

# REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



SPRING 2016

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2



- 3** FROM RUTHERFORD HALL  
Jerry O'Neill
- 4** REFORMED SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY TEXTBOOKS: HAND MAIDEN TO THE  
ENLIGHTENMENT PRIVATIZATION OF FAITH  
William Edgar
- 14** CALVIN'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD: THE CASE OF CAROLI  
Richard Gamble
- 21** HOMOSEXUALITY IN AMERICA: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT AS COVENANTERS  
Michael LeFebvre
- 35** THE BATTLES OF THE FRENCH REFORMED TRADITION  
Thomas Reid
- 49** THE REFORMATION OF JOSIAH AND THE REDISCOVERY OF THE SCRIPTURES: 2 CHRON. 34  
C. J. Williams

RPTS

THE ONLINE JOURNAL OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



## DESCRIPTION

*Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* is the online theological journal of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* is provided freely by RPTS faculty and other scholars to encourage the theological growth of the church in the historic, creedal, Reformed faith. *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* is published biannually online at the RPTS website in HTML and PDF. Readers are free to use the journal and circulate articles in written, visual, or digital form, but we respectfully request that the content be unaltered and the source be acknowledged by the following statement. “Used by permission. Article first appeared in *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal*, the online theological journal of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (rpts.edu).”

## EDITORS

### **General Editor:**

Barry York  
byork@rpts.edu

### **Assistant Editor:**

Gabriel Wingfield  
gwingfield@rpts.edu

### **Contributing Editors:**

Tom Reid  
treid@rpts.edu

C.J. Williams  
cwilliams@rpts.edu

## ARTICLES

The Editorial Team of *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* selects individuals to contribute articles and does not receive unsolicited works. When a request for a submission has been made and accepted, articles should generally be about 3,000 to 6,000 words in length and should be submitted to the General Editor. Articles should use clear, concise English, following The SBL Handbook of Style (esp. for abbreviations), supplemented by *The Chicago Manual of Style*. They should consistently use either UK or USA spelling and punctuation, and they should be submitted electronically as an email attachment using Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx extensions).

ISSN 2377-7680

## **From Rutherford Hall**

**Dr. Jerry O'Neill**

---

*President of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

---

During the twenty-one years that I have served at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, I have often spoken of three aspects of ministerial preparation, sometimes comparing this to a three-legged stool. If you do not get all three right, you will not have a stable foundation.

The first leg consists of Christlikeness, godliness, and spiritual maturity. Personal piety and a solid marriage and family are important aspects of being a good pastor. The second leg involves the development of proper ministry skills. Godliness is not enough. A pastor must be able to preach, teach, counsel, evangelize, disciple, lead meetings, and show hospitality. The third leg consists of theological orthodoxy, and a growing understanding of systematic theology and the attacks of others on the historic Christian faith. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and we need theologically educated pastors who can not only teach correct doctrine, but also point out and rebuff false teaching.

The Preface to the original Constitution of our Seminary says that the qualifications for the ministry include piety, good sense, and a good theological education. In many ways, this is not too far from the way I say it today. "Good sense" may not be the equivalent of the development of ministry skills, but it is very clear from the original curriculum that a good education included "ministry skills development" and not just the cognitive aspect of a theological education. "Good sense" is wisdom that combines knowledge and spiritual maturity to make a man fruitful in ministry.

How we need "good sense" today! How the church needs wisdom today. There is little in the church today more uncommon than what we used to call "common sense." Indeed, how we need Biblically informed common sense today!

As you read through this edition of the Journal, may your hearts be blessed! May you grow in knowledge! But may you grow in piety, also, and in your communion with Christ so that the end result will be growth in wisdom, growth in "good sense" that our forefathers rightly point to as a qualification for ministry.

*Jerry O'Neill*

⊙

---

## **Reformed Systematic Theology Textbooks: Hand Maiden to the Enlightenment Privatization of Faith**

Dr. William Edgar

---

*Interim President of Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA. Previously, Dr. Edgar pastored the Broomall Reformed Presbyterian Church, in Broomall, Pennsylvania.*

---

### **Introduction**

Using words from Revelation, the climactic chorus of *Messiah* sings about Jesus Christ. “King of kings, and Lord of lords” is the central theme, while singers comment, “Hallelujah,” and exult, “And He shall reign forever and ever.” At its first production in London, King George II stood at these words, out of respect for the only King of kings, his King. His subjects rose with their king to honor their King. To this day, audiences do the same when they hear the joyous proclamation, “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

In an apocryphal scene in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, which nevertheless correctly captures Eric Liddell’s faith, “God above country,” the Scottish sprinter resists the Prince of Wales’ demand that he run in the Paris Olympics on Sunday. Liddell says to the Prince, “God made countries. God makes kings, and the rules by which they govern. And those rules say that the Sabbath is His. And I for one intend to keep it that way.”

### **Christ’s Kingship Over the Nations in Reformed Systematics**

Both the oratorio *Messiah* by Handel and the movie *Chariots of Fire* more clearly and truly teach that Jesus is King over nations than do most Reformed systematic theology texts used to train Reformed preachers and through them the Christian Church. The Reformed Presbyterian Seminary uses Robert Reymond’s 1998 text, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*.<sup>1</sup> It teaches little about the kingship of Christ and less about civil government, except for a page in which Reymond takes Theonomists (and Calvin and Luther) to task for confusing church and state. My grandfather, John Coleman, taught systematic theology at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in the 1930s and 1940s, using a 1907 text written by the Baptist Augustus Strong. Strong devotes four pages to Christ’s office of Prophet, seventy-two pages to his office as Priest, and one page to his office as King over the Church. Regarding civil government, Strong is

---

<sup>1</sup> Since the writing of this article, RPTS has begun primarily to use three texts in systematic theology courses: John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 ed., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, c1960); Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009); and A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1869). *Ed.*

silent. Westminster Seminary uses the late seventeenth century text by Francis Turretin. He does not address issues of Civil Government and is mainly concerned to establish the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingship over the Church. Westminster also uses Bavinck's systematic theology, which confesses that Christ is King over nations, but does not develop the point. On Civil Government, Bavinck mostly criticizes the Roman Catholic "confusion of Powers." The same, almost complete silence about Christ's rule over the nations and Civil Government prevails in systematic theologies by Shedd (1888) and Berkhof (1932).

The Princeton Presbyterian Charles Hodge (1871), on the other hand, has some material about Christ's Kingship. He notes that Christ's "royal office is rendered so prominent in the Messianic prophecies that the Jews looked for Him only as a king."<sup>2</sup> After quoting these texts extensively, Hodge teaches that Christ as King providentially rules the nations for the sake of the church. He devotes several interesting pages to civil government in connection with a discussion of the Fifth Commandment. His son, A. A. Hodge (1860), advances this improvement further by devoting a whole chapter to the mediatorial kingship of Christ. He writes, "The state is a divine institution, and the officers thereof are God's ministers. Rom xiii. 1-4, Christ, the mediator, is, as a revealed fact, 'Ruler of the Nations,' King of Kings, and Lord of lords, Rev. 19:16; Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9-11; Eph. 1:17-23, and the Sacred Scriptures are an infallible rule of faith and practice to all men under all conditions." He concludes, "That every nation, therefore, should explicitly acknowledge the Christ of God to be the Supreme Governor, and his revealed will the supreme fundamental law of the land."<sup>3</sup> But A. A. Hodge does not go on to develop a doctrine of civil government.

Finally, the American Southern Presbyterian writers, Dabney and Thornwell, do address Christ's Kingship over the nations. Thornwell prepared a petition for the southern Presbyterian Church to submit to the new Confederate government, that they should amend their constitution to make it explicitly recognize the reign of Christ. It was never debated, and he withdrew it. Robert L. Dabney in his systematic theology defends at length Christ's mediatorial rule as judge of the nations, both now and at the End. He also discusses at length the origins of civil government, preferring a divine origin to social contract theory, but he does not otherwise deal with modern developments in the realm of government.

The frequent silence of Reformed systematic theology concerning Christ's reign over the nations and civil government, and the limited range of topics dealt with even by A. A. Hodge and R. L. Dabney, is quite surprising to find in the heirs of John Calvin and the Westminster Assembly. The Westminster Assembly, called to meet by the English Parliament according to the Solemn League and Covenant between England, Scotland, and Ireland, devoted an entire chapter in its Confession to the civil magistrate (*WCF* 23). The Confession elsewhere takes frequent notice of civil government, as in the chapters on Oaths (*WCF* 22), Church Synods (*WCF* 31), and Liberty of Conscience (*WCF* 20). John Calvin concludes his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a long chapter on civil government, beginning by sharply distinguishing between civil and ecclesiastical government. Calvin's political thought was sufficiently extensive that it has given rise to a vast literature in the academy. Calvin elsewhere devoted more space to Christ's Kingly office than do later Reformed writers. In the *Institutes'* prefatory address to King Francis I of France, Calvin lays down this principle: "Indeed, this consideration makes a true king: to recognize himself a minister of God in governing his kingdom. Now, that king who in ruling over his realm does not serve God's glory exercises not a kingly rule, but brigandage."<sup>4</sup> Here Calvin

---

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 2:460.

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1860), 434.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 ed., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, c1960), 1:12.

echoes Augustine in his *City of God*, “Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies?”<sup>5</sup> Calvin concludes his address to the king, “May the Lord, the King of Kings, establish your throne in righteousness [cf. Prov. 25:5], and your dominion in equity, most illustrious King. At Basel, on the 1st August, in the year 1536.”<sup>6</sup>

Calvin’s echo of Augustine reminds us that his attention to Christ’s Kingship over kings and hence over civil government was no new thing in Christian teaching. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* addresses both law and judgment extensively in the civil realm. Augustine’s *City of God* contrasts two cities formed by two loves, cities that interpenetrate each other in the present age. He ascribed Rome’s dominion to God’s Providence. “He, therefore, who is the one true God... gave a kingdom to the Romans when He would, and as great as He would....”<sup>7</sup> Rome’s fall to an enemy was not the result of its becoming Christian, but of its many vices. “But we say that [these Christian emperors] are happy if they rule justly... If they make their power the handmaid of His majesty by using it for the greatest possible extension of His worship; if they fear, love, worship God...”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the near silence of seminary-taught Reformed Dogmatics about the Kingship of Christ over the nations and civil government should be a surprise to anyone who gives the Bible even a cursory reading. The Old Testament’s messianic prophecies are overwhelmingly about the coming Davidic King. God’s covenant with David promised a son who would sit on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:27, “Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth”; Jer. 33:19-22). Isaiah predicted a son born to a virgin who would be called “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever” (Is. 9:6-7). Daniel foresaw

One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away.... (Dan. 7:13-14)

Micah furnished the prophecy that the scribes related to Herod the Great in answer to the question, “Where is the Messiah to be born?” “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2).

The New Testament, while it clearly reveals Christ as Prophet and Priest as well as King, makes Christ’s Kingship His central mediatorial office. Matthew begins, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David (Mat. 1:1).” The point is kingship! Jesus’ final and last word to the Church about Himself in Revelation is this: “I am the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16). The point is kingship! In the first sermon preached after Jesus’ Resurrection, Peter quoted King David in Psalm 16, that God would not allow His Holy One to see corruption (Ps. 16:10). Clearly this was not David—he was long dead. The words were a prophecy about David’s greater Son, now ascended to heaven, of whom David said in Psalm 110,

---

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, c1950), 112, IV.4.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, 1:31.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, 174-175, V.21.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, 178, V.24.

“The LORD said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Ps. 110:1, quoted in Acts 2:25-35). The point is kingship.

The Apostles’ Creed confesses that Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” At his trial, Pilate asked Jesus directly, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He replied, “It is as you say” (Mat. 27:11) and He directly alluded to Daniel’s prophecy already quoted (Mk. 13:62; Dan. 7:13). Jesus submitted to Pilate’s verdict, but noted to Pilate, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above” (Jn. 19:11). He was put to death on the charge, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Mat. 27:37). The point was kingship.

Later, when the Jewish Sanhedrin arrested Peter and John for preaching in Jesus the resurrection of the dead, the Apostles observed that Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and Israel, had joined forces against Jesus, fulfilling the Second Psalm: “Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ” (Acts 4:24-27, quoting Ps. 2:1-2). The Revelation given to John also refers the Second Psalm to Jesus, “the male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron” (Rev. 12:5, see Rev. 2:26-27, quoting Ps. 2:10). The Book of Acts traces the continual interplay between a spreading church and Roman officials, in Cyprus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome (Acts 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22-28). The spread of the Church to Gentile lands meant that God was fulfilling His promise to David, “After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name” (Acts 15:16-17 quoting Amos 9:11-12). The point is kingship. In Thessalonica, a mob accused Paul of saying “there is another king—Jesus (Acts 17:7).” The Jews understood that by calling Jesus the Christ, Paul meant that Jesus is the promised son of David who would be King. Gentiles heard the name “Lord” applied to Jesus and heard Caesar’s claim to be “lord and savior” met with the rival claim of Jesus to be Lord.

The typical seminary’s systematic theology textbooks by and large distort Scripture by their few words about Christ as King, depart from the Christian traditions of centuries in Christendom, fail to instruct new preachers in the full counsel of God, and leave preachers and their congregations with the impression that Jesus is first of all our priest, secondly our prophet, and in only some vague way our spiritual King. There is virtually no instruction on civil government as it has developed since the European Enlightenment, none at all on the nations of the world, and almost nothing on public ethics. So preaching in some conservative churches idolizes the United States of America as the last best hope of mankind, in others it ignores civil affairs completely or addresses them piecemeal without any solid framework of understanding. We end up as Christians flailing futilely to defend the legal remnants of Christendom in our public life in areas such as life and marriage. Reformed preaching, in other words, implicitly accepts the legitimacy of a naked and secular public square, at best opposing it in an *ad hoc* fashion, without a clear theology to give it shape and heft. As now taught from our Reformed textbooks in our Reformed seminaries, Reformed systematic theology distorts Scripture by its silence on Christ’s Kingship and civil government, departs from the Great Tradition of the Christian Church in these matters, fails to follow in the path laid out by John Calvin and the Westminster Assembly, and leaves the Church ill-equipped for the cultural and political battles of our day between the two loves that Augustine describes.

Desperate for help and guidance in dealing with the social and political challenges of our times, Reformed American Christians have sometimes turned to the century-old Dutch tradition associated with the name Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper wanted to see the Netherlands a Christian nation.

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that this is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which the Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, great as he was, I consider Kuyper's movement to be a dead end for American Reformed Christians for both theological and political reasons. Politically, Kuyper worked within the bounds of a small continental European nation, with a homogeneous society and a political tradition that have little in common with the American Empire, an offspring of the British Empire. Theologically, Kuyper's movement used a flawed concept of "common grace" as the basis for cooperation between believers and nonbelievers in the public arena, a concept that continues to bear bad fruit both in the Netherlands and in churches of Dutch descent in this country, because it has been used to blur the antithesis between believer and unbeliever, and between Revelation and human efforts to grope for the truth.

The alternative to Kuyper for Reformed American Christians is modern Roman Catholic writing. It is noteworthy that there will soon be no Protestants on the American Supreme Court, only Jews and Catholics. It is to the Catholic Justices that most Reformed Christians look for understanding and defense of the remnants of Christian thinking concerning, for example, life and marriage enshrined in our laws. Many Reformed Christians read the journal of ideas, *First Things*, edited for many years by the late Richard John Neuhaus, a Roman Catholic convert. We read it because it does address, for the most part from within the Christian tradition, issues of American government, education, international relations and the like.

Why did Reformed systematics develop as it did after 1660, falling mostly silent on Christ's Kingship over the nations and on civil government? The answer to that question is beyond the scope of this paper, but in large measure the answer surely has to be found in the outcome of the Thirty Years War on the continent in 1648 and in the defeat of the Puritan project in England with the accession of Charles II to the throne in 1660. The early Reformers aimed to reconstitute both church and civil life on the basis of a Reformed Christianity. John Knox's stay in Geneva "so broadened his outlook on the whole movement, that he now saw the Reformation not just as an effort at religious reform, but as a movement to create a reformed Christian public and private life-style."<sup>10</sup> But after 1660, it was clear that the Reformed party had lost: Europe was not going to be reconstituted on the basis of a Reformed Christianity. Only in Scotland with the Presbyterian Covenanters did the attempt continue for another generation. Their defeat was sealed in 1689 when William became king, and the Covenanter Cameronians were so reduced in number that the Crown could safely ignore them. To put it bluntly, Reformed systematics after 1660 is written for a defeated party in Europe that by and large accepts its reduced ambitions and influence in the new Europe that now began to emerge out of Christendom. The Enlightenment, which in its early years still had strong Christian roots, began, aiming to constitute national unity on the basis of a common morality and an almighty sovereign state, but not on the basis of a common religious commitment. It decisively put denominations as they now evolved into a boxed-off realm of religion and family.

---

<sup>9</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near Unto God*, trans. John Hendrik de Vries (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, c1925), 7.

<sup>10</sup> W. S. Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Scribner, 1974), 154. Quoted by Richard Gamble in "The Christian and the Tyrant: Beza and Knox on Political Resistance Theory," *Westminster Theological Journal* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 126.

The Enlightened West, however, faces two insuperable difficulties. First, it turns out to be impossible to maintain national consensus on public ethics without a religious basis for those ethics. The West today can no longer agree on what constitutes murder. There is no agreed upon sexual ethic. What constitutes a family is up for grabs. The result is a culture that increasingly looks like it cannot maintain itself as it now is for many more decades. Second, Christ really is King over the nations. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Nations and their rulers must deal with Him, and the warnings in Psalm 2 and the rest of the Bible are clear and certain: rulers who lead their nations in rebellion against God in Christ put their nations in line for judgment. The Church must at least bear witness to these two realities. But it also needs to think responsibly in its systematic theology about the place of nations before God and about civil government in our day, just as Calvin and Westminster did in their day.

Suppose that those who write and teach Reformed systematic theology to instruct new pastors, and through them the Christian Church, were to reattach themselves to Christian teaching on the Kingship of Christ over the nations and civil government. Three lines of thought, at least, should be explored.

