


BEWARE OF THE
ECUMENICAL
AGENDA!

*A RESPONSE TO
'MORE CALVINISTIC THAN CALVIN'*

A close-up photograph of a garden bed filled with orange lilies. Several flowers are in full bloom, showing vibrant orange petals with some white variegation. Interspersed among the open flowers are numerous green, unopened buds. The leaves are long, narrow, and green. The background is dark, making the bright orange and green of the plants stand out.

Boon-Sing Poh

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About the author

Boon-Sing Poh was born in Malaysia in 1954. Brought up in a pagan background, he was saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ while studying in the United Kingdom. He returned to Malaysia to become a lecturer in a university for six years, founded the first Reformed Baptist Church in the country in 1983, and was imprisoned for his faith from 1987 to 1988 for a period of 325 days. He is the pastor of Damansara Reformed Baptist Church (DRBC) in Kuala Lumpur, a contented husband, a thankful father of four sons, and a happy grandfather. He earned the PhD degree in Electronics Engineering from the University of Liverpool, UK, the Diploma in Religious Study from Cambridge University, UK, and the PhD degree in Theology from North-West University, SA.

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Dedicated to
the members of
Damansara Reformed Baptist Church (1999-2024).

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Introduction

The present book is a response to a recently published book, entitled *More Calvinistic Than Calvin? Hardline Reformed Theology And The Malaysian Church*.¹ The present book may be understood without prior reading of the latter book. The latter book will be referred to as MCTC after the first mention in each chapter. As will be seen, the substance of this book is relevant to other parts of the world, and not only to Malaysia.

The book MCTC begins with the words, “This book is about Reformed theology, or more specifically, a particular version of it. Contrary to what some might think, it is not an attack on Reformed theology per se. In fact, readers will find that this book has much to say that is positive about aspects of the Reformed tradition, and also shows great appreciation for some Reformed theologians and leaders.” Further on in the Introduction, we are told, “...such hardliners are not just concerned with affirming the five distinctives of Reformed theology or Calvinism, summed up by TULIP. But over and above these, they have added other lesser distinctives as a way of championing or demonstrating the purity of their doctrines. The unfortunate fact is that hardline Reformed practitioners are found in many parts of the world and the problem we face is not just a Malaysian one.”

The book MCTC says some things about Reformed theology which are accurate and good, but inaccuracies, distortions, omissions, and misrepresentations predominate. If hardline Reformed theology is found in many parts of the world, it will need to be corrected by an accurate presentation of mainline Reformed theology. The presence of good and accurate substance in MCTC does not negate the neces-

¹Hwa Yung, Lee Soo Tian, Lee Tat Yan and Lim Kar Yong. 2023. *More Calvinistic Than Calvin? Hardline Reformed Theology & the Malaysian Church*. Faith Books.

sity of correcting those parts that are misleading and harmful (Rev. 2:2-6; etc.). After all, the book issues the invitation (p. 12): “Test all that is stated here in the light of Scriptures. Challenge and correct us if we are wrong. But at the same time be willing to let the Spirit speak to you and challenge your thinking as you read.”

The Introduction of the book further says (p. 3), “This book therefore has been put together with a pastoral intent, to help all those who have been troubled by a particular church in the Klang Valley that has been asserting this kind of hardline theology in an aggressive manner. But we are also aware that there are other churches or groups in the country that similarly advocate a strong, or even exclusive, Reformed position, even if not as aggressively. We therefore offer this volume to help all who have been affected and are troubled by the matter.” The authors of the book have drawn a line, even if unintentionally, between those who are clearly Reformed and those who are not.

The Reformed Baptist churches that the present writer is associated with have existed in Malaysia for over forty years, during which time we have had fellowship with other churches to varying degrees. We have engaged in church-planting and carried out extensive ‘good works’ in this country and the nations around us. We have advocated a strong, and in some sense exclusive, Reformed position without necessarily being aggressive. We do not align ourselves with the particular church in the Klang Valley that holds to a “hardline theology in an aggressive manner”. That said, we are unfazed by any attempt to push us into a defensive position and be apologetic about our doctrine and practice.

