

Calvinism: A Cause for Rejoicing, A Cause for Concern

“Building Bridges: Southern Baptists and Calvinism”

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“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever.”

Psalm 133 (NASB)

How Texans Build Biblical Bridges

Alongside our fierce defense of local church independence, Southern Baptists west of the Mississippi River are interested in Christian unity. For instance, from the beginning of Baptist life in Texas, we have sought unity. Indeed, the first association of Texas Baptist churches, which began in 1840, was self-consciously entitled, “The Union Baptist Association.” And earlier this month, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) resolved to pursue unity, but in direct contradiction to much ecumenism, the convention declared that unity is to be pursued only upon the basis of “sound doctrine.”¹ Recently, it was my privilege to review the minutes of that first association and ponder the beginnings of the Baptist witness in our great republican state, as well as the foundational beliefs of B.H. Carroll and the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Union Baptists first attempted to gather in June 1840 in Independence, Texas, but two of the four ministers, Abner Smith and Ariel Dancer, were not only soteriologically Calvinist but pragmatically anti-missionary. Indeed, the first Baptist churches in Texas were personally led and long inspired by Daniel Parker.² Parker was fanatically active in Baptist life, spreading his “two seeds” doctrine as far and wide as possible. He proclaimed and wrote that it was foolish to present the Word to the non-elect and that the elect would be won without missionaries.³

When the missionary Baptists realized they could simply never work with anti-missionary Calvinists and remain true to the Great Commission, no matter how hard they might try, they formed the Union association on their own. Thus, the remaining two ministers from that fateful June 1840 meeting gathered a group of missionary Baptists in October of the same year in Travis, Texas. T.W. Cox was elected the moderator, but R.E.B. Baylor, ordained Baptist preacher, state judge and founder of Baylor University, was the theological giant in the Union Baptist Association. The first part of Baylor’s

¹ Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, “The Importance of Sound Doctrine for True Unity,” adopted 13 November 2007; Internet, <http://www.sbtexas.com/missions/07/resolutions.htm>, downloaded 22 November 2007.

² These Calvinistic churches later formed “do nothing” associations, considering it a point of pride to do exactly that with regard to organizing Christian efforts for evangelism and mission: nothing. Harry Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Dallas: Baptistway Press, 1998), 22-23.

³ Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists*, 2nd ed. (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1995), 26-27.

personal motto, *Pro Ecclesia-Pro Texana*,⁴ is clearly manifested in the “Bill of Inalienable Rights” adopted by the association: “Each Church is forever free and independent, of any and every ecclesiastical power formed by men on earth, each being the free house-hold of Christ. Therefore every ordination and power granted by the Churches emanating as they do directly from the Church, those who are thus ordained or upon whom such powers are conferred, must be to her forever obedient.”⁵

As you can see, Texas Baptists, who brought their pristine Baptist theology with them from many states both north and east, were committed churchmen before Landmarkers J.R. Graves and J.M. Pendleton ever came to their ecclesiastical doctrines, and I pray we will be committed churchmen long after Calvinists John Piper and Timothy George finish testing the ecumenical slope.⁶ Leaving the Hyper-Calvinists to kill their witness ever so slowly, the missionary Christians organized in the Union Baptist Association in the Texas of yesterday pursued a healthier path of biblical orthodoxy and missionary ecclesiology. Leaving the ecumenists to pursue their agenda, the missionary Baptists of today are pursuing the “unifying and healthy” path of biblical theology, soteriology and ecclesiology, for we believe “true biblical unity is based upon certain unalterable doctrinal confessions as revealed in God’s inerrant Scripture.”⁷ If I can translate the Texas resolution into postmodern missional language, it might sound like this: traditional missionary Baptists will build bridges with others all day long, but only on the basis of scriptural doctrine, only by the means of scriptural proclamation and only for the purposes commanded by our Triune God in Scripture, for Scripture alone reveals what is truly relevant.

Defining Calvinisms

Before proceeding, it may be helpful to develop a taxonomy for understanding Calvinism in the Southern Baptist context. What many have noted in the recent debates over Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is a lack of clarity over what both proponents and opponents mean by the term, “Calvinism.” Please allow me to set forward a threefold paradigm for referring to Calvinism in the SBC. Delineating the differences between Classical Calvinism, Baptist Calvinism, and Hyper-Calvinism may help us progress toward unity around what Southern Baptists consider essential doctrines.⁸ Liberal Calvinism, Neo-orthodox Calvinism and Post-modern Calvinism are subjects worthy of consideration in their own right, but tangential to the current context.

⁴ Guy B. Harrison, Jr., “Baylor, Robert Emmett Bledsoe,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Broadman, 1958-1982), 1:150.

⁵ *Minutes of the First Session of the Union Baptist Association* (Houston: Telegraph Press, 1840), 9-10.

⁶ E.g., John Piper *et al*, “Baptism and Church Membership at Bethlehem Baptist Church” (9 August 2005); Internet, http://www.desiringgod.org/media/pdf/baptism_and_membership.pdf, downloaded 26 November 2007; Timothy George *et al*, “That They May Have Life: A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” *First Things* (October 2006): 18-26.

⁷ “The Importance of Sound Doctrine for True Unity.”

⁸ Not considered here is the debate over the relationship between Calvin and Calvinism. Cf. R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982); Kevin Dixon Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin*, *Studies in Biblical Literature* 48 (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

1. Classical Calvinism

Classical Calvinism is that Calvinism which began with the work of leading Magisterial Reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and most notably, John Calvin. The philosophical basis of Classical Calvinism was subsequently propounded in the work of Scholastic theologians, such as Theodore Beza, William Perkins, and the Heidelberg Theologians. There were numerous attempts to codify competing visions of the Calvinist system in canons and confessions produced by various groups and synods, such as the two Helvetic confessions,⁹ the Belgic Confession,¹⁰ the Remonstrance,¹¹ the Synod of Dort,¹² and the Westminster Assembly.¹³ After the Synod of Dort, Reformed theologians split into two irreconcilable camps: Arminians, among whom the leading theologians are Jacobus Arminius and John Wesley, and Calvinists, who bind themselves to the historical doctrines codified at Dort and Westminster.¹⁴

The five heads of the Synod of Dort provide Classical Calvinists with their acronym of TULIP (originally, ULTIP): Unconditional Predestination, Limited or Particular Atonement, Total Human Corruption, Irresistible Grace, and Final Preservation. Fisher Humphreys is correct when he notes, “anyone who accepts unconditional predestination should have no trouble accepting the other four ideas [that] follow naturally from unconditional predestination.”¹⁵ By unconditional predestination, Classical Calvinism understands not only positive election, which Scripture definitely affirms, but also negative reprobation, which is their mere logical supposition.¹⁶ After the line is crossed into philosophical theology with speculation regarding the divine decrees, there is little holding the Christian theologian back from embracing the soteriological doctrines of Classical Calvinism in their entirety.