### **Towards a Reformed Systematic Theology of Christ's Kingship Over the Nations**

The first line of thought would be a full development of Christ's office of King. Conventionally, that office is placed third in the triad, Prophet, Priest, and King, but in its presentation in the Scriptures, that office has preeminence. It is the focus of Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah; it is the first meaning of Jesus' title of Christ, or Messiah; it is the obvious import of the title "lord;" it is the first and last word about Jesus in the New Testament; it is the charge on which He was executed; and it is the office that is clearly His by reason of His Resurrection (see Acts 2, Rom. 1:1-4, Phil. 2:5-11). Jesus' preaching was about the Kingdom of God. In many of His Kingdom parables, the master or king is Jesus. It is a universal Kingship, since Jesus claims that all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him. Therefore, He sends His disciples into all the world to teach all nations to believe in Him and to obey His Law.

Two books by Reformed Presbyterian writers have developed the Bible's teaching about Christ's Kingship over the nations at length, David Scott in his book *Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (1841, Albany), and William Symington in *Messiah the Prince* (1882, Glasgow), but both books show their age. They do not fully deal with modern developments in political thinking, and they think in terms of an established church.

The second area to explore in the Bible's teaching of Christ's Kingship over the nations would be a development of the identity and place of nations in God's plan. In the New Testament, the word "nations" (*ethnoi*) is often used of all non-Jewish people indiscriminately, for example, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 6:7) instructs us not to pray as the Gentiles (*ethnoi*) do. Non-Jews may be the meaning of *ethnoi* in the Great Commission, "teach all nations," although it could be argued that "nations" in that context means individual nations, not just non-Jews. The simple division of the world into Jew and non-Jew is reflected in Paul's phrase in Romans concerning salvation, "For the Jew first, and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16, see Col. 3:11). Later Christian writers sometimes referred to three races, Jew, Gentile, and Christian. Such usage of *ethnoi* reflected the universality of the Roman Empire prophesied in Daniel (see Dan. 2:40).

Nevertheless, there is an older usage of "nation" (*ethnos*) in the New Testament that refers to nations in their particularity. In Athens, Paul preached that "[God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings (Acts 17:26)." Here Paul echoes Deuteronomy: "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations..." (Deut. 32:8). Paul continued that God intended for the nations to seek after Him. But in their ignorance they did not find Him, even though He is not far from us. However, God now commands all men everywhere to

repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world, the king's task, by a Man He chose, proving His choice by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:27-31).

Although the nations were united in one great Empire in Jesus' day, Daniel's prophecy indicated that that Empire itself would eventually cease. Individual nations would reemerge. And so they have, some strong, some weak. God's division of the world into nations based on common descent, catalogued in the table of nations in Genesis 10 and affirmed at the Tower of Babel with language, was not undone either by the Roman Empire or by the Christian message. On the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, the Spirit pointedly empowered the Apostles to speak in all of the languages present (Acts 28:8-11). The Spirit did not empower the hearers to understand Aramaic or Hebrew. Even the picture of a fully redeemed humanity in Revelation portrays a chorus of unity in diversity: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne" (Rev. 7:9).

The Old Testament contains a remarkably developed account of nations. Already noted are the boundary markers of territory, descent, and language. In Deuteronomy is the idea of nations occupying specific parts of the earth with boundaries. Additionally, nations, as Israel observed, usually had their own kings. Finally, the Bible notes that each nation has made its own gods to worship instead of the one Creator. Common descent, common language, common territory, common history, common rule, and a common religion identified the nations. Sometimes only three or four of them delineate a nation. Israel in Egypt did not have its own territory or rulers; the Swiss today speak several languages; Americans do not share a common descent.

God speaks to nations as a whole, repeatedly, in the Bible, since His promise to Abraham was in him to bless all nations of the earth (Gen. 15:16). He gave Amos a message for Syria, Phoenicia, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Judah, and finally Israel (Amos 1-2). He sent Jonah to Assyria with a message. Jeremiah spoke to Egypt and Babylon. Through Daniel, and a dream to Nebuchadnezzar, and a sign to Belshazzar, God spoke to Babylon.

Any systematic theology development of the Bible's teaching about nations, established by God to seek after Him, and now called to end that rebellion and obey God's Messiah, must include a treatment of the place of "kings and nobles" in the nations. A good beginning place is Psalm 2. Whereas Psalm 1 describes the two ways of righteousness or wickedness open to every man, Psalm 2 describes the two ways open to every nation. Together, the two Psalms introduce the Psalter, and it is Psalm 2 that the New Testament repeatedly quotes rather than Psalm 1. The rulers of the nations, the elites as we might say today, lead nations in their rebellion against God, who calls on them to lead their nations to end their rebellion.<sup>11</sup> It is almost tautological to observe that nations follow their leaders. That is why they are leaders. So God commands the kings and nobles of the nations to kiss the Son, lest in His wrath He destroy them. Leaders who lead their nations to defy God's Anointed put their entire nations at risk of God's judgment.

In the midst of the chapters in Isaiah concerning God's plan for His Servant, He declares, "Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship." "So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him." "Kings shall be your foster fathers, and queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the ground" (Is. 49:7; 52:15; 49:23). When Augustine wrote, as I quoted him earlier, that those emperors who think of sovereignty as a ministry of God, and use it for the spread of true religion, he reflected the words of the prophets, as did Calvin when he addressed the King of France and urged him to see himself as a minister of God.

---

<sup>11</sup> For a further discussion of the meaning of Psalm 2, see William Edgar, "Christ's Kingship in Contemporary Politics," in *Explicitly Christian Politics* (Pittsburgh, PA: Christian Statesman Press, c1997)

In connection with a development of the place of nations in God's plan, we need to come to grips with the history of the interplay of the Christian gospel (Jesus is the promised Messiah, and He is now God's reigning King) and the nations of the world. In centuries past, many of them have thought of themselves collectively as Christian nations. American and Protestant pride should not as easily dismiss their way of thinking as we do.<sup>12</sup> Many Americans, perhaps because they are ill-educated Protestants, proudly dismiss the notion that a nation could or even should be Christian. Other Americans, because they are ill-educated about the radical secularism of our Constitution, continue to insist that the United States already is a Christian nation. For much of our history, indeed, an informal Protestant establishment of the once mainline churches continued our colonial legacy of a generally Christian public life. But in the last half century, that establishment has failed decisively, and it is now often a strong proponent of ever more startling denials of godly ethics in American life. It would be most accurate to describe our nation as not Christian in any official sense, and in recent decades as intensifying its rebellion against the King of kings, even while many Christians live here and have greatly shaped our public life in the past.

The third area that should be discussed in connection with Christ's Kingship over the nations should include an account and evaluation of near universal developments originating in Europe after 1600 A.D. Here I have in mind the emergence of the nation state as the putatively only valid form of social and political organization, with empires, confederations of cities, or tribes considered invalid. In connection with this preeminence of the nation state comes the choice of representative democracy as the only valid form of politics, with an emphasis on rules of the game and procedural justice, more than on rules of life. The huge increase in our productive capacities by the deliberate application of scientific methods to industry, and the significant lengthening of human life, has transformed social life since 1600. In the minds of many this prosperity validates the new political arrangements that have accompanied it. Finally, and with growing insistence, Western national elites have rejected Jesus Christ. The rejection of the reign of Christ is what the term "secularization" truly refers to. The emergence of the nation state, liberal democracy, and productive abundance do not ineluctably lead to a secular life in which religion becomes a purely private matter among consenting adults. No, secularization is the deliberate choice of our leaders, our kings and nobles so to speak.

The systematic theology taught in our seminaries, as it teaches that Christ is King over the nations, needs to be written with an understanding of the contemporary world in which we bear witness. It also needs to interact with Catholic thinking in regard to these things, that is, with Popes Leo XIII, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI, with the American Jesuit John Courtney Murray and with the theology of Vatican II. That is how Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin all wrote their theology—fully interacting with other thinkers and with the world they lived in.

A recent TV exchange between two leading conservative Catholic intellectuals and a caller who represents traditional Catholic thinking illuminates how strongly the tides of Western secularism overpower even conservative Catholic intellectuals. As you hear it, note how weak the argument is: because something might be done poorly, it should not be done at all. That is not their stance on taxation, making roads, or going to war. They do not begin to explain why silence about Christ is a good thing for the government. Here is the exchange, a partial transcript of a TV question and answer session with Joseph Bottum, new editor of *First Things* magazine, and the conservative Catholic writer George Weigel:

---

<sup>12</sup> See William Edgar, "The National Confessional Position" in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1989), 176-199.

*Caller:* The Catholics' perennial position and commitment to the Kingship of Christ in America, for example, to a constitutional amendment, perhaps, declaring Christ King....

*Joseph Bottum:* Richard [Neuhaus, editor of *First Things* until his death] would have thought that this was a fundamentally un-American idea, precisely because America is not a Catholic country, and we're a country born of the rejection of kings. Now Christ is the King, but He is the King over we [sic] the individuals, and thus we are called to something beyond the nation. He...would have seen the changes that happened from Leo XIII on in Catholic social teaching and Catholic understanding, particularly of Vatican II of democracies..., I think Richard would have seen this sort of movement to have a constitutional amendment to declare Christ the King as a retrograde movement.

*George Weigel:* I think he would also say... that that's simply not the business of the state, and that the state is incompetent to make those sorts of judgments. A state that could say Christ is King is the state that could say that Charles III or George VII or Mohammed or Oprah Winfrey is Queen. The deeper point is that the state is incompetent to make theological judgments. The guys who can't fix the potholes should not be saying theological arguments. This is important to recognize because it puts the state in its proper place. The state is important for certain functions, but it does not have the capacity to make the judgment that Christ is King.

## **Conclusion**

Reformed systematics since Turretin has by and large abetted the secularization of Western nations by its silence about Christ's reign over the nations. It has little to say to the elites that govern us, except to call them to personal (and private) religion. What is needed is a new appropriation of the Christian tradition exemplified by Calvin's chapter on civil government, with an emphasis on Christ as God's chosen anointed King who rules the nations. Then our preachers will have a systematic framework in which to teach their flocks how to call our nation to repentance and obedience to Christ our Lord.

There is no name in America with the power to provoke controversy like the name *Jesus*. I still remember the shocked silence in a 1978 University of Pennsylvania graduate seminar when I quoted Jesus by name. Anyone who has quoted Jesus by name in a public school classroom as I have, or who has referred to salvation through repentance and faith in Him on television as Brit Hume did a few years ago, or who has named Him as His favorite philosopher as George Bush did, has noted the instant hostility that the name Jesus evokes among unbelievers. Systematic teaching about Christ's present Kingship over the nations will bring howls of protest about the imposition of theocracy. And yet, every Christmas we sing the Easter story of Messiah, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." And the occasional "Eric Liddell" puts God above country. It is time for Reformed systematics to catch up with them, because Christ reigns now as King. Our country and its elites need to hear that, because that is the Gospel of God, which "He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son

Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:2-4).

---

*This article was originally given as a lecture at the Westminster Conference on June 10, 2010 at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA*

---

# Calvin's Theological Method: The Case of Caroli

Dr. Richard C. Gamble

---

*Professor of Systematic Theology  
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

---

## Introduction: Justification for the Investigation

Calvin's early ministry in Geneva was marred by the intense controversy between his colleagues and himself, and a colleague from Lausanne by the name of Pierre Caroli. This fascinating period of church history has received very scant investigation in the English language. There is only one major article (published in 1972) which is a translation of an earlier Dutch article.<sup>1</sup> Prior to that there was a five page study which investigated a small part of the controversy and addressed one specific problem,<sup>2</sup> and there were a few pages analyzing Caroli from the perspective of the reforming movement at Meaux.<sup>3</sup>

The situation is not much better in German language study. A few pages of analysis are given by W. Kampschulte, O. Ritschl, and A. Lang.<sup>4</sup> Their combined analysis accounts for less than ten pages of material. More lengthy is the work of E. Bähler, *Petrus Caroli und Johannes Calvin*,<sup>5</sup> but it is unbalanced and at times inaccurate. More work has been done in Dutch and French. Very helpful is the biographical account of Caroli in Haag<sup>6</sup> and two articles by Pierson.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> W. Nijenhuis, "Calvin's Attitude Towards the Symbols of the Early Church During the Conflict with Caroli," in *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 73-97.

<sup>2</sup> Steven M. Reynolds, "Calvin's View of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds," *Westminster Theological Journal* 23 (1960/61), 33-37. Reynolds is primarily dealing with Wiliston Walker's misunderstanding of Calvin's attitude toward the Athanasian Creed. Reynolds properly corrects Walker's citation that according to Calvin no true church would have ever approved of the Athanasian Creed. Reynolds is simply agreeing with the interpretation of E. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, vol. II, 256. John T. McNeill also briefly addresses the controversy, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 141, 155.

<sup>3</sup> H. Heller, "Marguerite of Navarre and the Reformation of Meaux," in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 33 (1971), 271-273.

<sup>4</sup> W. Kampschulte, *Johann Calvin, Seine Kirche und sein Staat in Genf* (Leipzig: 1908); O. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Leipzig: 1908); August Lang, *Johannes Calvin: Ein Lebensbild zu seinem 400. Geburtstag am 10. Juli 1909* (Leipzig: R. Haupt, 1909).

<sup>5</sup> E. Bähler, "Petrus Caroli und Johannes Calvin," in *Jahrbuch für Schweizerische Geschichte* 29 (1904), 39-169.

<sup>6</sup> Eugène et Emile Haag, *La France Protestante* (Paris: Librairie Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1881), III, col. 770-775.

<sup>7</sup> Pierson, "Kalvijn en Caroli," in *Nieuwe Studien over Johannes Calvijn* (Amsterdam: 1883), 17-89; "Caroli na de nederlaag," in *Studien over Johannes Calvijn*, 3rd series (Amsterdam: 1891), 123-158.

Combining the work of Nijenhuis, Haag, Pierson and Bahler, a relatively complete account of the historical background and theological results of the controversy may be obtained. Nevertheless, no thorough analysis has been undertaken examining the literature of the controversy from the more narrow focus of Calvin's theological method.

The impetus for this investigation has come from two sources. The first is the necessity to prepare annotations to Calvin's letters from 1535 to 1538 for a republication of Calvin's *Correspondence*. Professor Neuser has been a great aid to the important cause of the production of the *Editio Recognita* of Calvin, of which the letters play a part. The second comes from the aforementioned article by Nijenhuis. One statement in particular underlines the need for further analysis: "In Caroli's mode of thought and discussion..., Calvin detected the speculative and rationalistic method of theologizing which according to him were characteristic of the church of Rome. The way in which Calvin repeatedly returns to this subject in his *Defensio* shows us that this difference played an important role in the conflict."<sup>8</sup>

Questions which naturally accrue from this statement are: how repeatedly does Calvin return to this subject, and how important was this theological difference in fact? These questions are properly raised by Nijenhuis but not fully answered because he focuses attention more specifically upon Calvin's attitude toward the church symbols rather than Calvin's theological method. Thus this controversy should also be analyzed from the vantage point of theological methodology.

## **Calvin and Caroli: History of the Debate and Its Interpretation**

### ***A. History of Calvin Interaction with Caroli, to 1537***

Caroli<sup>9</sup> had probably been influenced by the reforming movement connected with bishop Briçonnet in Meaux, as early as 1521.<sup>10</sup> We know that he was teaching and preaching in Paris in 1524 with a doctor's degree from the Sorbonne. His preaching was apparently being done in the French language with men and women present.<sup>11</sup> His theological problems began in 1525 with charges being brought against him by the Parisian faculty. Nevertheless, by 1530 he was reconciled to the faculty.

Later he had a church in Alençon in 1530.<sup>12</sup> After a short time of peace, in 1533, some over-zealous youths destroyed church property. This brought heavy judgment to the area with the death sentence meted out to the two, plus seven others. Caroli, too, was condemned, not for this crime but for theological heresy.<sup>13</sup> Caroli then fled France to Switzerland. He was resident for some time in Geneva, then spent further time in Basel, between the end of August 1535 to March 1536.<sup>14</sup> After that, he was sent to minister to the protestant church in Lausanne, as main

---

<sup>8</sup> Nijenhuis, 88.

<sup>9</sup> Born in 1480, in Rosay (province of Brie). Cf. Haag, col. 3:770 and Bähler, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Haag, III, col.770. H. Heller, "Marguerite of Navarre and the Reformers of Meaux," in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 33 (1971), 271.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Bähler, 46.

<sup>12</sup> Haag, III, col. 771. Pierson, "Caroli na de nederlaag, 123. Bähler, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Bähler, 48f.

<sup>14</sup> Nijenhuis, 78. On page 79 he cites a letter from Grynaeus who states that Caroli is in Basel at the time. Cf. Herm. III, 374. Cf. also Bähler, 55.

preacher, chosen over Viret (Spring 1536)<sup>15</sup> and to be professor of Old Testament at the new Academy<sup>16</sup> (late 1536/early 1537).

Calvin arrived in Geneva in 1536, having apparently met Caroli earlier in Basel. Very shortly after his arrival in Geneva, Calvin was involved in the controversy with Caroli. The controversy was not at all purely between the two of them, but it began with Viret, extended to Farel and Calvin, then to the ministers of Lausanne, Geneva and Berne,<sup>17</sup> and eventually Basel,<sup>18</sup> Strassbourg and Zurich.<sup>19</sup>

Caroli was charged with believing in the efficacy of prayers for the dead.<sup>20</sup> He in turn charged Viret, Farel and Calvin with Arianism. These charges and counter-charges were dealt with first in a discussion in Lausanne in October of 1536,<sup>21</sup> continued in Berne, and concluded with a synod held in Lausanne, May 14 1537.<sup>22</sup> The syndics of Berne wanted Caroli to come there and express himself in debate with Farel in June of 1537,<sup>23</sup> but before a total resolution of the situation occurred, Caroli returned to the Roman church.<sup>24</sup>

### ***B. A Brief History of Interpretation***

There has not been a great deal of interest in secondary literature as to whether or not Caroli actually advocated prayers for the dead nor whether Calvin was an Arian. Much more interesting has been the issue as to why Calvin would not subscribe to the Athanasian creed as demanded by Caroli.

