

*Calvinism*  
**A Review**

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***Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue.* By Ray Clendenen and Brad Waggoner, eds. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008. 303 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.**

It was an idea whose time had come: in the fall of 2007, a bi-partisan conference aptly named “Building Bridges” brought together ten scholars, including one college president, eight professors and one pastor, to present papers on the subject of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention. These ten were paired in groups of two to address the following five subjects from a Calvinistic and non-Calvinistic perspective: the Historical Record, General Evaluation (of Calvinism in the SBC), the Atonement, Theological Stereotypes, and Election and Calling. The papers have now been collected and made available in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*. The editors have included three additional chapters which provide helpful perspective to the subject. The volume is introduced by LifeWay’s research division director Ed Stetzer’s presentation and analysis of data from two recent surveys on the influence of Calvinism among pastors and staff members in SBC churches. Rounding out the volume are two chapters where Seminary president Daniel Akin and Senior Pastor Tom Ascol, co-sponsors of the “Building Bridges” Conference along with LifeWay, address the subject “Working Together to Make Christ Known.” A helpful Glossary of thirty terms used by the various authors is appended, followed by a name, subject and scripture index. Though some may look on my rather lengthy review as an example of kibitzing, I trust and hope some benefit to the cause of genuine dialogue will accrue.

Calvinism is viewed through many prisms in the SBC. Some see it as absolutely vital to the health and prosperity, both theological and otherwise, of the convention. Others view it as a niggling nuisance that hinders evangelism and splits churches. Regardless of which camp you are in, or somewhere in the middle, this book is a must-read for all Southern Baptists concerned about the current state of the SBC with respect to the theological debates concerning Calvinism. And “debate” it is, as the editors acknowledge with their use of the term four times in their two page preface. Fortunately, though the writers square off on the issues, the result is no donnybrook. For the most part, authors avoid strident language in their chapters. When it comes to Calvinism in the SBC, a fair amount of misinformation, misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation characterizes the current climate. This book should go a long way towards cutting through some of the fog.

Stetzer’s opening chapter presents and interprets recent survey data with the hope of identifying the proportion of pastors and church staff members who are Calvinistic and what this data says about the commitment to evangelism by churches with Calvinistic leadership. Stetzer’s stated goal is an attempt to “use specific data to answer the general question: Do churches with Calvinistic leadership remain committed to evangelism?” (13). The bulk of the chapter contains graphical information reporting specific findings of the surveys, followed by a brief summary. Not too surprising, four generalizations were noted. 1) Churches with Calvinistic leaders are a small minority in the SBC. 2) Calvinism is on the rise among recent seminary graduates. 3) Calvinist-led churches are generally smaller and report fewer baptisms than non-Calvinist led churches. 4) Annual baptism rates indicate little difference between Calvinist-led and non-

Calvinist-led churches (24–25). The chapter concludes with a listing of the study protocols used in the survey.

Stetzer's chapter evinces several weaknesses. First, one should not have to wait to the end of the report to discover the parameters of the research. Second, the LifeWay study of 2006 used a random sampling of 413 pastors across the SBC. The NAMB study was conducted on seminary graduates from 1998 to 2004, with 1,234 respondents indicating they were pastors. From a methodological perspective, there are numerous problems related to the populations from which these studies were conducted. For one thing, the LifeWay study included all pastors randomly selected from all 42,000 churches in Southern Baptist life. The NAMB study included only the graduates of theological seminaries in recent years. There is no statement whether any pastors who were in the first study might have been also in the second study, thus making direct comparison problematic. Second, considering the diverse nature of Baptist life, the population of total pastors would represent a much more diversely educated group than the survey of recent seminary graduates. Again, drawing conclusions from responses from two possibly different populations is problematic. Third, Stetzer concluded Calvinism is on the rise based on the percentages from the two groups that identified themselves as five-point Calvinists. Although this may be warranted from a common sense standpoint, direct comparisons from one group to another cannot be statistically interpreted in such a fashion.

Another problem relates to the question whether one's commitment to Calvinism is related to the age of the pastor. The survey done on recent seminary graduates does not detail how many people were in the age categories. In the years 1998–2004 there would have been very few graduates born in the years 1945 or earlier, and even few born between 1946–1955. Nonetheless, percentages from these groupings are presented as being equal with the 1966–1975 and the 1976 and later groupings to illustrate a trend line. Presenting raw percentages in this manner is misleading and vulnerable to misinterpretation.

Finally, another problem has to do with presentation of the data related to worship attendance, baptisms and baptismal rates. Merely looking at means associated with one group or another does not indicate if there is a statistical difference. There is a mean difference of about 10 or 40 on worship attendance depending on the survey, but we simply don't know if that means anything. There are similar kinds of differences related to baptism and baptism rate data.

Stetzer's survey results have been alternatively praised and criticized. Stetzer himself noted that the two surveys rendered "conflicting results" concerning baptism rates (defined as how many baptisms occur annually for each 100 in average worship attendance) among Calvinist and non-Calvinist led churches. The survey data gives the appearance that Calvinism is a growing influence among SBC leaders, especially younger leaders. However, given the diversity between the protocols of these two surveys, it is difficult to draw overall substantial conclusions. Clearly, survey data can be "misused" and more research needs to be done, as Stetzer correctly acknowledges (24). Given the dissimilarity of the size of the groups, and since no actual statistical measurement of a statistical nature such as chi-square is used, one simply cannot draw and report statistical-sounding conclusions as Stetzer does here.

David Dockery, president of Union University and Tom Nettles, Professor of Historical Theology at Southern Seminary, take us on a quick overview tour of the history of Southern Baptists and Calvinism. Dockery aims to answer the question: are Southern Baptists Calvinists or have Southern Baptists been Calvinists? He correctly answers the question "yes and no" (29). Have there been Calvinists in the SBC from the beginning? Absolutely. Are there Calvinists in

the SBC today? Absolutely. Dockery's chapter demonstrates such. However, the first of two money quotes from this chapter asks the crucial question using the operative word "majority:" "Are the majority of Southern Baptists or have the majority of Southern Baptists been consistent, five-point Calvinists? I think the answer is no" (29). Following a very brief historical overview concerning the question of the relationship of divine sovereignty to human responsibility from the early church to Dort, Dockery justifies his "no" answer by tracing, albeit in a very cursory manner, the issues in Southern Baptist life and thought past and present.

Dockery's historical hindsight is 20/20 when it comes to our Southern Baptist roots. Both the Charleston tradition, with its Calvinistic heritage (although the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina had its share of non-Calvinists in her membership), and the Sandy Creek tradition, with its strong revivalistic heritage, form the twin streams that merge to produce the river known as Southern Baptists. Dockery affirms the Calvinistic influence in the early years of the Southern Baptist Convention, including the founding faculty of Southern Seminary. Here comes the second money quote: "The grass roots, however, then as now, had much more in common with Sandy Creek. Those two important concepts have to be held together. We cannot just look at who the leaders were to understand Southern Baptists. . . ." (35). This statement likely refers to the Founders Ministries, headed by Tom Ascol, a co-sponsor of the "Building Bridges" conference and contributor to this volume as well. Also deeply involved in Founders Ministries is Tom Nettles, the author paired with Dockery to discuss the historical question. The primary mission of the Founders movement is to demonstrate the Calvinistic roots of the early convention leaders and encourage a resurgence of Calvinism in the SBC. More on this later.

Among those early leaders, Dockery mentions J.L. Dagg, J.P. Boyce, J.M. Frost, and B.H. Carroll. E.Y. Mullins, and W.T. Conner played significant roles in the first half of the twentieth century, followed in the latter half by such stellar names as Herschel Hobbs and W.A. Criswell, among others. At this juncture the proof of Dockery's earlier assertion that one cannot look merely to the leaders to determine what Southern Baptists believe about Calvinism comes into play. He demonstrates that not all of the early leaders were strict five-point Calvinists, much less those in the twentieth century. For example, he takes note of the fact that Carroll, Mullins, Conner, Hobbs and Criswell all rejected limited atonement. In fact, Hobbs only affirmed one of the points of Calvinism. Dockery points out the influence on Boyce by the Princetonian professor Charles Hodge. Interestingly, although a Calvinist, Hodge himself rejected a strict view of limited atonement, *contra* John Owen, who held to a limited imputation of sin to Christ; namely, only the sins of the elect were atoned for by Christ on the cross. All five-point Calvinists affirm a strict view of limited atonement which, by definition, means a limited imputation of sin. Hodge's influence on Boyce may have played into the latter's ambiguous language on this topic in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*.<sup>1</sup>

If Dockery's historical hindsight is 20/20, his foresight is likewise keen. As the Conservative Resurgence consolidated its hold on the SBC in the late 1980's and early 1990's, Dockery was one of the first to peer into the twenty-first century and see the coming resurgence of Calvinism as well. True to his irenic nature, Dockery concludes his chapter by encouraging Calvinists and non-Calvinists in the SBC to join hands and work together without compromising our convictions in the process. He states "we must recognize that Calvinism is not necessarily a key Baptist distinctive; it is not a primary doctrine" (42). Dockery's vision for a harmonious future in the SBC is to build theological consensus around the gospel, not around Calvinism.

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<sup>1</sup>J.P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 336-40.

Following Dockery, Tom Nettles steps to the plate with his historical survey of the doctrinal importance of Calvinism among Baptists. Nettles is a five-point Calvinist and professor of historical theology at Southern Seminary. Nettles wastes no time in swinging at the first pitch. “Southern Baptists were the product of a complex of dynamics at work among Baptist Calvinists. The influence of Arminians was either completely rejected in most cases, or severely muted, in some cases” (47). Following is a quick survey including a smattering of quotations from an associational circular letter, Baptist confessions, culminating in the well-worn Spurgeon quote from his *Autobiography* on the heresy of Rome, the heresy of Arminianism, followed by the statement “Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else” (49–50). Spurgeon’s comment is an unfortunate overstatement that is actually a misstatement. Does Nettles believe that those who do not affirm the five points of Calvinism are somehow believing, advocating, preaching and teaching something less than the gospel? The implications of such a statement are problematic, as was brought out clearly by Nettles’ fellow five-pointer, Greg Welty, in his chapter on “Election and Calling.” Speaking “bluntly,” (Welty’s word), to his fellow Calvinists, he reminds them of the distinction between the *esse*, “essence,” of the gospel and the *bene esse*, “well being,” of the gospel. Welty considers the Spurgeon quote to be “both misleading and unhelpful,” and if taken at face value, would “draw the circle of fellowship more narrowly than Christ Himself has drawn it” (243). Calvinism should not be viewed as the *sine qua non* of the gospel.

As with Dockery, we can grant Nettles’ case that many of the early Baptists, both Separate and Regular Particular Baptists, were Calvinistic. But even here, caveats must be inserted. For example, in quoting Boyce’s assertion that the doctrine of perseverance is inseparably associated with the other doctrines of grace such that they are universally accepted or rejected together, Nettles makes the point that Boyce’s conviction here challenges those non-Calvinistic Baptists who maintain the doctrine, but do not necessarily affirm the other four points of Calvinism. Actually, the problem is reversed and creates an inconsistency in Boyce since he himself did not explicitly make limited atonement a necessary doctrinal distinctive in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*.<sup>2</sup> Had Boyce done so, and had it been delineated in the *Abstract of Principles*, a number of faculty members who have taught and do teach at Southern Seminary would never have been there because they clearly were and are not five pointers. One thinks of the current and immediate past Senior Vice President for Academic Administration and Deans of the School of Theology Russell Moore and Daniel Akin, neither of whom affirm limited atonement (the latter also disavows irresistible grace, as traditionally defined), and yet both signed the seminary’s doctrinal statement, *The Abstract of Principles*.