Moreover, the philosophico-theological system of Classical Calvinism may not be falsely reduced to soteriological matters alone. As a premier Classical Calvinist scholar, Richard Muller, remarks, “it would be a major error—both historically and doctrinally—if the five points of Calvinism were understood either as the sole or even as the absolutely

⁹ *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 97-111, 220-301.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 185-219.

¹¹ *Articuli Arminiani sive Remonstratia* (1610), in *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols., ed. Philip Schaff (1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 3: 545-49.

¹² *Canones Synodi Dordrechtanae* (1618-1619), in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 550-80 (ET, 581-97).

¹³ *Confessio Fidei Westmonasteriensis* (1647), in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 600-73.

¹⁴ For an invaluable theological introduction, consider Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, transl. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). For an historical perspective of Westminster, the most important English Calvinist assembly, consider Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985); and, Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c.1590-1640* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ Fisher Humphreys, “Traditional Baptists and Calvinism,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 39.2 (2004): 57.

¹⁶ “God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive unto salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.21.7, ed. John T. McNeill, transl. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., The Library of Christian Classics 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2: 921.

primary basis for identifying someone as holding the Calvinistic or Reformed faith.”¹⁷ The Synod of Dort is merely a negative reaction to a Reformed aberration. For a complete understanding of Classical Calvinism, one must turn to the confessions of Zurich, Bern, Basel, Geneva, Lausanne, Heidelberg, and Westminster, among others. Muller correctly notes that what we are referring to here as Classical Calvinism “makes very little sense” unless one also adopts “the baptism of infants,” “the identification of sacraments as means of grace, the so-called amillennial view of the end of the world,” among other doctrines.¹⁸ Conversely, Classical Calvinism denies concurrent emphases upon “adult baptism, being ‘born again,’ and ‘accepting Christ,’” and is uncomfortable with evangelical language advocating a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”¹⁹

In other words, from a traditional Baptist perspective, Classical Calvinism is, to say the least, unacceptable, and perhaps more correctly, utterly reprehensible. Although we could spend much time here deconstructing the unbiblical nature of Classical Calvinism, consider one example: the murder of Michael Servetus by the Genevan Calvinists. While admittedly a heretic, Servetus was still a precious human being created in the divine image, and for Calvin to advocate his murder is inexcusable. As Thomas Grantham, a General Baptist who was writing systematic theology before John Gill began his inventive career, wisely asked: “O *Calvin*, why didst thou (like *Cain*) thy pious Brother slay, Because he could not walk with thee, in thy self-chosen Way?”²⁰ It should be remembered that Calvin only weakly apologized regarding the condemned Baptist, “I had never entertained any personal rancor against him.”²¹ It should also be remembered that Servetus was burnt at the stake by the Reformed, not only for his anti-Trinitarianism, for which he was wrong, but also for his anti-paedobaptism, for which he was right.²²

2. Baptist Calvinism²³

To understand Baptist Calvinism, it may be helpful to distinguish three major theories of Baptist origins: Historical Succession, Protestant Branch, and New Testament Pattern. The Historical Succession theory seeks to trace in history a succession of baptizing churches stretching back through history to the first church of Jerusalem.²⁴ The Protestant Branch theory finds the origin of modern Baptist churches in either the continental Reformation with the Anabaptists or the English Reformation with the Separatists.²⁵ The New Testament Pattern theory is less concerned with a traceable

¹⁷ Richard A. Muller, “How Many Points?” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 426.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 430-31.

²⁰ Thomas Grantham, *A Dialogue Between the Baptist and the Presbyterian* (London, 1691; reprint, Fort Worth: Center for Theological Research, forthcoming 2007), 21-22.

²¹ Roland H. Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511-1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 209.

²² *Ibid.*, 207-8.

²³ “Reformed Baptists” is not used, as that term has been applied to particular Baptist churches unaffiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

²⁴ J.M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood* (Lexington: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931). J.M. Carroll was the brother of the founder of Southwestern Seminary and an original trustee.

²⁵ B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), ch. 6; James R. Coggins, *John Smyth’s Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 32 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991).

historical succession or with a Protestant origin than with the marked tendency that Christians who take New Testament theology seriously often become Baptist.²⁶

Whichever of the above theories one holds, it should be noted that the Particular Baptists are without doubt two to three decades behind the General Baptists in their development. The first English Baptists, which all historians agree are the forefathers of today's Baptists, were not Calvinists strictly speaking, although they developed *out* of the Calvinist context. The first English Baptists, under the leadership of Thomas Helwys, explicitly rejected predestinarian Calvinism as unbiblical.²⁷ Moreover, Stephen Wright recently argued that the Particular Baptists did not at first develop a separate denomination, but had long intimate relations with the General Baptists.²⁸ The split between General and Particular Baptists came only with the hardening of predestinarian theology amidst the political posturing of the Particular Baptists in adopting the Second London Confession. Yet even then, it must be noted that these early Calvinistic Baptists were careful to distinguish themselves over against both Calvinistic Presbyterians and Calvinistic Independents or Congregationalists by presenting a distinct ecclesiology, even as they adopted the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration as models for their own confession.²⁹

Whether one prefers Zurich in 1525, or Amsterdam in 1609, or London in 1633 or 1638 as the favored origin of modern Baptists, the point is that in every historical instance, the Baptists explicitly rejected, or at the least significantly modified the theological method and numerous dogmatic conclusions of the Reformed. Baptists, in all three instances, moved away from or developed out of the Calvinist context. They both implicitly retained certain beliefs and explicitly rejected other beliefs of the Classical Calvinists. The problem is that not all modern Baptists agree on exactly how much should be retained and how much rejected. The relevant theological lessons we can learn today from the origins of Baptist Calvinists for our current subject are threefold: first, Baptists came to their beliefs in the Reformed context; second, Baptists came to their beliefs and were compelled to separate from the Reformed churches; and third, Baptists have always had both an appreciation for and healthy distrust of Calvinism.

This appreciation and distrust is not due so much to historical factors, but to the fact that Reformed theology intentionally seeks to reflect upon biblical truth. Although it does so with great theological creativity, it must be recognized that Calvinism takes the biblical text seriously. Baptists, too, take the biblical text seriously, but moreso. This confluence between Baptist and Calvinist explains why Baptist Calvinism is a long-standing phenomenon. It also explains why Baptist confessions sometimes appear to have a Calvinistic tone to them, even as they reject Classical Calvinism's extra-biblical inventions. For instance, the Union Baptist Association explicitly affirmed both divine sovereignty and human freedom in the third of its eleven articles of faith, thus setting

²⁶ Robert A. Baker, *The Baptist March in History* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1958), 3.

²⁷ Thomas Helwys, *A Short and Plaine prooffe by the Word, and workes off God, that Gods decree is not the cause off anye Mans sinne or Condemnation. And That all Men are redeemed by Christ. As also That no Infants are Condemned* (London, 1611).

²⁸ Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006).

²⁹ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Revised ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 235-40.

itself to address the premier Augustinian-Calvinist question, though not in Calvinistic terms.³⁰

Thus, even as Texas Baptists at their foundation reacted against anti-missionism, Cambellism, and Calvinism, they simultaneously responded to the Calvinist question.³¹ Anecdotally, it should be noted that Texas Baptists have always alternated between both defense of their Baptist Calvinist brethren in Louisville and warnings to those same brethren. On the one hand, Texas Baptists distanced themselves from George M. Fortune and J.M. Fort, the latter opining that “the Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville was the greatest curse upon the denomination and Christianity ever tolerated.”³² On the other hand, Texas Baptists fully supported B.H. Carroll as he led the attack against W.H. Whitsitt, the President of Southern Seminary, because they worried Southern was undermining Baptist ecclesiology through historical revisionism.³³

It is commonly known that the New Hampshire Confession of 1833 is the basis of the Baptist Faith and Message of 1925, subsequently revised in 1963 and 2000. What is sometimes forgotten is that the New Hampshire Confession actually represents a turning away from the Second London Confession.³⁴ Dortian Calvinism, as James Leo Garrett, Jr. terms that synod’s soteriological doctrines,³⁵ is well represented in the London Baptists’ second confession. Unconditional predestination is affirmed, both from the standpoint of positive election (10.1-3) and, arguably, from negative reprobation (10.4). The Second London Confession also affirms limited atonement (11.3-4), total corruption (6.2), irresistible grace (9.4, 10.2), and final preservation (17.1-2).³⁶

But the New Hampshire Confession was the culmination of a significant undermining of the Calvinism of the Regular Baptists, who championed the Second London Confession at Philadelphia and Charleston. On the one hand, the work of Benjamin Randall in the New Hampshire area modified the Calvinistic tenor of the surrounding churches, preparing for the development of the New Hampshire Confession.³⁷ On the other hand, the Separate Baptists, an especially fruitful branch of the family arising during the Great Awakening, were either adamantly opposed to confessions of any kind, or if willing to accept the Philadelphia Confession, were careful to deny it specific authority.³⁸ In 1787, when the Separate and Regular Baptists, who

³⁰ *Minutes of the First Session of the Union Baptist Association*, 8.

³¹ McBeth, *Texas Baptists*, 33-35.

³² *Ibid.*, 115.

³³ Alan J. Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Life and Work of Benajah Harvey Carroll* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1994), 84-94.

³⁴ Timothy George strongly asserts that the New Hampshire Confession “follows the Reformed orientation of the Philadelphia Confession,” but only mildly admits, “its treatment of the doctrines of grace is briefer, less specific, and more susceptible to theological ambiguity.” George, “Introduction,” in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms: John A. Broadus*, ed. Timothy George and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 12.

³⁵ James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptists and Calvinism: An Informational Examination* (Birmingham: The Alabama Baptist, 2007).

³⁶ *Confession of Faith Put forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations Of Christians* (London, 1677), in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 241-95.

³⁷ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 360-61.

³⁸ In 1792, the South Association of Separate Baptists in Kentucky answered some queries: “1. What was the Separate Baptists first constituted upon, in Kentucky? *Ans.* The Bible. . . 3. Did those terms [of union with the Regular Baptists] oblige us to receive any part of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith? *Ans.* No.” John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, 2.3.1; Internet,

joined under the name of United Baptists in several states, formed their union in Virginia, they agreed the Philadelphia Confession should have no “tyrannical power.” They were willing to affirm the essentials of orthodox soteriology, but the essentials were severely limited to the statement “that the doctrine of salvation by Christ, and free and unmerited grace alone, ought to be believed.”³⁹

It should cause little wonder then that, soon after, when the New Hampshire Confession was published in the manuals of Brown, Pendleton and Hiscox, it quickly supplanted the strict Calvinism of the Second London/Philadelphia/Charleston Confession as the favored symbol of most Baptist churches. The New Hampshire Confession’s long-standing local popularity has caused not a few of the new Calvinists in the SBC heartfelt concern. Indeed, one admitted that after discovering his church’s confession was “less than Calvinist,” he decided to use that standard for church membership, but dusted off a different standard, the Second London Confession, for the church’s leadership.⁴⁰

The New Hampshire Confession downplays most of the doctrines that the Synod of Dort and the Second London Confession emphasized. There is no hint whatsoever of unconditional predestination, for the questions of particularity and reprobation are never addressed. Rather, New Hampshire immediately affirms that election is “perfectly consistent with the free agency of man,” then proceeds to teach the benefits of a biblical doctrine of election: it effectively elevates divine wisdom, promotes humility among men, encourages Christian proclamation, and provides assurance (9). The debate between general and particular atonement is left unaddressed: Christ simply “made atonement for our sins by his death” (4). There is a doctrine of corruption, but the Augustinian doctrine of original sin is muted: all are “now sinners, not by constraint but choice” (3). As for irresistible grace, it is replaced with a strong statement regarding the freeness of salvation: “nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own voluntary refusal to submit to the Lord” (6). Ultimately, the only soteriological distinctive of the Synod of Dort to be clearly confessed in the New Hampshire Confession, and in its Southern Baptist descendants, is final preservation (11).⁴¹

3. Hyper-Calvinism⁴²

The full history of “High Calvinism,” if the particular historian appreciates the movement, or “Hyper-Calvinism,” if the historian does not, is better rehearsed elsewhere. However, from a traditional Southern Baptist perspective, this third type of Calvinism is as legitimate as Classical Calvinism. Having led several groups of faculty and students to tour the Northamptonshire Association churches that turned the British tide against the

http://www.pbministries.org/History/John%20T.%20Christian/vol2/history2_part3_01.htm, downloaded 20 November 2007.

³⁹ David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1813), 60-62; cited in H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 165-66. Cf. W. Wiley Richards, “Southern Baptist Identity: Moving Away from Calvinism,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 31.4 (1996): 28-29.

⁴⁰ Mark Dever, “Which Confession?” *Founders Journal* 61 (2005): 4-9.

⁴¹ *The New Hampshire Confession* (1833), in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 361-67.

⁴² Hyper-Calvinism is treated after Baptist Calvinism because it flourishes best in the Baptist context. Hyper-Calvinism is less likely to occur in a Classical Calvinist context due to the latter’s temporal sacramentalism and emphasis upon covenantal community. Muller, “How Many Points?,” 428-29.

Hyper-Calvinism of John Brine and John Skepp, I can personally attest that not only are Texas Baptists consistently offended by Hyper-Calvinism, but so are South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana and Missouri Baptists. The missionary theology of Andrew Fuller and the passionate evangelism of William Carey are inspiring, precisely because these men forsook the rigid Calvinism of their forefathers and launched the modern missions movement as a result of their departure from strict Reformed theology. Fuller's passionate advocacy of faith as a duty for all people consistently trumps the Hyper-Calvinistic argument that faith is only available to those possessing a warrant to believe.⁴³ To argue, like the Hyper-Calvinists, that sinners should not be freely offered the Gospel nor invited to respond with faith and repentance, is anathema to missionary Baptists.

For instance, Texas Union Baptists adopted articles of faith that have been interpreted as Arminian: "We believe that Christ died for sinners, and that the sacrifice which he has made, has so honored the divine law that a way of salvation is consistently opened up to every sinner to whom the Gospel is sent, and that nothing but their voluntary rejection of the Gospel prevents their salvation."⁴⁴ While the claim that such a statement is necessarily Arminian is doubtful, it is definitely not a Calvinist sentiment. The sixth article of the New Hampshire Confession is similarly non-Calvinist: "That the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the Gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by a cordial, and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own voluntary refusal to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, which refusal will subject him to an aggravated condemnation."⁴⁵

It should not surprise anyone then that although B.H. Carroll was not past referring to the Philadelphia Confession, it was the New Hampshire Confession that he preferred.⁴⁶ Indeed, the founding confession adopted by the Board of Trustees, and subscribed to by the Faculty of Southwestern Seminary was the New Hampshire Confession. The New Hampshire Confession, with one significant correction—the word "visible" was replaced by the word "particular" in the article on the church, removing even an implicit affirmation of the fictitious invisible church promoted by Classical Calvinism—was declared the "Permanent" articles of faith of the seminary.⁴⁷ When the faculty elected to speak out against the accusations of J. Frank Norris in 1921, they again affirmed their allegiance to the revised New Hampshire Confession. Moreover, they outlined "the fundamentals of Christianity," which could be identified as uniquely Calvinist only by a fertile imagination: "the inspiration of the Bible, the sovereignty of

⁴³ Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation: Or the Obligations of Men Fully to Credit, and Cordially to Approve, Whatever God Makes Known* (London, 1785).

⁴⁴ Robert A. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following: A History of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1908-1983* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 32; *Minutes of the First Session of the Union Baptist Association*, 8.

⁴⁵ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 363.

⁴⁶ Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 67, 73.

⁴⁷ *Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*, November 1908 (Fort Worth: Archives of the Roberts Library), 21-22; Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 142-43. Earlier Baptist Calvinists were also uncomfortable with the concept of an invisible church. The First London Confession does not use the term invisible in reference to the church, and the Second London Confession carefully qualifies the Westminster Confession's use of the term by adding, "(with respect to internal work of the Spirit, and truth of grace) may be called invisible." Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 165, 285.

God, the deity of Christ, the personality of the Spirit, the fallen condition of all mankind, Christ's death and resurrection as man's only hope and the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as the only power that can lift man out of his fallen condition."⁴⁸

The first occupant of the first chair of evangelism in any seminary and the second president of Southwestern Seminary, L.R. Scarborough, was a member of the committee led by E.Y. Mullins that presented the Baptist Faith and Message for adoption in 1925. Mullins was wise to look, not to the Abstract of Principles of Southern Seminary, a slim version of the Charleston Confession, for a consensus document for Southern Baptists. Perhaps detecting a theological bulwark against a resurgent Baptist Calvinism, Southwestern was so pleased with the new confession that it was the first Southern Baptist institution to adopt it. And in an extraordinary resolution, the SBC explicitly commended Southwestern for its action, requesting "all its institutions and Boards, and their missionary representatives, to give like assurance to the Convention and the Baptist Brotherhood in general, of a hearty and individual acceptance."⁴⁹ Following the Elliott controversy and the promulgation of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message, Southwestern again affirmed this non-Calvinist statement as its own.⁵⁰

In an excellent article survey of the changing views of Southern Baptists on the doctrine of predestination, Paul Basden has shown how Southern Baptist theologians transitioned away from Calvinism toward non-Calvinism, even outright Arminianism. In the nineteenth century, Southern Baptist writing theologians, as exemplified by Patrick Hues Mell, John Leadley Dagg, and James Petigru Boyce, borrowed heavily from Classical Calvinists in order to affirm either double predestination or preterition.⁵¹ In the early twentieth century, Southern Baptist writing theologians, all of them in or from Texas, moderated the Calvinism of earlier theologians. "While they still affirmed God's election of persons to salvation in Christ, they denied God's rejection of any to eternal damnation." And methodologically, "The revealed will of God in Christ replaced abstract speculation."⁵² Finally, after the mid-century, led by theologians affiliated with Southern Seminary and New Orleans Seminary, Southern Baptists even moved toward Arminian positions. Herschel Hobbs, the chairman of the 1963 revision committee, rejected speculation regarding the divine decrees and defined election as an eternal redemptive plan for those who are "in Christ."⁵³ Hobbs, however, held the line against Dale Moody's Arminianism by protecting the one clear Dortian affirmation in the Baptist Faith and Message, that of final preservation.⁵⁴

With such a history behind Southern Baptists, it should be clear that the SBC in general may be willing to tolerate Baptist Calvinism, but Classical Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism are singularly unwelcome. In spite of the efforts of Tom Nettles and Timothy George to promote Calvinism, Basden believes the non-Calvinist outlook will continue for at least three reasons: "(1) Southern Baptists are committed to foreign missions. ...

⁴⁸ Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 224-25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁵¹ Paul Basden, "Predestination," in *Has Our Theology Changed? Southern Baptist Thought Since 1845*, ed. Basden (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 41-50.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 50-59.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 59-68.

⁵⁴ Yarnell, "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 672-73.

They fear that belief in a God who predetermines the eternal fate of every person will eventually undermine missionary zeal. (2) In their own nation, cities, and hometowns, Southern Baptists have greatly emphasized evangelism and church growth. This emphasis, pragmatic though it may be, generally stands on the theological conviction that ‘whosoever will may come.’ ... (3) A dispensational view of eschatology, which enjoys popularity across the Southern Baptist Convention, is generally not compatible with Calvinistic theology.”⁵⁵ Yet other reasons could be listed as to why Calvinism will find it difficult to triumph, as will become apparent in our evaluative comments.

Causes for Rejoicing and Concern

With this threefold taxonomy in place and a long-standing non-Calvinist Baptist tradition, particularly in Texas, historically established, let us tremble toward a moral evaluation of Calvinism. There are five causes for rejoicing about Baptist Calvinism and five causes for concern, especially when Baptist Calvinists exhibit tendencies toward Classical Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism. These causes rotate around essential Baptist beliefs regarding Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Gospel, the Church, and the Christian Life.

1. Jesus Christ

Calvinism is a cause for rejoicing because it takes the Christological definitions of the early church seriously. One cannot pick up a book by a Calvinist such as John Gill and not be impressed with the basic Christian orthodoxy therein expounded.⁵⁶ The Christological orthodoxy of all three Calvinisms is generally superb. With Calvin, all Baptists can heartily agree that the Christology promoted at the Council of Chalcedon is a “pure and genuine exposition of Scripture.” With Calvin, we also agree that the focus of our Christology should be upon the benefits of Christ, an experiential dimension sadly not always reflected in later Calvinism.⁵⁷

If there is one thing that characterizes Baptist belief at the folk level, and our best theologians, it is the centrality of faith in the Savior and submission to Him as Lord. We may joke at how our children offer the answer, “Jesus,” to almost any question put to them, but the phenomenon indicates a deep-rooted Christocentrism. We Baptists love our children, and rather than finding false security in the deceptive practice of paedobaptism, we instruct our children about who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us. This Christocentrism is seen also in the theology of that former Hyper-Calvinist, Andrew Fuller. Where Classical Calvinists such as Herman Bavinck and High Calvinists such as John Gill founded their theology upon philosophical determinism, Fuller disagreed. He preferred personal faith in Jesus Christ and His cross as the foundation for theology.⁵⁸

The cause for concern with regard to Jesus Christ is that the key Reformation doctrine of faith in Christ and the key Believers’ Church doctrine of discipleship to Christ have been sidelined for speculative reasons by many Calvinists. Classical Calvinists

⁵⁵ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁶ John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 1.30, 2.11.

⁵⁷ Bruce L. McCormack, “For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43 (1998): 284-88, 292-94.

⁵⁸ Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 154-55.

consider even the use of the terminology of Christocentrism to be “imprudent.”⁵⁹ As I have shown elsewhere, Classical Calvinism demotes faith in Christ in order to elevate philosophical speculation regarding the divine decrees and common grace. Fortunately, Baptist Calvinists like John Dagg recognized speculation should not replace experiential, practical faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.⁶⁰ Non-Calvinist Jerry Falwell, moving beyond recognition, said John 3:16 required a central focus upon faith in Jesus Christ.⁶¹

Unfortunately, Baptists enamored with Reformed theology may be tempted to downplay faith in Christ in the rush toward rationalistic doctrines of predestination. Such speculations, especially with regard to eternal justification, are key to the theological development of Hyper-Calvinism.⁶² Moreover, the debate over Lordship Salvation and Antinomian Salvation is primarily an intra-Calvinist controversy.⁶³ Resort to the pastoral legacy of Jonathan Edwards and Andrew Fuller may be helpful here for Baptist Calvinists who are tempted to pursue the rationalist paths of scholasticism. Consider again the Psalm that began this presentation. Unless unity is based upon the One Who is anointed prophet, priest and king, there is no brotherhood, nor is there eternal life. Non-Calvinist Baptists call their Baptist Calvinist brethren to reject clearly and permanently speculative doctrines insofar as they detract from experiential faith in and consistent submission to Jesus Christ as Lord.

2. The Bible

Both Baptists and Calvinists have a high appreciation for the Bible. Conservative theologians in both groups affirm the Bible’s inspiration by the Holy Spirit, the inerrancy of the original autographs, the infallibility of the copies, the unique authority of the Scriptures (*sola scriptura*) for our faith, and the regulative principle as determinative for our practices. There is much with which we agree with one another. For this, non-Calvinist Baptists truly rejoice in the stands taken by our taxonomy of Calvinists. This is why non-Calvinists are glad to work alongside Calvinists in the Conservative Resurgence of the SBC, and in such non-ecclesiastical venues as the Evangelical Theological Society, although that organization is detaching itself from its biblical theological moorings.

However, non-Calvinist Baptists detect causes for concern in the way Calvinists use the Bible. These arise particularly in the theological systematization of Classical Calvinism. William Greenough Thayer Shedd, the erudite 19th-century defender of the Westminster Confession, described the problem, although he meant it as a panegyric: Calvinism is “that intellectual and powerful system of theology which had its origin in the Biblical studies and personal experience of the two most comprehensive and scientific theologians of Christendom, Aurelius Augustine and John Calvin.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Richard A. Muller, “A Note on ‘Christocentrism’ and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68.2 (2006): 253-60.

⁶⁰ Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 57-59, 67-70.

⁶¹ Jerry Falwell, Jr., “Introduction to Jerry Falwell, ‘Becoming Champions for Christ,’” *Live from Liberty*, Television Broadcast (19 October 2007).

⁶² Cf. John Brine, *A Defence of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification* (London, 1732).

⁶³ For the debate between John MacArthur and Zane Hodges, see Millard J. Erickson, “Lordship Theology: The Current Controversy,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33.2 (1991): 5-15.

⁶⁴ W.G.T. Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed* (1893; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1986),

The shift of emphasis is subtle but significant. Calvinism is not so interested in the Bible, but in a system that issues forth from ruminations upon the Bible by the fifth-century bishop of Hippo and the sixteenth-century reformer of Geneva. Richard Muller's well-regarded book, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, illustrates the problem. In this work, as in his Reformed corpus generally, Muller is most particularly interested in presenting Calvin's theology as Calvin understood it.⁶⁵ Although Muller's historical method is laudable, his theology is not. As a Biblicist, I am more concerned to present "The Unaccommodated Christ" from the Bible than I am to present the reflections of "The Unaccommodated Calvin" upon the Bible.

The rationalist approach to Scripture is found in the Calvinist tendency to rightly divide the Word of truth, but then continue dividing it *ad infinitum*. I once entered a dialogue with E. Earle Ellis. This accomplished scholar read an article of mine on Calvinism in *SBC Life*⁶⁶ and sent me a contradictory article he wrote for a British journal. I queried Professor Ellis for the exegetical clue to distinguish between the hidden and revealed wills of God with regard to particular redemption. I await an answer. Likewise, there are many important theological distinctions utilized by Calvinist theologians that lack a sufficient biblical basis for the theological load they are asked to bear. These include, among others, the logical ordering of the divine decrees, the covenants of works and grace, the equation of circumcision with baptism, etc.⁶⁷ As Charles Haddon Spurgeon complained about some Calvinists, "They bring a system of divinity to the Bible to interpret it, instead of making every system, be its merits what they may, yield, and give place to the pure and unadulterated Word of God."⁶⁸

Similarly, in the Texas free churches, there is a longstanding distrust of extra-biblical systems. The second article of faith for the Union Baptist Association reads, "We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are revealed from God, and that they contain the only true system of faith and practice."⁶⁹ Considering the Bible is, by all accounts, not organized as a scientific system, that is quite a statement. Baptists are not as interested in a rationalist system as they are in following the Word of God precisely in their faith and practice. B.H. Carroll was personally led away from God by human philosophies. As a result, after conversion, he explicitly rejected any attempt to construct belief upon them: "Whoever in his hour of real need, makes abstract philosophy his pillow, makes cold, hard granite his pillow. Whoever looks trustingly into any of its false faces looks into the face of a Medusa, and is turned to stone. They are all wells without water, and clouds without rain."⁷⁰ Non-Calvinist Baptists would call our Baptist Calvinist brethren to reject clearly and permanently speculative doctrines, extra-biblical distinctions and theological methodologies insofar as they detract from the revelation of the Word of God illumined by the Holy Spirit to the gathered churches. Some forms of Calvinism are simply not biblical enough.

⁶⁵ Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press). Cf. Matthew C. Heckel, "Review Essay," *Presbyterion* 31.2 (2005): 101-6.

⁶⁶ Yarnell, "The TULIP of Calvinism: In Light of History and the Baptist Faith and Message," *SBC Life* (April 2006).

⁶⁷ For a fuller though undeveloped list, see Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 155n.

⁶⁸ Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973), 46.

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the First Session of the Union Baptist Association*, 8.

⁷⁰ Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 60-61.

3. The Gospel

Spurgeon's comment, "Calvinism is the Gospel, and nothing else," receives much attention, while his comments regarding Hyper-Calvinism's problems are often ignored. Spurgeon understood the gospel and proclaimed it regularly, but his statement here is challengeable, not only on the basis of the Bible, but also from his very sermon. First, note that Spurgeon's *A Defence of Calvinism* does not explicitly affirm all five points from the Synod of Dort. He definitely affirms final preservation, and probably irresistible grace, but he moderates the doctrine of limited atonement with the sufficient-efficient distinction, and his doctrine of depravity lacks the Augustinian belief in the transmission of guilt. When it comes to the fundamental doctrine of unconditional predestination, reprobation is noticeably absent from the presentation.⁷¹

Moreover, from a biblical perspective, Spurgeon's sermon slights the central figure of the gospel, Jesus Christ. The Lord appears but primarily to argue the extent of His atoning work. The prince of preachers laid aside his crown of evangelism on the day he produced this piece, for he was more interested in limiting the recipients of Christ's atoning work, than in exalting Jesus Christ. In light of recent worries that Southern Baptists may be losing the gospel, such misdirected attempts surely must raise concerns.⁷² Lost priorities are not only evident in this presentation by Spurgeon, but also in the evangelistic presentations of John Piper.

Piper's Desiring God Ministries placed three evangelism tracts on the web for distribution. The first tract is noticeable for its elevation of Piper's "Christian hedonism." Although Piper must be lauded for injecting divine glory into a gospel presentation, it caters to rather than challenges our narcissistic culture: "God gets the praise and we get the pleasure." Piper, busily promoting peculiarities, never discusses the person of Jesus Christ. And when asking what the believer must do, he points them to a church, but neglects to exhort them to follow Christ in baptism, as the Great Commission teaches.⁷³ In the second tract, Piper correctly discusses Jesus Christ at length, alongside his passion for glory, but passes quickly over sin and never issues a call for the sinner to believe in Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ In the third tract, Piper issues a call for faith in Christ, but the tract is written for the struggling believer rather than the lost person.⁷⁵

The Calvinist concern for the gospel is a cause for rejoicing, but the demonstrated confusion of Calvinism with regard to the gospel is a cause for concern. A related cause for concern is the Calvinist doctrine of conversion. The Classical Calvinist understanding of faith and repentance, which together define conversion, is troubling. Bavinck demonstrated that the Lutheran recovery of faith was pushed back in the speculative

⁷¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *A Defence of the Gospel*; Internet, <http://www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm>, downloaded 25 November 2007.

⁷² Tom Ascol, "Have We Lost the Gospel?"; Internet, <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/blog/2007/02/have-we-lost-gospel.html>, downloaded 25 November 2007.

⁷³ Thanks to Cky Carrigan for his helpful analysis of this tract. John Piper, "Quest for Joy"; Internet, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1546_Quest_for_Joy/, downloaded 25 November 2007.

⁷⁴ John Piper, "Don't Waste Your Life Tract"; Internet, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/2004/1547_Dont_Waste_Your_Life_Tract/, downloaded 25 November 2007.

⁷⁵ John Piper, "The Gospel in 6 Minutes"; Internet, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/2007/2389_The_Gospel_in_6_Minutes/, downloaded 25 November 2007.

Calvinist *ordo salutis* to a second-order issue, while repentance was pushed even further back into discussions of the Christian life. While admitting Calvinism is confused about the exact time of regeneration in relation to baptism, Bavinck believed Baptists over-emphasized the new birth.⁷⁶ Classical Calvinism's emphases seem contradictory to Scripture, especially with regard to the first-order invitation of Christ and the apostles for sinners to repent and believe.⁷⁷

There are problems with regard to the restricted presentation of the gospel. Although Classical Calvinists may deny the Reformed system limits the offer of the gospel to the elect alone, even a majority of Presbyterians have at times not believed that. When 19th-century Presbyterians sought to revise the Westminster Confession, they complained that it allowed for "no declaration of the love of God towards all men,"⁷⁸ a complaint reiterated by traditional Baptists.⁷⁹ Shedd's denial of a restricted love depends upon an extra-biblical distinction lost upon most lay Christians. The elite theologians of Calvinism distinguish between "common grace in the common call" and "special grace in the effectual call." The folk theologians among the Baptists recognize no such distinction, for they cannot find it in the Bible.

Non-Calvinist Baptists would call our Baptist Calvinist brethren to reject clearly and permanently speculative doctrines insofar as they detract from a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must plainly declare the gospel to all people that they are sinners, who will die and spend an eternity in hell unless they are born again. We must proclaim that the Second Person of the eternal Trinity became flesh in order to reveal Himself to us, died on a cross in order to atone for the sins of the whole world, and rose again from the dead so that those who hear, believe, and confess might have eternal life. As the Word is proclaimed, faith in God and repentance from sin are brought near to the hearts and mouths of men, women, and children by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. If you will but believe in Jesus Christ and confess that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Such salvation results in disciples, who publicly profess Jesus as Lord through baptism in a local church, regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper therein, personally submit to her teaching and redemptive discipline, and preach the gospel to all nations. This is a gospel that both Non-Calvinist and Calvinist Baptists should be able to agree upon.

4. The Churches

The Calvinist treatment of the doctrine of the church should be a field for rejoicing and concern. The greatest service of modern Southern Baptist Calvinists to the SBC has been a renewed focus upon ecclesiology. Although not alone in this regard, they have been at the forefront, especially Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. He has emphasized regenerate church membership, especially with regard to church discipline, but has not ignored believers-only baptism and the Lord's Supper. Dever has also been instrumental in publishing and republishing a number of Baptist works on the doctrine of the church.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 55-59.

⁷⁷ Mark 1:14-15; Acts 2:37-39.

⁷⁸ Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed*, 23.

⁷⁹ Humphreys, "Traditional Baptists and Calvinism," 58-60.

⁸⁰ Mark Dever, "The Doctrine of the Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Akin, 766-856.

But the Calvinist treatment of ecclesiology is also a cause for concern. Although there is room for disagreement over multiple-elder versus single-elder churches, there is no room for the loss of congregationalism among Baptists. Suppression of democracy in the local church is not just against the Baptist Faith and Message, it is more importantly misinterpreting Scripture. Baptists have never been an elitist people who exalt a clerical hierarchy, Roman or Genevan. Rather, we have emphasized the priesthood of all believers at the same time that we have followed our pastors.⁸¹ It is feared that some manifestations of Calvinism are moving churches away from Baptist identity, in a rush to ecumenical relevance encouraged by the fictitious doctrine of the invisible church.

The Calvinist treatment of the history of Baptist churches should also be a field for rejoicing and concern. A number of primary sources and secondary sources might not be widely available today were it not for the efforts of such prominent Baptist historians as Nettles, George, and Michael Haykin. All of these Baptist Calvinists deserve lauds for publishing works by and about Hercules Collins, John Gill, John Dagg, and James Petigru Boyce, among others. Baptist Calvinist historiography is a cause for rejoicing. But alas, it is also a cause for concern. The original edition of *Baptist Theologians*, edited by Timothy George and David Dockery, emphasized Baptist Calvinists at the expense of Baptist non-Calvinists.⁸² In the revision, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, the problem intensified.⁸³ After reading these otherwise fine collections, one could conclude that Calvinists were the only historically important Baptists.

Again, consider the confessions, covenants, and catechisms collected by Dean George. The only General Baptist confession is the Orthodox Creed, and the covenants and catechisms are similarly skewed toward Calvinism.⁸⁴ Again, consider a recent collection of devotional texts introduced by Michael Haykin. While Hercules Collins wrote nearly a quarter of his books to defend passionately believers-only baptism, from the perspective of pious obedience, Haykin saw fit to include excerpts from none of those works.⁸⁵ If one did not know Haykin personally, he might wrongly conclude that the seminal Baptist doctrine of baptism was unimportant to this Calvinist historian. Baptist historians would do well neither to privilege nor ignore either Calvinists or non-Calvinists. So far, it could be argued that Baptist Calvinist historiography is not exactly setting the standard for balanced historical scholarship.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to learn a lesson from a British historian. In his highly influential theological biography of Spurgeon, Iain Murray focused upon three major doctrinal movements that the prince of preachers opposed: Arminianism, Baptismal Regeneration, and the Downgrade.⁸⁶ Of the three, Murray admitted he was most concerned to refute Arminianism. While Arminianism was and is certainly a

⁸¹ Yarnell, "Democratic Congregationalism: A Seventh Baptist Distinctive in Peril" (two parts); Internet, <http://sbctoday.com>, downloaded 25 November 2007.

⁸² *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990).

⁸³ *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001).

⁸⁴ Fortunately, the New Hampshire Confession and the Baptist Faith and Message are included. *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. George and George.

⁸⁵ *Devoted to the Service of the Temple: Piety, Persecution, and Ministry in the Writings of Hercules Collins*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Steve Weaver, Profiles in Reformed Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007).

⁸⁶ Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 1st ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1966).

problem, the wise Calvinist should realize it is not the only problem. What Murray failed to do for British Baptists in 1966 was to rehearse the battle that the last of the Puritans fought with Hyper-Calvinism. Three decades after Murray helped lead a Calvinist revival in England, he belatedly addressed the opposing problem. He lamented, “While not accepting the tenets of Hyper-Calvinism it may well be that we have not been sufficiently alert to the danger of allowing a supposed consistency in doctrine to override the biblical priority of zeal for Christ and the souls of men.”⁸⁷ In 1966, Murray the historical theologian led a fight against Arminian laxity; in 1995, he regretted he had not forewarned against Hyper-Calvinism.

Non-Calvinist Baptists would call our Baptist Calvinist brethren to reject clearly and permanently speculative doctrines insofar as they detract from a strictly biblical understanding of the local churches. Non-Calvinists will also continue to challenge Baptist Calvinists to forget not that New Testament church membership is impossible apart from believers-only baptism, and this truth is what makes us Baptists rather than Presbyterians.⁸⁸ But Non-Calvinist Baptists must also appreciate the contributions our Baptist Calvinist brethren have made and will make with regard to maintaining the local church as regenerate. We must unite together around the biblical doctrine of the church even as we disagree over minor issues, keep one another honest about the major issues, and warn one another not to turn a minor issue into a sign of elitism or test of inner fellowship.

5. Christian Life

In this last cause for rejoicing and concern, please allow me some personal reflections, for it is here that I have had the sharpest appreciations for and disagreements with aggressive Calvinism in the SBC. First, I rejoice over the emphasis upon speaking the gospel clearly, as many Calvinists teach. Any gospel presentation relying upon human manipulation, rather than the Holy Spirit, should be rejected by all Baptists. However, I am concerned that protests against the invitation or altar call have been too negative, proposing no real alternatives. The invitation is certainly not the public profession of faith; that is the role of baptism. But there is biblical support for intense dialogue between preacher and sinner at the end of a sermon (Acts 2:36-40). It should also be remembered that the anti-invitation, anti-application attitude is a sign of Hyper-Calvinism.

Second, I rejoice over the emphasis upon personal integrity that many Baptist Calvinists emphasize. However, I am concerned that the delving into eternal decrees can have an effect on personal ethics. A man very close to me once shared with me his move toward Calvinism. A little later he left his wife and two children. When I reproached him, he argued this was God’s desire for him, for God gave him those desires. His Calvinism had become Antinomianism, another sign of Hyper-Calvinism.

