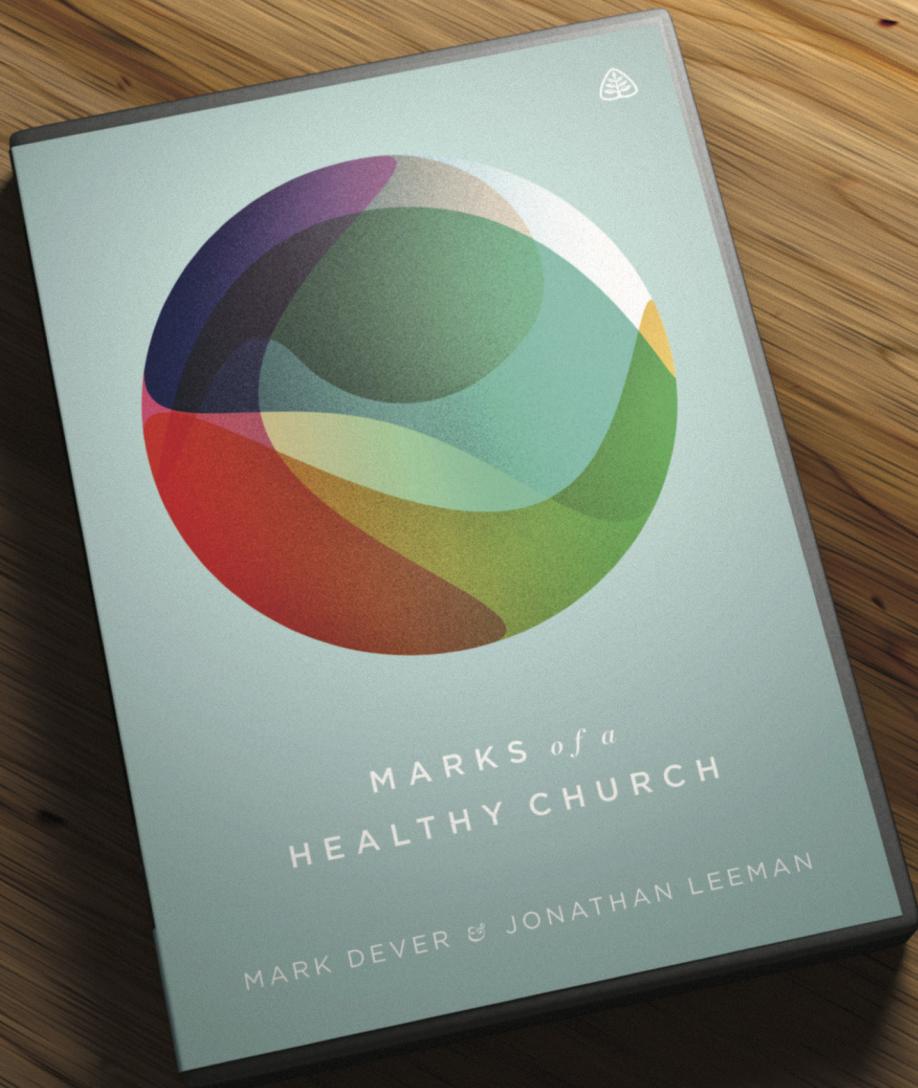


CREDO

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 4 | DECEMBER 2016

Sola Scriptura



NEW

CHRISTIANS NEED HEALTHY CHURCHES

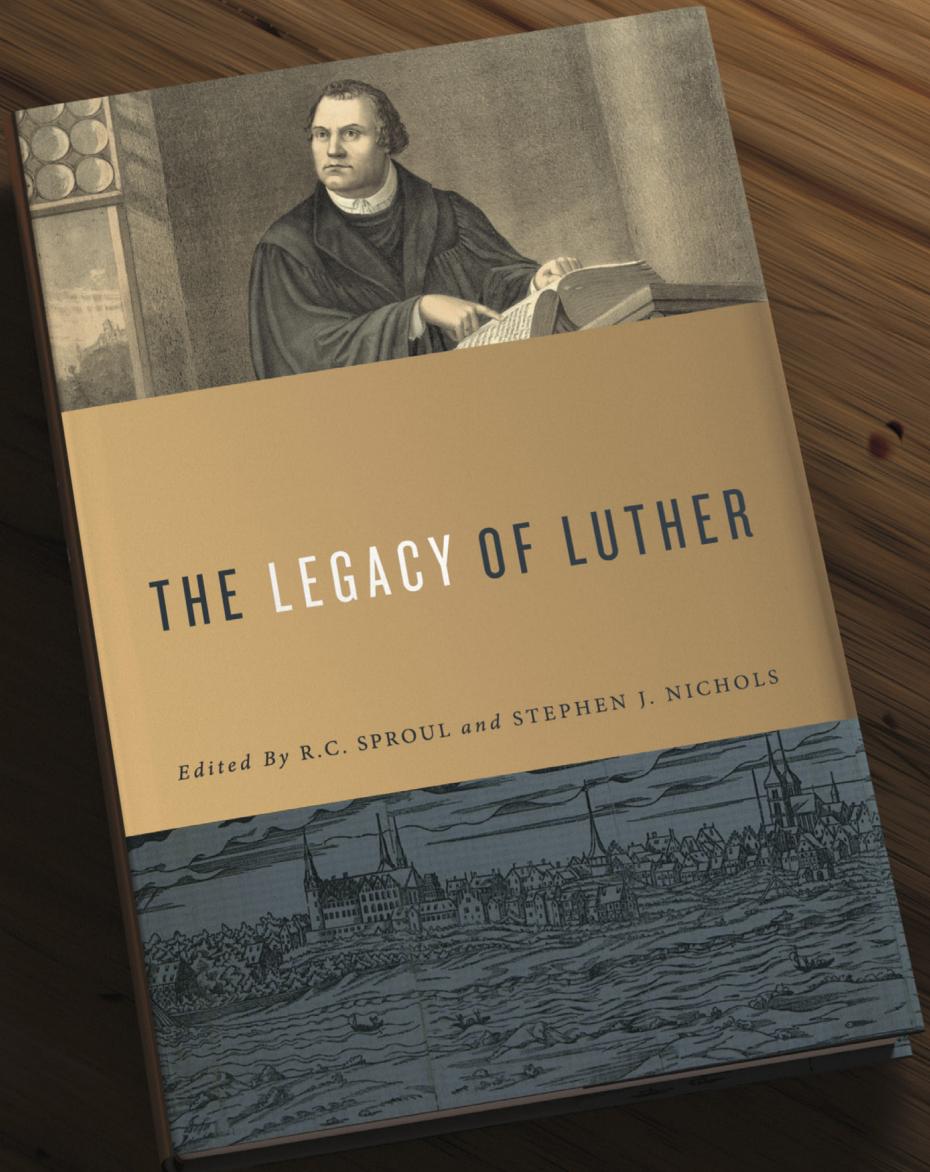
The church wasn't our idea—it was His. Jesus established the church as the natural arena for our spiritual growth, and our health depends on it. In this series, Drs. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman survey the marks of a healthy church, where we are called to display God's glorious character in unity, holiness, and love. We can't do it alone.

Available study resources with this series:

DVDs (2) | CDs (5) | STUDY GUIDE | ONLINE COURSE



Ligonier.org/teachingseries | 800.435.4343



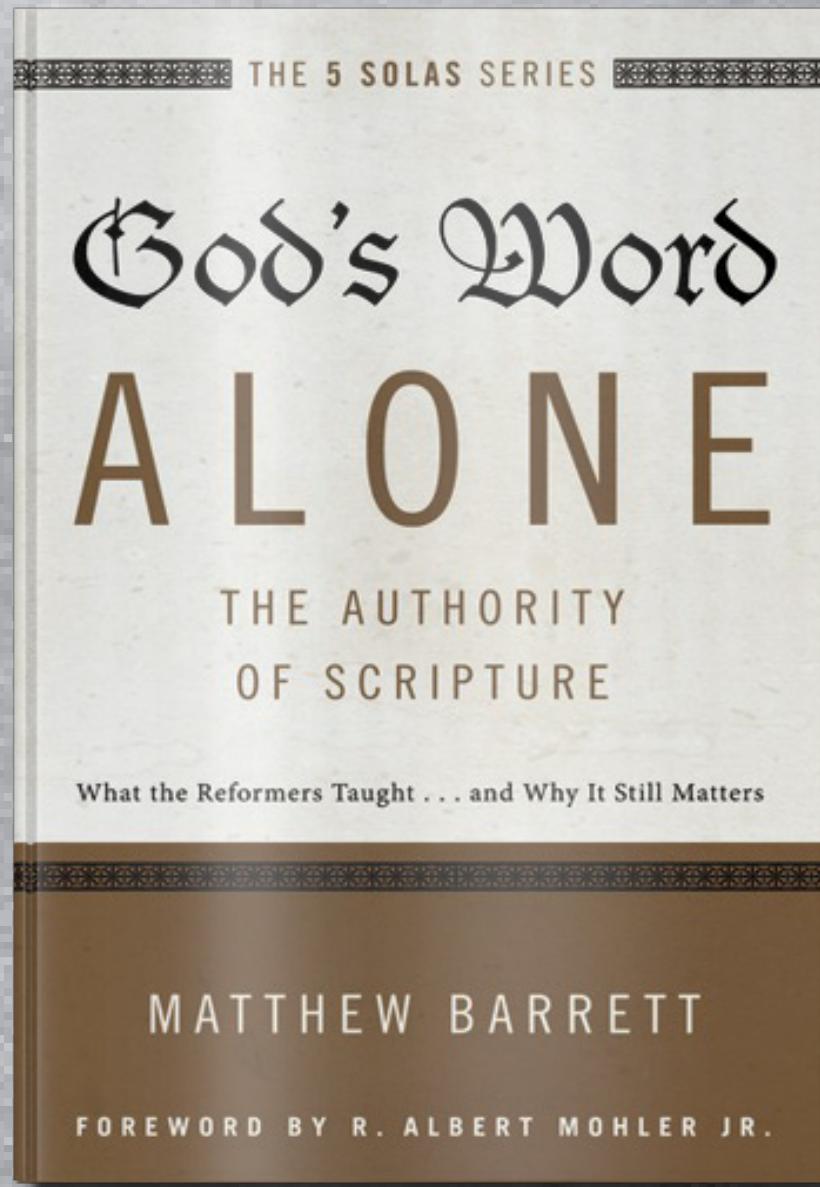
NEW

MEET MARTIN LUTHER

He was the most influential man of his day. The movement that began with his posting of the Ninety-Five Theses reshaped Europe, redirected Christian history, and recovered the truth of God's Word. Five hundred years later, what is Luther's legacy? In this volume, R.C. Sproul, Stephen J. Nichols, and thirteen other scholars and pastors examine his life, teaching and enduring influence. Meet Martin Luther, the audacious Reformer who, out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, set the world ablaze. Now available in digital and print editions wherever books are sold.



LegacyofLuther.com



- Now Available -

"This book - what a feast!"

- Robert W. Yarbough

"Barrett here covers all the theological bases – biblical, historical, and systematic – as one might expect of a home run."

—Kevin Vanhoozer

"Barrett ...competently demonstrates the relevance of the doctrine of Scripture in our day."

—D. A. Carson

"In very readable prose Barrett graciously provides thoughtful and nuanced responses to the objections of critics of this doctrine."

—John D. Woodbridge

"It is a massive understatement to say this book is much needed today. I cannot recommend it too highly."

—Sam Storms

"Barrett's knowledge is very broad and his position thoroughly biblical."

—John Frame

"Barrett draws in the Bible's own Trinitarian, covenantal, and salvation-historical themes to offer a persuasive alternative to various attempts to evade scriptural authority."

— Michael Horton

500 YEARS

AFTER THE REFORMATION WE NEED TO RECOVER THE
5 SOLAS AND RESTATE THEM FOR A NEW GENERATION



Contents

FEATURES

- 20** What is Sola Scriptura?
by Matthew Barrett

- 26** Sola Scriptura Then and Now:
Biblical Authority in Late Medieval
and Reformation Context
by Gavin Ortlund

- 32** God Has Come to Talk to Us:
Martin Luther and the Word of
God
An Interview with Luther Scholar
Robert Kolb

- 38** Biblical Authority and the
Conviction to Preach
by Chris Castaldo

- 42** No Creed but the Bible?
by Justin S. Holcomb

- 9.** Theology Together: Paul House
Explains Why Dietrich Bonhoeffer's
Model of Theological Education
Desperately Needs to be Retrieved
Today

- 12.** Let's Get Theological
by Peter Lillback, James Bruce, Paul
Helseth, Alan Gomes, Ron Gleason,
and Owen Strachan

- 48.** Book Reviews

- 60.** First Principles: A Wise Woman
Builds Her Home on Sola Scriptura
by Jessalyn Hutto

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Matthew Barrett

STAFF EDITORS

*Matt Manry
Timothy Raymond
Matthew Claridge
Gary Steward
Joshua Greever
Catharine Clayton
John Ferguson
David Livernois
Theodore Lee
Ryan Modisette
Chris Holmes
Steve Lee
Jake Grogan*

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Adrian Martinez

EDITORIAL COUNCIL

*Thomas Schreiner
Fred G. Zaspel
Ardel B. Caneday*

ADVERTISING

*To advertise in Credo Magazine
matthewbarrett@credomag.com*

PERMISSIONS

Credo Magazine grants permission for any original article to be quoted provided Credo Magazine is indicated as the source. For use of an entire article permission must be granted. Please contact matthewbarrett@credomag.com

From the Editor

Protestantism today faces a crisis in authority. Living in the twenty-first century means we are born into a world that has experienced the full effects of the Enlightenment, Protestant Liberalism, and Postmodernism. Yet at the same time, God's Word continues to stand undefeated. No doubt, the Bible is under fire today as critics, both secular and evangelical (oddly enough), attack the Bible's full authority. But if we've learned anything from the sixteenth-century Reformation, we know that God's Word will prevail in the end.

As he stood there trembling at the Diet of Worms, certainly it must have seemed to Martin Luther that the whole world was against him. Yet Luther could boldly stand upon the authority of God's Word because he knew that not even his greatest nemesis was a match for the voice of the living God.

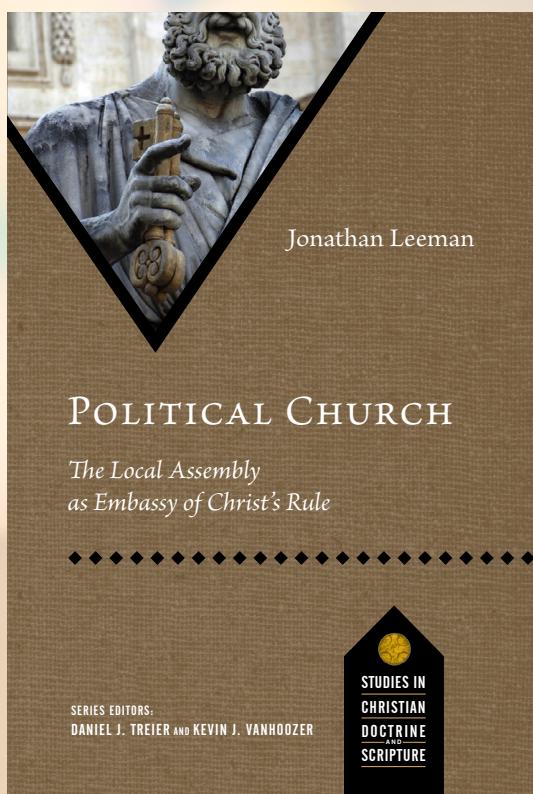
While our circumstances may differ today, the need to recover biblical authority in the church and in the culture remains. The next generation of Christians need to be taught, perhaps for the first time, that this is no ordinary book we hold in our hands. It is the very Word of God. In other words, if Christians today are to give an answer for the faith within them against those who would criticize the scriptures, then they need to be taught the formal principle of the Reformation: *sola Scriptura*—only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church. ■

Matthew Barrett

Executive Editor

THE CHURCH AS EMBASSY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

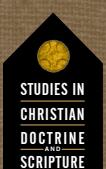
407 pages, paperback, 978-0-8308-4880-5, \$40.00



POLITICAL CHURCH

*The Local Assembly
as Embassy of Christ's Rule*

SERIES EDITORS:
DANIEL J. TREIER AND KEVIN J. VANHOOZER



POLITICAL CHURCH

The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule
STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
AND SCRIPTURE

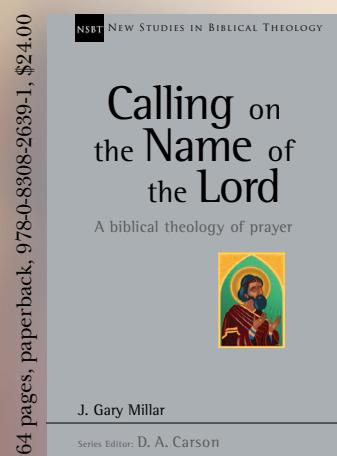
Jonathan Leeman

What is the nature of the church as an institution? What are the limits of the church's political reach? Drawing on covenant theology and the "new institutionalism" in political science, Jonathan Leeman critiques political liberalism and explores how the biblical canon informs an account of the local church as an embassy of Christ's kingdom.