The remainder of Nettles’ chapter is devoted to an articulation of eight examples of core doctrinal beliefs. Nettles’ prefaces this with two statements. First, he affirms these doctrinal beliefs “*are not unique to Calvinism*,” [italics mine] but are nevertheless “essential for the vitality of the witness of every Baptist church” (51). No problem here. Next, he makes the point “one could argue that these commonly held core affirmations are more consistently attested within the Calvinistic system, and thus a decline in Calvinism will mean a decline in overall health of the churches” (51). The first part of this statement could be argued no doubt, but so could its opposite. The real problem lies in the conclusion Nettles draws, namely, a decline in Calvinism will mean a decline in church health. For this to be demonstrated, several things would have to be true. First, one would have to be able to prove that the Calvinistic system is doctrinally correct in all it affirms. Since this cannot be done and since many in this very book

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

dispute Nettles' point, his conclusion does not logically follow. Second, Nettles' statement ignores the fact that Calvinism is not a monolithic system. It can be historically and theological shown that there are at least three major categories of Calvinism: Moderate Calvinism, High Calvinism (five-point Calvinism) and Hyper-Calvinism. These categories are even more complex since Amyraldianism is a subset of Moderate Calvinism, and is, in fact, a form of Calvinism, though often highs and hypers reject it as a legitimate form of Calvinism. But I digress. Third, the conclusion is problematic in that one of the eight examples of core doctrinal beliefs Nettles proffers is simply not true: "The Baptist Calvinist has been a consistent advocate of missions and evangelism" (59). This statement is stunning in itself when one reflects on the historical fact that hyper-Calvinism once held considerable sway in late eighteenth century England *among Baptists!* It took the labors of such stalwart saints as Fuller, Carey and others to break the hyper-Calvinist stronghold on Baptist missions and evangelism. Unlike some of the other eight core doctrinal beliefs, Nettles restricts his historiography in this section to the time of the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention up to the present. It is true that during this time frame, hyper-Calvinism has not been a significant problem for Southern Baptists. But it has been so in the past for English and early American Baptists, and it continues to be so today for those non-Southern Baptist Baptists who are committed to Calvinism, and this, by the way, is the fourth reason why Nettles' statement on page 51 is problematic.

The eight core doctrinal beliefs that Nettles discusses are introduced with the statement "The Baptist Calvinist historically has been a consistent advocate of . . ." These eight are: the divine inspiration of Scripture, a fully Trinitarian theology, substitutionary atonement, religious liberty, missions and evangelism, Christ-centered preaching, holiness of life, and regenerate church membership. Generally speaking, we can grant Nettles' points here, but there are varying degrees of problems to note. First, with respect to the substitutionary nature of the atonement, Nettles states that this seems to imply particularity (limited atonement), and then bases this implication on the famous "double payment" argument made popular by John Owen in his defense of a strictly limited atonement (57). The problem here is that several Calvinists themselves reject the double payment argument as can be seen in the writings of John Davenant, Edward Polhill, Charles Hodge, W.G.T. Shedd and Robert Dabney, to name a few. The double payment argument is based on a blurring of the critical distinctions between pecuniary and penal justice (to pay a debt and to endure punishment are entirely different concepts), an anachronistic appeal to Western jurisprudence unknown in biblical days, and is simply not found in Scripture. Substitutionary atonement does not entail or even imply limited atonement.<sup>3</sup>

With respect to religious liberty, Nettles states the rationale for John Leland's position was "clearly Calvinistic." From his juxtaposition of quotations from two different works of Leland, I don't see how this follows. Leland's position on religious liberty would have been no different had he not been a Calvinist. The earliest Baptist advocates of religious liberty were the English General Baptists led by such men as John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, and these men certainly were not Calvinists. In fact, they polemicized against Calvinism. On this point, Nettles might have just as easily written "Baptist non-Calvinists historically have been consistent advocates of religious liberty." Nettles' point is even more problematic when one recognizes the

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<sup>3</sup>See Neil Chambers "A Critical Examination of John Owen's Argument for Limited Atonement in "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ," (Th.M. Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 1998), 241-293, for a devastating critique of Owen at this point. Chambers demonstrates this fact clearly in his thesis. Note the thesis was done at Reformed Theological Seminary, Chambers himself is a Calvinist, and one of the thesis readers who approved it was Ligon Duncan.

cause of Roger Williams' plight that led him to establish Providence in Rhode Island. In the early American colonies, Calvinist state churches squelched religious liberty. There is no evidence of which I am aware that would demonstrate Calvinistic Baptists have been more consistent than non-Calvinistic Baptists on the subject of religious liberty.

Nettles concludes his chapter on pages 68–69, and here he basically makes two affirmations. First, any policy, determination or resolution “that seeks the repression, or elimination, of Calvinism from the ranks of Southern Baptists would be a theological tragedy and historical suicide” (68). I could not agree more. However, given Nettles' next statement that one could argue exactly the opposite should be the case, his lengthy quote of P.H. Mell's “serious” question as to whether we should make the doctrines of grace “the basis of all our pulpit ministrations,” Nettles' own high-profile participation in the Founders movement within the SBC and his comments in his other writings, it would have been helpful for him to state clearly that any agenda to “Calvinize” the SBC would be just as tragic. Second, Nettles reminds Baptist Calvinists not to deny “that true work is done for the glory of Christ by non-Calvinists.” Since this is the first, last and only place where he explicitly speaks such of non-Calvinists, one should be glad for its appearance in his conclusion.

Round One: Dockery vs. Nettles. Decision: Dockery by split decision.

The next pair of chapters offers a general evaluation of Calvinism in the SBC. Malcolm Yarnell, Associate Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Theological Research at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, writes the chapter entitled “Calvinism: Cause for Rejoicing, Cause for Concern.” He is followed by Jeff Noblit, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, whose chapter is entitled “The Rise of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention: Reason for Rejoicing.” The reader is immediately struck by the similarity and the difference between these two titles. Yarnell, a non-Calvinist, finds both cause for rejoicing and concern with the rise of Calvinism in the SBC, while Noblit, a five-point Calvinist, finds a whole chapter's worth of rejoicing but, as we shall see, only three sentences worth of concerns.

We shall begin with Yarnell. This chapter is one of the most substantive and thought-provoking in the entire collection. It contains ninety-five footnotes, the most in the book, although the chapters by Nathan Finn and Tom Nettles run a close second with eighty-seven and seventy-two respectively. Yarnell's chapter is likely to be the most unsettling to Calvinists in the entire book as well for reasons we will discuss below. It certainly garnered the most criticism on the Calvinist blogs after it was originally delivered at the “Building Bridges” conference. The chapter is divided into four parts. First, Yarnell introduces us to the earliest association of Texas Baptist churches founded in 1840. In the association's initial attempt to come together, two of the four pastors were hyper-Calvinists in their orientation, having been influenced by the radical Daniel Parker. “When the missionary Baptists realized they could never work with antimissionary Calvinists . . . they formed the Union Association on their own” (74). This historical tidbit works against the claim by Nettles in the previous chapter that Baptist Calvinists have historically been consistent advocates of missions and evangelism (59–62).

Second, Yarnell moves to define Calvinism for his readers. It is interesting that only here in the entire book is a detailed attempt made to provide a taxonomy of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist context. Yarnell discerns three kinds of Calvinism: Classical, Baptist, and Hyper. By “classical,” he means the Calvinism that began with the magisterial Reformers, most notably John Calvin, developed by Beza and Perkins and the Heidelberg Theologians, and culminating in the canons and confessions leading up to and including Dort and Westminster. This is traditional

five-point Calvinism. An important note of clarification needs to be made at this point. There were those at Heidelberg, Dort and Westminster who were not five-pointers in the sense of being strict particularists, that is, they held to a form of universal atonement (all humanity's sin was imputed to Christ at the cross) *contra* those like Beza, Perkins, and Owen, who held to a strict limited atonement. It is thus technically an inaccuracy to summarize all "Classical Calvinists" as being lock step on the subject of the extent of the atonement. Yarnell is aware of this distinction no doubt, and is speaking generally at this point. The majority of "Classical Calvinists" held to "strict particularism," i.e., strict limited atonement. Yarnell makes the salient point, following Richard Muller, that this system may not be reduced to soteriological matters alone, but includes other views, paedobaptism for example, that all Baptists must reject. What Yarnell means by this is that in his judgment, this reduction cannot be done *consistently*, but whether it can or cannot, the brand of Calvinism which includes all the other accoutrements that have come to be known as Reformed Theology must be unacceptable to Baptists.

The second category is Baptist Calvinism. Although the earliest English Baptists arose out of the Calvinist context, they were not "classical Calvinists." According to Yarnell, "in every historical instance, the Baptists explicitly rejected, or at the least significantly modified, the theological method and numerous dogmatic conclusions of the Reformed" (78–79). Thus, for Yarnell, "Baptists have therefore always had both an appreciation for and a healthy distrust of Calvinism" (79). This is further borne out by the New Hampshire Confession of 1833, which significantly "toned down" Dort and the Second London Confession, and became the foundation for the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 1925, 1963 and 2000 (79–81). Yarnell's third category, hyper-Calvinism, is likewise unacceptable to Baptist Calvinists (81).

The third section of Yarnell's paper attempts a theological evaluation of Calvinism under the following rubrics: Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Gospel, the Churches, and the Christian Life (85–94). In an attempt to be fair, the author first addresses causes for rejoicing and then causes for concern. Christologically, Calvinism, in all three categories above, is "generally superb" (85). The concern is the sidelining of the doctrines of faith in Christ and discipleship to Christ for speculative reasons, by which Yarnell means excessive speculation concerning the divine decrees (rationalistic doctrines of predestination), and the doctrine of "eternal justification" (86).

He states "Classical Calvinists consider even the use of the terminology of Christocentrism to be 'imprudent'" (86). I would nuance this to say "some Classical Calvinists" do so, for many Calvinists, especially when speaking about preaching, do more than just tip their hat to Christocentrism. I think of Bryan Chapell's book *Christ-Centered Preaching*, which is built on a healthy theology of Christocentrism. Nonetheless, the critique stands, if only necessarily nuanced by degree.

With respect to the Bible, Calvinists have always held a high view of biblical authority and inerrancy. The cause for concern is the danger of imposing a rationalistic extra-biblical system of theology on Scripture (88). While Yarnell finds cause for rejoicing in the Calvinist concern for the gospel, he is likely to raise hackles when he says ". . . the demonstrated confusion of Calvinism with regard to the gospel is a cause for concern" (89). It takes some kind of gumption, in back to back paragraphs no less, to criticize Charles Spurgeon and John Piper over their confusion concerning the gospel. In Spurgeon's sermon "A Defense of Calvinism," Yarnell opines against Spurgeon's famous statement "Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else" as a case of lost priority. We have already seen the unwisdom of Spurgeon's statement. Within this sermon, yes, it is a problem. This is not Spurgeon at his best, but in the light of Spurgeon's hundreds of other published sermons, in most of which Jesus appears supreme, I must demure.

Perhaps it would be better to say this is not a case of “lost” priority for Spurgeon as much as “misplaced” priority. However, this peccadillo aside, Yarnell’s point of concern remains. If Spurgeon himself can succumb to such misplaced Christological priority in a sermon on Calvinism, how much more does danger loom for Calvinists today?

Yarnell’s trenchant critique of Piper’s “Christian hedonism” in one of the gospel tracts placed on the Web by Desiring God Ministries concludes by noting “it caters to rather than challenges our narcissistic culture: ‘God gets the praise and we get the pleasure.’” He continues: “Piper, busily promoting peculiarities, never discusses the person of Jesus Christ.” This is the single most startling sentence in the entire chapter. The tract goes on to point the new believer to the church, “but neglects to exhort them to follow Christ in baptism. . . .” In a second tract, Piper “passes quickly over sin and never issues a call for the sinner to believe in Jesus Christ” (89). I must confess, here I agree completely with Yarnell’s assessment. The remainder of this section calls on Calvinists to abandon speculative doctrines “insofar as they detract from a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (90).

Yarnell praises contemporary SBC Calvinists for their role in renewing focus on ecclesiology, especially in the area of regenerate church membership and church discipline. The potential loss of genuine congregationalism in some churches moving towards an elder-led or elder-rule system of polity is cause for concern. Baptist Calvinist historiography is cause for rejoicing (the publication of primary and secondary works on important Baptist leaders) and cause for concern (a tendency to neglect important non-Calvinistic Baptists). Finally, Yarnell rejoices over the Calvinistic emphasis of speaking the gospel clearly, but strongly disagrees with the concomitant protests and diminution of the public invitation or altar call as being too negative and offering no real alternatives (93). These are well-balanced observations.

The chapter concludes in a somewhat inclusio fashion with appeal to B.H. Carroll as one “Texas Bridge Builder” who repudiated the “classical” and “hyper-Calvinistic” models. Carroll was, according to Yarnell, more concerned with a biblical consistency than a synodal consistency. Lamenting the choice of some Baptist Calvinists no longer desiring to be Baptists, Yarnell appeals for denominational integrity. Finally, he calls on Baptist Calvinists to refute intentionally and publically the errors of “classical Calvinism” and “hyper-Calvinism” (95).