⁸⁷ Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), xiv. Murray also chides Nettles for his defense of John Gill. *Ibid.*, 130-31n.

⁸⁸ Tom Ascol’s proposed 2007 resolution on regenerate church membership entirely neglects baptism; a 2007 resolution by the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention provides baptism its proper place. Jerry Pierce, “Regenerate Church Membership Resolution Refused,” *Southern Baptist Texan* (19 June 2007); Internet, <http://www.texasonline.net>, downloaded 22 June 2007; Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, “Reaffirming Regenerate Church Membership,” adopted 13 November 2007; Internet, <http://www.sbtexas.com/missions/07resolutions.htm>, downloaded 26 November 2007.

Finally, as a professor, I have vivid memories of dealings with several Calvinist students, who displayed interesting attitudes. Most Calvinist students have no difficulty with this non-Calvinist theologian whatsoever, for I make life equally difficult for non-Calvinist and Calvinist students. When we debate the difficult soteriological doctrines, I always make it a point to assign the partisans to defend publicly the positions of their opponents! But there was a time when some Calvinist students felt distinctly unwelcome at Southwestern Seminary. Recognizing their sincere Christian and Baptist beliefs, I stepped out to provide them with fellowship. Mistaking kindness for total agreement, one assumed I was a Calvinist, too, and excitedly asked when I had “converted to the doctrines of grace.” Friend, Christians convert to Christ His person, not to Calvin his doctrine.

Then there was the student who confessed, after regretfully fulfilling an assignment to evangelize and pen a theological reflection, that she was actually a Hyper-Calvinist. Thankfully, she repented and took up personal evangelism, even though it meant she was at first angry with this professor. Next, there was the student who chided me for disrespecting Reformed doctrine in class. He turned away sheepishly when I reminded him that in the same session, before reprimanding Reformed theology for its rationalism, I read Calvin’s *Institutes*, praising his description of the transformative nature of growth in the knowledge of God and man. Finally, there was the student who moved so far into Reformed thought that, in spite of the efforts of both Dr. Garrett and myself, we could not keep him from compromising his Baptist convictions.

The First Texas Bridge Builder

Texas Baptists respect the founder of Southwestern Seminary. Benajah Harvey Carroll was a giant of a man, a compelling preacher of the gospel, a skillful defender of New Testament churches, and a respected organizer of Baptist energies. At the populist level, some argue Carroll was a Calvinist. But Carroll’s doctrine of election was corporately in Christ and reprobation was absented. He embraced neither limited atonement nor a classical doctrine of depravity. He did believe in irresistible grace, but qualified it with contrition. He personally affirmed final preservation, but his second wife happily disagreed. His most recent theological biographer concluded, “Carroll was a Calvinist in line with the moderate tone of the New Hampshire Confession.”⁸⁹

To the Dortian Calvinist, Carroll’s soteriology may seem inconsistent, but the father of Southwestern Seminary was concerned more with biblical consistency than synodal consistency. Because Carroll believed in the living Word of God first and foremost, he faithfully lived out of the Bible. He possessed “a biblical-pastoral theology of practical value which called the church to evangelism and ethical responsibility.” It was on that biblical and experiential basis that J.B. Gambrell could comment that the common thread in Carroll’s career was that “he championed Christian truth and Baptist unity, faith, and practice.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ James Spivey, “Benajah Harvey Carroll,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. George and Dockery, 173-74, 177-78; B.H. Carroll, *Colossians, Ephesians, and Hebrews*, ed. J.B. Cranfill (Chicago: Fleming Revell, 1917), Eph. 1.

⁹⁰ Spivey, “Carroll,” 177-79.

In the boots of Carroll, the Texas Baptist tradition—as exemplified by the current president of Southwestern Seminary, Paige Patterson, and the founding Executive Director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Jim Richards, and prominent pastors such as Jack Graham—indicates that Texas Baptists maintain an appreciative place for Baptist Calvinism, for it is a wide and tolerant Baptist fellowship.⁹¹ However, the Texas tradition also indicates that Classical Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism should feel distinctly unwelcome, for it expects personal faith and repentance from preaching.⁹²

Perhaps I may be bold enough to speak a word of exhortation on behalf of Texas Baptists, Louisiana Baptists, and many other average Southern Baptists: We non-Calvinists treasure Calvinist Baptists. Like the Union Baptist Association, we believe it decorous to grant one another “the appellation of brother,”⁹³ and not only in the created sense, nor ending with the redeemed sense, but also in the ecclesiastical sense. However, it would be helpful for non-Calvinist Baptists if all Baptist Calvinists would intentionally and publicly refute the errors of Classical Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism.

There is also the issue of denominational integrity. Shedd was concerned that in the rush to identify Presbyterianism with modernity, his people were losing their integrity. When the pure beliefs of a people are mixed with others, it weakens them in the long run. “By this method, Calvinism, or Arminianism, or Socinianism, or any creed whatever, becomes mixed instead of pure; a combination of dissimilar materials, instead of a simple un-compounded unity. . . . The purest and most unmixed . . . Lutheranism, or Calvinism, is the strongest in the long run,” Shedd wrote.⁹⁴ Similarly, it pains me that in the rush to adopt a rationalist creed, some Baptist Calvinists have discovered they no longer wish to be Baptists. When Baptists replace their Biblicism⁹⁵ with Reformed rationalism, they risk losing their New Testament identity.

Finally, let me exhort both non-Calvinist Baptists and Calvinist Baptists from the Word of God. For the Calvinist Baptists, let me remind you that Paul, the inspired apostle of Jesus Christ, wrote that you must “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). For the non-Calvinist Baptists, let me remind you that Paul then went on to say that “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (2:13).

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⁹¹ Tony Cartledge, “Seminary Presidents Debate Calvinism,” Associated Baptist Press (13 June 2006); Internet, <http://www.abpnews.com/1086.article>, downloaded 23 November 2007; Jim Richards, “Distinguishing Between Fellowship and Leadership,” *Southern Baptist Texan* (23 October 2006); Internet, <http://www.texanonline.net/default.asp?action=article&aid=4838>, downloaded 23 November 2007.

⁹² Jack Graham, “The Truth About Grace,” Sermon at Prestonwood Baptist Church (July 2005); Internet, <http://resources.christianity.com/details/pbc/19000101/9290F735-33AF-45FC-83A3-2386D0699096.aspx>, downloaded 23 November 2007.

⁹³ *Minutes of the First Session of the Union Baptist Association*, 13.

⁹⁴ Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed*, ix.

⁹⁵ I do not define Biblicism in the same sense as Gerhard Ebeling, but as a simple commitment to live out of Scripture as God’s never-changing dynamic Word. Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*, transl. Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 38.

