Whosoever Will: A Review Essay

J. Matthew Pinson[1]

It was interesting growing up Free Will Baptist in the religious culture of the South in the 1970s and 80s. It was dominated by the Southern Baptist Convention, which Martin Marty has called the "Catholic Church of the South," owing to its ubiquity in Southern religious life. If you were an intellectually curious and theologically oriented Free Will Baptist, the finer points of soteriology were always forced to the forefront of your thinking. There was no way to avoid it: When a Southern Baptist asked you what church you were a member of and you said "Free Will Baptist," it was unremarkable. The Southern Baptist said, "Everybody believes in free will. What makes you different?"

You braced yourself, because you knew what was about to happen. Before you could blurt out all the words "Free Will Baptists believe Christians can fall from grace," your Southern Baptist friend would react in horror at the prospect that there were people who actually believed in the possibility of apostasy from the faith. But no Southern Baptist would react negatively to your belief that God had granted all people—including the reprobate—the freedom to resist his gracious, universal calling in salvation.

In those days, at least in my neck of the woods, Southern Baptists didn't mind being called Calvinists. They just said they were "mild" Calvinists. Some joked about being "Calminians," but it was unsurprising that "Missionary Baptists" had moderated their Calvinism. But they would never have thought of themselves as Arminian. After all, Arminians believed—horror of horrors—that a believer could apostatize!

So when I read *Whosoever Will*, it seemed uncontroversial. It seemed very familiar to me—much like the "mild" Calvinism of the "Catholic Church of the South" in whose theological shadow I grew up—and from whom I was a friendly but persistent dissenter.

Whosoever Will is a fascinating and thought-provoking book. Of course, like many such works that arise out of church conferences, there is some unevenness both in style and scholarly perspicuity. Some of this seems to be by design, with some of the authors, for example Paige Patterson and Richard Land, taking on a more pastoral and conversational tone, and others, for example David Allen and Steve Lemke, tending more to utilize scholarly conventions. However, it appears that the whole book is designed to be read by pastors and other church leaders who are interested in Christian theology, not just professional scholars. So while I think some of the chapters could have gone into more depth, on the whole the work strikes a good balance between practical and scholarly, especially given its intended readership.

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In this essay I do not intend to give a summary or systematic analysis of the book. Rather, I would like to contemplate the general tenor of the book, emphasizing certain features of chapters that stood out to me. The first three chapters—the sermon on John 3:16 by Jerry Vines, and the chapters on total depravity and election by Paige Patterson and Richard Land respectively—represent a pastoral sort of interaction with these themes that will no doubt create interest among younger Southern Baptist scholars to probe more deeply the doctrines they discuss. Vines preaches the sort of universal-grace sermon one would hear in most evangelical Protestant pulpits, expounding the text of John 3:16. He emphasizes, through winsome exposition and exhortation, that God's love is global, sacrificial, personal, and eternal.

I appreciate Patterson's appeal to a basic Augustinian-Reformed framework for understanding original sin and depravity, as represented by the late nineteenth-century Baptist thinker Augustus Strong.[2] Despite Patterson's espousal of Reformation approaches to original sin and total depravity, I wish he had gone to greater lengths than he did to articulate a consistent Reformed approach to these crucial doctrines. For example, at one point Patterson asks, "Are humans born guilty before God?" to which he replies, "That cannot be demonstrated from Scripture. Humans are born with a sin sickness—a disease that makes certain that humans will sin and rebel against God."

In another place, Patterson tells the story of a World War II sailor, blinded from an explosion on a sinking ship. Floating in the water, and nearly deaf, the soldier faintly heard the sound of a helicopter and began to cry for help. The helicopter dropped the collar, but the sailor was too weak to put it on. A corpsman took the initiative to go and save the sailor. The disoriented sailor began fighting off the corpsman, but eventually the corpsman overcame the sailor and rescued him. Patterson says, "The Heavenly Father is the Admiral who saw our hopeless condition and sent that helicopter. That helicopter with the whirring blades is like the Word of God. The Lord Jesus is like the corpsman; He came to earth and leaped into the water to save us even while we resist him" (43).

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[2]Strong is joined in his Augustinian naturalism by his late nineteenth-century Presbyterian colleague William G. T. Shedd, who goes to great lengths to demonstrate that federalism is a later development in Calvinism and that the "elder Calvinism" was naturalist/realist (see William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, esp. 2:39-40).

Strong exerted a commanding influence on subsequent Baptist evangelical thought, mediated through the work of the influential Wheaton College professor Henry Clarence Thiessen. Yet Thiessen moderated Strong's four-point Calvinism considerably. His 1949 book *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, which was used widely in Bible Colleges and seminaries as an introductory text, had a strong influence on many evangelical theologians and preachers and is perhaps the most outstanding example of the sort of Baptist *via media* between Calvinism and Arminianism represented in *Whosoever Will*. Curiously, after Thiessen's death, the book was revised to teach four-point Calvinism. Thus the original work's original mediating position has had less influence on recent generations. The first edition can be found only in libraries and used bookstores.

The problem with this story is that the sailor was injured and not so incapacitated as to not be able to cry out for help. It might be helpful to note that this is an internecine debate among Southern Baptists who are not strong Calvinists. For example, Kenneth Keathley, in his excellent new book, *Salvation and Sovereignty* (for which Patterson wrote the foreword), provides what I think is a much better illustration of the biblical approach. He cites Richard Cross's "ambulatory model," according to which the sinner is like an unconscious person who is rescued by EMTs and wakes up in an ambulance and does not resist the EMTs' medical actions to save his life.