Jeff Noblit’s chapter has the unenviable position of being paired with Yarnell. Noblit argues the rise of Calvinism in the SBC is cause for rejoicing. Certainly one cannot help but rejoice with Noblit over the remarkable world missions commitment which he has led his church to have. All Southern Baptists should emulate Noblit here. Noblit’s chapter has more of a narrative feel about it than Yarnell’s. This can be explained by the fact that twenty of the fifty-seven paragraphs are anecdotal in nature, and there are only three footnotes compared to ninety-five in Yarnell’s chapter. Frankly, I’m not too concerned who wins the footnote race here, but it seems problematic to me that Noblit’s anecdotalage comprises more than one-third of his chapter with a somewhat suffocating effect. Anecdotal evidence certainly has its place, but in this case less would have been more. The simple truth is, many of Noblit’s anecdotes can be easily matched with tales from the other side of the aisle.

True to his title, Noblit finds much to rejoice about with the rise of Calvinism in the SBC. However, his chapter gives me cause for concern due to its lack of cause for concern. There are only three sentences in Noblit’s entire chapter where he raises any concern about Calvinism in the SBC. On page 101 he says “I think too many Calvinists love the system and use God rather than loving God and using the theological systems. I’ve been guilty of that myself, and we must repent when a theological system rises up as an idol in our own hearts.” I don’t know how many

“too many” might be, but it sounds like there are enough to warrant more on the “cause for concern” end of things. On page 104, Noblit writes: “In fact, I have more kindred fellowship with some Semi-Arminian<sup>4</sup> brothers than with Calvinists.” And, of course, some of us non-Calvinists would have more fellowship with some Calvinists than with some non-Calvinists. Now of course I don’t expect Noblit to mention or discuss an equal amount of concerns along with his “rejoicings,” nor do I expect him even to mention and respond to many concerns which those who see things differently than he does may have. However, when his chapter is read in tandem with the previous chapter, three sentences are simply not enough “cause for concern,” even for someone who is writing in support of his own perspective.

I applaud and share Noblit’s passion to recover the sufficiency of Scripture, expose covert liberalism and restore true evangelism, which are major sections in his chapter. I think all non-Calvinists in the SBC would agree. I certainly know of no one who would disagree. In fact, throughout most of this chapter, I found myself thinking: “Me too!” Nevertheless, I have two major problems with this chapter. First, the section “Better Church Splits” makes me nervous because I can’t tell whether Noblit is equating splitting over Calvinism with splitting over a major doctrine such as the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection, salvation by grace through faith alone, or some such foundational doctrine. If he is equating these, I see no possible justification for it. We can certainly agree that there are some things worth splitting a church over. Calvinism should not be one of them. Of course, if one believes the Spurgeon statement “Calvinism is the gospel” then one might indeed equate Calvinism with these other first-order doctrines and thus foster a church split. The fact of the matter is that within the SBC there have been numerous church splits over Calvinism in the past several years, and no doubt some of them were caused by over-zealous young Calvinist pastors. Instead, Noblit’s approach is to treat us to an unfortunate incident where apparently a Calvinist pastor was removed from his church for no good reason, with no explicit recognition that sometimes young Calvinist pastors by their unwisdom actually cause a church split. (By the way, as one who has taught young preachers since 1985, I might add young Calvinists don’t have a corner on the market in this area. Many a young pastor has been sent packing for a variety of stupidities perpetrated on a church. The problem is not always obstreperous deacons.)

My second problem is Noblit’s proposed Calvinistic cure for the disease of seeker-friendly Christianity. Of course it is true that finding a seeker-friendly Calvinist is about as likely as finding a ham sandwich in a synagogue, but the cure is not Calvinism as he proposes. The cure is biblicism; a return to doing church the Bible way. All non-Calvinistic Baptists are not into the seeker-friendly approach. Just listen to the preaching of Jerry Vines over the past thirty years, to mention only one example. In fact, it is this point which might be applied to many of the Calvinist authors in this book. Problems are often correctly identified in our local churches, but then the solution is thought to be Calvinism, when in fact in virtually every case a good dose of biblical thinking, acting, preaching and teaching would do the trick.

Round Two: Yarnell vs. Noblit. Decision: Yarnell.

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<sup>4</sup>Semi-Arminian? This is a curiously humorous label. Why not “Semi-Calvinist”? From a Calvinistic perspective, can one be a “Semi-Calvinist”? If someone is a three-point or four-point Calvinist, wouldn’t that make them a “semi-Calvinist”?

The next two chapters deal with the subject of the atonement, specifically its extent. Here David Nelson, Senior Vice President and Professor of Theology at Southeastern Seminary, and Sam Waldron, Academic Dean and Professor of Theology at Midwest Center for Theological Studies, square off. Nelson argues the unlimited atonement position while Waldron argues for limited atonement.

Nelson's chapter divides into three major sections, covering the design, nature and extent of the atonement, with the bulk comprising the latter. With respect to design, 2 Corinthians 5:19 furnishes us with perhaps the best statement: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself." With respect to nature, Nelson rightly concludes the foundational metaphor, albeit not the only metaphor, for the atonement is penal substitution. With respect to extent, Nelson develops the subject under three headings: historical, exegetical and theological.

One key significance of this chapter is Nelson's proof that limited atonement was not the position of the church before the Reformation. Following the work of Michael Thomas,<sup>5</sup> he also shows that Dort was deliberately ambiguous in its language concerning the extent of the atonement. In fact, John Davenant, a signer of Dort, was one of many signers who rejected limited atonement and held to a form of universal atonement.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Nelson points out how many of the confessional statements of the seventeenth–nineteenth century showed variety on the subject of the extent of the atonement, with some clearly affirming universal atonement. These are significant points that many Calvinists, whether unwittingly or not, fail to recognize. Nelson does make one common mistake with reference to the Westminster Confession when he says it "explicitly affirms" limited atonement (126). In fact, although the majority of the Westminster Divines held to limited atonement, and the quotation Nelson makes can certainly be read in that way, the authors deliberately chose to use ambiguous language that would permit those who held to an unlimited atonement such as Edmund Calamy, Henry Scudder and John Arrowsmith, among others, to sign.<sup>7</sup>

Exegetically, Nelson appeals to the standard verses which affirm unlimited atonement: John 3:16–18; 1 Timothy 2:1–6; 2 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 2:9, 14–18; 2 Peter 2:1; 3:9; and 1 John 2:2. He correctly states "In John 1 and 12 *kosmos* is used in the sense of both the earth and all the inhabitants of the earth, indicating that in the incarnation Jesus came to earth for the sake of saving all who would believe in Him" (127–28). Calvinistic attempts to make *kosmos* refer to something other than "all people" or "universe" "are strained and unnecessary" (128).

Theologically, Nelson makes several observations, affirmations and denials. However one defines predestination and election, our view of the atonement should not be controlled by a speculative order of the divine decrees. Nelson himself affirms unconditional election, but rejects double predestination, supralapsarianism and eternal justification. He asks two pertinent questions of those who hold to limited atonement: 1) Do you hold to limited atonement primarily because of your view of the elective decrees? If so, one is prejudicing logic over exegesis. 2) Is

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<sup>5</sup>G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536-1675)* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

<sup>6</sup>John Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ, as to its Extent and Special Benefits: Containing a Short History of Pelagianism, and Shewing the Agreement of the Doctrines of the Church of England on General Redemption, Election, and Predestination, with the Primitive Fathers of the Christian Church, and Above All, with the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 2, *An Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1832). In the recent Banner of Truth reprint of Davenant's work on Colossians, this volume is omitted. Davenant's work probably remains the best refutation of the Limited Atonement position (strict particularism).

<sup>7</sup>One may consult Richard Muller's *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:76–80 to confirm this point.

the *will* of God or the *love* of God determinative for your view of limited atonement? If the former, what of the latter?

Nelson's view of the instrumentality of faith is that it has no meritorious value. He addresses two key limited atonement arguments: "payment for unbelief" and the "double payment" argument. "*If Christ died for sins, and unbelief is a sin, then must not all sin be atoned for?*" This objection makes a false assumption: the atonement works apart from faith. "*If Christ died for the sins of all people, as the general atonement doctrine holds, then are there not two payments offered for the sins of those in hell, the payment offered by Christ on their behalf and the payment of each condemned person himself in eternal death?*" Although Nelson's answer to this "double payment" objection is correct (no one receives the saving benefits of the cross apart from faith and according to John 3:18, unbelievers are condemned by their rejection of Jesus), it is insufficient because the objection also confuses pecuniary payments with penal justice, as before mentioned, and it fails to note also that the objection anachronistically imports categories of Western jurisprudence foreign to the New Testament. Furthermore, both "payment for unbelief" and "double payment" arguments are adequately rebutted by Calvinists themselves who accept an unlimited atonement (in the sense of unlimited expiation of the sins of mankind) as I have noted above.

One of the very few concerns I have with Nelson's chapter comes near the end when, after mentioning how limited atonement may "minimize or extinguish the free offer of the gospel," he then says "the unlimited view of the atonement may promote a cheap offer of the gospel that may undermine the gospel altogether" (136–37). Obviously, the former statement is true. But it is not at all obvious that the latter statement is true. Nelson says this may result from "homiletical silliness, or it may be a deduction from general atonement to the belief that we may dispense with the doctrines of election and effectual calling, thus producing 'inhumane' presentations of the gospel. By this I mean that our offers of the gospel sometimes seem to imply that God has nothing to do with salvation. By both our methods and our rhetoric, this seems apparent to me" (136–37). Now let me be clear that those who hold to unlimited atonement are guilty of their fair share of homiletical silliness, gimmicks and rhetorical tricks. But are such cheap offers of the gospel a corollary of unlimited atonement or rather are they not the result of a *faulty deduction*? In other words, limited atonement *logically* leads to a minimization of the free offer of the gospel, for by definition, there is no saving efficacy in the atonement for the non-elect. This is a problem endemic to the doctrine itself which can only be overcome by offering the gospel to everyone, *in spite of the fact that* there is actually no satisfaction available for them in Christ's death. There is no faulty deduction involved; only correct deduction given the doctrine. On the other hand, there is saving efficacy in the atonement for *all people* in the unlimited view. Homiletical silliness, gimmicks or rhetorical tricks cannot *logically* be deduced from unlimited atonement. Such antics may be practiced sometimes by those who hold unlimited atonement, but not as a logical corollary of the doctrine itself. Nelson makes a telling statement when he says he admits he cannot say "either view of the atonement *causes* these aberrations." He should rather say something along the lines of "Limited atonement logically causes a problem for the free offer of the gospel. Unlimited atonement does not *cause* cheap offers of the gospel."

In conclusion, Nelson's chapter is well written, cogently argued, and one of the best in the book.

Sam Waldron argues the case for limited atonement. This is the shortest chapter in the book, and I found it to be clear, concise and to the point. However, problems surface immediately. After clarifying what the question is not (it is not for whose benefit did Jesus die, is

the atonement limited, or is the atonement sufficient to expiate the sins of the world), he concludes that the real question is “in whose place did Christ substitute himself?” Waldron’s comment that the question is not “is the atonement sufficient to expiate the sins of the world” is simply wrong. The question is *very much about the sufficiency of the atonement!* Strict particularists like Waldron limit that sufficiency to a mere intrinsic sufficiency that actually means: “the death of Christ *could have atoned for the sins of the world had God intended such, but he did not intend such; rather God intended the atonement only for the elect.*” To the non-elect, this is no sufficiency at all. It is like offering them the hole of a donut! We must distinguish between *intrinsic sufficiency*, which is the view of those who hold to strict limited atonement such as Waldron, and *extrinsic sufficiency*, which is the view of all four-point Calvinists, Arminians, and everybody else. He then seeks to answer the question “in whose place did Christ substitute himself?” under two headings: the proofs of particular redemption, and the problems of particular redemption. Under these two, Waldron covers the main arguments in favor of limited atonement (particular redemption). A cursory look at his eleven footnotes indicates his dependence upon John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* and John Murray’s *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Owen’s work is the definitive treatment on the subject from the limited atonement perspective and Murray’s book is one of the better modern treatments.

