

The Once and Future Calvin

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For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9)

Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, in his article, "Present Day Attitude to Calvinism," began his address by saying,

"The subject upon which I am to address you involves the determination of a matter of fact, about which it is not easy to feel fully assured."¹

As I begin to present this address on "The Once and Future Calvin" I feel Warfield's unease. And yet if I allow myself to look deeper into the mind of Calvin, revealed in his sermons and commentaries and indeed through his whole career, I am left with more confidence than Warfield. Indeed, it is the idea of Calvin that helps me to talk about the future of Calvinism with some confidence.

It was Sir Winston Churchill, who told a gathering at Harvard University in September of 1943,

"The empires of the future are the empires of the mind."²

The "empires of the mind" in the 20th Century have yielded forth previously inconceivable new outposts of that empire: the advent of the Internet, the routine nature of space travel, and the lifesaving advances of medicine. But not all empires are good. We have seen the God-less empires sending out demonic armies of secularism into old Christendom, now redeployed into every area of life in Europe and North America. These "empires of the mind" have been responsible for the silent Holocaust of abortion, the redefining of marriage, the open acceptance of homosexuality, and numerous other sinful ways that bring Romans 1³ to life in a way that has never been seen before.

We have seen, also, the bloody resurfacing of the Islamic radicalism in, for example, the Arab, Persian and South Asian communities of the world. If it is not Satan himself behind this murderous movement, then I don't know what satanic attack is. Churchill's personal peccadilloes notwithstanding he did think from a Western-Christian-Biblical-Calvinistic framework. And his statement that "the empires of the future are the empires of the mind" is a truth embedded in and throughout the Word of God, except that the greatest empire is coming from the very mind of God, not man.

One place where this is seen is in Isaiah chapter 11, where the prophet foretells the fulfillment of redemptive history on planet earth culminating in that glorious Scripture:

¹ Benjamin B.; Reed Warfield, Richard; Orr, James; Webb, R.A.; and Johnson, Thomas Cary, ed., *Calvin Memorial Addresses* (Vestavia, Alabama: Solid Ground Christian Books, July 2007 edition of the May, 1909 original).

² Speech at Harvard University <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_University>, September 6, 1943, in "The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations," (Knowles & Partington, Oxford University Press, 1999).

³ Romans 1.19-32 deals with the downward moral cycle of Man and his culture as a result of denying God.

The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea
(Isaiah 11:9).

The mind of God overtakes the mind of man through this knowledge and the empire of God is spread across the universe. Now whether you are an optimistic or pessimistic Amillennial, historic Premillennial, old Postmillennial or neo-Postmillennial, or some amazingly insightful and creative hybrid of the all of them, this much is certain: the knowledge of Jesus Christ—the very stronghold of *the empire of the mind* of God—set as it is upon the redemption of His own creation and especially upon the sixth-day crowning glory of His creation, Man—will in one way or another permeate all other empires of the mind, and thus as the mind conceives thoughts after God pertaining to our world, to all physical realities on Planet Earth.

This was, as we all know, the fifth monarchy which Daniel saw coming⁴. This is the great tree that grew from a mustard seed on which all of the birds of the air shall come and nest.⁵ This is Christ's own word in Revelation that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of God and of His Christ.⁶ John Calvin read these words and wrote:

“With good reason does the Prophet add, that this invaluable blessing flows from the knowledge of God; for it abases all flesh, and teaches men to commit themselves to his trust and guardianship, and brings them into a state of brotherly harmony, when they learn that they have the same Father. (Malachi 2:10.) Although many, who have not yet been renewed by the Spirit of Christ, profess to have humanity, yet it is certain that self-love (*filauti ÷ an*) reigns in them; for in all it is natural and so deeply-rooted, that they seek their own advantage and not that of others, think that they are born for themselves and not for others, and would wish to make the whole world subject to them, if they could, as Plato has judiciously observed. Hence arise fraud, perjury, theft, robbery, and innumerable crimes of this sort; and therefore there is no other remedy for subduing this lawless desire than the knowledge of God. We see how the Prophet again makes the government of Christ to rest on faith and the doctrine of the gospel, as indeed he does not gather us to himself (Ephesians 1:10) in another way than by enlightening our minds to reveal the heavenly life, which is nothing else, as he himself declares, than to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.” (John 17:3.)

And when speaking about the last clause of Isaiah 11:9, the Reformer of Geneva said (in his lectures at St. Pierre's)⁷:

⁴ Following the description of a Fourth Kingdom (in Daniel 2:40), Daniel records this prophecy about a fifth and final kingdom: “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

⁵ “It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches” (Luke 13:19; and, Matthew 13:31 and Mark 13:18).

⁶ Revelation 11.15.

⁷ See his Preface, for instance, as well as the translator's notes in John Calvin, "Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah," in *Translated from the Original Latin by The Rev. William Pringle* (Accordance Software 7.0, From the first edition, published 26 December 1550).