Incidentally, Jacobus Arminius himself would have liked Keathley's illustration better than Patterson's. Several Free Will Baptist scholars (including Leroy Forlines, Robert Picirilli, Stephen Ashby, and myself) have been attempting in their teaching and writing to revive many of the views of Arminius, especially on depravity, atonement, and justification (this viewpoint is often dubbed "Reformed Arminianism"). They argue that it is possible to subscribe to a genuinely Augustinian-Reformed approach to original sin and depravity while still maintaining the resisitibility of divine drawing grace.

Arminius espoused the Augustinian view of original sin and taught that "the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and (*nuatum*) weakened; but it is also (*captivatum*) imprisoned, destroyed, and lost: And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such are excited by divine grace."[3] Fallen humanity, Arminius argued, has no ability or power to reach out to God on its own. Arminius explains that "the mind of man in this state is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God, and, according to the apostle, incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God."[4] He goes on to discuss "the utter weakness of all the powers to perform that which is truly good, and to omit the perpetration of that which is evil."[5] Arminius's approach to depravity and inability is the sort I would commend to Baptists who affirm the sort of *via media* soteriology this volume espouses.

Richard Land's brief chapter on "congruent election" is interesting, interpreting divine foreknowledge of individuals as being in Christ or outside of Christ as a result of belief, in terms of an eternal-now sort of approach to God and time. In essence, Land is arguing that God has an omniscient grasp on what *is* in ontological reality, and part of that is his knowledge of those who are his by faith and those who have separated themselves from him through unbelief. His election and reprobation are based on this knowledge. Land presents some interesting ideas here about the relation of divine foreknowledge to election (which seem to me to have more fruitful possibilities than the avant-garde approach Keathley takes to divine knowledge in *Salvation and Sovereignty* with his Molinist approach to *scientia media*). One wonders if Land has to embrace an "eternal now" approach to God and time to articulate the kind of perfect knowledge that is demanded by his "congruent election" approach. At any rate, Land's ideas are far too brief and need to be expanded on by a doctoral student at a Southern Baptist seminary.

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[3]Arminius, 2:192.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., 2:193.

Perhaps most compelling about Land's chapter are his historical remarks, which seem to be an attempt to rebut the arguments of classical Calvinists in the Southern Baptist Convention that true, historic Southern Baptist theology is Calvinist theology. I have long found convincing the views of Tom Nettles and others that historic Southern Baptist theology is really Particular Baptist theology brought over from England and later institutionalized by people like John Leadley Dagg and James Petrigru Boyce. Yet a more developed account similar to Land's has the potential to give non-classical Calvinists in the SBC a historical grounding that challenges the formidable Particular Baptist historiography of scholars such as Nettles and Michael Haykin. I am not yet convinced, but there are the makings of such an argument, for example, in Land's discussion of John Leland, whom he quotes (in a statement made as early as the 1790s) as saying, "I conclude that the *eternal purposes* of God and the *freedom of the human will* are both truths, and it is a matter of fact that the preaching that has been most blessed of God and most profitable to men, is *the doctrine of sovereign grace in the salvation of souls, mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism*" (46).

Chapters four and five—Allen's defense of universal atonement and Lemke's critique of irresistible grace—constitute the heart of the book. The most important part of Allen's chapter is his historical consideration of Calvinists who believed in some form of universal atonement, whom the vast majority of his readers would assume were five-point Calvinists. Allen makes a cogent case for the fact that many Calvinists most people would assume were adherents of limited atonement actually held some form of universal atonement. His readers will be shocked to hear that people like Calvin, Bunyan, and Edwards, as well as many of the members of the Synod of Dort, did not support limited atonement. Some of the arguments Allen employs regarding Calvin's views on the extent of the atonement are dealt with at greater length in Chapter Seven, Kevin Kennedy's "Was Calvin a Calvinist?"

Allen makes a convincing case for unlimited atonement without ever appealing to any non-Calvinist or Arminian writers. He probes the doctrine of the extent of the atonement utilizing both exegesis and systematic theology, and argues convincingly for universal atonement. Especially helpful is his handling of the objection of five-point Calvinists—best represented by John Owen—that for Christ to atone for the sins of all people, and then for the reprobate still to be punished for their sins, would constitute a "double payment" for sins. Allen handles this argument well, and strongly supports a penal-satisfaction view of atonement at the same time.

Interestingly, most Arminian theologians reject the penal-satisfaction account of atonement in favor of some other theory of atonement (most often, historically, the governmental view), using the same double-payment argument. They simply choose not to believe that Christ paid the penalty for sin on the cross and safeguard the atonement's universality, whereas Owen's and other Calvinists' way of dealing with the problem is to safeguard the penal-satisfaction nature of the atonement and reject its universality. In this regard, Reformed Arminians like me would agree with Allen's view that the universality of atonement is consistent with a full penal-satisfaction view of Christ's atonement.[6]

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[6]Arminius would concur. See J. Matthew Pinson, "The Nature of Atonement in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (forthcoming).

Lemke's chapter on the resistibility of divine grace in salvation is thought-provoking and, all-in-all, cogent. I deeply appreciate his commitment to the Remonstrants' notion that "the only way for anyone to be saved is for God's grace to come before, during, and after justification, because even the best-intentioned human being can 'neither think, will, nor do good' apart from God's grace" (110). For Lemke, libertarian free will does not detract from human beings' utter depravity and inability to save themselves, nor from God's utter graciousness in salvation. "Humans do not do anything to earn or deserve salvation. Humans are too sinful in nature to seek God independently or take the initiative in their own salvation. Humans can come to salvation only as they are urged to by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and they are drawn to Christ as He is lifted up in proclamation" (157).