Waldron treats four issues under his first heading: 1) the substitutionary nature of the atonement, 2) the restricted recipients of the atonement, 3) the guaranteed effects of the atonement, and 4) the covenant context of the atonement. It is Waldron’s contention that “The nature of the atonement as substitutionary curse-bearing demands particular redemption” (140).

Following John Owen, Waldron presses the “double payment” argument against universal atonement. (This argument has already been presented and answered above). He comments: “Vast support can be marshaled for the idea that the nature of the atonement requires that all those for whom Christ died are actually and ultimately saved” (141). The use of the phrase “vast support” is somewhat exaggerated, given the overall evidence. Those who hold to universal atonement can only do so “by muffling or receding” from the idea of penal substitution, according to Waldron. This is a common Calvinist gaffe that one often reads in the popular literature. It fails to recognize that many Arminians have been staunch defenders of penal substitution. Off the cuff, one thinks of John Wesley.<sup>8</sup> More telling, such a statement by Waldron betrays a limited historical awareness and understanding of his own Calvinistic camp since a host of Calvinists—including John Calvin himself—have affirmed unlimited atonement and penal substitution!<sup>9</sup>

As further evidence for limited atonement, Waldron appeals to Revelation 5:9–10, which says Christ has purchased with his own blood for God *men* from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. Waldron confuses the extent of the atonement with the application of the atonement. Clearly the application is limited only to the elect who believe, which is the point of Revelation 5:9–10. Even Bullinger, a leading sixteenth century Calvinist, in a sermon on Revelation 5:9–10,

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<sup>8</sup>See Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006).

<sup>9</sup>See Curt Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1983); and Kevin Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin*. Studies in Biblical Literature 48 (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

says this “signifies an universality, for the Lord has died for all: but that all are not made partakers of this redemption, it is through their own fault.”<sup>10</sup>

Second Corinthians 5:14 asserts, according to Waldron, that substitutionary death means representative death; only those are saved for whom Christ suffered, thus he suffered only for the elect. But what does Paul mean by what he says in 2 Corinthians 5:14? Waldron, like John Murray (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied* [Eerdmans, 1955], 69–72), appeals to 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 to sustain his case that Christ only died for all of the elect. He takes the pronoun “all” as “designating all those in Christ who are a part of a new creation (v. 18)” (143). When Paul speaks of “us,” he is referring to those who have died and have been raised with Christ through faith. However, when Paul uses “all” three times in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, there are three possible interpretations, only one of which might be used to support limited atonement. Waldron takes the three “alls” to mean “believers” and the “them” to mean “believers.” The second view takes the “all” to mean “all humanity” in all three occurrences. Think of the verses paraphrased in this way: Jesus, the one, died for all humanity, therefore all humanity died. He died for all humanity, so that they that live (the elect) shall no longer live unto themselves. “All” indicates universal atonement; “they that live” indicates the application of the atonement to the elect. A third approach takes Paul’s words to form a parallel ABAB structure. In this case, the passage would be paraphrased thus: “Jesus, the one, died for all humanity, therefore all believers died spiritually with him. He died for all humanity, so that all believers who live in Christ spiritually should not live unto themselves. . . .” Furthermore, the use of “world” in verse 19 does not and cannot mean “the elect” but the world of humanity. While one can say Waldron’s interpretation is a reasonable option, there are other options just as reasonable that would lead to a different conclusion. Furthermore, even granting his view of the passage, he cannot prove his own case, as limited atonement still cannot be logically deduced.

Waldron then argues, following Murray (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 69), that there is “an inseparable relation between the idea of substitution and the idea of representation” (143), and associates this notion with 2 Corinthians 5:14b, “one died for all, then all died.” He uses this association to prove the proposition that “if Christ died for someone, that person died on the cross.” However, the reader should note the shift in the argument that occurs at this point. It is one thing to argue that 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 says that 1) *believers* have died in Christ, and quite another thing to argue that 2) *all* those for whom Christ died have also died in him. Contrary to Murray (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 70), Paul is explicitly uttering the first proposition, and *not* the second. *On Waldron's own interpretation*, all he can establish from 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 (as well as from his citation of Romans 6:4–8) is that if Christ died for you *and you are believing*, then you have died and live in Christ. The “dying” and “living” ideas correspond to the “all things passing away” and the “all things becoming new.” It is believers alone who have experienced this death, burial and resurrection, and not *all those for whom Christ has died*. I don’t think Waldron (or Murray) would want to say that *all* those for whom Christ died *are* new creatures. If so, then on their own presuppositions, *all of the elect* would be new creatures *at the time of* Christ’s death. This is the false doctrine of justification at the cross or, pushed further back according to decretal speculation, eternal justification. Without getting too theological, what Waldron does, as is frequent among five-point Calvinists and hyper-Calvinists, is to blur the distinction between *federal* union and *real (vital)* union with Christ. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5 and Romans 6, is saying that *believers* in *real* union with Christ

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<sup>10</sup>Heinrich Bullinger, *A Hundred Sermons Upon the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (London: John Daye, Dwelling over Aldersgate, 1573), 79–80.

have died in him and live unto him. These two things can be predicated of all in *real* or *vital* union with Christ. Participation in Christ's death and resurrected life cannot either be predicated of all humanity (those in federal union with Christ as the last Adam) or of those in *decretal* union with Christ (all of the elect *as such*).

The many passages which speak of Christ dying for his “sheep,” “friends,” “the church,” etc., do not prove limited atonement as Waldron supposes. Even Robert Reymond, a supralapsarian hyper-Calvinist (take note that all supralapsarians are not hypers), is forced to admit:

It is true, of course, that logically a statement of particularity in itself does not necessarily preclude universality. This may be shown by the principle of subalternation in Aristotelian logic, which states that if all S is P, then it may be inferred that some S is P, but conversely, it cannot be inferred from the fact that some S is P that the remainder of S is not P. A case in point is the “me” of Galatians 2:20: the fact that Christ died for Paul individually does not mean that Christ died only for Paul and for no one else.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, the fact that many verses speak of Christ dying for his “sheep,” his “church” or “his friends” does not prove that he did not die for others not subsumed in these categories.

Dabney, a respected Calvinist by all, likewise noted that statements such as Christ died for “the church” or “his sheep” do not prove a strictly limited atonement, because to argue such invokes the negative inference fallacy: “the proof of a proposition does not disprove its converse.”<sup>12</sup> One cannot infer a negative (Christ did not die for group A) from a bare positive statement (Christ did die for group B), any more than one can infer that Christ *only* died for Paul because Galatians 2:20 says that Christ died for Paul. This is the same kind of logical mistake that John Owen makes numerous times in his *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, and it is a logical fallacy constantly made by Calvinists with regard to the extent of the atonement.

Waldron then proceeds to argue that the guaranteed effects and the covenant context of the atonement demand particular redemption. The guaranteed effects of the atonement demand the application of the atonement to all the elect; they do not negate the fact that atonement was made possible for all men. The covenant context likewise does not do for Waldron what he wants it to do. God has placed a condition on his covenant: men must repent and believe the gospel in order to be saved.

Waldron’s second section addresses three of the major problems with limited atonement: the biblical passages employing universal terminology with respect to the atonement, the free offer of the gospel, and the apostasy passages. I shall address only the free offer of the gospel. Waldron makes the stunning comment “The free offer of the gospel does not require us to tell men that Christ died for them” (149). He further states: “this way of preaching is utterly without biblical precedent.” Finally, he states: “if the free offer of the gospel meant telling unconverted sinners, ‘Christ died for you,’ then particular redemption would be inconsistent with the free offer. But nowhere in the Bible is the gospel proclaimed by telling unconverted sinners that Christ died for them” (149). Such bold assertions are squarely contradicted in numerous places in the New Testament. They are contradicted by Paul’s statement of the gospel which he preached

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<sup>11</sup>Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 673–674.

<sup>12</sup>R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985; reprint 2002), 521.

in 1 Corinthians 15:3: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins. . . .” Note that Paul is telling the Corinthians what he preached to them *before they were saved!* He preached to them “Christ died for their sins.” Waldron’s statement is contradicted by Acts 3:26 which states: “To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.” Peter is telling his unbelieving audience that God sent Jesus to bless *each* and *every* one of them and to turn *every one of them* from their iniquities. *This is equivalent to Peter saying: Christ died for you.* How could Jesus save every one of them (which is what blessing and turning away from iniquity involves) if he did not *actually* die for the sins of all of them? Certainly “each one” of the Jews Peter addressed must have included some who were non-elect! As if this were not enough, what will Waldron do with Luke 22:20, 21? “Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table.” Here Jesus clearly states his blood was shed for Judas, and yet Judas was not among the elect. It will not do to attempt to argue Judas was not at the table at this time as the text clearly states that he was. Calvin himself explicitly says Judas was at the table in numerous places in his own writings.<sup>13</sup> If Jesus died for Judas, then his death was not restricted to the elect alone, for Judas was not elect.

Waldron’s attempt to prove limited atonement falters historically, biblically, and theologically.

Round Three: Nelson vs. Waldron. Decision: Nelson by a TKO.

The next two chapters dealing with “Theological Stereotypes” were my favorite in the book. I found these two chapters the most fun to read. Chuck Lawless, Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at Southern Seminary and Nathan Finn, now Assistant Professor of Church History at Southeastern Seminary, bring us into the streets, churches, seminary classrooms and media of the SBC over the past few years. What they reveal to us is a fair amount of dirty laundry . . . on both sides of the issue! In “Southern Baptist Non-Calvinists—Who are We Really?” Chuck Lawless seeks to debunk four common stereotypes of non-Calvinists. Stereotype 1—Non-Calvinists are more concerned about numbers than theology. Lawless admits, as would I, that this is undoubtedly the case in some instances. He is quick to point out, however, that this stereotype certainly does not fit the majority of non-Calvinists. As Bill Metzger said: we should be “building a holy dissatisfaction with non-results” (158). There is a right and wrong way to be concerned about numbers. Lawless produces a lengthy quote from Spurgeon’s *The Soul Winner* on the subject. (Poor old Spurgeon must be dizzy from the tug-of-war he has been caught in throughout this book. He is quoted in almost every chapter in an effort to enlist his support!) Lawless opines we ought to be concerned that some Southern Baptists *never* ask the number questions. Following a series of questions along this line, Lawless states: “I am, of course, implying that many of these churches are strongly Calvinistic churches.”

A second stereotype is that non-Calvinists promote pragmatic church growth. Lawless eschews all pragmatism for pragmatism’s sake, but points out the question “is it working” is not fundamentally a wrong question (161). He agrees some have gone off target by asking only the numbers question. A third stereotype is that non-Calvinists use faulty approaches to evangelism

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<sup>13</sup>See John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises, With a short life of Calvin by Theodore Beza*. vol. 2. trans. Henry Beveridge. ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 93, 234, 297, 370–371, 378; and also his commentary on Matthew 26:21 and John 6:56.

and are unconcerned about regenerate church membership. After stating this stereotype, Lawless leads with the story of one of his students who returned an incomplete personal evangelism report form, stating: “I don’t believe we’re supposed to call people to respond to Christ.” This is a clear example, and one which I hope will not be duplicated many times, of how Calvinism can and does create problems for evangelism. A bullet-point listing of poor approaches to evangelism by non-Calvinists immediately follows this story, showing Lawless to be balanced in his critique.

Lawless asks his Calvinist readers to cut non-Calvinists some slack in four areas: 1) if we use a tract in witnessing, don’t assume our evangelism is faulty; 2) persuasion to follow Christ does not cause anthropocentrism to trump God’s sovereignty; 3) many non-Calvinists use the public invitation with integrity; and 4) don’t be gravely concerned if non-Calvinists still use the term “decision” and lead a repentant sinner to pray a prayer. Also, with respect to regenerate church membership, it may come as some surprise to Calvinists that non-Calvinist Baptists have been concerned about this issue for quite some time, as can be documented in SBC literature over the past hundred years. I myself have been listening to Paige Patterson opine against unregenerate church membership since I was eighteen years old and a freshman at the Criswell College in 1975 during his first year as president there. Regenerate church membership is not an exclusive Calvinistic concern.