[From the phrase] As with waters that cover the sea [we learn that]...There is an implied comparison between the abundance of knowledge and that slender taste which God gave to the ancient people under the law. The Jews having been kept in the rudiments of childhood, (Galatians 3:23, 4:3,) the perfect light of wisdom hath fully shone on us by the gospel, as was also foretold by Jeremiah: They shall not every one teach his neighbor, and a man his brother, to know God; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. (Jeremiah 31:34.)

If this fullness of knowledge takes possession of our minds, it will free us from all malice.⁸ *The empire of the mind* that has been shaped by the knowledge of God, supremely revealed to Man in the Word of God made flesh, Jesus Christ, will set us free. That is what Calvin said would happen. He said this not only in preaching on Isaiah but also in teaching on the Lord's Prayer. When John Calvin prayed "Thy kingdom come" this is what he meant, according to his Commentary on Matthew:

"The substance of this prayer is, that God would enlighten the world by the light of his Word, — would form the hearts of men, by the influences of his Spirit, to obey his justice, and would restore to order, by the gracious exercise of his power, all the disorder that exists in the world."⁹

Thus we are bound to respond, even with that noted controversial Swiss theologian that we sometimes don't mention (K.B.), as he reflected on Calvin's understanding of this petition of the Great Prayer:

"May the light of God which was in Jesus Christ, in his life, in his death and resurrection, be shed over us, over our whole life, and over all things."¹⁰

But our optimism is cultivated even more by Calvin in his Geneva Catechism. There we can also hear Calvin's understanding of what we are praying for in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer:

"268. What do you understand under the 'Kingdom of God' in the second petition? It consists basically of two things: the leadership of His own through His Spirit and, in contrast to that, in the confusion and the destruction of the lost, who refuse to submit to His rule. In the end, it will be clear that there is no power that can resist His power.

269. How do you pray for the coming of this Kingdom? May the Lord increase the number of His believers from day to day, may He daily pour His gifts of grace upon them until He has filled them completely; may He let His truth burn more brightly, may He reveal His justice which shall confuse Satan and the darkness of His kingdom and obliterate and destroy all unrighteousness.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John Calvin, "Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, Translated from the Original Latin, and Collated with the Author's Original French Version," (Accordance 8.0 Bible Software, 1845).

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Prayer: Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*, ed. Edited by Don E. Saliers from the translation of Sara F. Terrien (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

270. Does this not happen today already? Yes, in part. But we wish that it might continually grow and progress until it reaches completion on the Day of Judgment, on which God alone will rule in the high places and all creatures will bow before His greatness; He will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

Calvin’s catechism is surely the tasty fat that is marbled throughout the fine steak portion of the Westminster Larger Catechism that states:

“What do we pray for in the second petition? Answer: In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come), acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sin, and the conforming, comforting and building up of those that already converted; that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of His second coming, and our reigning with Him forever and that He would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of His power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.”

I will now confess something that came to me as I prepared this paper. As I read Calvin’s words on the future of this world, as well as the Calvinist document we hold in the Presbyterian Church in America to be the very system of doctrine taught in Scripture, I heard in my mind the old song, “We Are The World.”¹¹ I should hardly mention Michael Jackson and popular culture in the same sentence with John Calvin, much less admitting that I thought about it, except for the fact that I would want to say that John Calvin was way ahead of the celebrity-centered, global peace movements of Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie in the 1980s or the iconic Bono in the early 21st Century, or even the most thoughtful liberal intellectuals of the 20th Century. In fact, my title, “The Once and Future Calvin,” aims to simply state this very truth in contrast to other ideas in our culture: that John Calvin’s theology is perennially contemporary and will, in fact, prove to be most prophetic (not a small “p” in prophecy, but a large “P” in prophecy, for Calvinism we must say repeatedly is nothing but a total understanding of the Word of God). And his theology will finally be dispersed the world over. His theology being so radically Biblical, it cannot help but finally overwhelm all other theologies and all other ideas. This is my proposition in this paper.

Definitions

“Well, then,” someone might ask, “exactly what shall be dispersed the world over? Do you mean that the world will embrace a particular doctrine, like predestination, or embrace a theological system?” My answer is that when I speak of Calvinism I am speaking of something beyond one doctrine or even a system. Calvinism is, as Warfield put it,

¹¹ “We Are The World,” © 1985 Words and music by Michael Jackson and Lionel Ritchie, produced and conducted by Quincy Jones, for “USA for Africa.”

“...Theism come to its rights. Calvinism is religion at the height of its conception. Calvinism is evangelicalism in its purest and most stable expression.”¹²

So I am speaking of a catholic Christianity that Calvin sought to and did restore in his lifetime and which has continued to grow, in greater and lesser degrees across the earth. The depth and breadth of Calvinism is so “catholic” that it will, indeed, at length either transform all other ideas or demolish them upon the anvil of cosmic, God-ward truth. And when I speak of his theology being “catholic” I do not mean universal as is often now used, and which is a simplistic corruption of the word. Rather I mean “catholic” as St. Cyprian used it in 251, and as Dr. Douglas Kelly has used the word, as the opposite of the word “heresy.”