Libertarian free will for Lemke is not a human-centered concept that makes man the author of his own salvation. Instead, it is set in opposition to meticulous sovereignty, whereby God ordains all things that come to pass. In other words, to say that "man has free will" is simply to say that God gives humans creaturely freedom to make significant decisions as personal beings made in God's image who think, feel, and make authentic decisions. But such freedom does not imply absolute free will: the ability to desire God or to think, will, or do good apart from divine grace. According to Lemke, God graciously draws and enables human beings, without which they would never yearn for God. But he graciously gives them the ability to resist that gracious drawing. This is what I see as the drift of Lemke's account, although at times some of the things he says (for example, his allusion to Patterson's floating-sailor illustration) seemed unclear and inconsistent with his overall anti-Pelagian line of thought.

I believe that Calvinists need to take Lemke's reflections on the definition of divine sovereignty seriously. He argues that Calvinism's view of divine sovereignty arises more from philosophical than biblical considerations, and that sovereignty from the Bible's point of view is more about God's reign and submitting to it or risking negative consequences by one's lack of submission. This, Lemke argues, is how the Bible views sovereignty—not as God's "micromanaging creation through meticulous providence . . . [ruling] in such a way that nothing happens without His control and specific direction" (153). Lemke shows that Calvinists do not have a corner on God's sovereignty and glory. He extols John Piper's emphasis on the sovereignty and glory of God, but he asks,

> Which gives God the greater glory—a view that the only persons who can praise God are those whose wills He changes without their permission, or the view that persons respond to the gracious invitation of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to praise God truly of their own volition? So the question is not, Is God powerful enough to reign in any way He wants? Of course, He is. God is omnipotent and can do anything He wants. As the Scripture says, "For who can resist His will?" (Rom 9:19, HCSB). But the question is, What is God's will? How has God chosen to reign in the hearts of persons? If God is truly sovereign, He is free to choose what He sovereignly chooses. So how has He chosen to reign? (155).

I believe young non-Calvinists need to come to grips with the sovereignty and glory of God and articulate a more robust doctrine of them. Non-Calvinists can stand to learn from Piper's Edwardsean emphasis on the "God of grace and glory," but they must find a more biblical way to affirm those beautiful truths that avoid the deterministic tendencies of Piper

and the New Calvinists. I hope Lemke's account of these things will spur some of them on in that direction.

I was intrigued by Lemke's discussion of R. C. Sproul's view that God "woos" and "entices" people to come to Christ. Sproul says that this wooing and enticing is a necessary but not sufficient condition for salvation, "because the wooing does not, in fact, guarantee that we will come to Christ." Sproul argues that the term "draw" in John 6:44 is more forceful than "woo" and "entice" and instead means "to compel by irresistible superiority." (113). The question in the Arminian's mind is akin to the question why God would offer free grace to people he does not enable to appropriate it (i.e., the general call as distinguished from the effectual call). The question is: Why does God woo and entice people to come to him if he has determined that they are among the reprobate and will hence be unable to come to him? This concept involves, not just an external Word-based call to the non-elect—a general preaching of the Word of the Gospel to all—but rather the Holy Spirit working diligently with people, convicting them, wooing them, enticing them to come to him. Yet he does this realizing that they will never come, because he has eternally foreordained them to damnation to the praise of his glory. This is a rather difficult concept for modern-day Calvinists. It was discussed a great deal in Puritan literature, and especially in Jonathan Edwards, but it is not dealt with openly by most contemporary Calvinists.

Lemke's discussion of Jesus's lament over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37 is illuminating. That text reads: "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, yet you were not willing!" Lemke correctly comments that the Greek verb *thelō* (to will) is used twice in the verse: "I willed . . . but you were not willing." He notes that Jesus is not referring only to the elect within Jerusalem but for all Jerusalem over many generations. Thus Jesus's will (*thelō*) is for all the children of Jerusalem to come to him, yet they frustrate his will and do not come because of their will (*thelō*). This is difficult to square with the Calvinistic concept of irresistible grace. I also think it is more than a curiosity when Lemke points out about the use of "all" (*pas*) in "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16), "All things were made by Him" (John 1:3), and so on, cannot submit to the same use Calvinists place on "all" when describing God's salvific will. This is a stock non-Calvinist argument, but Calvinists need to be reminded of it.

Another important argument Lemke makes concerns placing regeneration prior to faith. F. Leroy Forlines argues in his book *The Quest for Truth* and his forthcoming book *Classical Arminianism* that there is a problem for the coherence of Calvinism when it places regeneration before faith, because, as the Calvinist theologian Louis Berkhof states, "Regeneration is the beginning of sanctification." It is a problem, logically, to place regeneration prior to faith in the *ordo salutis*, because, if regeneration is the beginning of sanctification, and if justification results from faith, then logically Calvinism is placing sanctification prior to justification. Lemke parallels Forlines's argument when he quotes Lorraine Boettner as saying, "A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved," to which Lemke replies, "Clearly, being saved before believing in Christ is getting 'the cart before the horse.' This question can be divided into three questions about which comes first: Regeneration or salvation? Receiving the Holy Spirit or salvation? Salvation or repentance and faith? Many key texts make these issues clear" (136, 138). Lemke asks, "When does the Spirit come into a believer's life? . . . What do the Scriptures say about the order of believing and receiving the Spirit?" (137). This is

particularly poignant, Lemke argues, in view of Peter's statement in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (NASB). If Berkhof and Boettner are correct, and regeneration is the beginning of salvation and sanctification, then the Calvinist *ordo salutis* which places regeneration prior to saving faith, which is prior to justification and the gift of the Spirit, is problematic.