Lawless speaks lastly to his fourth stereotype: non-Calvinists do not like Calvinists. I laughed out loud when I first read this! I can think of one or two Calvinists I have known in my time for whom I don’t particularly care; in fact, it wouldn’t bother me if their dog died. But I can think of many more non-Calvinists I feel the same way about! This stereotype of course works both ways. Lawless’ list of concerns here reads as if he has had first-hand experience with such people: 1) the strong five-pointer who has determined that we are less than gospel preachers because we do not accept all five points; 2) the Calvinist who spends more time trying to convince us of his truth than he does sharing Christ with his lost neighbor; 3) the young student who in his zeal for Calvinistic truth attempts to change his church overnight and then pronounces the church “unregenerate” because the congregation does not follow his poor (that is, dumb) leadership (this is my personal favorite); 4) the strongly Calvinistic pastor who has determined he must reform his church before inviting unsaved people to attend, which of course means he will never get around to evangelism; and 5) the young zealot who somehow finds glee in God’s condemnation of the wicked (169). In my thirty years of preaching and teaching, I have met them all.

Are there stereotypes of Calvinists on the non-Calvinist side Lawless asks? You bet. A stereotype paints with a broad brush. But just as the existence of a counterfeit coin is sure-fire evidence for the genuine article, so our Calvinist brothers should admit that Lawless has indeed put his finger on a sore spot within Southern Baptist Calvinism that needs to be addressed. Ouch.

Nathan Finn’s chapter, “Southern Baptist Calvinism: Setting the Record Straight,” reveals the stark truth that Calvinists aren’t the only ones who can paint with a broad brush. When it comes to less than accurate comments about Calvinism, Finn has caught some non-Calvinists in the SBC with their britches down. Finn aims to identify the “myths” about Southern Baptist Calvinists by citing documented evidence of non-Calvinist statements about Calvinists or Calvinism, the bulk of which he cites from popular media, including sermons, denominational periodicals, Weblogs, and short books. In a commendable effort to be charitable, Finn operates with the assumption that “most of the mischaracterizations of Southern Baptist Calvinism are based on misunderstanding or confusion.” Finn’s fourth assumption is a crucial one and is more to the heart of the issue as far as I am concerned: we must all represent accurately the beliefs of

those with whom we differ (173). Here lies the greatest reason for the rancor that exists between camps . . . and it is not all one-sided.

Myth 1—Calvinism is a threat to evangelism. After citing numerous SBC leaders who raise this concern, Finn concludes that although SBC Calvinists are not as evangelistic as they should be, which, he adds, makes them like most Southern Baptists, “to claim that SBC Calvinists are not committed to evangelism is incorrect” (177). Finn proceeds to cite a 2001 *Founders Journal* article by Tom Ascol responding to this charge. Finn quotes Ascol saying: “The doctrines of grace, rightly understood, have never done that.” Finn notes other venues where SBC Calvinists have argued their commitment to evangelism. Several thoughts come to mind. First, Finn is assuming that all the written media he cites have quoted or interpreted accurately the comments that have been made. I suspect in most cases this is a safe assumption, but it does need to be mentioned. Second, we need to remember that differences of opinion over what the words “threat” and “evangelism” mean may cause one man’s myth to be another man’s fact. Third, merely arguing one’s commitment to evangelism in print as many Calvinists have done does not mean the commitment is expressed in shoe leather. No doubt sometimes it is, perhaps even most of the time. The point is writing about one’s commitment to evangelism does not qualify as proof of commitment to evangelism.

Fourth, would Finn admit the possibility that there are some SBC Calvinists who are not committed to evangelism, and this is, in part or in whole, due to their understanding or misunderstanding of Calvinism? If he would admit this, and I think he should admit it, then he needs to reword his first myth to read something such as “Calvinism is always a threat to evangelism.” Here he would be on much more substantial ground, for the fact is, some brands of Calvinism (hyper-Calvinism and other extreme forms of five-point Calvinism) are in fact less than evangelistic. The previous chapter’s anecdote about the young student at Southern Seminary makes that clear, as does Lemke’s study which Finn seeks to debunk in this very section. Finn finds fault with Lemke’s study on two grounds: 1) the study was limited to those churches aligned with the Founders Ministries and did not include other Calvinistic churches; and 2) Lemke did not survey these churches to inquire about their actual evangelistic practices, but instead merely conjectured based on baptismal statistics. “All Lemke’s study proves is that Founders-affiliated churches baptize *fewer* people than the ‘average’ SBC church (whatever that means)” (178). Finn’s two criticisms aside, Lemke’s conclusion still stands. That the *significance* of that conclusion may be open to more than one interpretation does not negate the data which Lemke uncovered. Furthermore, with reference to number 1) above, Lemke intentionally limited the study since the only way to do the comparison is to have a clearly defined segment of churches identified with a Calvinist group. To avoid anecdotal evidence, Lemke was trying to get something statistically relevant, which is why he utilized the annual report of these churches. This makes it an apples to apples comparison. Also, Lemke refrained from conjecturing; he merely presented the evidence and said: “what does this imply?” The facts of his study remain. Nearly one fourth of Founders’ churches had no baptisms. Only 11 of the 233 had more than one thousand members. Forty-two percent had 100 or fewer members. Over sixty percent had 200 or fewer members. These numbers are much less than the typical SBC church. Finally, the numbers reveal Founders’ churches as more likely to be plateaued or declining than the average SBC church. Whatever interpretation and/or significance of this data one ascribes, the data is what it is.

Finn’s second myth is that Calvinists are opposed to invitations. He rightly notes the semantic confusion generated when the more general word “invitation” is used to mean a public

altar call. Finn maintains Calvinists are not against invitations in the sense of inviting sinners to repent and believe the gospel, but many are against altar calls. Rejection of the method of an altar call should not be construed as rejection of passionate evangelistic preaching, according to Finn. He cites SBC Calvinists Jim Elliff and Tom Nettles as opposing the practice along with their reasons. While it may be mythical to shackle SBC Calvinists with opposing invitations in the first sense above, (though I remain unconvinced there are not examples even of this), Finn's own discussion makes it clear it is no myth that many SBC Calvinists are opposed to public forms of invitation, including the altar call. Finn correctly notes that opinion on this issue among Calvinists is divided (180). Finn does not commit himself to the question at hand, but one may infer from his treatment that his loyalties lie with those who look with disfavor on the use of an altar call. This is a reasonable conclusion in that he does not offer any arguments in favor of the use of a public altar call, nor is there any mention whatsoever of Dr. Alan Streett's definitive work on the subject of the altar call entitled *The Effective Invitation*, originally published in 1984 and updated in 2004. This is a glaring bibliographic omission in Finn's chapter. Streett, who serves as the W.A. Criswell Professor of Preaching at The Criswell College in Dallas, Texas, is a Southern Baptist who wrote his doctoral dissertation on this subject. He demonstrates conclusively that a public invitation/altar call is historically substantiated, biblically affirmed, and theologically validated. Oh yes, perhaps I should mention . . . he is a four-point Calvinist! Streett's volume has an appendix where he directly appeals to his Reformed brothers not to reject the use of the public altar call.<sup>14</sup> I might also add that in personal conversation with Dr. Lewis Drummond before his home going, Drummond told me that during his research in England for his definitive biography on Charles Spurgeon, he found in the recently unsealed vault containing the archives of the Downgrade Controversy eyewitness accounts of Spurgeon's occasional use of the public altar call after his preaching. This of course debunks a common myth among Calvinists that Spurgeon never gave a public altar call.

Finn's third myth is that five-point Calvinism is hyper-Calvinism. Since I have been a bit tough on Finn so far, let me state at the outset here that I agree this statement is a myth. Five-point Calvinism is not hyper-Calvinism and it is a confusion of categories to suggest that it is. However, we need to be reminded that although all five-pointers are not hyper, all hypens are, by definition, five pointers. If a five-point Calvinist buys into a speculative approach to the decrees and/or combines his strict particularism (limited atonement) with Federal theology, such a volatile theological mixture can explode into shades of hyper-Calvinism, with negative consequences for evangelism. One thinks of A.W. Pink as an example who drifted back and forth between high and hyper-Calvinism. Though I am not yet prepared to defend this theologically at the moment: a case can be made that hyper-Calvinism grew out of the addition of the doctrine of limited atonement to Calvinistic theology by those in the two generations immediately following Calvin, coupled with the rise of Federal theology and speculation concerning the divine decrees. The Baptist John Gill, following Joseph Hussey, formulated the recipe, John Skepp and others stirred the concoction, and then served up an eighteenth century dish called hyper-Calvinism. (I would highly recommend the excellent 1983 University of Edinburgh Ph.D. dissertation by Curt Daniel entitled "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill.") Nevertheless, Finn's essential point about myth number three is valid.

Myth number four is Calvinists deny free will. Citing Roy Fish, the now retired and revered Distinguished Professor of Evangelism at Southwestern Seminary, Finn catches Fish in a tangled net of injudicious language in a sermon on Calvinism where Fish avers that irresistible

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<sup>14</sup>R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984, 2004), 238–45.

grace destroys free will. The key here is in Finn's final sentence in this section: "SBC Calvinists uniformly believe that individuals must choose to trust Christ; we simply differ with non-Calvinists over the role God's sovereignty plays in that choice" (186). Actually the situation is more complicated than that. The question has to be asked: "What does one mean by 'free will'?"

From a non-Calvinist perspective, compatibilist free will is not the same as true libertarian free will. Fish's statement, as it stands, perhaps needs to be nuanced better, but it hardly serves as an example to bolster Finn's myth. Let the record show that we non-Calvinists do believe that some understandings of irresistible grace *can* lead, at the very least, to a distortion of human responsibility in the salvation event.

Finn's fifth myth is that authentic Baptists are not Calvinists. We can readily agree with him here on this point. However, we must note that sometimes Calvinists in the SBC can cease to be authentic Baptists! Finn remarks: "Southern Baptist Calvinists have been vocal defenders of Baptist distinctives" (188). I believe that is certainly true . . . most of the time. Actually some Southern Baptist Calvinists have not been defenders of Baptist distinctives in at least two areas. Witness the contemplated actions of Henderson Hills Baptist Church in Edmond, Oklahoma, in relaxing baptism requirements for church membership to receive those who have not been immersed. Although this kind of thing is not widespread among Calvinistic Southern Baptists, the example illustrates the point. Second, witness also the rise of elder-rule in Southern Baptist ecclesiology. This is primarily driven by Calvinistic theology. Where this is carefully defined within the overall structure of a healthy congregationalism, there is little problem. However, when elder-led bleeds over into elder-rule and congregationalism is thwarted, a Baptist distinctive suffers. To his credit, Finn reminds us that Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike must commit to traditional Baptist principles lest we drift into errors such as "polity structures that are antithetical to congregationalism" (191).

It appears to be the case that at least three of Finn's five myths turn out to have same basis in fact! This should not be too surprising since some myths do have their basis in fact, though they are not themselves factual. Finn needs to rewrite his myths to reflect more accurately the real state of affairs.

Finally, Finn's chapter concludes with a potent paragraph, two sentences from which I must share because they are crucially important and reflect what all of us should believe about the debate at hand. "Southern Baptists on both sides of the Calvinism discussion must be free both to hold their convictions and to seek to persuade other Southern Baptists to embrace those convictions." The second statement is also right on the money: "The Calvinism issue is not going to go away, so Southern Baptists must be willing to discuss and debate openly the doctrines of grace in an effort to be biblically accurate and perhaps come to a greater theological consensus in the years to come" (192). This review is an exercise in my right as a Southern Baptist to do both.

Round Four: Lawless vs. Finn. Decision: Lawless on a technicality.

The fifth pair of papers covers the broad subjects of "Election and Calling." Pull up a chair, and haul in your copy of either the Oxford or Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (reader's choice); you're going to need it! When these two theologian/philosophers square off, sesquipedalian vocabulary is bound to fly everywhere! Ken Keathley, now Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Greg Welty, Assistant Dean for Philosophy and Ethics, and Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Southwestern Seminary, treat us to "A Molinist View of Election, or How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian," and "Election and Calling: A Biblical Theological Study" respectively. These

two chapters address the thorny problem for all theologians: how does one reconcile the sovereignty of God and human responsibility in salvation. All agree that election is taught in the Bible.

Keathley's answer to this thorny problem is Molinism. Developed by the sixteenth-century Jesuit priest Luis Molina, Molinism affirms both God's control of the universe and man's human freedom in that universe. God infallibly knows what free human beings would do in any given situation. As Keathley says, "Molinism formulates a radical compatibilism . . ." (198). Molinism has experienced something of a revival among many evangelical philosophers today. The gist of Molinism is its attempt "to affirm divine sovereignty and human freedom in a consistent manner" (199). Keathley develops the concept of "permission" alongside of sovereignty. Although God controls all things, He does not cause all things. The key question is how does one relate sovereignty and permission as both pertain to predestination. Keathley notes how infralapsarian Calvinism and Molinism affirm both sovereignty and permission. The debate occurs over what role permission plays in the process. The fact that permission entails conditionality and contingency makes it problematic for the Calvinist. Calvin himself apparently held to supralapsarian double predestination.