Certainly scholars agree that this controversy was very important for the movement of Reformation in French-speaking Switzerland. Caroli's charges brought a cloud over the theology of all the major preachers. There is also agreement that his charges, although appearing absurd upon first reading, had sufficient weight for this to be a true controversy. Nijenhuis is particularly helpful in outlining why it could be believable that Farel, for one, could be questioned on his doctrine of Christ.<sup>25</sup> Nijenhuis has also provided the most modern synopsis of the history of interpretation. He concludes correctly that the issues between Calvin and Caroli

---

<sup>15</sup> Pierson, "Caroli na de nederlaag," 123 incorrectly gives the date as May 1535, but we know that Caroli was still in Geneva at that time. Cf. Bähler, 51-53. Cf. Herm. IV, 103 and 109.

<sup>16</sup> Herm. IV, 167.

<sup>17</sup> Herm. IV, 183-187.

<sup>18</sup> Herm. IV, 241.

<sup>19</sup> Herm. IV, 252f., 254f.

<sup>20</sup> CO VII, 328f. Cf. Herm. IV, 188.

<sup>21</sup> Haag, *La France Protestante*, III, col. 772.

<sup>22</sup> Nijenhuis, 83.

<sup>23</sup> Haag, *La France Protestante*, III, col. 773.

<sup>24</sup> Caroli's letter to Pope Paul III is dated the end of June, 1537. Cf. Herm. IV, 248f.

<sup>25</sup> Nijenhuis mentions that in 1534 Farel was suspected in Berne of holding to certain anti-trinitarian views, that in 1535 Grynaeus wrote to Farel on the christology found in the *Sommaire* (suspicions raised to him by Caroli himself) and that the *Sommaire* did not in fact contain classical trinitarian formulations, 79.

are far more than personal, and that McNeil, Long, and Bähler are incorrect in their conclusions concerning the matter. McNeil analyzed Calvin from a late nineteenth/early twentieth century vantage point by making Calvin a champion of individual rights, which is not correct. Lang also incorrectly underlined Calvin's independence from church tradition and Bähler sided with Caroli regarding his suspicions against the reformers.<sup>26</sup>

Calvin could certainly sign ecumenical creeds and, furthermore, he could see them as binding upon the conscience of the person.

## **An Analysis of Calvin's *Pro G. Farello et collegis ejus...*, 1545**

### **A. History of Events from 1537 to 1545**

After Caroli's defeat and expulsion at the synod of Lausanne, he travelled back to France and returned to the Roman Church. In a letter dated June, 1537, Caroli rejected his own "errors" in conjunction with joining the Protestants.<sup>27</sup> One other "error" which he rejected was his wife who was left in Switzerland.<sup>28</sup> He was then forgiven by Pope Paul III in August.<sup>29</sup>

However, in 1539 Caroli travelled back to Switzerland to be reconciled with the Protestants.<sup>30</sup> The ministers Farel, Viret, Zebedee and others met with him in July of that year and had an amicable colloquium. In September he arrived at Strassbourg. In the first week of October there was a conference held with Bucer, Capito, Sturm and the other ministers present, with the possible exception of Calvin.<sup>31</sup> There he repudiated all of his "papal mistakes" and asked to be received as a brother, which was granted. Finally, he was officially forgiven by the Senate of Berne in January of 1540.

Also in 1540 Caroli travelled to Metz.<sup>32</sup> At this time the city was not protestant, and since it was important, was carefully observed by both sides of the controversy. Details of Caroli's life and work during this period are difficult to determine. However, the Protestants determined that Farel should travel to Metz to assist in evangelizing the town, which he left to do in August of 1542.<sup>33</sup> As can be expected, with Farel's arrival a tremendous controversy broke out among the populace, and Farel was expelled at the beginning of the next year. Farel's appearance was probably the catalyst for Caroli's published work against Farel and Calvin in 1543. Response to the writing occurred immediately, with a conference concerning it occurring in May of 1543.

---

<sup>26</sup> Nijenhuis, 88f.

<sup>27</sup> Herm. IV, 249. "Cum autum [...] blasphemias aequo animo ferre."

<sup>28</sup> Herm. IV, 250. "...et poenas quas ob dictum (...) declarare."

<sup>29</sup> Haag, col. 773. Bähler, 86 cites a copy of the letter in the Berne archives.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Haag, col. 773f. and Bähler, 122.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Herm. VI, 40ff. for a complete transcript.

<sup>32</sup> There is a letter to Caroli from Calvin in August of 1540.

<sup>33</sup> Bähler, 130.

## **B. Synopsis of the Contents**

It is impossible within the space of a short article to analyze the entire document of forty-seven columns. The issue which will be addressed in this article concerns Calvin's theological method.

The first question which must be answered touches upon the relationship between Calvin's statements in the *Institutes* of 1536, the *Genevan Catechism* of 1537, the *Institutes* of 1539<sup>34</sup> and then six years later in the *Pro Farello*. By focusing upon his implementation of the words '*trinitas*' and '*persona*' prior to the *Pro Farello*, a framework can be built to understand Calvin's reasons for refusing to employ those words during the controversy and will shed light upon his theological method.

From the first edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin did not hesitate to use the *terminus technicus*, '*trinitas*'. As a matter of fact, he made a strong argument for implementation of the word, even though it does not itself appear in Scripture. That word was crucial in resolving the conflict with Sabellius, and Calvin says: "Say that in one essence of God there is a trinity of persons; you will say in one word what Scripture states, and cut short empty talkativeness."<sup>35</sup>

The word '*trinitas*' appears at least six times in the 1539 *Institutes*, three times in direct connection with the word '*persona*'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, in the first two editions of the Latin *Institutes*, Calvin does not have any hesitation directly discussing this important topic.

In between the writing of these two editions, the citizens of Geneva accepted a *Catechism* which does not contain the classical trinitarian formulations.<sup>37</sup> That lack was the ostensible reason for Caroli's objection to the *Catechism* and cry for the return to the Ancient creeds.

## **C. Specific Analysis of Method**

With this background completed, analysis can begin. Since Calvin was not against implementing the terms '*trinitas*' and '*persona*' in his *Institutes*, there is no question that he was not an Arian and that he finds the technical terms acceptable in theological discussion. There are therefore other reasons for his not using the formulations in the *Catechism* and his rejection of its use during the controversy with Caroli.

One plausible reason for his not employing it with Caroli is on personal or psychological grounds. In that his opponent insisted upon its utilization, Calvin in arrogance could simply refuse to grant him the request. This reason is not unrealistic, for there was apparently quite a bit of personal dislike for Caroli by Calvin. Recognizing, nevertheless, the human element in this controversy, Nijenhuis is correct in assuming that these personal or psychological reasons are not sufficient to explain the controversy.<sup>38</sup> The grounds are theological.

---

<sup>34</sup> Although we are not analyzing all of the Latin and French editions of the *Institutes* until 1545, our point will be easily demonstrated by the time of the 1539 *Institutes*.

<sup>35</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 1536 Edition. Battles, transl., (1975), 48.

<sup>36</sup> "Dic in una Dei essentia personarum trinitatem, dixeris uno verbo quod scripturae loquuntur." IV 29,106 "Proinde et nos eam personarum trinitatem, ne imaginari in animum inducamus." IV 29,110. "...in Dei unitate, subsistere personarum trinitatem." IV 29,62. *Institutes of the Christian Religion of Jolin Calvin*, 539: Text and Concordance. Wevers, vol. 2 (1988), 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Catechism of Geneva*; CO X/1 13.

<sup>38</sup> Nijenhuis, 88.

Calvin, like other protestants before him, had made it clear that when discussing the doctrine of God, great care must be taken to avoid speculation. Calvin's classic formulation of this principle is found at the beginning of the first edition of the *Institutes*, "For I do not feel that concerning God we should speak with less conscientiousness than we should think, since whatever by ourselves we think concerning him is foolish, and whatever we speak, absurd. Yet some measure ought to be preserved: we ought surely to seek from Scripture a rule for thinking and speaking. To this yardstick all thoughts of the mind and all words of the mouth must be conformed."<sup>39</sup> This "rule" for theologizing would not itself preclude use of the technical trinitarian terms. In the same edition of the *Institutes* Calvin supports their use.

In the controversy with Caroli, as recorded in the work *Pro Farello*, in addition to providing historical background to the debate itself the theological issue between these two theologians is precisely the issue of the "rule for thinking and speaking." In the previously cited statement, Calvin asserted that the Scripture must be the yardstick for all thoughts and words concerning articulation of the doctrine of God. Undoubtedly this is the central issue of debate.

The *Pro Forello* is riddled with statements supporting Calvin's view of the Trinity from the Scripture. Over and over one reads "Ex Verbo Dei," "Ex Scripturis," "A verbo Domini," "Scripturae Normam," "Scripturae Fontibus," "Scripturae Testimonia," "Scripturae Verbis," etc.

These statements concerning the application and the authority of the Scripture are set in contrast to the theological method which Calvin summarized as that of Rome or the Sorbonne. There one finds the "sacra dotium papisticum," the foolishness of the "Facultatis Theologicae Parisiensis."<sup>40</sup>

Oftentimes Calvin makes the contrast very clear as to the precise theological difference between the method of the Parisian theologians and the method which he would follow. For example "Cur hic, inquit, sedemus? an non ut palam fiat huic populo, doctrinam quam profitemur veram esse et ex Verba Dei sumptam, papistarum vero religionem impiam esse et plenam multis abominationibus."<sup>41</sup> More particularly the issue of the debate is the "frigidam cavillationem"<sup>42</sup> of the specific propounder of this theological method, Caroli, versus what Calvin considered to be the simple and clear teaching of the Scripture.

#### ***D. The Methodological Difference***

Why the issue of the debate is the "cold" theology of the Sorbonne can be proven by examination of four elements of Calvin's text in conjunction with comments made in other parts of Calvin's contemporary theological writings. At nearly the same time that Caroli was forgiven by the Senate of Berne for returning to the Roman Church, (January of 1540), Cardinal Sadolet had written to the leaders of the city of Geneva admonishing them to return to the church. Calvin was, of course, asked to respond to Sadolet's missive which he did in 1539. Neither Calvin's writing nor the history of that interesting time of the Reformation concerns us in this article. However, in the *Pro Farello* Calvin mentions Sadolet no less than three times.

Calvin's specific condemnation of the theological method which was against his own, appears throughout the works. For example, he condemns the use of antithesis as done by his

---

<sup>39</sup> Battles, 46.

<sup>40</sup> In the *Pro Farello* Calvin mentions in a negative way the "papists" with a variety or adjectives at least thirteen times.

<sup>41</sup> CO VII, 303.

<sup>42</sup> CO VII, 325.

opponent.<sup>43</sup> He also condemns “otiosa speculatio.”<sup>44</sup> This speculation is also condemned in the 1539 *Institutes*. There Calvin says: “Quae practica notitia certior haud dubie solidiorque est qualibet otiosa speculatione: Illic enim pius animus Deum praesentissimum conspicit et pene attrectat, ubi se vivificari, illuminari, servari, iustificari ac sanctificari sentit.”<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, in the *Institutes* Calvin condemns the use of “coniecturam.” This is likewise rejected in the *Pro Farello*.<sup>46</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that prior analysis of the controversy with Caroli and the *Pro Farello*, although oftentimes accurate, has not sufficiently underlined the true issue at stake in the controversy. Analysis has focused especially upon Calvin's attitude toward the early creeds. This is a proper focus, nevertheless sufficient attention has not been paid to the underlying methodological questions of the debate. Caroli, as a doctor of the Sorbonne, represented for Calvin the embodiment of a most improper theological method. As has been made clear in other articles, for Calvin both theological and exegetical methodology is not a neutral science.<sup>47</sup> The way in which theology is performed must be in accord with very strict theological principles. Those principles are conformity, as far as humanly possible, to the clear expressions of Scripture.

Since Calvin found the Athanasian creed to be in accord with Scripture (but not above criticism), and the use of the words 'Trinity' and 'Person' acceptable, the underlying issue with Caroli must be conceived in terms of a methodological debate.

It was Caroli's attempt to conform theological statements to a 'cold' mold which forced Calvin and the Reformers to fight for their freedom.

---

*This article was originally published in Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag: Festschrift für Wilhelm Heinrich Neuser zum 65. geburtstag, Willem van 't Spijker, ed. (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing, c1991), 130-137.*

---

---

<sup>43</sup> CO VII, 332.

<sup>44</sup> CO VII, 313.

<sup>45</sup> Wevers, Vol. 1, 102.

<sup>46</sup> CO VII, 299.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Richard C. Gamble, “Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic,” in *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985), 1-17; “Exposition and Method in Calvin,” in *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987), 153-165; “Calvin as Theologian and Exegete. Is There Anything New?” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988), 178-194; “Calvin's Theological Method. Word and Spirit. A Case Study,” in *Calviniana*, Vol. X, 63-75. One of the fundamental points of these articles is that “method” is not a neutral science for Calvin. Calvin discussed in the *Pro Farello*, which had not been analyzed in my earlier articles, the concept of 'brevitas' in theological writing when he said: “Neque enim credibile est, quum sancti patres, quam maxima possent brevitate, complecti vellent formulam compositam ex rebus adprime necessariis, luisse supervacuo verborum circuitu. Vides autem in his verbis esse battologiam, Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero. Quorsum ista repetitio? An vel emphasisim habet ullam, vel maiorem expressionem? Vides ergo carmen esse, magis cantillando aptum quam formulam confessionis, in qua syllabam unam redundare absurdum est,” CO VII, 315.

## **Homosexuality in America: Retrospect and Prospect as Covenanters**

Dr. Michael LeFebvre

---

*Pastor at Christ Church in Brownsburg, Indiana  
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary Board President*

---

One of the hallmarks of the Covenanter heritage is a keen alertness to the social and political winds of the day with a rigorous, theological response to them. Exercised well, such a testimony is a powerful witness to the Mediatorial Reign of Christ over State and Culture, as well as Church. But sometimes, it is easy to confuse a heated moral reaction for a clear and gracious theological witness. The former approach (moral reaction) might faithfully present the condemnation of God's Law, but only the latter effort (a clear and gracious theological response) will minister the hope of his Gospel.

In this article, several key points of retrospect and prospect regarding homosexuality as an important, social issue of our day will be surveyed. The first part of this article will review key points of social and political history leading to the present shifts in cultural attitudes toward sexuality. Then, in the second half of this article some ways that the Mediatorial Kingship of Christ should frame a Covenanter perspective on those shifts will be explored, first on the frontier of personal struggle and thereafter on the frontier of societal witness. The issues touched on in these pages are deep and complex, and this contribution is offered as nothing more than a personal perspective—hopefully as an encouragement to others—in our ongoing efforts to “understand the times” and shine the light of Christ's gracious dominion across his world.

### **Retrospect: Changing Attitudes toward Homosexuality**

The modern attitude toward homosexuality has a long history. In order to understand and respond to the view pervading America today, let us begin with three, key ideas that emerged over a course of time.

The three historical moments are in 1869, 1973, and 1980. The three, distinct ideas about homosexuality that emerged into public discourse on those three dates combine to give us the new attitude toward same-sex marriage we are facing today. Before strategies for personal and social responses to this new attitude can be discussed, these three ideas behind it must be understood.

An important clarification needs to be made up front. Care has been taken to use neutral terms like “new attitude” and “key ideas” so as not to cast wholesale aspersions on the insights inherited from this history. The biblical and confessional doctrines of marriage and of sexuality are wise, rewarding, and frankly beautiful—we must remain faithful to the hope and vision that our gracious Lord has taught us. But it would be wrong for us, as Christians, to become alarmists and assume that everything about the new attitude toward homosexuality is wrong. There are

aspects of the three key ideas—even, in some cases, key insights—concerning same-sex attraction that it would be important for us to respect, and even appreciate, without mistakenly assuming that accepting certain new ideas compels us to accept them all, or to surrender the beauty of biblical doctrine on sexuality and marriage.

Thus, a survey of these three moments in history and the new ideas they offer about same-sex attraction will be examined. After introducing each of these three ideas, some perspective for assessing what is helpful and what is troubling in each of them will be offered. After that, this article will conclude with personal and social strategies for responding to these developments.

### **1. *Homosexuality as Orientation***

The first point in history to note is 1869. It was in 1869 that an Austrian journalist named Karl-Maria Kertbeny coined the terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual*. These terms brought a new understanding of same-sex attraction to public attention, first in Germany and eventually throughout Europe and America.

Kertbeny was writing at a time of political realignments in western Europe. The independent states of Germany were unifying under Prussian leadership to form what would become the German Empire, and eventually modern Germany. As part of this political realignment, the old Prussian laws were being revised for use in the new German Empire. It was in this context that Kertbeny wrote his 1869 pamphlet specifically targeting the anti-sodomy laws of old Prussia. In his pamphlet, Kertbeny coined the term *homosexuality* to introduce a new distinction into public discourse about same-sex relationships.

Rather than viewing all those who engage in same-sex relations the same way, Kertbeny urged that a distinction be made. Some nurture same-sex desires by choice, and some do not choose their same-sex inclinations. Old terms like *sodomy* and *sodomite* focus on same-sex activity and therefore put all same-sex relationships into the same category. And most people in the 19th century assumed that same-sex desire was a deviation from a person's actual inner nature. The terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual* promote the recognition that one's sexual interests are not chosen as a decision of the will, but in many cases emerge along with sexual desire. As some people are left-handed or right-handed, it was often said, so some people are same-sex inclined by their own nature and others opposite-sex oriented.

That was over a hundred years ago. There has been much debate as to the whether such a concept of sexuality is valid. Medical research has, thus far, failed to locate a clear genetic or other physiological cause for sexual orientation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore the mounting testimony of those—including Christians—who experience same-sex desires they did not choose, they did not want, and that cannot be simply blamed on a fault of their own actions or their parents. The debate continues to rage, and neither side has found a “smoking gun” demonstration to prove whether same-sex desires are the product of nature or nurture. Nevertheless, the scales have certainly been tipped, and by now the overwhelming consensus of experts and the general population is that Kertbeny was right. The first major idea, or perhaps insight, that led to the new attitude toward same-sex relations is the concept of sexual orientation as something innate within a person's own sexual nature, not chosen deliberately.

