Nettles turns the reader's attention to the great gifts of money, station, and ability with which Boyce was endowed. Thus, the entire biographical enterprise is cast in the light of the Bible and Boyce's attempt to live in faithful obedience to it.

For those not versed in Baptist history, Nettles begins not in the century of Boyce's birth but in seventeenth-century Charleston, South Carolina, placing him in the larger context of Baptist life and the birth of the movement in the South. From there the audience is treated to a flowing narrative of Boyce's life and thought. Considerable attention is given to those matters for which Boyce perhaps is most well known, his role in the founding vision for a Southern Baptist seminary—a school that saw its fulfillment under his guiding hand in 1859—and his lifelong dedication to that institution.

Nettles dedicates nearly one-third of the volume to Boyce's theology, both his personal beliefs and his exposition of those beliefs in his text, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. In these, the author argues, Boyce held and taught a system of theology grounded in the Reformed tradition and informed by contemporary evangelical thinkers, factors that give testimony to the premise that his were the beliefs of "true Baptist theology" (396). The biographer takes his time with Boyce's theology, devoting an entire chapter to his Christology and soteriology, what Nettles calls the cornerstones of Boyce's entire theological system.

I find much to commend here. First, Nettles's efforts represent the first book-length attempt to deal with this influential Southern Baptist in nearly 100 years. Given Boyce's role in the life of the denomination's earliest days, any right understanding of the movement must acknowledge his influence. Second, unlike the 1893 biography by his friend John

Broadus—which has been labeled as hagiographic by some—this work ably deals with the nuances of Boyce’s life and thought and reflects both a heartfelt appreciation for the subject and a scholarly discernment for the foibles and failings of the man.

Readers will appreciate the deftness with which Nettles intertwines historical explanation and biographical detail. Nettles carefully places Boyce within his cultural and theological context in such a way that a novice can follow the flow of history and understand Boyce’s place in it. Likewise, Nettles’s grasp of Boyce’s theology and his own ability to explain the nuanced arguments will aid comprehension and illustrate the importance of theology and the intersection of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. As Nettles argues, Boyce lived the life he lived because of the doctrines he believed, a point well made throughout the book.

Finally, readers should recognize Nettles’s grasp of the historian’s craft. Working from a wide variety of primary source materials—letters, memos, newspapers, etc.—Nettles has crafted a highly readable, engaging story of the life of a man largely. Thus, with good cause, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman* was chosen as one of three finalists for the 2010 John Pollock Award for Christian Biography.

Tom Nettles’s latest effort proves that history does not have to be a simple recitation of facts and dates. Good history is good storytelling. This work proves that sometime the best stories are true life stories.

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Rolnick, Philip A. *Person, Grace, and God*. Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age series. Gen ed. Alan G. Padgett. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. 280. \$28.00.

Philip A. Rolnick serves as Professor of Theology and as the Coordinator of Exploring Ethics across the Disciplines program at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. His previous publications include *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Oxford Press, 1993). *Person, Grace, and God* is a part of the Eerdmans’ series Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern World. With this in mind, Rolnick sets out to discuss how postmodernism has encroached upon traditional positions within the doctrine of Christian anthropology. He surveys the challenges of postmodernism and includes an examination of the work of theologians and philosophers who have embraced neuroscience and have incorporated the findings of the science into their theology.

Two underlying threads are weaved throughout this work: gift and *incommunicabilis*. For Rolnick, personhood is a gift that comes from God, and personality cannot be communicated; it is “unique and non-transferable, unlike a property such as kindness or an essence such as humanity, which innumerable individuals can share” (11). These threads form the foundation of his argument.

After a lengthy discussion of the etymology and history of the theological concept of “person,” Rolnick investigates the challenges brought by postmodern scholars. He examines

the views of Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Rorty, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida on the self (ch. 4). From his inquiry, Rolnick concludes that the question of person is not a question of “what” but of “who”; and “the question of ‘who’ cannot ultimately be deconstructed” (120).