Keathley highlights the differences between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. One key difference is this: supralapsarianism teaches God reprobated the non-elect and then "decreed the fall in order to actualize His disfavor toward them" (200). Keathley cites Bruce Ware as pointing out that in this scheme, grace plays no part at all. "This is because when God decided whom He would choose and whom He would reject, humans were not yet viewed in His mind as sinners in need of grace or deserving of judgment" (200). This explains why some hyper-Calvinists do not hesitate to speak of God's eternal hatred of the non-elect. Keathley, in quoting Calvin's *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 176, says "So Calvin makes the breathtaking claim that God is the very 'author' of sin, an assertion that subsequent Calvinists reject" (201). Actually, not all subsequent Calvinists have rejected the notion of God being the "author" of sin, for R.C. Sproul Jr. clearly makes such a claim.

Keathley argues the point that the only way God can be protected from being made the author of evil is to invoke the notion of permission. In the infralapsarian scheme, election is unconditional but reprobation is conditioned on the rejection of the offer of salvation in Christ. Thus, God *permits* the damnation of the non-elect. But infralapsarians face several problems and wind up running afoul of other tenets of Reformed theology, which Keathley discusses. He concludes: "In the final analysis infralapsarianism teaches that reprobation is as much a part of God's decrees as is election" (204). Keathley presses the issue upon the Calvinist and states they face a logical paradox, indicating "an error either in one's starting assumptions or his reasoning processes" (205). "The dilemma for the Calvinist is that he cannot take his starting assumptions to their logical conclusions" (205).

Enter Molinism. Keathley argues the distinctive feature of Molinism "is its contention that God's knowledge of all things can be understood in three logical layers or moments." Unlike decretal Calvinistic theology, Molinism posits "that there is only one decree . . . but attempts to discern the logical order of God's knowledge." "Decretal Calvinism perceives logical moments in God's *will*; Molinism perceives logical moments in God's *knowledge*" (206). According to Molinism, God knows everything that could happen (God's natural knowledge). Then, from all these possibilities, God also knows which scenarios would result when people freely respond in the way God desires them to respond (God's middle knowledge). God therefore foreknows what will certainly occur (God's free knowledge) (208).

In the remainder of the chapter, Keathley posits seven advantages of this approach over infralapsarianism. First, it affirms the genuine desire on the part of God for all to be saved (God's universal saving will) in a way that is problematic for Calvinism. This eliminates the need within Calvinism for two wills of God: his secret will and his revealed will, a concept which cannot be found in Scripture. Second, Molinism provides a better model for understanding just how it is that God's decree of election is unconditional while his rejection of the non-elect is conditional. The non-elect exists because of God's sovereign will; he is reprobated however because of his own unbelief. Third, Molinism contradicts Arminianism in that God actively elects to salvation. Fourth, Molinism has a more "robust and scriptural understanding of the role God's foreknowledge plays in election" (211).

In Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2, Keathley points out that the Calvinist claim that "foreknow" means to "forelove" is a case of "special pleading" (211). The Calvinist faces a lexical problem here that is difficult to overcome. Fifth, Molinism relieves the tension between divine sovereignty and human free will. Keathley appeals to Matthew 11:20–28, where Jesus condemns the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum for failure to repent:

Molinism argues that, as the text indicates, God used his middle knowledge to accomplish His will despite (and even through) the unbelief of Israel. Since Molinism affirms the reality of both human agency (vv. 20–24) and divine agency (vv. 25–27), it holds that God is meticulously achieving His will and that Jesus' offer is in good faith when he invites all to freely come to Him. Like so many other passages, Matt 11:20–28 simultaneously teaches human choice and divine sovereignty. Molinism is in the unique position of not having to bludgeon one truth into submission for the sake of the other (213).

Sixth, Molinism places mystery in God's infinite attributes rather than His character. Seventh, Molinism proffers a valid concept of permission that does not have to resort to special pleading.

Keathley notes the development in recent days of "middle knowledge Calvinism" where such men as Bruce Ware, John Frame and Terrance Tiessen attempt to incorporate Molinistic insights into Calvinism. Keathley concludes that it is impossible to do justice to our doctrine of God without affirming both God's sovereignty and His permission. In Keathley's mind, Molinism achieves both.

Whether Molinism as outlined by Keathley is a true picture of the way things are will continue to be debated.<sup>15</sup> What cannot be debated, when it comes to election, is there are clear alternatives to Calvinism that can be biblically defended and Molinism is one of them.

Greg Welty discusses unconditional election and effectual calling from the perspective of five-point Calvinism. His chapter is clearly and succinctly laid out. The chapter is divided into two sections, each of which defines election and effectual calling, expounds some proof texts,

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<sup>15</sup>See, for example, the critique of Molinism by Robert Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002), 62–63; and David Basinger, "Divine Control and Human Freedom: Is Middle Knowledge the Answer?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993): 55–64. Picirilli, 63, sees "some truth" in Molinism, but questions just what significance it has for the problem at hand. "In the final analysis, the difference between Calvinist and Arminian is not as much about foreknowledge and free will as it is about God's sovereign control and free will. And the proponent of this 'middle knowledge' still cannot avoid having God decide which sets of circumstances—and therefore which human responses—to actualize, as David Basinger has pointed out."

and answers objections. Welty defines election positively and negatively: God chooses the elect for salvation and this choice is not on the basis of foreseen faith or good works (217). Two major proof texts, Ephesians 1:3–11 and Romans 9 are evaluated. According to Ephesians 1:3–11, election is eternal, personal, and grounded in God’s will. Welty makes the point that here in Eph 1, “*our will and what we do with it* is never mentioned as the basis of God’s choice” (219). Turning to Romans 9, Welty argues first that the text addresses matters of personal salvation, “not merely election to temporal service or historical privilege.” Second, God’s own purpose and will have always been the ultimate reason He elects some and passes over others. Third, Welty argues Paul “*clearly denies that God’s saving purposes are conditioned on how we use our will*” (221). Welty admits that all this is not to say that “divine election has no place for human willing or effort in history. Nor is it to say that divine election is unrelated to our willing and working. It is simply to say that divine election *is not on the basis of* our willing and efforts” (221–22).

Welty responds to the following objections to unconditional election. First, election is on the basis of foreseen faith. According to Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2, election is said to be according to the “foreknowledge” of God. Welty opines this interpretation is neither necessary nor plausible. It is not necessary because neither text says God elects on the basis of foreseen faith. What is foreknown is people not faith. It is implausible since it would “cut against the grain of everything taught in Eph 1 and Rom 9.” Welty argues for the standard Calvinist view of “foreknowledge” here as actually meaning “to forelove.” Welty does admit that these texts actually do not explicitly say “whom God foreloved” even as they do not explicitly say “those whose faith God foreknew.” “Both Calvinists and non-Calvinists need to admit that neither interpretation is textually necessary” (224). This is a telling but true admission. A second objection is arguments for unconditional election confuse faith with good works. The Calvinist position on this is simple, as stated by Welty: “If our obedience to that command were ultimately from us, why wouldn’t we take credit for it? An *independently exercised* faith would be meritorious” (226). In other words, *if* faith is ultimately from us, then faith would be meritorious. According to Welty, the non-Calvinist position *entails* this unscriptural notion, therefore non-Calvinism is in error on this point.

Welty is here attempting a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. In fairness to Welty, he is not saying he thinks non-Calvinists *believe* faith is a work and that it is meritorious. What he is saying is that the non-Calvinist position *necessarily entails* such a notion. For Welty, *the ultimate decisive cause* for why one man believes and another does not is “ultimately” *in the believing man*. God is doing *everything* he can to assist *all men* to believe *equally*, but the believing man “ultimately” becomes the decisive cause in the non-Calvinistic system. Welty’s point seems to be that, on Arminian grounds, the ultimate decisive cause for salvation is not in God himself, but in the believing man himself. Welty believes God is the ultimate decisive cause for why one person chooses to believe, and not another. We have nothing that is not ultimately caused from God, including our act of faith. Consequently, the door is opened for man to engage in self-praise, and this, according to Welty, undermines Ephesians 1:6.

Welty’s attempt at *reductio ad absurdum* does not work if it can be shown that boasting is not a *necessary* corollary to the claim that faith is exercised by us and is not given directly by God. Let’s break it down this way. I see no problem in granting Welty’s thesis that on the specific issue of the exercise of faith, the ultimate decisive cause for this is within man. The problem arises when Welty avers that boasting is a *necessary* result. Non-Calvinists would agree that such is a *possible* response on the part of man, but not a *necessary* response. Notice Welty says: “An *independently exercised* faith would be meritorious.” He should have said “An

*independently exercised* faith could be considered as meritorious, but such would be a false conclusion on the part of the believer.” In other words, independently exercised faith does not *entail* grounds for self-praise, but some may think or act as if it does.

The operative word in Welty’s case is “ultimately;” he uses it four times on page 226 alone. In addition to the quote above, Welty states “if our faith ultimately originates from us and is not a gift of God . . . .” “Another way to put it is our salvation is not ‘to the praise of the glory of His grace’ (Eph 1:6) if it ultimately depends on our choice. For in that case we made the ultimate difference between our being saved or not saved.” Welty has created an untenable either/or disjunction. Our obedience to the gospel is never “ultimately” from us because faith is never exercised “independently” of the previous work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. No non-Calvinist I know thinks that salvation “ultimately” depends on our choice. The fact that human choice is involved does not negate the sovereign work of God in salvation, nor does it render Eph 1:6 untrue. Arminius himself believed and taught that man cannot exercise saving faith by himself alone for God “has determined to bestow on man sufficient grace by which he may believe.”<sup>16</sup> If the grace of God makes faith *possible* without making it *necessary*, as in the Arminian view, does this *logically* entail the conclusion that faith is therefore a work? I think not. Nor does it logically entail that faith so exercised causes boasting.

Now let’s proceed on a different but related issue. In the Calvinist system, regeneration is *to faith* rather than *by faith*. Welty’s construal of things comes close to making God the one who is doing the “believing” for the sinner. It is the sinner who believes; not God who believes for him. In Welty’s approach, faith is a part of the *effects* of regeneration, not the *condition* for regeneration. However, the Scripture is replete with passages making faith the condition for regeneration, not the result or effect of regeneration. The will to believe in Christ is the free decision of a sinner, but it is a decision that cannot be made without the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith is thus non-meritorious. Salvation by faith does not stand in contradiction to salvation by grace. The Calvinist seems to be saying: “if by faith (not given directly by God), then by works and not by grace.” The Scriptures teach: “by faith, not by works, but by grace.” Romans 4:16: “It is of faith that it might be according to grace.” Faith is the condition for receiving salvation, not the ground for it. The atonement of Christ on the cross is the ground for salvation. Therefore the exercise of faith on the part of the sinner does not logically entail either 1) faith is a work, or 2) faith is meritorious.

Welty identifies the third objection to election: if God’s choice of us is unconditional, then we don’t choose him, which is contrary to Scripture. Welty clears up the misunderstanding by reminding us that for Calvinists, the issue is not either/or but both/and. Welty rejects “concurrency” views of election where divine choice and human choice are on a logical par.

Welty addresses four additional objections. The first argues if election is unconditional, then it must be arbitrary. Welty is correct to respond that this argument is something of a *non sequitur*. Just because we do not know what God’s reasons are for his election, this does not mean he does not have a reason. The second argues if election is unconditional, then God is to blame for those in hell. Welty first argues that if this objection were valid, it would prove too much and attack the non-Calvinist understanding as well as the Calvinist. According to Welty, non-Calvinists believe “the lost are damned passively by God’s acts of creation and providence

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<sup>16</sup> James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. by J. Nichols and W.R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 1:383. Arminius also states: “It is very plain, from the Scriptures, that repentance and faith cannot be exercised except by the gift of God” (3:334). This same position is held by modern day Arminian Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 153–58.

rather than by the decree of election” (230). God cannot be “faulted” or “blamed” for passing over the non-elect since he owed salvation to no one in the first place. Third, if election is unconditional, then God’s offer of salvation to all is insincere. Fourth, if election is unconditional, then there is no reason to evangelize. With these last two objections, Welty continues his *modus operandi* here with his sauce for the goose reply. For the third, the same objection can be raised against the non-Calvinist. This fourth objection is likewise defeated, according to Welty, because it overlooks the fact that God is a God of means as well as ends. God uses people to bring about his will. To summarize most of Welty’s responses to objections in this section, “It does no good to raise a point as a means of adjudicating between A and B, if that point tells against *both* A and B.”