I heard this description from my esteemed colleague in his mesmerizing paper presented in Charlotte on “The Catholicity of Calvin’s Theology” in which Dr. Kelly sought to show that far from wanting to make the Church less “catholic,” Calvin was wanting to make the Church more “catholic.” After unsettling several ardent but self-limiting Reformed folk in our audience, Dr. Kelly went on to clarify his statement by saying that he wasn’t referring to the Church of Rome, but referring to the way Calvin understood the word “catholic” and how he was so thoroughly committed to that understanding. Dr. Kelly wrote that by “catholic” he meant, “that he [Calvin] was seeking to expound the fullness of the entire Word of God to his people [and to the reading public]”.¹³ For Kelly as well as for Paul Wernle, Francois Wendel, Ronald Wallace, Herman Bavinck, Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield and many others, predestination was not the controlling “centre of Calvinism” but rather Calvin’s theological vision that must be “characterized as ‘catholic’”¹⁴

“Calvin believed that the Roman Church of this time had lost its catholicity because the papal system had intruded its power structures between the people and the voice of the Lord speaking in Scripture.”¹⁵

As Stephen J. Nichols has recently written, “[Calvin was] not talking about something new but something that had been lost.”¹⁶ Thus, as we consider Calvinism I would affirm with these men that we are dealing with a restoration of the Church to its catholic nature, according to the very meaning of the Greek *katholikos*, “according to the whole:”

The whole Word of God for the whole man; thus the very revelation of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments unleashed on the intellectual and therefore institutional strip mining of man and his world to bring a flowering, a divinely wrought, Isaiah-prophesied renewing and a blossoming of the human mind.¹⁸

¹² Warfield, ed., *Calvin Memorial Addresses*.

¹³ Douglas F. Kelly, “The Catholicity of Calvin’s Theology,” in *Calvin 500 Joint Service* (Carmel Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC: 2009).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Stephen J. Nichols from an interview by Ken Meyers on volume 92 (July/August 2009) of Mars Hill Audio Journal, and quoted in Michael F. Ross, *50 Days of Prayer for the PCA* (Atlanta: Christian Education and Publications, 2009).

In this, Calvinism's outlook is not only *catholic* but also *cosmic*. It is no wonder that Calvin's Geneva academy led to such a robust missions movement, as happens in all true movements of God in revival.

And on that point, I must move to how we might envision Calvinism taking over the world—and I have no other way to put it than that. Calvinism is simply *catholic* Christianity, and if we had only our main text, Isaiah 11:9 to consider, then we would have to say that this is the destiny of Calvinism: to eclipse every other dogma and thought and religion that has a hold on the human mind, to finally release mankind into the dream of truth and beauty, and to return to an Eden that is embedded with eternal hope in our breasts. This is Calvinism's destiny because Calvinism is simply the religion of Jesus Christ.

Well, then, how will it look? How is it going now? And, if we could dream for a while, what might Calvinism look like in the emerging 21st century?

Let me divide my thoughts on this question into (1) What We are Seeing of the Calvinism in the Here and Now and (2) What We Might Expect of Calvinism in the Future.

Disclaimer

First a disclaimer. This is not a futurist paper. I do appreciate futurists and their work. If you have not read the truly amazing, eye opening article by Samuel P. Huntington called "The Clash of Civilizations,"¹⁷ which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* back in 1993 and is now widely quoted, on the future of global politics in the 21st century, it is both sobering and increasingly believable, *and is a must to be read*. Futurism, as a distinct literary genre, has a place. But that is not my concern here. This is not particularly an argument about which Calvinist groups we are talking about, as the celebrated George Marsden deals with this in his first essay in the fine book edited by David Wells, *The Reformed Theology in America Today: A History of its Modern Development*.¹⁸ He classifies three groups of Calvinists whose future must be considered: doctrinalists, culturalists, and pietists. James Gidley reflected Marsden's thoughts in his "The Future of Calvinism" which appeared in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's denominational magazine back in 1992. Most of the his very interesting article is really taken up with what amounted to preliminary work on Marsden's thoughts about classifications of Calvinists in the future and some commentary on why in his opinion the doctrinalists are the only ones that matter. I can't argue with him on that as in the final analysis there must be some parameters as to what a Calvinist is, but Kelly's proposition is never far from my thoughts: a Calvinist is a true catholic Christian, taking in the whole of the Bible. There are several different expressions of that as we will see, but their own claim is that they are Calvinists. That is really not my concern in this talk. If we are talking, as he seems to be, about Calvinism only existing within the OPC, PCA, ARP, EPC, URC and a few others, then that is one thing (and I will not even venture to divine the outcome of some of the debates of the 2009 General Assembly of the PCA). I would appeal to the global-minded verses of Isaiah 49:6:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

¹⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1993).

¹⁸ David F. Wells, *Reformed Theology in America : A History of Its Modern Development* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997).

Once again, to speak of Calvinism, for me, is to speak of that pure form of Christianity which dwelt, at first, in the hearts of Ancient Israel, and then more fully and with greater God-given revelation in the New Testament Church, in so many of the Church Fathers, and through history was revived by that pastor-scholar in Geneva, and is growing this very hour all over the world, though amidst great conflict from the Enemy.

My thoughts on what is and what might be are not formulated on any other ground than to observe the tremendous growth of Biblical Christianity and in its purer form, that is Calvinism. And my final observations are only statements that are grounded in God's Word. I am stating a faith in the promises of God that, once again, the knowledge of God shall cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. Thus, I speak not as a futurist but as a preacher of the Gospel, Calvinism being simply that most notable movement to restore the Church to its catholicity, its orthodoxy, and its faithfulness to that Gospel.

So back to the questions:

What We are Seeing of Calvinism in the Here and Now

We cannot help but agree with Alan Carlson that we are in a "civilization crisis"¹⁹ and one that devolved as a result of what the great, early Twentieth Century Lutheran economist, Wilhelm Köpke, described as

"a cultural retreat...a squandering of our inheritance linked to 'a continuous process of secularization.'"²⁰

We all know that. Yet I don't know about you, but when I hear of the miraculous advancements of the Gospel and of revival in the East, my heart rejoices with this. But I am unsettled. I am unsettled for I am jealous in the Lord to see revival in our own land. I am thirsty. I am dry. But we must not despair. The Word of God is sure. Christ will win. And Calvinism is the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ and thus Calvinism must prevail. I recall from Jeremiah 29 that even though I live in Babylon, I am to plant, to give in marriage, and to seek the welfare of the city.

I am encouraged and we should be encouraged, I think, as we consider the future of Calvinism in the West.

Recently R. C. Sproul spoke hopefully to the once and future Calvin when he wrote:

"The roots of reformed theology are springing new branches—branches that go beyond the boundaries of traditional Presbyterian and Reformed bodies. Thousand of Baptist Christians are recovering their roots in the Reformation and untold numbers of 'broad Evangelicals' are looking for more substance and finding it in the historic writings of the thoroughgoing Reformed tradition."²¹

Indeed. We all know that our churches are filled not with legacy Presbyterians, but with new Calvinists who have come to embrace the full counsel of God's Word. But what is happening in

¹⁹ Alan Carlson, "Wilhelm Köpke's Conundrums over the Natural Family," *The Intercollegiate Review* Spring (2009).

²⁰ Ibid, Wilhelm Köpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992).

²¹ R.C. Sproul, Calvinism: The Once and Future Queen, *Tabletalk*, May, 1997, reprinted at <http://www.ducati.onlinehome.de/calvinismus/history.htm>.

your church is spreading. Without intending it, we have come to the place where Calvinism is, considered, well, *cool*. We were awakened to this trend by articles such as Collin Hanson in *Christianity Today* in 2006²², which grew to become a very popular book, *Young, Restless, Reformed*.²³ One young blogger, Tim Challies, summarized not only the book, but also the movement itself, when he wrote:

“Restless youth are discovering anew the great doctrines of the Christian faith. Weary of churches that seek to entertain rather than teach, longing after the true meat of the Word, these young people are pursuing doctrine.”²⁴

As Hanson showed us, we see this not only in Albert Mohler’s work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, or D.A. Carson’s and John Piper’s work with the increasingly popular Gospel Coalition, or Mark Dever and our own Ligon Duncan’s ministry with Together for the Gospel, or Tim Keller’s Redeemer Ministries in New York, but also in more unusual places like Yale’s Jonathan Edwards Center, or in Mark Driscoll’s more postmodern, West Coast, hip-Calvinistic Mars Hill Church in Seattle. I have to admit that though his theology most assuredly falls within that broadest parameters of Calvinism, his philosophy of ministry rubs me the wrong way. Yet when Molly Worthen of the *New York Times* wrote an article, “Who Would Jesus Smack Down?” warning her liberal readers not to be taken in by the dressing, but to be aware that this man is really reviving Puritanism in America, I began to warm to him a bit. Listen to what she says,

“Driscoll...has resurrected a particular strain of fire and brimstone, one that most Americans assume died out with the Puritans: Calvinism, a theology that makes Pat Robertson seem warm and fuzzy.”²⁵

I would still prefer my Calvinism the way I like my Starbucks coffee—undiluted by cream, unaltered by sweeteners—but I do admit something is going on. I think D.A. Carson hit the nail on the head when he reviewed Hanson’s book:

“A number of strategic ministries have been quietly upholding the doctrines of grace, planting churches, seeing people converted, teaching the whole counsel of God. It is time for quiet gratitude to God and earnest intercessory prayer that what has begun well will flourish beyond all human expectation.”²⁶

So Calvinism as North American Christianity is expanding. And with a host of our friends: the Mackenzie’s and *Christian Focus*²⁷ and *Banner of Truth*²⁸, along with *Proclamation Trust*²⁹, The

²² Collin Hanson, "Young, Restless, Reformed," in *Christianity Today* (2006).