On the contrary, we have a message to Christians throughout the world. We see the church in Malaysia as a microcosm of the worldwide church. There are local peculiarities and special challenges here, but which country doesn’t have a fair share of its own? Apart from countering the misrepresentation of the Reformed faith, we intend to sound forth the warning against the ecumenical agenda of the Neo-evangelicals. The Neo-evangelicals play down on doctrinal distinctives and promote unity among all who call themselves Christian. To them, unity between Christians must be sought even at the cost of compromising the truth.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) is a name seldom heard of today, at least in most Christian circles. He has been regarded as the greatest preacher of the last century. In his lifetime, he was a

legend who championed the truth and opposed ecumenism. Many in his time were inspired by him but did not fully appreciate the seriousness of the ecumenism which he opposed. The ecumenical movement has not abated but has gained momentum instead. It is promoted by the Neo-evangelicals whose influence has become all-pervasive. The writers of MCTC have been influenced by them and, indeed, may be regarded as Neo-evangelicals themselves. Who are the Neo-evangelicals? What is the ecumenical agenda that they are promoting? Why should all evangelical Christians be concerned? How should Christian unity be expressed? These are questions we seek to answer in the present book. From this perspective, the present book is of relevance to Christians everywhere, although its genesis is in little Malaysia.

In this response to MCTC, we cover the ground by following the chapter-divisions of that book. Each chapter of this book interacts with the corresponding chapter of that book by giving an alternative view, making corrections, filling in omissions, and providing comments and observations as necessary. If this modest book succeeds in offsetting any negative perception of the Reformed faith engendered by MCTC, the objective would have been accomplished. If it warns Christians of the danger posed by ecumenism, praise is due to God. If it wins adherents to the Reformed faith, thanksgiving to God is called for. We see no place for triumphalism, as our concern is to glorify God and to edify the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Soli Deo gloria!*

B S Poh,
Kuala Lumpur, February 2024.

One

Why This Book?

A book was published recently (2nd print in April 2023), entitled *More Calvinistic Than Calvin?*, subtitled *Hardline Reformed Theology & the Malaysian Church*. The authors are Hwa Yung, Lee Soo Tian, Lee Tat Yan, and Lim Kar Yong. It consists of seven chapters, of which only the first chapter has its author (Hwa Yung) identified. As such, the contributors take the shared responsibility for its contents. For convenience, we shall refer to the book *More Calvinistic Than Calvin?* as MCTC after its first mention.

1.1 Purpose of MCTC

The book ostensibly arose from the need to address the disquiet among churches and Christian organisations caused by one particular church in the Klang Valley (the Kuala Lumpur area), viz. the Christ Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) in Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya. In the first chapter, two charges are brought against that church, which we reproduce ‘verbatim’ (p. 7):

“The first is that the church is allegedly propagating a rather rigid or hardline version of Reformed theology, which claims that it is the most (or even, only?) correct expression of biblical truth and all others are inadequate at best, if not wrong. This, of course, then leads to an exclusive posture towards Christians of other denominations, especially in the Klang Valley. Apparently, this

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has led to splits in some mixed denominational groups in which their members have been involved.

The second issue is that there have been repeated complaints about the methods that are being employed to further the influence of the church, especially among the younger generation and university/college students. Pastors of churches and leaders of youth organizations around Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur have received various complaints about such methods being used against their members. Some who have been involved with CERC but who have since left the church, as well as others who have been on the receiving end of these methods, have now come out publicly with their grievances.”

The author (Hwa Yung) proceeds to relate his personal encounter with CERC, and mentioned that others have had similar unpleasant experiences. We again quote verbatim the next two paragraphs of the book (p. 10), which have some bearing on what we have to say about it.

“Given the above, it was felt that, for the wellbeing of the Malaysian church as a whole, the relevant issues need to be addressed openly. However, the concern of this book is not to attack CERC specifically, although some things said will relate directly to some of their teachings. Rather, this book will focus primarily on theological issues and not on the complaints about a church’s methods or practices. On the latter, we will leave it to the Christian public to make their own judgment.

We will address two main concerns. The first is to help the Christian public in Malaysia have a better understanding of Reformed theology in the context of global Christianity, and not only the rigid interpretation of it as propagated by CERC. The second concerns the unity of Christians and churches in the country. Reformed theology as taught and advocated by CERC has caused serious division within the Christian Fellowships (CFs) in some colleges and universities in the Klang Valley. Moreover, there have also been complaints that this divisiveness has also affected some churches. Our purpose here is to draw

attention to this matter so that churches in and around the country and their leaders will know how to deal with any disruptive influence and divisiveness, which may arise from a rigid and exclusive Reformed theology propagated aggressively. Simply put, our concern is for the unity of the Malaysian church.”

1.2 Purpose Of The Present Book

The above quotes, together with the contents of the subsequent chapters, give rise to the following concerns. Firstly, the authors have a desire to foster unity among the churches of Malaysia. In itself, that would seem noble and commendable. However, when pursued regardless of differences in theology and at the expense of important truths of Scripture, that is tantamount to ecumenism. The word ‘ecumenism’ comes from the Greek word ‘oikoumene’, meaning ‘the whole inhabited world’. When used in the Christian context, it refers to the gathering or union of many churches. In the early centuries of the history of the church, a number of ecumenical councils – consisting of the gatherings of leaders from many churches – were held to discuss about, and counter, heresies and to produce creeds to declare the correct doctrines. We thus have the Apostles’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Nicene Creed. Today, the word ‘ecumenism’ carries a largely negative connotation, meaning to have unity at the expense of truth, to compromise with errors, and to be genial and generous to those who differ from oneself. No doubt, there will be grades of compromise, and degrees of liberalism, among those who are ecumenical-minded. We perceive that the authors of MCTC have an ecumenical agenda for the churches in Malaysia.

Secondly, the attempt by the authors to expound Reformed theology, when they are themselves not from the Reformed tradition (as they openly acknowledge, p. 11), inevitably displays prejudice against the Reformed faith and partiality towards their own theological positions. It will be shown that they have employed a questionable approach and engaged in misrepresentation of Reformed theology, while attempting to advance their ecumenical agenda. This is not to say that the contributors have any malicious intent or sinister motive towards Reformed churches. Instead, the misrepresentation

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of Reformed theology seems to have arisen from a lack of familiarity with the wider Reformed world and the controversies in Reformed circles. Much as one may try, there is a limit to one's ability to be completely impartial and fair in any matter controverted. The authors of MCTC have misrepresented Reformed theology, despite the positive things they say about it.

This leads to a third concern, which is that those who read MCTC may be discouraged from pursuing Reformed theology, or may wrongly think that their anti-Calvinist prejudice (if present) has been confirmed. It is no secret that there has been considerable interest in Reformed theology in recent years, the reasons for which are quite clear to us but will be contested by those who disagree with us. The excesses and scandals associated with the Signs and Wonders movement, the Toronto Blessing, and the Kansas City Prophets have resulted in many in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches seeking stability for their faith in Reformed theology. The quiet and steady advance made by Reformed theology via powerful, systematic, and expository preaching and teaching – transmitted in the pulpit, in print, and via conferences, the internet and social media – have convinced and won over many evangelicals. This advance is occurring worldwide, and also in Malaysia. Non-Reformed evangelical churches will understandably be concerned that their members might be drawn away. At the same time, vocal and aggressive anti-Calvinists have arisen to attack Reformed theology in print and online. We will provide examples of such at the appropriate places in this book. There are hardline anti-Calvinists, just as there are hardline Calvinists! Other anti-Calvinists, although less belligerent, have given a distorted narrative of Reformed theology and its development, examples of which we will provide as well.

The chief purpose of this book is to correct the misrepresentation of Reformed theology, and not to cause distress to other churches. We look upon believers in true churches as our brethren in Christ. We rejoice when their churches are blessed by God. Members of their churches who adopt Reformed theology have not turned heretical. In fact, they would have come closer to the teaching of Scripture. There is no necessity for them to be evicted, unless required by the Constitution of their churches. After all, there are Reformed Baptists, Reformed Presbyterians, Reformed Anglicans, Reformed Independents, etc. Furthermore, there will be cases of the voluntary transfer of membership between churches which should not trouble

us too much, as we believe in ‘the liberty of conscience’ and ‘the voluntary nature of discipleship’. (Again, this might be contested by those who disagree with us.) Overall, we should desire for ‘all the tribes of Israel’ to prosper, and come closer to the truth.

1.3 Subordinate Purposes Of The Present Book

The present writer harbours no ill-will towards the authors of MCTC. The present book, which is a response to it, is in no way a defence of the Christ Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC), with whom we have not had any meaningful fellowship. There were at least two attempts made to infiltrate our church by CERC members, and an attempt made to infiltrate one of our sister churches. We have been firm with their emissaries (or spies?), warning our young people of them. We have confronted one of them and frankly told him that he was not welcome. An elder of another church told me that the members of CERC are banned (his word) from the churches of his denomination because they (the CERC members) have been drawing away their young people. It will be shown in this book that the CERC is hardly ‘Reformed’ in the traditional sense of the word.

The leading author of MCTC refers with favour to two Reformed leaders of recent years, the late Dr. J. I. Packer and the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. One was an academician hailing from the Church of England, and the other a medical doctor turned powerful preacher of an independent church in London, namely the Westminster Chapel. They are put forward as the epitomes of Reformed theologians with big hearts who were ready to accept, and cooperate with, Christians who differed from themselves. Not revealed in MCTC was the great rift between the two men over differences on Christian unity, which will be discussed in greater length in the subsequent chapters. Suffice here to say that Dr. Lloyd-Jones advocated strongly evangelical unity outside ‘mixed’ denominations while Dr. Packer chose to remain in the compromised Church of England, from where he extended fellowship to equally broad-minded people of other churches. Packer was ecumenical-minded, while Lloyd-Jones believed in selective fellowship around the truth. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is to be emulated, while J. I. Packer’s weakness must be noted.

Another purpose of this book is to warn Christians everywhere of the danger posed by ecumenism. Lloyd-Jones’s fight against ec-

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umenism need to be appreciated better by the present generation of Christians. Ecumenism has spread its influence farther since the days of Lloyd-Jones. In this regard, Lloyd-Jones was prophetic. We do well to understand the character of ecumenism and its ambition to influence the churches. There are those who have been drawn away from the old evangelicalism to become Neo-evangelicals who are ecumenical-minded. There are Reformed people who are fraternising with such Neo-evangelicals more closely than is safe for themselves. To understand the ecumenical agenda is to forearm ourselves!

1.4 Conclusion

In this book, an alternative approach to unity among the churches is proposed which might not go well with the authors of MCTC and other church leaders. Why then propose it? It is to help them understand that there are those who disagree with ecumenism and yet are able to 'live and let live'. It is also to demonstrate the Christian duty of exposing errors and propagating the truth without the need to be belligerent or discourteous. If they love the Lord, so do we. If they love the church, so do we. We bemoan the facts that we are not holier, that we do not know the truth better, that we have not been more faithful to the Lord and His word. May the Lord use this modest book to draw the readers closer to Himself! Amen.

* * * * *

Two

The Historical Emergence Of Reformed Theology

The book *More Calvinistic Than Calvin* (MCTC) makes a number of omissions which we believe are critical to the understanding of the Reformation and Reformed theology. The Reformation cannot be properly understood without reference to medieval Christianity, during which the Roman Catholic Church was politically influential, superstition was rife, and immorality was rampant. This omission would be in line with the desire of the ecumenical-minded to avoid causing offence to Roman Catholics today. The book also fails to refer to the Anabaptists who have been called ‘the Radical Reformers’.¹ Descendants of the Anabaptist movement include the Mennonites, the Hutterites and the Amish who have quite a visible presence in some parts of the world. Furthermore, it is simplistic and inaccurate to sum up Reformed theology under the Five-Points of Calvinism, represented by the acronym TULIP. Reformed theology has its roots in the Reformation, just as Lutheran theology and Anabaptist theology have their roots in the Reformation. Reformation theology, or Protestant theology, was characterised by the truths expressed by the Five Principles (Five Sola’s) of the Reformation. Reformed theology encompasses the Five Points of Calvinism as well as the Five Principles of the Reformation. Sadly, Lutheran theology and Anabaptist theology developed and veered away from Reformation theology. Similarly, the newer Protestant denominations developed away from Reformation theology, failing to appreciate the importance of

the Five Principles.

It is fashionable in certain circles today to claim that Reformed theology developed away from that of John Calvin due to the influence Scholasticism, i.e. the theology of the Medieval age which was based on Aristotelian logic and the teaching of the church fathers, especially that of Augustine. Hence the epithet, 'More Calvinistic than Calvin'. MCTC assumes the correctness of this questionable claim. Furthermore, it is misleading to regard Lutheranism and John Wesley's theology as responses to Reformed theology. As noted, Lutheranism developed upon Luther's teaching and departed from Reformation theology, while John Wesley never developed a system of theology. His personal reactions to certain elements of Reformed theology were a reflection of his personality and his interaction with some Moravian Christians.

Here, we provide an alternative narrative of the history of Reformed theology, from its emergence to the present.² No reference need be given for most of the background information, as any standard book on church history will supply the confirmation. Reformed theology *per se* will be considered in the next chapter.

2.1 Events Leading To The Reformation

Persecution and heresies (AD 100 AD to AD 300)

The early disciples carried out the Great Commission, "from Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). John, after his exile to the island of Patmos, was based in Ephesus until his death in AD 98. Mark brought the gospel to Egypt, and Thomas to India. Missions and intermittent persecutions kept the early churches pure in membership and doctrine.

Constantine and the Roman Catholic Church (300-500)

The Roman emperor Constantine (272-337) professed faith in 312 but did not get baptised until he was on his deathbed. (Some scholars question the genuineness of his conversion, wondering if it was a political tool to unite the empire.) He issued the Edict of Milan in 313 which commanded official toleration of Christianity and other

¹ Estep, William R. 1986. *Renaissance & Reformation*. Eerdmans.

² Some of the substance have appeared in Poh, B. S. 2017. *Thoroughgoing Reformation: What It Means To Be Truly Reformed*. Good News Enterprise.

2.1. Events Leading To The Reformation

religions. Heresies of various kinds – notably on the Trinity and the person of Christ – appeared, which were dealt with at the various ‘ecumenical councils’. Some of these councils were chaired by the Roman emperors. The true doctrines were published in documents called the ‘Creeds’. Hence the Apostles’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Nicene Creed. Church and state began to be intertwined. The church of Rome, being located at the capital of the empire, began to grow in prominence. The title ‘Pope’ (meaning Father) was generally used of all bishops by the early third century. Pope Stephen I (254-257) was the first bishop to explicitly claim primacy, although opposed by others. Pope Damasus I (366-384) was the first pope to use Matthew 16:16-19 to shore up the claim for primacy over other churches.

Medieval Christianity (500-1500)

Medieval Christianity split into the Eastern Orthodox Catholics and the Roman Catholics when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, King of the Franks, as Holy Roman Emperor in AD 800. The Eastern Emperor and the Byzantine Empire felt slighted after having withstood the Germanic barbarian invasions and upheld the faith for centuries. (The nomadic tribes in Asia were pushing the Germanic tribes westward.) Back of the political-social divide were disputes over papal authority. The East-West Schism was formally sealed in 1054 when each excommunicated the other. Through the centuries, there were many dissenting groups which disagreed with the Catholic (Establishment) Churches in the Roman Empire. The dissenting groups were persecuted by the Establishment churches. These groups included the Albigenses, the Paulicians, the Bogomiles, the Waldensians, the Lollards, the Hussites, and the Anabaptists. They largely kept to believer’s baptism, the separation of church and state, and the authority of Scripture over church traditions, although holding to some doctrinal peculiarities as well.³

The Reformation (1500-1600)

At the eve of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church was particularly influential in Western Europe. Governments were under its influence, immoral priests ignorant of the Scriptures were propagating superstitious ideas and upholding the human traditions of

³See Estep, William R. *Renaissance & Reformation*. Eerdmans Pub Co.

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the church. A priest and theologian by the name of Martin Luther (1483-1546) struggled to find peace with God through asceticism. He finally came to peace with God through faith in Christ, whose imputed righteousness alone assured him of acceptance before God. He began to preach the doctrine of 'justification by faith, in Christ, alone'. The sale of indulgences for the dead ('certificates to heaven') by one Johann Tetzel outraged Luther. The many abuses of the Roman Catholic Church drove Luther to nail the 'Ninety-five Theses', a list of questions and propositions for debate, to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in Germany. This event, on 31 October 1517, marked the official beginning of the Reformation.

Martin Luther was summoned by the authorities to the town of Worm and urged to renounce his teaching, to which he responded, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."⁴ The doctrine of 'sola scriptura' had been boldly proclaimed! It became known as 'the formal principle of the Reformation', upon which rest the other principles. Together, they constitute the Five Principles (Sola's) of the Reformation.

As the Reformation spread, other notable Reformers were raised up by God, including Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Martin Bucer (1491-1551), Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), and William Farel (1489-1565). Another was John Calvin (1509-1564), who trained as a lawyer in France, and escaped to Switzerland after his conversion in 1533. Upon being challenged by William Farel about his selfish seclusion for academic pursuit, Calvin came to Geneva to preach. By his preaching and writing he developed the system of theology later called Calvinism, which included the doctrine of predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of man from eternal damnation. Calvin spent his final years promoting the Reformation in Geneva and throughout Europe. One of his students, John Knox, brought the Reformation to Scotland.

⁴Bainton, Roland H. 1987 edn. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. Abingdon Press, p. 144.

2.1. Events Leading To The Reformation

The Puritan Age (1600-1700)

In the Netherlands, the followers of the seminary professor, James Arminius (1560-1609), drew up 'The Remonstrance' to present to the State Church, demanding that the Confessions of Faith of the church be replaced by their document. A national synod was held, in which some delegates from other countries were invited. The Synod of Dort concluded their findings and produced 'The Canons of Dort' in 1619, in which the 'Five Points of Calvinism' was put forward in opposition to the 'Five Points of Arminianism' found in 'The Remonstrance'. The Five Points of Calvinism are a summary of the doctrine of salvation taught by John Calvin and his followers, which became widely known by the acronym TULIP. The T stands for Total Depravity, the U for Unconditional Election, the L for Limited Atonement, the I for Irresistible Grace, and the P for Perseverance of the Saints.

A cold orthodoxy settled upon the Protestant churches in the early part of the seventeenth century. Calls for the spirit of the Reformation to be rekindled began to be heard. John Robinson, an early leader of the English Separatists based at Leiden in the Netherlands, addressed those of his church migrating to America in 1620 (called the Pilgrim Fathers): "I charge you before God and His blessed angels, that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveals anything to you by any instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth by my ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of those reformed churches which are come to a period [i.e. a full-stop] in religion, and will go, at present, no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented, for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received, for it is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-christian darkness

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and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.”⁵

In Britain, a religious reform movement, known as Puritanism, arose within the Church of England which spilled over to other denominations. The Great Ejection of 1662, arising from refusal to conform to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, caused 2,000 Puritan ministers to join the Separatists in the work of reforming the church. The Puritans were well-known for their preaching and pastoral care. Their writings were most influential, even up to today. They became known as ‘the second-generation Reformers’. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and other church documents were drawn up, followed by the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order (1658), and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (of 1677, affirmed in 1689). The Confessions of Faith covered important doctrines of Scripture more comprehensively than the early Creeds.

The rise of Puritanism in Britain corresponded with the ‘Dutch Second Reformation’ or ‘Nadere Reformatie’ (‘Another Reformation’) in the Netherlands and the Reformed Orthodoxy movement in Germany, which emerged after the devastation of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-48) in Europe. In Germany, Lutheranism had developed into a scholastic system useful for contending with Roman Catholic and Reformed opponents but was lacking in spiritual vitality. English Puritanism reached the European continent through the translation of works by Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, and others. The English religious exiles in the Netherlands such as William Ames and John Robinson were active.

In Germany, the Pietist movement developed under the leadership of Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705), and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727). Pietism emphasised the priestly responsibilities of believers, practical Christian living, and piety in learning with edifying preaching, instead of intellectuality. A notable Pietist was Nikolaus Ludwig (1700-60), also known as Count von Zinzendorf, who founded the Moravian Church which had a strong missionary emphasis. John Wesley, the founder of Wesleyan Methodism, received inspiration from the Moravians and incorporated Pietistic elements such as the emphasis on saving grace, into his movement.⁶

⁵Broadbent, E. H. 1981. *The Pilgrim Church*, pp. 245-246.

⁶Petruzzello, Melissa. *Pietism*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.>

2.2. From The Puritan Age To The Present

The system of belief of the second generation of Reformers – in Britain, the Netherlands, and North America – may rightly be called Reformed theology. Although not expressed as a list until later, the Five Principles of the Reformation were clearly characteristic of the teaching of the Reformers and the Puritans. The Latin word ‘sola’ means ‘solely’ or ‘only’. They include: (i) *sola scriptura*, by Scripture alone; (ii) *sola fide*, by faith alone; (iii) *sola gratia*, by grace alone; (iv) *solus Christus*, through Christ alone; (v) *solī Deo gloria*, glory to God alone. As noted already, the Five Principles of the Reformation must not be confused with the Five Points of Calvinism. Reformed theology encompasses both the Five Points of Calvinism and the Five Principles of the Reformation. It also encompasses the practical implications of the Five Points and the Five Principles. What this means will be elaborated in the next chapter.

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Over the years, more and more churches have been founded, and different denominations established. Revivals have occurred in various parts of the world, while decline has set in among some churches and denominations. In the mid-nineteenth century, Modernism (also known as Theological Liberalism) spread from Germany to other parts of the world. It came to a head in the Evangelical-Liberal Clash that occurred from 1910 to 1930, the aftermath of which is seen even today. Here, we sketch the events and movements that arose from after the Puritan Age.

Revival and missions (1700-1900)

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, waves of religious awakening and revivals took place in Britain and America. Revival preachers included George Whitefield (1714-70) and John Wesley (1703-91) in Britain, and Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) in America.⁷ From the mid-eighteenth century, there was tremendous interest in foreign missions, starting with the Particular (Reformed) Baptists in Britain sending William Carey (1761-1834) to India in 1793. Other well-known missionaries include Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) in Burma, and Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) in China. The second Great Awakening began in America during the late eighteenth century,

[britannica.com/topic/Pietism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pietism) (accessed 26 Oct. 2023).

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in which one of the revival preachers was Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844). In Britain, the revival preachers included C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) in London and William C. Burns (1815-1868) in Scotland. Burns later became a missionary in China and Mongolia.

The Evangelical-Liberal Clash (early 20th century)

Modernism, or Theological Liberalism, began in Germany with the teaching of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Modernism undermined the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture by introducing critical studies of the Scripture texts. C. H. Spurgeon fought against Modernism in the Downgrade Controversy of 1887, but it continued to spread on both sides of the Atlantic. Between 1910 and 1930, the evangelicals in the United States of America united to counter Modernism in what has been called the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy (or Evangelical-Liberal Clash). A series of books, called 'The Fundamentals', were written by various conservative writers and sent out to pastors and seminary students, to counter the claims of Modernism. This was the period when the Chinese evangelist, John Sung (1901-1944) studied in Union Theological Seminary and had his faith wrecked, until he was saved by God's grace in 1927. In Britain, E. J. Poole-Connor contended against the inroads of Modernism and founded the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) in 1922.

After the Evangelical-Liberal Clash, when the spread of Modernism was contained but not stopped, the evangelicals broke into three camps, viz. (i) the Fundamentalist camp, which included men like Carl McIntyre (1906-2002), Bob Jones Sr. (1883-1968), and Bob Jones Jr. (1911-1997); (ii) the Reformed camp, which included J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), James Orr (1844-1913), Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981); and (iii) the Neo-Evangelical camp, which included Harold J. Ockenga (1905-1985), Carl F. Henry (1913-2003), and Billy Graham (1918-2018). At that time, Pentecostalism⁸ arose as a fourth group, which merged with the charismatic renewal of the 1960's to form the charismatic movement. The personalities of the movement included David du Plessis (1905-1987), John Wimber (1934-1997), and G. E. Patterson (1939-2007) in the United States of America, David C. K. Wat-

⁷ See Dallimore, Arnold. 1970, 1980. *George Whitefield, Vols. 1 & 2*. Banner of Truth Trust.

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son (1933-1984), and Michael C. Harper (1931-2010) in the United Kingdom, and Paul (later changed to David) Cho Yonggi (1936-2021) in South Korea.

The Reformed and Charismatic movements (mid-20th century)

From the 1960's there was a revival of interest in Reformed theology, at the same time that there was a charismatic renewal. The two streams have become unwitting contenders among Christians. Cross-overs have taken place across-the-board, leading to heterodoxy in many cases. John R. W. Stott (1921-2011) was an Anglican Reformed writer and preacher who turned Neo-evangelical by advocating social actions and teaching annihilationism.⁹ Another Anglican Reformed writer, J. I. Packer, who will be considered further in the next chapter, proposed in the Anglican Journal *Churchman* in 1980 how the charismatics could strengthen their weak theology. His book, *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, approves of much that is seen among the charismatics. There were Reformed men who attempted to incorporate charismatic teachings to Reformed theology, calling themselves 'Reformed Charismatics'. In recent days, there have been charismatics who adopt Calvinistic teaching, the outreach methods and spirit of Postmodernism, and who eschew traditional classifications such as 'evangelical', 'conservative', and 'liberal' – preferring to be all inclusive while expressing disillusionment with organised Christianity. Many of them rely on Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, which seems tailored to strengthen their otherwise weak doctrinal base.¹⁰ These are all characteristics of the so-called Emerging Church movement. Some of them have called themselves 'Reformed', when they are better described as 'New Calvinists'.¹¹

The Neo-evangelicals have been on the frontline of compromise with the charismatics, the liberals, and the Roman Catholics. They attempted to gain a hearing from non-evangelicals by emphasising on scholarship and placing men of suitable qualifications in the the-

⁸ An account of the life of Edward Irving and the rise of Pentecostalism, which subsequently spread to America, is in Dallimore, Arnold. 1983. *The Life Of Edward Irving: The Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement*. The Banner of Truth Trust.

⁹ The belief that the soul gradually ceases to exist in hell. See Edwards, D. L. and Stott, J. 1988. *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, pp. 313-320. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

¹⁰ Grudem, Wayne. 1994. *Systematic Theology*. Zondervan.

¹¹ A critique of New Calvinism is found in Williams, E. S. 2014. *The New Calvinists: Changing the Gospel*. Wakeman Trust.

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ological faculties of academia. From such men have come the ideas that Reformed theology has become 'more Calvinistic than John Calvin' and that it has been unduly influenced by the Enlightenment¹² and the use of Aristotelian logic. The basic objective is to unite together a fragmented Christendom by minimising the differences in doctrine while emphasising commonalities. Within the Church of England, there was a desire to reunite with the Roman Catholic Church. In short, there has been an ecumenical agenda that is being promoted by the Neo-evangelicals.¹³ This has been resisted by Reformed, as well as Fundamentalist, Christians to varying degrees. Observers are often confused, failing to distinguish between the Fundamentalists and the Reformed. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) was a Reformed preacher in London who opposed the ecumenically minded Anglicans, J. I. Packer and John Stott. We will have more to say about this contention in a subsequent chapter.

The Reformed movement today

Reformed theology continues to attract adherents from the various streams of Christianity. It fulfils the deep yearning for a well-grounded faith in those raised in charismatic subjectivism. There are individuals and churches in the charismatic movement who have discarded the more extreme expressions of their belief and practice, to embrace the Calvinistic system of salvation summarised by the acronym TULIP. Quite a number of them have claimed to be Reformed, while retaining belief in the extraordinary gifts of tongue-speaking, prophecy, and healing. At the same time, Neo-evangelicals who subscribe to Reformed theology – such as John Piper, D. A. Carson, and Timothy Keller – have promoted 'The Gospel Coalition' as a platform of unity for those who hold to TULIP, while being open to charismatic practices such as tongue-speaking, prophecy, and contemporary worship. While it is a matter for rejoicing that others have come to embrace the Calvinistic doctrine of salvation, it is a matter for concern that they have not come far enough to embrace Reformed theology. By calling themselves 'Reformed', these New Calvinists not only show themselves confused but also confuse oth-

¹² Also known as the Age of Reason, lasting the whole of the eighteenth century, during which there was scientific, political and philosophical discourse in Europe.

¹³ For an account of the development of the ecumenical agenda by Neo-evangelicals, see Murray, Iain H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000* Banner of Truth Trust.

ers into equating Reformed theology with mere adherence to the Five Points of Calvinism. Reformed theology, as we have noted, encompasses more than the Five Points of Calvinism.

Reformed theology has also attracted adherents from a background of Arminianism. Many evangelical churches today are Arminian – including those that are Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Plymouth Brethren, and Baptist. The Presbyterian, Lutheran and Mennonite churches have their historical roots in the Reformation, but they have developed away from the theology of the Reformation such that they generally pay lip-service to the Confessions of Faith of their Reformation forebears. Together with the newer Protestant denominations, they hold to the belief that salvation is by what they call the ‘prevenient grace’ which God gives to the sinner, enabling him to decide whether or not to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. The understanding on ‘prevenient grace’ varies among those who hold to it, but they all share in common the objection to the Calvinist teaching that God’s grace irresistibly (or invincibly) saves those who are elect (i.e. those who have been chosen by God from eternity). The cogent arguments of the Calvinists from Scripture have humbled many and caused them to embrace the Calvinistic system of salvation. Not only that, many of such have been drawn to embrace the Five Principles of the Reformation, concerning which their own churches are weak. This has caused alarm to the churches, for they fear that this is a small step away from questioning the beliefs and practices of their own churches, leading them to the next step, which is to seek membership with other churches that conform to their newly found belief.

It is to be noted that cross-overs between churches have occurred all through the centuries – sometimes amicably, at other times with acrimony. A change in belief might have been the cause, or personal problems encountered in their churches might have been the cause. Reformed Christians must be given more credit than to accuse them of being narrow-minded bigots who are out to steal sheep from other churches. The misbehaviour of the odd churches on the periphery of the Reformed movement is not typical of mainline Reformed churches down the centuries. