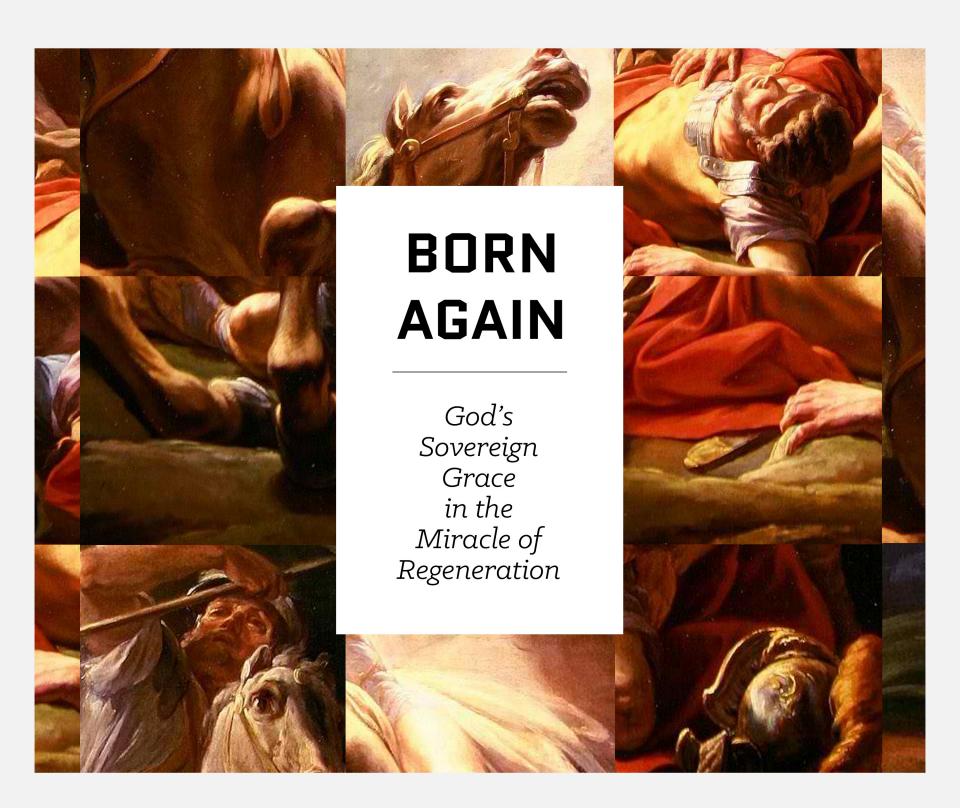
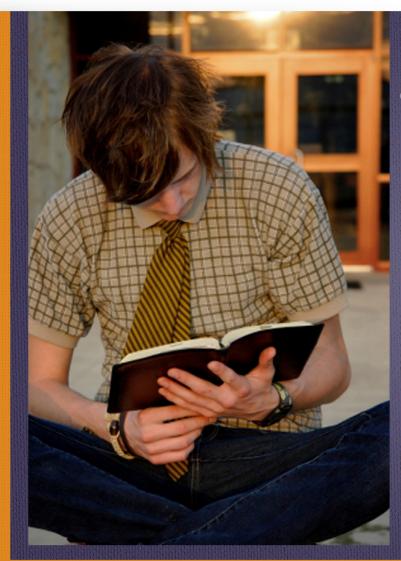
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FEATURES

### 18. EFFECTUAL CALLING AND REGENERATION: UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

by Matthew Barrett

### 42. LET THERE BE LIGHT: HOW CHARLES SPURGEON PREACHED REGENERATION

by Thomas J. Nettles

### 50. REGENERATE MEMBERSHIP AND A TRUE POLITIC

by Jonathan Leeman

### **60. THE UNDOMESTICATED DOCTRINE OF REGNERATION**

An Interview with Douglas A. Sweeney

### 64. SAME WORD, DIFFERENT WORLD: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

by Leonardo De Chirico

### 74. BORN FROM ABOVE: A PURITAN PERSPECTIVE ON DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN SALVATION

by Michael A.G. Haykin

**5. FROM THE EDITOR** by Matthew Barrett

7. ELEVEN QUESTIONS with Andy Naselli

#### 14. FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

What is the Most Difficult Part About Being a Pastor?

16. FIVE MINUTES with Douglas Huffman

31. WHAT ARE THE BASIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEEN CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM?

By Thomas R. Schreiner

72. THE REFORMED PASTOR: WHAT DOES **REGENERATION HAVE TO** 

DO WITH EVANGELISM?

By Tom Ascol

#### 87. BOOK REVIEWS

106. LISTENING TO THE PAST: PETER A. LILL-BACK SHARES WISDOM FROM THE LIFE OF **GEORGE WASHINGTON** 

108. FIRST PRINCIPLES - REGENERATION: ENTERING THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

By Matthew Claridge



hile doctrines such as election, justification, and sanctification typically receive all of the attention in theological conversations, the doctrine of regeneration is often forgotten. Yet, it is this doctrine that undergirds the entire order of salvation. It is the initiatory change in regeneration that results in everything else, from faith and repentance to justification, sanctification, and perseverance. All of these other doctrines owe their existence to that first moment when God breaths new spiritual life into the sinner's dead corpse.

Regeneration, or the new birth, was certainly important to Jesus. In John 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless he is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God! Jesus goes on to highlight the sovereignty of the Spirit in the new birth as well, comparing him to the wind which blows wherever it pleases. This reminds us that since Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus there has been a long history of debate over exactly what it means to be "born again," a debate that has preoccupied the best theological minds, including Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Synod of Dort, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, and many, many others. The key questions in this controversial matter are these: Does God work alone (monergism) to create new spiritual life in depraved sinners, or does God and man cooperate with one another (synergism), man having the final say in whether God's grace will be accepted or rejected? Also, does regeneration precede and cause conversion (faith and repentance), or is the Spirit's supernatural work in regeneration conditioned upon man's will to believe? We believe Scripture overwhelmingly supports the former. Anything else would compromise the sovereignty of God and rob him of his glory in salvation.

Join us in this issue as we explore the doctrine of regeneration, a doctrine so important that Jesus himself felt it was the first thing he needed to address on that dark night when Nicodemus approached him with the most piercing of spiritual questions.

**Matthew Barrett** 

Executive Editor



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### Questions with Andy Naselli

Naselli Provides Advice to Seminary Students, Explains Keswick Theology, and Gives His Take on Evangelicalism Today

Interviewed by Gary Steward

Having spent many years in seminary, both at the masters and Ph.D. level. what are some of the spiritual dangers and temptations a student can face even while having his or her head in good books?

First, there is the danger of pitting doctrine against devotion. This is a false dichotomy because God intends them to go together. They are not mutually exclusive; one without the other is incomplete. The best antidotes I've found to this danger are five articles by B. B. Warfield. Second, there is the danger of being sinfully discontent with your gifts and jealous of others. Instead of being envious, the way God has gifted other

people should fuel humility and thankfulness.

What were some of the most significant lessons that you learned from your supervisor, Don Carson, on the practice of scriptural exegesis and the academic study of Scripture during your time at Trinity **Evangelical Divinity School?** 

First and foremost, scholars should be scholar-pastors, as John Piper and D. A. Carson have explained in their book, The Pastor as Scholar, and the Scholar as Pastor. Second, exegesis should be a fundamental component of your theological method.

In your book, Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology, you critique Keswick theology. Just briefly, what is Keswick theology, and does your critique tie in with your own experience of it?

Keswick theology is one of the most significant strands of second-blessing theology. It assumes that Christians experience two "blessings": the first is getting "saved," and the second is getting serious. People experience this blessing through second surrender and faith: "Let go and let God."

Like many others, I tried to follow Keswick theology when trusted pastors and preachers propagated it. It led to frustration, disillusionment, and suspicion.

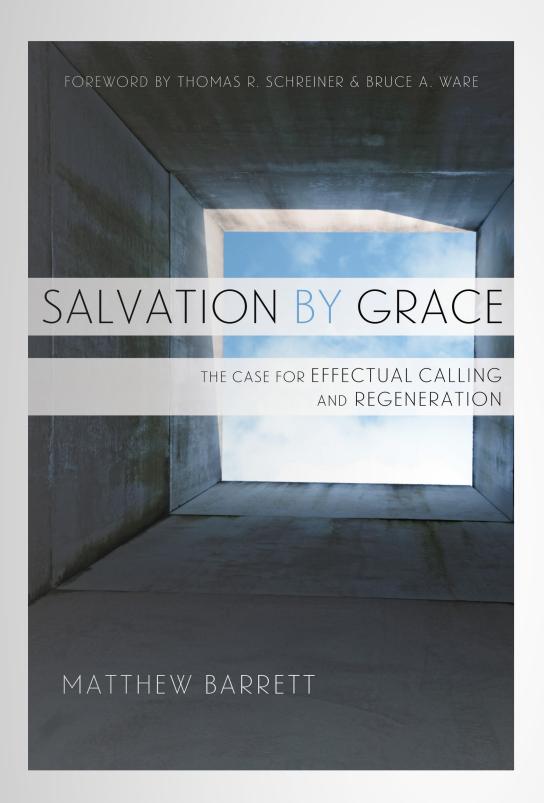
### Are there points on which the **Keswick theologians of the late** nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are helpful for us?

Sure. The Keswick preachers generally exalt Christ and faith rather than selfdependence, and they are warmly devotional. Many of them were sincere, devout, godly men who were above and they commendably reproach. desired that believers be holy. They encouraged personal holiness, prayer, Bible study, and zeal for foreign missions

You have devoted time to how Paul utilizes the prophet Isaiah in your book, From Typology to Doxology: Paul's Use of Isaiah and Job in Romans 11:34-35. Can you give us your thesis in a nutshell?

When Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11a, he includes their larger OT contexts, which reveal a remarkable typological connection between the two OT passages and the end of Romans 11. The three rhetorical questions in Romans 11:34-35 communicate three of God's characteristics that correspond to his ways in salvation history, and each carries simple and profound theological implications. By quoting Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11a in Romans 11:34-35, Paul typologically connects Isaiah 40 and Job 38:1-42:6 with Romans 9-11 in order to exalt God's incomprehensibility, grace, patience, wisdom. mercy, independence, and sovereignty. (Please see my interview with Credo Magazine: "A Conversation with Andy Naselli.")

Along with Collin Hansen, vou edited Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism. How would you define



"This is quite simply the most thorough and convincing account of divine sovereignty, both over the new birth and over effectual calling, that I've ever read. It is historically informed, lucidly written, eminently practical, and, most important of all, biblically faithful. This book, and Matthew Barrett in particular, renews my confidence that the socalled young, restless, and Reformed are in good hands and moving in the right direction. Salvation by Grace merits a wide reading and will undoubtedly prove to be an indispensable resource for the serious student of God's Word. I cannot recommend it too highly."

-**Sam Storms**, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration presents a magisterial case that God's grace is monergistic—that God acts alone, apart from human cooperation, to effectually call and sovereignly regenerate sinners. Thus effectual calling and regeneration logically precede conversion in the ordo salutis (order of salvation), thereby ensuring that all of the glory in salvation belongs to God, not to man. Matthew Barrett also evaluates Arminian and modified views of the nature of God's grace in salvation, finding them unbiblical because they fail to do justice to the scriptural portrayal of God's sovereignty and glory in salvation.

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### evangelicalism? Do you think it is a helpful label?

Defining evangelicalism depends largely on one's approach, and there are at least two basic approaches. First, there is "sociology," which is a descriptive approach that most historians adopt. Second, there is "theology," which is a prescriptive approach that some theologians adopt.

I think it's better to adopt a prescriptive approach that defines evangelicalism theologically according to the evangel, that is, the gospel. That's the approach that Kevin Bauder and Al Mohler take in the book.

Like many other labels, "evangelicalism" can be helpful in certain contexts. readv ľm not to discard it.

### How would you assess the state of American evangelicalism today? What are its bright spots, and are there things you are concerned about?

This reminds me of the question, "Will the world get worse or better before Jesus returns?" The answer is both at the same time. As in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, both will grow until the end. And the church will experience periods of revival and persecution.

So with American evangelicalism: some

of it (defining it based on a sociological approach) is bankrupt of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy. But some of it is doctrinally robust and thriving, "and that is an encouraging thought" (to appropriate Gandalf's words). One helpful resource addressing this question is D. A. Carson's preface to the fifteenthanniversary edition of The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism.

### What Bible-study tools do you use most often and find the most helpful and why?

Use these three tools most often:

- 1. Logos Bible Software If I could have a book in any format (e.g., print, Kindle, PDF, Logos, BibleWorks), I'd prefer to have it in Logos. I've got about 5,000 books in that format, and I love accessing and marking up books and articles on my computer, laptop, iPad, or iPhone.
- **BibleWorks** This tool for biblical exegesis complements Logos. I love its layout and speed.
- 3. Zotero This bibliographic manager isn't designed to be a Bible-study tool, but that's how I use it. It's the hub for all of my research. I give other tips in my article "Why You Should Organize Your Personal Theological Library and a Way How."

### What dead guy in church history do you return to the most, and how can we benefit from that person today?

For exegesis, I return most often to John Calvin's commentaries. But overall, I return most often to B. B. Warfield's voluminous writings. Some brilliant people are experts in just one field; others are generalists. Warfield was one of those unusually brilliant people who seemed to be an expert in just about every field he ventured into. Remarkable. I especially recommend readers to buy The Theology of B. B. Warfield and Warfield on the Christian Life: Living in Light of the Gospel, both by Credo Magazine contributor Fred Zaspel. These books are outstanding.

You are the father of several girls. Tell us, what is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a father of daughters? Any challenges?

I thank God for giving Jenni and I three precious little girls. I especially love reading good books to them. Pure pleasure.

What parent would say there are no challenges? For us, at this early stage, the challengesare often overwhelming, whether it's dealing with emotional volatility or sickness or sin. I don't know how my wife

does it during the day! Jenni has shared her perspective in her review article, "Give them Jesus: Parenting with the Gospel."

You are moving to Minneapolis to teach at Bethlehem College and Seminary. Will you now root for the Twins, Vikings, and Timberwolves? Or do you have an allegiance to your home teams?

No. And probably the only way I'd root for the Vikings is if they made Tim Tebow their starting quarterback! I'm a Bears fan.

I grew up in so many places that I have lots of "home teams." But these days I find myself rooting more for teams based on who is playing for them (e.g., rooting for the Rockets with Jeremy Lin).

### **Andrew David Naselli** (PhD in

Theology, Bob Jones University; PhD in New Testament Exegesis and Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is research manager for D.A. Carson and administrator of Themelios. He is also Assistant Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Bethlehem College and Seminary. He blogs over at andynaselli. com.





MATTHEW BARRETT

# The **GRACE** of **GODLINESS**

An introduction to doctrine and piety in the \*\*\*\*

Canons of Dort



### The **GRACE** of **GODLINESS**

An introduction to doctrine and piety in the Canons of Dort

When the pastors and theologians who comprised the Synod of Dort met in 1618 and 1619 to frame a response to the rise of Arminian theology in Dutch churches, they were concerned to provide not just theological argument but pastoral vision. They considered seriously the implications of right theology on both growth in grace and holiness and the spiritual comfort of believers.

Keenly aware of this vital link between theology and practice, they drew up the Canons of Dort in a manner that astutely rebutted from Scripture the Arminian Remonstrants, point by point, arguing the veracity of the doctrines of predestination, particular atonement, total depravity, effectual grace and the perseverance of the saints—the five points that have come to be known as "the doctrines of grace."

Matthew Barrett opens a window on the synod's deliberations with the Remonstrants and examines the main emphases of the canons, with special attention on their relationship to biblical piety and spirituality.

"Wow! I really like this book. Matthew Barrett has given us history, theology, ministerial counsel and impetus to true piety in this treatment of the Synod and Canons of Dort. The brief but vibrant historical accounts are informative, his guidance in some thick theological discussion is expert, and his focus on piety leads us to the true purpose of all theology—the production of a sincere and pure devotion to Christ....This is an excellent account of a vitally important subject."

**Tom J. Nettles**—Professor of Historical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

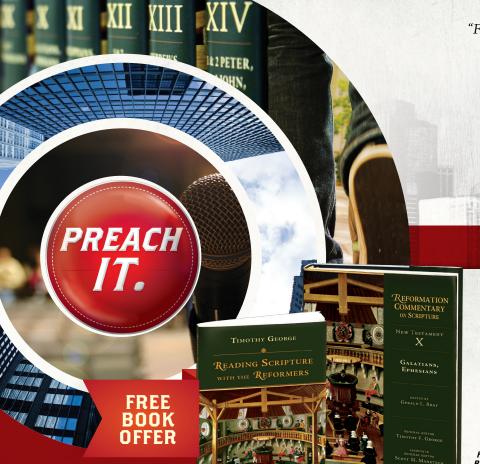
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Note here what the purpose of restoring the lapsed is, and why we should bear one another's burdens—the purpose is to fulfill the law of Christ.



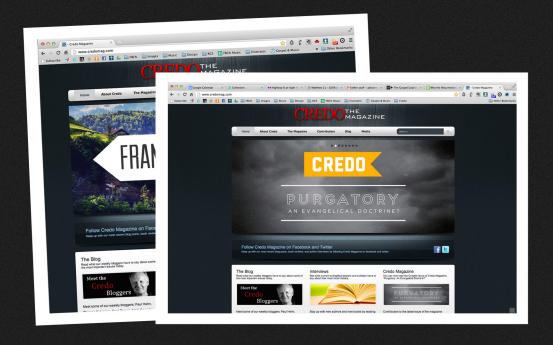


The law of Christ is nothing other than the love of Christ. The example of Christ is nothing other than gentleness. Nature dictates to us that those who are sinking under a burden should be relieved.



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# FROM THE HO

## What is the Most Difficult 1

### **Tim Brister**

The most difficult part about being a pastor is grieving over wayward professing Christians who turn away from the Lord and his church. Being passionate about disciple-making can cause great sorrow when the investment you make may turn up empty. This was the regular concern of Paul (laboring in vain), and it is a difficult burden to carry, knowing that their souls are at stake.

**Tim Brister** is the Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, FL

### **Drew Hunter**

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23) and, we might add, "the springs of life-giving pastoral ministry." Because of this, the most important and difficult aspect of pastoral ministry is keeping a close watch on the condition of my own heart. Specifically, the battle is to maintain a humble and thankful responsiveness to God in light of the gospel.

**Drew Hunter** is Teaching Pastor of Zionsville Fellowship in Zionsville, IN

# RSE'S MOUTH

### Part About Being a Pastor?

### Simon Manchester

I would say the pastor's own sinfulness that surfaces in moods, words, attitudes and actions – as well as failures – that affect the congregation. Next would be the task of working with volunteers in a consumerist culture – people can sit back and do little, then leave if pressure is applied. Last, the pagan thinking that seeps into the church – someone has said that within ten years the church is believing whatever the culture is thinking. Having said all that, the Lord is good and great – so it is a privilege to know and serve his people!

**Simon Manchester** is Senior Minister of St. Thomas' Anglican Church in North Sydney, NSW

#### **Conrad Mbewe**

To me, the most difficult part about being a pastor is balance. I need to balance the various biblical demands upon me as a child of God, a husband, a father and (wider) family man, with the role of a church pastor, which has its own demands of prayerfully maintaining a relevant vision for the church and carrying the troops with me, ensuring regular and good "three-course" sermons, visiting those who are needy, etc. The key is balance!

**Conrad Mbewe** is the Pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia

## IT'S GREEK TO ME

### 5 Minutes with Douglas Huffman

Douglas Huffman Gives Invaluable
Advice to Greek Students

# You have taught Greek for many years now. Tell us, why is it so important to learn Greek, especially if we want to understand what the New Testament says?

Let me say first that there is nothing magical about the Greek language. Greek has been around for thousands of years and has gone through various developmental periods from the ancient classical Greek of Homer's day to the modern day Greek spoken today. Scholars call the Greek of the first century "Koine" Greek, meaning it was the "common" international language of the day. The New Testament was written in this "common," every-day, first-century language (the same language they used to write their letters, legal documents, and grocery lists!).

Now, having said that, let me answer your question. Reading the New Testament in Greek will not give you magical access to the "real" meaning of God's Word. But there is a noticeable and appreciable difference between reading in English and reading in Greek. The difference is analogous to watching a movie in black-and-white and watching the same movie in high-definition

color: it is the same movie and the same storyline and the same message, but there are some things about the story and the message that are helped and augmented and advanced more quickly when you see it in color. That is what happens when you read the New Testament in Greek.

So, for example, when you examine the story of the transfiguration in Luke 9:28-36, you read about Jesus on a mountain, glowing in appearance, and talking with Moses and Elijah. Only Luke mentions the topic of that conversation, and in English translations it reads something like, "they spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (v. 31). It seems clear enough and, with some advanced knowledge of the Jesus story, we know that he is to die and rise again and ascend to heaven at Jerusalem. But if you read this passage in Greek, you will notice that the word for "departure" in Luke 9:31 is ἔξοδος ("exodus"). Luke says that Jesus was glowing and talking on a mountain with Moses about leading an exodus! The quintessential rescue event of the Old Testament to get people to the Holy Land was really just a picture of the ultimate rescue event that would be accomplished there. Reading in Greek gives us quick access to that kind of "color,"

which is easily missed when reading in English.

## Can Greek make a difference for the average pastor when it comes to sermon preparation?

My goals for *The Handy Guide to New Testament Greek* were threefold: (a) to summarize all the salient points of two years of language study in 100 pages, (b) to do this in a helpful and accessible format, and (c) to introduce phrase diagramming, which makes it possible to get a sermon or lesson outline *faster* out of the Greek text than you can out of the English text. In addition to the "color" of reading in Greek (or as part of that "color"), it is this third goal that motivates my teaching of Greek.

You see, English translations do not typically tolerate the long sentences in which the New Testament was written using Greek. So, one long sentence in Greek (with one main thought and three supporting thoughts) will be translated into English with four separate sentences that each look like a separate main thought. While this makes for simpler English reading, there might be some question as to which of those four English sentences is really the main thought of the passage. Reading in Greek (and diagraming the author's thoughts as expressed in the Greek) helps the pastor see which of the four English sentences represents the main thought and how the other three sentences support that main thought. Thus, familiarity with the Greek of this passage quickly gives the pastor a confident, three-part sermon around the one main theme.

For our readers who are just beginning to learn Greek, which book in the New Testament do you recommend they begin with?

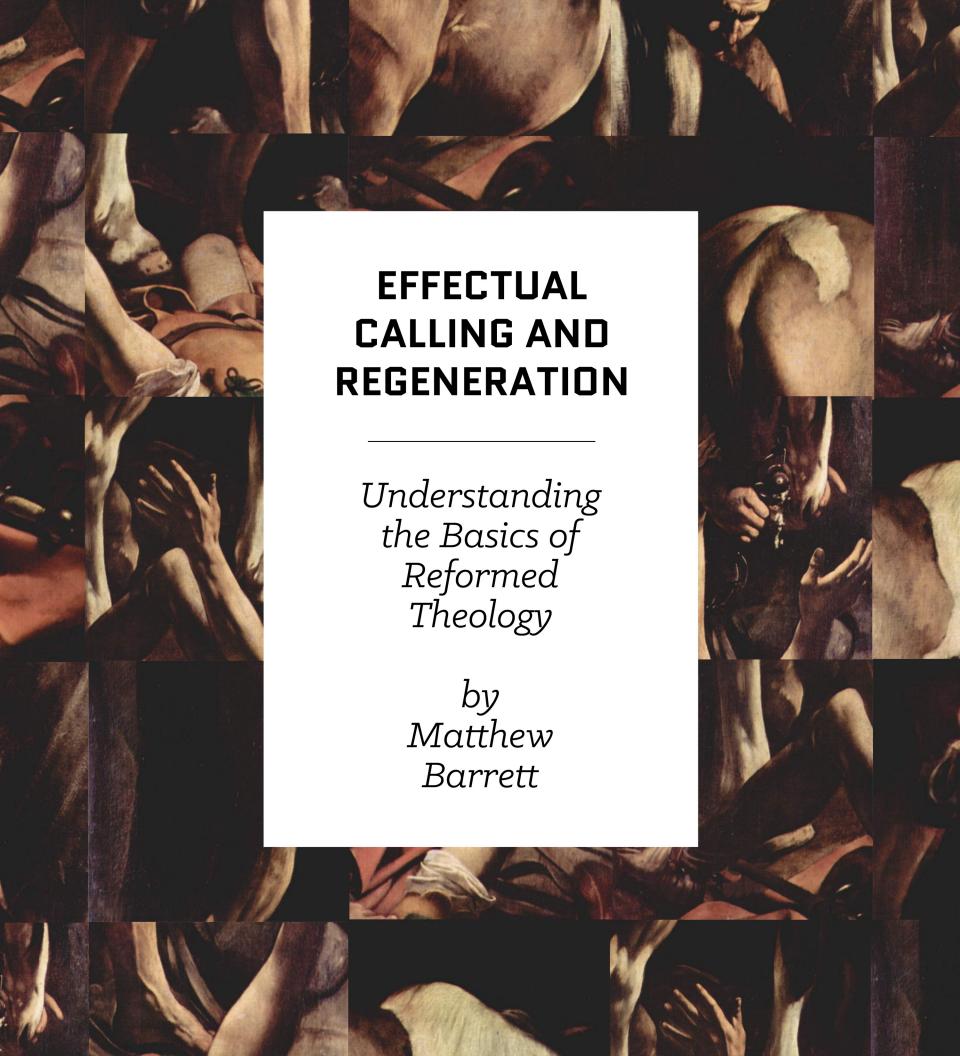
The Gospels of Mark and John and the letter of 1 John are common New Testament books for beginning level Greek readers. Their vocabulary and writing styles are generally beginner-friendly.

This brings to mind another difference between reading in Greek and reading in English: English translations tend to smooth out the styles of the various New Testament writers, but reading in Greek gives you a greater appreciation for the individual methods and emphases of the different authors.

Thinking back on your own experience learning Greek over the years, what advice can you give to those who have taken Greek but now want to maintain that knowledge and improve upon it in the midst of life's responsibilities?

There is nothing that works as well as the practice of everyday use. And perhaps more than that, it is not a matter of pastors adding separate Greek review sessions to their already busy schedules (although that certainly may be a necessary place to begin for some). Rather, pastors should seek to do their current work utilizing Greek. They already prepare sermons: so they can make use of the Greek (or Hebrew for the OT) when they do. They already open their Bibles and dig into commentaries to answer theological questions for parishioners: so they can make use of the Greek New Testament when they do so. And there are a lot of useful tools available to help pastors bridge the gap. The Handy Guide to New Testament Greek is meant to be one such useful tool.

**Douglas S. Huffman** is the author of *The Handy Guide* to *NT Greek: Grammar, Syntax, and Diagramming* 



### THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL

"Because of the bondage of sin by which the will is held bound, it cannot move toward good, much less apply itself thereto; for a movement of this sort is the beginning of conversion to God, which in Scripture is ascribed entirely to God's grace." These words, written by John Calvin, are a lethal blow to the common man's optimism concerning his spiritual ability in matters of salvation. Calvin's words, however, parallel what Scripture says. For example, Jesus himself states in John 8:34 that "everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." Likewise, the apostle Paul tells us that man is dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and all of us are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). "The natural person," says Paul, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Similar to the Corinthians, Paul also says to the Galatians, "In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world" (Gal. 4:3). And again, Paul explains to Timothy that prior to salvation the sinner is in the "snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:26). Paul makes a similar statement in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "In

their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

In short, the sinner is very much like Lazarus, dead in the tomb, rotting away. As John Owen states, we have no more power than "a man in his grave hath in himself to live anew and come out at the next call." Therefore, what the sinner needs is to hear the equivalent of the resurrection words of Christ, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43).

But how exactly does God call sinners to himself and liberate them from their bondage to sin? According to Scripture, while God has a gospel call that goes out to all people, he also has an effectual call intended only for his elect.

#### THE GOSPEL CALL

Despite man's depravity God is outrageously gracious to sinners, sending forth his gospel message to the ends of the earth, inviting and commanding sinners everywhere to repent and believe. The gospel call can be defined as the "offering of salvation in Christ to people, together with an invitation to accept Christ in repentance and faith, in order that they may receive

the forgiveness of sins and eternal life."<sup>3</sup>

First, the gospel call is an invitation for everyone who hears the gospel. Hence, sometimes the gospel call is labeled the *general* or *universal* call, meaning that the gospel is preached indiscriminately to people of any age, race, or nation. As the Lord proclaims in Isaiah 45:22, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (cf. Isa. 55:1; John 4:10, 14; 6:35-51).

Second, the gospel call is a well-meant offer of salvation. The preaching of the gospel

**GOD NEVER MAKES** 

GOSPEL OFFER THAT

HE DOES NOT KEEP.

A PROMISE IN THE

to all people comes out of a real, genuine desire to see all people repent and be saved (Num. 23:19; Ps. 81:13-16; Prov. 1:24; Isa. 1:18-20; Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11; Matt. 21:37;

23:37; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:13; 2 Pet. 2:9). Arminians often object that this cannot be the case in light of the Calvinist belief that God chooses to only give his effectual grace to his elect. God's gospel offer would be disingenuous and cynical. However, there

Such an offer is not superfluous because it is the gospel call which is the *very means* by which God converts sinners. (2) God never makes a promise in the gospel offer that he does not keep. God promises that

is no inconsistency for several reasons. (1)

eternal life will be granted on the condition of faith. However, God never promises that he will bestow faith on everyone. (3) The gospel call is seriously meant regardless of the fact that man cannot fulfill it. It is objected that since sinners do not have the ability to believe (due to depravity), a gospel call cannot be genuinely offered. However, man's inability to repent and believe is his own fault. God will not lower the conditions of the gospel (faith and repentance) because man, by his own depravity, cannot fulfill them. Moreover, God is not obligated to bestow his grace on anyone. Man is a sinner, deserving only judgment, and for

God to fulfill the gospel condition on anyone's behalf is sheer grace.

Third, the gospel call is resistible. All those whom God has not elected

will and do resist the gospel call and consequently further their condemnation before a holy God. One passage that makes such resistance especially evident is Acts 7 where Stephen is martyred for his faith in Christ. Stephen gives a biblical theology of God's redemptive purpose through Israel and when he comes to the end he reminds the Jews putting him on trial that they have failed to understand what the Scriptures have said concerning the "coming of the Righteous One" (7:52). Stephen accuses

them of being just like their fathers who persecuted the prophets. "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you" (Acts 7:51; cf. Heb 3:8-13).

Theresistibility of the gospel call is important to reiterate because often it is assumed that Calvinists deny the resistibility of grace. However, Calvinists affirm that God's grace in the gospel call can be resisted. It is when God so chooses to effectually call his elect that such a calling cannot be finally resisted for God's purpose in saving his elect will be accomplished without fail. The difference here is in God's intention and design. As John Owen says, "Where any work of grace is not effectual, God never intended it should be so, nor did put forth that power of grace which was necessary to make it so."

### THE EFFECTUAL CALL

When the gospel call is heard, why is it that some believe while others do not? In short, the reason for belief is not to be found in man's will but in God's effectual grace. Scripture teaches that when the gospel call goes out to all people, God secretly, irresistibly, and effectually calls his elect and only his elect to himself.

Scripture is replete with references to the effectual call. First, consider how effectual calling is spoken of by Paul. When Paul refers to calling he is not referring to a gospel call which is a mere invitation that can be resisted, but rather is referring to that calling which is effective, performing and fulfilling exactly that which it was intended to accomplish. We read in Romans 8:28-30,

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whomheforeknewhealsopredestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Notice, Paul has the same exact group of people in mind throughout his entire chain of salvation, so that those predestined are the same ones who are called and likewise those called are the same ones as those justified, etc. Therefore, calling necessarily proceeds from God's eternal election (cf. Rom. 9:11-12, 24-26, 1 Cor. 1:9, 2 Tim. 1:9, 1 Thess. 5:23-24, 2 Thess. 2:13-14). And Paul must be referring to a calling other than the gospel call because in the gospel call it

is not true that all those called are justified. Indeed, with the gospel call many disbelieve and are never justified. Paul does not say that out of all those whom he calls some are justified and then glorified. No, Paul is clear: those whom he calls are indeed justified and also glorified. Therefore, since many reject the gospel call and are not justified let alone glorified, Paul must be referring to a calling that unfailingly and immutably leads to and results in justification. It is this effectual call that is grounded in predestination and results in justification.

Moreover, Paul cannot have in mind here the gospel call because those who are "called" are promised that not only will all things work according for good, but they will be glorified (8:30), demonstrating that calling produces perseverance. Paul in verse 28 shows that the called he has in mind are only those who love God. These are "called according to his purpose," predestined, and promised that all things work together for good. Now it is true that the gospel call is also a call that is "according to his purpose" but it is not true that the gospel call only consists of those who love God and those for whom all things work for good. Therefore, Paul is referring to a call that works (cf. Rom. 1:6-7; 9:22-24).

Paul's use of the effectual call is also apparent in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. The gospel Paul preached (the "word of the cross") is both the power and wisdom of God to those who are saved (1:18, 21, 24; cf. Rom 1:16) and at the same time is a gospel that is foolishness to those who disbelieve and perish (1:18, 23, 25). Notice, there is no change in the gospel. The gospel remains the same. However, some hear this gospel and see it as folly while others hear this gospel and see it as the power of life. Paul's words here are similar to 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 where the gospel is a fragrance of Christ. To those being saved it is an aroma of eternal life, but to those perishing it is an aroma of eternal death (2:15-16).

So if it is not the gospel then what is it that accounts for the fact that some reject the gospel and see it as folly while others, who hear the same message of Christ crucified, accept the gospel as life? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, "but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." This specific group ("the called ones") is in contrast to the larger group of Jews and Greeks whom Paul says received the message of Christ crucified and saw it as a stumbling block (Jews) and as folly (Gentiles). Such a contrast precludes any idea that Paul is only referring to a general gospel call. Moreover, Paul must have in

mind a calling that is irresistible because those identified as "the called" believe as a result of being called. In contrast to those who are not "the called" and therefore can only see the cross as folly, those who are identified as "the called" (both Jews and Greeks) consequently see Christ as the power and wisdom of God. Being called inevitably results in submitting to the lordship of Christ.

Furthermore, verses 26-31 preclude an Arminian interpretation which would view the success of God's call as that which is based on the free will of the sinner. Paul explains that those called are not chosen because of anything in them, their own wisdom or power for example. How could

IF IT WERE THE CASE THAT CERTAIN JEWS AND GENTILES WERE CALLED AND REGENERATED BECAUSE THEY THEMSELVES BELIEVED, THEN PAUL COULD NOT EXCLUDE ALL BOASTING.

this be when God purposefully chose those who were weak, lowly, and despised, so that "no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1:29)? If it were the case that certain Jews and Gentiles were called and regenerated because they themselves believed, then Paul could not exclude all boasting. Man would then have something

to boast about "in the presence of God" (1:29). Rather, it is "because of him you are in Christ Jesus" and therefore if anyone is to boast he is to "boast in the Lord" (1:31). Many other passages speak of an effectual call (1 Cor. 7:15; Gal. 1:15-16; 5:13; Eph. 4:1-6; Col. 3:15; 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:14-15; 2:9-10, 21; 2:21; 3:9; 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3-5, 10; Jude 1:1-2; Rev. 17:14). However, no one so strongly emphasizes the effectual nature of calling as Jesus does in John 6:35-44. Why is it that some see the signs and hear the message of Jesus and believe while others, seeing the very same signs and hearing the very same message, disbelieve? What is to account for belief and unbelief? Notice, Jesus does not explain why some believe and others

do not by turning to the fact that some choose him while others do not. While he holds out the promise of life to all (6:35-37, 40, 47, 51), he never says that everyone has the spiritual ability

to believe, nor does he attribute belief to man's free will. Quite the contrary, Jesus highlights the inability of man when he says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." What determines then whether they will come to Jesus is whether or not the Father has chosen to give them to his Son. As we read in verse

37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me." Jesus places the decisive factor in the will of the Father, not in the will of man.

This brings us to the precise nature of such a drawing in John 6:37, 44 and 65. These three passages read:

> All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37).

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:44).

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (John 6:65).

Is such a drawing effectual and irresistible? Or, as the Arminian believes. can this drawing be resisted successfully? In response, Jesus teaches that the grace he is speaking of here is one that is particular to the elect and effectual. Several observations bear this out. In John 6, especially 6:44, the drawing of the Father necessarily results in a coming to Christ. In other words, this is not a drawing that merely makes possible a coming to Christ

but rather is a drawing that inevitably and irresistibly leads to Christ. All those drawn do in fact believe. As Jesus explains in 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." Arminians view 6:44 as saying that while it is true that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, such a drawing can be resisted. However, such an interpretation fails in two ways: (1) It ignores the fact that "no one can come to me" (i.e., inability) and (2) it fails to finish the verse, viz. "I will raise him up on the last day." Each of these points deserves consideration.

First, in John 6 the grammatical language is in support of an irresistible, effectual drawing. The word draw in Greek is elkō, which, as Albrecht Oepke explains, means

### IS SUCH A DRAWING EFFECTUAL AND **IRRESISTIBLE? OR, AS THE ARMINIAN BELIEVES, CAN THIS DRAWING BE** RESISTED SUCCESSFULLY?

"to compel by irresistible superiority."<sup>5</sup> Though the Arminian rejects such a notion, the word linguistically and lexicographically means "to compel." Therefore, Jesus cannot be saying that the drawing of the Father is a mere wooing or persuasion that can be resisted. Rather, this drawing is an indefectible, invincible, unconquerable,

indomitable, insuperable, and unassailable summons. In short, this summons does not fail to accomplish what God intended. Second, the Father's drawing will indeed result in final salvation, the resurrection on the last day, as is evident in John 6:44. Jesus comes down from heaven to do the will of the Father and what is this will but to lose none of all those whom the Father has given to him but to raise them up on the last day (John 6:39-40). In other words, Jesus is referring only to those whom the Father has given him and these only will Jesus give eternal life and the resurrection to glory. Here we see once again that the Father's giving of the elect to the Son invincibly leads to final salvation. Therefore, the drawing Jesus speaks of must be effectual.

### REGENERATION

A discussion of regeneration flows naturally from effectual calling. Those whom God effectually calls to himself are made alive (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13; Rom. 8:7-8). The actual word "regeneration" (palingenesia) is only used in Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5 and only the latter uses the word in the narrow sense, namely, as referring to the first instance of new life. Nevertheless, the *concept* of regeneration in this narrow sense is affirmed throughout

Scripture, for even if the word itself is not used, the idea is prevalent. That said, it is appropriate to precisely define regeneration in this narrow sense.

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the elect sinner to Christ by breathing new life into that dead and depraved sinner so as to raise him from spiritual death to spiritual life, removing his heart of stone and giving him a heart of flesh, so that he is washed, born from above and now able to repent and trust in Christ as a new creation. Moreover, regeneration is the act of God alone and therefore it is monergistic in nature, accomplished by the sovereign act of the Spirit apart from and unconditioned upon man's will to believe. In short, man's faith does not cause regeneration but regeneration causes man's faith.

With this definition in view, let's now look to Scripture itself, particularly with the monergistic nature of regeneration in mind.

### THE CIRCUMCISION AND GIFT OF A NEW HEART

Deuteronomy 30:6

In Deuteronomy 30 Israel faces and anticipates the reality of coming exile and judgment for disobedience. However, Moses foretells of a time to come when Israel will experience restoration, redemption, genuine repentance, and new spiritual life rather than judgment and condemnation. Included in such a future restoration is liberation from the slavery of sin. However, liberation from bondage to sin only comes through the circumcision of the heart (i.e., regeneration). In Deuteronomy 30:6 we read, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut 30:6). If the circumcision of the heart refers to regeneration (cf. Rom. 2:25-27) then to

IT IS YAHWEH'S SOVEREIGN ACT OF CIRCUMCISING THE HEART THAT CAUSES THE SINNER TO LOVE HIM.

what purpose does Yahweh promise to circumcise the heart? Yahweh circumcises the heart "so that" they will love the Lord. The Lord does not circumcise their hearts "because" they acted in repentance and faith by loving the Lord. Rather, it is Yahweh's sovereign act of circumcising the heart that causes the sinner to love him. Nowhere in Deuteronomy 30:6 do we see any indication that Yahweh's sovereign act

of circumcising the heart is conditioned upon the will of man to believe. Rather, it is quite the opposite. Yahweh must first circumcise the heart so that the sinner can exercise a will that believes.

In Deuteronomy 29:2-4 Moses summons all of Israel and says, "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear." Why is it that those in Israel, who saw the many miracles God performed in saving them from Pharaoh, do not believe? Verse 4 gives the answer, "To this day the LORD has not given you a heart

to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear." It is remarkable how much Deuteronomy 29 parallels John 10:26. As Israel saw the miracles and

failed to hear and see spiritually so also did the Jews in the gospels see the miracles of Jesus and fail to hear and see spiritually. But again, notice the reason Jesus gives as to why they do not believe, "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock" (John 10:25-26). Like Deuteronomy 29:2-4, the reason they do not see or hear is because God did not give them "a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear." It is not man's choice or will which determines whether he will spiritually have a heart to hear and see but it is God's sovereign choice to give the sinner a heart to hear and see that is the cause and reason for belief.

### Jeremiah 31:33 and 32:39-40

The concept of a new heart is also illustrated by the prophet Jeremiah, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33; cf. Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Similarly the Lord says in Jeremiah 32:39-40, "I will give them one heart and one way, that they

may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them

NOTICE, GIVEN THE SPIRITUAL INABILITY OF THE PEOPLE (SEE JER. 6:10), IT IS ONLY WHEN GOD WRITES HIS LAW WITHIN, ON THE HEART, AND PLACES WITHIN A FEAR OF HIMSELF THAT THE SINNER CAN FOLLOW AFTER HIM.

an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." Unlike Deuteronomy 30:6, in Jeremiah the phrase "circumcise your heart" is not used. Nevertheless, the phrase is used in Jeremiah 4:4 and the concept is present in 30:6 and 32:39-40 for the text does speak of the Lord writing his law on their hearts (in contrast to writing his law on tablets of stone), giving his people one heart, and putting the fear of the Lord in their hearts. Like Deuteronomy, in Jeremiah regeneration is in view. Notice, given the spiritual inability of the people (see Jer. 6:10), it is only when God writes his law within, on the heart, and places within a fear of himself that the sinner can follow after him.

### Ezekiel 11:19-21 and 36:26-27

The concept of a circumcised heart in Deuteronomy 30:6 and a new heart in Jeremiah 31:33 is also taught in Ezekiel

11:19-21 and 36:26-27. Yahweh a g a i n promises a day to come when his people will experience

restoration and renewal. He explains that in order for a sinner to walk in his statutes, keep his rules, and obey his law, he must first remove the dead, cold, lifeless heart of stone and replace it with a heart that is

alive, namely, a heart of flesh. Yahweh does not give the sinner a heart of flesh because the sinner obeys but rather the sinner obeys because Yahweh surgically implants a heart of flesh. Such an order is indicated at the beginning of 11:20. Yahweh removes the heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh "that they may" obey (11:21; 36:27). The same causal order is even more apparent in Ezekiel 36 where Yahweh states that he will "cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (36:27). Once again, God does not put a new heart and spirit within in reaction to or because of the sinner's faith, but it is God's sovereign act of implanting a new heart, a new spirit, that causes the sinner to turn in faith and obedience (cf. Ezekiel 37:1-14).6

#### THE NEW BIRTH

John 3:3-8

Perhaps one of the most well known and important texts on the new birth or regeneration is the encounter Jesus has with Nicodemus. Nicodemus begins the dialogue by stating, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (3:2). It may appear that Jesus avoids answering the assertion made

by Nicodemus when he responds, "Truly truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (3:3). However, Jesus is simply getting to the heart of the matter, directing his attention to how it is one can know God in a saving way. Nicodemus seems to ask his question wanting an answer, namely, who are you Jesus? The answer Jesus gives shows that the only way one can truly know who God is (and therefore who Jesus claims to be) is by being born again (or "born from above"). In other words. Nicodemus will never believe Jesus is from God (let alone that Jesus is the Son of God) unless he first receives the new birth from the Spirit. Therefore, rather than Jesus telling Nicodemus "yes, I am from God" he responds by saying that unless one is born by the Spirit he will never understand who Jesus is in a saving way. It is not by human reasoning but by spiritual rebirth that one comes to understand Jesus.