²³ Collin Hanson, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Crossway Books, 2008).

²⁴ See <http://www.challies.com/archives/book-reviews/book-review-young-restless-reformed.php>.

²⁵ Molly Worthen, "Who Would Jesus Smack Down," in *New York Times* (New York City: New York Times, January 6, 2009). See the online article at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html?_r=1.

²⁶ In his review of *Young, Restless, Reformed* at <http://www.amazon.com/Young-Restless-Reformed-Journalists-Calvinists/dp/1581349408>.

²⁷ See <http://www.christianfocus.com/pages/home/-/->.

²⁸ See <http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/home.php>.

²⁹ See <http://www.proctrust.org.uk/index.htm>.

Evangelical Movement of Wales³⁰, and old masters like John Stott, J.I. Packer, Eryl Davies, and the flood of new doctoral students at New College, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, St. Andrews, The University of Wales at Lampeter, Cambridge, Oxford, Welsh Evangelical School of Theology³¹, Highlands Theological College³² and other British schools, we know that the phenomenon is not limited to North America. Indeed, English speaking Christianity is seeing a great resurgence of Calvinism—it may not look like what we are used to, it may not pass muster with most of our faculty at RTS, or at Covenant or Westminster—but it is surely under the larger umbrella of Calvinistic movements. And who is to say that what starts out in one way may not end up looking another way? At least you would grant me that the germ of John Calvin’s theology is there: the doctrinal, cultural and even pietistic shades of this great man’s *catholic* Christianity.

But is the “future Calvin” heartier than only these hopeful movements in an otherwise bland and even broken evangelical Western Christianity? Calvinism, as it did when the magisterial Reformer was on the world stage, is spreading to other places in our own generation; and one of those places is the new Canterbury. We know that John Calvin and Martin Bucer and John Knox all had a significant part to play in the formation of *The Book of Common Prayer*. And we know that the Church of England’s Thirty Nine Articles of Religion are part of the doctrinal and confessional bedrock for our own Westminster Standards. Today, in the midst of the collapse of the Episcopal Church in the USA, a phoenix is rising. Splintered now into groups like CANA³³ and AMIA³⁴, Anglican Archbishops like Henry Luke Orombi of Uganda and Peter Akinola of Nigeria and Gregory Venebles of the Anglican Southern Cone of America are all faithful Thirty Nine Article of Religion leaders and are emerging as confessional leaders in this nation and in the West. They all view America as ground for evangelism and their movements are growing. And this is the new Canterbury in our midst. The old Canterbury still exists, but is more the bastion for Western, secularized, Enlightenment-ridden religion. The new Canterbury has a robust devotional life; an early church-like fire that is causing the Gospel to spread through church planting and through revitalization work in old Western nations like ours, as well as in older Colonial forms that need reviving. This is the new Canterbury. And as Calvinism impacted the old Canterbury, so it is providing the theological engine for this tremendous movement in our generation. In our own seminary, we are meeting even now to form an Institute for Anglican Studies to help meet the growing need to provide theological education and vocational preparation for this movement.

As we consider what God is doing in America through the Calvinistic Anglicans, we must also look to England. For not only is the New Canterbury coming, but also the “ancient-future” York is already here! In England, we can behold the current Archbishop, John Sentamu, of Uganda, holding up the historic Prayer Book faith of J.C. Ryle. Indeed, in Sentamu’s inaugural sermon, the Anglican Archbishop pointed to the writings of Michael Ramsey of Canterbury from 1960:

³⁰ See <http://www.emw.org.uk/en/>.

³¹ See <http://www.west.org.uk/>.

³² See <http://www.htc.uhi.ac.uk/>.

³³ The “Convocation of Anglicans in North America.” See their website at http://www.canaconvocation.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=32. CANA is a missionary district sponsored by the largest province of the Anglican Communion, the Church of Nigeria.

³⁴ The “Anglican Mission in the Americas.” See their website at <http://www.theamia.org/>. The Province of the Anglican Church of Rwanda provides oversight for AMIA.

“He was speaking of the stupendous missionary century that saw the wonderful spread of Christian faith in Africa and Asia by missionaries from these islands, and compared it to the spiritual decay in England. He longed for the day in England when the Church would learn the faith afresh from Christians of Africa and Asia. He ended his address by saying, ‘I should love to think of a black Archbishop of York, holding a mission here, and telling a future generation of the scandal and the glory of the Church.’ Well, here I am.”³⁵

Powerful. And unstoppable.