Arminians will agree with Lemke when he argues that the two callings God gives, according to Calvinism ("outward and inward, effectual and ineffectual, serious and not serious") necessitate two wills in God, a secret and a revealed will, and this dichotomy presents problems for people's knowledge of the will of God. For example,

> The revealed will of God issues for the Great Commission that the gospel should be preached to all nations, but the secret will is that only a small group of elect will be saved. The revealed will commands the general, outward call to be proclaimed, but the secret will knows that only a few will receive the effectual, serious calling from the Holy Spirit. The God of hard Calvinism is either disingenuous, cynically making a pseudo offer of salvation to persons whom He has not given the means to accept, or there is a deep inner conflict within the will of God. If He has extended a general call to all persons to be saved, but has given the effectual call irresistibly to just a few, the general call seems rather misleading. This conflict between the wills of God portrays Him as having a divided mind. In response to this challenge, Calvinists appeal to mystery. Is that a successful move? (144-5).

Lemke's concerns are encapsulated by some quotations he provides from the early Remonstrants, who he says were concerned that the perspective of the Synod of Dort "portrayed God as riddled by inner conflict" (145):

> 8. Whomsoever God calls, he calls them seriously, that is, with a sincere and not with a dissembled intention and will of saving them. Neither do we subscribe to the opinion of those persons who assert that God outwardly calls certain men whom he does not will to call inwardly, that is, whom he is unwilling to be truly converted, even prior to their rejection of the grace of calling.
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> 9. There is not in God a secret will of that kind which is so opposed to his will revealed in his word, that according to this same secret will he does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom, by the word of his Gospel, and by his revealed will, he seriously calls and invites to faith and salvation.
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> 10. Neither on this point do we admit of a holy dissimulation, as it is the manner of some men to speak, or of a twofold person in the Deity (145).

Lemke is right to argue that the most coherent, biblically consistent theodicy is provided by the doctrine of libertarian freedom. Determinism, whether in a hard or soft (compatibilist) sense, provides a troubling solution to the problem of evil—why there is so much evil in the world if there is a loving God. Lemke invokes a form of the classic free will theodicy—that evil results largely because God created people free so that they could

genuinely love him, freely, not because they are caused or determined to love him. Lemke quips,

> Babies do not come home from the hospital housebroken. They cry all night. They break their toes, and they break your hearts. But when that child of his or her own volition says, "Daddy, I love you," it really means something. The parents are more glorified with a real child than with a doll that could not have praised them had they not pulled its string. So, then, which gives God the greater glory—a view that the only persons who can praise God are those whose wills He changes without their permission, or the view that persons respond to the gracious invitation of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to praise God truly of their own volition? (154-155).

Regarding compatibilism, Lemke is right to argue that someone's merely *willing* (wanting) to do something does not constitute a free action. There are too many examples in human life of people being willing to do something but not having the choice to do otherwise. Indeed, the way human freedom is normally defined, even when compatibilists use it of everyday human circumstances, is as the power of alternative choice. Furthermore, "the human analogies that come to mind about God changing our will in irresistible grace, whereby others change our minds irresistibly and invincibly, are unpleasant phenomena such as hypnotism or brainwashing. Obviously, these are not pleasant phenomena, and are not appropriate when applied to God" (150).

Lemke's chapter is not without its problems. I think Lemke is stretching when he is appealing to David Engelsma's hyper-Calvinism and avers that irresistible grace might make conversion unnecessary and infant baptism might result (p. 132) Englesma is not representative of Calvinism on the necessity of conversion. Lemke also erroneously conflates the issue of infant baptism and salvation with the issue of Calvinism vs. Arminianism (133). I think the following statement is unnecessary and somewhat beside the point in a work on Calvinism and Arminianism:

> Hopefully, very few Calvinistic Baptists are tempted to practice nonconversionist Calvinism in the manner of Engelsma. When Baptists go out of their way to organize fellowship with such Presbyterians rather than fellow Baptists, or when they push to allow people christened as infants into the membership of their own church without believer's baptism, or when they speak of public invitations as sinful or as a rejection of the sovereignty of God, seeing much difference between them is difficult (134).

Also, Lemke's reasoning is fallacious when he cites John Calvin's view that some people can be saved without preaching and then conflates it with Terrence Tiessen's views, which are certainly unrepresentative of Calvinism.

I think Lemke goes too far in trying to paint Calvinism with the brush of hyper-Calvinism. This will do more to rally the non-Calvinist troops than to win over Calvinists. Still, I think he is onto something in pointing out the inconsistency of mainstream Calvinism in affirming irresistible grace and a distinction between a universal, ineffectual calling and a particular, effectual calling—and the resultant distinction between God's revealed will and secret will—while at the same time affirming the free offer of the gospel. What he is trying

to do, like Engelsma, is get mainstream Calvinists to see the inconsistency of their particularistic soteriology with a general call of the gospel. I think he is right. Both Arminians and Calvinists have errors that they are liable to, and Lemke, even though he takes his rhetoric too far in places, is right to remind Calvinists of the peculiar errors to which they are liable, errors that Calvinists have sadly repeated at various points in their history (hyper-Calvinism).

Chapter six by Kenneth Keathley argues a position on perseverance and assurance that is Calvinist in its assertion that genuine believers cannot cease to be believers and hence fall away from a state of grace. However, Keathely is critical of post-Reformation Reformed (especially Puritan) views of assurance that predicate it on sanctification rather than justification. He argues that "good works and the evidences of God's grace do not provide assurance. They provide warrant to assurance but not assurance itself" (184).