Welty defines effectual calling as involving an “outer call” and an “inner call.” The outer call is extended to all whether they believe or not. The inner call *goes to the elect alone* and conveys to them the gift of faith and repentance. Along these lines, Welty states the real difference between non-Calvinists and Calvinists revolves around whether God’s work of grace is *sufficient*, in any individual case, to bring about repentance and faith. Welty argues in favor of this distinction between the outer and inner call by appeal to several scripture passages. The parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt 22:1–14) with its statement “many are called but few are chosen” is taken by Welty to affirm the notion of outer and inner call. He footnotes the similar parable in Luke 14. 1 Corinthians 1:23–24, 2 Peter 1:10 and Jude 1 are also appealed to by Welty. Another argument Welty enlists is that God’s work of grace in calling the sinner to himself is sufficient for that person to come to faith. Philippians 1:29; Acts 5:31; 2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 13:48, 16:14; Ephesians 2:5 and 1 Peter 1:3 support this notion according to Welty. Welty argues the most persuasive passage proving the point is John 6. Unlike the previous passages, which receive sometimes only a sentence or two of comment, here Welty attempts a more substantive analysis of the passage to prove his point.

Welty lists and responds to four objections to effectual calling in the Calvinistic sense. First, regeneration cannot precede faith since both are simultaneous in Christian experience. Calvinists affirm the chronological simultaneity of faith and regeneration, but affirm a logical priority for regeneration. Welty does not offer any proof of his response to the objection. Second, the Bible teaches that grace is resistible. Welty responds that the outer call is resistible but the inner call is not. Again, he offers no proof of his rejoinder. Third, effectual calling is a form of coercion. Welty offers two responses. First, is coercion always bad? In some contexts Welty says it is not. Second, it remains unclear whether the Calvinistic view is coercion. He argues the elect sinner is not coerced since God changes the sinner’s will to want to respond to the gospel call. The elect then exercises his will as a gift of God. The final objection is that effectual calling carries with it all of the problems of unconditional election. Welty again returns to the sauce for the goose defense.

Although my Oxonian friend and colleague occasionally travels lightly over the evidence for his case, particularly when he cites Scripture verses with little or no discussion as to how these verses support his claims, and although I’m not convinced the goose’s sauce will equally feed the gander, nevertheless, I found this chapter to be a clear and well-balanced presentation of the Calvinist position on election and effectual calling. There are no misrepresentations to be found here. I especially appreciate Welty’s conclusion for its expression of humility and for its “blunt” (to use Welty’s word) appeal to his fellow Calvinists not to use Spurgeon’s oft-quoted statement: “Calvinism is the gospel.” (See my comments on Welty’s comments in the section above on Nettles’ chapter.)

Round Five: Keathley vs. Welty. Decision: Draw (since Keathley focuses purely on Molinism and the two chapters are not directly squaring off on the subject of election and effectual calling).

The volume concludes with a pair of chapters appealing to both sides to work together for the sake of the gospel. Daniel Akin, President of Southeastern Seminary and Tom Ascol, Senior Pastor of Grace Bible Church and Executive Director of the Founders Ministries in Cape Coral, Florida, each present their vision for how we can all work together for the sake of the gospel. The volume would be incomplete without these two chapters in my opinion because here we see, from the non-Calvinist and Calvinist perspective, what the issues are and what is at stake. Both men are not novices to the Southern Baptist scene. Both men speak candidly; no punches are pulled. Frankly, if we all pursue this issue following the guidelines these two men lay out for us, there is cause for genuine hope for the future.

I have known Daniel Akin since 1977 when we were in college together. He and I have worked side by side in a number of venues, including attending college, seminary and Ph.D. work together, serving together on the same church staff in the mid 1980's, teaching adjunctively together at The Criswell College, and co-hosting the radio program "The Criswell College Presents" for three years during the late 1980's. He is a man of the highest integrity, seldom do we disagree, and I count him a dear friend.

Akin's purpose in this chapter is to answer a twofold question: 1) Why should we come together in a Great Commission Resurgence? And 2) How can we come together in a Great Commission Resurgence (248)? In answer to the first question, Akin offers seven compelling reasons: 1) we agree on a common confession of faith: the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BFM 2000); 2) we agree on the inerrancy, infallibility and sufficiency of Scripture; 3) we agree on the necessity of a regenerate church membership; 4) we agree on the exclusivity of the gospel; 5) we agree on the lostness of humanity apart from Christ; 6) we agree that salvation is by grace through faith alone in Christ alone; and 7) we agree that the Great Commission is a divinely mandated assignment given to the church and we should give ourselves to it until the end of the age.(248–52). I agree completely and I would be surprised if any Southern Baptist, Calvinist or no, would disagree.

In answer to the second question, Akin offers five propositions. First, we need a sound theology, not a soft theology or a strait-jacket theology. Our sound theology is to be found in our complete agreement with and support of the BFM 2000. Akin identifies a "strait-jacket theology" as one where the entire SBC becomes Calvinistic. This is not his vision for our future. "I have Calvinist friends who say they hope and pray for the day when all of our seminaries have presidents and faculties that are five-point Calvinists" (253). Now this is a remarkable statement on several levels. First, it validates the concern raised by some in this book and by others of us along the way that some Calvinists in the SBC do indeed believe we would be better off if we reverted to Calvinism unilaterally in the seminaries. Second, I wonder if Akin's friends who feel this way realize if they got their wish, Akin himself would be out of a job! Third, if there are Calvinists who feel this way about the seminaries, no doubt many of these same folk feel this way about SBC churches. Of course this is a recipe for disaster. I was not surprised to see the fair-mindedness and plain-spokenness of my old friend exhibited in his next paragraph. Akin proceeds to mention other friends who would mandate we have no Calvinists in our seminaries and who would never support a five-point Calvinist for president of the SBC. This too is an

extreme position. Although I personally know of no one in the first category, I certainly know some in the second category.

Second, biblical theology should drive and determine systematic theology. This is true, Akin says, for all theological systems, regardless. Although I agree wholeheartedly with this, here I would like to have seen Akin spend some time addressing a constant (and to my mind legitimate) critique of Calvinism, namely that its adherents frequently allow systematic theology to trump biblical theology.<sup>17</sup> Since the focus is on Calvinism, other theological systems don't come into view nearly so much here. Sometimes Calvinists, with their federal theology, speculative decrees, and theological arguments for limited atonement not derived from Scripture, certainly fall into this trap. Third, Akin says we need a revival of authentic expository preaching. AMEN! Now you're talking! Akin's critique of the contemporary Southern Baptist pulpit is a direct hit and his remedy is also a bull's eye. Rip page 256 out of the book, post it on your office wall, and read it everyday for the rest of your life!

Fourth, we need the balance of a Great Commission theology. Listen again to Akin's fair and balanced approach. He reports; you decide. "Some of my semi-Arminian friends . . . need to become better and more careful theologians. In contrast, some of my hyper-active Calvinist friends . . . need to get out of their study and onto the mission fields. They need to hit the streets and become hot-hearted evangelists for Jesus Christ, and not John Calvin" (257). Again I respond with a hearty "Amen!" However, I must make an observation at this point which I think this book itself bears out. Some of my Calvinist friends need to become better and more careful theologians as well. What do I mean by this? Generally speaking, Calvinists are by definition concerned about and committed to theology. It goes with the territory. Calvinists think theologically. Many non-Calvinists could take a lesson here. However, Calvinistic theologizing is often marred by several factors. Sometimes Calvinists, especially young Calvinists, simply take their theology from Calvinist writers past and present without filtering it through the New Testament. None should be a theological epigone. This is where I would invoke Akin's second proposition above. Sometimes Calvinists subsume one set of Scripture passages under another set of Scripture passages in order to maintain the system. I am thinking primarily here of the issues of unconditional election and particular redemption. Sometimes Calvinists prejudice that which is logical over that which is paradoxical in the Scripture. Sometimes Calvinists succumb to logical fallacies in an attempt to maintain the system. (I have pointed this out in my comments on Sam Waldron's chapter on particular redemption.) Calvinists think theologically, but some Calvinists need to become better and more careful theologians. I might also add here that some Calvinists, especially young Calvinists, need to have a thicker skin. When non-Calvinists critique aspects of the system, they should not be looked upon as attacking the gospel! Furthermore, sometimes Calvinists respond as if they were being attacked personally. Of course there is no place for *ad hominem* attacks on either side of the debate, but it has been my observation that too often Calvinists take criticism of the system personally.

Akin's fifth proposition falls right in line with my previous comments. We need to love and respect one another even though we are not in complete agreement on every theological point. "Shrill rhetoric, sloppy history and theology, and unchristian words and actions on both sides" need to stop (258). Akin is right to point out that the decline in baptisms in the SBC cannot be laid at the foot of Calvinists since the majority of our churches are not pastored by

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the comment by Calvinist J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 3:159, on John 3:16, "I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system."

Calvinists. “Could it be that the real problem is not Calvinism but a lack of love for Christ . . .” (259). I would offer a slight variation to Akin’s statement to bring out the point that it is not Calvinism, *or the lack of Calvinism*, that is the problem. This would make it clear that the problem is not caused by Calvinism and the answer to this specific problem, at least in my view, is not more Calvinism. I feel this clarification is warranted given the comments and trajectory of arguments offered by some Calvinists in this volume.

Tom Ascol offers his vision for how we can proceed to work together in the future in his chapter “Working Together to make Christ Known: Considerations for the Future.” Ascol longs to help us find the common ground necessary to achieve this goal. He informs us that the doctrines of grace played a major role in the theological foundation of the SBC and a growing number of Southern Baptists “are becoming convinced that the doctrines of grace are taught in God’s Word” (262). Similar to Akin above, Ascol offers us five principles of bridge building. The first three are doctrinal and the last two are ethical. The three doctrinal principles, couched in the form of questions, are: 1) What is the gospel? 2) What is a Christian? 3) What is a church?

Appealing to 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 as a springboard, Ascol tells us the gospel is an exclusive message in that it is the only message we must preach. Our preaching should be truly expositional and Christocentric. The gospel is also an all-inclusive message: it informs all our human experience. All our teaching and our living should be governed by the gospel. Using the BFM 2000 as a basis, Ascol answers the question, “What is a Christian?” Here Ascol devotes space to address the vital concept of a regenerate church membership. His reminder that we Southern Baptists must be committed to this doctrine is right. In answering the question “What is a church?” Ascol appeals to Article VI of the BFM 2000 and again reminds us of the necessity of regenerate church membership.

Two ethical propositions round out Ascol’s chapter. The first is “Obey the truth.” Truth matters to Ascol, as it should to all of us. We must seek to purchase truth at whatever price and sell it at no price. “Whatever position a person believes the Bible to teach [with reference to unconditional/conditional election], he should not be inhibited in asserting it and critiquing views that are contrary to it. Commitment to truth requires no less” (276). Ascol laments the fact that this attitude “is missing in most ecumenical efforts. Too often truth gets sacrificed in the name of cooperation” (276). I agree completely. Ascol’s second ethical proposition is “Live in love.” Doctrinal differences should be openly discussed without insult or caricature. I agree completely.

I can find little in Ascol’s chapter with which to disagree. However, I do have some observations to make concerning one sentence and its implications in Ascol’s conclusion. He states in his chapter that nowhere has he “suggested that everyone must or should become a convinced Calvinist, though you would hear no complaints from me were that to happen!” (278). However, what I have read over the years on the Founders Ministries website causes me no small measure of concern that such an agenda is afoot. In fact, some of what I have read in this book fuels my suspicions that such an agenda is present in the SBC. In the same year *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue* appeared (2008), Ascol published in the *Founders Journal* an article by Tom Nettles entitled “Why Your Next Pastor Should be a Calvinist.”<sup>18</sup> More alarming still is Ascol’s own comments about this article.