"Leeman's well-argued book is a welcome reminder that the full reality of the church is to be found in the local congregation. I cannot imagine that his book will not become a standard work in this area of theological inquiry."

STANLEY HAUERWAS, Duke University

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



Calling on the Name of the Lord

A biblical theology of prayer



J. Gary Millar

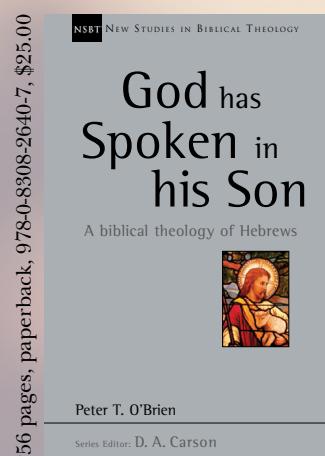
Series Editor: D. A. Carson

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

NEW STUDIES IN
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

J. Gary Millar

Defining prayer simply as "calling on the name of the Lord," Millar follows the contours of the Bible's teaching on prayer. In this NSBT volume, he shows how prayer is intimately linked with the gospel and how it is primarily to be understood as asking God to deliver on his promises.



God has Spoken in his Son

A biblical theology of Hebrews



Peter T. O'Brien

Series Editor: D. A. Carson

NSBT New Studies in Biblical Theology

God has
Spoken in
his Son

New Studies in Biblical Theology

GOD HAS SPOKEN IN HIS SON

NEW STUDIES IN
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Peter T. O'Brien

Peter O'Brien's cohesive exposition of Hebrews examines the major interlocking themes highlighted by the author addressing this "word of exhortation" (Heb 13:22). The themes in this NSBT volume include God speaking, Christology, salvation, the people of God, and warnings and encouragements.

Interview

Theology Together

Paul House Explains Why Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Model of Theological Education Desperately Needs to be Retrieved Today

Paul House is Professor of Old Testament at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, AL. His most recent book is Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together (Crossway, 2015). Matthew Barrett, executive editor of Credo Magazine talks to House about Bonhoeffer's seminary vision and why it matters so much today.

Many of our readers may be totally surprised to learn that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was involved in directing a seminary. Would you briefly tell us how this happened?

Bonhoeffer received his doctorate in 1927 and his license to lecture in 1930. After taking a year to study at Union Seminary in New York, he

taught at the University of Berlin during 1931-1933. He was ordained a Lutheran pastor in November 1931. Hitler came to power in January 1933, and a struggle over control of the national church resulted. Bonhoeffer became part of the Confessing Church, a renewal movement within the national church. Feeling out of step with many of his less radical Confessing Church colleagues, he left Germany to pastor two London churches during 1933-1935. By 1934 the Confessing Church decided to open protest seminaries and asked Bonhoeffer to lead one of them. After some soul searching he accepted the position. He wrote a friend that the times called for teaching students in communities committed to the Bible and the Sermon on the Mount.

What were some of the risks and threats Bonhoeffer faced in leading a seminary during Hitler's rise to power?

Hitler was firmly in control when Bonhoeffer opened his seminary in April 1935. The seminary was not government-approved, so it was technically illegal from the start. The Gestapo could close it at any time, making his life quite uncertain. Several students and one colleague were arrested and served jail time. He lost his license to lecture at the University of Berlin due to his involvement with the seminary. He also lost friends, money, property, and prestige.

Tell us, what was it like to be a student in Bonhoeffer's seminary? What would one's schedule look like, what subjects would one study, what was it like to listen to Bonhoeffer's lectures, and what sacrifices would one have to make to study in such a setting?

Bonhoeffer's students were well educated, committed to the Confessing Church, and ready to serve even tiny congregations. Before they came to Bonhoeffer for their six-month course they had completed university theology studies, spent a year in an internship, and passed a first ordination exam. They gave up the chance for a settled ministry, a fixed government salary, and easy conditions in which to prepare for ministry. On weekdays they rose early for morning worship, after which they spent time in silent

meditation. Then they attended lectures on the New Testament, preaching, pastoral care, church music, and theology. After lunch they enjoyed a time of recreation. Evenings they studied, spent time together, and ended the day with worship before bed. On Saturdays they had a worship service that included communion and confession once a month. On Sundays they helped with local churches. Several witnesses note that Bonhoeffer was not a stirring lecturer. His content and character drove home his talks to his students.

Bonhoeffer's students were well educated, committed to the Confessing Church, and ready to serve even tiny congregations.

In your estimation, what were Bonhoeffer's top priorities for seminary education?

Bonhoeffer wanted to help students do the following: learn to read the Bible and to pray, which their university studies had not taught them; learn to live in community with other pastors as brothers rather than as competitors; learn to live alone in communion with God while serving, not dominating, God's people. He believed that spiritual discipline and academic excellence in community were necessary for these traits to develop.

One thing that sets Bonhoeffer's vision of seminary apart from many seminaries today is how much he valued learning in community. Have we lost this value in our seminary education today? If so, how might a seminary pride itself once more on the importance of theology within community?

To make a fresh start, we would do well to remember Bonhoeffer's belief that Christian theology is grounded in Jesus's incarnation, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension.

We have in many, probably most cases. No seminary admits to giving up on personal attention completely, though some have indeed done so, particularly by offering online classes. Seminaries seeking to please as many constituents as possible and to keep afloat financially often sell credits to people wanting credentials. Students buy credits by attending classes without getting to know their teachers or other students. Seminaries sell credits by not requiring themselves or the students to know one another or minister to one another. Data may get transferred and bills may get paid, but real formation does not take place.

To make a fresh start, we would do well to remember Bonhoeffer's belief that Christian theology is grounded in Jesus's incarnation, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension. God sent his son for face-to-face, life-on-life ministry and ministry training of the 12 and the 70. The incarnation is crucial, for it should make us very wary of disembodied means of pastoral formation, especially on mission fields. The body of Christ is an actual physical reality, not an

abstract principle. If there is no body there is no church, according to Bonhoeffer (and the apostle Paul). We would then do well to rebuild communities that serve the churches and places that send us students, faculty, and staff. These commitments will take different forms in different places, but there will be a strong family resemblance in them all.

What lessons have you personally learned from Bonhoeffer as a professor and how have they impacted your teaching ministry?

Studying Bonhoeffer has helped me recommit to following Jesus whatever the concrete cost may turn out to be, to make hearing God in his Word a chief daily priority, to persevere in slow, careful formative work, to refuse to separate intellectual and spiritual formation, and to stress the value of face-to-face ministry with students and colleagues.

If our readers have never read Bonhoeffer before, where should they start? What books would you recommend?

With this bare historical background in mind, read *The Cost of Discipleship*, recalling that the book teaches seminarians what sort of ministers churches need. Then read *Life Together*, which describes seminary life and also gives good ideas about how Christian families, housemates, and communities can operate. Then it might be helpful to read his "After Ten Years," a letter he wrote to friends a few months before going to prison. You do not have to agree with everything Bonhoeffer wrote to gain a great deal from him. 

John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Dr. Peter A. Lillback

John Calvin's (1509-1564) *Institutes*, first published in 1536, is timelessly important. Its abiding significance is due to three factors. 1. He was a brilliant thinker trained in both theology and law. 2. He wrote eloquently having been shaped by the scholarly humanist tradition. 3. He was a second generation Reformer who knew the concerns of the Reformation, and so was able to critique and perfect the Protestant faith by clarifying theological debates and systematizing Protestant theology.

Intended to be a theological guidebook for reading the Bible, the *Institutes* offers a logical summation of the main truths of the Bible. Calvin interacts with the history of the Christian tradition in the midst of the clash of Protestantism and Medieval Catholicism. His work expanded through several editions in Latin and French. To summarize, the four books of the *Institutes* emphasize the knowledge of God that is possible due to God's self-revelation in Scripture:

- One: The Knowledge of God the Creator
- Two: The Knowledge of God the Redeemer
- Three: The Knowledge of God the Holy Spirit who Applies Salvation
- Four: The Knowledge of the Church and Sacraments

The books are further divided into chapters and

sections. Many translations summarize each section with a title. Calvin's work has been translated globally and continues in print.

Reformed and Presbyterian theology, in its earliest form, is found in Calvin's theology. The *Institutes* presents classic statements of biblical authority, the Trinity, creation and providence, the history of the covenant, the application of the Ten Commandments to the Christian life, Christology, the saving work of Christ and its application to the believer by union with Christ through the Holy Spirit, the church and sacraments (infant baptism and the Lord's Supper), and the relationship of Church and state.

The *Institutes* also presents key "Calvinian" distinctives. While Calvin was a "Calvinist" and taught "double predestination," he does not treat predestination in the doctrine of God, but in Book Three, after his discussion of the work of Christ. Interestingly, he does not develop Limited Atonement, the famous "L" of the "TULIP." Calvin's doctrine of justification by faith alone supports Luther's justification by grace through faith, but Calvin develops justification in the covenant of grace as one of its dual blessings alongside sanctification.

There is scarcely a better place for an in-depth overview of Christianity than Calvin's *Institutes*. 

Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*

James Bruce

Francis Turretin (1623–1687) had me at hello. On the first page of his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, he asks two apparently innocent questions: Should Christians use the word theology? If so, how should we define it? In reply, Turretin shows how we can give names to things found in Scripture that are not given names by Scripture. The word theology does not appear in the Bible, but the idea does, so we can retool an old philosophical word to identify it. This defense is not a waste of time: By saying we can rightly give a name to something unnamed, Turretin prepares the reader for theology's careful distinctions and technical vocabulary. Even better, defending the use of the word theology paves the way for a far more theologically important word, Trinity.

Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* considers twenty major topics in three printed volumes. Elenctic in the title refers to the Socratic method of arguing all sides of a question to arrive at the best answer. Its feisty discourse offers a bracing tonic for our superficial age. But make no mistake: Turretin is no cranky, narrow-minded professor. His learning is exceptional and evidenced on every page. As I note

in my book *Rights in the Law*, Turretin references five works by Plato and nine by Aristotle; 15 works by Cicero and seven by Seneca, as well as 135 works by Augustine. Turretin works with major medieval thinkers (and some minor), all the major Reformers, and many Early Modern philosophers. Having had the privilege to work with the man's own books, I can attest to Turretin's firsthand familiarity—evidenced by underlining and margin notes—with works both ancient and modern. His notes on Latin texts are in Latin; his notes on a Greek-language commentary on the plays of Sophocles are in Greek.

The Institutes offers a wealth of theological knowledge, a seminary education in a book. Because Turretin offers objections to his own Reformed positions, those who do not share his theology will find their views faithfully represented. Turretin occasionally even strengthens his opponents' arguments before answering them.

So take up and read Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* on a topic that interests you—the cross of Christ or the law of God, for example—or just read the whole work, starting with the first page. Here's hoping he has you at hello, too. ▶

Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*

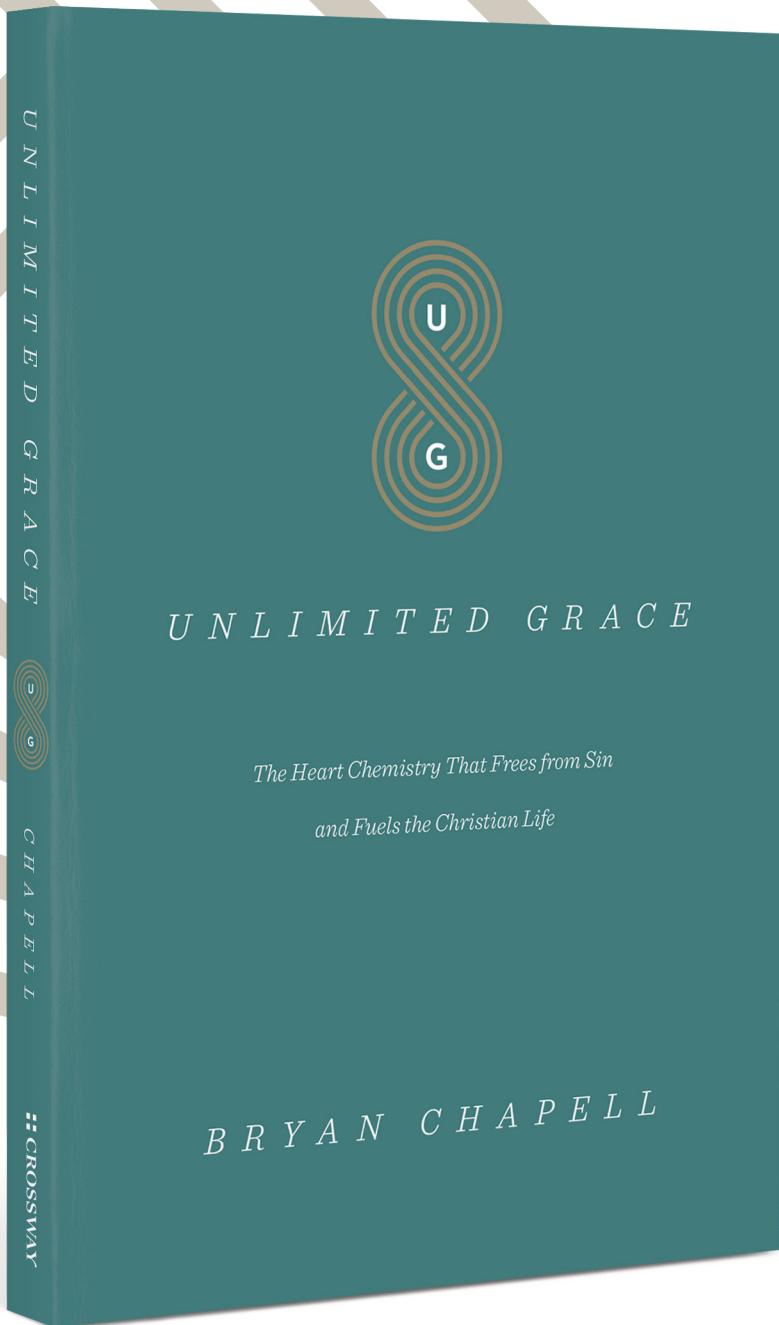
Paul Kjoss Helseth

I first encountered the theology and theologians of Old Princeton Seminary when I was working on my doctorate at a Roman Catholic University in the Midwest. I was taking a course on American Church History when I had the opportunity to read J. Gresham Machen's modern classic, *Christianity and Liberalism*. Machen's work turned my world upside down and introduced me to a theological perspective and a school of thought that were not just revolutionary to me, but instantly compelling. Here was theology that was not only substantive and relevant to the theological issues I was encountering in my studies, but also faithful to the teaching of Scripture, devotional in the best sense of the term, and beautifully written.

The more I read the works of Machen and his colleagues at Old Princeton, the more I came to appreciate their ability to unpack the revelation of God in a way that drove me to worship. They helped me to see the dangers of a kind of dead orthodoxy on the one hand and a kind of unbridled religious enthusiasm on the other, and they persuaded me that because theology is an organic enterprise involving the totality of the

whole soul, it is done most faithfully when there is – by God's grace – a symbiotic relationship between the regenerated head and heart.

Shortly after I encountered Machen I learned that the classic expression of the Princeton Theology is found in Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, which he published in 1871-73 after half a century of teaching first Scripture and later theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. In my estimation and despite what some would have us believe, Hodge's *Systematics* demonstrates that he was neither a rigid rationalist on the one hand nor thoroughgoing subjectivist on the other, but a "man of the center" – as his recent biographer, Andrew Hoffecker, has described him – who combined both Presbyterian confessionalism and evangelical pietism in the ideal of the Princeton tradition. While many contemporary interpreters lament the enduring influence of Hodge's *Systematics* on the evangelical mind – and for a host of reasons – others, like me, insist that it should be celebrated for its clear, compelling, and faithful – even if not flawless – presentation of the essentials of Old School Presbyterianism. ■



“Few books on the subject of God’s grace are as balanced, practical, and clear as this one. This book is packed with insight into the mysteries of why we do what we do and how to live in the light of God’s grace.”

DONALD S. WHITNEY,

Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean of the School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

HOW GOD'S
UNLIMITED GRACE
FUELS AND EMPOWERS
OUR OBEDIENCE

W.G.T. Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*

Alan W. Gomes

C. S. Lewis, in his essay entitled On the Reading of Old Books, presents a cogent rationale for why modern readers should study carefully the writings of past thinkers. According to Lewis, every age has its characteristic blind spots. These blind spots, he observes, generally differ from one age to the next. Since the misapprehensions of times past usually are not the same as our own, reading older writers can show us where our view of reality is askew. Where the past writers were themselves in error is of relatively little danger to us, because the foibles of their age, being quite dissimilar to ours, appear vividly before our eyes.

While I believe that C. S. Lewis's observation about the value of old books has considerable truth, there is also a sense in which certain old books, at least, never really become "old." No doubt there are elements in every work that reflect the limitations of the author's own age. But some works also have a timeless quality about them—works that, in their essence, transcend the historical circumstances of their authors. In the case of musical works this could be illustrated by Bach and Handel, and in religious literature the Confessions of St. Augustine come to mind. We call

such works classics. William Shedd's (1820-1894) *Dogmatic Theology* is a classic. It is a profound work that sets forth the deepest themes of religion with a grandeur and majesty of expression that has rarely been equaled and that will never be outdated. It is a work beautiful in form and substance. A careful study of Shedd's dogmatics is, I dare say, much more than an intellectual exercise: it is an aesthetic experience for those who appreciate the comeliness of truth. If truth is beautiful in itself, then Shedd's vigorous and stately prose sets before us incomparable beauty beautifully expressed.

If this age is more harried than most then it is all the more critical that we use our time as wisely as we can. Our lives are too short and our days too compressed to spend them on the merely good: we must devote ourselves to what is best. If we would be extraordinary Christians we must surround ourselves with the greatest minds and immerse ourselves in their thoughts. May I suggest that you do not merely read *Dogmatic Theology* but ponder it. When Shedd lays bare the most sublime truths in their dazzling splendor, stop and reflect, and then adore the God of whom they speak. ■

Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*

Ron Gleason

Every Christian has a favorite theologian. Mine is Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). I find his theological reflections so balanced and Scripture-filled that I wrote a biography about him called *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (P&R, 2010). I believe Bavinck is one of the finest theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Why do I hold Bavinck in such high esteem? There are a number of reasons why Bavinck constitutes a “must-read” for English speaking audiences. Until recently, he was virtually inaccessible to many because of the barrier of the Dutch language. Now, however, his magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics* have been translated into English, his popular *Dogmatics* (*Magnalia Dei*) is available under the title *Our Reasonable Faith*, and there is also an abridged one-volume work of the *Reformed Dogmatics*.

The serious Christian should purchase the *Reformed Dogmatics*, but both the abridged version as well as *Our Reasonable Faith* are exceptionally valuable reads. People often remark—with some degree of surprise—that when they read Bavinck he seems so “relevant.” They are quite correct and the reason why this is the case is that Bavinck writes in concert with Scripture. The *Reformed Dogmatics* is filled with clear and concise biblical exposition, along with informative

sections dealing with the particular history of the doctrine being discussed.

Even though his pastoral experience was limited to one year in Franeker, Holland, he enjoyed the presence and mentoring of his father, Jan, over a forty year period. Father Jan was a very accomplished and much-beloved expositor of the scriptures and Herman benefited greatly from his father’s tutelage. During his stint in Franeker, Herman was diligent in preaching biblical sermons to his congregation, to visiting them in their homes, in teaching the Heidelberg Catechism to the younger, non-communicant members of his church, and attending Consistory (Session) meetings, as well as higher church courts. While in Franeker, the size of the congregation grew exponentially under his preaching and instruction.

On January 9, 1883, Bavinck became the professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at the Theological Seminary in Kampen, Holland. He labored profitably in that calling for twenty years and during that time became a prolific writer, a friend of Dr. Abraham Kuyper of the Free University of Amsterdam, and a committed churchman. I highly recommend this giant of a theologian for your spiritual edification. ■

Carl Henry's *God, Revelation, & Authority*

Owen Strachan

My appreciation for Carl Henry's magisterial six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority* series owes in part to context. As Baptists profited in many ways from the democratization of American Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they all too often moved away from their robustly theological heritage. Church growth, practical ministry, and doctrinal minimalism characterized a good portion of Baptists, and affected many of this movement, leaving them without a serious doctrinal core grounded in a majestic view of God and his holy, inerrant Word.

Carl Henry sought, almost singlehandedly, to correct this atheological bent. His *God, Revelation, and Authority* represents nothing less than the late twentieth century revival of rigorous, deeply conversant, God-exalting Baptist theology. Many sharp young Baptists grow up knowing little about Henry, and so venture outside their tradition for excellent theology. For many of us, Henry has functioned as a lookout on the wall,

calling thinking Baptists to come home, and to think carefully at his side, and to lay our insecurities down. This tradition is strong, sound, and textually grounded above all.

Henry is unique. There is almost no theologian in the church's history who can more deftly toggle between a high-level engagement with Barthian epistemology on one page and a searing call to prophetic ecclesial witness on the next. Amidst the digressions and occasionally clunky prose, one regularly arrives at passages in *God, Revelation, and Authority* where Henry soars, and leaves us locked onto the glory of the crucified, risen, and ruling Christ. In sum, *God, Revelation, and Authority* is in my view the church's most undervalued major work of systematic theology, and deserves to be read—in all its six-volume, 2,500-page glory—by every pastor, professor, seminarian, and student of theology. ■

THIS CHANGED EVERYTHING

500 Years of the Reformation

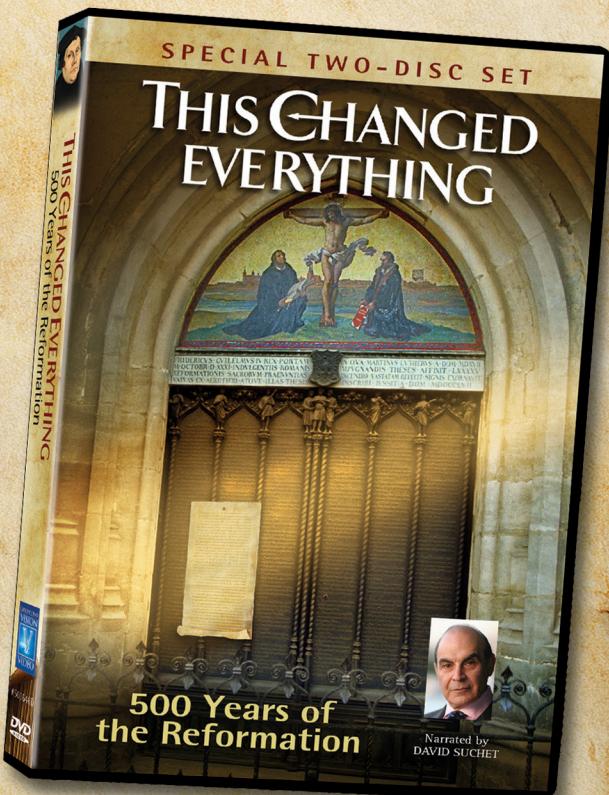
Christian History Institute presents a new three-part documentary on the Reformation. *This Changed Everything*, hosted by actor David Suchet (PBS's *Poirot* series), explores the roots and the fruits of the Reformation while grappling with difficult questions about the legacy of division.

Leading scholars from a broad range of perspectives tell the dramatic story of the Reformation, analyze its effects, and address vital questions about unity, truth, and the future of the church. The three-hour documentary also includes five hours of bonus material and a companion guide in PDF.



Scan code
to download
or stream

Two-DVD set - \$29.99



www.ThisChangedEverything.com

AVAILABLE NOW!

Over 25 experts featured in this series, including



Dr. Michael
Horton



Dr. Frank
James



Shane
Claiborne



Dr. Jacqueline
Rose



Mark
Galli



Dr. John
Armstrong

Christian
History
Institute

Produced by Christian History Institute
www.ChristianHistoryInstitute.org • 1-800-468-0458

WHAT IS SOLA SCRIPTURA?

MATTHEW BARRETT

So what if everything in the Bible isn't true and reliable or from God? That doesn't really matter, does it? The Bible still remains an authority in my life." Though it has been years now, I remember hearing these words as if it were yesterday. I had no idea what to say in response.

I was shocked because I was hearing these words from a churchgoing, Bible-carrying, evangelical Christian. This person saw no relation between the truthfulness of Scripture and the authority of Scripture, as if one had nothing to do with the other.

In that moment I realized two things: First, the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is just as important today as it was in the sixteenth century. In the sixteenth century the Reformers faced off against Rome because the Roman church had elevated tradition and its magisterium to the level of Scripture. Nevertheless, Rome still believed Scripture itself was inspired by God and therefore inerrant, that is, trustworthy, true, and without error.

THE CRISIS OF AUTHORITY WITHIN PROTESTANTISM

Since the sixteenth century, Protestantism (and its view of the Bible) has undergone an

evolution in its identity. Movements such as the Enlightenment, Liberalism, and, more recently, postmodernism have elevated other voices to the level of Scripture or even above Scripture, and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture have been abandoned, something Rome never would have done in the sixteenth century. Today, many people reject that the Bible is God-breathed and truthful in all it asserts.

As Carl Henry pointed out in his magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, the church throughout history has faced repeated attacks on the Bible from skeptics, but only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God's Word been questioned, criticized, and abandoned by those within the body of Christ. To the Reformers, this would have been unthinkable, yet this is the day we live in. Not only do Bible critics pervade the culture but now they have mounted the pulpit and sit comfortably in the pews.

If Carl Henry is right, then there is legitimate cause for alarm. Repeated attacks on Scripture's own character reveal the enmity and hostility toward the God of the Bible within our own souls. One of the most significant needs in the twenty-first century is a call back to the Bible to a posture that encourages reverence, acceptance, and adherence to its authority and message.

Along with the realization that *sola Scriptura* is just as applicable today as it was in the

sixteenth century, I also saw that many Christians in the church have no idea what *sola Scriptura* is or what it entails. What is the relationship of the authority of the Bible to attributes such as inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency? Even if we accept that the Bible alone is our final authority, we may have no idea why this is true. Is it because the Bible is the best guidebook we can find?

These questions led me to carefully study the massive shifts in authority that have taken

place since the Reformation in my new book *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture*. I wanted to better understand the relationship between biblical authority and the nature of Scripture, namely, its own inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency.

WHAT IS SOLA SCRIPTURA?

But what is *sola Scriptura* exactly? *Sola*

Scriptura means that *only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.*

As Carl Henry pointed out in his magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, the church throughout history has faced repeated attacks on the Bible from skeptics, but only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God's Word been questioned, criticized, and abandoned by those within the body of Christ.

First, this means that Scripture alone is our *final* authority. *Authority* is a bad word in our day of rugged individualism. But the Bible is all about authority. In fact, *sola Scriptura* means that the Bible is our chief, supreme, and ultimate authority. Notice, however, that I didn't say the Bible is our *only*

authority. As chapter 10 will explain more thoroughly, *sola Scriptura* is too easily confused today with *nuda Scriptura*, the view that we should have "no creed but the Bible!" Those who sing this mantra believe that creeds, confessions, the voices of tradition, and those who hold ecclesiastical offices carry no authority in the church. But this was not the Reformers' position, nor should it be equated with *sola Scriptura*.

Sola Scriptura acknowledges that there are

other important authorities for the Christian, authorities who should be listened to and followed. But Scripture alone is our *final* authority. It is the authority that rules over and governs all other authorities. It is the authority that has the final say. We could say that while church tradition and church officials play a *ministerial* role, Scripture alone plays a *magisterial* role. This means that all other authorities are to be followed

Sola Scriptura means that only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.

only inasmuch as they align with Scripture, submit to Scripture, and are seen as subservient to Scripture, which alone is our supreme authority.

Second, *sola Scriptura* also means that Scripture alone is our *sufficient* authority.

Not only is the Bible our supreme authority, but it is the authority that provides believers with all the truth they need for salvation and for following after Christ. The Bible, therefore, is sufficient for faith and practice. This notion of the Bible's sufficiency has been powerfully articulated by Reformation and Reformed confessions. The Belgic Confession (1561) states: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein." And the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) says: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men [Gal 1:8–9; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15–17]." In short, the Bible is enough for us.

Third, *sola Scriptura* means that only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our *inerrant* authority. Notice that the basis of biblical authority—the very reason why Scripture is authoritative—is that God is its divine author. The ground for biblical authority is divine inspiration. As the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for

Luther had the audacity to say that only Scripture is the inerrant authority. While popes and councils err, Scripture alone does not! For Rome, Scripture and Tradition were inerrant authorities. For Luther, Scripture alone is our inerrant authority.

which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the *author thereof*; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God [1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19, 21; 1 John 5:9].” Scripture and Scripture alone (not Scripture and Tradition) is God-breathed and, on this basis, stands unshakable as the church’s final, flawless authority. What Scripture says, God says.

To get a full picture of *sola Scriptura*, we need to go beyond saying that the Bible is inspired or God-breathed. Inspiration should lead to an understanding that the Bible is perfect, flawless, and inerrant. In other words, inerrancy is the necessary corollary of inspiration. They are two sides

of the same coin, and it is impossible to divorce one from the other. Because it is God speaking—and he is a God of truth, not error—his Word must be true and trustworthy in all that it addresses.

Because inerrancy is a biblical corollary and consequence of divine inspiration—inseparably connected and intertwined—it is a necessary component to *sola Scriptura*. The God of truth has breathed out his Word of truth, and the result is nothing less than a *flawless* authority for the church. In saying this, I am aware that my inclusion of inerrancy in our definition of *sola Scriptura* will prove to be controversial, given the mixed identity of evangelicalism today. However, were we to divorce the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture from its authority, disconnecting the two as if one was unrelated to the other, then we would be left with no doctrine of *sola Scriptura* at all. Should Scripture contain errors, it is unclear why we should trust Scripture as our supreme and final authority. And should we limit, modify, or abandon the total inerrancy of Scripture, we set in motion tremendous doubt and uncertainty regarding the Bible’s competence as our final authority. The ground for the believer’s confidence that all of Scripture is the Word of God is shaken.

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy makes this point as well: “The authority

of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine *inerrancy* is in any way limited or disregarded.” In other words, to reject inerrancy is to undermine confidence in the Bible’s authority, and what could have more relevance to *sola Scriptura* than biblical authority? As Roger Nicole once exclaimed, “What is supremely at stake in this whole discussion [of inerrancy] is the recognition of the authority of God in the sacred oracles.” It should not surprise us to find that in the recent history of evangelicalism, leaders have rallied around statements such as the Cambridge Declaration (1996), affirming inerrancy’s inseparability from *sola Scriptura* in stating, “Scripture alone is the *inerrant* rule of the church’s life,” and they “reaffirm the *inerrant* Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience.”

What is often missed in retellings of Luther’s progress to the Diet of Worms is the question of *why* Luther’s stance on Scripture was so detested by Rome. After all, Rome also affirmed Scripture’s authority and inspiration. So what made Luther’s stance on biblical authority so different and so offensive to the Roman church? The answer is that Luther had the audacity to say that *only* Scripture is the *inerrant* authority. While popes and councils err, Scripture alone does not! For Rome, Scripture and Tradition were *inerrant* authorities. For Luther, Scripture *alone* is our *inerrant* authority.