A large portion of the book is dedicated to a discussion of “gift” as “grace.” According to Rolnick, we cannot be persons except through the grace of the creator: “If personhood is possible, then gift is likewise possible. The confluence of personhood and gift is no mere happenstance. If either personhood or gift were found to be impossible, the other would share its fate” (158). He also states that “to recognize God as creator is to recognize ourselves as recipients of creation, that our very existence and the world in which we live it are gifts. Because we ourselves are gifts, we are persons spiritually predisposed to giving and receiving” (167-68). The concept of giving and receiving is expanded upon later in the discussion.

Delving into a discussion of trinitarian personhood, Rolnick draws upon Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas for support. The challenge, as he sees it, is how we should understand the tension between divine simplicity and the threeness of a triune God. He defines simplicity as “the infinite unity of essence and existence so that what God is and the way God is are one” (192). In this discussion Rolnick unfortunately gets bogged down in philosophical double-talk. Two examples are, “Uniquely, in God the real relations among Father, Son, and Spirit are a ‘between’ that is also an ‘in’” (195) and “God wills Trinity as exceeding the highest good, even exceeding the infinite realization of the highest good in the divine nature” (198). After several readings, these sentences and others remain opaque.

As Rolnick merges his discussion of divine personhood with human personhood, he brings in the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Zizioulas. Continuing with giving and receiving, the author explains that gift giving is reciprocal thus relational on an individual and communal basis: “Receptivity should not be understood as poverty or need, but as active contribution to interaction and thereby to community” (202). Therefore, we are beings in communion. For him, “gift” is “grace”: “Grace [is] the pure gift of self for the other, the Trinitarian life of God is infinite and eternal grace” (205). From this he correctly concludes that “grace is not only soteriological; it is soteriological because it is first and foremost ontological” (213) and he adds “The capacity to say no, both to God and to our fellows, supercharges the encounter of ‘yes.’ Because relationship can be denied, those relations that are freely chosen can become events of grace” (218). For Rolnick, the gift of grace links humanity and divinity both in relationship and in being. In this way, we are created in the image of God.

While this book draws from a vast array of resources and advances the discussion in its field, it is not without flaw. First, the writing was written at such an advanced level that it will leave most of its readers behind. The terminology seems to be pointed toward philosophy grad students rather than at theology grad students. The book demands that the reader bring a lot of knowledge to the reading. It also was somewhat repetitive in its presentation, which further decreases its enjoyment.

The second flaw is a common problem found in most presentations on the human constitution. He explains that personhood requires the indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

“Personhood does not emerge, at least not in a sustainable manner, apart from the Spirit” (217). Is he suggesting that only believers are persons? Are we not persons because we are created in the *imago Dei* by God?

The third flaw is his lack of differentiation between humans and animals. The only reference to this point is found near the end of the book: “Forgiveness is not something that animals do or need to do, but it is a distinguishing mark and practice of humans and a centerpiece of Jesus’ teachings” (236). Often, presentations on the human constitution are derailed by postmoderns’ claims that we merely are high functioning animals, nothing more. In a book specifically aimed at fending off postmodern challenges, I would expect a more detailed defense than is provided by a single sentence.

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Blomberg, Craig L., *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. 2d ed. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic 2009. Pp. 500. \$26.39.

Blomberg has served as Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary since 1986. He published the original version of *Jesus and the Gospels* in 1997. The first edition was well-received. The Evangelical Christian Publishers Association awarded it the Gold Medallion Award, and many evangelical professors adopted it as their primary textbook for survey of Gospel courses.

The most notable changes between the first and second edition include the incorporation of insights from scholarly publications of the past decade; the expansion of material, especially the newer critical methods, the Gospel of John, the quest for the historical Jesus, the canon, and the historical reliability of the Gospels. Also, bibliographies found at the ends of the chapters were updated to 2008. The second edition is about fifteen percent longer than the first edition.

The intended audience is theological students, namely upper-level college students and beginning seminary students (1-2), though he is mindful that scholars, pastors, and laypeople also will be interested in his work. To guide theological students in their reading, he includes questions at the end of each chapter that identify the most important points.