Keathley spends much of his chapter critiquing the view of Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Canaday, which holds that the warning passages in the New Testament are genuine warnings that God uses as a means of helping the elect to persevere. Keathley rightly sees the difficulty with saying that God is threatening people with the possibility of apostasy—which is not in reality a threat since it cannot occur—to help them persevere—which they cannot keep from doing.

Yet in his critique of Schreiner and Canaday's misuse of the warning passages, Keathley fails to provide his readers with an understanding of how they are to treat the warning passages. I assume this is because his Southern Baptist audience is not an Arminian one (i.e., believing in the genuine possibility of apostasy), and so he sees no need to do this in the context of this book. Still, it would have been helpful if Keathley had provided a brief explanation of how someone who argues for unconditional perseverance should explain warning passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6. In other words, how can a Southern Baptist say "Amen" to a responsive reading in church, without comment, on, say, Hebrews 6:1-12?

It is gratifying to see that Keathley explicitly eschews the easy-believism views of Charles Stanley, which are shared by Zane Hodges and the Grace Evangelical Society. This is what I believe SBC people who are not classical Calvinists need to be on vigilant guard against: "preaching people into heaven" just because they walked the aisle one time decades ago, even though their lives have been characterized by the consistent practice of sin and not progressive sanctification. Thus, it was refreshing to hear Keathley say:

> The genuinely saved person hungers and thirsts for righteousness, even when he is struggling with temptation or even if he stumbles into sin. In fact, I am not as concerned about the destiny of those who struggle as I am about those who do not care enough to struggle. Indifference is more of a red flag than weakness.
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> The absence of a desire for the things of God clearly indicates a serious spiritual problem, and a continued indifference can possibly mean that the person professing faith has never been genuinely converted (184-85).

I would add, of course, that it could also possibly mean that the person has ceased to believe in Christ, is no longer in union with Christ, and thus has apostatized from saving faith.

However, I believe that Keathley's approach can help Southern Baptists avoid the ever-present temptation of an easy-believism that places all the emphasis on a one-time, past decision—a sinner's prayer—and not on hungering and thirsting for righteousness in the here and now.

All the chapters I have just discussed comprise Part One of the book. Those were chapters that were plenary sessions at the conference from which these essays originated. Part Two of the book consists of five additional essays that complement the general argument of the book. I will spend less time discussing these well-written essays. I have already made reference to Kevin Kennedy's excellent discussion of Calvin's views on the extent of the atonement.

Chapters eight and nine—Malcolm Yarnell's discussion of the potential impact of Calvinism on Baptist churches and Alan Streett's consideration of Calvinism and public invitations—raised more questions in my mind than they answered.

Yarnell argues in his chapter that embracing Calvinism lays Baptists open to Calvinist ecclesiological tendencies—things like moving away from *sola Scriptura* toward an exaltation of the ancient church, specifically Augustine, and an aristocratic-elitist church polity. Malcolm Yarnell is one of the brightest evangelical scholars writing today. What he is doing in his writings and the journal he edits is brilliant. I look forward to his future writings and have learned a great deal from his writings to date. However, I have a disconnect with him that seems to arise from historiographical differences: He tends to exaggerate the Anabaptist influence on Baptist thought and radically discount Reformed and Puritan influences. I exalt the Reformed and Puritan influence on Baptist thought while believing that the continental Anabaptist movement did exert modest influence on early Baptist thought.

It is ironic that I am a full-fledged Arminian who comes from a faith community that has always seen itself as self-consciously and integrally connected with Arminius and with the General Baptist tradition. Yet I have far more appreciation for the Reformed tradition and the Puritans than Yarnell does. I think this arises from the fact that I see "Reformed" as being not chiefly a soteric word but an ecclesial one.

The English General Baptists of the seventeenth century claimed to be "reformed according to the Scriptures" every bit as much as the Particular Baptists. Both General and Particular Baptists were radical Puritans who inherited the Puritan desire to reform and purify the church according to the Scriptures. Just as there were both Calvinist and Arminian baptistic puritans (Baptists) who wanted to reform the church according to the Scriptures, there were Calvinist and Arminian (e.g., John Goodwin) paedobaptist Puritans who wanted to reform the church according to the Scriptures. There were also Calvinist and Arminian (e.g., Jacobus Arminius) paedobaptist continental Reformed churchmen. Neither do I think "Reformed" is about church government.

I view being "reformed," as my ancestors did, as being about (1) the reformation of the church along New Testament lines and (2) the gospel—atonement and justification, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Some of the people I think are doing more than anyone else for ecclesial renewal and the gospel are "Reformed." I think it makes more sense to see Baptist identity as having developed out of a

Puritan-Reformed sensibility—albeit with important influences from continental Anabaptism—than as an Anabaptist movement.

I am not as concerned with Calvinist tendencies on Baptist churches as Yarnell is, unless by "tendencies" one is referring to unconditional election, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints as conceived by Calvinism. I am not worried about Calvinism in the Kuyperian sense having a negative influence on Baptists, or Calvinist theological method having a negative influence on Baptists. The only thing that worries me is that Baptists will become Calvinists in the soteriological sense. I am not any more worried that Southern Baptists are going to become non-baptistic in polity and baptismal theology by reading Calvin than I am that Free Will Baptists will do the same by reading Arminius. What I am hoping to see is more people who are reforming the church according to the Scriptures in ways similar to John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius, John Owen and John Goodwin, Hanserd Knollys and Thomas Grantham.