Moreover, Jesus is insistent that if Nicodemus is not born again he will not enter the kingdom of God. In theological language, Jesus is teaching the necessity of the new birth. The necessity of this new birth leads Jesus to also explain in 3:5-6 exactly what it means to be born again. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the

Spirit is spirit." Jesus says that the birth he speaks of is not one of flesh but of the Spirit (v.6). If one is born of the Spirit he is spirit. John's use of flesh (sarx) here is not the same as Paul's use of flesh where flesh refers to the sinful, enslaved nature. Rather, John is referring to flesh as physical flesh. In other words, the contrast is not between sinful flesh and spiritual new life but is between physical birth and spiritual birth or new life. Hence, Nicodemus misunderstands the words of Jesus as referring to physical birth. Jesus must clarify for Nicodemus: I am not talking about an earthly birth of human flesh, but of a spiritual birth from above.

Furthermore, this second birth is of "water and the Spirit" (3:5). The best interpretation

THE MIRACLE OF HUMAN BIRTH IS A UNILATERAL ACTIVITY.

of "water" is one that identifies "water" symbolically. Water is used to represent the spiritual washing that must take place for one to be regenerated. Such an association of water with cleansing is supported in the Old Testament. As already seen, Yahweh promised in Ezekiel 36:25-27, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a

heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." Water then is co-ordinate with the Spirit demonstrating the cleansing, purifying nature of the Holy Spirit in regeneration (cf. 3:6). Such a washing or cleansing is at the very essence of what it means to be born by the Spirit.

Before moving into John 3:7-8, it is essential to observe that the language of "birth" in John 3:3-7 precludes the possibility of synergism. The miracle of human birth is a unilateral activity. There is nothing the infant does to be born. The infant does

not birth itself. Nor is it the case that birth is conditioned upon the infant's will to accept it or not. Likewise, the same

is true with spiritual birth. Man is dead in his sins and spiritually in bondage to sin. His only hope is the new birth and yet such a birth is a unilateral, monergistic act of God. Man plays no role whatsoever in the spiritual birthing event. Rather, God acts alone to awaken new life, as demonstrated in the use of the *passive voice* which tells the reader that the recipient of this new birth is absolutely inactive. Jesus is emphasizing, through the image of birth, the passivity and inability of the sinner and the autonomy of God in creating new

life. This same principle of monergism is again taught by Jesus as he further explains the role of the Spirit in John 3:7-8.

Already Jesus has indicated that one must be born of water and Spirit (John 3:5), demonstrating that the new birth is effected by the power of the Spirit. But two other points demonstrate the sovereignty of the Spirit as well. First, the sovereignty of the Spirit is demonstrated by both the presence

THE RESULT IS CLEAR: GOD'S ACT OF REGENERATION PRECEDES BELIEF. THE IMPLICATION, THEREFORE, IS THAT IT IS GOD'S **ACT OF REGENERATION THAT CREATES THE FAITH MAN NEEDS** TO BELIEVE.

of the divine passive and the emphasis Jesus places on human inability in John 3:3-8. The Spirit is the one who causes sinners to experience this new birth from above. Second, the sovereignty of the Spirit is manifested in how Jesus compares the Spirit to the wind. Jesus states, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You [plural] must be born again.' The wind [spirit] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." In the Greek the word for Spirit  $(πνε \tilde{v}μα)$  is also wind and likewise the word for wind is also spirit. Jesus is drawing a clear parallel here between wind and Spirit (as made obvious by 3:8), so that when he speaks of one he is speaking of the other. He is comparing the effects of the wind to the effects of the Spirit. It is very important to note that the phrase the "wind blows where it wishes" conveys the sovereignty of the Spirit. The Spirit is not controlled by the human will but works when and

where God pleases to bring about new life. Therefore, a regeneration dependent upon man's will to believe or a regeneration where God and man cooperate is ruled out by this text.

### 1 John 5:1

Just as the gospel of John teaches that the grace that regenerates is monergistic, preceding man's faith, so also in John's first epistle is the same truth evident. For example, consider 1 John 5:1, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him." Notice, "believes" in the phrase "Everyone who believes" (or "Everyone believing") is a present active participle in the nominative case, indicating ongoing faith. In contrast, when John says all those believing "have been born of him," "have been born" is a perfect passive indicative,

## WHAT ARE THE BASIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM?

Thomas R. Schreiner

he fundamental difference between
Calvinists and Arminians is this:
Calvinists believe that human beings
repent and believe because God
causes them to do so by choosing them to be
saved. Arminians believe that the ultimate
reason people believe is our free will. Perhaps
the clearest way to explain the difference is
to contrast the five points of Calvinism and
Arminianism, commonly known by the acronym
TULIP.

Calvinists believe in total depravity. That doesn't mean people are as evil as they can possibly be, but as sinners they have no ability to choose to be saved (Rom. 8:7-8). Arminians believe people are evil but still have the ability to choose to be saved.

Calvinists believe in unconditional election. God from eternity past chooses from his own good pleasure whom will be saved (Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 9:10-23). Armininans believe God looks ahead and sees who will believe in him and then chooses those whom he foresees will have faith.

Calvinists believe in limited atonement, or what is better described as particular redemption. That means Christ's death is particularly for the elect and that he has purchased their faith (Rev. 5:9). Arminians believe in unlimited atonement, which means that Christ died for all people, and those who trust in Christ will be saved. Some people are four point Calvinists and reject limited atonement.

Calvinists believe in irresistible grace. This doesn't mean that no one ever resists God's grace, but that God overcomes the resistance and hardness of those whom he has chosen (John 6:37, 44, 65; Rom. 8:28-30). Arminians believe that God's grace is not effectual and can be resisted.

Calvinists believe in perseverance of the saints (John 10:28-30; Rom. 8:28-39; 1 John 2:19). All those whom God has chosen will never fall away from the faith. Arminians teach that believers can lose their salvation.

**Thomas Schreiner** is James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary meaning that it is an action that has already taken place in the past (it is completed) and has ongoing effects in the present. In 1 John 5:1, in other words, the action in the perfect passive indicative (regeneration) precedes and causes the action in the present active participle (faith). The result is clear: God's act of regeneration precedes belief. The implication, therefore, is that it is God's act of regeneration that creates the faith man needs to believe.

The use of the perfect in 1 John 5:1 can also be found in 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, and 5:4, 18. In these texts we likewise learn that being righteous (2:29), resisting sin (3:9), loving God and neighbor (4:7), having saving knowledge of God (4:7 and 5:1), possessing a faith that overcomes the world(5:4), and abstaining from sin(5:18) all result from and are caused by regeneration.

But what about John 1:12-13, which reads, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Does this text not teach that believing (faith) brings about becoming children of God (the new birth)? In response, John 1:12-13 actually proves the exact opposite.

First, it is mistaken to assume that the

phrase "become children of God" is synonymous with "new birth." Why should the reader assume that the phrase "become children of God" is synonymous with the new birth? Why not interpret becoming a child of God as the result of the new birth? Why not interpret such a phrase as referring to adoption, which is produced by the new

### IT IS MISTAKEN TO ASSUME THAT THE PHRASE "BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD" IS SYNONYMOUS WITH "NEW BIRTH."

birth? Indeed, there are several reasons why the phrase "become children of God" is referring to adoption, not regeneration. (1) The phrase "children of God" in John 1:12 is also used by Paul in Romans 8:15-16 to refer to adoption, not regeneration. Paul writes, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16; cf. Eph. 1:5). Paul's language of adoption is again reiterated when he says in Galatians 3:26, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (cf. Gal. 4:5). As a consequence to believing (John 1:12) or having faith (Gal. 3:26), one is adopted into God's family as a

son. (2) Adoption is emptied of meaning if it is the case that regeneration refers to already being placed in God's family, receiving all the privliges of an heir.

Second, in order to argue that the phrase "become children of God" is referring to the new birth or regeneration, one must take a leap that is not warranted by the text and assume the text reads that one becomes a child of God because he believes. However, the text does not make such a causal correlation in 1:12. In fact, causal language does not come into view until verse 13 which actually prohibits the new birth being conditioned on man's free will, bringing us to the third problem.

Third, we cannot ignore verse 13, which reads, "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Verse 13 actually clarifies and qualifies verse 12. In other words, being born is in no way due to the "will of man." Since the will of man is involved in faith, there is no way that faith could precede being born again.

To conclude verse 13, John makes it clear that the new birth is *not* conditioned upon man's will, but is completely and only the act of God. Therefore, we cannot conclude from verse 12 that regeneration is conditioned upon man's faith.

### BROUGHT FORTH BY GOD'S WILL: JAMES 1:18

James also has much to say concerning regeneration: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." It is important to note two things in this passage. First, "brought us forth" refers to regeneration, as it is a metaphor for spiritual rebirth. As seen with John 3, just as a baby is brought forth or birthed from the womb, so the sinner is brought forth or birthed by the power of God. Second, God brought us forth of "his own will." The emphatic "his" highlights both the gracious benevolence of God in begetting new life to sinners and the omnipotence of God in doing so by "his own will." James' language here is very similar to Peter's when he says that according to God's mercy "he has caused us to be born again" (1 Pet. 1:3). James also shares similarities with John who states that those who believe are born not of the will of man but of God (John 1:12-13). Again, no mention is made of man's cooperation with God's grace nor is there any hint by James that God's work of bringing us forth is conditioned upon man's will to believe. To the contrary, James places all of the emphasis on God. It is God's will, not man's, which brings the sinner into new

life in order that he should be the firstfruits of God's creatures. Therefore, it is "by His doing you are in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:30).

### **CAUSED TO BE BORN AGAIN:** 1 PETER 1:3-5

Peter also places emphasis on God's sovereignty in the new birth. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Peter uses the language of causation to describe God's merciful yet powerful act of new birth. Several observations are necessary. First, the reason Peter gives as to why God is to be praised is that in his great mercy God caused us to be born again. Peter will use the language of spiritual begetting again in 1 Peter 1:23 where he says that they "have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." Here Peter shows that God the Father takes the initiative in producing spiritual children by his Word. Second,

Peter says that this new birth is according to God's great mercy. By definition mercy precludes any possibility of human works or contribution. Believers prior to the new birth are dead in sin and only deserving of God's judgment and wrath. However, as will be seen in Ephesians 2:4-5, God granted mercy to those who rebelled against him. Third, the image of birth is used and as with John 3:5-6, so also in 1 Peter 1:3-5 such an image precludes any human contribution. This becomes apparent when Peter states that out of this great mercy God caused us to be born again. God causes, creates, brings about, and produces the new birth not on the basis of anything we have done but purely on the basis of his great mercy.

### MADE ALIVE WITH CHRIST

### Ephesians 2:1-7

While Jesus and Peter explain regeneration through the imagery of birth, Paul regeneration explains through the imagery of resurrection from the dead.

> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at

work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:1-7).

In Ephesians 2 we see a powerful picture of what takes place in regeneration. The sinner is dead but God makes him alive. The sinner is in the grave but God resurrects him from the dead. Notice, contrary to Arminianism, there is no contingency here or intermediate stage where God begins to make a sinner alive but whether or not God can finally do so is dependentuponthesinner's decision. Rather, the transition is immediate, instantaneous, and unilateral as the sinner is at one moment dead and the next moment alive (Eph. 2:10). The situation is comparable with the resurrection of Christ. Christ was

dead but God in great power resurrected him bodily from the grave (Eph. 1:19-20). Or consider Lazarus who was dead, rotting in the tomb for days, and suddenly, at the command of Christ, he is resurrected and walks out of the tomb alive (John 11).

Moreover, the sinner who is "made alive" has a situation not only comparable to Christ but the new life he receives is actually found in and with Christ. Paul states that God made us alive *together with Christ* and seated us up with Christ in the heavenly

### MOREOVER, THE SINNER WHO IS "MADE ALIVE" HAS A SITUATION NOT ONLY COMPARABLE TO CHRIST BUT THE NEW LIFE HE RECEIVES IS ACTUALLY FOUND IN AND WITH CHRIST.

places (2:6), so that in the coming ages we would know the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us *in Christ Jesus* (2:7). We are right in identifying being made alive with the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). It is Christ's resurrection that is the very basis of the sinner's coming to life with Christ, as is further demonstrated in 2:6 where the sinner is raised up and seated in Christ. Our spiritual resurrection to new life is made explicit by what Paul contrasts it to, namely, deadness in trespasses and

sins and bondage to the world (2:2), Satan (2:2), and the flesh (2:3). Like the rest of mankind we were "by nature children of wrath" (2:3). Therefore, being made alive, implies not only forgiveness but liberation from our former slavery.

Finally, Paul also states that being made alive together with Christ is by grace ("by grace you have been saved"). As seen throughout Paul's epistles, grace stands opposed to merit or any contribution on the part of man (Eph. 2:8-10). Grace is God's favor towards sinners in spite of what they deserve (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:4; 5:15). The word "save" can and is many times used to refer to an eschatological reality, the deliverance from God's wrath and final judgment (1 Thess. 2:16; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 10:33; Rom. 5:9-10; 9:27; 10:9; 11:26). Moreover, in some passages Paul can also describe "saved" as an event in the present (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15), so that he can even say, 'Now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 6:2; cf. Isa. 39:8). However, the case differs in Ephesians 2 for "saved" refers specifically to what has already taken place and been accomplished in the past. In other words, Paul is referring to salvation as something that is already present for Christians. Yes, Paul does draw our attention to the future eschatological consequences of this salvation in verse 7 (being seated with Christ in the coming

age). However, in verses 5-6 Paul shows that being saved by grace means that God making us alive together with Christ is also by grace. Therefore, being made alive or regenerated is neither an act that is accomplished by man's worksrighteousness nor an act conditioned upon man's willful cooperation. Rather, being made alive is by grace and by grace alone, meaning that it is purely by God's initiative, prerogative, and power that the sinner is resurrected from spiritual death. Therefore, it will not do to say that God's grace is a gift to be accepted or resisted. Yes, God's grace is a gift, but more than that it is a powerful gift that actually and effectually accomplishes new life as God intends.

### Colossians 2:11-14

Another passage of Scripture that is a powerful example of monergistic regeneration is Colossians 2:11-14 where Paul writes to the Colossians,

In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without [human] hands, by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him

from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

In verse 11 Paul presents the metaphor of circumcision, a clear reference to the OT where Moses and the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel call for a "circumcision of the heart" (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 44:7; cf. Rom. 2:17). The contrast Paul makes, however, is not a circumcision by human hands but a circumcision by the Spirit on the heart as that which is needed for a person to experience new life in Christ.

As already seen, the metaphor of circumcision itself communicates the monergistic work of God. Spiritual circumcision is an act performed upon the recipient by God, apart from the sinner's cooperation. God and God alone circumcize the heart and then and only then can the sinner trust in Christ. It is only when spiritual circumcision takes place that the sinner is set free from the flesh. As Paul states in verse 12, we have been "raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the

dead." Paul transitions from the metaphor of circumcision to the metaphor of resurrection. Notice the parallel Paul makes in verses 12-13 between God raising Christ from the dead and God spiritually raising the sinner from the dead. Paul calls this act the "powerful work of God" and rightly so for just as God takes a dead corpse and brings it to life so also does he take a dead soul and breath new spiritual life into it.

### THE WASHING OF REGENERATION: TITUS 3:3-7

Paul's words in Colossians show many similarities to his words in Titus,

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified

by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3-7).

Like Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2, Paul begins in Titus 3 with man's depravity and slavery to sin, once again emphasizing man's deadness to sin and spiritual inability. Prior to the washing of regeneration man was a slave to evil desires (cf. Titus 2:12; 1 Tim. 6:9), spending his time in malice, envy, and hatred. However, out of his love and goodness "God our Savior" saved us. How exactly did he save us? Not by our own works of righteousness but purely according to his "own mercy." Therefore, according to Paul, salvation is unconditional. Such mercy is made effective by the power of the Holy Spirit who washes the sinner clean as Paul says "by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (3:5; cf. 2:14). The very purpose of Christ's redeeming work is for the Spirit to purify a people unto God.

Two observations can be made. First, Paul's two prepositional phrases provide the basis for God's redemption of sinners, the first of which dismisses any human contribution and the second of which is a very strong affirmation of salvation based completely on God's mercy. Therefore, works-righteousness or works plus faith is clearly eliminated by Paul. Second, one does not escape the unconditionality of this passage by arguing that while one is saved by faith alone, not works, one must cooperate with God's grace in order to receive the washing of regeneration. This is the Arminian argument and it still contradicts the point Paul is making, namely, that man can contribute absolutely nothing whatsoever to God's work, including the washing of regeneration.

To the contrary, man is passive in the washing of regeneration. Such a point is further proven by the language Paul uses for regeneration. Paul refers to regeneration as a "washing" which is accomplished by the Spirit who renews. Paul's language here parallels 1 Corinthians 6:11, where Paul, much like Titus 3:3-7, begins with a long list of the types of depravity the believer once walked in, but then says such were some of you, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." Notice, not only does Paul use the same metaphor of being "washed" to refer to the change and inner renewal or cleansing that must take place, but he once again ties the washing of regeneration to the agency of the Spirit. Paul's union of regeneration and Spirit both in Titus 3:3-7 and 1 Corinthians 6:11 utilizes the OT language of Ezekiel 36:25-27, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall

be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you" (36:25). God, through Ezekiel, goes on to say in 36:26-27 that he will give them a new heart, putting his Spirit within, and cause them to walk in his ways. Paul, like Ezekiel, is emphasizing the power of the Spirit to wash or regenerate the sinner, causing him to walk in obedience and new life.

As already demonstrated, Ezekiel 36 and John 3 both attribute to the Spirit the sovereign work of regeneration, which is always monergistic. Paul is no different. As demonstrated already in Ephesians 2:5 and Colossians 2:11-14 so also in Titus 3, Paul connects the washing of regeneration with the Spirit who blows wherever he wills, quickening sinners from death to new life. The difference in Titus 3 is that the metaphor has changed slightly from regeneration as birth (John 3:5) or the resurrection from death to new life (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13) or circumcision (Col. 2:14-15), to the washing of the dirty and stained sinner. Yet, though the metaphor shifts, the message remains the same.

LET LIGHT SHINE
OUT OF DARKNESS:
2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6

A final passage that serves to complement what has been seen so far is 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 where we read that God has shone in the hearts of sinners "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here we see an example of the revealing of the Son to those who are veiled and blinded. However, it is not a mere revelation that takes place but the knowledge Paul speaks of is actually a "light" that pierces into the heart and like creation brings into existence a heart that has been radically changed. To understand this miracle we need to look at the entire passage,

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:3-6).

The unbeliever is veiled to the truth of the gospel, blinded by the god of the world so that he cannot see "the light" of the

gospel of the glory of Christ. As one who is blind, the sinner is in darkness, unable to see, and without the spiritual light that comes from beholding Christ in faith.

Keep in mind, however, that it is not the case here that man is blinded and veiled but not to the extent that he cannot see or come to the light of Christ (Semi-Pelagianism). Nor is it the case that man was blinded and veiled but God provided a prevenient grace so that every man can, if he wills to, cooperate and come to the light (classic Arminianism). Neither of these options is present in the text. To the contrary, God acts in a direct, unilateral, unconditional, monergistic manner, creating sight where there was only blindness. As Paul says in verse 6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Paul is referring to Genesis 1:3 where God creates light when "darkness was over the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2). Though darkness hovered over the face of the deep so also did the Spirit, hovering over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2b), so that at the very word light would be created. As Genesis 1:3-4 states, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness." Paul, speaking from personal experience (Acts 9:1-20),

uses this language and miraculous event to describe, in parallel fashion, what takes place when God transforms a sinner. Just as God calls light into being where there is only darkness, so also God calls spiritual light (the light of the glory of his own Son) into being where there is only spiritual darkness. The language of calling light out of darkness resembles the biblical language of regeneration as an act that brings about a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

### CONCLUSION

It has been a common practice among evangelicals to say "you must be born again" in such a way that it is equivalent to the command to repent and trust in Christ. However, these evangelicals wrongly assume that the new birth is something that we must do. In Scripture, however, the new birth is something God accomplishes and gives to us. As seen above, the new birth is not a work conditioned on our will, but rather any spiritual activity by our will is conditioned upon God's sovereign decision to grant us new life by the Spirit.

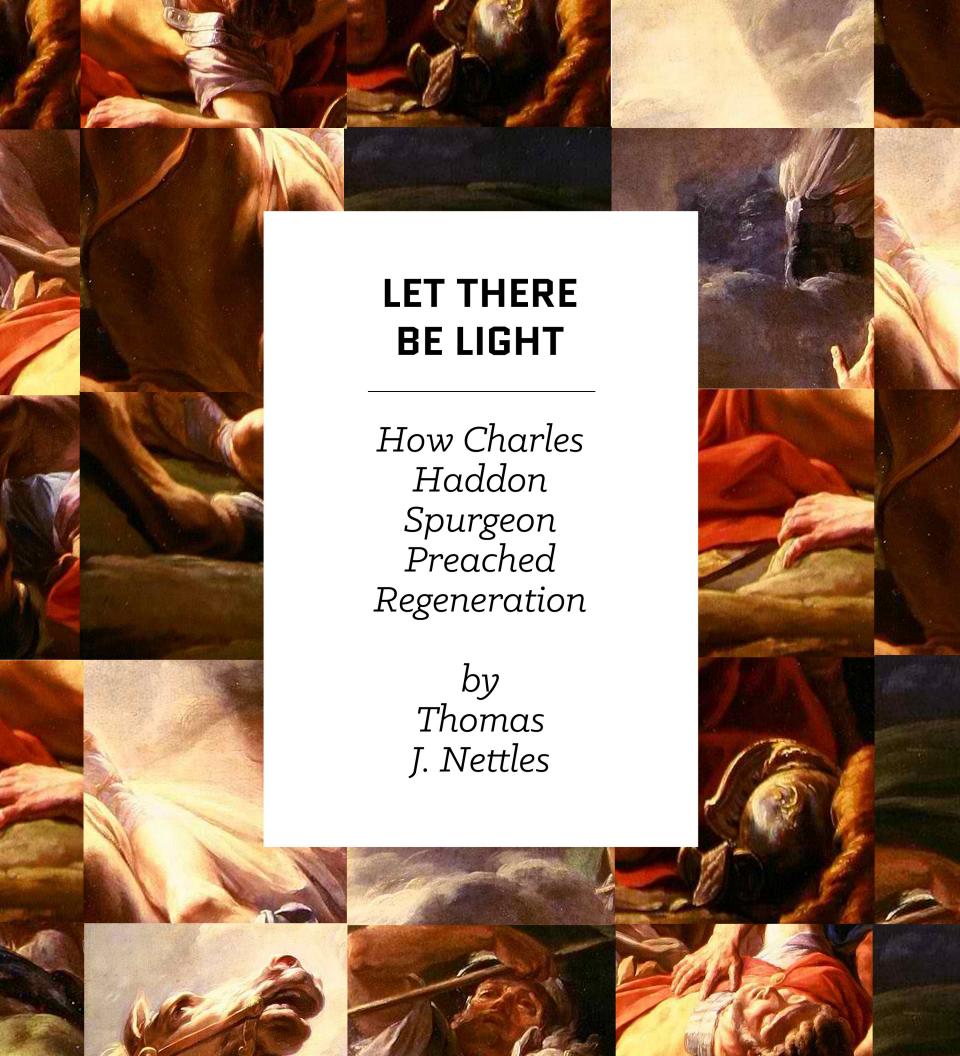
### **ENDNOTES**

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- 3 Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 68. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 459-61.
- 4 John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:318.
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6 Some will object, appealing to
Deuteronomy 10:16, Ezekiel 18:31,
and Jeremiah 4:4. For a response, see
Matthew Barrett, *Reclaiming Monergism*(Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013).

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s a preacher of the gospel, Charles H. Spurgeon not only knew of his personal dependence on the work of the Spirit for the success of his preaching, he felt it right to explain to his hearers how and why both they and he were so dependent.

### PREACH IN BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS

Spurgeon gave special attention to achieving truthful integration of biblical doctrine in his preaching ministry. He believed this was a special stewardship for the preacher. "One point of difficulty," Spurgeon advised, "will be to preach the whole truth in fair proportion, never exaggerating one doctrine, never enforcing one point, at the expense of another, never keeping back any part, nor yet allowing it undue prominence." Relating the work of Christ for us, and outside of us, to the operations of the Spirit within us calls for such fair proportion. "Justification by faith is a matter about which there must be no obscurity, much less equivocation; and at the same time we must distinctly and determinately insist upon it that regeneration is necessary to every soul that shall enter heaven," for Christ himself has made it essential. Spurgeon feared that "Some zealous brethren have preached the doctrine of justification by faith not only so boldly and so plainly, but also so baldly and so out of all connection with other truth, that they have led men into presumptuous confidences, and have appeared lend their countenance to a species of Antinomianism." A dead, inoperative faith should be dreaded and special attention must be given to avoiding it. To proclaim, "Believe," with no attention to the nature of faith, to stress salvation as deliverance without showing that it means "deliverance from the power as well as from the guilt of sin," may satisfy the fervent revivalist as a proper thing for his task, but those that reap the result of such teaching see as much hurt as good in the outcome.

Spurgeon saw an equal danger in the other extreme. To emphasize the necessity of the new creature is clearly biblical. Some, however, focus so ardently and exclusively on this truth and its fruits that they make short work of the "glad tidings that whosoever believeth on Christ Jesus hath everlasting life." The effect often is so "exacting as to the marks and signs of a true born child of God, that they greatly discourage sincere seekers, and fall into a species of legality." Both legalism and antinomian fideism must be avoided. The sinner, deeply aware of his damnable failings, must never receive the impression that he is to look within for the ground of his acceptance before God. We must not allow a contorted emphasis on the glory of the Spirit's internal work to hold in legal bondage many who should presently enjoy peace and the liberty of the children of God.

The third chapter of John gives the perfectly proportioned treatment in the connection of these doctrines. Both the necessity and secret sovereignty of the Spirit and the powers of simple faith in Christ have clear emphasis. In calling the attention of

### REGENERATION, THEREFORE, FOR THE LEAST PRACTICED IN REBELLION OR THE MOST SETTLED IN HOSTILITY IS EQUALLY NECESSARY.

his congregation to this chapter, Spurgeon showed its repeated insistence upon a man's being born of God, and at the same time ascribes wondrous efficacy to faith. Faith, in fact, is the index of our being born again. It overcomes the world, possesses the inward witness, and brings eternal life. In the passage, so Spurgeon preached, Jesus could not "heap honour enough upon believing, while at the same time he insists upon the grave importance of the inward experience connected with the new birth." As a discreet Pastor-Theologian, Spurgeon insisted. "I earnestly long that these two doctrines may be well balanced in your souls."

### NONE ARE EXEMPT

Though Spurgeon believed in a heavenly destiny for all infants dying in infancy, this came because of salvation, not because of innocence. Salvation always and only arises from the sovereign gracious acts of the triune God. Such infants attain to glory and immortality "through the election of God, through the precious blood of

> Christ, through regenerating influence of the Holy Ghost." When Spurgeon preached, "He who can change the course of a river when it

has rolled onward and become a mighty flood, can control a new-born rivulet leaping from its cradle fountain, and make it run in the channel he desireth," he not only taught the possibility of childhood conversion but that infants also were susceptible to, and under the necessity of, the saving influence of the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration, therefore, for the least practiced in rebellion or the most settled in hostility is equally necessary. Regeneration as a grace, gives spiritual life to the human spirit and makes it a willing recipient of all the blessings inherent in the atoning work of Christ. "Other parts of salvation are done gradually," Spurgeon observed, "but regeneration is the instantaneous work of God's sovereign, effectual, and irresistible grace." So Spurgeon viewed the nature of the new birth. That work of the Spirit occurred in an instant and was fundamental to every other manifestation of spiritual life. Justification, of course, in Spurgeon's theology, was not a gradual process but immediate by imputation; but for all the operations of God by his Spirit subsequent to regeneration and justification, a progressive

a grain of saving faith, and it never will."

### REGENERATION IS A NEW CREATION

Spurgeon reminded his preacher students that no soul winning would ever be accomplished apart from the Holy Spirit's working of regeneration. The voice of God in grace carries the same force as the voice of God in creation. "If God says: 'Let

"IF GOD SAYS: 'LET THERE BE LIGHT,' THE IMPENETRABLE DARKNESS GIVES WAY TO LIGHT; IF HE SAYS: 'LET THERE BE GRACE,' UNUTTERABLE SIN GIVES WAY, AND THE HARDEST-HEARTED SINNER MELTS BEFORE THE FIRE OF EFFECTUAL CALLING."

there be light,' the impenetrable darkness gives way to light; if he says: 'Let there be grace,' unutterable sin gives way, and the hardesthearted sinner

realization of transforming influences and the chastened pursuit of freedom from corruption continued throughout this earthly life. God bestowed the source of spiritual life in an instant, and the rivers of living water gradually gave a sustained life to all spiritual fruit. "You shall never find simple faith in Jesus exercised by any life," Spurgeon instructed, "except the life that is born of divine seed in the new birth." In that way, "faith is as much the gift of God as Jesus Christ himself. Nature never did produce

melts before the fire of effectual calling." Life precedes action and as surely as Adam could not resist being given life when God breathed into him the breath of life, neither can the sinner resist this life-giving call of God. All that receive this call receive salvation; none receives salvation but he that receives this call. "Every man that is saved is always saved by an overcoming call which he cannot withstand." Its "essence lies in the implantation and creation of a new principle with the man."

Nursing something of doctrinal a idiosyncrasy, Spurgeon believed that in his fallen nature, prior to regeneration, man consists only of body and soul and "that when he is regenerated there is created in him a new and higher nature—the spirit which is a spark from the everlasting fire of God's life and love." He viewed the human spirit as that point of contact that naturally, intrinsically, welcomed the holy influences of the divine Spirit. The fall pushed that away, and regeneration restores

it—creates it anew. Thenceforward he may be said to consist of body, soul, and spirit. This is what Peter meant by "partakers of the divine nature," Spurgeon believed. Thus by regeneration, the formerly "soulish" man becomes a "spiritual man" capable of and naturally exhibiting the spiritual realities of repentance toward God, faith in

Jesus Christ, and increase of love for God and man. Because man's spiritual life is as dependent upon this divine creative act of regeneration as the world's existence was dependent upon God's power and prerogative, that work must precede all else.

Though Spurgeon employed a variety of images, God's creative prerogative always sustained the substance of his teaching. God's first operation is to pull down the old house and build himself a new one that

"He may be able to inhabit us consistently with His holy spiritual Nature. A new heart is absolutely essential. We must be bornagain or the Spirit of Truth cannot abide within us." Coming to Christ is "the first effect of regeneration." The quickened soul discovers and is horrified at its lost estate, looks for a refuge, and "believing Christ to be a suitable one, flies to him and reposes in him." Preaching on the moral implications of justification by faith, Spurgeon asserted, "When a man turns

THE GRACE OF REGENERATION, **ACCORDING TO SPURGEON'S** RHETORICAL METHOD OF SELF-**CORRECTION, NEITHER FOLLOWS NOR MERELY ACCOMPANIES** TRUST, BUT IS THE MIRACULOUS, **GOD-DRIVEN CAUSE OF IT.** 

> his eyes to Jesus and simply trusts Him for we adhere to that as being the vital matter—there is accompanying that act no, I must correct myself, there is as the cause of that act a miraculous, supernatural power which in an instant changes a man as completely as if it flung him back into nothingness and brought him forth into new life! If this is so, then believing in Christ is something very marvelous." The grace of regeneration, according to Spurgeon's rhetorical method of self-correction, neither

follows nor merely accompanies trust, but is the miraculous, God-driven cause of it.

### THE INADEQUACY **OF ARMINIANISM**

In such a work of grace, the soul is necessarily passive. Arminianism falls to the ground in its explanation of this transaction and nothing will do but that "old-fashioned truth men call Calvinism." This portion of Calvinistic thought, "the immutable truth of the living God," gave all the glory to God and put man in his proper place as an absolute dependent in this matter; man cannot make a new heart for himself. The heart as the center of life, cannot create

THERE NEVER WAS A MAN YET, THAT

HAIR TOWARDS MAKING HIMSELF A

DID SO MUCH AS THE TURN OF A

The exertions of the old heart can not bring forth a new heart. A tree dead at its core can

itself a new center.

not generate for itself a new core. Even so, "there never was a man yet, that did so much as the turn of a hair towards making himself a new heart. He must lie passive there—he shall become active afterwards—but in the moment when God puts a new life into the soul, the man is passive." Though he actively resists the early stages of God's call upon him, in the moment of regeneration

**NEW HEART.** 

all resistance falls and the positive infusion of new life is all of God. The recipient of this effectual call finds it indeed to be an "irresistible grace," does nothing, and must be described as passive in the transaction. God's overcoming, victorious grace, gets the mastery over man's will.

All of this happens in accordance with the rational and moral order established in the eternal covenant of grace—in eternity given to the Son who was the promised seed of the woman, and finally drawn by the Spirit to be enemies to the serpent even as Christ was, and finally, with Christ, trampling him under foot. Central to the sinner's shift from personal enmity toward God in alliance with the Adversary, to the rescue from him, to victory over him is the reality

> of regeneration. It is a work of omnipotence, unilateral and irresistible action of God, one that

he necessarily does without the aid of the sinner who is the object of this action. In the regeneration of our nature the Lord alone is seen, Spurgeon proclaimed. Before a creature can give another a new heart he must suspend the laws of gravitation, recall the thunderbolt, reverse the chariot of the sun, and transform the Atlantic to a lake of fire.

### THE AFFECTIONS AND THE HEART

Spurgeon focused on the importance of the affections in this saving work. The same God who made men, in dealing with the fountain of all affection and thus action, the heart, makes them new. Until the affections be renewed, "it is not possible for any man to love the Lord Jesus Christ." If not, then it is also impossible for a person to have faith apart from this same renewal, for the assumption of faith is that a sinner has come to hate the life of sin and love righteousness as he sees it in its beauty in the obedience of Jesus Christ. When a Christian reflects on the reality of such a conversion, he cannot believe that he

### **UNTIL THE AFFECTIONS BE** RENEWED, "IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR ANY MAN TO LOVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST."

himself has effected it. The free will doctrine may be held as theory, "but you never find a believer hold it as a matter of experience." When Spurgeon was accused of preaching that Christ grabbed people by the hair of the head to drag them to him, he responded that "I believe that he draws them by the heart quite as powerfully as your caricature would suggest." This drawing, though infallibly irresistible, is not compulsion that violates a resisting will. "Christ never compelled any man to come to him against his will." The Spirit makes a man willing by going to "the secret fountain of the heart" and through a "mysterious operation" turns the will "in an opposite direction."

### AN UNFAILING CHRIST AND AN UNFAILING SPIRIT

In the interests of demonstrating this symmetrical and integrative approach at the core of Spurgeon's theology, we come full circle to show briefly the relation between effectual calling and atonement.

> "All for whom Christ died shall be pardoned, all justified, all adopted. The Spirit shall quicken them all, shall give them all faith, shall bring them all to heaven, and they shall, every one of them, without let or

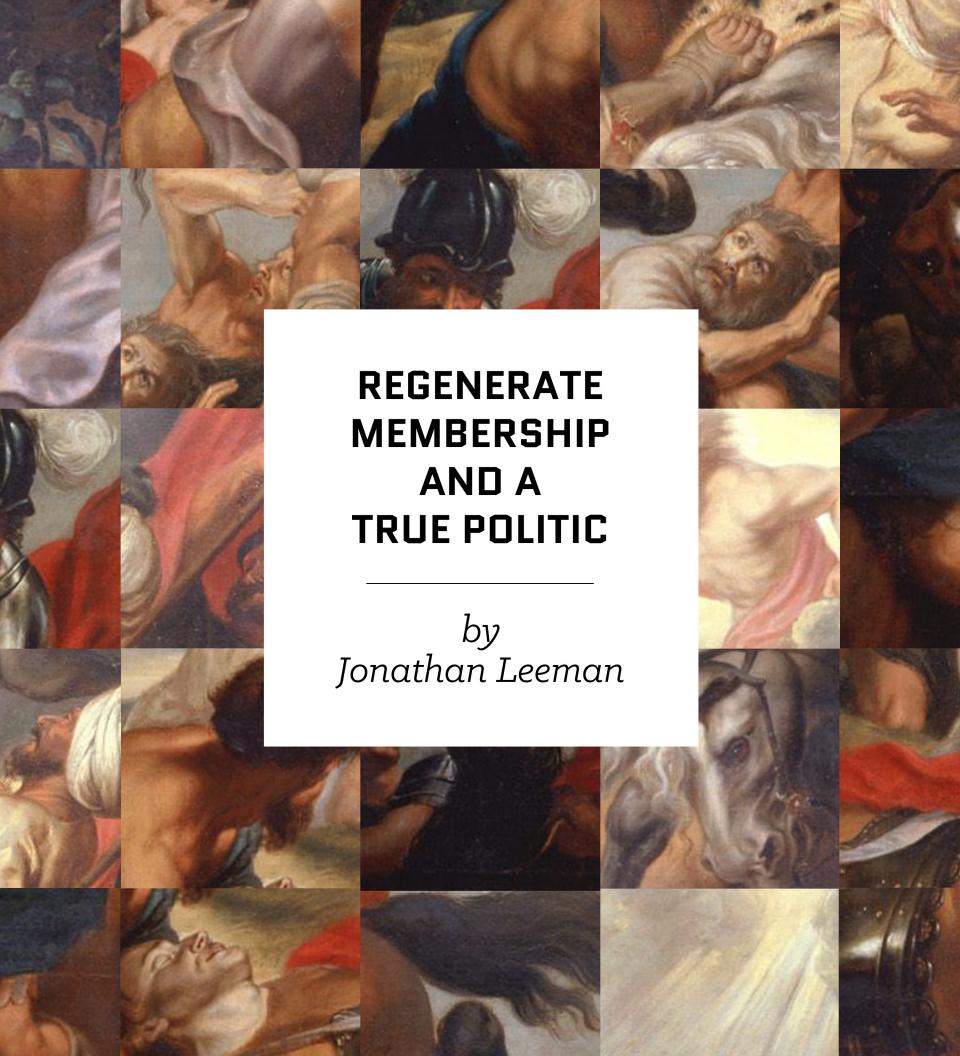
hindrance, stand accepted in the Beloved." The will of sinners shall not be done in the matter of salvation but rather the will of Christ in dying for those whom the Father gave him. Though one may say or feel that he doesn't want salvation, Spurgeon countered, "The gospel wants not your

consent. It knocks the enmity out of your heart." The hardness of sinners against Christ today is such that should he appear, this generation would resist him again and put him to open shame, and execute him for "not one of you would consent if you were left to your will." But his death shall not be in vain and if some reject him others will not. "Christ *shall* see his seed, he *shall* prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord *shall* prosper in his hands."

Some believe that many for whom Christ died will nevertheless be lost at last. "I never could understand that doctrine," Spurgeon replied; those for whom he died are as secure as the angels in heaven for "God cannot ask payment twice. If Christ paid my debt, shall I have to pay it again?" Certainly not; for those for whom he substituted himself certainly will come and "naught in heaven or on earth, nor in hell, can stop them from coming." The success

of this atonement is certain for the Spirit has pledged "I hereby covenant, that all whom the Father giveth to the Son, I will in due time quicken." The Son's completion of his covenantal obedience brings about the gift of the Spirit for those for whom he died; and the Spirit induces the seeing, loving, trusting and uniting of the elect person with Christ in the triumphs of his obedience.

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he words "regenerate church membership" have always struck me as somewhat polemical, even adversarial. The point of the doctrine, historically at least, is to correct the error of paedobaptism. Focus your eyes on the word *regenerate*. Church membership is for *regenerate* believers, not for unregenerate, unbelieving infants.

Also, the doctrine rightly offers pastoral pragmatism a polemical poke. The church growth talk of "belonging before believing," brandished here and there, blurs the line between church and world. Yes, church gatherings should be friendly, hospitable, and loving. But letting unbelievers believe they "belong" only confuses them about what church really is—a regenerate and repentant assembly.

## THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP EXISTS AS A RESPONSE TO ERROR.

In short, the doctrine of regenerate church membership exists as a response to error.

Now, the polemical approach serves a good and necessary purpose. But it narrows the scope of the conversation. Unless you are engaging with paedobaptists or church marketers, it is hard to get excited about the topic.

But what if there is something in the doctrine of regenerate church membership for all Christians to see—something glorious? In fact, I believe this oft overlooked and seemingly sectarian doctrine points us to nothing less than the heavenly-sanctioned model of true politics.

### A JUST AND A LASTING PEACE

Abraham Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, exhorted the war-torn America to do everything it could to "achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations"—words now carved in marble inside the monument bearing his name. And, no doubt, those presidents

and peoples who pursue such justice and peace deserve a seat of honor. But here is one of the Bible's primary lessons in the movement from old covenant to new: it is only the regenerate

local church that has been enabled by the Lord and the power of the new covenant to begin enjoying such a just and lasting peace.

So stop looking at the monumental presidents and mighty peoples described in your high school history book. And glance over at those two crumpled old women sitting in the church pew. Have you noticed them before? Both of them have persevered in the faith for decades. Both have listened carefully week after week to their king's words heralded from a pulpit. And year after year, decade after decade, through the ebb and flow of seasons, through the raising of children and the temptation to compare whose children rise higher, through the petty jealousies of friendship and the desire to outdo one another, through the divergent paths of financial prosperity and the attendant threats of covetousness and condescension, through hasty words and hurt feelings, through times good and bad, these two old women, unrelated by blood, enemies by birth, have, by the power of the Spirit, found their worth and justification in an alien righteousness. And so they have discovered the freedom to forgive one another's hasty words, to surrender

**GOD, ADAM, AND EVE CONSTITUTED** THE FIRST POLITICAL SOCIETY ON THE PLANET.

those desires to compete and compare, to outdo one another only in showing honor, to fight for sisterly love amidst everything that would have torn them apart.

Here is where you will find a true politics. Do you see it? Between these two women we find the just and the lasting peace that Lincoln could only orate about, and for which the nations long. You will find it there in the pews, wherever two or three are gathered to bow down before Jesus and are lifted up together in obedience by his Spirit.

The ground for all this is the new covenant. The new covenant is the political dynamite which moves mountains and does what no other political program in history has been able to do: change people.

### **POLITICAL FAILURE** AND PROMISE

Let's back up and retrace how we get to the political promise of the new covenant.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, Old Testament scholar says Gordon McConville, the "political question" at stake "is how the just rule of the one God Yahweh in the world might be implemented in the political life of a people."

If "politics" is fundamentally organizing and governing the life of a people in the polis, then God, Adam, Eve and constituted the first political society on the planet. The laws were few, and Adam and Eve's remit as broad as sky, sea, and earth. But they couldn't keep the peace or walk in righteousness. Both pulled out their parchment paper and ink quills to draft separate constitutions, each crowning themselves king. The Garden, it seems, was a political failure.

Which leaves the rest of history with the question, says McConville: "Can there be a recipe for mature political life, nurturing the creation intension to bless

IF "POLITICS" IS FUNDAMENTALLY ABOUT ORGANIZING AND GOVERNING THE LIFE OF A PEOPLE IN THE POLIS, THEN GOD, ADAM, AND EVE CONSTITUTED THE FIRST POLITICAL SOCIETY ON THE PLANET.

humanity, the dignity of humanity as such, and the divine will to righteousness in the world?"<sup>2</sup> Good question.

At first, it looked like the ethnic descendants of Abraham would provide the answer. Perhaps they would model true righteousness and justice. God called Abraham's offspring to bless the nations (Gen. 22:18), and Abraham's body was to produce not just a nation but a company of nations and kings (35:11; cf. 17:16).

Father Abraham, it seems, was to produce not only biological children but political children—a multitude of nations.<sup>3</sup> And Abraham's family would bless the nations as long as Abraham "command[ed] his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice" (18:19).

Inotherwords, Godwould give Abraham what he commanded of Adam. He commanded Adam, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). He promised Abraham, "I...will multiply you...I will make you exceedingly fruitful" (17:2, 6, NAS).

Several generations later, Abraham's family even formalized as a nation. This would put his descendants on an international stage as a more public and visible model: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests

and a holy nation" (see Exod. 19:5-6).

Scholars Peter Gentry and Steve Wellum help interpret this enigmatic phrase: Israel would "make the ways of God known to the nations" like priests, and "bring the nations into a right relationship to God" like kings. By keeping the stipulations of the covenant, furthermore, Israel would "display to the rest of the world within its covenant community the kind of relationships first to God and then to one

another and to the physical world, that God intended originally for all humanity."4

The book of Deuteronomy confirms what these two scholars say. Israel's obedience would commend this model body politic in the sight of the nations:

> Keep them and do these commands, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."... And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? (Deut. 4:6, 8).

God's government is wise, and the nations would see this when God's people followed in God's ways.

### ANOTHER FAILURE **AND PROMISE**

Sadly, this is not how Israel's history went down. Israel and kings its rebelled. They didn't represent God's and righteousness wisdom their corporate life. They mimicked the folly and idolatry of the nations instead. The injustice and unrighteousness result: (e.g. Isa. 1:23; 10:1-2; Jer. 5:28).

And the lesson: Like God's covenant with Adam, the Mosaic covenant appeared to fail as a political program. It didn't go "deep" enough into the human being. It couldn't give what it asked for: circumcised and obedient hearts (Deut. 10:4). People can change their natures no sooner than leopards can change their spots (see Jer. 13:23). "The heart wants what it wants," said Woody Allen.5

In fact, a political program, to be truly successful, requires more than the right

### A TRULY SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL PROGRAM REQUIRES NEW (OR RENEWED) NATURES. ONLY THEN DO COMMANDS BECOME FREEDOM.

combination of laws and external structures. It needs those, but it needs two other things as well. A truly successful political program requires new (or renewed) natures. Only then do commands become freedom.

And it requires a new basis for action. Ordinarily, human activity roots in some form of self-justification, some argument for why we deserve to sit on

God's throne. (Self-justification and self-enthronement have always been correlates, the former providing as the basis for the latter.) It is like the politician who thinks he *deserves* office because he's wiser, wealthier, whiter, or whatever.

But when you remove all the self-justifying arguments; when you convince a people that

MOVING FROM THE MOSAIC TO THE NEW COVENANT, IN OTHER WORDS, IS NOT ABOUT MOVING FROM CORPORATE TO INDIVIDUAL, OR FROM OBEDIENCE-REQUIRED TO NO-OBEDIENCE-REQUIRED. IT IS ABOUT MOVING FROM A COVENANT IN WHICH ISRAEL'S OBEDIENCE AND POLITICAL LIFE DEPEND UPON THEIR OWN STRENGTH TO A COVENANT IN WHICH THEIR OBEDIENCE AND POLITICAL LIFE WOULD DEPEND UPON GOD'S SPIRIT.

they actually deserve judgment; when you then forgive their crimes and restore them to the enfranchised life of the community in spite of their crimes, you give them a whole new basis for their activity. No longer do they need to prove themselves. They are there by mercy, and now they can act for love's sake. An alien justification removes the need for self-justification, and all the social hierarchies that result from it, freeing people to love. (Just as self-justification and self-enthronement are correlates, so a divine justification and obedience are correlates.) Forgiveness, in other words, yields a whole new brand of politics, a politics of love.

Sure enough, these are the two things that the new covenant provides (e.g. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27): a new nature and the promise of a politics grounded in forgiveness. Take Jeremiah's description of the new covenant:

- The covenant establishes a community of people ruled by one ruler—a body politic: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."
- It gives them new, obedient, and free natures: "I will put my law within them."
- It establishes this body politic on a foundation of judicial pardon and political reconciliation: "I will forgive their iniquity."
- It even guarantees a basic equality of political access and privilege among every member of the group: "for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."

Looking at this passage, McConville calls the new covenant "an answer to the problem of a disintegrated society."

Moving from the Mosaic to the new covenant, in other words, is not about moving from corporate to individual, or from obedience-required to no-obedience-required. It is about moving from a covenant in which Israel's obedience and political life *depend upon their own strength* to a covenant in which their obedience and political life would *depend upon God's Spirit*: from "Circumcise your heart" so that you obey (Deut. 10:16) to "God will circumcise your heart" so that you obey (Deut. 30:6).

Just as the Abrahamic covenant promised to give what the Adamic Covenant commanded, so the new covenant, from one vantage point, gives what the Mosaic covenant commanded.

In the new covenant, God promises to keep us: "I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me" (Jer. 32:40). A person does not move in and out of the new covenant. God's promises are decisive, and he promises to keep us. He will make it so.

## THE CHURCH: A SUPERNATURALLY CHANGED PEOPLE

Which brings us back to regenerate church membership. Who is the church? It is the people of Christ's new covenant, a people indwelt by his Spirit who live on the basis of his forgiveness. It is a body of people gathered around a king who—remarkably, unbelievably— have new hearts that love to obey this king.

Don't you see? All of redemptive history pushes toward this conclusion. If the Mosaic covenant had been faultless, there would not have been need for another. But God found fault with the people, and so he said, "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Heb. 8:7-10).

It was not ethnic Israel of whom the nations would finally say, "What a wise and understanding people." Rather, it would be "through the church" that "the manifold wisdom of God" would be made known (Eph. 3:10; cf. Deut. 4:6). It would not be ethnic Israel who would remain God's holy nation and royal priesthood. It would be the church (Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). What is the church but *a supernaturally changed* 

and forgiven people gathered around history's true king (see 1 Cor. 2:12-13)!

We sing about this king in our Christmas services: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it

## THE LOCAL CHURCH PRESENTS US WITH NOTHING LESS THAN THE HEAVENLY-SANCTIONED MODEL OF TRUE POLITICS, TRUE JUSTICE, AND TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore" (Isa. 9:7; see also Isa. 11). And this king governs a people of whom it is said, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:4).

Local churches, these covenanted assemblies of believers, confront the nations as embassies of light, embassies that represent not another kingdom on the planet, but a kingdom imported from the end of time. And these embassies will provoke both an envy that leads to persecution and a wonder that leads to praise (see Matt. 5:10-16; also, 1 Pet. 2:10-12).

Jesus labels their members "sons of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38), and he calls them to an unworldly political ethic: They should not hate, discriminate, or murder, but seek reconciliation (5:21-25). They are not to exploit or use others (5:27-30). They will honor God's common covenant ordinances

like marriage (5:31-32). They should speak truthfully on all occasions (5:33-37). They employ their property to protect and equip others (5:38-42). They even love their enemies (5:44-45). What kindofpoliticalsociety is that?!

A church consists of those who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2), the "faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1), and "the holy and faithful" (Col. 1:2). Sixty times the New Testament refers to them as "saints." They are "called, beloved...and kept" (Jude 1; also Rom. 1:7). That's why, writing to the church in Rome, Paul can so clearly assume every member had been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, seemingly when each of them had repented (Rom. 6:3-4).

The local church presents us with nothing less than the heavenly-sanctioned model of true politics, true justice, and true righteousness. Perfectly? No, but here a new history of a new creation has begun.

### BACK TO THE ADVERSARIAL

Can unregenerate, unbelieving infants belong to this company of heavenly citizens, as the paedobaptist argues? It would seem to fly in the face of the whole movement of redemptive history.

What role then do such children play? They are given front row seats to these new realities and in some sense could even be said to be "sanctified" by them (1 Cor. 7:14). Indeed, they, more than any, should be able to taste this true politics by living in the home of regenerate parents. What a privilege! But a taste of

MY CHURCH, AND HOPEFULLY YOURS, IS WHERE MEN AND WOMEN OF MAJORITY AND MINORITY ETHNICITIES JOIN HANDS AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS. IN MY CHURCH, AND HOPEFULLY YOURS, WE HAVE BEGUN TO FORGIVE AND LOVE OUR ENEMIES.

the Spirit is not enough (see Heb. 6:4).

Do we do our unbelieving children any favors by admitting them to this regenerate society of heavenly citizens? Does not this very act declare the church to be something other than an embassy of changed people kept by God? Does it not say to them that they can move in and out of the new covenant, and that God won't actually keep them in it?

Would it not offer more room for hope to say to our children (assuming this is biblical), "If you repent and believe, you, too, will belong to God's true humanity"? It hardly seems like an act of kindness to diminish the wonder of the church by writing the unregenerate and unkept into its definition.

### I HAVE A DREAM

Like most Americans, I love Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech. He

> dreams of a place "where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers."

I know of at least one place where King's dream has begun to take hold in reality. It's not in America, and it's not even in my family, which presently has three young children. It's in my local church.

My church, and hopefully yours, is where

men and women of majority and minority ethnicities join hands as brothers and sisters. In my church, and hopefully yours, we have begun to forgive and love our enemies. A strange justice has begun to take hold in our hearts. It is not that injustice is overlooked. It cannot be—that would be unjust! Rather, it has been paid for by someone else. So now we pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). And then we seek to put on the justice and righteousness of our king.

The nations and their governors can only dream of such a holy nation!

### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 See John Hammett's excellent and straightforward chapter, "Regenerate Church Membership," in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Jason Duesing, Malcolm Yarnell III (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 21-44. I cannot improve on it here.
- 2 Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 171.

- 3 See Paul Williamson, "Covenant," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 147.
- 4 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 305; cf. 320-29. See also Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 172.
- 5 "The heart wants what it wants," an interview by Walter Isaacson with Woody Allen, *TIME*: August 31, 1992.
- 6 J. Gordon McConville, "Theology of Jeremiah," in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 765.
- 7 Hammett, "Regenerate Church Membership."

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# THE UNDOMESTICATED DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

Douglas A. Sweeney
Talks with Matthew Barrett
About the 18th Century
Great Awakening,
The Theology of
George Whitefield
and Jonathan Edwards,
as Well as the Dangers of
Nominal Christianity

### hat brought about the 18th century Great Awakening, who were its noted representatives, and what were its defining characteristics?

The revivals that Americans call "the Great Awakening" began in Europe, usually in places where the Pietists had been active. They quickly spread to the British Isles and Britain's North American colonies, partly due to the missionary work of Pietists such as Nicholas Count von Zinzendorf's Moravians. In the English-speaking world, their early leaders were the Methodists—Arminian Methodist preachers such as John and Charles Wesley, and Calvinistic Methodists such as the famous George Whitefield. In America, Jonathan Edwards came to be the most important revival spokesman in New England, while Gilbert Tennent and others spread revival farther south.

## Is there a sense in which we can say that the 18<sup>th</sup> century Great Awakening was indebted to Reformation and Puritan thought?

Definitely. The leaders of the revivals were steeped in Reformation theology (both Lutheran and Reformed), while their emphases on personal faith, genuine conversion, and the ministry of the Word were fueled by movements for the further reformation of the church led by Puritans and Pietists in Britain, the Netherlands, and Lutheran territory farther south.

## Was the doctrine of regeneration (the new birth) significant in the preaching of George Whitefield and why?

To say that regeneration was significant to Whitefield is an understatement. Whitefield's preaching usually *centered on* the new birth. Whitefield felt a special burden as an evangelical clergyman in England's national church to help people understand that there is a wide, eternal difference between nominal commitment to one's cultural Christianity and vital, twice-born, Spirit-filled Christianity.

One of the most famous debates during this period is between George Whitefield and John Wesley on the subject of Calvinism and Arminianism. In what ways did these two men disagree with each other when it came to God's sovereignty in salvation?

Whitefield was a Calvinist who taught that God has elected some (not all) for the blessings of salvation unconditionally, that is, in a way that was not based on anything that they would do. Wesley was an Arminian who taught that God has elected the saints based upon His foreknowledge of how they would respond to the offer of the gospel. Despite these differences, both men taught the doctrine of predestination. And both preached the good news to everyone who would listen.

Most know Jonathan Edwards for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." But one of his best sermons is, "A Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God." What is this sermon about and why was Edwards' message so important if his people were to have a biblical understanding of how God works in the heart of a sinner?

"A Divine and Supernatural Light" is about spiritual regeneration and the difference the Holy Spirit makes in the lives of true Christians. Edwards argued in this sermon that while the Spirit of God may "act *upon* the mind of a natural man" (that is, he may work upon unconverted people from without), "he acts *in* the mind of a saint as an indwelling vital principle." He gives converted people "a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the Word of God, and a conviction of the truth and

reality of them." He gives them a sense, a taste, a relish and delight in the things of God. He gives them real, personal knowledge of the Lord. There is "a difference," Edwards preached, "between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace." When the Spirit enters one's life, renovating one's mind and heart, reorienting one's affections, he gives one an existential acquaintance with God himself. As a tax-supported minister in a nominally Christian country, Edwards wanted to make sure that people understood the difference between nominal Christianity and the genuine Christian faith that the Spirit of God himself effects in us.

When Edwards saw that his preaching was being used by the Spirit to awaken dead hearts, he also noticed that God was doing, as he called it, a "surprising work" of revival in the church at large. However, did Edwards have certain concerns as well?

Yes. Edwards knew that the devil can counterfeit religious zeal and use it to harm us. That is why he spent so much time teaching and writings about the "distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God." In times of heightened religious intensity (like the time of the

Great Awakening), Edwards encouraged people to "try the spirits" (1 John 4) and see if they were from God. And the best test, he said, of real, godly spirituality is to ask oneself whether it has enhanced one's love for God, one's conviction of the reality of the things revealed in the Bible, and has fueled one's daily practice of Christian charity in the world. The devil does not counterfeit such things!

Moving forward, one of the most controversial figures of the 19th century was the revivalist Charles Finney. In what ways did Finney's revivals (and the theology behind his revivals) differ so radically from those in the 18th century, especially in comparison to Whitefield and Edwards?

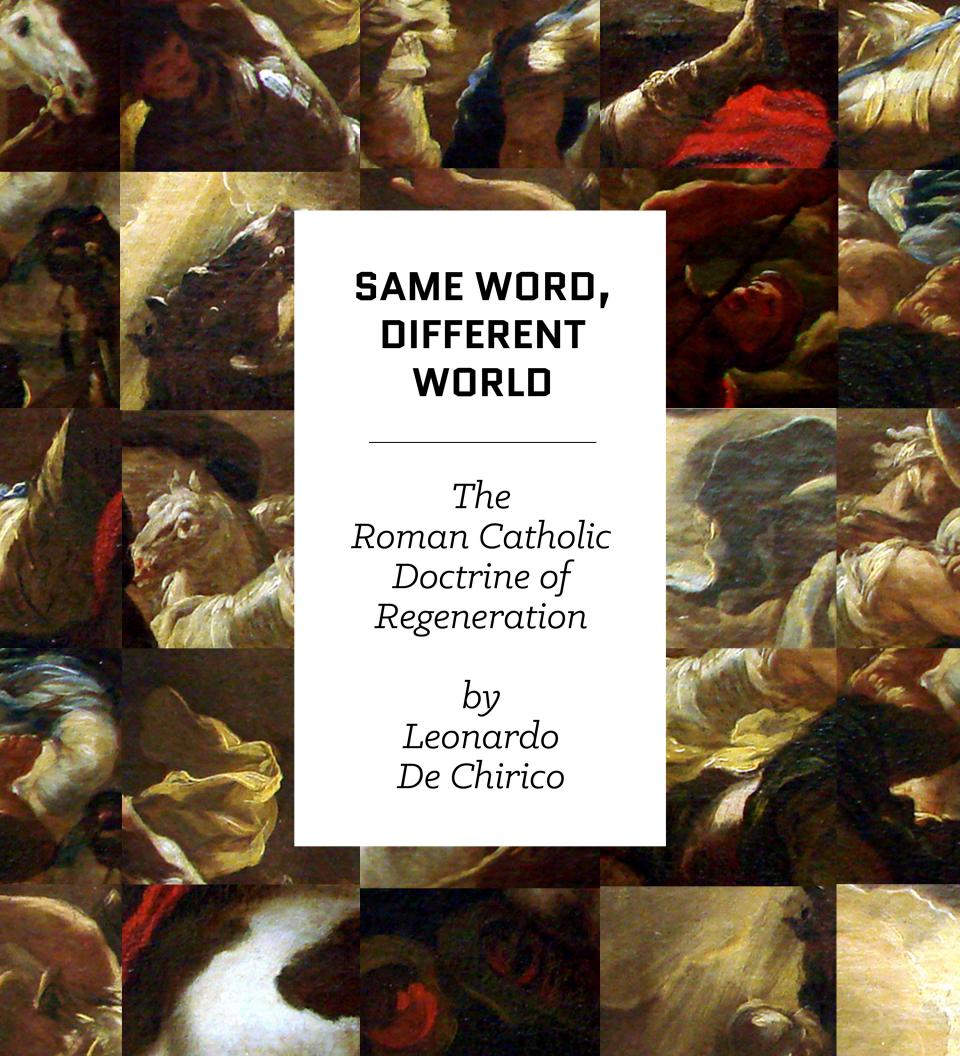
Finney was upset that so many Calvinists in his day used predestination as an excuse not to work for further revival. He believed that genuine revival requires the work of the Holy Spirit, but he also taught that God does not bless complacent people. Finney was something of a maverick who liked to rattle cages. So he taught that revivals are not bolts from the blue, but events that can be manufactured by prayer, planning, and zeal. Finney taught people how to orchestrate religious revivals. This has led both friends and foes to view revivals as mere exercises

in moral and emotional manipulation.

In what sense would you say Evangelicals today are heirs of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Great Awakening and have we lost or maintained the great emphasis they had on the new birth and its necessity for entering the kingdom of God?

I think the Great Awakening and its spiritual and ecumenical emphases are what distinguish modern, interdenominational, international evangelicalism from other forms of orthodox Protestantism. The new sense of Christian identity and new ministry patterns yielded by 18th century revivals have made us who we are today. But they have also played a role in undermining state churches which, in turn, undermined the way that evangelical ministers like Edwards, Whitefield, and Wesley (all of whom were state-church pastors) preached for genuine conversion. After the evangelical movement rose to prominence in the West, many assumed that its members must be genuinely converted. But lots of free churches today—that is, non-state churches—are rife with superficial faith, merely nominal Christianity. This is a tragic irony. Evangelicals have domesticated the doctrine of regeneration. We need to study Edwards again, reapplying his supernatural understanding of conversion in our own situations. As he preached on John 3, "If there be such a thing as conversion, 'tis the most important thing in the world; and they are happy that have been the subjects of it and they most miserable that have not." We need to ask ourselves today whether the Spirit of God has given us a longing for God and His Word, and has filled our souls with wisdom and love for service in the world. We need to ask ourselves whether we've been supernaturally changed.

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he doctrine of regeneration belongs to the core of the biblical view of salvation and is a term that is shared by all Christian traditions in their respective accounts on what it means to be saved. To be regenerated by God is the act by which God himself re-creates life in an otherwise spiritually dead person. Regeneration is, therefore, the entry point of a saved life. Surveying the biblical evidence, J. I. Packer summarizes it this way: Regeneration "means rebirth (palingenesia): it speaks of a creative renovation wrought by the power of God." On the surface, the theological meaning of the word is pretty clear and all Christian traditions acknowledge it. However, the difference between them is not so much in the word itself, but the theological "worlds" in which they implant the word in order to make sense of it.

A theological word is not a self-contained unit. Though it carries its own semantic weight, it is also defined by when and where it is found, the web of references which are associated with it, who is involved in enacting it, as well as the practices that precede, accompany and follow it. In other words, regeneration as a word can have one meaning which is common to all, but regeneration as a doctrine may point to different theological directions depending on the way it is construed.

In what follows we will explore how Roman Catholicism understands the doctrine of regeneration, especially as articulated by the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>2</sup> This magisterial authoritative source is a thoughtful and comprehensive explanation of the Catholic faith and is the best place to come to terms with what the Roman Catholic Church believes about regeneration.

### THE VOCABULARY OF REGENERATION

One way of pursuing our goal is to examine the vocabulary used by the *Catechism* as far as regeneration is concerned. There does not seem to be a specific and technical definition of the term, but the *Catechism* uses the word by associating it with other biblical and liturgical words and expressions that contribute towards its definition. In doing so it approximately indicates the meaning of regeneration by way of connecting it to similar words.

As a life-giving event, regeneration is related to "new birth" or "re-birth" (e.g., 1213; 1270). Therefore, the *Catechism* translates the Greek-derived word (re-generation) into birth-related words. In another metaphorical area, regeneration is linked to the transition from darkness to light (e.g.,

1250) and to the inner renewal of one's own self and purification from sin (e.g., 1262). Moreover, regeneration is further associated with entering the kingdom of God (1263). No doubt there are biblical references here and there to support each meaning.

What is most striking however is the

relationship that the Catechism envisages between regeneration and the sacrament of baptism. More than its biblical nuances and theological significance, it is this inherent association

that ultimately defines the Roman Catholic understanding of the core of regeneration.

### **SACRAMENTAL** REGENERATION

As it is well known, the *Catechism* is structured according to the order of the Apostles' Creed (the profession of faith), followed by the presentation of the sacraments (the celebration of the Christian mystery), the Christian life including the Ten Commandments (life in Christ), and the life of prayer, which is centered on the Lord's prayer. In this overall framework, it is interesting to notice where regeneration is theologically placed and treated. It is

not found in the section on work of Christ, nor in the section on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but instead comes to the fore in the second part which deals with the sacraments of the Church. Doctrinally, then, regeneration, though organically related to the work of the triune God, is specifically attached to the sacramental

WHAT IS MOST STRIKING HOWEVER IS THE RELATIONSHIP THAT THE CATECHISM ENVISAGES BETWEEN REGENERATION AND THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

> ministry of the Church. From a systematic point of view, the Roman Catholic theological map places regeneration under the rubric of the liturgy of the Church rather than in the chapter on God's salvation.

> More specifically, it is the sacrament of baptism that plays a fundamental role in bringing regeneration about.

> > Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the

Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word" (1213).

The final quote comes from the 1566 Roman Catechism (II, 2, 5), which was published as a result of the Council of Trent. Notice, however, that no scriptural reference is given to support the doctrine, but rather it appears as the combination of different biblical words, which are given a sacramental bent. Such an absence of biblical support is telling. Indeed, there is no clear biblical evidence to support such a weighty doctrinal statement. In the Catechism, baptism is seen as the sacrament which accords freedom from sin and re-birth as children of God. As

IN THE CATECHISM, HOWEVER, IT IS
THE SACRAMENT THAT "SIGNIFIES
AND ACTUALLY BRINGS ABOUT"
REGENERATION. IT IS THE ACT OF
BAPTISM THAT CAUSES THE NEW BIRTH
TO OCCUR EX OPERE OPERATO (FROM THE
WORK DONE).

regeneration is the result of baptism and baptism is administered by the Church, it is syllogistically evident that regeneration does not happen as an act of God's grace alone, to be received by faith alone, but as an act mediated by the sacrament of the Church who enacts its intended result.

Expanding its teaching on baptism as that which effects regeneration, the Catechism goes on to say that this "sacrament is also called 'the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit,' for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit (1215). This time the language comes directly from Titus 3:5, but fails to indicate that the biblical passage puts the "washing of regeneration" in the context of God's goodness and loving kindness, stressing that we are not saved because of "works done by us," but out of "his own mercy." The focus of the whole passage is God alone working out his loving plan of salvation without any contribution

on man's part nor on the church's part — any work of any kind. In the *Catechism*, however, it is the sacrament that "signifies and actually brings about" regeneration. It is the act of baptism that causes the new birth to occur *ex opere operato* (from the work done). The emphasis

has shifted from the merciful God who regenerates out of his sovereign grace to the baptizing Church who performs the sacrament of regeneration. In other words, a major shift has taken place: from

### **"SANCTIFYING GRACE" & "GRACE OF** JUSTIFICATION"

These terms here are confusing for a Protestant reader: "sanctifying grace" is defined as "the grace of justification," therefore significantly blurring sanctification and justification. Ecumenical advocates tell us that the 1997 unofficial document "The Gift of Salvation" and the 1999 official Roman Catholic-Lutheran "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" reached a substantial agreement on sola fide. The reality is that the Catechism (which is far more authoritative than the just mentioned texts) keeps on confusing sanctification and iustification, as the Council of Trent had done in the XVI century.

the graceful act of divine salvation to the participation of the Church in the saving act, and from the free gift of God to the ecclesiastical sacrament ministered by the priest.

According to the *Catechism*, the time of regeneration is when baptism is administered. It is the baptized person that is regenerated and therefore enters the sacramental life of the Church in whose sacraments he/she will receive the fullness of salvation.<sup>3</sup> It is through baptism that the person is forgiven from all sins (1263), made a new creature, adopted as a son of God, becomes a member of Christ, a co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit (1265). It is in baptism that the person receives "sanctifying grace, the grace of justification" (1266) and is incorporated into the Church (1267-1270). It is baptism that is the sacramental bond of the unity of Christians (1271), therefore warranting the Roman Catholic view that Christian unity is based on baptism (even though the majority of the baptized ones do not show any sign of regeneration).

### THE "SACRAMENTAL ECONOMY" AND EVANGELICAL CONFUSION

This view of baptismal regeneration is part of the Roman Catholic view of the sacraments. The *Catechism* defines this theological framework as the "sacramental economy" of the Christian faith (1076). If one reads what the *Catechism* says about regeneration without grasping what the "sacramental economy" means, one will completely misread it. To put it succinctly, the "sacramental economy" is a view that binds God to act through the sacraments and therefore through the Church.<sup>4</sup> Everything that God does, he does through the sacraments. His grace comes to us through the sacraments. His salvation reaches us through the sacraments. His work impacts us through the sacraments. The problem is not the recognition of the biblical importance of the sacraments, but their exclusivity in terms of what God can do. In the background of the sacraments, there is always the Church that administers them, having therefore

THE ROMAN CATHOLICS, IN DEFINING REGENERATION, USE THE SAME WORDS, BUT PUTS THEM IN A DIFFERENT WORLD, THAT OF A "SACRAMENTAL ECONOMY," ONE THAT HAS PRECLUDED SOLA GRATIA.

a fundamental role in mediating God's actions. The word regeneration means new birth received from God, but the world of the "sacramental economy" makes it a Church affair because God is believed to bind himself to work only through the sacraments of the Church. His grace is always a mediated grace through the Church.

This point is crucial even beyond the specific topic under consideration. When Evangelicals deal with Roman Catholic theology, they tend to overlook the "sacramental dimension" of the Roman Church. They analyze common words, common concerns, and common language in an atomistic way and may come to

the conclusion that the old divisions are over because the language is similar.

For example, this is the case in the book, *Is* the Reformation Over? by Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom.<sup>5</sup> In a useful chapter which highlights the contents of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the authors argue that

"evangelicals can embrace at least two-thirds" of it (119), and that it stems from "common orthodoxy" based on the ancient trinitarian and Christological creeds. Later, they admit that when the *Catechism* speaks of Christ, it interweaves him to

the Church to the point of making them one (147; 149), which is unacceptable for Evangelicals who consider the exaltation of a created reality an instance of idolatry.

So, on the one hand there is an apparent "common orthodoxy" and on the other a profound difference on the doctrines of Christ, the Church, salvation, etc. Therefore, here is the key question: How can Evangelicals accept "two-thirds" of the *Catechism* if this document speaks of the (Roman Catholic) Church whenever it speaks of Christ, the Spirit, the Trinity, and regeneration? Evangelicals find it difficult to discern the "sacramental economy" in Roman Catholic teachings and the result is

that they easily misinterpret them, limiting their analysis to surface matters, failing to grasp the whole. Yet, the sacramental economy keeps the system together and makes it coherent. If one fails to appreciate it, he misses the whole point of it.

In dealing with Roman Catholicism, especially in times of mounting ecumenical pressure, Evangelical theology should attempt to go beyond the single, detached statements and seek to get a grip on the internal framework of reference Roman Catholic theology uses. Roman Catholic theology is more than the sum of its words. It is rather a complex, yet coherent system based on the "sacramental economy," whereby God is bound to act through the sacraments of the Church.

### THE DIVIDING LINE

Surveying the tenets of the Evangelical faith, J. I. Packer and Tom Oden remind us that "Evangelicalism characteristically penal-substitutionary emphasizes the view of the cross and the radical reality of the Bible-taught, Spirit-wrought inward change, relational and directional, that makes a person a Christian (new birth, regeneration, conversion, faith, repentance, forgiveness, new creation, all in and through

Jesus Christ)". 6 Regeneration is this inward change wrought by the Spirit that brings life to those who were dead in their sins. For the Catechism, this is a defective definition in that it lacks the reference to the "sacramental economy," whereby the Church administers the sacrament of baptism that brings about regeneration.

The Roman Catholics, in defining regeneration, use the same words, but puts them in a different world, that of a "sacramental economy," one that has precluded sola gratia. So the difference between the Evangelical and the Roman Catholic understanding of regeneration does not lie in some exegetical detail theological minutia. Instead, centers on nothing less than how God works out his work of salvation.

#### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 J.I. Packer, God's Words: Studies in Key Biblical Themes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 149.
- 2 Ouotations will be taken from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994). The electronic text can be found at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/ INDEX.HTM.

- This whole section of the *Cate-chism* echoes or quotes Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 11.
- In a more technical way, the *Cate-chism* speaks of the "sacramental economy" as "the communication of the fruits of Christ's Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church's sacramental liturgy" (1076). One would need another article to begin to unpack this dense sentence.
- 5 M.A. Noll and C. Nystrom, *Is* the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).
- 6 James I. Packer Thomas C. Oden, One Faith. The Evangelical Consensus (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004) 160.

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he biblical idea of salvation includes a whole complex of spiritual operations. There are many aspects of God's saving work that go into making a Christian. Justification, glorification, forgiveness, sanctification. regeneration, as well as repenting and believing and being converted are all spiritual realities that fit under the heading of "salvation."

The very first reality that a person experiences when he becomes a Christian is the work of regeneration. Thus Paul writes, "He saved us, through the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). The new birth, or regeneration,

the initiatory event that ushers a person into the experience of salvation.

Jesus graphically illustrates this in his conversation with Nicodemus, a religious leader who came to him with a question (John 3:1-8). Before he could get the question out of his mouth Jesus went to the heart of the matter and said to him, "You must be born again. You must be born of the Spirit." Jesus uses the analogy of physical birth, in essence saying, "What must happen to you spiritually, Nicodemus, is tantamount to what happened to you physically when you came into this world. You must be born spiritually if you're going to enter into the kingdom of God." In an analogous way, spiritual birth is that initiatory experience that brings an individual into a state of salvation. It is that which enables him, for the first time, to see Christ with faith, to repent of sin and to begin trusting and following the Lord.

Paul underscores this point by using the equally graphic analogy of "quickening," or "making alive" in Ephesians 2. He reminds his readers that prior to being saved they were dead in trespasses and sins, separated from God and under divine wrath. When they did not know God, he "quickened" them and made them spiritually alive. Such "quickening" (regeneration) is the initial experience which comes to a person and ushers him into the whole realm of salvation.

This initial, life-giving work is necessary because of mankind's sinful depravity. Sin has morally and spiritually devastated the human race, resulting in (among other things) the bondage of the human will. Sin has left us without the spiritual ability to turn from sin and to trust Christ. Jesus teaches this when he says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44, 65). Similarly Paul says that the mind that is set on the flesh "cannot" submit to God's law and "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

Regeneration changes the sinner's nature, empowering his will to repent and believe the gospel. Without this work, no one would ever "see" or "enter" the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). That is, no one would ever be saved.

So how does this theological reality inform our evangelism? Followers of Jesus are commissioned to make disciples by calling on people to repent and believe the gospel (Acts 17:30; 16:31). Everyone who hears the gospel is obligated to believe it, to trust Christ savingly. Yet, because of their sinful depravity, they do not have the power in themselves to do so. Knowing this, what is the evangelist to do?

First, we must remember what the Bible teaches regarding how God regenerates people. Paul says that God does it through the renewing work "of the Spirit" (Titus 3:5), while Peter teaches that a person is born again "through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). By holding these together we recognize that regeneration comes by the ministry of the Word and Spirit.

Next, we must allow this truth of how

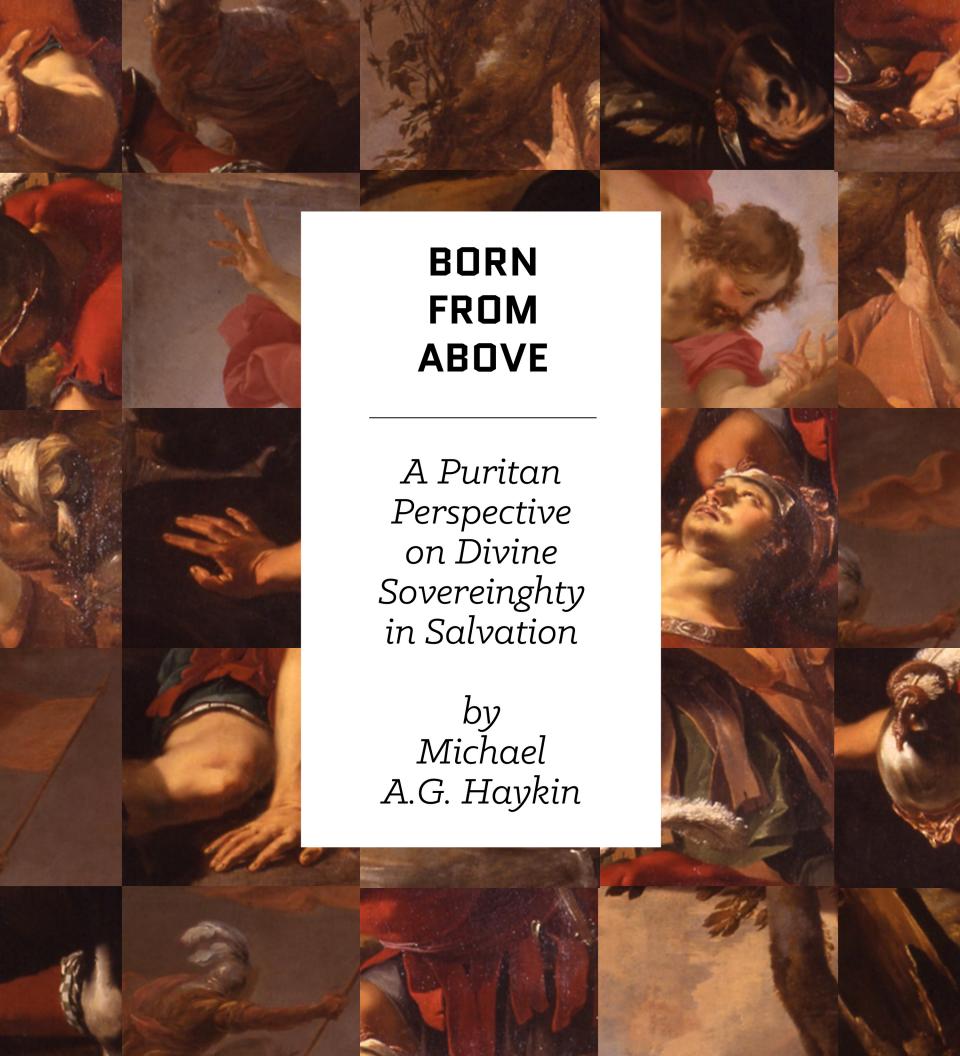
regeneration works to inform our evangelistic practice. Specifically, we must commit ourselves to proclaiming the Word of God as we pray for the Spirit of God. The Spirit uses the Word to grant new life.

That is the "subtext" of Ezekiel's experience in the valley of dry bones. Those bones came to life only after the prophet both preached the Word and prayed for the "breath" (Spirit) to come (Ezek. 37:1-10). Likewise, the only way any sinner is ever converted is by the Spirit taking the Word that has been proclaimed and granting life to spiritually dry bones.

Luke tells us that this is exactly what happened when Paul spoke God's Word to a ladies' prayer meeting outside of Philippi. As Lydia listened, "the Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:14). She was obligated to repent and believe but she could not until the Spirit used the Word to grant her spiritual birth.

By understanding the priority of regeneration and the means whereby God grants it in the work of salvation we are encouraged to evangelize boldly, humbly and dependently. We proclaim Christ and call everyone to him as Lord and we plead with the Spirit to use the message preached to grant spiritual life.

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t the heart of the Reformation was one of the most fundamental questions of the Christian faith: How can I be saved from eternal damnation? The answer of all the leading Reformers was one and the same: only by God's free and sovereign grace. As J. I. Packer and O. Raymond Johnston have pointed out, it is wrong to suppose that the doctrine of Justification

For all these Reformers this was *the* crucial question: Was Christianity "a religion of utter reliance on God for Salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort"?<sup>1</sup>

# FOR ALL THESE REFORMERS THIS WAS THE CRUCIAL QUESTION: WAS CHRISTIANITY "A RELIGION OF UTTER RELIANCE ON GOD FOR SALVATION AND ALL THINGS NECESSARY TO IT, OR OF SELF-RELIANCE AND SELF-EFFORT"?

Loyal to the heritage of the Reformation, the Puritan authors in the last half of the seventeenth century were equally insistent on the vital importance of confessing that

by faith alone, that storm center of the Reformation, was *the* crucial question in the minds of such theologians as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin. This doctrine was important to the Reformers because it helped to express and to safeguard their answer to another, more vital, question, namely, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith.

salvation is by sovereign, free grace alone. A good example of this loyalty is found in the work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), one of the most prolific Puritan authors and a Baptist by conviction. In a recently published history of religion in Britain, Michael Mullett has

identified Benjamin Keach as the leading Baptist theologian of his era, similar in importance for his denomination as Richard Baxter (1615-91) was for the English Presbyterians and John Owen (1616-83) for the Congregationalists.<sup>2</sup> He argued against the Quakers, those seventeenth-century counterparts of modern-day charismatics; he wrote allegories, now long forgotten, that in his day rivaled those of John Bunyan (1628-88) in popularity and sales; he was a pioneer in the congregational singing of hymns in a day when singing was limited to the Psalter; and he published a number of lengthy collections of sermons,

including A Golden Mine Opened (1694) and Gospel Mysteries Unveiled (1701), which remain invaluable, though largely unused, treasures for the study of seventeenth-century Baptist thought.3

#### **EARLY YEARS**

Keach was born on February 29, 1640, to John and Fodora Keach, an Anglican couple residing at the time in Stoke Hammond, North Buckinghamshire.<sup>4</sup> Raised Anglican, he joined the group known to history as the General Baptists when he was fifteen. The General Baptists were Arminian in theology and had emerged from the womb of Puritanism in the second decade of the seventeenth century. Within three years of his baptism as a believer he was called

to preach by the General Baptist congregation that met in Winslow, not far from Stoke Hammond. There is still in existence Winslow an old Baptist meeting house dating from 1695 which

is called Keach's Meeting House. Whether or not Keach ever worshipped in this chapel is not known. Yet, it is an appropriate way to recall the connection of this great Puritan leader with this area of Buckinghamshire.<sup>5</sup> Around the same time as his call to the ministry of the Word, Keach married Jane Grove (d. 1670), a native of Winslow. During the ten or so years of their marriage the couple had five children, of whom three survived infancy. One of them, Hannah, later became a Quaker, which undoubtedly would have caused her father some distress.

The 1660s through to the 1680s was a time of great persecution for any who sought to worship outside the Church of England, and Keach found himself in trouble with the state on more than one occasion. For instance, in 1664 Keach was arrested on a charge of being "a seditious, heretical and schismatical person, evilly and maliciously disposed and disaffected to his Majesty's government and the government of the Church of England."6 It appears that

"I AM NOT ASHAMED TO STAND HERE THIS DAY, ... MY LORD JESUS WAS NOT ASHAMED TO SUFFER ON THE CROSS FOR ME; AND IT IS FOR HIS CAUSE THAT I AM MADE A GAZING-STOCK."

> a children's primer which Keach had written containing reading lessons, simple instruction in punctuation and arithmetic, and lists of words of one, two, or three syllables had been read by the Anglican

rector of Stoke Hammond, Thomas Disney, and reported to the government authorities as not only unfit for children, but positively seditious. No copies of this primer exist today. At the time of his trial all copies of it were destroyed, though we are told Keach rewrote it later from memory and published it as The Child's Delight: Or Instructions for Children and Youth. The original primer was deemed heretical, especially because of references to believer's baptism and Keach's interpretation of the Book of Revelation.<sup>7</sup> Put on trial on October 8, 1664, Keach was found guilty, imprisoned for two weeks and fined 20 pounds, a considerable amount in those days for a poor Puritan preacher.

In addition to these punishments, Keach had to stand for two periods of two hours each in the pillory, a wooden framework that had holes for the head and hands of the persons being punished. Generally the pillory would be placed in the town or village square where the offender could also be subjected to various forms of public ridicule. On this occasion, however, Keach took the opportunity to preach to the crowd that gathered around. "Good People," he began during his first time in the pillory,

I am not ashamed to stand here this day, . . . My Lord Jesus was not ashamed to suffer on the cross for me; and it is for His cause that I am made a gazing-stock. Take notice, it is not for any wickedness that I stand here; but for writing and publishing His truths, which the Holy Spirit hath revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

At this point a Church of England clergyman, possibly the local minister, sought to silence Keach by telling him that he was in the pillory for "writing and publishing errors." Keach, recognizing a golden opportunity for public debate and witness, quickly replied, "Sir, can you prove them errors?" But before the clergyman could respond, he was rounded on by others in the crowd, who knew him to be a drunk. Keach proceeded to speak in defense of his convictions despite a couple of further attempts by the authorities to silence him. Eventually he was told that if he would not be silent, he would have to be gagged. After this he was silent except for his quoting of Matthew 5:10: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."8

On another occasion, when Keach, in the act of preaching, was apprehended by a troop of cavalrymen, four of them were so enraged with him that they swore they would trample him to death with their horses. He was accordingly bound and forced to lie on the ground. But just as they were about to

spur their horses down upon their victim, their commanding officer arrived and prevented them from harming Keach, who almost certainly would have been killed.9

#### A MOVE TO LONDON AND AN **EMBRACE OF CALVINISM**

In 1668 Keach moved to London, where he joined a General Baptist cause meeting on Tooley Street in Southwark, London's first suburb located on the south shore of the Thames river. He was soon ordained an elder of this congregation. However, not long after his arrival in London he made the acquaintance of two Calvinists, Hanserd Knollys (1599-1691) and William Kiffin (1616-1701), both of whom were also Baptists and who would become two of Keach's closest friends. By the time of his second marriage in 1672 to Susannah Partridge (d. 1732) of Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire—Jane, his first wife, had died in 1670 — he, too, had become a Calvinist. Of the details of this momentous theological move we know nothing. As the American historian, J. Barry Vaughn, has noted, the "date and circumstances of Benjamin Keach's acceptance of Calvinism is the greatest puzzle of his life."10 However, the fact that Knollys officiated at the marriage of Keach to Susannah Partridge certainly leads

one to believe that this influential figure played a role in Keach's coming over to the Calvinistic Baptists. It is interesting to note that while such a move from the ranks of the General Baptists to those of the Calvinistic Baptists was not uncommon during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was rarely any traffic the other way.<sup>11</sup>

In the same year of his marriage, Keach and a few like-minded individuals, possibly former members of the General Baptist cause on Tooley Street, began a Calvinistic Baptist work in Horselydown, Southwark. A meeting house was eventually erected, which, after a number of additions over the years, could hold about a thousand people. Keach was evidently a powerful preacher, whose sermons, his son-in-law later noted, were "full of solid divinity."12

In addition to his labors as a pastor, Keach was also active in employing his pen to elucidate the Scriptures and defend Reformation truth. Of the many subjects upon which he wrote, his defense of the Calvinistic perspective on Salvation would prove to be especially influential. As we have seen, during the 1680s and 90s, at the time when Keach was being widely published, Calvinism was increasingly a house under attack. The theology of Puritan theologians like Keach and John Owen was coming to be regarded with



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scorn and disdain as outmoded and oldfashioned. Encouraged by the "middle way" thinking of Richard Baxter, which sought to develop a theological perspective that toned down some key doctrines of traditional Calvinism and embraced some elements of Arminianism, not a few of the heirs of Puritanism, in particular the English Presbyterians, were involved in a wholesale retreat from their Calvinistic heritage. This was not, however, the case with the Calvinistic Baptists and that in large measure because of the writings of Keach.

#### **CALVINIST VIEWS ON SALVATION**

Consider, for example, his final major work, Gospel Mysteries Unveiled, published only three years before his death in 1704.

This work was originally a series of sermons which exhaustively expounded all of Christ's parables and similitudes. The discussion of the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), for instance, ran to sixteen sermons and well over a

hundred pages in the four-volume edition that was issued in the 1810s.<sup>13</sup> In his fifteenth sermon on this parable, Keach presented an understanding of regeneration and conversion that was common to most Calvinistic Baptists of his day, and served to distinguish them from other denominational bodies like the Presbyterians who were fast moving out of the Calvinist orbit.

Keach began by observing that this parable clearly taught that "lost sinners cannot go home to God of themselves," but must be carried to Him on the shoulders of Christ. To Keach this doctrinal conclusion was clear first of all from the reference to the lost sheep being placed on the shoulders of the shepherd. When other passages of Scripture talk of the "finger of God" (Luke 11:20) or the "arm of the Lord" (Isa. 53:1), these anthropomorphisms are to be understood as references to God's power. Likewise, Keach reasons, the mention of the shepherd's shoulders in Luke 15:5 must be a reference to "Christ's efficacious and effectual power,"

NOT A FEW OF THE HEIRS OF PURITANISM, IN PARTICULAR THE ENGLISH PRESBYTERIANS, **WERE INVOLVED IN A WHOLESALE RETREAT FROM** THEIR CALVINISTIC HERITAGE. THIS WAS NOT, HOWEVER, THE CASE WITH THE CALVINISTIC **BAPTISTS AND THAT IN LARGE MEASURE** BECAUSE OF THE WRITINGS OF KEACH.

> especially, given the nature of the parable, as it relates to regenerating and converting.<sup>14</sup> Keach then adduced further scriptural proof

that regeneration was wholly God's work, a work in which men and women are entirely passive. There was, for example, John 15:5, where Christ informed the apostles, "without Me you can do nothing." This verse clearly has to do with the living out of the Christian life, but Keach evidently saw principles embedded in it that also apply to entry into that life. Keach understood Christ's statement "without Me" to be a reference to Christ's "almighty arm . . . made bare" and His "power exerted." If it be true, therefore, that Christ's power is with for the presence of "against his

vital for the presence of "acceptable fruit to God" during the Christian life, how much more is it the case that this power is required for "a sinner's implantation into Christ"?<sup>15</sup> Yet, because the verse has to do with living a fruitful Christian life, which involves effort on part of both the believer and Christ, it does

not really substantiate Keach's assertion that the sinner is passive in regeneration.

The next verse he cited, John 6:44a, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him," is much more germane. The drawing involved here, according to Keach, is "the sublime and irresistible influences of the holy God upon the heart, by which he inclines, bows, and subjects the stubborn and rebellious will to believe and receive the Lord Jesus Christ."

Keach rightly links this verse with one later in the same chapter: "No man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father" (John 6:65). That which is given, Keach emphasized, is what enables a sinner to come to Christ: the gift of the indwelling Spirit, the affections of a new heart, grace, faith, and divine power.<sup>16</sup>

The third text that Keach cited is yet another Johannine one, John 1:13. The children of God, this verse asserts, are born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of

IT IS NOT "IN THE POWER OF THE MOST ABLE MINISTER IN THE WORLD, THAT THE WORD PREACHED BECOMES EFFECTUAL; NO, NO, . . . IT IS FROM GOD" THAT PREACHING RECEIVES THE POWER TO CHANGE THE HEARTS OF MEN AND WOMEN.

the will of man, but of God." Regeneration is not based on one's physical lineage, nor on one's "legal privileges" (so Keach reads "nor of the will of the flesh"). Nor is the new birth accomplished by any "power of man's will, for "before a vital principle is infused" into a person, all that he or she can do are "dead works." The "plain and evident" declaration of this verse is that "God is the efficient or great agent in regeneration." 17

The Puritan preacher then quoted a series

of Pauline verses — Romans 9:16; Titus 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 3:5; 4:7; Philippians 2:12-13 — as further confirmation of his position. With regard to the two texts from 2 Corinthians, Keach especially emphasized that when it came to preaching, it was not the preacher who could effect the change about which he had been talking. It is not "in the power of the most able minister in the world, that the word preached becomes effectual; no, no, . . . it is from God" that preaching receives the power to change the hearts of men and women.<sup>18</sup>

In the next section of this sermon Keach provided additional arguments in support of his perspective on regeneration. These are based on a variety of Scripture texts, most of them drawn from the New Testament. It is in this section of the sermon that Keach defines what he understood regeneration and conversion to be. Regeneration he described as "the forming of Christ in the soul," a new creation or a new birth, which is accomplished by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Keachbelieved that regeneration takes place when the Holy Spirit comes to indwell a person, and a new nature, that of Christ, is formed within the heart of that individual.

Like most of his fellow Puritans, Keach regarded this work of the Holy Spirit as absolutely essential to the salvation of a sinner. "It is this Spirit indeed," he said in one of his sermons on the parable of the prodigal son, "who is the immediate agent that meets and brings lost sinners home to God: the Father and Son act and work in, and by the Holy Ghost."19 By this means the enmity toward God that grips the heart of every unbeliever is taken away, and a love and delight for God as their chiefest good imparted. Moreover, just as an unborn child contributes nothing toward its formation in the womb, so are "sinners wholly passive in regeneration."20 As Keach said elsewhere:

> If God doth not meet a sinner, or move towards a sinner by his Spirit, the sinner can never meet him. . ... Can that which is dead move itself? Sinners are dead, or without a principle of divine life, naturally; and when life is infused, the soul must be influenced by the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

When Keach defined conversion he included what he had already said about regeneration and thus appears to blur the distinction between the two terms. Conversion, he stated, involves a "two-fold act":

> (1) Passive, which is the act of God's Spirit, by which he infuseth a vital principle, and gracious habits, or divine qualities in the soul: in this act the creature is wholly passive.

Christ . . . infuses life in the dead soul, as he did to dead Lazarus. (2) Active, whereby through the power of that grace, the sinner being quickened, is capacitated to believe, and return to God: being acted, we act; for the Holy Spirit . . . so moves the soul, and the soul acts, and moves towards God. . . . First the sinner's heart is turned, and then the sinner returneth, then, and not till then: if Christ sought us not first, and found us not first, and took not us up first by his arms and shoulders of divine power, we should never seek, find, nor return to him.<sup>22</sup>

Although this passage shows Keach failing to observe a clear distinction between the two terms, his meaning is clear. What he calls the "passive" aspect of this "two-fold act" is what he has already termed "Regeneration." It is wholly an act of God, to which human beings contribute nothing. The Holy Spirit comes into the soul, and gives it both the power and the desire to turn to God. Thus, it is in regeneration that "the seed of actual conversion is sown" in a person's heart.<sup>23</sup> In conversion, on the other hand, the individual is vitally involved as his newly given capacity to turn to God is now exercised.

As is evident from the content of this sermon, Keach was typically Puritan in

the delight that he took in emphasizing the way in which regeneration is a sovereign work of God. Keach was rightly convinced that the stranglehold of sin over men and women is so great that "only omnipotence can break its bond."<sup>24</sup>

## CRITICAL OF HYPER-CALVINISM

Finally, it should be noted that in presenting this solidly Calvinistic perspective on regeneration and conversion Keach was careful to guard against High or Hyper-Calvinism, which was becoming more prevalent during the final years of his life. For instance, among the views that this position espoused was that of eternal Justification.<sup>25</sup> According to the doctrine of eternal justification, Christ's commitment to suffer for the sins of the elect prior to the creation of the world meant that even then they were regarded as being actually justified. The elect can thus be regarded as having been justified from eternity. If this were true, then saving faith is reduced to a realization of what God has already done in the act of eternal justification.

Keach, however, steadfastly opposed this position during the 1690s. In his main work on Justification. *A Medium Betwixt Two* 

Extremes (1698), Keach pointedly asked:

Do we not all preach to all out of Christ as unto ungodly ones, to such that are under Wrath and Condemnation in their own Persons, and so remain until they believe or have Union with Christ. Our Lord came not to call the Righteous, as such, neither selfrighteous ones, not such who in a Gospel-sense are righteous Persons, but Sinners to repentance; to such that were really lost in the first Adam, and under the Bondage of Sin, and the Law.

Men and women become justified only at the point of believing in Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Keach had made the same point fifteen years earlier in his popular allegory, Travels of True Godliness (1683). At one point in his journey, Godliness encounters a man whom Keach described as "a haughty looking person who seemed greatly disposed to dispute about religion" and to whom he gave the name "Antinomian." In response to Godliness' query about what Antinomian believed with regard to Justification. the latter stated that he believed "all the elect are personally and actually justified from eternity." Antinomian was confident that the love which God had for the elect

ACCORDING TO C. H. SPURGEON, IN SPEAKING TO THE LOST KEACH WAS "INTENSELY DIRECT, SOLEMN, AND IMPRESSIVE, NOT FLINCHING TO DECLARE THE TERRORS OF THE LORD, NOR VEILING THE FREENESS OF **DIVINE GRACE.**"

before their conversion was identical to that which He has for them after it. "God sees no sin," he says, "nor ever did, in his elect." Godliness' response to this view was unequivocal: It was "a doctrine Jesus Christ abhors" and which brings reproach upon Calvinism. Godliness goes on to say that the very notion of being justified presupposes that one was formerly in a state of guilt and condemnation. If unbelievers are under God's wrath (as John 3:18, 36 bear witness) and at the same time also "actually justified," then the very notion of Justification becomes meaningless.<sup>27</sup>

As Keach rightly realized, this debate about the nature of Justification had immensely practical consequences. In the Antinomian schema, that style of preaching where the lost are explicitly urged to turn to Christ becomes quite unnecessary. What is needed in preaching is simply the proclamation of what God has done in Christ. God will use that to awaken the elect and show them what he has already done for them. Keach's pulpit ministry, however, was characterized by vigorous evangelism and regular calls to the unconverted to respond to Christ in faith. According to C. H. Spurgeon, in speaking to the lost Keach was "intensely direct, solemn, and impressive, not flinching to declare the terrors of the Lord, nor veiling the freeness of divine grace."<sup>28</sup>

Typical of Keach's evangelistic appeals to the unconverted is the following, cited by Spurgeon to illustrate the above statement:

> Come, venture your souls on Christ's righteousness; Christ is able to save you though you are ever so great sinners. Come to Him, throw yourselves at the feet of Jesus. *Look* to Jesus, who came to seek and save them that were lost. . . . You may have the water of life freely. Do not say, "I want qualifications or a meekness to come to Christ." Sinner, dost thou thirst? Dost thou see a want of righteousness? 'Tis not a righteousness; but 'tis a sense of the want of righteousness, which is rather the qualification thou shouldst look at. Christ hath righteousness sufficient to clothe you, bread of life to feed you, grace to adorn you. Whatever you want, it is to be had in Him. We tell you there is help in Him, salvation in Him. "Through the propitiation in

His blood" you must be justified, and that by faith alone.<sup>29</sup>

Here we see Puritan evangelism at its best: cleaving to Christ alone for salvation, and intensely desirous that others might truly know this joy.

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- 3. James Barry Vaughn, "Benjamin Keach," Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990), 68.
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- 7. On Keach's eschatology, see Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Benjamin Keach, William of Orange and the Book of Revelation: A Study in English Prophetical Exegesis," *The Baptist Quarterly*, 36 (1995-96), 43-51.
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- 13. Gospel Mysteries Unveiled: or, An Exposition of All the Parables and Many Similitudes Spoken by Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (London: L. I. Higham, 1815), 2: 321-428. On the composition of Gospel Mysteries Unveiled and its style, see Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology," 89-127.
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- 15. Ibid., 2: 394.
- 16. Ibid., 2: 394-95.
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- 18. Ibid., 2: 396-97.
- 19. Ibid., 3: 57-58.
- 20. Ibid., 2: 400-401, 404-405, 407-408, 412.
- 21. Ibid., 3: 57.
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BOOKS

#### 88. ACTS: AN EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY -INTRODUCTION AND ACTS 1:1-2:47. VOL 1.

by Craig S. Keener

#### 92. AN HONEST, WELL EXPERIENCED HEART: THE PIETY OF JOHN FLAVEL

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#### 94. COUNSELING THE HARD CASES: TRUE STORIES ILLUSTRATING THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S RESOURCES IN SCRIPTURE

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#### 97. THE CREEDAL IMPERATIVE

by Carl R. Trueman

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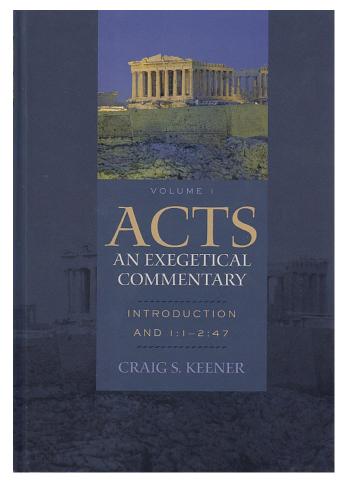
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by Tim Cooper and Kelvin Gardiner



Acts: An Exegetical Commentary – Introduction and Acts 1:1–2:47. Vol 1.

by Craig S. Keener

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012

ne gains a new understanding of the word "comprehensive" in commentary writing when this work of Craig Keener's on Acts is consulted. With a total of 1,038 pages (the first 638 pages covering introductory matters followed by 400 pages for just Acts 1–2), surely reviewers will not complain that Keener's work is too brief! The other 26 chapters of Acts will be completed in three more volumes (each subsequent volume will presumably be about the same size as the first). One slight inconvenience at this stage is that the indexes for all four volumes will be printed in the final volume so the publisher has supplied an accompanying CD which has 426 pages of indexes for volume one and the current working bibliography for the entire work.

Ironically, one of the first headings in the introduction is entitled, "Limitations of This Work." This section is particularly important, however, for understanding Keener's focus and for guiding readers in what to expect from this commentary. Keener alerts readers to a possible misconception that the word "exegetical" in the title might convey (a term which was not in his original title). Specifically, "the focus of this commentary is not on lexical or syntactical details but on the larger level of broader cultural connections to the ideas or customs alluded to in the text" (7). This

focus on providing readers with lengthy discussions about the social-historical context on a multitude of topics pervades both the 638 pages of introduction as well as the commentary on Acts 1–2 (it should also be noted that most of the substantial interaction with secondary literature is with sources published before mid-2007).

The introduction covers the usual topics one would expect to find in any commentary: genre (ancient historiography, particularly in contrast to proposals that Acts is biography, or novel), date (between AD 70 and 90), authorship (Luke the physician and short-term companion of Paul), audience (a biblically literate Christian audience of mixed but predominantly Gentile congregations), purpose apologetic work which provides answers to Roman objections for his believing audience), and structure (a combination of summary statement markers [2:47; 9:31; 12:24] and geographical markers [20:1]). The introduction also includes extensive discussions on topics specific to Acts: speeches in Acts, Acts and Paul, Israel's story, Lukan theology, geography, and women and gender. In keeping with Keener's focus and expertise, many of these topics are saturated with stimulating social-historical discussions, such as the character of ancient historiography (e.g., historians had an interest in genuine

historical information as well as how they presented their information), an excursus on ancient physicians (as general background information for authorship), travel and urbanization (covering topics such as safety, hardship, and speed of travel, as well as ancient perspectives on urban and rural life).

Of course there will be elements of these wide ranging introductory discussions that will be less convincing to some. For instance, I'm still not persuaded by (1) Keener's arguments for dating Acts post AD 70 (Luke 21 does not require this and Acts 28:30 more strongly suggests an earlier date), (2) his hesitancy toward the idea that Luke may have seen himself as writing Scripture (more could be made of the arguments for Luke-Acts as "biblical history"), (3) his analysis of Luke's perspective on women and gender (cf. especially where he stretches the implications of 2:17-18 beyond their intention), and (4) his focus on primarily Roman objections to Christianity as the background to Luke's apologetic purposes (perhaps more could be made of the ways in which the fulfillment of God's saving purposes in the reign of Christ provides "assurance" [Luke 1:4] to believers in the midst of persecution and suffering). These are mainly quibbles, however, in light of the overwhelming strengths of this section, Keener's extensive interaction with other views,

detailed argumentation for the historical reliability of Acts, and comprehensive treatment of the social historical context for so many topics leaves me profoundly grateful for such a resource. This is essentially an encyclopedia of information related to Acts and its first century world!

of This encyclopedia-like treatment topics does not end when one moves to the actual commentary on Acts 1–2. For just the first two verses of Acts 1 we encounter the following headings over the course of 16 pages and 131 footnotes:

- 1. Introducing Introductions
- 2. Luke's Recapitulation
- 3. Preface (1:1-2)
  - a. Prefaces
  - b. Luke's Own Preface in Acts (1:1-2)
    - I. Relation to Volume 1 (1:1)
    - II. Dedications
    - III. Who is Theophilus?
      - c. Luke's Preface to Volume One (Luke 1:1-4)
      - d. Jesus' Orders until His Taking Up (Acts 1:2)

Many of these sections and sub-sections include extended discussions of ancient literature (e.g., in terms of the headings above. introductions. prefaces. and dedications in ancient literature), providing readers with much material that is not easily accessible elsewhere. Likewise, the rest of the commentary section includes excurses with discussions of ancient literature on topics such as the Sabbath in early Judaism, astrology, wine and excessive drinking, and providence, fate, and predestination.

Methodologically, this kind of substantial interaction with ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish literature always runs the danger of what Samuel Sandmel called "parallelomania" (i.e., finding supposed "parallels" everywhere on the basis of apparently similar terms). Keener is often careful, however, to weigh the relevance of such parallels. For instance, at 2:4, Keener enters into an extended discussion of speaking in tongues. This section includes headings such as "Proposed Jewish settings for tongues," "Greek paganism," "Tongues in early Christianity," "Studies of modern Christian glossolalia," "Other tongues as foreign languages," and "Meaning and function of tongues in Acts." He argues that supposed parallels of unintelligible ecstatic speech in Greco-Roman religion do not explain the nature of "tongues" in Acts. According to Keener, speaking in tongues in Acts 2, 10, and 19 is the miracle of speaking unlearned foreign languages as a symbol of empowerment for crosscultural mission and therefore as one kind of prophetic speech. Interestingly, against many, Keener observes the similarities

and differences between Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14 and argues that although Paul has different theological emphases, the phenomenon in Acts is the same as that in 1 Corinthians. "[I]t is virtually inconceivable," says Keener, "that the two writers would independently coin the same obscure phrase for two entirely different phenomena" (813). It is not clear, however, how Keener's discussion of modern Christian glossolalia and the modern missionary expansion of Pentecostalism relates to his conclusions concerning tongues in Acts as speaking unlearned foreign languages (821-23, cf. esp. 828-31).

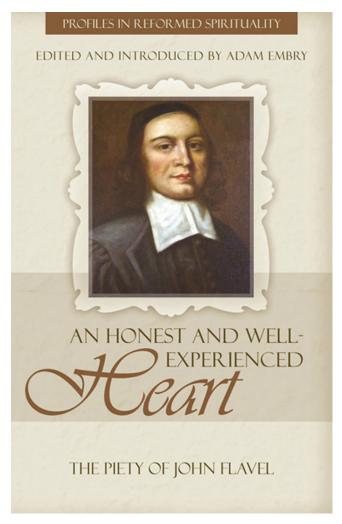
This focus on conceptual parallels, however, brings with it some potential difficulties with this kind of commentary. As helpful as it is to have extensive interaction with ancient literature and extended excurses at various points throughout the commentary, it is easy to lose the flow of thought in the argument of the text in Acts being discussed. For instance, at 2:44-45 Keener provides an extended discussion on sharing possessions in Hellenistic utopian ideals, Greek ideals of common property, friendship ideals, Qumran examples, Ancient Israelite models, Jesus' own model, and then an excursus on possessions. After working through this

material, however, readers might lose the connections to Keener's prior discussions of *koinōnia* and meals and the reference to unity in his subsequent discussion and therefore miss the overall emphasis in these verses on the unity of this new community as one people under one Lord.

This brings us back to Keener's concern to explain the word "exegetical" in the title of the work so that the commentary is used in the way in which it was intended. Other books might help pastors and Bible teachers with the overall biblical-theological framework of Acts, and other commentaries such as those by Bock (BECNT), Peterson (Pillar), or Schnabel (ZECNT) will help more with the flow of argument in individual passages with an eye to the theological claims and historical context of Acts. This commentary is best treated as more of an encyclopedia of information about almost any topic that is raised in Acts and related to the ancient world than an exegetical For scholars of Acts, commentary. Keener's encyclopedia is indispensable!

#### Alan J. Thompson

Lecturer in New Testament Sydney Missionary & Bible College **▼** 



An Honest, Well Experienced Heart: The Piety of John Flavel

Edited by Adam Embry

Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012

e's not as well known as Jonathan Edwards, perhaps. And probably John Owen's name comes up more often than his, too. But, for readers who want to read a Puritan voice on issues of devotion and piety, it is difficult to find better than the English-born John Flavel.

> "For Flavel, 'keeping the heart' is a lifetime work," writes Adam Embry in a new collection of Flavel's pietistic writing. "For this reason, he affirms 'that the keeping and the right managing of the heart in every condition, is the great business of the Christian's life'."

In this new, brief volume, An Honest, Well Experienced Heart, Embry collects passages from Flavel's writings about the Christian's "keeping" and "managing" of his or her heart. Embry, who is an alumnus of Southern Seminary, introduces Flavel's writings and provides a suggested reading list for those not familiar with the Puritan.

Embry organizes the book into four sections -- "Christ Rules the Heart"; "Keeping the Heart"; "Seasons the Heart"; "Discerning the Heart" -with an introduction and conclusion.

"How do we account for the

spiritual legacy of Flavel's writings?" Embry writes, summing up Flavel's ministry. "First, he made much of Christ. ... Furthermore, Flavel stressed communion with God through Christ. ... Finally, Flavel wrote from the vantage point of Christian experience."

An Honest, Well Experienced Heart concludes with Flavel's vision for a renewed heart:

The time is coming when your heart will be as you would have it, when you will be discharged of these cares, fears, and sorrows and never cry out, 'Oh my hard, my proud, my vain, my earthly heart'

anymore when all darkness will be banished from your understanding, and you will clearly discover all truths in God, that crystal out of your thoughts and they will be everlasting, ravishingly, and delightfully entertained and exercised upon that supreme goodness and infinite excellency of God, from whom they shall never start anymore like a broken bow.

This 150-page book provides an accessible introduction to an often underappreciated Puritan writer and a fine exercise in devotional reading.

#### **Aaron Cline Hanbury**

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 🔳

## Counseling the Hard Cases

True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture



Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture

Edited by Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert

Nashville: B&H Academic. 2012

s Biblical Counseling effective? Can we really care for people with only a Bible in our hand? Should we not separate the Bible from the complex problems that plague our lives? These are all great questions that Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert answer in their book titled Counseling the Hard Cases. The premise behind this book is that difficult problems can and should be addressed with the word of God. Within the Scriptures is a vast knowledge that not only leads to great stories, but to life transformation. There are much more than simple nuggets of truth contained in this ancient book; there are life altering truths applied to our hearts through the Holy Spirit testifying to a hope we can all have in Jesus Christ.

In their preface, editors Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott write, "Large groups of Christians are not yet aware that God has given his people reliable and significant resources sufficient to help people with any problems that require counseling." Therefore, the goal of this book is to tell stories of change so that Christians will know the power of God contained within the Scriptures. All of the authors for this book believe that both the descriptions and prescriptions of human problems found in God's Word are far superior to anything that secular psychology has to offer (301). So then within the ten cases that comprise

the majority of this book, there are not just hypothetical scenarios, but real people with real problems who change through the application of the Scriptures and the encouragement of a Christ-centered community. Cases range from well known issues such as Depression, to the more unknown issues such as Dissociative Identity Disorder. The counselors are real people in real ministries who do not always appear to be experts on every counseling case that walks in their door, but they are faithful stewards of the word of God who delve into the Scriptures and patiently walk with the hard cases before them. Throughout this book there are tears shed, hearts broken, sins revealed and suffering confronted, and the power of God prevails. I thoroughly enjoyed this book as it was gripping to me as a reader and encouraging to me as a pastor.

Counseling the Hard Cases has three very strong points to it. First, it encourages faithfulness. For any pastor or lay person who is seeking to counsel a friend or a loved one through a difficult life issue, this book shows that change in all circumstances is possible. In some cases change came quickly and in others it came very slowly. One particular case in chapter 10 dealt with a woman named "Julie" who struggled through various

addictions and adulteries. Though it looked at times as if all hope was gone, through the faithful and continuous encouragement of Bible applying Christians, she eventually changed. For anyone discouraged in the process and progress of counseling, this book is refreshing.

Secondly, Counseling the Hard Cases presents a clear defense of the sufficiency of Scripture. Each chapter is laden with Scripture demonstrating that counseling was conducted through the knowledge of God and not human ingenuity. This is demonstrated very clearly in chapter 2 when Laura Hendrickson counsels with "Mariana." "Mariana" was a 45 year old married woman who had endured severe sexual abuse in her past. She had been through 20 years of psychotherapy to overcome the effects of her suffering and some of the sinful responses that resulted, but she found herself still unchanged. However, when she comes to Laura for biblical counseling, the principles of Scripture are applied to her problems, she is shown how to have hope in Christ and slowly she is transformed through her suffering and sin. Counseling the Hard Cases clearly displays the power and sufficiency of the word of God.

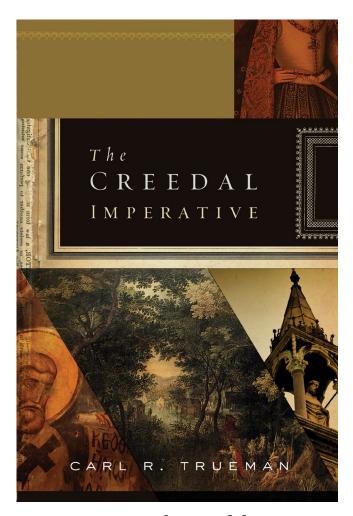
Thirdly, Counseling the Hard Cases presents a helpful methodology when approaching a counselee. Quite often it is difficult knowing exactly where to start with a person. Every single person has a unique background with different sufferings and different heart desires. But throughout each chapter, there was a basic grid that is helpful to consider when approaching someone in need. In chapter 6, Elyse Fitzpatrick lays out a list of topics to work through with "Ashley" after sitting through a session of data gathering. She then explains throughout the chapter how she takes each one of these issues and works through them in the course of counseling. Every writer in this book is clear to lay out their strategy and method

of counseling.

Counseling the Hard Cases is a must read for anyone desiring faithfulness in their counseling. It is much more than a theoretical book on the nature of biblical counseling. Instead, it is more like a practical handbook of real life case studies displaying the power of the word of God to change lives. Every reader should walk away convinced of the power of the word of God and encouraged to greater faithfulness in whatever ministry they possess.

#### Michael Nelson

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The Creedal Imperative

by Carl R. Trueman

Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012

ery early in my ministry I was heavily and wonderfully influenced by a much older man for whom to this day I am deeply grateful. His impact was profound and cherished. And although I never quite bought into it, I did admire his church's "no creed but the Bible" position. Once when the IRS wrote for a copy of their constitution, they sent a copy of the New Testament with a kind note. This man was nearly as learned as any man I have known, and his knowledge of the church's creeds and confessions was extensive. But he would adopt none for his church — only the Bible, which he read regularly in the original languages. And for a long time I wondered if that should be the model.

Add to this the fact that I come from a fundamental Baptist tradition which in many of its expressions actually decries creedalism and anything smacking of formal liturgy in worship, and you can understand why the recitation of creeds or confessions was never a part of my church experience.

In more recent years I have begun to see the merits of the corporate recitation of a creed or confession, but still it has not yet found a permanent, regular place in the churches I pastor.

Carl Trueman just may have changed all that. In his new The Creedal Imperative he sets out not just to tell us that the corporate use of creeds is okay; he wants to convince us that it should be expected. The use of creeds and confessions in public worship, he argues, is not only consistent with a conscientious adherence to the sufficiency and sole authority of Scripture but in fact is endorsed by the biblical writers and essential to the church's well-being. As he summarizes his purpose in writing, "I want to make the case that it is at least arguable, based on Scripture, that the need for creeds and confessions is not just a practical imperative for the church but is also a biblical imperative" (19).

Those who claim to have "no creed but the Bible," in fact, have creeds of their own, even if they are not publicly displayed and open to public scrutiny. Christians are not divided between those who have creeds and those who do not; they are only divided between those who acknowledge a known creed and those who do not. Trueman's purpose in part, then, is to unmask this false disjunction. We all embrace tradition, whether or not it is acknowledged.

Chapter 1 provides an analysis of certain aspects of our cultural milieu that militate the use and the viability of creeds and confessions. The suggestion is not that all who oppose creeds are simply overly influenced by this culture but that the possibility is real in any given case.

Chapter 2 establishes the biblical warrant and precedent for creeds and confessions, examining matters such as the qualifications androle of church elders and the implications of such Pauline expressions and concepts as "the form of sound words" and the "faithful sayings" of the Pastoral Epistles.

Chapters 3 and 4 provides a history of creeds and confessions from the ancient church (chapter 3) and the time of the Protestant Reformation (chapter 4), demonstrating a continuation of the apostolic precedent. These documents were produced for the objective, positive statement of the content of Christian doctrine as well as for polemical and pedagogical use.

Chapter 5 presents the doxological origins and usefulness of the creeds and confessions of the church, emphasizing this continued value for the church today.

Chapter 6 explores several aspects of the continued value and usefulness of creeds and confessions in the church today.

Anyone who has read behind Carl at all

knows that he is nothing if not enjoyable. His historical insights, quick wit, mild sarcasm (and sometimes not so mild), and his healthy awareness of cultural currents combine to provide an enjoyable read. And if you also enjoy seeing an author nail down his argument tightly, then you will surely enjoy this new book.

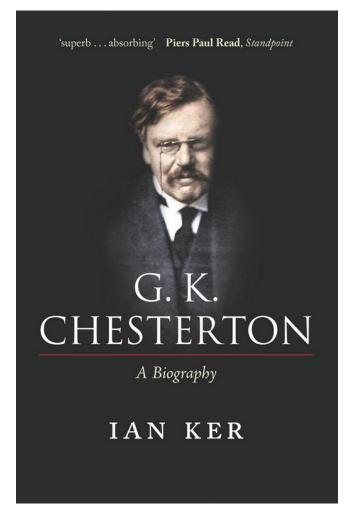
Trueman makes short use of typical arguments against the corporate use of creeds in church, such as the complaints that the practice tends to formalism and that the repetition lends itself to mindlessness. Of course we do not mind repeating old hymns, and for that matter we do not mind repeating the same chorus seven or eight times at a single singing! More positively, Trueman convincingly demonstrates the value of creeds and confessions as means of teaching. Still more important and persuasive for his case is his exposing, in chapter 2, the biblical warrant and precedent, and his exposition, in chapter 5, of the doxological purpose and function of creeds and confessions.

The claim to have no creed but the Bible is specious, and, more to the point, Trueman argues, it is likely a contradiction in terms, for the Bible itself "seems to demand the production of something like a creed or confession" (187). The challenge, then, is reversed: taking the Bible seriously, how could we not employ creeds and confessions? How can we fulfill the Pauline commands with any degree of confidence? Moreover, history suggests that it is doubtful that Christianity can exist in stable form without such statements. We must not settle for a form of "mere" or minimal Christianity. We must be careful to offer to God the informed praise that is due him.

I found this book both convincing and one of the most enjoyable reads I have experienced in quite a while. I highly recommended it.

#### Fred Zaspel

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G.K. Chesterton: A Biography

by Ian Ker

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011

f the beloved Christian writers in the past century, Gilbert Keith Chesterton is perhaps the most influential but hardly receives the recognition he deserves. This need for recognition is the driving force behind Ian Ker's massive biography that develops Chesterton as the successor to the Victorian age and a larger-than-life British celebrity.

"I realized that Chesterton was a much bigger figure than either I or the academic world that I knew was aware," writes Ker in the preface to his 747-page biography.

Chesterton's prolific creativity generated the works of a journalist, literary critic, novelist, playwright, poet and theologian. Because of the diversity of Chesterton's writings, previous generations have been unable to estimate his modern value or identify common themes.

Ker, however, argues that humor and humility define not only Chesterton's gregarious personality but also heartbeat of his writings. Readers will enjoy Ker's description of Chesterton's untidiness. absent-minded behavior self-deprecatory and remarks.

Chesterton's personality remained virtually unchanged despite his rapid ascent to popularity. For instance, his unkempt appearance and propensity to argue incessantly only become more noticeable in the midst of his celebrity. Ker highlights Chesterton's absent-mindedness when recounting how the writer could argue in taverns while remaining oblivious to the food on his lap or his sleeping audience.

Equally delightful to read are descriptions of Chesterton's genius. Ker recounts Chesterton's biographies and literary criticisms on Robert Browning, Charles Dickens and Thomas Aquinas (among others), noting the author's ability to quote lengthy passages from memory and write an entire work without revisions or consulting secondary sources.

Famous figures of the early 20th century pass through this biography. Not only does the reader meet his closest friends (and philosophical opponents) H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw but also William Butler Yeats, Hellen Keller, Benito Mussolini and Pope Pius XI.

For each of Chesterton's published works, Ker provides a concise summary of its contents as well as detailing specific situations in Chesterton's life that may have shaped his thinking. This helps the reader not only to grasp an understanding of Chesterton's body of work but also to sympathize with his conversion to Roman Catholicism.

The frequency of embedded quotations from books, essays and letters may require some initial adjustment, but Ker excels in weaving them beautifully in his exhaustive Chestertonian portrait.

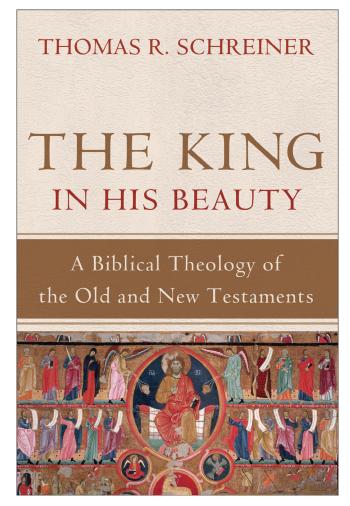
Included in this portrait are Chesterton's devotion inseparable his to barren wife for children. Frances. love and wonderment at the world.

This biography is a necessity for any student of Chesterton, but tepid fans may find the price of the biography or its length intimidating. Fortunately for both of these camps, a cheaper paperback edition releases in December.

Ker offers no concluding remarks to his biography and rarely conjectures about Chesterton's thought or actions without first examining, allowing him to assimilate the events and conclusions of others for the purest reflection of Chesterton's life.

#### **Craig Sanders**

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments

by Thomas R. Schreiner

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013

ew disciplines have helped me understand the Bible as well as biblical theology. I am still reeling from my first exposure to it years ago. My whole perception of the Bible has been revolutionized because of it. Along with this, few scholars have helped me grasp the meaning Scripture as well as Thomas Schreiner. The first book I read by him was a biblical-theological treatment of perseverance. My whole understanding of the doctrine of perseverance, not to mention my understanding of the New Testament, has been largely shaped by his writings. With the publication of The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments. I can now add that Tom Schreiner's writing has enhanced my understanding of the whole Bible. There are a number of reasons for this, but let me focus in on just three. As he does in his other works, Tom Schreiner in his newest book exhibits exceptional clarity, brevity, and fidelity.

First, in terms of clarity, he clearly sets forth his thesis and supports it throughout his journey through the biblical landscape. Schreiner suggests that the concept of the kingdom of God is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. To be sure, it is not the central theme of the Bible, but a prominent one that is recurrent throughout it. The "kingdom" theme is comprised of three specific elements that show up again and again in the biblical narrative—God as King, human beings as the subjects of the King, and the universe as the place where God's kingship is established. As the story line of the Bible unfolds, it becomes clear that God intends for his people to see the beauty of his holiness on full display in his universe.

Second, in terms of brevity, Schreiner briefly surveys the terrain of Scripture without getting bogged down by detours. At first glance, the size of the book may seem to detract from this statement. But, when it is considered that Schreiner comments on every book of the Bible—including every single Psalm—it is impressive that his book is not bigger than it is. Schreiner has a unique ability to say in one sentence what it takes other writers to say in an entire paragraph. This is partly because he seeks to be accessible to a wide audience and therefore purposefully avoids technical discussions and scholarly debates in this volume. But this is also because he has an uncanny ability to write with precision. He does not waste words in moving through the narrative but only includes insights that are pertinent to the overall purpose of his book.

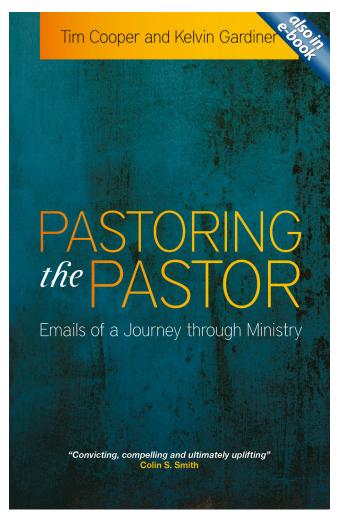
Third, in terms of fidelity, he faithfully allows the biblical writers to speak for themselves. Schreiner's approach to the study of God's Word serves as a model for all who desire to divide rightly the word of

truth. Before looking at what other scholars and commentators had to say about the theology of the biblical writers, Schreiner first sat down with an open Bible and read it carefully while making observations and taking notes. As a result, his sharp eye notices the intricate details present in the biblical tapestry, but also sees the beautiful pattern that emerges when the entire scope of Scripture is taken into consideration. It is remarkable to see a New Testament scholar handle the Old Testament with such masterful skill. This is hardly surprising, though, since Schreiner's approach to the Old Testament is no different than his approach to the New Testament. The same competence and faithfulness that mark his Pauline and New Testament theologies also leave an unmistakable imprint on his biblical theology.

Let me get right down to why you should read this book. When it comes to a book claiming to be a *biblical theology*, what could be more of a commendation than saying that it helped me understand the theology of the Bible better? Not only this, but *The King in His Beauty* also gave me a glimpse of what the future holds for all those who place their trust in Jesus Christ— a glorious encounter with the majesty of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

#### Lucas Bradburn

Editor, Credo Magazine



Pastoring the Pastor: Emails of a Journey Through Ministry

by Tim Cooper and Kelvin Gardiner

Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012

astoring the Pastor by Tim Cooper and Kelvin Gardiner is an outstanding little book. fact, I would make it required reading for every seminarian or young considering pastoral man ministry.

The book is a collection of fictional emails. primarily sent back and forth between Daniel, a young pastor in his first church, and his Uncle Eldon, an older, experienced pastor in the twilight of life. The emails cover a wide breadth of pastoral issues including visitation, handling opposition, confrontation, guarding your heart, loving difficult people, dealing with anxiety, and maintaining one's personal walk with the Lord. I was surprised by how many topics were covered so well in a book of this size and format.

Pastoring the Pastor's main strength is its raw realism about the difficulties and stresses of pastoral ministry. Being a pastor is tough, and this book does not attempt to hide that. I did not really have any clue about this upon entering the pastorate. There are lots of times when you want to cuss, to quit, or even worse. Pastoring the Pastor helpfully knocks the wind out of the sails of the overly optimistic, blissfully ignorant seminary graduate. However, by realistically addressing such issues, the

book helps the reader process the challenges biblically and hopefully become better prepared when encountering the same problems (and no doubt, they will come).

While the book is really excellent, two minor caveats are worth mentioning. First, some of the details of the fictional situations are outlandish in a Chris Farley/"Tommy Boy" sort of way. On more than one occasion, my wife caught me nearly hyperventilating in laughter as I read about Meredith the cat lady, the church barn dance or Sidney Snider's charts for easy church growth. While these make for entertaining reading, they boarder on the absurd. Also, the entire book covers only about two years of time, which is a pretty brief span for a man to

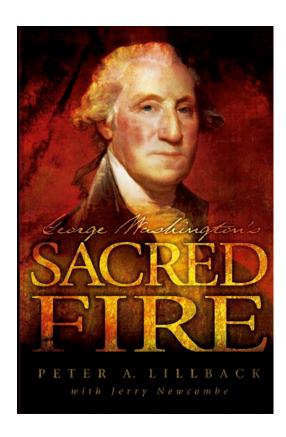
learn as many lessons as young Daniel did. To be more realistic, some of the lessons described herein take several years, if not decades, to learn. You sort of get the impression that after two years, Daniel will have smooth sailing for the rest of his career.

Nonetheless, *Pastoring the Pastor* is an excellent little volume on pastoral ministry. I do not think I have ever read a book which more accurately describes the gritty trials of the pastorate. And thankfully, it includes much biblical teaching for making the most of our trials.

#### Timothy R. Raymond

Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church Muncie, Indiana **■** 

#### LISTENING TO THE PAST



## PETER A. LILLBACK **SHARES** WISDOM FROM THE LIFE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

#### What lessons have you learned from George Washington?

Three aspects of Washington's leadership are models for my leadership at Westminster: character, concern for the good of the whole institution, and self-denial. First, Washington's life showed that character matters. Honesty, humility, perseverance, conviction for and adherence to core values were all aspects of his renowned leadership that emerged from his character. Those qualities are timeless for leaders and are aspirations that I long for in myself and my community. Second, Washington consistently asked what was best for the "good of the great whole" when making a difficult decision. As I've led Westminster, I've tried to consider not just what's good for the professors, or the students or the staff, but what's best for Westminster Seminary as a whole. Third, Washington's self-denial is seen when he refused to become king, as he was urged to do by his officers. A leader who leads to serve others creates the healthiest and most stable institution humanly possible.

#### How do you see the seminary serving the local church?

The seminary is never an end in itself. Semi-

nary narcissism is a death knell for the churches it serves and for the relevance of the seminary itself. The word "seminary" suggests a seed bed for growing young plants. If trees were never moved from the greenhouse, the trees and the greenhouse would suffer and eventually die. If attention is given only to the greenhouse, the seedlings may suffer from lack of nurture or perhaps not even be planted. But when the greenhouse and the seedlings are cared for together with recognition of their distinct and interdependent value, generations of life will result. When the seminary sees itself as a servant to advance the health of the church, it assures the survivability of both. Another way to express this is captured in the words, "What's whispered in the seminary classroom in one generation will be shouted from the pulpits in the next." The biblical truth or lack thereof in a seminary's curriculum and instruction will be reproduced by the students that the seminary trains. The seminary serves the local church best when it assures that the church's future pastors are taught to honor Christ, to proclaim his Word and to live by his life-saving gospel.

#### If you could host George Washington and John Calvin for dinner, what conversations do you imagine would transpire?

After getting over the amazement of their contemporaneous resurrection, and at being, of all places, at the home of a Presbyterian seminary president, I think the conversation

would begin with a deep and common commitment to the absolute sovereignty of God's providence. Providence, of course, was a core doctrine in Calvin's theology. Moreover, Washington referred to providence more than 270 times in his writings, showing his reliance upon God's sovereignty in every aspect of life.

They probably would also have a good discussion of how religious liberty should work its way out in a free nation. Calvin was shaped by the idea that the state should oversee the religious convictions of individuals, whereas Washington was convinced of the full religious liberty of conscience.

Finally, I think Washington would express his gratefulness to Calvin for all the Presbyterian support for the American Revolution. Many of Washington's officers and soldiers were Presbyterians. After all, Presbyterians historically have tended to be a rather contentious group. Whether that's true of Southern Baptists, I'll leave to the reader to decide.

This interview is used with permission from *Towers*.

**Peter A. Lillback** is President of Westminster Theological Seminary and author of George Washington's Sacred Fire.



#### Regeneration: Entering the Undiscovered Country

by Matthew Claridge

alvation is a very particular work of God. God does not merely elect nations, tribes or churches to salvation, but individual people. This particular electing love of God is the glory of our Reformed heritage, something to be cherished and protected. At the same time, one might get the impression that Reformed soteriology is excessively individualistic, that it leaves little room for the importance or role of community, e.g, we are individually elected aggregates who gathers together for convenience. As such, salvation becomes a very private, personal affair, focused narrowly on the state of one's own soul.

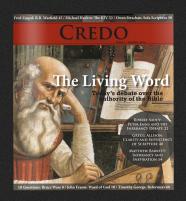
There are various ways Reformed theologians have attempted to mitigate or, better, balance this unmistakable fact of their heritage. Lutherans and High Calvinists have often made recourse to the Sacraments as a solution. However, there is a theologian in the stream of Reformed thought that offers another route through what we know today as "already-not yet" eschatology. The theologian I have in mind is Geerhardus Vos, one of the initial pioneers of this brand of eschatology. He points to the role of the Spirit, a quintessentially Reformed move, as the key that opens the door between regeneration as an individual experience and regeneration as a rite of passage.

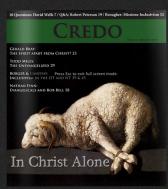
Vos states in The Pauline Eschatology: "On the one hand the Spirit is the resurrection-source, on the other He appears as the substratum of the resurrection-life, the element, as it were, in which, as in its circumambient atmosphere the life of the coming aeon shall be lived" (163). Drawing on the meaning of the biblical meaning of "spirit" as "wind" he states elsewhere, "the 'Pnuema' was ... before all else the element of the eschatological or celestial sphere, that which characterizes the mode of existence and life in the world to come and consequently of that anticipated form in which the world to come is even now realized" (59).

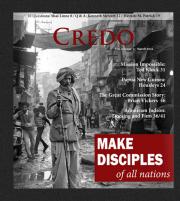
To translate: to be reborn is not simply a change in the state of the soul, but a change in a state of affairs. By receiving the Spirit, we have entered the world of the age to come. We are baptized into the world of the new heavens and earth. We are not just a new people, but a new people in a new place. We are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, "seated with Christ in heavenly places" (Eph. 2.6). Like the Pevensie children, we have passed through the wardrobe into a divine realm consisting "in the enveloping, circumambient, one might almost say atmospheric character of the Spirit's working" (59).

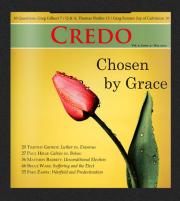
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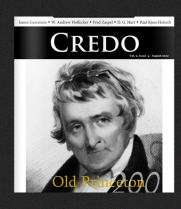
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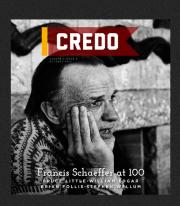














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