### **(A Christian Response)**

What are we—personally and as a church—to make of this first new idea about same-sex attraction: that it is something innate in certain persons? The denominational paper on *The*

*Gospel and Sexual Orientation*<sup>1</sup> addresses this point at length, and is summarized in what follows.

Obviously, there is a lot of controversy and there are many hurting people involved in this question about the source or root of same-sex desire. Any issue that has as much at stake as this one must be handled with charity for the real experiences of those impacted, and also recognizing that objectivity is very difficult in such a climate. It is difficult to draw clear conclusions whether same-sex desires have a physiological origin, a sociological origin, a psychological origin, a spiritual origin, or some combination of all the above. Christians ought not be too hasty to jump on the latest bandwagon, but neither ought they be too dogmatic to presume they can brush aside the mounting evidence of modern research.

The Scriptures teach that each person is born with a sin nature, which means that the deck is stacked against each and every individual from the beginning. Everyone experiences his sinful human nature with its different inclinations and vulnerabilities. If same-sex desires are, in some cases, rooted in an individual's very nature, this does not mean the tendency is godly. But it does mean that those who experience these struggles may not have chosen to feel them, and Christians should demonstrate compassion in our prayers and care for brothers and sisters who have these struggles.

Jonathan Edwards wrote about such innate weaknesses a full century before same-sex desires came to be recognized as being so deeply rooted in human nature. In his "Treatise on Religious Affections," Edwards wrote, "Allowances, indeed, must be made for the natural temper, which conversion does not entirely eradicate: those sins which a man by his natural constitution was most inclined to before his conversion, he may be most apt to fall into still... Though grace ... does not root out an evil natural [disposition], yet it is of great power and efficacy to correct it... The *old man* is put off, and the *new man* put on... Converting grace will make a great alteration in him, with respect to these evil dispositions; so that however he may be still most in danger of these sins, they shall no longer have dominion over him...."<sup>2</sup>

Do you sense the admission of struggle, yet the confidence of victory, in Edwards' words? He is simply expressing the teachings of the Apostle Paul who wrote extensively of the real—but hopeful—struggle we each fight against our own sin nature. Including our innate sexual lusts, of all varieties. It is unbiblical to single out same-sex attraction as somehow uniquely disoriented or damaged; the truth is that we all must come face-to-face with our innate inclinations to selfishness, pride, lust, sinful despair, bitterness, and other natural tendencies that are displeasing to the God who made us for holiness and beauty. And like Edwards, we cling to God's grace as a converting and a sanctifying grace, giving us hope and real experience in new life and victory.

There are two theological terms to introduce at this point. In the Reformed tradition, the sinful inclinations experienced can be identified in two categories. Theologians use the terms *original sin* and *actual sin* to make a biblical distinction.

Actual sins are, as the term indicates, sins of our own will. Sins of choice. Notice the word "act" in "actual sins." The term is not used to imply that original sin (the other category) is any less real or any less sinful. But *actual sins* are the sins brought upon ourselves by our own will, whether enacted by our hands or carried out in our thoughts. We praise God that his mercies are

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael LeFebvre, ed., *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant, c2012).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections in Three Parts," part 3, section 7, in *The Works of President Edwards* (New York: Leavitt, Trow & Co., 1848), 3:156–7.

so rich and so free: he patiently provides for our forgiveness even though our actual sins, committed willfully, are so abundant!

Virtually all Christians recognize the guilt we bear for our willful sins. In historic Christianity—that is, the teaching of the Reformed and medieval and early church—the stain we bear from *original sin* has also been a basic point of Christian doctrine. The guilt and brokenness we bear due to *original sin* is not our own, personal fault. It is not the product of our own will, nor is it something we should blame on our parents or grandparents. We use the term *original sin* to remind us that there is sinfulness in our being that is there because of our first father's sin: the original sin of Adam.

This doctrine of *original sin* seems unfair, which is why it has fallen into disfavor in many branches of the church. Yet it is a biblical teaching that helps us to understand the presence of many ungodly inclinations we never chose. It is also a doctrine that urges us not to blame ourselves for those marks of sin, yet to own our responsibility to confess them and seek God's grace for victory over them.

In the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 6, we confess, “By [Adam's] sin, [our first parents] fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation” (§§2–3).

Not everyone experiences the impact of original sin in the same way. The nineteenth and twentieth century insight that same-sex desire is often innate helps us as Christians to be more compassionate in how we view those with this struggle. Rather than viewing same-sex temptation as a result of actual sin—chosen willfully by the individual—we should regard this *temptation* as one of those tragic results of *original sin* and seek to support and encourage those who carry that particular burden in their effort to do so in a godly and sanctifying manner.

More will be said about our response to such innate temptations later. For the moment, this first theological response to this first key idea behind the modern attitude toward same-sex desire will be underscored. One should not assume that those who experience same-sex temptation chose this interest; and those who do have such feelings should not berate themselves as though they brought it on themselves. But neither should believers surrender to this or any other aspect of sin's marks on human nature.

In light of this first key idea about homosexuality—introduced to public discourse in 1869—let us exercise patience and compassion toward those who need hope, not condemnation.

## **2. *Homosexuality as Healthy***

The second point in history to mention is 1973. By this date, same-sex attraction had become widely recognized as an innate desire. But it was still generally regarded as an abnormal and unhealthy desire. To be more specific: prior to 1973, homosexuality was regarded in America as a psychiatric disorder. Like depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity, Aspergers, schizophrenia, and other conditions individuals do not choose but nonetheless experience, homosexuality was regarded as a mental disorder that should be treated with the same dignity as depression and other mental disorders, but nonetheless as a disorder.

That changed in 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the standard dictionary of mental disorders, called the DSM—the *Diagnostics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The primary reason for the change was the simple fact that same-sex oriented men and women are typically well-adapted participants in society. Psychiatry only

gives the label “*disorder*” to a condition when it reaches a point where it hinders a person’s ability to function. Many people struggle with feelings of being down or discouraged; the diagnosis of depression is supposed to be reserved for those whose affliction is of such severity as to hinder their ability to function. Because homosexuality has an impact on a person’s private relationships, but does not necessarily hinder a person’s ability to function on the job or at school or in society at large, it does not really qualify as a psychiatric disorder. For this reason (among others), homosexuality was removed from the DSM in 1973 and ceased to be viewed as a medical disorder.

From that date onward, this further concept was added to the emerging new attitude toward homosexuality: that same-sex attraction is a *healthy* aspect of sexuality. What is unhealthy, the line of thought continues, is for those of same-sex inclinations to be made to feel guilty about their sexuality.

### ***(A Christian Perspective)***

It is true that people with same-sex desires typically are able to function in a completely normal and healthy manner at work, at school, and in most aspects of their daily lives. Those who wrestle with same-sex desire can be thankful that their cross to bear is not as debilitating as the many disorders and struggles that some are called to carry. This world is full of afflictions that keep all of creation groaning and travailing in pain, waiting for the final redemption.

Thankfully for those whose particular struggles include same-sex attraction, that particular cross is not one that requires psychiatric treatment. Perhaps it was right for the APA to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders; but there are many sexual temptations that are unhealthy without rising to the level of a psychiatric disorder. We maintain that same-sex temptation, like heterosexual lust, is unhealthy. Even though we may agree at this point with the American Psychiatric Association, that same-sex desires do not necessarily make a person socially unfit.

In other words, there is a partial truth we can affirm from the 1973 idea. The old stereotype of the so-called “sodomizer” as someone who is unstable, maladjusted, and even dangerous needs to be dismissed. From leading athletes to media anchors to politicians and business leaders—it has become popular today for society’s movers and shakers to “come out” about their sexual inclinations in order to show that same-sex interests do not hinder a person’s participation in society.

But there are many sexual desires that fall short of the psychiatric label “disorder” that are, nonetheless, unhealthy. It is a mistake to think that the line between healthy and unhealthy sexual desires runs between hetero- and homosexuality. Actually, the line runs right down the middle of heterosexuality. Indeed, the vast majority of the *heterosexual* desires pervading our culture are sinful before God and unhealthy.

A recent public service announcement campaign of the Ad Council was made urging men to respect women. The Ad Council is buying space on pornography websites to post these public service announcements. Though not equating same-sex desire and indulgence in pornography, there are many struggles of a sexual nature that do not rise to the level of psychiatric “disorder” but are nonetheless fundamentally unhealthy to oneself and to society. Heterosexual desires are often just as vexing and unhealthy.

The 1973 decision of the American Psychiatric Association opened the door to a new portrayal of homosexuality in the media. Men and women in same-sex relationships are now commonly portrayed as well-adjusted, prosperous, stylish, and community-minded citizens. But many well-adjusted, community-minded individuals carry unhealthy burdens.

So, in sum, the 1973 correction can be accepted, that the old stereotype has to go. Same-sex desires do not make a person unfit for productive social involvement. Christians should attend classes, work, fellowship, and develop wholesome friendships with those of same-sex persuasions just as they would with those struggling with heterosexual desires, or economic fascinations, or prideful yearnings, and so forth. Nevertheless, same-sex desires are not healthy. Like all other unhealthy desires that afflict the human soul, same-sex desires need to be confessed before God and brought under the dominion of his mercy and grace. Like every other desire that arises from our sin nature.

### **3. *Homosexual Marriage as a Civil Right***

The final date to highlight is 1980. In August of that year, the Democratic National Convention met at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Some of the leading issues of the day included immigration reform and government wiretapping to pursue foreign intelligence.

Homosexuality was also addressed at that convention, with the following statement added to the party platform that year: “We must affirm ... the right of each individual to have equal access to and participation in the institutions and services of our society. All groups must be protected from discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, language, age, sex or *sexual orientation*.”

With that statement, one of the major political parties turned homosexuality into a *civil rights* issue. The third idea that has brought the new attitude toward homosexuality is that introduction of *sexual orientation* as a civil rights issue alongside race and gender. “The institutions ... of our society” must be equally available to all, regardless of “race, color, religion” and so on, now including “sexual orientation.”

Now, sexual orientation had never been a basis for legal exclusion from any civil benefits to the extent race had been. There were never laws in place banning homosexual men or women from sharing the same water fountain, or sitting in the same part of the bus as heterosexuals. Thankfully, society has made slow, painful, but real progress on racial civil rights. There had never been such a litany of legalized restrictions against homosexuals quite like the legalized segregation of race.

The one (quote) “institution ... of our society” (close quote) eventually found to be as “discriminatory” against homosexuals is marriage. Without denying the reality of other prejudices in other institutions of American society, the alleged discrimination of sexual orientation that was entrenched in law was marriage.

It would take a generation for the movement to unfold, but at that convention in 1980, homosexuality was changed from a moral issue into a civil rights issue. Who wants to be identified with the painful tragedies of racial discrimination in our nation’s past, by opposing the latest frontier in civil rights?

#### ***(A Christian Perspective)***

The Christian response to this third idea is to agree that a change in marriage law *would* be the necessary next step, if homosexual orientation were a healthy, morally valid expression of human sexuality. The church shares the zeal for civil equality, but humbly appeals the underlying assumption. A biblical vision of sexuality and marriage leads the church to differ on the underlying presupposition. Same-sex desire is one of many experiences that arise from our sin nature inherited due to original sin. But same-sex desire is not a wholesome expression of sexuality as God created it.

However, it is not enough to hold up a stop sign and oppose same-sex marriages. The gospel is a proclamation of hope, and if no message of redemption for those wrestling with same-sex temptations is offered, what message does the church have for other similarly deep and difficult temptations?

\* \* \*

Those are the three, key ideas that have produced the new attitude toward homosexuality we are facing in the present generation:

1. The idea introduced into public discourse in 1869—that same-sex desire is an innate experience, not a willful choice.
2. The idea introduced into public discourse in 1973—that same-sex desire is a socially healthy experience, not a disorder.
3. The idea introduced into public discourse in 1980—that same-sex desire is not a moral issue, but a civil rights issue.

Christians cannot naively brush these ideas aside completely; but neither can they blindly embrace them wholesale. There are aspects of profound insight and helpful guidance to be appreciated in these three ideas. But there are also aspects that cannot be affirmed by those captivated by the beauty of the gospel and the vision of society, marriage, and sexuality taught by our Savior.

In love for all who need God’s grace, men and women everywhere must be humbly urged to acknowledge their sinfulness—both the marks of original sin and Then, strategies for responding to these developments on the level of social change will be given.

### **Prospect: The Personal Battle**

How does one respond to same-sex desires on a personal level? Is it a losing battle? Absolutely not. There are two points, however, that are important for a proper response to same-sex temptations.

#### **1. Recognize it as Temptation**

First, same-sex temptation must not be treated as though it is somehow different from other temptations, requiring some different kind of solution.

The Bible does not give us a special epistle, providing unique instructions for handling same-sex temptations as though same-sex inclinations are a more difficult kind of temptation, or that they require different techniques, than other temptations. Of course, there are some practical differences in responding to different temptations: if one struggles with temptations to overeat, Christian prudence would avoid stocking the fridge with stumbling blocks; and if you struggle with sexual desires, different *practical* safeguards are prudent. Certainly there are practical differences that this unique struggles call for; but fundamentally, same-sex temptation needs to be recognized as one of many kinds of temptations to be handled like other temptations.

In Paul’s sixth chapter of First Corinthians, and in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks about same-sex sins. These are two New Testament texts often cited to address homosexuality questions. But one of the most important points drawn from such passages is the

fact that same-sex sins are included in lists of all manner of human temptations. It is not a “super sin” in a category on its own.

It is true that some kinds of temptations are more difficult to bear than others. Some are less burdensome than others. Some people experience a greater degree of temptation in a given area, while others with the same weakness experience a lesser degree of temptation. All temptations are not equally felt. But the same biblical instructions for dealing with a propensity toward bitterness, a weakness for overeating, a desire to look lustfully at the opposite sex, a tendency to look down on others and think pridefully of myself, and all the other sinful temptations human experience in various ways—the same biblical resources for victorious battle against all these temptations are also provided for our sanctification in the face of same-sex temptation.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Those words are to encourage Christians not to fall into the lie of believing particular areas of temptation emerge from a different category of struggle than those experienced by others in the same pew at church. Furthermore, Paul’s words are not mere rhetoric for nice people with (seemingly) easy problems. Paul wrote those words to the congregation in Corinth—a congregation notorious in the pages of Scripture for their intense, even bizarre struggles with sin. Including same-sex sins which Paul specifically identified as among the struggles faced by Christians in Corinth.

The first point proposed for a personal response to this battle is to avoid viewing same-sex temptation as though it requires a different solution than other temptations.

## **2. Use the Means of Grace**

Every one—in each of his various temptations—needs the daily and weekly grace of Christ for consistent victory captured in the old fashioned doctrine of sanctification. Christians fail to appreciate how wonderful and real the work of sanctification is in the believer’s life when they imagine they need some different answer to the particular temptations they face (whatever those temptations may be).

The Spirit’s work of sanctification is a process that brings real growth and real victory over sin. But it also happens to be a patient work involving perseverance and faith. Living in a society that prizes one-time, quick solutions, patience is not valued as it ought to be. One can doubt whether any other solution is even worth trying. The search for a single-treatment fertilizer that will kill the weeds in a yard forever will yield that no such product exists. Rather, a lawn must be re-treated every Spring and every Autumn for there to be progress. Weed-killing and grass-feeding are patient works. So it is with sanctification. It is not a weakness of God’s grace, but his design, that sanctification unfolds over time as Christians persevere in the means of grace.

Joe Dallas is a Christian counselor and speaker who has written several books on overcoming same-sex temptations. In one of his books, he writes, “I have seen plenty of successes. But there are plenty of failures, too. And among the failures I have seen two common elements: wrong motivation and unrealistic expectations.”

The *wrong motivation* refers to Christians who want freedom from same-sex temptation simply to feel better about themselves—to correct something they feel embarrassed about. Sanctification certainly does bring personal peace and joy; but the right motivation for sanctification is never “self-fixing,” but “Jesus-honoring.” Grace will not persevere if our the is self-centered rather than Christ-centered. The *unrealistic expectations* common among those who give up the struggle refers to those who expect same-sex temptations will go away all of a sudden. The struggle with this temptation—like all temptation—calls for patient perseverance.

In all areas of our Christian growth—including but not limited to same-sex temptation—confidence in the biblical doctrine of patient, persevering sanctification must be recovered. Patient sanctification brings real victory and growth through daily and weekly participation in the means of grace.

The wonderful truth about biblical sanctification is that growth in grace occurs as time is spent in fellowship with Christ. In fact, maybe that is why God designed sanctification to be an ongoing process, rather than a quick fix. The means of grace appointed for growth are, essentially, means by which one communes with Jesus. Recovering confidence in the means of grace will help in overcoming daily temptation.

Many think that personal Bible study and Sunday worship are times to look for new, life changing truths. Yet Sunday worship is not necessarily about life changing experiences. Sabbath worship happens weekly because its purpose is much more modest and fundamental. Lord's Day worship is a time to come to Jesus who tends to a believer's wounds after a week of struggling with the world. It is a time to revisit the wonderful, resurrection promises of Jesus—promises not forgotten but that have begun to fade in the face of all the pressures and strains of the week. Worship is a time to renew the Christian's hope in the power of those resurrection promises. Sabbath worship is a time to meet with Jesus to be refreshed in faith and launch into another week, equipped to walk victoriously—if not perfectly—before Jesus brings his people back for another washing in his grace.

It is wonderful when God's Spirit does bring dramatic, life changing moments! He is able to heal, and he does delight—sometimes—to bring sudden changes in hearts. Jesus instantly healed *some* people during his earthly ministry. He did that, but not because those individuals deserved it. He instantly healed some so that his people could look on and know that our Savior's promises really are backed with resurrection power. By those dramatic healings witnessed in Scripture, believers know that sanctification—however fast or slow—leads to a certain and complete victory. Nevertheless, the Lord teaches the church us to rest in him through his normal means for sanctification, which centers around patient participation in the means of grace.