The author describes his perspective as “broadly evangelical” (3). Generally speaking, the positions he adopts are theologically conservative, especially in comparison to the larger world of critical NT scholarship. One aspect of *Jesus and the Gospels* that illustrates Blomberg’s perspective is his concern to demonstrate the historical reliability of the events recorded in Scripture (e.g., 243-244, 257, 259, 261, 266, 281-283, 296, *et al.*).

Blomberg’s purpose in *Jesus and the Gospels* is to provide a concise introduction to the Gospels, giving special attention to five foundational areas: 1) the history of the intertestamental period; 2) the critical methods employed in studying the Gospels; 3) the basic issues tied to the history, literature, and theology of each Gospel; 4) a survey of Christ’s

life with particular concern for his teaching and actions; and 5) a synthesis of the issues linked to the historicity and theology of Jesus himself. Since the original publication of *Jesus and the Gospels*, new works related to the study of the Gospels have appeared, including Jarl Fossum's and Phillip Munoa's *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction to Gospel Literature and Jesus Studies* (2004), Frederick J. Murphy's *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (2005), Clive Marsh's and Steve Moyise's *Jesus and the Gospels* 2d ed. (2006), Mark L. Strauss's *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (2007), and Charles B. Puskas's and David Crump's *An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts* (2008). However, even with these recent publications, Blomberg's work still retains a degree of uniqueness because it is the only one to explore these five key areas of Gospel research in a systematic manner.

Some will criticize Blomberg's work. For instance, his comments regarding the woman at the well in John 4 will strike some as speculative (77-78). Others will be hesitant to follow him completely in his comments related to Christian social concern (456). Nevertheless, if you view the work in its entirety, you will find that it is an exceptional resource. First, the book provides a concise overview of the Gospels and the major issues related to their interpretation. To be sure, this is no small feat for the information is vast and the issues are exceedingly complex. However, Blomberg is able to present the material in a succinct and accessible manner. He excels in his attempt to provide a "one-stop shopping" textbook for courses on the Gospels (1).

A second commendable feature of *Jesus and the Gospels* is Blomberg's discussion of the history of interpretation of crucial topics (e.g., 102-108, 209-17, 300-3). He gives his readers a sense of perspective regarding the key debates and major approaches employed by scholars. Another positive aspect of the writing is the helpful up-to-date bibliographies at the end of each chapter. The author lists titles topically and according to their degree of difficulty. Furthermore, he is quite thorough, for he includes quality works from diverse theological perspectives.

I highly recommends the second edition of Blomberg's *Jesus and the Gospels*. It is a superior survey of the Gospels written by an evangelical scholar.

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Beeley, Christopher A. "Theology and Pastoral Leadership." *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (2009): 11-30.

Christopher Beeley is the Walter H. Gray Assistant Professor of Anglican Studies and Patristics at Berkeley and Yale Divinity Schools in New Haven, Connecticut. He is an Episcopal priest, a founding member and theological consultant for the "Gathering of the Leaders," and the author of *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford, 2008). He is currently writing a book on pastoral leadership in the early church (11).

In 1991-92 Julius del Pino, director of Supervised Ministries at Yale Divinity School, conducted a survey. He discovered that students desired more theology and less practical ministry classes after entering the church field. From the results of this survey, Beeley was inspired to “reflect on the theological heart of pastoral leadership per se, and on the principles of biblical exegesis that inform such leadership” (14). To disclose these principles, he examined the preaching of Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine. He communicated the importance of these preachers for observing a connection between theology and practical ministry.

Beeley’s summary of Gregory showed that pastoral ministry shares the aim of preaching, which is to give the soul wings, rescue the soul from the world, enhance the Christian in his walk, and defy the heavenly realm upon those committed to Christ (17). The Cappadocian shared the chief function of Christian leadership was to guide the baptized believer through ongoing transformation as the individual came to participate deeply in the eternal life of the Trinity. He possessed a rigorous schedule of preaching, teaching, counseling, and the celebrating of the mysteries. He stressed congregation rule and exhorted Christians to remember they aided in God’s healing (20). Beeley related that Gregory understood the importance of Scripture for teaching, preaching, and biblical interpretation.