We can expect more of this Anglican Calvinistic health in the world in days to come. Who would have thought that an increasing number of Latimer’s and Ridley’s and Ryle’s sons would be leading the way, on fire with the doctrines of grace, in the 21st century? But who would have thought that the continuing Episcopal Church in America and the Church of England in that “green and pagan” land would be led by Africans and Asians and South Americans to revive a truly Calvinistic Prayer Book movement? This is a work of God in our midst. And it is wondrous in our eyes.

But we can also expect a growing confessional and practically Calvinistic faith in—yes, thankfully—Presbyterianism. But again, we need to thank Korean, Chinese, Indonesian, and African Presbyterians. And we are reminded through the encouraging statistics that the most hopeful thing for conservative Christians in America and Europe is the very thing that concerns so many of them: *immigration*. For many of the immigrants that are coming to the West are overwhelmingly pro-life, pro-sanctity of marriage, and open to declaring homosexuality a sin in the sight of God, and resistant to sexually permissive popular culture. Philip Jenkins in his volume *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*³⁶ documents the fact that the growing movements of Christianity are all thoroughly committed to the Bible, and that number includes many Calvinistic movements. And we could add, many of those conservative Christians immigrants are Calvinistic. For instance, journalist Michael Mewshaw has written of the phenomenon of how European Calvinism is resurging through these Presbyterian immigrants in Rome:

“[I]n recent years the music from St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church has become more melodious, not to mention more professional. This parish of Scotsmen has welcomed a contingent of Korean evangelicals, many of whom are in Rome to study music composition and opera.”³⁷

This is not uncommon. In the late 19th Century, that great era of missions, the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales (the Presbyterian Church of Wales founded by Whitefield) evangelized the land of Mizoram in the northeast of India. Today those Indian Presbyterians have sent their missionaries to Wales to re evangelize those who gave them the Gospel.³⁸ Cameroonian Presbyterians in the 20th Century, grandchildren of those converted by American missionaries are coming to our shores with a sense of obligation to bring us back in the fold.

³⁵ Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁷ Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

Madagascar and Congolese Reformed Christians are going to France and infusing their faith into the land of the Huguenots who went to them two centuries ago. And all of this points to the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what we believe Calvinism is, though it may appear dead in a tomb today, is and will resurrect again in our nation and in the West. And by God's grace, we would believe that it can thrive even if that fruitful vine is planted in a nation tilting towards Gomorrah. As Mark Noll has written in his book *The New Shape of World Christianity*,

“This past Sunday more Anglicans attended church in each of Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda than did Anglicans in Britain and Canada and Episcopalians in the United States combined—and the number of Anglicans in church in Nigeria was several times the number in those other African countries. □ This past Sunday more Presbyterians were at church in Ghana than in Scotland, and more were in congregations of the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa than in the United States. □ This past week in Great Britain, at least fifteen thousand Christian foreign missionaries were hard at work evangelizing the locals. Most of these missionaries are from Africa and Asia.”³⁹

In other words there is great hope because of the seeds that we planted. The wind of the Spirit is blowing them back to us to re seed our barren lands. For some who view this as Pollyanna-type thinking, I would have to counter by repeating the words of Herman J. Selderhuis when he wrote,

“Faith and joy cannot be separated. As Calvin remarks, this joy is rooted in the experience of God's fatherly love. Furthermore, true joy arises from the assurance of God's shelter... Therefore, the faithful rejoice because there is nothing more beautiful than to know that God is by one's side. They can derive this great joy... from the assurance that God will provide for salvation.”⁴⁰

Again, he writes,

“Calvin's view of the present and the future is characterized by the theme that, although the life of the faithful is currently shrouded in darkness, the coming of the Lord will be for believers like the break of morning in which the elect and the outcast will be awakened.”⁴¹

Calvinism is optimistic about the future of the faith and the spread of the kingdom, even though obstacles remain. So Calvin wrote:

“Though we are not immune to sorrow, it is nonetheless necessary that a gladness of faith must rise above it making us to sing of the joy to come.”⁴²

And if we say that religion is too corrupt, morals too low, and things are simply too bad to imagine that the Gospel and in particular that Reformed expressions of it could spring forth again from the burnt stumps of Edwards and Whitefield in this nation, Calvin reminds us:

³⁹ Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009).

⁴⁰ H. J. Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² John Calvin, “Psalms 13:6” quoted in Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms*, 257 (see footnote 85).

“We are not called to inquire why he wills events which contradict our sense of what his administration should be, but if we would not unsettle the very foundations of religion, we must hold by this as a firm principle, that nothing happens without the divine will and decree. His will may be mysterious, but it is to be regarded with reverence, as the fountain of all justice and rectitude, unquestionably entitled as it is to our supreme consideration.”⁴³

Calvin’s theology of the future, of the future of his own faith, and thus our faith, his “eschatologically-oriented joy”⁴⁴ as Selderhuis puts it, cannot be limited by circumstance. His theology is as clear and calm as the Lake near his home, as he commented upon Psalm 51:9,

“Even though, for as long as they make their pilgrimage through this world, the faithful constantly struggle with misery and are plagued by all sorts of worries, hazards and burdens, it is sufficient for the easing of their sorrows merely to hear of joy; for the joy of the Spirit cannot be separated from faith.”⁴⁵

If I could be pastor for just a moment to those who despair under the present conditions of oppression to true faith, to the increase of ungodliness in the media, of the outright hostility to true Christian faith in the universities and now, it seems, in many parts of our national life, I would say that Calvin helps us as his writings call us to an understanding that the spiritual increase of the kingdom of Jesus Christ cannot be stopped by these things. Do not despair! Do not faint at these signs! Look up! For our redemption draws near!

And do not think that a hostile culture can stop a revival of God in this land founded by our Pilgrim forefathers anymore than a hostile Communist government in China can stop the Gospel from overtaking that land in our generation! A theology of hope, not in man, not in the PCA, not in our abilities, but in the Triune God who is bent on redemption of this fallen race and this fallen land, lifts us up and over the very winds that seek to destroy us. And if God wills, we shall fly like an eagle over the winds of change that seek to undo Calvinism. This is our future by God’s grace and mercy, should we repent and call upon Him. He will answer. And as Martyn Lloyd Jones said in some place, if he doesn’t do it in our lifetime, then our lifetime of prayer will have been used by God to lay a foundation for revival in a generation we will never see until heaven!

Perhaps it will be, indeed, through a massive revival that will sweep our land as a result of great repentance and prayer by the people of God. Perhaps it will grow slower and overtake us almost imperceptibly, as Calvin even suggests. But the seed here in this land will not be wasted. Christ will be victorious. The once and future Calvin in America and the West is an undeniable, unstoppable reality. The knowledge of God cannot cover the earth without covering North America and, yes, Europe. It is not over. It is only beginning. For Calvin taught, as he did in Psalm 72:2⁴⁶ that “the reign of Christ is spiritual, and this reign sees to it that everything perfectly returns again to its original order.”⁴⁷

⁴³ John Calvin, "Commentary on the Book of Psalms," ed. Arthur Golding (Accordance Bible Software, From the original 1571 English edition)."

⁴⁴ Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice! Psalms 72:2

⁴⁷ Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms*.

So we do not despair. As William F. Buckley, Jr. remarked about the future of the West, “the wells of regeneration are infinitely deep.”⁴⁸ Or as Philip Jenkins has written,

“Death and resurrection are not just fundamental doctrines of Christianity; they represent a historical model of the religion’s structure and development.”⁴⁹

And I say again, I am not a futurist. I am not a glass-half-full man. I am a believer. I am a Calvinist. As long as there is a possibility of renewal in the West, there is a future for a robust Calvinism.

What We Can Expect of Calvinism in the Future

Calvinism will be the Final Act of God in World Evangelization and World History. For at length, we must believe that if Calvinism is a radical reorientation of the empires of the mind towards the Biblical *katholikos*—the very revelation of the mind of the Almighty which must of necessity then transform all others minds—then we must expect that the ancient churches of Iraq and Iran will be rebuilt. We must anticipate that the labors of St. Mark in Egypt will bring forth its unstoppable fruit. We must expect that Calvinism will take root in the Middle East.

And we must also now imagine the unimaginable, that which even Pope Benedict XVI prays for in his Tridentate Liturgy on Fridays (now authorized again in 2007 by Benedict)⁵⁰ that the Jews themselves will be converted⁵¹. And we would add that this conversion is not to a Papal authority but to a truly catholic faith which thinks thoughts after God in true Calvinistic understanding.

The very forward movement of Calvinism as the Gospel itself leads us to conceive a thought with Murray and Kelly that if the Lord tarries He might be pleased to bring a great revival to the Jews. As Chinese Christians, many of them Calvinists and many more becoming Calvinistic, are beginning to cry, “On to Jerusalem!” we are bound to say, this too is a glorious future.

How beautiful that as the Anglicans and Presbyterians and Baptists and Independents, and perhaps some other surprising groups as has been and will no doubt always be the case with Calvinism, begin their glorious spiritual march towards Jerusalem, that the Jews themselves come out to greet the evangelists with open arms and those from whom the covenants came embrace their spiritual descendants and most importantly fall before the living and reigning Christ and beginning to join in the hymns of the faith.

Many other Calvinists have had such dreams. And not just John Murray and Douglas Kelly!