The theme of the latest *Founders Journal* (Winter, 2008) is “the other resurgence.” It contains articles by Tom Nettles and Christian George, representing the “old guard” of the reformation efforts within the SBC and the

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<sup>18</sup>Tom Nettles, “Why Your Next Pastor Should be a Calvinist,” *Founders Journal* 71 (Winter, 2008): 5–15.

rising generation who is similarly committed to those efforts. Dr. Nettles needs no introduction to most of the readers of this blog. His teaching and writing ministries have been blessed of God to call many back to our biblical and historical roots as Southern Baptists. His book, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (recently revised, updated and republished by Founders Press) has never even been seriously engaged, much less refuted by those who lament the resurgence of the doctrines of grace among Baptists over the last 25 years. It is a classic work. Tom's article in this issue of the *Founders Journal* is entitled, "Why Your Next Pastor Should Be a Calvinist." I highly recommend it.<sup>19</sup>

I cannot imagine using such a title, much less arguing it in print. A church's next pastor should be the man God leads that church to call, be he Calvinist or no. Imagine the outcry if some group of non-Calvinists should publish an article entitled "Why Your Next Pastor Should not be a Calvinist." Please understand. Ascol is well within his rights to direct the Founders Ministries and to publish such an article in his journal. This is not in question. What is in question is whether such constitutes a problem for the SBC and for Ascol's involvement in a bipartisan conference such as "Building Bridges." Since one cannot distinguish between Ascol the Calvinist pastor and Ascol the director of the Founders Ministries, his presence on the program of the "Building Bridges Conference," given the stated goals of the Founders Ministries, is problematic in my view. Furthermore, what is the precedent for two Southern Baptist entities (LifeWay and Southeastern Seminary) partnering with a non-Southern Baptist entity (Founders Ministries) for this kind of conference? I have already stated I think the conference is a great idea. We need to have more. My concern is with the involvement of the Founders Ministries. For them to be a co-sponsor legitimizes their agenda within the convention, an agenda which is counter-productive in my judgment. For SBC entities to partner with any non-SBC group that is polarizing and that represents a small fragment of the convention is problematic.

## CONCLUSION

*Calvinism: a Southern Baptist Dialogue* is an important book. The "Building Bridges" conference which generated the book was an important conference. Both conference and book were conducted fairly; I observed no bare-knuckle boxing or below the belt punches, though many punches and counter-punches were thrown. Although a few may have been fighting outside their weight class, there were certainly no palookas in this match. While probably no one actually kissed the canvas, there were a few pitty-pat punches thrown, a couple of knockdowns along the way and probably one knockout. However, no one succeeded in throwing a Sunday punch. All in all, it was a good match.

The reader may be fatigued at this point, having plodded through my megillah, but allow me to make some final observations. First, although this book on the surface appears to be a balanced presentation of the issues, when one carefully considers who the authors are and what they say, I'm not so sure the book is not somewhat slanted in a particular direction, albeit clearly not deliberately so by the editors. I shall attempt to justify this claim. In the first pair of articles, Dockery succeeds in showing the majority of Southern Baptists, past and present, have not been and are not five-point Calvinists. He does not, however, argue in any way against Calvinism. On

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<sup>19</sup>Tom Ascol, "The Other Resurgence—FJ 71," Founders Weblog, Wednesday, April 2, 2008, [http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/blog/archive/2008\\_04\\_01\\_archive.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/blog/archive/2008_04_01_archive.html) (Accessed 29 October 2008).

the other hand, Nettles' chapter concludes with a statement that any effort to seek the repression or elimination of Calvinism within the SBC would be "a theological tragedy and historical suicide." Fine so far. He then introduces a lengthy quotation by P.H. Mell with the following remark: "In fact, one could argue along with P.H. Mell that exactly the opposite should be the case." One could indeed argue this, but my point is *one should not argue this!* There is a wide chasm between "could" and "would" and "should." I get the distinct impression that Nettles would indeed like to argue this and that he has semantically done so with his quotation.

Consider the next two chapters by Yarnell and Noblit. Yarnell's chapter is arguably the only chapter in this book that actually suggests an alternative to Calvinism. Yarnell finds causes for rejoicing and causes for concern with Calvinism. Noblit finds only three sentences worthy of concern for Calvinism in an entire chapter. Noblit concluded his chapter with these words: "I am convinced that the rise of Spirit-filled, evangelistic Calvinism is an essential agent to the revival and reformation needed in order to build strong true churches and bring God the glory He deserves" (112). Look at that sentence carefully. Noblit is *convinced* that Calvinism is an *essential* agent needed to the revival and reformation needed in order to build *true* churches. Is Calvinism *essential* to the revival we need? Will our churches only be *true* churches when they are permeated with Calvinistic theology? Such statements and their implications are problematic for building bridges.

What of the next two chapters on the extent of the atonement by Nelson and Waldron? While Nelson rightly makes the case against limited atonement, he is not otherwise critiquing Calvinism. Of course, he is not obliged to do so given the nature of his subject matter. Nelson makes it clear in his conclusion that he sees no danger to the SBC from Calvinism. Notice how Waldron's conclusion has a different tone to it. He states that the "difficulties" to particular redemption which he covers in his chapter "do not overturn *or even address* the pillars of particular redemption raised in the earlier part of this essay" (152). I find this statement somewhat incredible in light of Nelson's thorough critique of limited atonement, not to mention the scads of Calvinists who have historically argued against strict limited atonement. Waldron seems to believe that Calvinism is simply unassailable theologically, and this attitude is problematic for building bridges.

Thankfully, the conclusions of the two chapters by Chuck Lawless and Nathan Finn conclude with a very similar goal of building bridges. Even so, there is still something of a different tone in these two chapters. I suppose I could be chided for reading into things something that is not there in these chapters, but I shall venture on anyway. For example, Lawless' title is couched as a question: "Southern Baptist non-Calvinists: Who are We Really?" (155). Finn's title is a bit more, shall we say, challenging: "Southern Baptist Calvinism: Setting the Record Straight" (171). This is not to say that Finn's chapter is an "in your face" challenge; in fact, it is not that at all. However, in Finn's effort to set the record straight, some of the examples he cites are not really statements of mischaracterizations of Calvinism as much as they are statements by non-Calvinists about Calvinism with which Finn disagrees. Take one example from among several that could be mentioned. Finn cites James Leo Garrett as claiming "that belief in unconditional election and the so-called 'covenant of redemption' between the Father and Christ are also hyper-Calvinist doctrines." Then Finn states, "They are not" (182). *They most emphatically are!* They are not beliefs held *only* by hypers, nor does Garrett claim such, but they are indeed held by hypers. One man's fact can be another man's mischaracterization.

The final two chapters by Keathley and Welty also illustrate my point, although not as decisively. Keathley's title and chapter indicate that he is not writing to argue so much against

Calvinism's understanding of election and effectual calling as he is advocating Molinism as a more *consistent* way to be a Calvinist (although Keathley is himself not a Calvinist). On the other hand, Welty is clearly articulating the Calvinist approach to the subject. Finally, consider the last two chapters by Akin and Ascol. Akin likewise is not attempting to offer a critique of Calvinism as Calvinism, but rather is attempting to take a stand in the middle of the issue and call both sides to work together for the gospel. He is interested in articulating a clarion call to us all for a Great Commission resurgence. No doubt Ascol would agree, but the sentiments expressed in one sentence in his conclusion to which I have already alluded and discussed above coupled with the stated purpose of the Founders Ministries and Ascol's own comments in his blog over the years would seem to make clear that Ascol's vision for the future and how we get there is different from that of Akin.

What are we to make of all this? I would suggest that the evidence would indicate the book is technically balanced but in reality somewhat slanted toward Calvinism. In building bridges, we must remember that traffic flows both ways. Though certainly not the intention of most if not all of the co-sponsors of the "Building Bridges" conference, nor the intention of the books' editors or authors, some have yet concluded that the conference itself as well as the book might better be described as "building bridges to Calvinism." While I would not want to go that far myself, I do have the sense, after having carefully read through the book, that the Calvinists within the book need to be more self-aware of the problems expressed by those who write from the opposite side of the aisle in the book itself as well as in this review. Clearly the non-Calvinists in the book (with the exception of Yarnell) seldom were outspoken critics of Calvinism *per se*.

A second overall observation is in order, and this is really the gravamen of my concerns. Let me state for the record my own convictions concerning the way forward. Attempting to run all Calvinists out of Dodge will not bring us together in the SBC. Attempting to return us as a convention to the so called "Founders" theology of Calvinism will not bring us together. Attempting to come together over missions and evangelism without theology will not bring us together. (We learned this lesson during the conservative resurgence.) If we are to come together, we must do so AS BAPTISTS, not as Calvinists and non-Calvinists. We must unite around *Baptist distinctives* which includes the only glue that can hold us together: a biblical Baptist theology wedded to a Great Commission Resurgence of evangelism and missions. Here I would find myself most in agreement with Daniel Akin's proposals. However, one of the disconcerting things this volume illustrates is the reality that some Calvinists are hoping for and working for a revival of Calvinism in the SBC. Let me be clear on this matter. It is any and every Baptist's right to be persuaded that Calvinism reflects the teaching of Scripture. Being a Calvinist should not be a convention crime. Calvinists have and should always be free to have a place at the SBC table. Any church that feels led of God to call a Calvinist pastor should do so without hesitation. On the other hand, Calvinism should not be a convention cause either. When Calvinists, individually, or as groups such as the Founders Ministries, seek to make it a cause with the intention of moving the SBC towards Calvinism, then we have and will continue to have a problem. Let us debate the theology of Calvinism and let the chips fall where they may, but deliver us from attempting to Calvinize or de-Calvinize the SBC. The majority of Baptists have always been, to use Dr. Leo Garrett's term, "Calminians."

Finally, the statement I am about to make will no doubt be perceived by some as divisive. At the risk of offending my Calvinist brothers, I must speak what I believe in my heart to be true. Should the SBC move toward five-point Calvinism, such a move would be away from and not

toward the gospel. Allow me to explain. The doctrine of Limited Atonement simply cannot be squared with Scripture in my view. Other dimensions of Calvinism are theologically problematic as well in my opinion, but for the time being let us put that aside. With respect to the issue of limited atonement and its acceptance as biblically accurate, serious implications follow for preaching and evangelism. J.I. Packer teaches Calvinists today to engage in evangelism for two reasons: Christ's missionary commands and the simple fact that *they do not know who the elect are*.<sup>20</sup> These two motives, while true, are insufficient motives for evangelism. We are to evangelize for a third reason: *because God wills all men to be saved* and has made atonement for all men, thus removing legal barriers to their salvation. We are also to express and display God's *saving love*<sup>21</sup> for humanity in the way we command all men to repent, in our preaching of the gospel, in our compassionate invitations, and in our indiscriminate offerings of Christ to all. A consistent five-point Calvinist cannot look a congregation in the eyes or even a single sinner in the eye and say: "Christ died for you." What they have to say to be consistent with their own theology is "Christ died for sinners." Since Christ did not die for the non-elect, and since the five-point Calvinist does not know who the elect are, it is simply not possible in a preaching or witnessing situation to say to them directly "Christ died for you."<sup>22</sup> The term "sinners" here becomes a code word in high Calvinism for "the elect only." Such a position is not the gospel but rather an aberration in my judgment. These issues are weighty and illustrate the fact that theology, rather than being an exercise in omphaloskepsis, is crucially important for our ecclesiological praxis.

*Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue* places on the table the current reality of our disagreement over Calvinism in the SBC. For this reason alone it is a valuable book. Just as important, and maybe even more important, it seeks to articulate a way forward. For this reason too this book is important. Some will consider the book to be a bridge to nowhere. I don't think such is the case. Others consider the book to be a bridge too far. Perhaps. At least it is a bridge, even if unfinished. Regardless, buy it; read it; and whether you are a Calvinist or not, think and act biblically on the issues. And don't forget to do your part to construct the bridge and then make the transpontine journey.

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<sup>20</sup> This is the thrust of J.I. Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> This universal *saving love* may be distinguished from a *redemptive love* that *some* Calvinists think pertains to the elect alone, since Christ only died for the elect's sins according to the scheme of strict limited atonement.

<sup>22</sup> I have occasionally heard this said in sermons by high-Calvinists, but when this is done, it is an inconsistency that stands in direct contradiction to their theology. Most five-point Calvinists will not use in their sermons the terminology "Christ died for you."

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