Sabbath worship is the backbone of weekly growth in victory over temptation. Daily, private prayer is the extension of that Sunday grace through all the week.

A vivid example of one man's approach to daily devotions is seen in the autobiography of George Müller. Müller's description of his daily devotions could be, on the whole, discouraging. He describes his day beginning with hours of peaceful meditation walking in the fields: that is simply not realistic for people. But there is one gem in Müller's description of his devotional practice that is priceless. He speaks of his daily devotional time as an exercise "to have my soul happy in the Lord."<sup>3</sup> What a refreshing and wise piece of counsel on how to approach daily, private worship!

This is actually the teaching of the first Psalm. Psalm 1 is about the man who meditates in God's law daily in order not to fall into the ways of sin in the society around him. But notice how that Psalm begins: "Blessed," or, literally the word should be translated, "*Happy* is the man who does not walk in ways of sinners, because *his delight* is in the law of the Lord on which he meditates daily." The man in Psalm 1 finds a twofold emphasis on joy and delight in God's word. Joy that strengthens him against the false trinkets of empty joy glittering in the temptations of the world all around. That is the purpose of daily prayer and meditation: to daily refresh one's joy and hope in the Lord's promises. It is that exercise of the means of grace, daily, that is needed in this work of sanctification.

---

<sup>3</sup> George Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller: The Life of Trust*, ed. H Lincoln Wayland (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 206.

Seven centuries ago, Thomas Aquinas wrote a chapter about Christian joy in his *Summary of Theology*. In that chapter, Aquinas observed that the reason we are tempted by any sin is because we do not yet appreciate the fullness of joy that is ours in God's ways. The process of sanctification really solves the problem of temptation as joy in Christ and his ways grows.

Sin and temptation will daily beat people down. Expect it. Christianity is not an escape from the struggles of life, but faith does give one God's promises and God's presence to deliver him through life's struggles. Daily devotions are to be times to drink afresh from the means of grace, to sustain joy in his promises.

The Apostle James wrote, "[God] gives more grace... Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (Jas. 4:5–10).

James was not writing those words to describe a one-time experience, after which the devil's temptations would nevermore be faced. He wrote those words to encourage regular exercises in prayer, repentance and faith. But notice, James writes of real victories experienced through worship! Drawing near to God, drawing upon his grace, brings real victories. As believers grow in that grace, day-by-day and week-by-week, the Spirit patiently sanctifies them.

A certain ad appears often on the internet. The ad has the photo of a bizarre looking piece of fruit or something, and the caption says something about eating this and never needing to diet again! It is a weight loss pitch. People long for the single serving, quick fix answer to all our troubles.

If a pill promises that it will shed all your excess pounds without exercise, do not believe it. Similarly, if someone offers the secret prayer, the three-step activity, or the Bible-code solution the rest of the world never saw before, that will instantly change your life, do not believe him. Rather, believe that God is faithful, and that the resurrection of Christ is the seal of complete victory over sin as you grow in Christ. That is the teaching of Scripture, and it is the testimony of his saints through the ages.

Through weekly worship and daily prayer, God's Spirit does his work of sanctification in our lives. There is victory over all temptations, including same-sex temptation. It is not a losing battle.

The denominational paper on *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation* includes a section at the back, with fourteen points of further counsel for ministering to same-sex temptations. There is certainly much more that could be said, and this section of that book provides additional encouragements. But the backbone of all victory is in right expectations concerning the means of grace.

### **Prospect: The Societal Witness**

Finally, some remarks are offered on the societal battle over homosexuality. Many Christian circles are in panic mode over the legalization of same-sex marriages taking hold throughout the country. What can Christians do about it?

One of the unique contributions the Reformed faith—and especially the Reformed Presbyterian testimony—brings to such a time of social upheaval is a testimony of patience and confidence. One of the reasons the review of over a century of transformational ideas about homosexuality was given was to make it clear that the sudden shift being experienced today is like the

earthquake that occurs on the surface after many long years of slow, gradual shifts in plates under the earth finally release their pressure. Likewise, a cultural recovery of the biblical vision for sexuality and marriage is going to be a slow and patient process. As in the work of individual sanctification, the work of social reformation needs to be a patient work.

One of the mistakes common in American Christianity is the sentiment that the way to change society is through political power. For the last few decades, much Christian energy has been expended on changing American by pouring resources and energy into political activism. Political activism is important and has a place; but the current widespread embrace of homosexual marriage illustrates the failure of three decades of Christian efforts that put political power at the center of their moral social agenda.

In the Reformed Presbyterian Church, special emphasis is given to the doctrine of Christ's Mediatorial Kingship—that he is the king to whom even states owe allegiance. But this doctrine is different than the basic belief that drives much of the "Religious Right" today. Much of the anxiety of political Evangelicalism today is grounded in a belief that it is Christians' duty to win the nation for Christ. It is the societal counterpart to Arminianism: the conviction that believers must win American for Jesus, just as Arminian soteriology teaches that the evangelist must change the heart of those to whom he witnesses.

A critique will be made on this unfortunate view of social transformation on two points, and then an alternative will be offered. As an aid to the my critique of the Religious Right, William Symington's book, *Messiah the Prince*, will be utilized. Symington was a Reformed Presbyterian minister in Scotland at the turn of the 18th century. His book continues to be the standard work on this important doctrine prized in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

### ***Critique 1. Faith in Christ's Kingship***

First of all, Reformed Presbyterians believe that Jesus is *already* the king over all nations. Philippians 2 tells us that God the Father already gave Jesus "the name that is above every name." We confess that passage to mean that Jesus is already king over America and all nations. His title "King of kings" is not a title waiting for Jesus in the future; it is the title he received on his ascension to the throne at the Father's right hand.

William Symington had much to say in his book about the duty of human governments to acknowledge this reign of Christ, and to obey Christ and his laws. But Jesus' reign is not dependent on the agreement of the state. His reign does not need their legislation. This is the true genius of Symington's exposition of Christ's Mediatorial Reign: we can rejoice that Jesus reigns *whether or not* the state acknowledges his ways. When we do go through times when the governments of men throw biblical truth to the wind, we need not fret. The *fact* of Christ's reign even now gives us confidence to carry on in our own service, knowing that tragic disregard of his ways cannot last forever.

Symington writes,

Christians are apt to feel discouraged when they reflect on the extensive prevalence of error compared with the limited success of the true religion, and despondingly inquire, “By whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.” But if they can only have faith in the mediatorial dominion, they may dismiss their fears, and confidently rely in, not merely the preservation, but the triumphant success ... of the church. The Lord reigns: and the children of Zion may well be joyful in their King.<sup>4</sup>

Much Christian activism today partakes in that anxious inquiry, “By whom shall Jacob arise? For he is small.” There is a spirit of fear that pervades the Religious Right, as though Christians are clinging to a country that is slipping from their fingers, and they wonder which political figure or group or strategy will finally exalt the cause of Christ, “for his cause is small.” Too much hope is placed in political resources by such anxieties; and too little confidence is taken in the real, present reign of Christ.

The first critique of the so-called Religious Right is the sense of fear and urgency that drive the effort, and that focus too much of that effort on political power. Jesus is already ruling, and these social changes have not escaped his notice. To repeat Symington’s counsel: “If [Christians] can only have faith in the mediatorial dominion, they may dismiss their fears, and confidently rely in, not merely the preservation, but the triumphant success ... of the church. The Lord reigns: and the children of Zion may well be joyful in their King.”

### ***Critique 2. Serving Christ’s Royal Agenda***

The doctrine of Christ’s Mediatorial Kingship teaches that Jesus has a specific purpose that guides his rule over the state. He has explained what his political priorities are, and sadly much Christian political activism today has neglected his agenda.

Again from Symington: “[In Ephesians 1:22], The Apostle Paul ... uses the expression, ‘And [God] gave him to be head over all things to the church’—language which asserts at once the unlimited extent of the mediatorial power, *and the high and glorious end for which such power has been conferred.*”<sup>5</sup> Jesus reigns, not to make America a nicer or more wealthy society; he reigns in order to order all things for the building of his church.

Modern evangelicalism leads believers to think that the purpose of Christian political influence is to promote moral values in society. The term “Judeo-Christian values” was coined in the 1950s to capture the idea of lifting the ethics out of the Bible, and leaving behind the doctrines of salvation that distinguish Judaism, Protestant, Catholic, and other Christian offshoots. All biblical faiths can agree on the basic family values of the Bible, it is argued, so Christian political activism should focus on ethical reform.

Good, moral government is much to be desired. But that is not Christ’s agenda as King of kings. His agenda is to order the affairs of human government for the furthering of the church’s gospel mission. While current events may lead people to feel like the Religious Right has largely failed to bring America around to Judeo-Christian values, the exact same events should lead the church to see that Jesus truly is advancing his political agenda. In the face of the church’s worldliness, lack of saltiness, and general weakness today, one might say Jesus is doing some

---

<sup>4</sup> William Symington, *Messiah the Prince or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ* (Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books, 1990), 187.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

pretty impressive and strategically significant things in America today to wake the church up and restore its sense of calling.

Though speaking, admittedly, in very broad strokes, here is the summary of the two critiques of the “Religious Right”:

1. First: Jesus is already King of kings; believers need not grow anxious and should not focus so much of their hope on political power.
2. Second: Jesus’ agenda as King over America is to see his church prospered in the mission he has given to her; the church should never plagiarize ethical values from the Bible and leave behind the Gospel and call it a *Christian* influence.

What then should be the church’s response to the profound moral shifts taking place in American society, including shifting attitudes toward homosexuality?

### ***Social Change by “Faithful Presence”***

James Davison Hunter recently wrote a book called *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*.<sup>6</sup> One of the major propositions Hunter makes in his book, is that social change is not achieved through politics but through the whole complex of leading social institutions, such as academia, entertainment, the news media, and so forth. Political institutions are a part of the fabric that shapes society, but only a small part. Christians have tended to place too much emphasis on political power, while complaining about the “secular media” and “secular academia” without engaging meaningfully in those other institutions.

Usually, by the time an issue like abortion—or homosexuality—reaches the political sphere, society has already made its transition. Rather than buying into political activism as the primary means to pull society from the brink, Hunter argues for an approach he calls “faithful presence.” Christians need to be present, as a faithful witness, in all of the spheres of social influence. Politics is among these, but really of less significance than science, entertainment, media, and such circles.

Hunter is correct. As the three key points in the long history of changing ideas about homosexuality illustrate, the process that has brought about the new attitude toward homosexuality has been a long one. The earthquake may be happening rapidly right now, but the tectonic shifts have been taking place over many generations in the fields of medicine, sociology, science, philosophy, psychiatry, and eventually politics.

Social changes experienced today should not lead to alarm. Instead, they should lead the church to call upon Christian young people to study for various professions, and to enter the many institutions of society to have a “faithful presence” there. And to do so resting in the confidence that Jesus reigns.

Christians do not need to try to coordinate their influence, trying to change America within a generation. There is no need to develop a central think-tank that networks and strategizes a Christian takeover of American thought centers. Saving the world must be left to Jesus. Meanwhile, believers should be faithful to promote the patient sanctification of society through

---

<sup>6</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, c2010).

“faithful presence” while patiently persevering in their own sanctification through faithful worship.

---

*The content of this article was first presented on January 18, 2014, at a workshop of the Purdue Corps College Winter Conference, organized by Lafayette RP Church.*

---

# THE BATTLES OF THE FRENCH REFORMED TRADITION

Prof. Thomas G. Reid, Jr.

---

*Librarian and Registrar  
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

---

## Introduction

When John Calvin died in 1564, the condition of the Reformed Churches in his native France gave solid reasons for optimism about their future. In over two thousand places, Reformed worship according to the Scriptures was conducted each Sabbath; churches were especially numerous in the southwest and south-central regions. The total number associated with these congregations approached two million souls, almost a fifth of the total population.<sup>1</sup> French Calvinists were found in all strata of society, from the numerous peasants through the burgeoning middle classes on to the nobility and even to the royal family. The Psalms had been paraphrased into singable, metrical French by Clément Marot (1495-1544) and others, and had attained a popularity in one generation that is truly remarkable. In 1559, the national synod adopted one of the first clearly Calvinistic creeds, the Gallican or French Confession, the first draft of which had been authored by Calvin himself. This Synod also adopted a Rule of Discipline to guide the organization of the churches. The churches were organized into regional synods and a national synod, which met regularly. Reformed books were being printed in the language of the people, a language whose grammar and orthography had been greatly influenced by Calvin in his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.<sup>2</sup> Professor Pierre Courthial writes, “The Reformed faith ... manifested itself in every area of human existence – in theology and philosophy, in the sciences and the arts, in town and country, in family and professional life[,] as well as in politics. And it appeared in all social classes ...”<sup>3</sup> The Peace of Amboise of 1563 had brought a welcome relief from civil conflict. And by this time, French Protestants had acquired a nickname, Huguenots, an appellation first mentioned by Théodore de Bèze in a letter in 1560, but still a word of uncertain derivation.

The early years of the French Reformed churches had not proven to be easy ones, and, after Calvin’s death, the same situation prevailed. The young French Reformed Churches were unable

---

<sup>1</sup> At the time, France had not attained its now familiar hexagonal shape, since areas in the southeast adjoining Italy only became French during the Second Empire in the 1860s, and Alsace and Lorraine, and some adjoining areas, did not adhere to the French state until the nineteenth or even twentieth centuries. France had about twelve millions inhabitants within its contemporary borders at the time, the third largest nation in the world in population, after China and India.

<sup>2</sup> The first French edition of the *Institutes* appeared in 1541, the last in 1560.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Courthial, “The Golden Age of Calvinism in France, 1533-1633,” in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, c1982), 76.

to build on their initial burst of growth, for they soon faced the first of six major battles which have confronted them in the past 450 years.

### **First, the Battle with Political Romanism**

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic usurpation of the Christian religion in the western portion of the former Roman Empire had been closely associated with political intrigues to extend and reinforce the authority of the papacy over the emerging nations there. The patchwork quilt of these nations, which developed following the demise of the Roman Empire in 476, made the task of the political papacy all that easier, especially after the aggrandizing pontificate of Gregory “the Great” (540-604, reigned 590-604). France was the first of what would become the major nations of western Europe to be established and quickly became both the largest in extent and population, but also greatest in its association with the papacy. It was “Good” King Louis IX (born 1214; reigned 1226-1270) of France who championed the seventh and eighth of the tragic crusades to reconquer the so-called Holy Land for Christendom. And it is no wonder that the papacy moved to Avignon in southern France from 1308 to 1378, its only period based outside Rome in history. The kings of France and the popes in Rome enjoyed a symbiotic relationship which furthered the aims of each side; France was sometimes dubbed as “the elder daughter of the Church” and certainly thought of herself as such.

When the Protestant Reformation broke out, however, the cozy medieval consensus was severely compromised. In France, the nobility,<sup>4</sup> chafing for centuries under the harsh hegemony of the kings, saw an opening to extend its authority and increase its wealth. Many nobles sided with the Reformers, some sincerely, many not, while almost all the noble families maneuvered to take advantage of the way the Reformation had broken the Medieval consensus for their own gain. The situation degenerated into what was essentially a civil war, usually termed the Wars of Religion, lasting from 1567 to 1593, in various phases.

The most spectacular event of these Wars was the infamous St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of August 23, 1572, which actually continued for several succeeding days. At this time, the leader of the Protestants was Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (born 1517). Like many other Protestants and Catholics from the provinces, he was in Paris for the marriage of Henry III of Navarre (1553-1610) with Margaret of Valois (1553-1615), a union which further solidified the power of the French crown. At the behest of the queen, Catherine de Medici (1519-1589), Romanists attacked Protestants in their beds, slaughtering thousands in a blind fury that turned the Seine River red. De Coligny was stabbed and tossed from the window of his bedroom, dying on the street below.<sup>5</sup>

The Wars of Religion came to an end only a few years before Henry, a Protestant, came to the throne in 1598 as Henry IV, and the relative peace lasted through the reign of Louis XIII, from 1610 to 1643. Henry converted to Romanism before his accession, however, arguing that “Paris was worth a mass.” His cavalier attitude toward the truth was all-too-typical of the French Protestant nobility. Henry IV signed the Edict of Nantes, named for the large city near the mouth of the Loire River, where he was residing in the castle during a tour of his domains, at the

---

<sup>4</sup> Noble families in France are distinguished from other families by some form of “de” at the beginning of their names. Reformed theologians Théodore de Bèze and Pierre du Moulin were from noble backgrounds, although the latter, especially, did not benefit financially from the family heritage. The most famous modern example is Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), although more recently, another president of France was of noble birth, Valérie Giscard-d’Estaing (b. 1926).

<sup>5</sup> Another prominent victim of the Massacre was Pierre de la Ramée or Ramus (born 1515), the well-known philosopher and mathematician, whose Reformed convictions were compromised by a rationalistic tendency. See Courthial, “The Golden Age of Calvinism in France,” 86-87.

time the edict was ready to receive his signature. The Edict proclaimed freedom of worship, so that the national government now protected both true Reformed worship and the false worship of the Romanist mass. France was tired of civil strife, and so, as one early twentieth century scholar has put it, “Religious toleration became a fashionable philosophy under Henry IV.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, at this point, a striking thing happened: French Protestantism stopped growing, never to be restored to its size and strength to this day.

When confronted with an armed foe, French Calvinists had taken up the sword to protect themselves, their property, their churches, and their faith. They did not opt for the pacifism of the so-called Radical Reformation. Because they were not under a Protestant ruler, they could not enjoy his protection, as did so many Lutherans in the German states and Scandinavia. But once a Christian movement determines to use violence to protect and even advance its cause, that movement creates a situation in which the furtherance of the gospel becomes more complicated and difficult. And that leads to the second battle of the French Reformed tradition.

### **Second, the Battle with Amyraldianism**

Following the death of Calvin, theological leadership within the Reformed world devolved upon Théodore de Bèze (1519-1605), also a Frenchman, born in Vézelay in Burgundy.<sup>7</sup> By the time de Bèze died, his position as chief theologian for the French Reformed movement had been assumed by Pierre du Moulin (1568-1658).<sup>8</sup> As a child, du Moulin survived the St. Bartholomew Day’s Massacre hidden by his family’s Roman Catholic maid under straw and blankets. After studies in Cambridge with William Whitaker (1548-1595), du Moulin served as professor of philosophy at Leiden from 1592 to 1598, where he taught the notable Remonstrant, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). In 1599, Du Moulin became a pastor in Paris. In 1621, du Moulin began teaching at one of the two theological seminaries of the French Reformed Churches, in the independent city-state of Sedan, near the Belgian border. Jean Cadier has described du Moulin as “a vigorous controversialist.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, though “occasionally harsh as a controversialist, du Moulin was an outstanding shepherd of souls.”<sup>10</sup> He was delegated to the Synod of Dordt in 1618, but the French government forbade any French representatives from attending that conclave, so he remained at home. The national synod in Alès in 1620 adopted the Canons of Dordt; du Moulin served as moderator of the synod.<sup>11</sup> It was likely this decision which set off the chain of events to which attention must now be paid.

Strong opposition to the consistent Calvinism of Dordt surfaced at the other French Reformed Seminary, situated in Saumur along the Loire River in central France. The first professor there

---

<sup>6</sup> Donald Culross Beattie, *Vence: Immortal Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1945), 126.

<sup>7</sup> For many years, the standard work in English on de Bèze has been: *Henry Martyn Baird, Theodore Beza: The Counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519-1605* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), originally published in 1899.

<sup>8</sup> Not much has appeared in print about du Moulin in English. In French, consult Lucien Rimbault, *Pierre du Moulin, 1568-1658: Un pasteur classique à l’âge classique* [Pierre Moulin: A Classic Pastor in the Classic Age] (Paris: J. Vrin, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> Jean Cadier, “Pierre du Moulin,” *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Edwin H. Palmer (Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972), 4:469.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:470.

<sup>11</sup> John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata: On the Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of Those Famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France* (London: T. Parkhurst and John Robinson, 1692), 2:37-38.

to question the doctrine of double predestination was Paul Testard of Blois (1596?-1670), in his work, *Eirenicon seu synopsis doctrinae de natura et gratia*, published in 1633.<sup>12</sup> But the dominant figure in Saumur was Moise Amyraut (1596-1664), born near Saumur, who taught from 1626 until his death. Theologically, Professor Roger Nicole observes that Amyraut was “particularly deeply influenced by John Cameron,”<sup>13</sup> the English theologian noted for his rejection of Calvinistic theology and Amyraut’s own theological professor. Furthermore, David Sabeau maintains that “Amyraut was a rationalist[,] in the sense that he submitted all truths to the test of reason.”<sup>14</sup> The promiscuous proclamation of a definite atonement must, therefore, be jettisoned, and Amyraut believed that he had found the way to do it.

Amyraut’s controversial career developed in three phases. The first phase, from 1633 until 1641, particularly concerned his work, *A Brief Treatise on Predestination and the Principal Things Which Depend Thereon*, published in 1634.<sup>15</sup> In this work, Amyraut maintained that Jesus Christ died equally for all mankind, on the condition of faith, a sort of “hypothetical universalism” which cut out the Reformed doctrine of unconditional election and decimated its doctrine of definite atonement. Theologians in Holland<sup>16</sup> and Geneva<sup>17</sup> wrote against this heresy, as did du Moulin and André Rivet (1572-1651) in France. Du Moulin and Rivet appealed against Amyraut’s doctrines to the French Reformed Synod, which determined, at its meeting in Alençon in 1637, that: first, Amyraut and Testard were guilty of dissimulation in trying to mask the unacceptable nature of their doctrine; second, that they deserved censure for the language they used in expressing their ideas; and third, following the suggestion of the Swiss, that further discussion of the matter was prohibited. The last decision could not be enforced, since writers residing outside of France were under no obligation to heed the authority of a French Synod. In 1641, Amyraut published a work defending reprobation in an attack on Samuel Hoard

---

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Courthial believed that “the golden age of Calvinism in France” came to an end with the publication of Testard’s book, because “this was the first work of a theologian of the Reformed churches in France to undermine”, even if only “in a covert way, the faith of these churches as declared in their Confession of 1559 and the Canons of Dordrecht accepted and ratified by their National Synod at Alès.” “The Golden Age of Calvinism in France,” 75.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Nicole, “Amyraldianism,” *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Edwin H. Palmer (Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972), 1:185. Cameron lived from 1579 to 1625.

<sup>14</sup> David Sabeau, “The Theological Rationalism of Moise Amyraut,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 55, no. 2 (1964): 204.

<sup>15</sup> Moise Amyraut, *Brief traité de la prédestination et de ses principales dépendances* (Saumur: Lesnier & Desbordes, 1634).

<sup>16</sup> The Theological Faculty in Leiden wrote a letter to the Synod against Amyraut’s formulations. “Furthermore[,] the Synod received the *Synopsis* of Rivet[,] together with the expression of approval of it[,] rendered by the Theological Faculties of Leiden, Franeker, and Groningen.” Roger Nicole, *Moise Amyraut (1596-1664) and the Controversy on Universal Grace: First Phase, 1634-1637* (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1966), 107, n5.

<sup>17</sup> “From Geneva came a lengthy and very pompous letter indicating the concern of the church in the destinies of the Reformed people in France. It encouraged the National Synod to deal firmly with any heresy that might develop which would run counter to the Reformed Confessions, and specifically[,] to the Synod of Dort. The main solution that was suggested for the present difficulties was to impose ‘un profond silence’ to all parties that were eager to explore the secrets of God’s counsels. The letter also contained a complaint to the effect that both the Swiss cantons and Geneva were displeased at the use made of the names and writings of certain Reformers of the previous century to support views of universal grace that they not hold. The letter was signed by J. Diodati and T. Tronchin, who had been Geneva’s delegates to Dort, and three others.” *Ibid.*, n6.

(1599-1658)'s book *God's Love to Mankind*.<sup>18</sup> Amyraut's thinly-disguised effort to pose as an orthodox Reformed theologian to deflect criticism from his own views should have been apparent to everyone.

The second phase of the Amyraldian controversy ran from 1644 to 1649. Frederic Spanheim (1600-1649), a German who had become professor of theology at Leiden in the Netherlands, prepared some theses against universal grace and had a student publicly read them on 25 May 1644.<sup>19</sup> Amyraut believed, accurately, that he was the object of the attack, and responded with *Dissertationes Quatuor* in 1645,<sup>20</sup> followed by a second edition in 1660.<sup>21</sup> Spanheim wrote *Exertationes de gratia universali*, a mere 2,600 pages in three volumes, in response to the first edition.<sup>22</sup> Amyraut wrote haughtily to Spanheim in order to gain sympathy as supposedly the undeserving objects of the attacks of ecclesiastical bullies. Du Moulin and Rivet and others also published works against Amyraut. The Acte de Thouars of 1649 brought public polemics largely to a close. But a distinguishable "Saumur School" had emerged, in which Amyraut and Testard had been joined by two other theologians antagonistic to Reformed orthodoxy: Louis Cappel (1585-1658) and Josué de la Place (1596-1655).<sup>23</sup>

The third and final phase of the Amyraldian controversy lasted from 1655 to 1661. Two Parisian pastors, David Blondel (1590-1655) and the more famous Jean Daillé (1594-1670), published works defending Amyraut's doctrines. Even du Moulin's son Louis (1606-1680), professor of history at Oxford University in England, got involved in the polemics against Blondel and Daillé. Amyraut himself chose to remain silent. At the Synod of Loudun in 1659, Daillé was elected moderator, and he and Amyraut were recognized as orthodox. Loudun was the last French National Synod until 1872, for reasons which will be mentioned later.

The popularity of Amyraut's doctrines in France kept increasing during his lifetime, for several reasons. First, Amyraut trained more and more of the French Reformed pastors at the seminary in Saumur, effectively buying their loyalty to their professor's heresy. Second, many of his abler opponents died off: Spanheim in 1649, Rivet in 1651, and du Moulin in 1658, when he was ninety. Third, some of Amyraut's opponents concluded that the differences they had with him stemmed merely from differing language or methodology, and they sinfully fell silent. Fourth, some Huguenots were seduced by Amyraut's argument that his recasting of Calvinism would, by softening its hard edges, promote union with the Lutherans and lessen the danger of Calvinists abjuring their faith and turning or returning to Romanism. Fifth, many Huguenots believed that the whole controversy was a personal spat which had developed between the aging theological

---

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Hoard, *God's Love to Mankind* (London: no publisher stated, 1633). John Davenant (1570-1641) and the more orthodox William Twisse (1578?-1646) also wrote against the theology of the same volume.

<sup>19</sup> Apparently, professors used their students to make statements in this way. The theses were published later in Friedrich Spanheim, *Exercitationes de gratia universali* (Lugduni Batavorum: Maire, 1646), 1-20, and still later in Friedrich Spanheim, *Disputationum theologicarum miscellaneorum pars prima et secunda* (Genevae: Petri Chouet, 1652), 230-236. See: F. P. van Stam, *The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur, 1635-1650: Disrupting Debates among the Huguenots in Complicated Circumstances* (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, c1988), 190-195.

<sup>20</sup> Saumur: Isaacum Desbordes.

<sup>21</sup> Saumur: Isaacum Desbordes.

<sup>22</sup> Leiden: J. Maire, 1646.

<sup>23</sup> Courthial, "The Golden Age of Calvinism in France", 76.

giant Du Moulin and the upstart theologian Amyraut.<sup>24</sup> Sixth, many thought that the orthodox Calvinists of Sedan and the cutting-edge revisionists of Saumur were conducting an institutional fight rather than a theological one. And seventh, many French Reformed pastors and elders feared a schism, which they believed would disastrously weaken the Protestant movement during a period when its persecution by the French government was increasing year by year under Louis XIV.

The results of the Amyraldian heresy were as stark as they were foreseeable and preventable. First, the confessional integrity of the French Reformed churches was lessened, encouraging further dismantling of the attainments of the Calvinistic Reformation. For instance, Claude Pajon (1626-1685) was soon able to get away with denying “that there is any direct[,] internal operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.”<sup>25</sup>

Second, the French Reformed churches became weaker against the renewed onslaught of political Romanism as the seventeenth century progressed, rather than stronger, culminating in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by King Louis XIV (1638-1715) in 1685.

Third, as Roger Nicole observes, “as far as can be seen,” Amyraldianism “did not in fact help to promote any basic union with the Lutherans, nor did it materially assist in preventing abjurations to the Roman Catholic faith.”<sup>26</sup> The practical advantages envisioned by the recast Calvinism of Amyraut failed to materialize.

Fourth, Nicole, who studied Amyraut for his doctoral dissertation,<sup>27</sup> continues by observing sadly that, despite the desires of its supporters, the theology of Amyraldianism “did provide a bridge toward Arminianism and perhaps toward the Semi-Pelagian tendencies of the Church of Rome. The advantages which Amyraut had envisioned failed to materialize, and the dangers against which his opponents had warned did in fact eventuate.”<sup>28</sup> Confronted with the historical record of a theologian who worked so hard for so long to obfuscate his teachings, one wonders if that bridge toward Arminianism was not Amyraut’s intention all along.

When the church speaks with a divided voice, it fails to rally its troops to the cause of Christ. Such was the situation of the French Reformed churches in the mid-seventeenth century, and they were therefore weakened as they entered into their next battle.

### **Third, the Battle with Hysterical Subjectivism**

As the pace of governmental regulation and persecution increased during the seventeenth century, many French Protestants emigrated. King Louis XIV, one of the most despicable despots of human history, came to spend one-third of the gross national product of France on his precious Versailles domain. Cut off from his own people, who were starving so that he could prance through life surrounded by sycophants of various pathologies attracted to him like a

---

<sup>24</sup> Such an excuse may have been in many minds in minimizing the important theological differences involved in other, later theological controversies within the Reformed Churches, such as Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) supposedly being challenged by Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965) or Klaas Schilder (1890-1952) being perhaps usurped by G. C. Berkouwer (1903-1996).

<sup>25</sup> Nicole, “Amyraldianism”, 191.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>27</sup> Much of the bulk of the dissertation is devoted to the first major attempt at a complete bibliography of Amyraut, including locations in libraries worldwide.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

moth to light, he was led to believe that the brilliance of his nation's Roman Catholic leaders had led every single one of his subjects into the fold of Rome. Thus, Louis XIV signed the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 because he erroneously thought that its protections were unnecessary. Yet if so, why did the Revocation make it a capital crime to remain a Protestant within France or to flee the country for religious freedom as a Protestant elsewhere? Hundreds of thousands of Huguenots fled anyway, mostly to the Germanic states, the Low Countries, and the British Isles, but some to more distant locales like South Africa, South Carolina, and even St. Helena Island. Since Protestants were over-represented in the productive, middle class, the French economy was devastated, leading to the rapid decline of French power throughout the world, including the loss of the enormous North American colonies of France in 1763.<sup>29</sup> At the time of the tercentenary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, French President François Mitterand (1916-1996) spoke at the official recognition of the anniversary and openly admitted as much.<sup>30</sup> The health of the Reformed Churches can very much affect the destiny of nations, for both good and ill.

Those Protestants who remained in France responded in several different ways to the new reality. In certain localities, local nobles provided protection from the worst effects of the persecution, such as in the Poitou in west central France. The irregular terrain in the Cevennes Mountains of south central France, full of natural caves and isolated gullies, protected other Huguenots. To this day, these two areas are the historic heartlands of French Protestantism.<sup>31</sup> Family worship was conducted clandestinely by the remnant, since public worship was all but impossible. Sadly, by the hundreds of thousands, other French Protestants recanted and returned to Rome, although a goodly number no doubt maintained their Protestant beliefs privately. It is fascinating to compare the experience of the French Huguenots with that of the Scottish Covenanters. During the 1680s, the former were entering into the worse persecution they would ever experience, while the latter were leaving their Killing Times, although the Covenanters could not know it until around 1689.

Virtually all the Protestant church buildings, called temples, were torn down as a final indignity; only a dozen or so still exist from before 1685, having been maintained for other purposes.<sup>32</sup> Pastors worked underground at great personal danger; when discovered, they were tried, convicted, and stripped and publicly executed, usually by being tied to a wheel and slowly beaten to death with metal rods.<sup>33</sup> For decades, no regional meetings of church judicatories could meet, leading to further theological and practical decline among the remnant French Protestants. These times were truly the wilderness years for French Reformed Protestantism.

---

<sup>29</sup> This defeat cemented France's ceding of world domination to Great Britain, with enormous repercussions, including the domination of the English language.

<sup>30</sup> "Allocution de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, aux cérémonies du tricentenaire de la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes, sur la tolérance en matière politique et religieuse et l'histoire du protestantisme en France, Paris, Palais de l'UNESCO, vendredi 11 octobre 1985" [Speech of Mr. François Mitterand, President of the Republic, at the Ceremonies concerning the Tricentenary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, about Toleration in the Matters of Politics and Religion and on the History of French Protestantism, Paris, Palace of UNESCO, Friday 11 October 1985]

<sup>31</sup> Although the later acquisition of Alsace added a third area of Protestant strength, albeit one historically speaking Alsatian, a German, not French, dialect.

<sup>32</sup> Yves Krumenacker, "Les temples protestants français, XVIe – XVII siècles" [Protestant Church Buildings, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries], *Chrétiens et sociétés* num. sp. 1 (2011), note 2.

<sup>33</sup> One of the most prominent Reformed pastors, Claude Brousson (1647-1698), suffered such a gruesome end at Montpellier.

In the Cevennes Mountains, some of the Protestants took up arms to protect themselves and their families. For several years, these men held the forces of the most powerful king on earth at bay, disappearing along mountain paths into the caves and crevices where the army hesitated to follow them. These fighters were nicknamed Camisards, after the French word for the white shirts they wore into battle.<sup>34</sup> Their leader, Pierre Laporte (1680-1704), took as his nom de guerre Roland; his family home in Mialet has been used, since the nineteenth century, for the most important historical museum of French Protestantism. Today its grounds are used for an annual conference which attracts over ten thousand Huguenots each September.

The Revolt of the Camisards embarrassed Louis XIV sufficiently that he replaced his generals and ordered the demolition of all the villages in the High Cevennes, even if they were inhabited by Romanists; about twenty thousand people were thus displaced, and considerable opprobrium fell upon the aging dictator. Through various intrigues, the Revolt was finally ended.

But, the resort to arms of the French Huguenots occurred not only because of those who were driven to respond in kind to the intense persecution of which they were the objects. The Camisards were encouraged to fight by the testimonies of many Protestants who maintained that they were modern prophets and, especially, prophetesses, able to envision the result of the armed opposition to the King and his forces, which Alan Clifford describes accurately as “a desperate but deceptive remedy for the oppressed.”<sup>35</sup> The prominence of certain women among the sorely persecuted Huguenots helped to open up the French Reformed churches in succeeding centuries to the ecclesiastical leadership of women, rather than seeing in these dreamers a warning of what not to do.

One woman who defied the king, but in a more appropriate fashion, Marie Durand (1711-1776),<sup>36</sup> has entered into the French consciousness. She was incarcerated in the Tower of Constance in Aigues Mortes for thirty-eight years (1730-1768), surviving the experience by a few years. At any time, she could have been released from custody if she had embraced the pope’s false religion. She refused, laboriously chiseling into the stone floor of her dungeon one word: *resistez* [resist]. People still flock to the Tower of Constance to gaze at this intrepid woman’s testimony down the centuries.

Another more wholesome response to the excesses of the Camisards and the visionaries was the establishment of a theological seminary for French Reformed pastors in Lausanne, Switzerland, headed by Antoine Court (1696-1760).<sup>37</sup> The seminary was established in 1730 and lasted until 1812. Court intended to inculcate a Reformed theological vision into the young men who studied under him, so that they could take that message to those who were increasingly being guided by emotion rather than Scripture and the Reformed confessions. While the level of persecution began to ebb after the death of Louis XIV in 1715, a death which was celebrated throughout France and its empire, the seminary was nicknamed the “School of the Martyrs”. Most of its graduates did end their ministries executed by their own government for their religion.

---

<sup>34</sup> Modern women may wear a “cami” or “camisole”, which is from the same French root.

<sup>35</sup> Alan C. Clifford, *Sons of Calvin: Three Huguenot Pastors* (Norwich, England: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 1999), 53.

<sup>36</sup> D. Benoit, *Marie Durand, prisonnière à la tour de Constance, 1715-1768: Son temps, sa famille, ses compagnes de captivité* [Marie Durand: Prisoner in the Tower of Constance, 1715-1768: Her Times, Her Family, Her Companions in Captivity] (Dieulefit, Drôme: Nouvelle société d’éditions de Toulouse, 1935). For a recent biography, written in English for the young, consult Simonetta Carr, *Marie Durand* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Clifford, *Sons of Calvin*, 54-62.

The official end of the persecution occurred in 1787, under King Louis XVI (1754-1793), with a Declaration of Toleration. But it was too little, too late. Two years later, the king had to call the Parliament into session in order to fund his government, with unforeseen repercussions. The French Reformed Churches had eked out an existence in certain locations, but the damage had been done. First, they were a fraction of the size they once had been. Second, they were beset by theological error, both Amyraldianism and Emotionalism. Third, they had few ministers and elders to lead them. Fourth, they had lost all their institutions and buildings. And fifth, they were a despised minority, subject to the whims of the Roman Catholic majority in unsettled times. All these factors left them greatly weakened in the face of the next battle which they were to face.

#### **Fourth, the Battle with Growing Secularism**

The French Revolution proclaimed the rights of man without recourse to the God of the Bible as establishing them. The revolutionaries enshrined the motto of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* [liberty, equality, fraternity], as the essence of the ethos of the French nation. Simply put, France replaced an authoritarian man with an authoritarian ideology, secularism. While French Protestants did not suffer the same depredations as did Roman Catholics,<sup>38</sup> it was only after 1815, when Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) definitively left the leadership of the nation, that Protestants began to emerge from their long period in the wilderness.

The French Reformed churches have been hobbled, however, by an enduring legacy of the Napoleonic Age, his legal code, which remains largely intact to this day in France. Two features loomed particularly important. First, all churches are defined legally as “associations”, like the garden club or a literary society. The government decrees that anyone who pays a nominal amount annually, an amount set by the government of the day, can be a member of the association, even be eligible for leadership posts within the association. The French Reformed Churches have accepted these standards; they were far too weak to oppose them at the time they were adopted. As a result, church membership has become too nominal, ecclesiastical discipline has proved almost impossible, and little effective ruling eldership has developed.

Second, the Reformed Churches were recognized, along with Roman Catholicism, as state churches. Ministers were paid by the government, and church buildings were erected where there were sufficient numbers of Protestants to justify doing so. From one end of France to another, rectangular buildings, often in prominent places, were erected. The benches centered on a high pulpit under a sounding board, with a communion table on the floor in front of the pulpit. The French Reformed Churches became financially, and psychologically, dependent upon the State.

This semi-Erastian system lasted for about a century. In the 1890s, France was convulsed by a controversy connected to the conviction of a Jewish army officer, Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935), for treason with France’s arch-enemy Germany. Roman Catholic leaders looked upon the Dreyfus Affair as a God-given opportunity to reassert their declining influence on secularizing French culture and to marginalize Protestants as well as Jews. Mass protests from one end of France to the other viciously attacked both groups, judging them as traitors to the nation.<sup>39</sup> After years of controversy, it became clear that Dreyfus had been framed by his military superiors, only because of his religious beliefs, in the rush to identify the traitor. The secularists in turn saw their opportunity against the discredited Roman Catholic faith, and, coming to

---

<sup>38</sup> Many priests and nuns were killed (usually guillotined), and Roman properties were seized and redistributed to those favored by whoever led the current regime.

<sup>39</sup> Prof. Pierre Birnbaum, in *The Anti-Semitic Moment: A Tour of France in 1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), has described in great detail such incidents focused on just one year, 1898.

dominate the government, cut off all religious groups from its financial subsidies in 1905. French Catholics survived the shock pretty well, but French Protestants did not. Their national system of schools closed down, ministers' salaries were slashed, and the plethora of Protestant institutions erected in the nineteenth century were largely abandoned.<sup>40</sup> The secularists had won a decisive battle in favor of their doctrine of *laïcité* (laicism).

The pairing of Jews with Protestants, so evident in the Dreyfus controversy, highlighted a real affinity between the two religious traditions, for so long despised minorities in a rough sea of bigoted Roman Catholicism. During the German occupation of France during the Second World War, twelve Reformed villages in the northern Cevennes Mountains centered on Chambon-sur-Lignon successfully hid thousands of Jews, mostly children, from the Germans, as well as members of other groups threatened by the collaborationist Vichy Regime of Marechal Philip Petain (1856-1951).<sup>41</sup> But both groups, Jews and Huguenots, have largely succumbed to the siren song of secularism, becoming largely indistinguishable from the secularists around them, since another battle had engulfed them.

### **Fifth, the Battle with Post-Kantian Liberalism**

The rise of the destructive criticism of the Bible and the resulting development of anti-Biblical and anti-confessional theology in the nineteenth century did not leave French Protestants unscathed.<sup>42</sup> In the chaos which followed France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and the end of the Third Empire of Napoleon III,<sup>43</sup> a national synod was able to convene without government interference. This synod adopted a "Declaration of Faith" which the liberals rejected, leading them to form a national synod separate from the "conservatives" or "evangelicals". The latter had been training ministers in a seminary in Montauban, in southwestern France. The liberals had been training their pastors in the theological faculty of the University of Strasbourg in the region of Alsace, now cut off from France by the German victory. Thus, the French liberals cooperated with the French Lutherans in creating a new seminary in Paris in 1877, where imposing facilities were built for the seminary two years later.<sup>44</sup>

In October 1906, an effort was made by some church leaders to mend the split, calling for a joint synod to meet in the small town of Jarnac, in the Charente Department of western France.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> For the Universal Exposition in Chicago in 1893, Frank Puaux prepared a large volume to describe them: *Les œuvres du protestantisme français au XIXe siècle* [The Activities of French Protestantism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century] (Paris: Comité Protestant Français, 1893).

<sup>41</sup> Philip Hallie brought world-wide renown to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, in his 1979 book, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). Numerous books, articles, and even films have added further light to this remarkable story; see Patrick Henry, "Le Chambon-sur-Lignon: 1979-2015," *The French Review* 89, no. 3 (March 2016): 83-96.

<sup>42</sup> "Ses représentants en France ont pour nom [Timothée] Colani [1824-1888], [Félix] Pécaud [1828-1898], [Edmond Henri Adolphe] Scherer [1815-1889], [Athanasie Josué] Coquerel [1820-1875]." Maurice Longeiret, *Églises réformées évangéliques: Les leçons de l'histoire* [Reformed Evangelical Churches: Lessons from History] (Nîmes, France: Éditions "Lumière des Hommes," 1997), 4.

<sup>43</sup> A nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, born in 1808, he became president in 1848, ruled as emperor 1852-1870, and died in 1873.

<sup>44</sup> The Seminary is located in the 14<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement in southern Paris on the Left Bank of the Seine River near the university quarter.

<sup>45</sup> Wilfred Monod (1867-1943), a member of a prominent French Protestant family, championed this effort.

Jarnac proved to be a double failure: not only was the breach not healed, but a third synod emerged from it, although this Jarnac Synod merged with the liberal synod in 1912.<sup>46</sup> By 1938, weakened by liberalism within and the ravages of World War I without, particularly on the Reformed Churches located in the battlefield areas of northern France, the Liberal Reformed Church, most of the Evangelical Reformed Churches and Methodist Churches, and some of the Free Churches, merged to form l'Église Réformée de France (the Reformed Church of France). The doctrinal agreement that permitted this union is vague – and non-binding anyway.<sup>47</sup> By 1948, the united church had begun ordaining women to the ministry. Eventually, the Reformed Church in France merged with the much smaller Lutheran Church to form the United Protestant Church of France in May 2013.

The theological liberalism of the Reformed Churches prompted liturgical experiments which moved the churches far from their Genevan roots. First, musical instruments, usually harmoniums, were introduced into worship, to replace the a cappella singing in worship inherited from Calvin three centuries earlier. Second, with the development of a French hymnody during the nineteenth century,<sup>48</sup> the Psalms were gradually supplanted as the text for singing the praises of the Lord. Third, liturgical elaboration bloomed, destroying the simple, spiritual, dialogical worship of the Reformed tradition. Late in the century, the Reformed Church of the Spirit in western Paris developed a highly liturgical form of worship, with homilies replacing sermons, extemporaneous prayers giving way to read prayers, and the authoritative reading of Scripture transformed into responsive readings.<sup>49</sup> The churches, even the evangelical ones, gradually embraced these changes. The liberals found the detailed liturgy very useful, as it permitted them to mouth orthodox formulations while personally disbelieving the normal sense of the words. The effects of this liturgical revolution were devastating: pastors became tied to their liturgical books; worship became overly formal; liberalism advanced through subterfuge; and the people stopped attending the boring ceremonies. The average French Reformed Church today has an attendance of about ten percent of its overall membership.

The neo-modernism of Karl Barth (1886-1968) swept into France beginning in the mid-1920s,<sup>50</sup> and had become the most popular form of theological liberalism by the eruption of World War II in September, 1939. Jean Baubérot explains its popularity as follows: “By closely mixing orthodoxy and dialectic, [Barthianism] gave to the members of the middle class of Protestant intellectuals (and especially the new generation) a possibility to master secularization and to

---

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Langlois-Berthelot, “Documents: de l’Assemblée de Jarnac (1906) à l’Union des Églises réformées de France’ (1912)” [Documents: From the Assembly at Jarnac (1906) to the Union of the Reformed Churches of France (1912)] *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 140, no. 2 (avril-juin 1994): 285-291.

<sup>47</sup> The theological statement of the 1872 synod was not as strong, but was required of ministers. The 1938 statement (written in 1936) was optional for them. How is that progress?

<sup>48</sup> Some hymns were written from a liberal perspective, others from an evangelical one (see the next battle).

<sup>49</sup> A later iteration of this liturgy has been helpfully translated into English as: *The Sunday Service of the French Reformed Church* (London: French Protestant Industrial Mission, circa 1950).

<sup>50</sup> The first work of Barth to appear in the French language appears to have been *Parole de Dieu et parole humaine* (Paris: Librairie Protestante, 1924); translated into English as *The Word of God and the Word of Man. L’Épître aux Philippiens* [The Epistle to the Philippians] followed in 1926, published by Labor et Fides in Geneva.

move towards ... ecumenical dialogue.”<sup>51</sup> As in other countries, Barthianism became passé in the tumultuous 1960s and has been replaced by more radical theologies. The most prominent late-twentieth century theologian at the Paris Seminary was Georges Casalis (1917-1987), whose motto was: “A conclusion is a prison.”

Theological liberalism became closely associated with socialist politics by the end of the nineteenth century, in part as a reaction to the perceived Romanism of the more conservative parties. In May 1968, the famous student revolts against the French system began among students at the Paris Protestant Seminary. These students even managed to have Dr. Frank Michaeli (1907-1977) removed from the chair of Old Testament; as a Barthian, he was considered a reactionary, and they, as fascists, felt free to put him in the unemployment queue. Meanwhile, another battle was being fought by the French Reformed Churches.

### **Sixth, the Battle with Pragmatic Evangelicalism**

The French Reformed Churches had hardly emerged from centuries of persecution when they faced a new challenge from the evangelical movement. Spawned in the Great Awakenings of the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Anglo-American world, this challenge spread to other countries.

The evangelical revival entered France via Switzerland, where a pair of remarkable Scottish brothers spearheaded the effort. Robert Haldane (1764-1842) and James Haldane (1768-1851) centered their work in the city of Geneva.<sup>52</sup> Their most important convert was César Malan (1787-1864), pastor of St. Peter’s Church in Geneva, the congregation served earlier by John Calvin himself.<sup>53</sup> Malan was removed from the pulpit when he continued to preach election and related Biblical doctrines, despite the Geneva Consistory’s instruction to the contrary. Malan became an itinerant preacher throughout Switzerland and France and even beyond. Today, Malan is best known as the “French Isaac Watts”, as he wrote a large number of hymns in order to replace the Psalms of Scripture in the worship of God. Other leaders of the revival work were Jean Henri Merle d’Aubigné (1794-1872), an important church historian, and Louis Gaussen (1790-1863), a theologian who wrote an often-republished work on the inspiration of Scripture, *Theopneustia*, as well as an important work on *The Canon of the Holy Scriptures from the Point of View of Science and Faith*.

The closest the French Reformed Churches came to a Reformed theologian in the nineteenth century was Professor Emile Doumergue (1844-1937) of the Protestant Seminary in Montauban, author of the monumental, seven volume set, *Jean Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps*.<sup>54</sup> However, Prof. Doumergue’s interest in Calvin was more antiquarian than theological. This Seminary moved in 1919 to the university city of Montpellier in south central France and was paired with the Protestant Seminary in Paris into an Institute of Protestant Theology in the 1970s.

---

<sup>51</sup> “L’émérgence d’une orthodoxie nouvelle au XXe siècle: Les causes de l’apparition du mouvement barthien en France” [The Emergence of a New Orthodoxy in the Twentieth Century: The Causes for the Emergence of the Barthian Movement in France], *Études théologiques et religieuses* 66, no. 3 (1991): 397.

<sup>52</sup> See Alexander Haldane, *The Lives of Robert and James Haldane* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), and, more broadly, Kenneth J. Stewart, *Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicalism and the Francophone “Réveil”, 1816-1849* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Solomon Caesar Malan, *The Life, Labours, and Writings of Caesar Malan* (London: James Nisbet, 1869), and often reprinted.

<sup>54</sup> *John Calvin: The Men and the Events of His Time*, published by G. Bridel in Lausanne between 1899 and 1927, but never translated into English.

But the early emphasis on election in the evangelical movement should not obscure the fact that many of the evangelicals were Amyraldian at best in their theology. And, as already noted, the revivalists embraced changes in the Reformed liturgy which had originated among the theological liberals.

The Reformed Churches were hobbled in their response to these tendencies by the refusal of successive governments, of widely-differing political tendencies, to permit a national synod to meet. But, the Churches were sufficiently Reformed to prompt frustrated evangelical believers to secede. The Free Churches left in 1849,<sup>55</sup> followed by the Baptists a year later, and the Methodists in 1868. While inevitable in many ways, and even desirable, these secessions removed some of the most dynamic and anti-liberal members and leaders from the Reformed Churches at a critical time in their battle against Post-Kantian Liberalism.

The Pentecostal Movement came to France in the early twentieth century and created the usual unrest within all the churches, including the French Reformed Church, before and after 1938. The French Assemblies of God, organized in 1932, had become the largest non-Romanist denomination in France by the late 1970s, in terms of actual attendance at Sabbath worship.

During the 1920s, a revival movement swept through many of the Reformed parishes in the Alps, particularly in the Department of the Drôme; the movement was nicknamed “The Brigade of the Drôme”. Quasi-Calvinists, they experienced, as is usually the case, rapid decline after the initial enthusiasm of the revival wore off. Their most important leader was Jean Cadier (1898-1981), author of *The Man God Mastered: John Calvin*,<sup>56</sup> and later a professor at the Seminary in Montpellier.

Following World War II, a wave of missionaries from the burgeoning Evangelical Movement in North America and the British Isles came to France, establishing congregations in the cities and producing a large number of denominations and a few institutions.<sup>57</sup> Already, evangelicals under the leadership of Ruben Saillens (1855-1942), had established a Bible college at Nogent-sur-Marne, east of Paris, in 1921.<sup>58</sup> Later evangelicals created a seminary in Vaux-sur-Seine in 1965; its most prominent leader has been Henri Blocher (b. 1937), a Reformed Baptist from a distinguished French evangelical family, who is now retired.

The Charismatic Movement emerged in the post-war period and has influenced the worship of the French Reformed Churches towards a greater informalism and emotionalism. With the surge of African and Caribbean evangelical immigrants into the Reformed churches in recent decades, such tendencies have been amplified and imitated.

---

<sup>55</sup> Frédéric Monod (1794-1863) led the Free Churches out of the Reformed Churches; the denomination continues today. *L'union des Églises évangéliques libres de France: Ses origines, son histoire, son œuvre* [The Union of Free Evangelical Churches of France: Its Origins, Its History, Its Work] (Paris: Chapelle Taitbout, 1899). Claude Baty, *Les églises évangéliques libres, 1849-1999* [The Free Evangelical Churches, 1948-1999] (Valence: Édition spéciale L.L.B., 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960.

<sup>57</sup> Allen V. Koop, *American Evangelical Missionaries in France, 1945-1975* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, c1986). Missionaries from the British Isles and other parts of Europe also came to France.

<sup>58</sup> Almost two thousand students have graduated from Nogent during almost a century of instruction there. The standard biography of Saillens was written by one of his daughters, Marguerite Wargenau-Saillens: *Ruben et Jeanne Saillens, évangélistes* [Ruben and Jeanne Saillens, Evangelists] (Paris: Les bons semeurs, 1947), reprinted in 2014 by Éditions Ampelos. Despite the title, it is almost totally focused on Ruben Saillens.

The growth of evangelical churches in France in recent years has been so obvious that *Christianity Today* devoted a cover story to the phenomenon in 2005.<sup>59</sup> The temptation for Reformed believers and churches is to mimic the theology and practices of evangelicals in order to experience similar growth, failing to recognize that this growth has come largely by transfer from the flood of evangelical immigrants joining established French congregations or founding their own churches. As a result, a certain pragmatism has been affecting the French Reformed Churches.

### **Conclusion**

The French Reformed Churches have fought these six major battles since the mid-sixteenth century. Where do these battles leave these Churches today? They are confused (when not contradictory) in their theology and practice, uncertain of the goals for their cash-strapped ministries, divided in their vision for future witness, and withdrawn into themselves with little impact upon the highly-secular society around them.<sup>60</sup> The sad reality is that the French Reformed Churches have abandoned much of what is good in their tradition as a result of their responses to the six great battles which they have faced over the past four and a half centuries. The only bright spot is a certain Calvinistic reform movement that has, in the past century, taken shape and advanced, but remains too much an abstract idea rather than an ecclesiastical reality. A future address will consider this movement's founder, Auguste Lecerf (1872-1943), as well as the movement itself.