Yarnell raises two other issues on which I feel the need to comment. First, He says that Calvinism is guilty of ecclesiological antinomianism, not holding closely enough to the scriptural pattern in polity and other matters. I am sympathetic to Yarnell, and believe that this can be said of many of us modern evangelicals. However, I think much of Reformed confessional ecclesiology forms the basis for Baptist views on the sufficiency of Scripture for the life of the church, including its polity, worship, and other practices. This explains why both the Orthodox Creed of the General Baptists and the Second London Confession of the Particular Baptists relied heavily on the Westminster Confession for many of their statements on the sufficiency of the Scripture, and of the divinely ordained means of grace, for the life of the church. Second, Yarnell argues against the concept of the worldwide, invisible church. Yet many historic Baptists have shared this commitment (I subscribe to it because of my own Free Will Baptist confessional commitments). Thus, I do not believe that subscription to the idea of a universal, invisible church is a problem of non-Baptist Calvinists.

Streett has done a great deal of work defending the idea of a public invitation biblically, theologically, and historically. His fear is that the reason for Calvinists' rejection of the public invitation is that they don't really believe in the free offer of the gospel—that there is a tension in their thought on the free offer of the gospel that keeps them from thinking that people can respond to that free offer in a public invitation.

I am not opposed to non-manipulative public invitations for people to come forward for prayer and counseling with the hope that they will be converted. However, I do not see this as a Calvinist-Arminian issue. There are many Arminians who argue against the use of public invitations because they think it does not have warrant in Scripture or that it is manipulative and goes against the free human response to the offer of the gospel and the mysterious conviction of sin that is taking place between the Spirit and the individual. For example, Wesleyan writer C. Marion Brown writes in *The Arminian Magazine*, "Gospel preaching at its best is aided and abetted by the Holy Spirit convicting and convincing men of sin. When men are shown their sins and convicted of the same, they need not be begged,

cajoled, or subjected to second rate psychology to induce or entice them to prayer."[7] Joseph D. McPherson, in a later issue of the same magazine, pointed out some similar concerns in an article entitled "Modern Altar Methods: An Inadequate Substitute for the Methodist Class Meeting."[8] (These perspectives remind me of fundamentalist Wesleyan author Jeff Paton's indictment of "Decisional Regeneration."[9]) I also know Arminian Anglicans, synergistic Lutherans, and traditionalist Mennonites who would never dream of offering a public invitation.

At the same time, I must admit that I am intrigued by the reasons my Calvinist friends sometimes give for not offering public invitations. I have often wondered the following: Calvinists all admit that the Spirit uses means to convert the elect. So why could the Spirit not use the means of a public response to an invitation to receive prayer and counseling with the hope that one will be converted? How is inviting people to respond publicly during a church service and have someone pray that they will be converted, with the hopes that they will, any different from doing the same thing in another location? I can understand if there are other reasons—similar to the Wesleyan Arminian brothers I cited above—that Calvinists would want to do things differently, but why all the concern over offering public invitations *per se* to respond to the gospel? In the end, however, I do not think this is a Calvinism-Arminianism issue. I know too many Calvinists who offer public invitations and too many Arminians who do not.

Along with the chapters by Lemke and Allen, those by Jeremy Evans and Bruce Little represent the most substantive and incisive chapters in the book. If the Southern Baptist Convention produces young scholars along the lines of Evans and Little, then it is sure that the *via media* soteriological approach of this book will experience a renaissance.

Jeremy Evans's chapter contains some penetrating reflections on determinism and libertarian free will that attempt to remain biblical and anti-Pelagian. In that vein, Evans makes approving reference to Richard Cross's excellent article in *Faith and Philosophy*, "Anti-Pelagianism and the Resistibility of Grace."[10] He cites Keathley's book, which goes into much more detail biblically and theologically than Cross's article. Cross asks, "Suppose we do adopt . . . that there can be no natural active human cooperation in justification. Would such a position require us to accept the irresistibility of grace?" (Evans, 260). Cross and Evans think it would not, and Evans calls this "Monergism with resistibility of grace." Evans reminds me of Arminius's desire to maintain "the greatest possible distance from

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[7]C. Marion Brown, "Some Meditations on the Altar Call," *The Arminian Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Fall, 1983), http://www.fwponline.cc/v4n1/v4n1cmbrown.html.

[8]See also Joseph D. McPherson, "Modern Altar Methods: An Inadequate Substitute for the Methodist Class Meeting," *The Arminian Magazine*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall, 1997), http://www.fwponline.cc/v15n2/v15n2joemac.html.

[9]http://www.biblical-theology.net/decisional_regeneration.htm.

[10]"Anti-Pelagianism and the Resistibility of Grace," *Faith and Philosophy* 22:2 (2005), 204.

Pelagianism."[11] Evans remarks that this approach means that "the only contribution the person makes is not of positive personal status, as strands of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism hold," because salvation is "wrought by God (Eph 2:8-9). So people do not "pull [themselves] up by [their] own bootstraps." Instead, saving faith is a "gift freely given from above and does not reside in any natural capacity of the person (Phil 1:28-29)." Furthermore, Evans maintains, affirming monergism together with resistible grace "helps explain how God desires that none perish (1 Tim 2:3)" (261).

Expanding on some of the themes in Lemke's chapter, Evans explains that this account of saving grace helps deal with the logical problem of placing regeneration before faith as Calvinism does. So, instead of new life leading to saving faith, saving faith brings about new life. This seems to accord better with straightforward scriptural statements about salvation and new life: "Jesus provides forgiveness of sins for those who believe in Him (Acts 13:38); the one who hears the words of Christ and believes passes from death to life (John 5:24). Notice that the verse does not say 'the one who passes from death to life believes' but 'the one who believes passes from death to life.' The New Testament is replete with other instances where new life is brought from faith (John 20:31; 1 Tim 1:16)" (261).