After spending over half of the article on Gregory’s position, Beeley turned his attention to the preaching of Augustine. He disclosed the importance of Scripture in the preaching of Augustine based on his book *On Christian Doctrine* (23). He rightly concluded that Augustine held to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture and concluded that the canon of Scripture held a summit of authority for salvation (28). However, Beeley did not show the depth in this section that he did concerning Gregory. His limited use of Augustine showed a lack of balance between the two-featured theologians.

In his conclusion, Beeley mentioned John Chrysostom as an example of an individual open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He also expressed Chrysostom taught on the importance of preparation for the preaching event as did Gregory and Augustine (28). Thus, Beeley gave his theory that strong pastoral leadership was a lifelong process that continued after seminary education ended. To address the initial problem, Beeley suggested for pastors and lay leaders to root themselves in the theological core of their identity. Thus, empowering all baptized believers to live out their ministries for the sake of Christ’s kingdom (30).

Beeley’s use of Gregory and Augustine brought out the characteristics of preaching: healing, teaching, comforting, supporting, and directing, which contributes to the field of patristic preaching. He also explored insights on the importance of ordination, the role of the Holy Spirit, apostolic doctrine, and congregation rule. The article lacked interaction concerning the leadership style of the preachers. Since the title of the article claimed an investigation that included pastoral leadership, an examination of some of the major leadership theories would have enhanced the study. However, the article contributes to the discussion on the integration of theology and practical ministry.

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Bass, Christopher D. *That You May Know: Assurance of Salvation in 1 John*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008. 240 pp. \$24.99.

*That You May Know* is the fifth in the Studies in Bible and Theology series produced by Broadman and Holman in connection with the New American Commentary. In this volume, Christopher Bass, pastor of Redeemer Fellowship Church in Boston, provides a careful exegetical study of the issue of assurance of salvation in 1 John.

Although this book is published by the denominational publishing house of Southern Baptists, its author appears reluctant to embrace a Southern Baptist identity. This new church at which Bass serves as pastor mentions its identification with the Baptist Association of New England, but it never identifies the Southern Baptist Convention among its affiliations. Its greater identity appears to be with two nondenominational groups, the NETS Institute of Church Planting, and Converge Northeast. Likewise, the church chooses an alternative doctrinal confession over the SBC's *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. Indeed, though Bass references the *Reformed Westminster Confession* in this book, he never references the *Baptist Faith and Message*, the confession of the largest Protestant denomination in America.

Bass identifies himself as a biblical theologian rather than a systematic theologian. He acknowledges that the doctrine of assurance has primarily been addressed through systematic theology, and that he is aware of just two book-length works in biblical theology on the subject of assurance of salvation (3-5). Unfortunately, this somewhat myopic focus on biblical theology overlooks the fact that most works of systematic theology, not to mention Bible commentaries written by theologians, offer extensive and direct exegesis of biblical material addressing the doctrine of assurance of salvation. Which is more important – the label of biblical theology, or basing one's perspective on a careful exegesis of the text?

Bass describes biblical theology as beginning with the text and allowing it “to speak for itself” (5) – a rather self-congratulatory statement by a biblical theologian – which seems to suggest the implication that systematic theologians may characteristically and intentionally do violence to the text of Scripture. Actually, biblical theologians do not own a privileged corner on truth. Biblical theologians are no more exempt from hermeneutical presuppositions and interpretive filters than are systematic or historical theologians. We all struggle through the hermeneutical arch or hermeneutical spiral to remove our own hermeneutical filters in order to get back to the authorial intended meaning of Scripture. Bass appears to be naively ignorant of the degree to which his own Reformed theological presuppositions play in coloring his exegesis. For example, consider Bass's treatment of 1 John 2:2, which affirms that Christ went to the cross “not for our sins only, but for the sins of the entire world” (1 John 2:2, NASB), a verse which is often cited as evidence against the limited atonement doctrine of Reformed theology. Bass never examines the lexical meaning of the phrase *holou tou kosmou*, but he rejects the interpretation that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient for all who believe in Him because “it is difficult to support theologically” (82). Bass, thus, does not begin with the text but immediately goes beyond the biblical evidence to an extended quotation from Calvinist writer John Owen who argued strongly for a limited atonement interpretation which Bass describes as the “definitive statement on the issue” with “irrefutable” logic (82-83). (Interestingly, Bass then proceeds to argue that Owen's interpretation is flawed). Bass, then, proposes a similar interpretation in which the “whole

world” refers just to the elect, i.e., the limited atonement view he brought to the text. “Let the text speak for itself,” indeed!