Conclusion

Timothy Larsen wrote an article in the May 29, 2009 edition of the Wall Street Journal entitled, “Look Who’s a Believer Now.”⁵² In this fascinating article in the Houses of Worship column, Larsen wrote about the confession of faith of the long time Christian antagonist, A.N. Wilson. It seems difficult for many to fathom that a man so committed to antagonizing Christ, Christianity and Christians, who wrote books like “God’s Funeral” (1999), could now openly declare that he

⁴⁸ As quoted in George H. Nash, "How Firm a Foundation? The Prospects for American Conservatism," *The Intercollegiate Review* Spring (2009).

⁴⁹ Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*.

⁵⁰ Raymond Arroyo, "The Language of Tradition," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 13 2007.

⁵¹ See "Jews Outraged at Vatican Prayer," in *Newser.com* (2009), Robert Kaplan, "Conversing with the Pope," in *The American Spectator* (2009).

⁵² Timothy Larsen, "Look Who's a Believer Now," *The Wall Street Journal*, Friday, May 29, 2009.

believes “that Christ had risen indeed.”⁵³ Perhaps even we, who have read Wilson, find his recantation of his earlier recantation, in the 1980s when he renounced his Catholic faith, too much to believe. But then again we have Saul of Tarsus always reminding us that he is the pattern of others who will be like him and believe. So we are delighted to hear of Mr. Wilson’s new faith. Mr. Larsen ended his article by saying,

“Next time you hear someone fume that God is the most contemptible being who never existed, keep in mind that you just might be watching the first act of a divine romantic comedy.”

To which I respond, “Well done, Mr. Larsen.”

Yet, I say, and Calvin would say, and the Bible would say, the next time you hear someone say that *Calvinism* is the most contemptible system of doctrine ever known to Christianity, keep in mind what happened to most of you in this room: and you may just be watching the next act in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in that person’s life. For it has been my pastoral observation that many Pelagians and semi-Pelagians become Calvinists, but few Calvinists ever go back the other way. I would suggest you ratchet this idea up one more gear the next time you hear someone say that a powerful revival of Calvinism could never happen in the West. If their words are not a hand-wringing in doubt that leads to an unholy contentment, but rather a lamentation in faith that leads to concerts of prayer, then you may just be seeing the first act in a mighty act of Almighty God that would bring revival that would sweep through America and Britain and Holland and France and Italy and Spain and Eastern Europe and bring about such a powerful reformation and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ that its result would be nothing short of a new Calvinism among us.

And if you hear someone say that the world has gone mad, and the clash of civilizations can leave us no future but a horrible one, or that radical Islam is such a power and their people so numerous that no great work of God could happen in our generation, then you may just be watching the *last* act of the divine drama of the cosmos, which would surely be the final great drama of Calvinism, of Biblical Christianity, when the *catholic* faith of John Calvin would sweep across the last unreached frontiers of the earth. Listen then for the cry of East Asian Calvinists crying, “On to Jerusalem!” Listen to the African Calvinists crying, “All for Jesus!” Listen to the teaching of the Confession of Faith in Arabic and in Hebrew, as well as in German and in Swahili. Listen, for then, in that time, a time not dreamt of by a futurist, or by a hopeful idealist, but a time which Isaiah says is on its way, which Calvin says is on its way, which our Confessions tell us is on its way, which our Lord and Savior said cannot be stopped—in that time—and who knows if it is not far away—the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ taught in all of its fullness and completeness, the religion of Calvin will be dispersed the world over.

I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession (Psalms 2:7, 8).

To this glorious decree Calvin reminds the ages, especially those living in days like ours:

“But although the ingratitude of men hinders the kingdom of Christ from prospering it does not render this prediction of none effect, inasmuch as Christ

⁵³ Ibid.

collects the dispersed remnants of his people from all quarters, and in the midst of this wretched desolation, keeps them joined together by the sacred bond of faiths so that not one corner only, but the whole world is subjected to his authority. Besides, however insolently the ungodly may act, and however they may reject his sovereignty, they cannot, by their rebellion, destroy his authority and power.”⁵⁴

The ages have agreed. And so at the Four Hundredth anniversary of John Calvin’s birth, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, meeting in session at Birmingham, Alabama, in May of 1907, received these words from the Executive Commission of the Alliance of Reformed Churches:

“In the providence of God [John Calvin] was one of the most potent forces of his day for human progress, and his influence continues in the present, and will abide in the future, a great power for the welfare of mankind.”⁵⁵

We, meeting here, must surely agree. This is the “once and future Calvin” for this is the Gospel of the once and forever King of King and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ; an “empire of the mind” that has become the inescapable empire of the cosmos. Oh that in our day, we may recommit ourselves to this empire in our own minds and thus join in this glorious future.

To this word I do not say, “Thus ends my paper,” but rather, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

⁵⁴ Jean Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David, by John Calvin. Based on the Translation of Arthur Golding. With the Text.* (London, Thomas Tegg, 1840.: Accordance 8.0, 1840).

⁵⁵ Warfield, ed., *Calvin Memorial Addresses.*

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