Evans is most helpful at the intersection of the disciplines of theology and philosophy of religion, and this comes to bear in his clear discussion of determinism and free will. He gets to the heart of the difference between libertarian freedom and various forms of determinism—whether hard or soft (compatibilism)—in his argument that we can be held responsible for something only if it is a genuinely free action. He explains: "I concur with Robert Kane, that ultimate responsibility . . . resides where ultimate cause is. If I am *never* the original force behind my choices, then I am not responsible for the contents of my choices. At some point in the causal chain, I must have contra-causal freedom (the ability to do otherwise)" (263).

In fleshing out his argument, Evans does a superb job of exposing the problem of classical Calvinism's views of the will. For example, he states, "The strong Calvinist's claim hinges on the notion of complete psychological determinism—that humans *always* act on their strongest desires or motives" (263). However, this perspective seems to be contradicted by passages like Romans 7 (regardless of whether it is interpreted as pre- or post-conversion): "Rather than taking Paul as saying, 'I have the desire to do what is right,' he must have meant, 'But I have a greater desire for something else.' Clearly, however, Scripture does not make this statement but provides the opposite one—he does the things he hates." (263-64).

No matter how much softening modern Calvinists do of their determinism, what they are still left with is the fact that God causes all things that come to pass. "Anyone who wants to grant God the type of sovereignty proposed by strong Calvinism, which is a causal account of human willing and acting, yet wants to say that the world is not as it should be (sin) is under a particular burden to explain how they can make these claims in conjunction with one another" (267).

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[11] *The Works of James Arminius* (Nashville: Randall House, 2007), 1:764.

Another problem with Calvinism is that it necessitates that the present world is the "Best Possible World." Yet, if the best possible world is the one we are in, how can the Calvinist say that many of the things that are, ought not to be (i.e., sin)? If God foreordains all things, therefore being causally responsible for all things, "and we say the world is not as it ought to be (which is conceptually entailed by sin, and in this case the rejection of Jesus [by human beings]), then we are explicitly saying that God should not have caused the world to be as it is." These ideas are not merely mysterious, Evans insists, "they are contradictory" (269).

The most difficult-to-understand section of Evans's chapter is also perhaps one of the most fruitful lines of argument he presents, on speech-act theory and problems it presents for Calvinist soteriology. Calvinist theologians and philosophers need to wrestle with this argument, because most conservative Calvinists ground their theory of plenary-verbal inspiration in speech-act theory.

In speech-act theory, an *illocution* is a speaker's intent revealed in what he speaks—his speech. The *perlocution* is the effect the speech has, or is intended to have, on the speaker or the hearer. Evans applies this construct to the statement that God "commands all people everywhere to repent." Evans says that the command is morally binding on everyone. However, when one follows the Calvinist line of reasoning, every detail of reality is determined by God for his purposes, "including the damnation of some for His good pleasure," then how are individuals to understand the command to repent? "It seems God has commanded something (repentance and faith from everyone) that He has not willed." This seems to drive a wedge between God's commands and His will, "and human beings are morally accountable for the content of God's will and not His commands." (270).

Thus it appears that God has no intention for his speech (his command) to change the reprobate. In Calvinism, God's intention was that the elect repent and be saved, but his intention for the nonelect was that they not repent and be damned. Yet he commanded them all to repent. "The same message, but two divine perlocutions, was given," Evans concludes (271).

Why is this problematic? Evans asks. His answer is that, if God gives the command to repent to inform people and direct them away from sin, he "*intends* to command human beings for the purpose of change" (271). However, this proposition cannot be true for Calvinists. It means that

> God will still hold persons accountable for patterns of thought and action that He never intended to correct by His command. Indeed, if God knew that He had not elected many, then His intention in the illocution for the non-elect would not be for a corrective course of action. If divine commands are not intended to correct a course of thought and action, then the non-elect are not morally obligated to that course of action (God never intended them to change their status) (271).

In his conclusion, Evans states that he moved away from classical Calvinism while in seminary, despite the fact that most of his professors were Calvinistic. He felt he needed to do this "to avoid what I considered to be problems bigger than those faced by non-Reformed views of the will")274). He believed that both deterministic and libertarian views

entail difficulties, but the difficulties with libertarian views of freedom dealt more with mystery regarding the infinite attributes of God, not problems with God's character as just, righteous, and holy. Many of us have made the same choice, and I think we have been right to do so.

In the book's final chapter, Bruce Little presents an incisive study of the implications of Calvinist views of determinism and free will for the problem of evil. He opens his essay with two illustrations of gratuitous evil. He refers, for example, to John Piper's statements surrounding the crash of US Airways flight 1549 on January 15, 2009, in which Piper said that God can take down a plane anytime he pleases and wrong no one because we're all guilty and deserve judgment (279). Piper said that the entire event was "designed" by God (288). Little remarks, "This assertion can only mean that God in His sovereignty designed it before the world began to fit His purposes. If that is so, God does not merely *allow* this; God designs and executes it. . . . God is responsible but not morally culpable" (288).

Little refers to the case of a young Florida girl named Jessica whom a convicted sex offender abducted, tortured, raped, and buried alive. According to the meticulous account of sovereignty and determinism of strong Calvinism advocated by Piper, Little argues, because this child was guilty before God, God did not owe her anything and thus had the right to ordain the state of affairs that led to and entailed her abduction, torture, rape, and burial alive (279).

Little rightly says that "Piper seems to confuse suffering in time with suffering in eternity" He argues that it does not follow that God would ordain Jessica's torture because she is a sinner. Furthermore, he argues, according to this Edwardsean-Calvinist account, Jessica's torture and death are the only way things could have turned out, because they were ordained by God. He makes it clear that this "means more than simply saying God allowed it to happen" (279).