---

<sup>59</sup> Agnieszka Tennent, "The French Reconnection: Europe's Most Secular Country Rediscovered Its Christian Roots," *Christianity Today* 49, no. 3 (March 2005): 28-35.

<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, "Protestants" have been found in many prominent positions since the nineteenth century, especially in business and the military, although some have also been found in politics. The Protestant Peugeot family created one of the major French automobile manufacturers; after they sold their interest in the company, they watched helplessly as the quality of the cars which were produced in their name declined. Three prime ministers of the Fifth Republic (established in 1958) have been Protestants in religious background, although not in personal belief and practice: Maurice Couve de Murville (1907-1999, served 1968-1969); Michel Rocard (born 1930, served 1988-1991); and Lionel Jospin (born 1937; served 1997-2002).

## **The Reformation of Josiah and the Rediscovery of the Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 34**

Dr. C. J. Williams

---

*Professor of Old Testament Studies  
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

---

### **Observing Reformation**

On Oct 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his famous 95 theses on the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, an event which many regard as the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation. So each year, on Oct 31, many reformed churches mark what we call "Reformation Day."

Why do we do it? Out of nostalgia for the past? A wistful longing for better times? Or maybe it is our attempt to maintain a distinctly reformed holiday! One we can celebrate in good conscience apart from the cultural trappings that now surround other holidays throughout the year!

Undoubtedly this day is observed for some of these reasons. However, a Reformation Day is only truly meaningful if we are committed to the same reformation in our times. This is not a call to live in the past, but a call to acknowledge very real and present need. To observe and understand the significance of events of the past is not merely to look back with historical interest; it is rather a serious consideration of how the church measures up today to the biblical standards of doctrine, worship, and ecclesiology. Reformation is not to be only a past event, but an urgent and contemporary calling. It is a biblical principle, in Old and New Testaments, that did not begin in Geneva.

Only in this light then is Reformation Day worth observing. Our desire ought to be a new reformation in our time, one that even eclipses the reformation of our fathers in the 16th century.

What, then, is this thing for which we pray, this thing we commemorate and seek after, called "Reformation"? Let us begin with a working definition:

Reformation is when God's people, out of faith and love for Him, cast off the traditions of men and the influences of the world, and passionately return to the purity of biblical direction in worship, doctrine, and practice.

A definition like this, imperfect as it may be, gives us a starting point for our prayers and our efforts. To unpack this definition, it will be better for us to examine some concrete examples of it to see how it works out in real history. Our first instinct may be to look to men like Luther, Knox, and Calvin. These figures are certainly fine examples and there is much we can learn from men such as these. However to focus on them, great as they may be, would be to content ourselves with secondary resources. The Reformers themselves drew, not from their surroundings, but from the Word of God. There is a primary resource on the subject of Reformation, and that is the

Bible itself- which is always contemporary. We will focus on a prime example of this in the book of 2 Chronicles.

## **2 Chronicles is an Old Testament Record of Reformation**

The Chronicler describes at great length the reformation that took place under the greatest men of the church, namely Hezekiah, Josiah, and Asa. These men were the Luther, Knox, and Calvin of the ancient Church. While 2 Kings focuses more on the political and military achievements of these men, Chronicles focuses on how God used them as great reformers who restored the worship, doctrine and practice of the Church and brought her back to biblical roots. This makes the Book of 2 Chronicles nothing less than the divine handbook on reformation.

While 2 Chronicles might not be everyone's favorite book of the Bible, we do well to remember what Paul says in Rom 15:4, *"For whatever things were written beforehand are for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* 2 Chronicles was written that we might have the hope of reformation, and that this might continue to be our prayer and our desire for the Bride of Christ.

In this article, we will examine a shining example of such reformation in the ancient church, under one of the greatest reformers of all time – King Josiah. If we define reformation as a time *"when God's people, out of faith and love for Him, cast off the traditions of men and the influences of the world, and passionately return to the purity of Biblical direction in worship, doctrine, and practice,"* then we find an exemplary instance of it in 2 Chronicles 34.

### **King Josiah**

First, let's consider the reformer himself. Although the parallel account of his reign in 2 Kings gives less of a view of his younger years, Chronicles gives an insight to his heart at a young age. In fact, in all the accounts of the great reformer-kings, 2 Chronicles reveals a clear view of the faith and love for the Lord that motivated them in reformation. It is important to see that reformers like Josiah were not iconoclasts who sought out controversy or "conservatives" who had an outward taste for the old traditions. Their reformation sprang from a heart of passionate faith and love for God, always the catalyst and motivating force for any real work of God. Without that there is no true reformation.

Josiah became king when he was a young eight years old. Marvelously, Chronicles says of his heart that "he walked in the ways of his father David," and that "he did not turn to the right hand or to the left" (2 Chron. 34:2). Eight years into his reign, at the age of sixteen, the Scriptures say that "while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David." (2 Chron. 34:3). At a young age, and in his teens, his heart was already set on God and seeking God. This consecration bore fruit, for at the age of 20 he began an active work of reformation by purging false worship and its locations from Judah (2 Chron. 34:3).

It is noteworthy that the text separates the ideas of "walking in the ways of his father David" (which he did while very young), and "seeking the God of his father David" (which marked the beginning of his reformation). Josiah was not just committed to following the good example and traditions of David, good as they were. He was committed to seeking the LORD and doing his will. This practice is essential to true reformation, for it is not simply preferring one tradition over another as handed down but seeking the will of God from the Scriptures. Today being reformed has become, in some senses, embracing conservative and confessional traditions often labelled the 'reformed tradition'. Once we start to think of ourselves as maintaining a tradition, we begin to lose sight of what reformation really is. Returning to the 'ways of David' was not the essence of this reformation, and returning to the 'ways' of the fathers is not enough for us. We have great human examples of reformers, such as Calvin and Knox, but

maintaining their "tradition" is not what makes us reformed, no more than "walking in the ways of David" made Josiah a reformer. Reformation does not start by seeking the ways of our fathers even if they are great examples. Rather, it begins by seeking the God of our fathers (2 Chron. 34:3 3). Reformation begins with a heart of faith returning to the God of our fathers, via doctrine, worship and practice.

### **The Nature of Josiah's Faith**

Toward the end of the chapter a further glimpse of Josiah's heart of faith is given, this time in the words of God through the prophetess Hulda. She says that Josiah's heart was tender toward God, and twice mentions his humility (2 Chron. 34:27).

When thinking of great reformers, the qualities we usually envisage first might be zeal for the truth, courage in the face of opposition, and boldness in proclamation. These characteristics are important and Josiah certainly had them, but God Himself highlights Josiah's heart of humility. We would be wrong to miss the significance of the condition of the reformer's heart in considering great works of reformation. In being called to be a king or a reformer of a nation it is common to overlook the priority of meekness and humility to hold such a position. Pride comes before a fall, but what comes before reformation is humility before God and man.

Calvin said in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "If you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, I will answer, first, second, and third, it is humility." If humility is that central to true faith, it must also be to true reformation. If we want to see reformation in our times, we must start by humbling ourselves before God. Further, we must maintain a meek spirit before others when it comes to the articulation of our convictions and how we present the scriptures to others. Josiah shows us that a heart of humility goes a long way in this matter.

### **Josiah's Reformation of Irregular Worship**

All the great reformers of the ancient church were known for restoring true worship by the guidance of Scripture alone. This is always a key element of what reformation is.

The historical background to Josiah's reformation is the long idolatrous reign of Manasseh. Though he eventually repented many of his idolatrous worship practices had become tradition by the time Josiah came to the throne. The young king set his heart to reform and restore the true worship of God. To achieve this he not only had to purge *worship of false gods* but also *false worship of the true God*. It is important to differentiate between the two.

The worship of false gods, such as Baal, was the first focus of Josiah's reformation (vs. 4) and should be at the forefront of any present-day reformation. But there were also man-made unbiblical worship practices in the land that were an attempt to worship the true God, which were of equal concern to Josiah. Unbiblical worship will eventually lead to entirely false worship, which is why it is important to hold to the scriptural standard. Josiah was compelled to return to this scriptural standard and did several things to accomplish it.

#### ***He tore down "high places"***

The high places were shrines where people often sought to worship the true God, but in a manner and location that God had not commanded (2 Chron 33:17).

#### ***He took away the "wooden, carved, and molded images"***

These idols were not always images of false gods, but were often attempts to visually represent the true God. It is important to comprehend this form of idolatry where unbiblical modes of worshipping the true God are used. A notorious example of this is the golden calf in Exodus 32,

which is called by the same Hebrew term (*massecah*) as is used here of these molded images. Aaron claimed the image was “your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”, and declared a feast to be held for the LORD. Aaron and the people were trying to visually represent the true God with an idol, which the Lord had clearly forbidden.

These “molded images,” such as Josiah tore down in Judah, were often attempts to worship the true God by false means. This is also what happened on the “high places”—they were attempting to worship the true God, but in the wrong place, and by their own methods. Josiah put a decisive end to not only the worship of false gods, but the unbiblical worship of the true God, with the important standard being *is this sanctioned and commanded in Scripture*.

This important distinction between outright idolatry and a false, unbiblical attempt to worship the true God is being forgotten today. God can be worshipped in a false way, for our worship is not sanctified by our motives. We cannot invent our own ways to worship and think it is fine because we are *trying* to worship the true God. The true God will only be worshipped according to His own word.

The examples today may be more subtle, but no less real. The point to glean from this text is that reformation demands that we distinguish between the will of God and the will of man when it comes to worship. Josiah had this discernment and this is precisely the thing that made him a great reformer.

### **The Priority of God's Commands in Worship**

Of other Old Testament kings such as Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, and Azariah it was said, “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, nevertheless he did not take down the high places.” These ‘almost-reformers’ were content to leave some traditions alone. Maybe they reasoned that as long as the people were sacrificing to the LORD on these high places, what’s the harm? Today, modern innovations in worship are excused by the same reasoning. What is the harm? The harm is that we fail to give God what he commands, and what pleases and glorifies him most, according to His word.

One passage that highlights this point is Jeremiah 32:35:

They built the high places of Baal, which are in the Valley of the son of Hinnom, and caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into my mind that they should do this abomination.

The people were worshipping false gods by killing their own children (which violates the first, second, and sixth commandments). Yet what God highlights is that he did not command this as the way of worship. Following the emphasis of the passage, worship practices that are not commanded by God are just as offensive to him (or more) as the hideous practice of child sacrifice. The disobedient element of man-made worship innovations put them all in the same category as the unthinkable practice of child-sacrifice as God did not command them.

This is why Josiah took the high places and the molded images down in spite of their long tradition. In spite of the people’s intentions, God had not commanded them.

### **Josiah's Reformation of Outright Idolatry**

Another observation is noteworthy about Josiah's purgation of false worship. The Biblical description of it is a tsunami of violent verbs. Every sentence in the account has verbs like “purge, break down, smash, cut down, grind into powder.” The parallel text in 2 Kings 23 is

even more vivid with its verbs, such as “defile, pulverize, execute, desecrate.” The verbs tell the story of Josiah's policy toward false worship and idolatry—make no exceptions, take no prisoners, show no mercy. He did not do these things out of hubris, for remember how the text speaks of his humility! He did these things out of godly zeal for the worship of God, which is the same kind of zeal that moved our Savior to drive out the merchants and moneychangers from the temple. Of Christ it was said, “Zeal for the LORD's house has consumed me” (Psalm 69:9; John 2:17). Josiah exhibited the same kind of zeal for the true worship of the true God.

Now, this zeal must be tempered by humility, and this zeal, in a modern context, might not exactly be expressed by burning, smashing, and pulverizing things. But there must be zeal if there is to be reformation and passion for the true worship of the true God. It is precisely this zeal and passion that makes Josiah stand out as perhaps the greatest reformer in all of church history.

### **Josiah's Rediscovery of the Scriptures**

Lastly, we come to the central event of this chapter, and the key event of Josiah's reign: the discovery (or re-discovery) of the Scriptures.

Josiah set out to repair and renovate the temple, just as Hezekiah did before him. In this process, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law. How long had it been lost? How long had God's people gone without Scripture? This explains a lot about the previous century when the kings simply did what was right in his own eyes. The church and its worship were in a state of utter chaos without the guidance of scripture.

A similar loss of the scriptures was also a precursor to the reformation of the sixteenth century. The Roman Catholic Church for centuries had purposefully hidden the scriptures from the people and replaced God's word with papal doctrine in order to manipulate, suppress, and control their people. Luther, Calvin, and Knox played the role of Hilkiah the priest in rediscovering the scriptures.

In the course of the chapter Hilkiah gives the book to Shaphan the scribe (one wonders what a scribe had to do in a time when the scriptures were lost!). Shaphan then goes to Josiah, first reporting about the progress of the temple repairs and the temple's financial situation. (2 Chron. 34:16-17) Then in a seemingly incidental way he tells Josiah about the book and reads it to him. (2 Chron. 34:18). Josiah's reaction again reveals his heart and character. In shock, in contrition, he tears his clothes and immediately sends for a prophet. His intention to reform is then immediately implemented.

A contrast exists between Shaphan, a scribe with no Scriptures who seemed most concerned about the building and the money, and Josiah, who was most concerned with God's Word and its message. A modern distraction is reflected here, when churches become preoccupied with their buildings and budgets to the point where the ministry of the word loses its centrality and urgency. However, Josiah's reaction stands out. He immediately recognizes God's word for what it is and responds, for the sheep recognize the Shepherd's voice. Similarly, Paul said to the Thessalonians that when they received their words they welcomed them as truth, the word of God (1 Thes. 2:13). Acknowledging the word of God for what it is in truth is essential for understanding His will and beginning to follow it. Josiah received it for what it was in truth, as the only authority for faith and life.

### **Josiah Sees the Judgement of God in the Scriptures**

Josiah also acknowledged the righteousness of God's judgment on the nation, according to the words of scripture. He did not make excuses or blame his predecessors but took responsibility,

repented, and initiated the task of reformation. This is an important point to note if we desire and pray for reformation. It is always tempting to deflect responsibility to the people around you or people who came before you. However, with the knowledge of God's word comes a very personal responsibility to repent over breaking it and to commit to following it yourself in your own age.

Josiah then sent for Hulda the prophetess who told him that God's wrath was still coming. An unavoidable judgment loomed on the horizon, but because Josiah's heart was humble and tender toward God he would not experience it personally. He gathered the nation, led them in a covenant to keep God's word, and continued on with the reformation even after he heard of the certainty of God's judgment to come.

Such an attitude reveals the sincerity of Josiah's motives for returning to God's word and reforming the worship of the church. He did not bring these changes because he thought the LORD would bless the nation and give them prosperity and peace. In fact, he knew the opposite was true. God's patience was at an end and they were about to be conquered and deported to Babylon. Josiah knew this outcome but he still led the nation in a covenant to keep the word of God. He saw the necessity of returning to the Scriptures in obedience to the LORD, regardless of the circumstances or the outcome. This is the kind of faith that is at the heart of reformation. An unwavering, unqualified commitment to return to the purity of biblical direction must be maintained.

### **Josiah's Covenant**

Josiah's "commitment" was really a "covenant." Just like Hezekiah before him, Josiah made his commitment clear by making a covenant. The covenant that Josiah made with the Lord is the crescendo of the chapter (vs. 29-33). Josiah led the elders and all the people in a covenant to keep God's word with all their heart.

Covenant making often goes hand-in-hand with reformation. Every reformer-king of the Old Testament, including Josiah, Hezekiah, and Asa, all led the people in a covenant with God. Such covenant making accompanied the reformation in Scotland as well. Covenants embody and articulate reformation. A covenant is a way to clearly define our commitment and our duty, especially in times when reformation is so urgent. Making a covenant is a good and biblical way to express and commit ourselves to our biblical duties in response to the specific challenges of the times. It is a corporate expression of faith and commitment to Christ and His word. Insofar as covenanting has fallen out of practice in our modern times we are poorer for it. Any significant impulse toward reformation remains indistinct and diffuse without the clarity of commitment that a covenant brings.

The substance of Josiah's covenant is that he, the elders, and the people would return with all their hearts to the word of God as their direction for faith, life, and worship. This played out in several ways, such as in the keeping of the Passover in the next chapter. But the principle itself is the true heart of what reformation is.

### **Sola Scriptura**

This principle is encapsulated in the Latin phrase *Sola Scriptura*, or "Scripture alone," and it embodies the principle that God's word alone is sufficient and infallible to teach us the way of salvation, the way of worship, and the way to live for the glory of Christ. The implied corollary to this is that the teachings and traditions of men, which are not drawn from the scriptures, are actually impediments to truly knowing, loving, and worshipping Christ. There is a place and a need for teachers, councils, and confessions, but these must all be based upon the only, final, infallible authority, which is God's word.

Examples of true reformation in the Bible and beyond can be characterized by this principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone must be rediscovered and reclaimed as our only infallible direction for faith, worship, and life.

In Josiah's time and John Knox's time, the scriptures were lost, or purposefully hidden, and had to be rediscovered. Today we are not in danger of literally losing it, yet our danger is that it may be lost in plain sight.

Our need is to continually re-affirm our commitment to God's word alone, and to rediscover it in our homes and in our churches constantly. We need to return to it, daily and instinctively, and lay it up in our hearts with a sense of discovery each day. In our churches we must have this kind of corporate commitment to preach, teach, and worship according to the Scriptures alone, and rediscover the vitality and joy that comes with a simple and singular focus on God's word.

Reformation is when God's people, out of faith and love for Him, cast off the traditions of men and the influences of the world and passionately return to the purity of biblical direction in worship, doctrine, and practice. Praise God that he has granted us true examples of reformation in the history of the church. Let it be our prayer that God would grant it again, and that reformation would be more than the stuff of history or a nostalgic idea to us, but that it would be a living commitment and our greatest desire for the body of Christ.