What distinguished Luther and the rest of the Reformers from church leaders in Rome was their claim that as important as tradition is (and they thought it was extremely important), tradition is not without error. That honor goes to Scripture *alone*. In fact, it is because Scripture alone is inspired by God and consequently inerrant that the Reformers believed Scripture alone is the church’s *final* authority, sufficient for faith and practice.

Matthew Barrett is Tutor of Systematic Theology and Church History at Oak Hill Theological College in London, as well as the founder and executive editor of Credo Magazine. He is the author of several books, including Salvation by Grace, Owen on the Christian Life, God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture, and Reformation Theology. Currently he is the series editor of The 5 Solas Series with Zondervan. You can read more about Barrett at matthewmbarrett.com.

This article was taken with permission from God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). ▶

Sola Scriptura Then & Now

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
IN LATE MEDIEVAL &
REFORMATION
CONTEXT

BY
GAVIN
ORTLUND

Sola Scriptura (“by Scriptura alone”) was one of the chief rallying cries of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Frequently it is regarded as the formal principle of the Reformation, while *sola fide* (“by faith alone”) is regarded as the material principle. The Reformers, in seeking to call the church back to the gospel, built their efforts on the foundation that Scripture alone is the final authority for matters of faith and life. But what led to the need for this doctrine in the first place? What alternative approach to the Bible was *sola Scriptura* intended to replace?

Sola Scriptura is often caricatured today, by both its detractors and proponents, as a simplistic posture of “no creed but the Bible.” But in its original context, the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* did not entail the wholesale rejection of tradition, but rather the affirmation of tradition in its proper, subordinate role under Scripture. Exploring how the church’s approach to the Bible and tradition developed in the centuries leading up the Reformation—and then how it functioned for the Reformers in relation to that context—may shed light on various ways this doctrine is still relevant to the church today.

THE BIBLE IN LATE MEDIEVAL ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The church’s view of the relation of Scripture and tradition has evolved throughout her history. A.N.S. Lane has summarized the major developments as follows, which we reproduce here as a conceptual starting point:

(1) The *Coincidence* view: tradition coincides with the teaching of Scripture (the practice of the church for roughly the first three centuries of the church).

(2) The *Supplementary* view: tradition is a second source of revelation to supplement Scripture (the view affirmed by Roman Catholic Church at the sixteenth-century Council of Trent).

(3) The *Ancillary* view: tradition is an aid in the interpretation of Scripture (view of the sixteenth-century magisterial Reformers).

(4) The *Unfolding* view: tradition is the process by which apostolic doctrine gradually unfolds (a view among modern Roman Catholicism, e.g., John Henry Newman).

Of course, collapsing the church’s diverse attitudes and practices over the centuries into a neat, four-fold categorization like this can run the risk of painting with too broad a brush. Furthermore, Lane’s schema has been critiqued on the grounds that it obscures the continuity between (1) and (3), and the extent to which the Reformers’ “ancillary” approach sought to return to the practice of the early church. Nonetheless, Lane’s schema, and particularly his distinction between (1) and (2), is one way to make visible the successive, developmental nature of the church’s approach to Scripture and tradition in the centuries leading up to Luther. As the centuries passed, the church began more and more to lean upon her own pronouncements, not merely as an interpretation and extension of the teaching of Scripture, but as a separate source of revelation and authoritative norm.

When exactly did this transition occur? This is a disputed question, but a good case can be made that the most crucial developments came not until later in the patristic era and that, by and large, the church fathers held Scripture as the paramount authority for the church's faith and life. For instance, in their struggles against Gnosticism, earlier church fathers like Irenaeus and Tertullian appealed to both Scripture and tradition, but tradition was never understood as an addition to biblical revelation; rather it was viewed as a handing down of the gospel that was consistent with what was already found in Scripture. By the fourth century, church fathers like Basil and Augustine appealed to oral apostolic tradition to establish truths not explicitly found in Scripture. Nonetheless, they also made it clear in various contexts that tradition functioned with an authority that was inferior to that of Scripture. Basil, for instance, defended the inclusion of the Son of God in the doxology by appealing to the witness of earlier church fathers, but then clarified, "but we are not content simply because this is the tradition of the Fathers. What is more important is that the Fathers followed the meaning of Scripture" (*On the Holy Spirit* 7.16).

The role of tradition continued to expand

gradually during the late patristic and medieval era, ultimately resulting in the full-fledged "two source theory," which the 16th-century Council of Trent affirmed in response to the Reformers' doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. According to this view, there is an oral tradition of Jesus' teaching to his disciples after his resurrection and before his ascension, and this tradition was passed down to the following generations through the magisterium of the church. At Trent the Church of Rome thus affirmed that Scripture and tradition are to be venerated "with equal affection of piety and reverence." Another important development came with the increasing prevalence of the notion of papal infallibility, which was not dogmatized until the First Vatican Council in 1870 but is frequently observable much earlier, throughout the medieval era.

During the late medieval era, as the machinery of church life and worship became more and more complicated, the knowledge of the Bible among the laity of the church diminished. Martin Luther once narrated his ignorance of the Bible in his early life: "When I was twenty years old I had not yet seen a Bible. I thought that there were no Gospels and Epistles except those which were written in the Sunday postils. Finally I found a Bible in the library and forthwith I took it with me into the

monastery. I began to read, to reread, and to read it over again."

Although this anecdote has at times been exaggerated, it nonetheless reflects something of the widespread ignorance of the Bible in the generations leading up to the Protestant Reformation. In late medieval Roman Catholicism, the Bible was generally not translated into the

Martin Luther once narrated his ignorance of the Bible in his early life: "When I was twenty years old I had not yet seen a Bible. I thought that there were no Gospels and Epistles except those which were written in the Sunday postils. Finally I found a Bible in the library and forthwith I took it with me into the monastery. I began to read, to reread, and to read it over again."

vernacular languages from Latin, so the laity had no direct access to it. Moreover, when the Bible was printed it was almost always with interpretative glosses and commentary. Church gatherings in the late medieval church emphasized the celebration of the Mass, which was seen to be the chief means of grace; biblical preaching tended to be in briefer homilies, and/or in Latin, or did not occur at all. John Calvin lamented sermons at this time simultaneously for their "speculations" and for their "frivolities," wondering "what one sermon was there from which old wives might not carry off more whimsies than they could devise at their own fireside in a month?"

LUTHER'S ARTICULATION OF SOLA SCRIPTURA

It was in this context that Luther launched his protest against Rome. It was not *sola Scriptura* that initially set Luther onto his path, but his own personal rediscovery of justification by faith alone in 1517 through his study of Romans. But soon Luther became convinced that defending

sola Scriptura was essential in order to call the church back to *sola fide*.

During a 1519 debate with John Eck, Luther was lumped together with John Hus (who had been declared a heretic). Seeing some truth in the association, Luther was compelled to

affirm that Scripture was authoritative over all church councils and the Pope, boldly claiming that "a simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it." In several publications from this time period he attacked the claim that only the Pope had the right to offer final interpretations of Scripture. When summoned to Worms, Luther grounded his opposition to Rome in the primacy of Scripture over all ecclesiastical authorities, claiming that they have often erred and contradicted themselves:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it

is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.

These statements from Luther's early years, and especially his famous statement at Worms, must not be considered in isolation. Luther was battling the claims of his opponents for papal authority to interpret Scripture.

For Luther, Scripture is the “norming norm” (*norma normans*) for the church’s faith and life, not the “normed norm” (*norma normata*). The creeds and councils of the church were valuable, but always subordinate to Scripture, never as separate norms parallel to Scripture.

In June of 1520 Luther had received a tract written in 1519 by Silvester Prieras, a high-ranking Dominican theologian, arguing that the Pope was a higher authority than all councils and even Scripture itself. The Pope at this time, Leo X, was a particularly worldly and corrupt leader. Luther's opposition to this particular expression of papal authority in no way entailed that Luther saw no valid role for tradition in the church, and this can be seen in some of his later writings.

In his *On the Councils and the Church*, for instance, Luther affirmed the early ecumenical creeds and councils, claiming that “the decrees of the genuine councils must remain in force permanently, just as they have always been in force.” Luther insisted, however, that their authority was not inherent but derived from Scripture. For Luther, Scripture is the “norming norm” (*norma normans*) for the church’s faith and life, not the “normed norm” (*norma normata*). The creeds and councils of the church were valuable, but always subordinate to Scripture, never as separate norms parallel to Scripture. Luther’s concern, as Keith Mathison has put it, was that when tradition is elevated alongside Scripture, the church essentially becomes a law unto itself—that is to say, the church is effectively removed from the position of accountability under Scripture that must always be maintained. For Luther, the church did not create the Bible; rather, the Bible created the church and thus always must stand over it. While the early church had an important role in determining which books were canonical and which were not, in this capacity the church was simply *recognizing* the authority that already resided in these books, not conferring authority upon them.

Similarly, Luther, along with the other magisterial Reformers who would follow him, distanced himself from the more radical Anabaptists who sought to restore the “true church” and dissolve connections between the church and the state. In many respects Luther was more *catholic* than his opponents (both Roman Catholic and Anabaptist), in both his positions and his inclinations. He was reluctant to fight Rome and initially sought to stay

within the church; even when a breach became inevitable, he always saw his efforts as ultimately in service of the true church of God. While he held that Scripture is the final arbiter by which all subsequent councils and doctrines and opinions must be evaluated, he also acknowledged that we must still read Scripture in and among the communion of saints and in light of the *regula fidei*.

SOLA SCRIPTURA THEN AND NOW

Contemporary accounts of *sola Scriptura* would do well to pay careful attention to how this doctrine functioned for Luther (and the other magisterial Reformers) in its original context against the Roman Catholic “two source” view of tradition. The Reformers held up Scripture as our final and supreme authority over tradition, but had no intention to encourage its being read in a tradition-less vacuum. In fact,

so far from seeking to do away with tradition, the Reformers actually grounded their case (in part) in tradition; for they argued that the Roman Catholic conception of Scripture and tradition as two complementary sources of divine revelation was inconsistent with the practice of the early church. By analogy: the notion that the Constitution is the supreme law of our nation in no way entails the

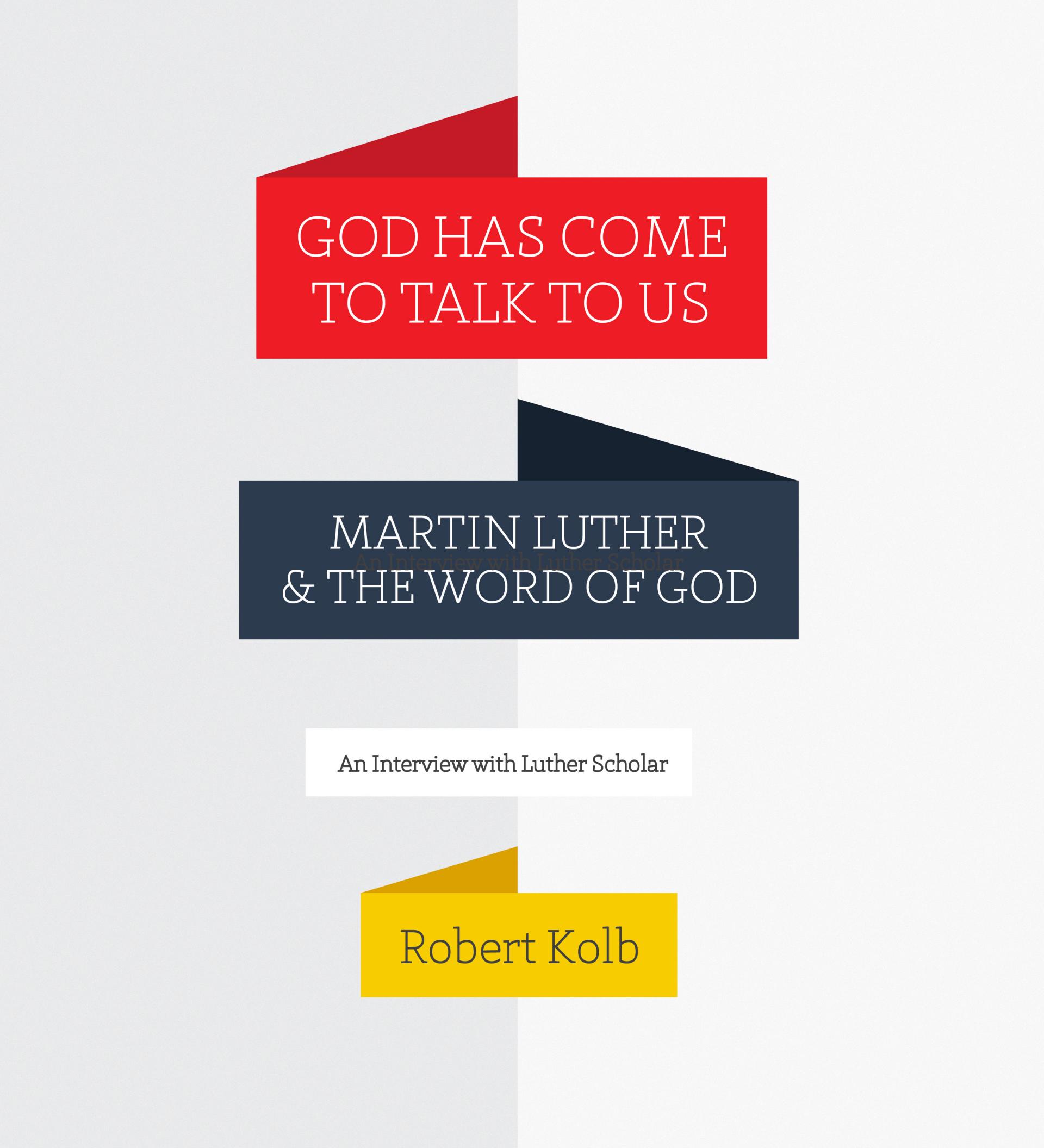
The Reformers held up Scripture as our final and supreme authority over tradition, but had no intention to encourage its being read in a tradition-less vacuum.

repudiation of the value of subsequent American legal history (for starters, interpretative helps such as constitutional law). It simply means the Constitution has authority over all else.

When *sola Scriptura* is construed as a repudiation of tradition (what is better called *solo Scriptura* or *nuda Scriptura*), our Protestant witness is weakened, and we potentially facilitate conversions to Rome and Constantinople. While a “two source” account of revelation undermines Scripture’s authority over the church, a truncated account of *sola Scriptura* can result in an ironically similar consequence: the autonomy of private, subjective interpretation and experience. Contemporary Protestants have much

to gain from a more responsible account of *sola Scriptura*, involving a careful appropriation of the creeds and councils and doctors of the church as frequently helpful though never infallible guides. This more inclusive attitude toward church tradition would surely result in a deeper and richer reading of Scripture itself—just as a thorough acquaintance with the history of constitutional law will help us see new things in the Constitution.

Gavin Ortlund (*PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary*) is associate pastor at Sierra Madre Congregational Church in Sierra Madre, California. ■



GOD HAS COME TO TALK TO US

MARTIN LUTHER An Interview with Luther Scholar & THE WORD OF GOD

An Interview with Luther Scholar

Robert Kolb

Robert Kolb (Ph.D, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin) has taught at Concordia College, St. Paul, in the departments of religion and history. He also served as acting president from 1989-1990. In 1993 Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, called him to be Missions Professor of systematic theology and director of the Institute for Mission Studies. Kolb is a well-respected and world-renowned Luther scholar. His most recent book is Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation. In this interview Robert Kolb talks with Matthew Barrett, executive editor of Credo Magazine, about Luther and sola scriptura.

When the Reformation is discussed today, *sola fide* is thought to be the central issue in Martin Luther's break with Rome. However, historians have often pointed out that underneath the debate over

sola fide was another debate that proved to be just as foundational: biblical authority or *sola Scriptura*. Why did Luther put up a fight against Rome's view of biblical authority and how did Luther's affirmation of *sola Scriptura* set the Reformation on an irreversible trajectory?