Little explains that, according to Calvinists such as Piper, God is not blameworthy even though he caused the chain of events to occur. This necessitates God operating under two categories of moral order—one for himself and another for people created in his image. This makes God the author of the evil he commands people not to perform. If all events are ordained by God, Little argues, then not only is Jessica's torture and death ordained, but also her murderer's motives and actions. Still, however, he points out, according to the Edwardsean view, her murderer is still fully responsible for the act, even though he could never have done otherwise because the act was divinely pre-planned. "Understand the logical force of this view: there is no way for Jessica to be raped except for *someone* to rape her. If the rape is ordained, then so is the *rapist* ordained to act" (279-80).

Little is concerned that Calvinism of this sort does not achieve the proper balance between God's right to do what he pleases and his commitments or promises by which he constrains himself (which self-constraint does not detract from his sovereignty). "Christians are commanded to do good to all people, especially those of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Should God do less—especially the sovereign God?" (280).

Little is quick to point out that all except perhaps open theists would agree that all that happens in the world happens either because God ordains or allows it. He argues that

the purpose of allowing evil will never be the greater good, because this would entail consequentialism, or an ends-justifies-the-means mentality. Some Arminians and other advocates of libertarian free will would not join Little in this assertion. However, the important point is that the sort of determinism he is considering does not simply have God allowing evil but ordaining it, being the causal agent of it, yet still holding individuals responsible for the evil.

According to this strong Calvinist view, Little stresses, God's purposes cannot be obtained unless he controls every aspect of reality. If he does not, then he cannot achieve his purposes. It is all or nothing. Either every aspect of reality has a purpose or all is chaotic. A core part of God's purpose in bringing about evil, according to this view, is to glorify God. In response to these notions, Little poses two questions: "(1) Does divine sovereignty require this strong view in order to maintain a biblical view of sovereignty? (2) If God ordains or wills all things, in that way do persons, not God, stand morally responsible for their acts?" (283). Little distinguishes between purpose and reason. There is a reason why all things happen, because God has ordered his universe in a careful way. But that does not mean God has a purpose in every event that occurs. (285).

Little's distinction between the Calvinist view of sovereignty and the biblical view is compelling. He suggests that exhaustive control or determination of every act in reality is not the biblical view of how a sovereign maintains control of that over which he is sovereign: "Another way to understand God's control is that of the man who is in control of his family. He ensures that everybody follows the established rules. This form is called *simple sovereignty* and is the one displayed in Ancient Near Eastern texts referring to the suzerain and his vassal." (287).

So why, according to Calvinists like Piper, does God ordain every evil that comes to pass? It is "to make the glory of Christ shine more brightly" (289). But Little, in classic libertarian fashion, points out that, if this is true, "then it seems that people need the ugly in order to appreciate beauty. That would mean that the beauty and glory of God could not be fully appreciated until there was the ugly—evil. So Adam in the garden could not appreciate the beauty and glory of God. Does that not necessitate the fall in the garden?" (289). This is one of the most common reasons people have left Calvinism in the past—because they think it necessitates a supralapsarian approach to the divine decrees or a "fortunate fall." This is precisely why Thomas Helwys left Calvinism, as seen in his work, *A Short and Plaine Proofe*, the first Baptist treatise on predestination.[12]

Little avers that "the logic of this argument says that the more evil there is, the brighter Christ's glory will shine." But he points out that this seems to contradict Paul's statement, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Rom 6:1-2). According to this system, Little argues, it appears that "God not only ordained evil but actually needs evil if Christ is to get the greater glory. In fact, it makes

[12]See J. Matthew Pinson, "The The First Baptist Treatise on Predestination: Thomas Helwys's *Short and Plaine Proofe*," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 6 (2009): 139-51. http://baptistcenter.com/Spring_09_Journal_PDF.pdf.

the fall in the garden necessary, which in the end means Adam had no choice. So why is God not the one morally responsible even if for a good cause—the glory of Christ?" (291-92).

Finally, according to Little, the Scriptures make it look as if people can make significant free choices and are then solely responsible for those choices. He refers, for example, to Deuteronomy 28, where God discusses his blessings and curses on his people because of their obedience and disobedience. I think we must reckon with his observation that, "if it was not a free choice, then moral responsibility cannot be imputed. . . . To say they chose but were not free is to void the meaning of 'to choose,' and then language means nothing. Not only that, but it destroys the entire notion of justice. The man who raped Jessica and buried her alive could not have chosen to do differently. In the plain sense of language, that choice means he should not be held accountable" (297). His logic is compelling: If God ordains all evil actions and is not considered morally responsible for them, but rather the person whom he determined to perform the action is considered solely morally responsible, this presents a problem that cannot be solved simply by appealing to mystery.

Little concludes that "The logical end of the Calvinist position on the question of sovereignty leads to a strong form of determinism, which is not the necessary outcome of biblical sovereignty. In addition, moral responsibility for sin must find its final causal agent to be God." (296). His reasoning is consistent with classic, non-determinist accounts of God's action in the world.

Whosoever Will is an absorbing book that needs to be read by Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike, not only in the Southern Baptist Convention, but also in the broader evangelical community. It is ironic that sometimes debate on important differences can bring people together on other important issues. I believe that healthy debate on this issue can bring Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals together by clarifying the essence of the gospel and the importance of theology in the life of the church and its proclamation. This volume has the potential to further such healthy debate so that evangelicals on both sides of it can unite for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ's kingdom.

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