Despite Bass’s assertion of a focus on biblical theology, he begins the book with a rather disappointing survey of views of assurance from systematic theology. Bass’s survey of views is rather truncated and one-sided in that it is limited only to the “historical trajectories” of medieval Roman Catholicism, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Later Calvinists, and Jacobus Arminius. He does add the “Grace Movement” in a later section as something of an afterthought. Bass would have served his readers better by focusing on the views that have had the most impact the contemporary church. Bass’s book was unfortunately published before Ken Keathley’s chapters on assurance of salvation in two books – *Salvation and Sovereignty*<sup>1</sup> and *Whosoever Will*,<sup>2</sup> which offer a more robust explanation of the theological options available regarding assurance. Bass could have profited from Keathley’s delineation of nine separate views on assurance of salvation (including Keathley’s own “evidence of genuineness” proposal).

The great strength of *That You May Know*, however, is in its exegesis of 1 John. The faith of the early church was evidently called into question by some incipient form of Gnosticism leading to a loss of assurance about salvation. First John addresses this issue, and thus offers our most thoroughgoing treatment of the doctrine of assurance of any book in the Bible. In Bass’s second chapter, he investigates John’s purpose for writing the epistle, including external evidence (the identity of the heretical “secessionist” group addressed by John) and internal evidence (John’s own six stated purposes for writing the epistle). It would have been helpful if Bass had been more specific in exploring how the text addressed the Cerinthian, docetic, proto-gnostic heresies, particularly in relation to the doctrine of the incarnation, but he provides an excellent survey of John’s purpose statements.

In chapter three, Bass builds a strong case from 1 John that assurance is grounded in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Bass also adds a helpful exegesis of John’s description of what it means for believers to be in fellowship with the God who is Light. The rather abrupt shift from a discussion of the supreme sufficiency of Christ’s atonement to the necessity for human good works foreshadows Bass’s endorsement of the view endorsed by his doctoral supervisor Thomas Schreiner, which, though ambiguous at points, has been described as a “means of salvation” approach because good works is a necessary component of salvation, and salvation cannot be won or assured without such good works.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Bass’s perspective is virtually indistinguishable from that of his dissertation supervisor Schreiner.

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth D. Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 164-90.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth D. Keathley, “Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism, Reflections from the John 3:16 Conference* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 163-87.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 40, 45, 89, 200; Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 166-67, 179-84; Keathley, *Whosoever Will*, 165-66, 177-83.

First John famously presents three tests to assure believers of the genuineness of their faith – the tests of righteousness, love, and belief. In chapter 5, Bass provides a careful exposition of these tests in 1 John, including an excellent discussion of six various views of whether John actually advocated sinless perfection, and Bass's own eclectic proposal (134-42). A more thorough discussion would have been helpful in this chapter of the distinction between the condemning heart and the confident heart in 1 John 3:20-21, and the five marks of a confident heart before God that follow in vv. 22-24 connected by a string of conjunctions.

The sixth chapter provides Bass's proposals about the application of these teachings for the church. He provides five brief case studies to apply these teachings. Unfortunately, like the early Puritans who struggled with assurance because they never knew if their good works were good enough to warrant salvation, the application of Bass's principles does not produce assurance. Indeed, according to Bass's recommendations, professed believers who are unloving, guilty of a besetting sin, or guilty of some particular publicly scandalous sins like adultery should be confronted with the charge that they are not truly saved. This immediately raises two questions. First, it promotes a judgmental culture in which Christians are constantly being judged by fellow believers – not a positive atmosphere for Christian fellowship! Who gave us the right to usurp the place of God and judge each other's salvation? Not Jesus or the Apostles (Matt. 7:1-5; Luke 6:37; Rom. 14:4, 10, 13; 1 Cor. 4:5; James 4:12)! Obviously, not all people whose name is on a church roll are truly saved. But churches should be fellowships of loving encouragement and exhortation, not of judgmental questioning and condemnation (particularly questioning and condemnation made by other sinners!).