Luther believed not only that God had not only "co-authored" the Scriptures with the prophets

and apostles but also that the Holy Spirit addresses people in every age from its pages and from the words that proceed from it, in oral, written, and sacramental form. In Scripture God promises his people forgiveness and life, and they encounter him talking about human life in such a way that they receive comfort, power, and instruction from it. Luther might have accepted some papal authority if the Pope had admitted that his governance of the church was of human, not divine, origin, and if the Roman curia had not persecuted the gospel. But Scripture alone contains God's authoritative revelation of his will for human behaviour and above all his will to bring forgiveness and life to those who trust in him. The insistence of medieval theologians that lay people could venture into Scripture only with great danger to their souls disturbed Luther profoundly. He believed that the Holy Spirit makes God's message clear to those who trust in Christ.

It is no secret that Luther entered into major debate with certain radical reformers, some of whom started out under Luther's teaching only to depart later on. Often this conflict revolved around the proper relationship between the Word of God and the role of the Holy Spirit. How did the radical reformers understand Word and Spirit, and what was Luther's response?

Our use of the term "radical" for anti-Trinitarians

CONTENTS

as well as Spiritualists and Anabaptists groups together form three quite different streams of thought, and even within sixteenth-century movements that fall into these categories there was a wide difference of opinion. Luther most criticized those who depended on inner revelation, which he thought to be subjective and unreliable. He insisted instead on the “external Word of God,” as found in Scripture and as it proceeds from the Bible, especially through preaching, the promises of forgiveness attached to the Lord’s Supper and baptism, and all sorts of written works such as hymnals, devotional literature, and catechisms.

He had gained some good insights from the monastic tradition that embraced mystical elements, but his own experience taught him that in moments of severe spiritual crisis and doubt, not inner feelings or movements but the objective revelation of Scripture alone is the rock on which to find firm footing. He did not regard these groups as “radical” but rather conservative, repeating ancient anti-Trinitarian heresies or the biblicistic, moralistic, anti-clerical, anti-sacramental, and millenarian protests that had persisted for a millennium or more within the church.

When churchgoers think of Luther they immediately think of his 95 Theses. Few remember Luther as a Bible translator. When Luther went into hiding after the Diet of Worms, why did he decide to devote himself to translating the New Testament into German, and what role did Bible translation play in Luther’s Wittenberg in the decades that followed?

He wanted to get the Word out, for God’s Word –

God’s speaking to humankind as the Word made flesh and through the words of the prophets and apostles – rather than human performance of good works—especially sacred works, such as attendance at mass—had become for Luther the center of what it means to be Christian. High on his list of priorities as he recognized the role he was being cast into, as a leader of reform, was getting the Word of God out in good preaching, so he worked on a “postil,” a collection of model sermons to demonstrate how to preach the gospel in an evangelical way.

While he was still in the midst of that project in 1521 and 1522, he turned to translating the Bible. As a professor of Bible he had been using the most recently developed tools for biblical study, prepared by the so-called “biblical humanists,” such as Erasmus of Rotterdam who had published the first printed edition of the New Testament in the original Greek in 1516. With other new grammars and dictionaries, Luther was delving into the Bible in new and fresh ways. His finely-tuned ear knew how to catch the language of the people and still maintain an elegance of expression. So his translation of the New Testament became a best-seller immediately. Then he organized a team of colleagues and friends to help him revise the New Testament and translate the Old. It came out in parts, and finally he published the entire Bible in his sprightly German in 1534. The Wittenberg theologians reshaped the medieval theology curriculum, concentrating no longer on the systematic theology of Peter Lombard but instead on Scripture, especially the Psalms, Genesis, John’s gospel, Romans, and Galatians.

Let’s talk about the “elephant in the room”:

Luther's opinion of the epistle of James. Is it true that Luther called James an "epistle of straw"?

That is a story that is almost never told in its entirety. Straw is not junk; it has value, too – just not as much value as silver or gold. When Luther called James “an epistle of straw” in his preface to the New Testament in 1522, he was comparing it with John’s gospel and Paul’s epistles, especially Romans and Galatians, which present the gold and silver of Christ’s saving work and offer the consolation of God’s promise to act in our behalf. In the same volume, the New Testament translation of 1522, Luther also wrote a preface to James and there praised it for “vigorously promulgating God’s law.” It just did not have the full sweetness of the message of Christ’s death and resurrection. Almost never mentioned is the fact that the reference to the “epistle of straw” was omitted from the preface to the New Testament when the complete Bible appeared in 1534. Nothing else was taken out; Luther never explained this unique excision. He preached occasionally on passages from James. While he recognized the doubts about its canonicity in the ancient church, and therefore its status as “antilegomena,” he never suggested it should not be regarded as part of the New Testament canon. In fact, he showed little interest in canonical questions: He simply wanted a text from the Holy Spirit on which to preach.

If we were transported back in time to the late medieval period to participate in a church service, the Mass would have been the major focus. The service was very much a visual affair. But when Luther started to reform the church, the service became an auditory experience.

Why did Luther move the sermon to such a prominent position in the worship service, and what does this say about Luther’s view of God’s Word?

Luther believed that God wanted to talk to us before we did anything in God’s direction. In fact, he believed we cannot move toward God on our own and that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith, to open our ears to hear what God is saying, and to trust in our hearts and minds that his promises are true and sure, that we are his righteous children through Christ. Luther recognized how important the visual is. He defended altar pieces and other Christian art that aids memory of the stories of Scripture and proclaims its truth. He used wonderful word pictures in his preaching and teaching. But perhaps because we are more passive in hearing than in seeing, and because he believed God is a talker who speaks to us before we can speak to him, he emphasized the oral delivery of God’s Word

Many know Luther for his many writings. Yet Luther was also a preacher, not just a biblical scholar. What would it have been like to hear Luther preach a sermon, and what impact did his sermons have in his day?

He must have been a pleasure to hear. But the qualities that made him such an excellent translator of the Bible helped him in the pulpit, too. His finely-tuned ear caught the rhythms of language and life from the people with whom he rubbed elbows on the streets of Wittenberg. His musical talent helped him capture the best ways to make the texts of Scripture penetrate his listeners’ thinking and stay there. He knew not only how

they talked but also how they lived; he sensed what they needed to hear as critique of daily habits leading them into disobedience to God's law, and he sensed what they needed to hear as consolation for troubled, anxious consciences and encouragement for trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Luther's ability to paint word pictures and to retell

Above all, his sermons were conversations with the congregation, and he made it clear that all that Christ accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection he had done “for you!” Hearers went home having heard a very personal message that God was directing through the preacher at them.

the biblical stories gave his hearers hooks to hang the text on as they took his comments home with them. Sometimes he elaborated the narratives of Scriptures with his speculations about what the biblical figures must have been thinking—for instance, Abraham and Sarah struggled with their lack of a child to fulfil God's promise, or how Mary might have reacted when the angel left her to ponder the pregnancy that he had just announced. That brought the Bible into the lives of the people of Wittenberg. He took the text as historical report, and he believed that the Holy Spirit had guided

the writers in their use of Hebrew and Greek as it was spoken in their day. Thus, he spent time with his hearers explaining grammar and vocabulary and sketching, usually briefly, the historical context which surrounded the events reported in Scripture, when possible from secular writers of the Mediterranean world. Above all, his sermons were conversations with the congregation, and he made it clear that all that Christ accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection he had done “for you!” Hearers went home having heard a very personal message that God was directing through the preacher at them.

Let's transition from Luther to the Wittenberg school. For our readers unfamiliar with the Wittenberg school, what was it and in what ways did it follow and depart from Luther's hermeneutical approach to Scripture?

The “Wittenberg School” was the group of people around Luther or under his influence who found in his way of interpreting the Scriptures the best access possible to God's message for humankind. It embraced those his own age or a bit younger who were his colleagues in Wittenberg or his network across the German lands who were introducing a Wittenberg style of Reformation into their towns or principalities. It also included students who had learned how to preach and teach the gospel of Christ under the tutelage of Luther himself or of Philip Melanchthon (his right hand man in reform), Johannes Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, and Caspar Cruciger (all colleagues at Wittenberg). It then also extended to people like Johannes Brenz in southwest Germany and many others whose published interpretations of portions

of Scripture in commentaries and sermons were used by the next generation and beyond.

Some of Luther's students captured his preaching style, with its catechetical thoroughness in explaining God's intervention to save sinners and in instructing believers in the proper way of living as God wills. Johannes Mathesius is a good example. In the mining town of Joachimsthal in Bohemia, Mathesius caught Luther's style of retelling the biblical stories with imagination and sprightliness that led the readers imaginatively right into the middle of ancient Israel and Jesus' Palestine. His word pictures and his exposition of the historical context must have made for interesting listening, just as Luther's did.

Mathesius caught Luther's and Melanchthon's fundamental hermeneutic of distinguishing law and gospel and other aspects of their thought. As is always the case, not all students catch all the nuances of their teacher's way of thinking, and they also confront new situations in which they must go beyond the precise way their teachers suggest they preach and teach. That was also the case with the second and third generation of the Wittenberg school, and by the end of the sixteenth century, Lutherans were learning to preach and teach in different ways; the direct influence of the Wittenberg doctors receded.

You've devoted many years of your life to studying Luther and the Wittenberg school that followed in his trail. If you could press upon evangelicals today the legacy they left behind, would there be any one lesson that would be especially important for evangelicals to learn in light of today's challenges?

Luther's relationship to God was painfully and beautifully personal. He found God to have strong emotions. The wrath of his Creator drove Luther to despair, not because he found it unfair or inappropriate but because he knew that his own failure to be God's obedient child had made that wrath well-founded. The deeper he read his own thoughts into Scripture, lecturing on Psalms and then Romans and Galatians in the 1510s, the stronger became his insight that God is angry with us because he loves his human creatures and wants us to return to him in a loving trust that permeates our lives. Luther found in the Psalms and in Paul's letters that God has come to talk to us. He has expressed his love for us by assuming our flesh and blood, skin and bones, as Jesus of Nazareth, and he died and rose for us.

It is often said that Luther prayed three hours a day, but I suspect that is not true. He probably did not sit at his desk with hands folded for three hours each day, but his whole life was filled with conversation with his Lord. He read Scripture avidly already as the fearful young monk, searching for peace, and he kept on reading his whole life. I think we would all profit from getting to know God more personally in the way Luther did, through reading and pondering his Word. He regarded Christ as the key to reading Scripture. Fundamental to good interpretation, according to Luther, is the proper distinction between what God created us to be doing (Luther labelled it "law") and what God has done and is doing for us, especially in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit's creating and maintaining our trust in him. ■

Biblical

AUTHORITY

and the

Conviction to

PREACH

CHRIS CASTALDO

It happens every week—at the same time and in the same place. I stand at the edge of the platform, extend my hand, look at the congregation, and sing the *Gloria Patri*. “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son...” Then, at that precise moment, the thought crosses my mind: “You are insane, Chris, if you think your words will engage the souls of these people, lift them from the mire of sin, impart eternal hope, and engender heartfelt worship. Audacious. Presumptuous. Ludicrous.” Nevertheless, I think, “here goes.”

In those brief moments before I begin to preach, as the arrows of doubt arrive from every direction, I have a few counterattacks ready. I repeat the words of Spurgeon, “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” which is exactly what I need to remember when I imagine that the impotence of my words is a barrier to the work of God. The other mantra I repeat is directly from our Lord Jesus, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The words of Scripture, precisely because they are the words of God, are inherently authoritative. Indeed, this is why we have the audacity to preach. Since God has appointed his Word as the means by which humanity is drawn into the light of his presence, it does everything that I cannot. “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

THE AVERSION TO AUTHORITY

But the authority of Scripture also presents a problem to those whom we serve. While humanity’s rebellion against authority is currently on full display, it is a longstanding tradition of our race. Ever since Adam and Eve tasted the forbidden fruit, people have demonstrated an

unwillingness to submit to God’s direction. With this resistance escalating and deepening over time, even previously accepted forms of delegated authority have been increasingly held in contempt: family, education, law, and church. All of this is a reflection of humanity’s disdain for the world’s ultimate authority—God.

So how does this affect the sermon, as one of the primary ways God speaks to the world? “Don’t preach at me,” is a popular idiom that expresses the moral autonomy we have claimed for ourselves since the fall. Used this way, to “preach” is to harangue someone with tedious or unwanted demands. We may not hear churchgoers openly flaunt such an attitude, but evidence of its influence is tangible, especially when preachers retreat into delivering feel-good homilies devoid of scriptural substance. It is equally noticeable in the degree of biblical illiteracy among contemporary Christians. Too often, if Christians do not hear God’s Word preached, they will not hear God’s Word at all.

Before we biblical expositors get too proud of ourselves, it is good to remember that we all have room for improvement in this area. Even those of us who attend exposition workshops and have, in our office, a picture of Martin Lloyd Jones or R. Kent Hughes (I have the latter), must be reminded again that authority comes from God, through his Word, and we are simply the stewards who have the privilege of defending and proclaiming it. As P.T. Forsyth wrote in 1907, “It is authority that the world chiefly needs and the preaching of the hour lacks an authoritative Gospel in a humble personality.” Therefore, all of us need to consider how to carefully balance our confidence in Scripture and suspicion of ourselves so that we

The effectiveness of our proclamation does not come from persuasive oratory, which is to say that we are not responsible for making God's Word effective.

exposit God's Word in a way, and with a spirit, that magnifies its authority. Here are four ways to achieve that balance.

1. EXPECTATION

While much doctrinal discussion rightfully deals with the authority, inspiration, and sufficiency of Scripture, we must remember that God's word is also effective. For this idea we may look to the locus classicus, 2 Timothy 3:14–16.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

On account of Scripture's inspiration, Paul maintained a deep and profound expectation that its communication would be effective. It is in this context, of course, that Paul issues his famous admonition, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season..." (2 Tim. 4:2). This is good news for preachers. The effectiveness of our proclamation does not come from persuasive oratory, which is to say that we are not responsible

for making God's Word effective. "By the open statement of the truth," Paul insisted, "we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." The Word, alive with God's purpose for it, is inherently effective; and we may preach it with expectation.

2. EXPOSITION

For a preacher to prepare an expositional sermon—a message that elucidates the meaning of a text from its particular context, historical background, literary style, relationship to the rest of Scripture, and significance for the mission of Jesus Christ—assumes something about the character of the text. It recognizes that God, by his own authority, moved these writers to record his intended message for humanity (2 Pet. 1:21). Not only is this the assumption of the expository preacher, it is the motivating force that drives him to fulfill his weekly responsibility of sermon preparation. Because God both inspired the biblical text through particular men who lived in particular contexts, and supervised the relationship of each part to the whole, preachers devote time and energy to study those particulars in order to effectively apprehend God's intended message. At the bottom of this activity is the authority of the divine source, which ensures that study is not just worthwhile; it is essential.

3. RELEVANCE

If the previous point underscores that preaching must be based on thoughtful exegesis, the testimony of Scripture also illustrates that preaching must be relevant, that is, it must entail exhortation

and application. This is not a human addition to preaching, since exhortation and application is frequently the intended purpose of God's Word. Yes, biblical preaching should inform the mind, but it must also encourage and admonish the heart. Following from the above quoted statement in 2 Timothy 3, Paul explains how God's Word is profitable: "so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (17). Like Paul, we preach the Word as shepherds seeking

Like Paul, we preach the Word as shepherds seeking to nourish the flock under our care. This growth happens by the authority of God who leads us into deeper levels of sanctification through his Word.

to nourish the flock under our care. This growth happens by the authority of God who leads us into deeper levels of sanctification through his Word.

4. UNCTION

The Bible envisages heralds who passionately announce the good news after they have been personally gripped by it. In the Old Testament, for example, Jeremiah said of his preaching, "If I say, 'I will not mention [the Lord], or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer. 20:9). This burning appears in the New Testament with the day of Pentecost, about which Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8).

An important aspect of this gift is what the Puritans called "unction." How does unction function? It is an anointing that a preacher perceives in the straight line from God's throne to the authority of the text, through the authority of a preacher's call, to the divinely appointed moment when that preacher announces the good news, to the instant when a human heart is penetrated by its truth and beauty. In that moment, the soul only sees God and forgets all the stages in between.

THE AUTHORITY OF PREACHING

There can be no recovery of biblical preaching if we do not first recover the conviction that the preacher's task is enabled by God's authority. The nature of the inspired text, the expectation of its effectiveness, the exposition that yields insight, the supreme relevance for people, and the unction in which it is proclaimed are all predicated on this truth. Yes, the fiery darts will come, especially in the moments immediately before we open our mouths. But that is also the very same moment when divine authority from heaven works through the servant and steward of the Word to transform human hearts. Therefore, with confidence and humility, we will continue to preach.

Chris Castaldo (Ph.D., London School of Theology) is Lead Pastor of New Covenant Church, Naperville. He is author of Talking with Catholics About the Gospel and recently co-wrote The Unfinished Reformation: What Unites and Divides Catholics and Protestants After 500 Years. Chris blogs at www.chriscastaldo.com. 

No Creed *but the* Bible?

by Justin S. Holcomb





The so-called fundamentalists of our day join hands with liberals on this point with their well-known slogan: “No creed but the Bible”.

—Louis Berkhof

Tradition is the fruit of the Spirit’s teaching activity from the ages as God’s people have sought understanding of Scripture. It is not infallible, but neither is it negligible, and we impoverish ourselves if we disregard it.

— J. I. Packer

Obviously, Christianity did not begin when we were born, nor did our generation invent Christian thought. We live two thousand years removed from the time of our founder, and—for better or for worse—we are the recipients of a long line of Christians’ insights, mistakes, and ways of speaking about God and the Christian faith. Today’s Christianity is directly affected by what earlier Christians chose to do and believe.

The fact that Christianity developed—that the sixteenth century, for instance, looked very different from the third, and that both looked very different from the twenty-first—can sometimes lead us to wonder

Thankfully, the church of the past has given us a wealth of creeds, councils, confessions, and catechisms. These are tools that the church has used to speak about God clearly and faithfully, to guide its members closer to God, and sometimes to distinguish authentic Christianity from the innovations, heresies, and false teachings that the New Testament warns against.

what the essential core of Christianity might be. As a result, some people decide to ignore history altogether and reconstruct “real Christianity” with nothing more than a Bible. But this approach misses a great deal. Christians of the past were no less concerned with being faithful to God than we are, and they sought to fit together all that Scripture has to say about the mysteries of Christianity—the incarnation, the Trinity, predestination, and more—with all the intellectual power of their times. To ignore these insights is to attempt to reinvent the wheel, and to risk reinventing it badly.

Thankfully, the church of the past has given us a wealth of creeds, councils, confessions, and catechisms. These are tools that the church has used to speak about God clearly and faithfully, to guide its members closer to God, and sometimes to distinguish authentic Christianity from the innovations, heresies, and false teachings that the New Testament warns against. While their purposes differ, all try to communicate complex theological ideas to people who do not have

sophisticated theological backgrounds (in some cases, to people who are illiterate).

Once *sola Scriptura* is properly understood and the divine authority and sufficiency of Scripture are established, we should appeal to the church’s ministerial authority (the theological statements from the tradition) as very useful tools. John Calvin writes: “Thus councils would come to have the majesty that is their due; yet in the meantime Scripture would stand out in the higher place with everything subject to its standard. In this way, we willingly embrace and reverence as holy the early councils, such as those of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus 1, Chalcedon, and the like, which were concerned with refuting errors—in so far as they relate to the things of faith” (4.9.1).

WHAT IS A CREED?

Some of the most important creeds in the Christian tradition are the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Definition, and the Athanasian Creed.

The English word “creed” comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe.” Church historian J. N. D. Kelly says that a creed is “a fixed formula summarizing the essential articles of the Christian religion and enjoying the sanction of ecclesiastical [church] authority.” More simply, the creeds set forth the basic beliefs of the church that have been handed down from earliest times, what the New Testament calls “the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 3). When teachers throughout history called parts

of this faith into question (usually the parts that were taken for granted or were less well-defined), the early church reaffirmed the essentials in a way that honored the traditional teaching.

The earliest creeds are arguably to be found in Scripture itself. In the Old Testament, what is known as the Shema (“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one,” Deut. 6:4) is a creed-like statement. While there are no official, full-blown creeds in the New Testament, scholar Ralph Martin has suggested that the beginnings of creeds are already present in the New Testament and were developed by early Christians to defend against subtle pagan influences and to establish key beliefs. Many scholars believe that Paul recites an early creed in his letter to the Corinthians when he summarizes the facts that he taught as “of first importance”: “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared [to the apostles and many others]” (1 Cor. 15:3 – 7). Furthermore, in the church’s acts of baptism, Eucharist, and worship, certain prayers and early creed-like statements of belief were developed, such as “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3) and the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19: “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” While there is no formal creed in the pages of Scripture, the idea of a central, basic teaching of Christianity certainly is there.

After the age of the apostles, the early church possessed what is known as “the rule of faith” or “the tradition,” which theologian Bruce Demarest describes as “brief summaries of essential Christian truths.” Early church fathers such as Irenaeus,

Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Hippolytus all assumed this “rule of faith,” an unwritten set of beliefs that had been passed down from the apostles and taught to Christian converts. In the second century, Irenaeus described the rule of faith in this way: “One God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and all things therein, by means of Christ Jesus, the Son of God; who, because of His surpassing love towards His creation, condescended to be born of the virgin, He Himself uniting man through Himself to God, and having suffered under Pontius Pilate, and rising again, and having been received up in splendor, shall come in glory, the Savior of those who are saved, and the Judge of those who are judged, and sending into eternal fire those who transform the truth, and despise His Father and His advent.”

Irenaeus’s rule of faith sounds quite similar to later formal creeds and contains the essence of the gospel. As the early Christian community dealt with new heretical movements, the rule of faith gave birth to more precise statements of the essentials of the faith, such as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.

HOW WERE CREEDS USED?

In individualist cultures, we pick and choose what religion we like. More than that, we sometimes combine parts of different denominations or religions to make something entirely new, whatever works for us personally. For the early Christians, however, creeds were meant to be used by groups, not just a summary of what everyone in the room agrees upon, but a promise made and kept as a group.

Creeds were initially used in baptism, during

which the baptismal candidate recited a formula or responded to questions, thereby publicly confessing belief in Jesus Christ. As time passed, however, the creeds also were used to teach new converts the basic elements of the Christian faith. Since the creeds were relatively short summaries of Christian doctrine, they were easy to learn. The creeds were also used in church liturgies (the set of actions and rituals in a worship service that illustrate Christian beliefs and mysteries), uniting the congregation in common confession. Far from being a device of the ivory tower, creeds were the way that ordinary tradesmen and farmers could learn about and pledge their lives to the God of the Bible.

Nowadays, we have a largely literate population and an ample supply of Bibles, so it's easy to wonder whether creeds are necessary. Some may even think that the creeds stand in opposition to (or at least in tension with) the authority of Holy

Learning how Christians throughout history have wrestled with the tough questions of our faith gives us a valuable perspective that deepens our understanding of the Christian faith, increases our dependence on God's revelation in Jesus Christ and Holy Scriptures, fuels our worship of God, increases our love for each other, and motivates mission to the world.

Scripture. However, as theologian John Webster says, "We may think of the creed as an aspect of the church's exegetical fellowship, of learning alongside the saints and doctors and martyrs how to give ear to the gospel." Creeds are not dogmas that are imposed on Scripture but are themselves drawn from the Bible and provide a touchstone to the faith for Christians of all times and places.

JUST YOU AND YOUR BIBLE?

What are we to make of the role of a human church in creating written documents about God? Are we better off relying on the sense that we ourselves can make of the Bible or the experiences that we have?

Even the finer points of Christian theology come out in our worship and lives. The humanity and deity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the trust that we know we can put in Scripture are all beside us in our services on Sunday and impact the way we honor God in our daily lives. And if that's the case, then we ought to tackle high theology the same way that we tackle sin and the needs of the Christian community, as a body of Christ, using the parts of the body that are best suited to the task. The various creeds, councils, confessions, and catechisms from the traditions of the church are the fruit of parts of the body that God gathered to proclaim and explain his gospel, stretching nearly two thousand years into the past.

The gifts and tools given to us by the tradition of the church are acts of confession. As John Webster explains, "Confession is a cry of acknowledgement of the unstoppable miracle of God's mercy. To confess is to cry out in acknowledgement of the sheer gratuity of what the gospel declares."

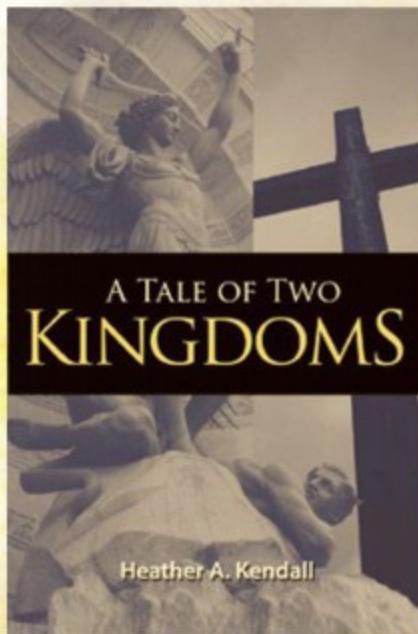
Seeing the theological statements of the church as specific instances of the Christian act of confession is significant because it helps us remember that they are not solely about doctrine and theology; they are ultimately about worship. Lest we think that fine points of doctrine and the minutiae of theological debate are merely intellectual exercises, the fact that confession is about praise helps ground the way that we view and use these documents.

Additionally, learning about and knowing creeds, confessions, catechisms, and councils is important so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past or exhibit our natural tendency for, as C. S. Lewis dubs it, “chronological snobbery.”

Learning how Christians throughout history have wrestled with the tough questions of our faith gives us a valuable perspective that deepens our understanding of the Christian faith, increases our dependence on God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and Holy Scriptures, fuels our worship of God, increases our love for each other, and motivates mission to the world.

Justin S. Holcomb serves as Canon for Vocations in The Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida. He also teaches at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary. Justin is the author, co-author, or edited of numerous books, including Know the Creeds and Councils and Know the Heretics. ■

Discovering The Big Picture in the Bible



A TALE OF TWO KINGDOMS

Heather A. Kendall

We live in a day when it is vital for Christians to communicate the big picture of what our faith is all about...*A Tale of Two Kingdoms* is a helpful tool in doing just this. It sets forth this big picture, with God at its centre, in a non-technical way but one that is faithful to the Bible.

Dr. Michael A.G. Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

- A history of God's Plan of Salvation
- Includes a Bible timeline and all the Old Testament prophets

- Told from the point of view of God, Satan and people

www.tale2k.com

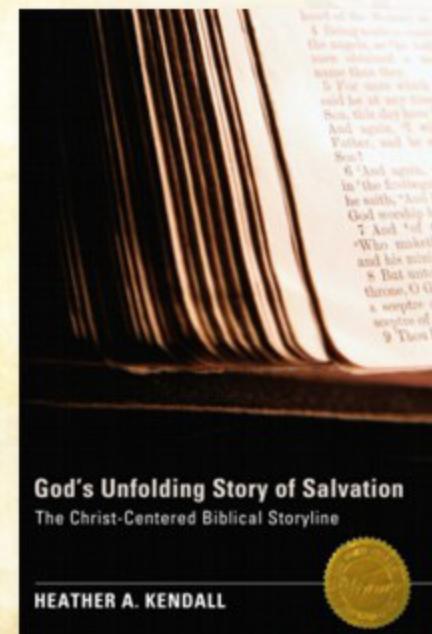
- The Christ-centered biblical storyline

- Thirty-eight lessons and questions

- An individual or group Bible study

"God's Unfolding Story of Salvation" is a biblical complement to Heather Kendall's earlier work...It is highly recommended for study groups as well as individuals who desire a clearly written, biblically accurate, spiritually encouraging treasure that lucidly documents with Scripture the Christ-centered message revealed in the progressive unfolding of redemptive history.

Gary D. Long, Th.D. Faculty President, Providence Theological Seminary



God's Unfolding Story of Salvation
The Christ-Centered Biblical Storyline

HEATHER A. KENDALL



Heather Kendall

705-456-1925

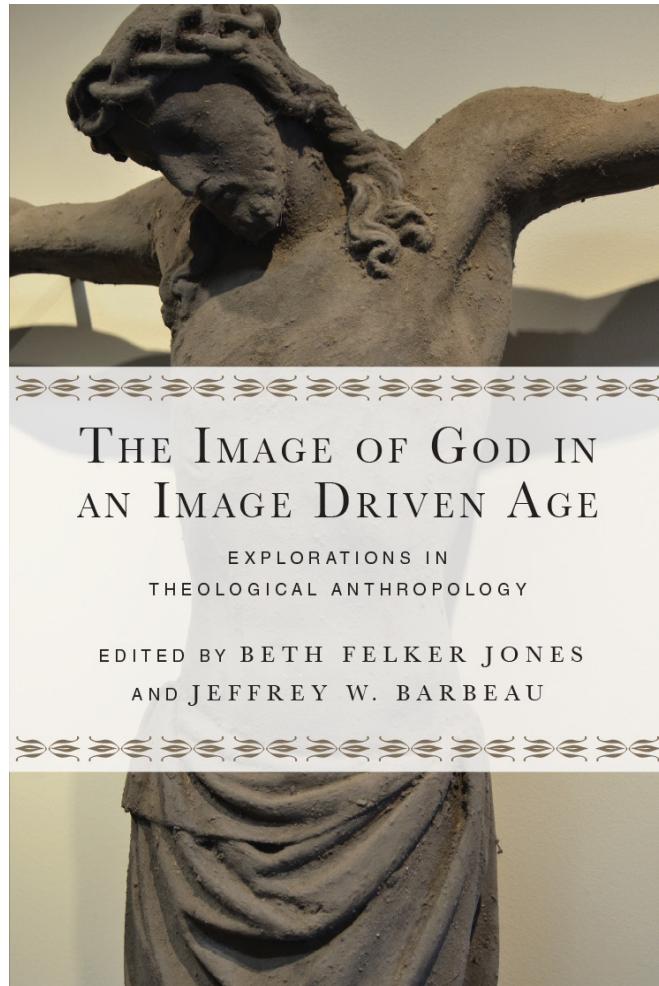
hkendall@tale2k.com

How Do We Understand the Image of God in a Fallen World?

*Strengths and Weaknesses
of a Recent Proposal*

by Matthew Lilicrap

The concept of the *imago Dei* has prompted centuries of reflection, each generation building on those who have gone before, seeking to take hold of the implications of the *imago* for itself. In our current time, fascinated and assaulted by images in equal measure, what does the ennobling biblical claim that we are made in God's image mean, and how does that self-understanding interact with an image-saturated world? *The Image of God in an Image Driven Age* (IVP Academic, 2016), edited by Beth Felker Jones and Jeffrey W. Barbeau is a collection of essays exploring such questions.



This volume collects addresses given at the 24th annual Wheaton Theology Conference. The contributors themselves are a refreshingly eclectic group. Systematic and biblical theologians, ethicists, pastor-teachers, art historians, English professors and more reflect together. Hence, the editors aim not to allow theology to "float free," but to explore the contributions and implications of the *imago* to areas as diverse as literature, human speech and relationship, racism, sexual ethics and witness. In biblical anthropology, perhaps dominated by lofty theologizing and philosophy, this is certainly a worthy aim! To achieve this, the

volume contains four sections:

1. Canon: a more classical theological study of the *imago* from Old Testament, biblical, theological, and New Testament perspectives
2. Culture: exploring the concept of image-bearing and its impact in the world of arts and literature
3. Vision: aiming to view humanity as informed by Christ as the ultimate ‘icon’ of God
4. Witness: presents an ethical and missional reflection

Unfortunately the aim of seeing theology “hit the ground” is not entirely fulfilled, as the strongest section by far is the opening three essays (“Canon”). Taken alone they could effectively introduce some of the many interpretations of the *imago*. Thus, Catherine McDowell (“In the Image of God He Created Them”) introduces a functional understanding, informed by an Old Testament study and suffused with distinctive arguments regarding “kinship” to God. Meanwhile William Dyrness (“Poised Between Life and Death”) gives a biblical-theological overview of a relational understanding, the image rooted in relationships between God and humanity, and between humanity themselves. Finally, Craig Blomberg’s New Testament perspective (“True Righteousness and Holiness”) is more moral in nature, albeit with significant relational elements, as he portrays Christ as the ultimate image and Christlikeness as the route for believers to “image God.” For each of these writers, the image is a reality to be celebrated. Human dignity is cherished, which is refreshing to read (lest we forget, God himself

declared humans in his image to be “very good!”), while for Dyrness and Blomberg the Christological focus helps draw the reader’s attention to the grace of the incarnation, that in “the image of the invisible God” God himself fulfils his own design in his human creatures.

Beyond this section the essays are more wide-ranging. Although the volume claims “a unified vision—ecumenical in nature and catholic in spirit,” essays do not obviously converse with one another. At times it can also be difficult to discern how they converse *alongside* one another. The authors’ underlying assumptions regarding the *imago* and its meaning are diverse, which is to be expected given the varied interpretive history. Interacting with their work and understanding their interaction with one another would be easier were their presuppositions clearer.

Despite this, help for the Christian in connecting culture and biblical anthropology can be found. For example, Christina Bieber Lake’s review of *The Road* proves a model engagement with secular literature, finding echoes of the *imago* in Cormack McCarthy’s depiction of human perseverance towards good in the midst of post-apocalyptic decay. Similarly, Soong-Chan Rah and Beth Felker Jones (Chapters 10 and 11) show how an understanding of humanity in the divine image interacts with concerns over racism and human commodification. While culture rails against institutional racism and sexual trafficking, both authors demonstrate an application of the *imago* which challenges more fundamental ethics, both within the church and without.

The volume, however, has two particular failings.

CONTENTS

First, there is a tendency to underemphasize the sinful nature of humanity in many (though not all) of the essays. This is surely a major pitfall for any reflection on the image of God in humanity and arises from the outset. Arguing that humanity made “in the image” corresponds to animals made “according to their kinds,” McDowell (the first contributor) understands humans to be God’s “kin.” Hereafter, taking her cue from both biblical and extra-biblical sources, she interprets the *imago* as connoting “sonship.” Thus, the functional nature of the *imago* is found in living as God’s “sons.” Unfortunately human failure to live up to this calling comes across as less than the abject moral failure for which God holds humanity culpable. It is striking that in the material discussing the “sonship” conferred upon Israel and demonstrated within the instructions of Torah, there is little mention of redemption. A clearer explanation of the fall’s effects upon humanity’s relationship with God, the extent to which “kinship” is forfeited, and the subsequent necessity of redemption would sound a more balanced note for the rest of the volume. Unfortunately this is not the case, and the opening essay is not unique. Although Dyrness and Blomberg argue that any Christian “imaging” of God is grounded in the new creation brought about by Christ’s death and resurrection, throughout the volume there is a tendency to present the incarnation as *the Good News*, the affirmation and fulfilment of the *imago* by God himself. At times one is left wondering where redemption at the cross fits in this great anthropological theme.

Second, a number of the contributors risk neglecting the analogical nature of the *imago* by legitimizing human conceptions of God as “read” from image to original. This is perhaps clearest

in the final essay by Philip Jenkins (“The Storm of Images”), examining how the image of God manifests in different cultures. Despite his caution over “how newer churches image God” (43), various ways in which humans have appropriated images are discussed without obvious correction. Joseph Smith, envisioning God’s people in America, is given as an example, showing that “the image of God in a person necessarily implies the image of God in a place” (253), while the subtly different function of images of Mary in different cultures are examined with some sense of approval (254-5). Finally, comments are made that “God is imagined differently according to the needs of his followers” (256) and that history, rather than Scripture, is the corrective required for distorted images (258). God’s self-revelation in Scripture as the only legitimate source of a human conception of God is marginalized and the creator-creature distinction is forgotten in a survey of very human images, whether from varied cultures or no.

In conclusion, this is a volume I cannot recommend unreservedly. While there is great strength in many of the contributions, and a refreshing positivity regarding the reality of the *imago*, the reflections represented here demonstrate too often a neglect of sinful depravity and the creator-Creature distinction. To be created in the image of God is indeed a high honor, a wonderful creative grace. However, an emphasis on this wonder should serve to further our horror at our rebellion, and drive us to glory in the redemption and restoration of that image found in the gospel of Christ.

Matthew Lillicrap

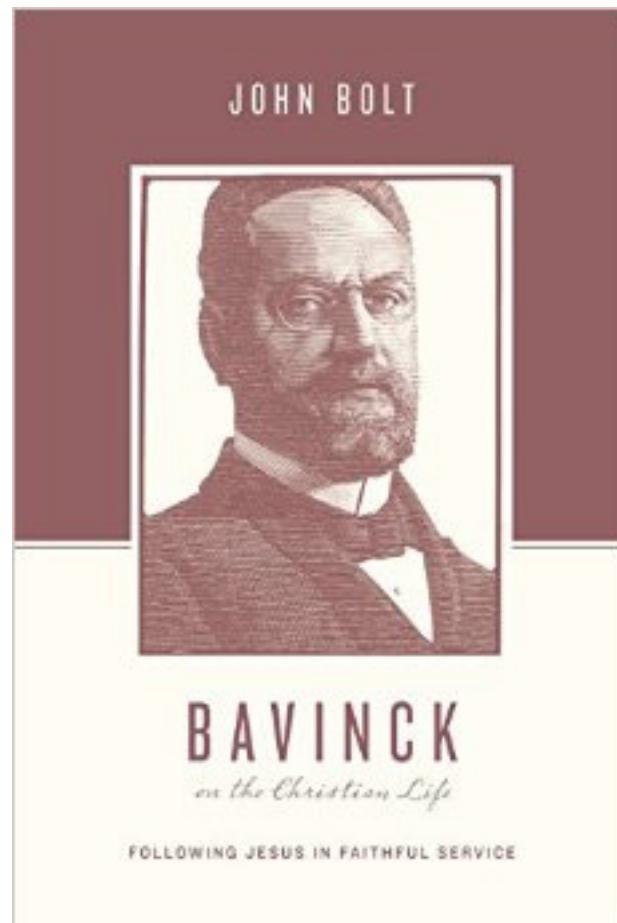
Oak Hill Theological College

Reformed Ethics for the Twenty-First Century

Why Herman Bavinck's Ethics Matter for the Church

by Greg Parker Jr.

The Christian Life series has given the life and theology of significant theologians the opportunity to shine, with top scholars working on each book of the accessible series. Theologians like Luther and Calvin, whom have long been heard by the Christian world, are displayed in the series, but one of the most significant of late is *Bavinck on the Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service*, by John Bolt (Crossway, 2015). Bolt's goal in the book is for the reader to hear the voice of Herman Bavinck, which he does best by allowing us to hear Bavinck's ethics. Bolt has done us a great service, especially in heading up



the translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* into English, which will arguably make Bavinck the most important Reformed theologian for the twenty-first century, giving voice to his theology. However, Bavinck's life and ethics have struggled to be given appropriate mic time apart from Ron Gleason's exceptional biography on Bavinck. Bolt is privy to Bavinck's ethics, as one involved in the translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics*, which is scheduled for publication in 2017. For these reasons, Bolt's book is a most welcome addition to Crossway's series.

CONTENTS

Bolt's book is broken into three parts. In many ways the book functions as a primer to Bavinck studies. Bolt introduces the reader to Bavinck's theological and ethical foundation, his Neo-Calvinist worldview, as well as the application of that worldview to the culture. In this way, Bolt structures the book as one building a house, beginning with the foundation, and fine tuning from there. What makes the book a pleasure to read is not only the voice Bavinck is given, but Bolt's ability to write as Bavinck would have today, with an eye on the church.

The first section, following a short biography of Bavinck, outlines for the reader Bavinck's theological foundation for ethics, focusing specifically on the function the image of God, the Law, and union with Christ. My only quibble is that the "organic" motif, which is key to understanding Bavinck's theological foundation, isn't highlighted in this section. Bolt does give the organic motif of Bavinck a few pages to shine in part two. Yet this controlling motif may have been more appropriately situated within Bavinck's theological foundation. However, this is just a preference, and does not take away from the quality of the work.

In the second section, Bolt introduces the reader to the Neo-Calvinist utilization of worldview. Bolt very helpfully carves out the difference between Kuyper's and Bavinck's application of the Neo-Calvinist worldview. Bolt demonstrates that Bavinck's worldview was not reductionist, but grew out of his Trinitarian theology. For example, Bolt elucidates his organic motif: man in heart, life, and mind reflects the organic unity of God. Rather than sitting in Kuyper's shadow, Bavinck actually surpasses Kuyper in this regard.

In the third section of the book, Bolt guides the reader through Bavinck's more ethical writings. Bavinck's voice as an ethicist is clearly reformed, with his theological foundation clearly shaping his application of ethics. The family, work, and society are each inspected through the lens of Bavinck's writings. For Bavinck, the Christian has an obligation to the "cultural mandate" and the church is to function as that which continually draws people towards God's principles. Bavinck's theological ethics are a masterful reflection on culture, as seen in the closing sermon of the book where Bavinck the preacher fittingly ties together the ethical and theological.

Bolt set out to give us the voice of Bavinck, and that is exactly what he accomplishes, showing us how Bavinck's theological ethics have much to offer the church today. This work is highly accessible and insightful. My only reservation, which is minor, revolves around the organic motif of Bavinck. Though it has only recently come to the fore in Bavinck studies, it is now crucial to understanding the genius of Bavinck's thinking and theology, especially since Bavinck connects theology and ethics in his *Reformed Dogmatics* as a "single organism". However, Bolt's work is truly significant because he helps readers hear Bavinck's voice for the church today. I heartily commend this book to you.

Greg Parker Jr.
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary 

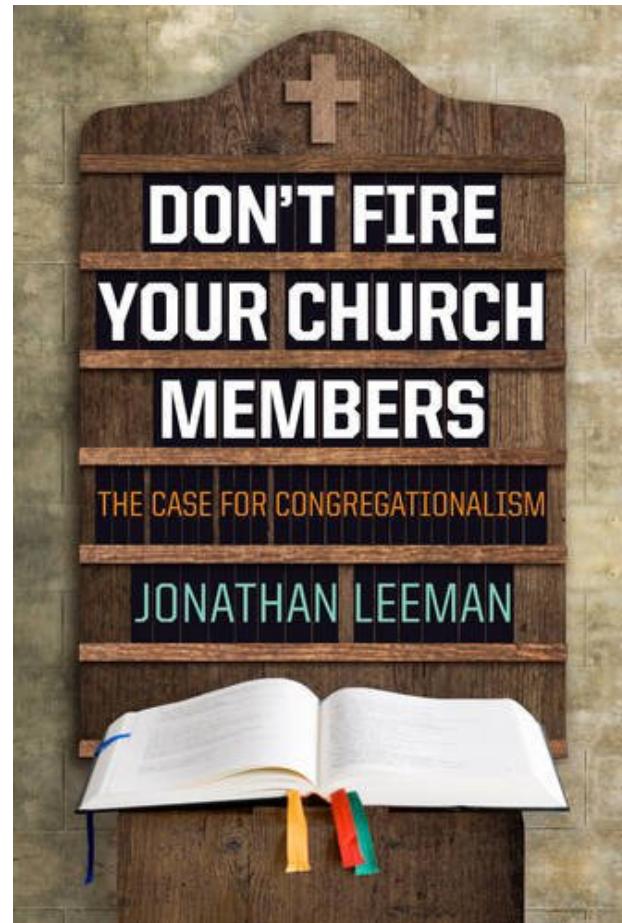
A Renewed Adamic Commission

Jonathan Leeman Restores Churches to Their Priestly and Kingly Responsibilities

by Richard Hutto

H ave you considered the implications of church polity on the health of your church? It's a subject often met with indifference by pastors and their congregations, and in many cases is left up to individual wisdom and preference as though Scripture has little to say on the matter. This culture of polity-agnosticism is exactly why Jonathan Leeman's book, *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (B&H, 2016), is such an important resource. For Leeman, church government may not be necessary for salvation, but it is essential for guarding the gospel and growing gospel people (vii).

In this highly accessible book, Leeman attempts to not only revive the importance of polity in



general but to make a biblical case for elder-led congregationalism in particular (16). Though his case rests on numerous elements, including a well-reasoned argument for an institutional hermeneutic (19-31), appeals to church history (85-96), and answering common objections (185-191), his primary and most persuasive argument is found in a biblical theology of Adam's office as priest-king (57-59).

In the commission given to Adam in the first chapters of Genesis to subdue the earth, Leeman argues that Adam is called to be a priest-king (36-40). In his role as king, Adam is to represent God on earth and expand the borders of the garden. In his role as priest, he is to protect and watch over

CONTENTS

that which belongs in the garden (39-40). However, as Adam transgressed the law of God and proved himself unfit, this office progressed through Noah and Abraham, and finally to the people of Israel. It was then that the offices of priest and king were separated into the priestly tribe of Levi and the kingly line of David. Of course the Israelites continued to fail in these roles and the promise of a new covenant where the priest-king role would be perfectly fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus was given (49).

Jesus functions as the New Adam, the offspring of Abraham, and the true Israel. He is the perfect King and perfect Priest. He succeeds where all before him failed and this is precisely where the covenantal trajectory culminates in a biblical argument for congregationalism. According to Leeman, as the church is united to Christ by faith, they are called to reign with him as co-heirs (50-51). The primary implication is that the church now identifies with Christ in his Adamic office and are thus “deputized as possessing a renewed Adamic commission” (51). The church, by nature of its union with Christ puts on the Adamic office of priest-king.

Just as Adam was to advance the borders of the garden-kingdom, so now God’s people serve in the advancement of the church through evangelism. Further, just as Adam was to watch over that which belonged in the garden-kingdom, so the people of God are to watch over what and who belongs in the church (53-54). All Christians, then, inhabit the office of priest-king which carries important implications for church polity since local church governance is the location in which these duties must be carried out.

Leeman shows that biblical evidence for this position is located in both explicit and implicit passages

of Scripture and corroborated through biblical examples and precedents (61-122). However, the most convincing passage in favor of congregationalism comes from Matthew 18:15-20 where the keys of the kingdom are discussed. Here Leeman demonstrates that it is the gathered assembly who wields the keys as they carry out church discipline.

The argument here is sound. It is in fact the church, not the elders alone, who are given final say over the what and who of the gospel. Therefore, the priest-king office given to Adam that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ does indeed have implications for the church. The whole congregation bears the responsibility to exercise the keys, and where responsibility is given the appropriate authority is required (104).

However, Leeman cannot be accused of being unbalanced in his argument. He doesn’t ignore the biblical data conferring authority on the elders of the church. Rather, he argues that we must do justice to both streams of authority that are biblically mandated. The church should function as a mixed government where the congregation has final authority over the “who” and “what” of the gospel and the elders have a Spirit-given authority to teach, lead, and equip the saints in their use of that authority (142-152).

In conclusion, Leeman’s work is convincing. He effectively argues that congregationalism accords with the covenantal trajectory of Scripture and is affirmed by the New Testament witness. In a time where polity has lost its appeal, pastors and lay people alike will benefit greatly from Leeman’s careful theological and exegetical arguments.

Richard Hutto

Pastor of King’s Church, Conroe, TX 

A Guide to Calvin's *Institutes*

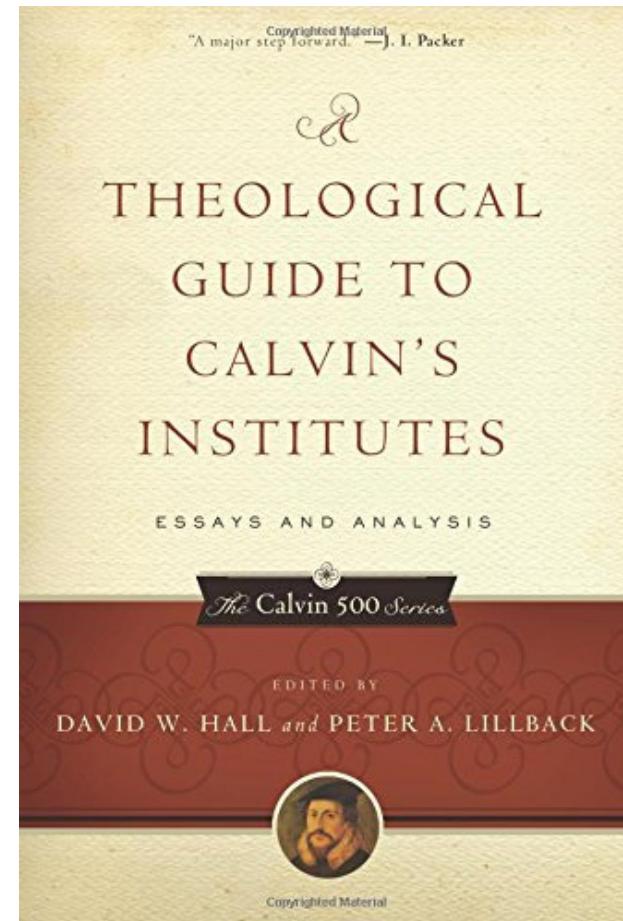
A Wealth of Insight from a Recent Collection of Essays

by Chris Stead

In the run up to 2017, the key events, texts, and theological emphases of the Reformation are receiving a surge of interest, and rightly so. One such text will be John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Initially written to provide basic instruction in the Christian religion, the final edition of Calvin's *Institutes* in 1559 is a masterpiece of the theological world, and has secured John Calvin a place in church history as one of the greatest, and warmest, theologians to bless God's people.

In it, as Richard Muller and others have helpfully explained elsewhere, Calvin provides a collection of doctrinal commonplaces, so that the Bible student



could arrive at the Scriptural text with a biblically informed framework in place to assist reading the passage. By detailing and defending orthodox doctrine in his *Institutes*, Calvin was able to avoid lengthy doctrinal excursions in his commentaries, and achieve brevity and clarity by following the flow of the biblical writer.

Understanding this division of labor helps in reading the *Institutes*. As a work, it underwent several expansions and rearrangements throughout Calvin's ministry; his extensive work as Bible preacher and teacher produced further exegetical insights to enrich his doctrinal conclusions. In turn, biblical references in the *Institutes* almost function as cross-references to his commentaries, where

CONTENTS

the doctrine's biblical basis is elucidated. I think it was Elsie McKee who used the phrase "symbiotic relationship" to describe the complementary interdependence of the *Institutes*, commentaries, and sermons.

So, Calvin was a Bible man, who let Scripture shape his whole project. And yet, his judicious appropriation of scholastic conceptual tools, together with his belief that the *Institutes* was an indispensable preliminary to fruitful Bible study, undercuts the notion that rigorous systematic theology was something Calvin avoided.

This is why David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback's book, *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes* (P&R, 2009, 2015), is such an asset. A group of Reformed scholars and churchmen (with impressive credentials in the relevant areas) have divided up key doctrinal *loci* in the *Institutes*, and they set about expositing the Reformer's position on each. Overall, the essays are significantly more than a mere rehearsal and paraphrase of the relevant sections, including numerous cross-references to the commentaries, sermons, and other writings, as well as the historical context of the doctrine under review. A small minority of essays could be improved in this regard; one finds oneself thinking that the person who will read a theological guide to the *Institutes* is already a keen enough reader to parse the relevant sections of Calvin's book for themselves, and is looking for more than a straightforward digest. However, the vast majority of articles are hugely illuminating and impressive in their analysis of Calvin's thought in the particular area, as well as faithful to Calvin's own intentions in his theological endeavours.

The book covers a diverse range of topics, not just

limiting itself to Calvin's understanding of election, the cross, and justification, but interacting with Calvin's articulation of the Trinity, Christology, prayer, worship, among many others. This extensive treatment shows that reducing Calvin to a polemicist for divine sovereignty wildly undersells the rich and inspiring ways he thought about the Christian life. Calvin was a catholic churchman seeking to teach godliness to God's people, and this Guide provokes serious admiration for the range of learning and biblical meditation displayed in the *Institutes*.

Two essays were particularly excellent. First, R. Scott Clark tackles Calvin's doctrine of election and predestination (interestingly 'out of place' in the Guide relative to its late placement in the *Institutes*). After carefully recounting the historical and intellectual context (including the important observation that double predestination was relatively standard catholic fare and thus Calvin was no innovator), and following Calvin's argument in his Romans commentary, Clark carefully unpacks the treatment in the *Institutes*. He explains the biblical foundations and logic, and even helps the reader appreciate the nuance in Calvin's position over the issue of God's will and absolute power, before finishing with the pastorally significant point that for Calvin, assurance came not from inquiring into the "abyss" of God's secret will, but in the external reality of the gospel. The essay closes with a brief look at the Ephesian sermons on predestination, reflecting the reality that Calvin the churchman saw the end of doctrines to be pastoral application, not academic posturing.

Second, Michael Horton's essay on sin in Calvin's thought, which sweeps away the caricature of "total depravity" that is often raised in Calvinist debates,

repays careful reading. Horton situates the fall and its effects in the context of humanity's dignity as God's image in creation, showing that Calvin's paradoxical anthropology properly emphasizes the heinous and inexplicable apostasy of sin as covenant-breaking, through its perversion of human nature, rather than rejecting humanity as just plain rotten. Horton argues that Calvin's doctrine of sin needs to be recovered today, in an age that "does not seem to know either the grandeur of creation or the tragedy of the fall" (153).

There were a few things missing that might have made this volume even better. First, while Kelly's chapter on the Trinity was superb, a little more could be said on Calvin's slightly uneasy relationship to the wording of the Nicene Creed that confesses Christ to be "Very God of Very God." As Scott Swain has argued, Calvin's denial that the Father communicates divine essence to the Son in the eternal generation of his person (remember, it is a divine person who is generated) puts him in a "notable minority" in orthodox history; thus, it cannot be said that it is only a "subordinationist" reading of the Creed that sees such essential communication, and therefore more argument is needed as to why Calvin can legitimately fill the Nicene phrase with content that was not originally intended.

Second, while the "index" approach of the Guide was helpful, a few more essays exploring underneath Calvin's own organization of topics by tracing a presupposition/theme through the *Institutes* would have served the reader well. For instance, Calvin's use of the Bible to do theology is a fascinating topic. More is meant by this than his hermeneutic; rather, how did Calvin treat the various scriptural data when coming to his doctrinal conclusions? Why is

one text a straightforward affirmation of what God is like, and another nothing more than a means by which God achieves a particular effect? In *John Calvin's Ideas*, Paul Helm argues that, in relation to Calvin's concept of accommodation, there are "first" and "second" order texts between which Calvin distinguishes when coming to his conclusions. While the Guide contains some valuable comments regarding accommodation (see, e.g. David Calhoun's chapter on prayer), the question of accommodation and Bible-use deserved a whole chapter.

Or perhaps, given the prominence of "piety" as a fundamental motive behind Calvin's work, an essay exploring how Calvin's concept of piety theologically informed his organization of the loci, as well as conclusions within a particular doctrine, would prove to be very interesting. Or again, Calvin regularly speaks of the "Turks"; given our current climate, seeing how Calvin defined and defended Christian orthodoxy against Islamic teaching throughout the whole of the *Institutes* might prove to be beneficial.

These suggestions are nothing more than a counsel of perfection in relation to a volume that already supplies a vast wealth of insight and support for anyone wanting to grasp something of Calvin's magnum opus. Any study of the Reformer will have to take note of the contributions made in this Guide.

And above all, the doxological note of Calvin's *Institutes* carries on sounding in these essays; one comes away moved afresh to consider the triune God, and committed to knowing him better.

Chris Stead

Curate, Grace Church Highlands, London 

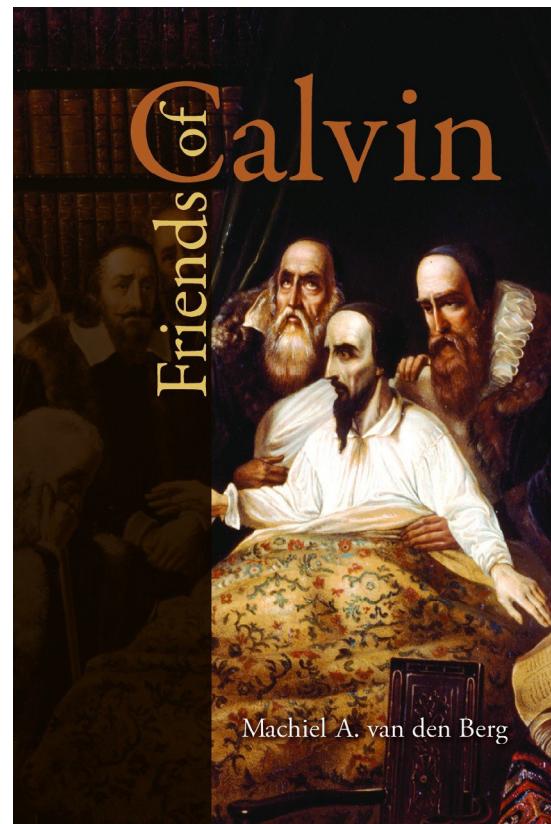
John Calvin is Not Batman

*Or a Book that Will
Permanently Change Your
Perception of John Calvin*

by Timothy Raymond

I feel somewhat odd writing this, but over the years I think I've read more books about John Calvin than anybody else not found in the Bible. This includes biographies of Calvin, books discussing and evaluating his theology, and books specifically about his preaching. And while I've loved and admired Calvin's theology and ministry for a couple of decades, up until relatively recently, my perception of Calvin's personality was rather negative. I looked at him as the theological equivalent of Batman.

What do I mean by likening Calvin to Batman? Well, Batman is a fairly stiff, dark soul, isn't he? While unusually intelligent and resourceful, Batman is able to singlehandedly perform almost supernatural feats without making any facial expressions. Moreover, Batman is a disturbed loner who doesn't get along well with others,



except maybe for his butler (and occasionally with Robin).

Truth be told, that's pretty much who I thought John Calvin was, just in the realm of theology. In contrast to the gregarious Luther (whom I might liken to Iron Man's Tony Stark), I perceived Calvin as this mega-mind who was, in his personal life, a dark, disturbed loner able to churn out doctrinal tomes faster than a woodchuck could chuck wood and without ever relaxing his perennial frown. Many portraits of Calvin on modern book covers only serve to reinforce this impression. Several I've seen make you think Calvin was some sort of cyborg who dispassionately sliced and diced heretics while sucking on lemons.

Well, recently all of that changed when I happened to pick up *Friends of Calvin* (Eerdmans, 2009) by

Machiel A. van den Berg. The book is a collection of 24 brief vignettes about Calvin's friends and colleagues. Here we learn about Martin Bucer, his "Fatherly Friend"; Phillip Melanchthon, his "Lutheran Friend"; Heinrich Bullinger, his "Swiss Friend"; John Knox, his "Scottish Friend"; and, sadly, about Louis Du Tillet, "A Friend Who Turned Away" (the words in quotation are chapter titles). Calvin had friends who were pastors, doctors, aristocrats, and students, and more than one who became his enemy. Obviously there's a chapter about his wife, Idelette, and another about his successor, Theodore Beza. All in all, I hadn't a clue Calvin had so many good friends and reading it made me wonder if a similar book were to be written about me if it'd include half as many chapters.

Assuming van den Berg is a reliable historian (and I have every reason to believe he is), the overall impression of Calvin is dramatically different from a theological Batman. Here we see a much more human, much more ordinary, and actually much weaker John Calvin who did what he did only because the Lord gave him so many helpful, wise, encouraging friends. Furthermore, van den Berg (or perhaps the translator) is a very clear communicator and the pathos of Calvin's life, work, and suffering comes through vividly. We sympathize with Calvin's fear, hesitation, and feelings of inadequacy when Farel threatens to curse Calvin if he doesn't become pastor in Geneva; we can smell the steaming pork and cabbage on Calvin's dinner table as he welcomes exiled Christians into his home for refuge; we can hear Calvin weeping with Idelette over the death of their infant son; we can feel Calvin getting hot under the collar as he confronts 69-year old Farel

over his ridiculous marriage proposal to a 17-year old girl; and we can see Calvin and Bullinger sauntering down the cobblestone streets of Zurich together in their long robes and leather clogs, bantering back and forth as to the best way to teach the communication of attributes. For maybe the first time this book helped me see Calvin as "a man with a nature like ours", a really rather ordinary brother used of God in part because of the people he chose as friends.

I enthusiastically and unreservedly recommend *Friends of Calvin* for two reasons. First, for you John Calvin aficionados, this book will hopefully give you a far more human, far more realistic understanding of this great Bible teacher. If you've always thought of him as the sort of doctrinal Dark Knight, after reading this book you'll never look at Calvin that way again.

But a second, and probably more important, reason you should read this book is that it will make you reflect much on your own friendships. *Who are my best friends? Why is it that so few of us have several close, reliable friends? Could I do more for God's kingdom if I had more and better friends? How can I maintain the friendships I have and cultivate new ones?* Chances are, this book will force you to consider these and similar questions.

Please read *Friends of Calvin* by Machiel A. van den Berg. It's the most affecting, paradigm-shifting book I've read thus far this year. And I'll never look at John Calvin the same way again.

*Timothy Raymond
Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Muncie,
Indiana* 

First Principles

A Wise Woman Builds Her Home on Sola Scriptura

by Jessalyn Hutto

Laura Ingalls Wilder is known for making the observation that “home” is the nicest word there is. Indeed, there is an inherent beauty and sweetness to the idea of home that can almost be felt in the sound of the word itself. Surely this is because that lovely place of shelter, comfort, belonging, and becoming that we call home finds its fullest actualization in our God who is himself inherently hospitable. He is the ransomed sinner’s very home. So it is that as we seek to provide an echo of that hospitality in our own families through the artful cultivation of the home, the warmth of his love is channeled through us, spilling out onto all who are welcomed under our roofs.

This calling to be a conduit of God’s love is a task worthy of careful consideration. Building a home

that glorifies God – a home where its traditions, its daily rhythms, its family roles, and its priorities are informed by and constrained by Scripture – is something that takes intentionality and it is not done without concerted effort.

Indeed, we are given some sober advice in the book of Proverbs as we seek to do this very thing. Here we are told that while the wisest women *build* their homes they can also easily become instruments of destruction by way of their foolish words and actions (Prov. 14:1). “By wisdom,” we are told in Proverbs 24:3-4, “a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” The principle in these proverbs should not be understood as referring to mere physical

blessing, but rather to the more imperative (and at times elusive) atmosphere of blessedness that we have the power to either cultivate or thwart within our homes. We see through these and similar proverbs that the successful building up of a family is done only through God-dependent wisdom. It is an act of humility as we continually turn our attention to the Creator for direction.

This brings me to an extremely practical and perhaps surprising application of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*: a God-glorifying home is built upon the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God. In other words, a Christian home is built upon *sola scriptura*. Now I can imagine that when a young woman prepares to enter marriage and she and her fiancé begin dreaming of their future home, “*sola scriptura*” is a phrase that rarely comes to mind. But if they are Christians, then they are very likely to speak of glorifying God with their future family. The question they will face throughout their marriage will then become how they will fulfill that desire.

Many couples will be quick to turn to tradition for the answers. They will remember the homes they grew up in and seek to emulate their parents’ style of homemaking and child-rearing. Or perhaps they will turn to our romanticized notions of family life in the 50’s and 60’s. Some of these appeals to tradition will be rewarded as far as they conform to Scripture, but many practices handed down to us from our parents or society (no matter how “wholesome” they may be) will be extra-biblical. This doesn’t mean that they are inherently wrong or unhelpful, but only that they are not constraining in the same way that Scripture is.

Other couples will be tempted to find guidance from the very loud voice of popular culture, though it is often at odds with the Word of God. Still others will rely upon their own feelings or “sense of what’s right.” They will subject Scripture’s clear teachings on the home to their own judgement, inadvertently proclaiming themselves the ultimate authority in their homes rather than the God who entrusted this sacred task to them.

Truly, the voices of tradition, culture, and self can quickly hijack our good intentions if we are not careful. If we desire to have homes that echo the goodness of God we must have homes that are ordered by his Word. Accepting the Bible as our sole, final authority and recognizing its sufficiency to direct our steps will protect us from dishonoring the Lord while simultaneously freeing us to creatively exercise dominion within our homes that is uniquely fitted to our families.

For this reason every woman who seeks to build a Christian home must consider what it means to do so by *sola scriptura*. Jesus said that those who hear his words and do them are like a man who builds his house on the secure and steady foundation of rock. This is exactly how a wise woman builds her home: by reading God’s Word and applying it in every way to its cultivation. ▶



CREDO

MAGAZINE