Second, all honest Christians are unloving at times, and suffer from besetting sins. We may not commit sins on a short list of publicly scandalous sins, but we sin repeatedly and all too frequently. To deny this is to deny John's admonition against lying by saying we are not sinners (1 John 1:8, 10). Therefore, like the Puritans, Bass's proposal provides virtually no realistic assurance to the believer. Keathley notes that this "means of salvation" view advocated by Bass, as expressed by his mentor Schreiner (and Caneday) in a book subtitled *A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*, is "long on perseverance and short on assurance."<sup>4</sup> As Roy Zuck noted in a review of Schreiner and Caneday, this view "comes dangerously close to salvation by works, and it fails to give absolute unqualified assurance of salvation for any believer."<sup>5</sup> Ironically, was not the basic purpose of the writing of 1 John to provide assurance for believers whose salvation was being questioned by others? And yet this proposal places the current day believer in a no-assurance position not unlike those to whom John sought to bring assurance!

*That You May Know* is probably too technical for most laypersons, and some of its fruit will be lost to ministers who have some theological training but no facility in the biblical languages. To the expository preacher who enjoys drinking deep from the Word of God,

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<sup>4</sup>Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 184; and Keathley, *Whosoever Will*, 182.

<sup>5</sup>Roy Zuck, "Review of *The Race Set Before Us*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (April-June 2003), 241-42; cited in Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 167, and Keathley, *Whosoever Will*, 165.

however, this book is a very useful resource. Despite its shortcomings, it provides a helpful exposition of 1 John on a subject of great significance in the church. Recommended for expositors.

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Witherington, Ben III, *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Times of Financial Crisis*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010. Pp. 192. \$18.99.

A common ‘preacher joke’ depicts Satan firing multiple attacks at a Christian only to see each attack repelled by the armor of Ephesians 6. The Adversary then sneaks around behind the Christian, fires an attack at the person’s wallet and the Christian falls over in defeat. Ben Witherington III, in his most recent book *Jesus and Money*, aims to help Christians guard against attacks on the wallet and move toward faithful stewardship and radical self-sacrifice for the good of others and the honor of Christ. The author senses that both the recent downturn in the worldwide economy and the “persistence of a distorted prosperity gospel” (57) make the times right for a book of this sort.

Books aiming to help Christians face financial challenges generally fit one of two patterns: either practical advice for implementing budgeting and stewardship habits or general principles derived from the Bible. Witherington’s work fits the second category, though his expertise as a New Testament scholar helps him avoid the trap of offering proof-texts, contrived sound bites, or overly generalized wisdom that could have come from any number of spiritual sources. Instead, Witherington offers a book that is part historical-grammatical hermeneutics, part New Testament theology, and part ethics. The result is a balanced approach to the Bible that takes seriously the counter-cultural stance of Jesus and the early Church, while incorporating a wide variety of witnesses within the canon.

*Jesus and Money* begins with a prequel that establishes the purpose, framework, and guiding principles for Witherington’s argument. The subsequent 8 chapters provide a roughly diachronic survey of biblical texts and themes pertinent to money and possessions. Chapter 9 summarizes how one should develop a New Testament theology of money, stewardship, and giving; chapter 10 offers practical advice for moving beyond a lifestyle consumed by materialism and greed. Witherington also provides two appendices: one represents his attempt to dispel ten common myths about Christianity and money, and the second is an edited sermon from John Wesley entitled “The Use of Money.” Finally, endnotes are available for those wanting to trace Witherington’s main lines of research. Unfortunately, the book does not contain what otherwise would have been a very helpful index of Scriptures.

Each core chapter is organized according to general introduction, exegesis of relevant passages, and a concluding “And So?” section devoted to the hermeneutical task of bringing the biblical text to bear on issues, both practical and theological, facing Christians and the church. Chapter 1, which looks at Genesis/Old Testament in general, lays the foundation for Witherington’s argument throughout the book by focusing on a creation theology exemplified by Psalm 24:1—“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the

world and all who dwell there.” In Chapter 2, Witherington draws heavily from his book *Jesus the Sage* to elucidate the differing views on wealth within Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Jesus and the Gospels, though Witherington does not follow the lead of some historical Jesus scholars who depict Jesus as a poor peasant. Instead, Witherington focuses on the choice Jesus made in leading the sort of life that he did and the ramifications of this choice within his teaching and ministry.

In Chapter 5, Witherington moves to Jesus’ brother James, who seems to be carrying forward the counter-cultural teaching of Jesus on financial matters, especially as they affect the relationship between rich and poor within Christianity. Chapter 6 moves the conversation to Luke-Acts; the Gospel of Luke focuses on care for those in need and the early chapters of Acts offer a picture of financial ups-and-downs within the early Christian communities. Chapter 7 is devoted to the apostle Paul, and as part of this chapter, Witherington helpfully provides an extended discussion on remuneration for ministers. Finally, chapter 8 discusses the critiques of materialism and systemic economic injustice set forth by John of Patmos in Revelation 2–3 and 17–18.

Several threads run through the book. Students and pastors should not miss the way Witherington integrates social-science criticism, theological reflection, historical-critical analysis, and ethics. In addition, he frequently reiterates the importance of reading Scripture in context; though the mantra can become wearying. The damage done by those who fail to incorporate the historical and canonical context of a passage justifies the author’s emphasis. Also, Witherington refuses to romanticize poverty and consistently eschews any hints of communism/socialism. These cautions, though, do not prevent him from advocating the radical self-sacrifice geared toward providing for those truly in need, which he characterizes as “community-ism” and “theology of enough.” This balanced approach is perhaps the hallmark of the book and should prove helpful to pastors who must daily deal with people on one side or the other of the financial spectrum.

Readers accustomed to scholarly works should be aware of Witherington’s colloquial style of writing, some of which fails to satisfy. For example, he consistently makes reference to prosperity preachers to the point that these caricatured figures begin to take on the role of the Jews in the Gospel of John. The author could have provided more definition and fewer stereotypes in this regard. Also, Witherington offers a necessary critique of legalistic tithing, though his lack of interaction with the end of Matthew 23:23 may leave some readers wanting. Finally, a few of the exegetical discussions in the core chapters wander afar before returning to their original purpose, but engaged readers will gain a primer in exegesis for the journey.

In the end, at less than 200 pages *Jesus and Money* is an accessible, solid, and timely book. My hope is that we heed Witherington’s advice to not allow the Adversary to move behind our backs and attack us through our wallets.

Owen Nease  
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Powell, Doug. *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics*. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006. Pp. 375. \$14.99.

Doug Powell's *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics* is about just that—apologetics for the Christian. The writing is to the point, accurate, orthodox, in-depth, and easy-to follow. Furthermore, *Christian Apologetics* covers most of the “hot topics” one would encounter from skeptics and the like.

Powell's thesis is that Christians who do not know why they believe what they believe are usually uncomfortable around unbelievers. They often get defensive and belligerent or develop a “fortress mentality.” Instead, believers should embrace the Great Commission, which itself is an offensive strategy, and learn to use the information pertaining to the rationality of the Christian faith (7). Agreeing with this assessment, I submit that *Christian Apologetics* is a timely tool for the Church.

The topics range from “Does God Exist?” to “Is the New Testament Reliable?” In the first section, Powell arms novice apologists with the cosmological (Kalam, Thomist, Leibnizian), design, and moral arguments, respectively. In the moral argument, he gives a brilliant illustration of objectivity within relativism. He provides an example in which shampoo is tested by rubbing it into the eyes of the relativist's dog (86). Another example, this one from J. P. Moreland, exposes the inconsistency of the relativist and involved attempting to hijack a relativist's stereo from his college dorm. Predictably, the supposed relativist objects on the basis of *his* morality (stealing *his* property is wrong). Powell concludes that “relativism . . . isn't merely emotionally offensive. It doesn't hang together logically. As a worldview, it cannot be sustained” (92).

On miracles, Powell begins by defining and giving criteria for what constituted a miracle in the Bible. First, the source of a miracle is God alone. Second, the purpose of a miracle was to prove Jesus' claims. Third, the character of a miracle was good (213-14). Interestingly, and perhaps uniquely, Powell discusses miracles in other religions, namely Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. In each, Powell shows that the origin, purpose, and result of the miracles were not similar to those found in Christian Scripture (224, 228, 232). In the case of Islam, Powell declares that the issue of miracles and the Quran is circular, and furthermore, the revelation is suspicious since it was received in secret—as opposed to Moses receiving revelation in full view of a nation (231).

Regarding the resurrection of Jesus, Powell presents many of the classic arguments (swoon, twin, stolen body, wrong tomb, etc.). The uniqueness of his work (besides presentation and packaging) is found in his conclusion. Because of the context of the resurrection, including the time and the person (especially his fulfilling prophetic utterances), the resurrection cannot be dismissed out-of-hand. Alternative explanations are left to shoulder the burden of proof.

The only drawback to Powell's *Guide to Christian Apologetics* is its brevity. The endnotes could be expanded and a bibliography could be added. Overall, a more comprehensive version of this well-written, brilliantly-illustrated work would serve well as a textbook.

The current volume is very attractive and would incite conversation anywhere the reader is found. I highly recommend Powell's book to all Christians wanting to understand their faith and discuss it with others.

Mel Winstead  
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No walking on water.

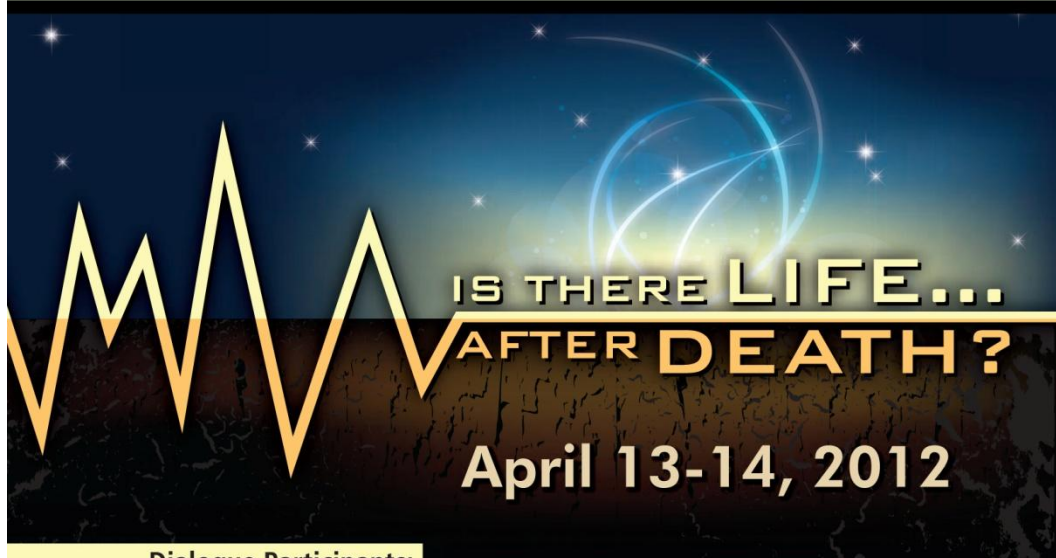
Just my father standing there at the pond's edge,  
showing us how to do it.

His feet are braced in cattle tracks, at the muddy rim  
where a family of Herefords comes to drink in the afternoons.

Patiently as an ox, he demonstrates how to cast. I watch  
my brothers as they hurl worms, minnows, plastic plugs  
to placate silver-plated lunkers as big as dinner plates,  
to please them, bring them home.

--Mary Kennan Herbert

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**Michael Shermer**

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

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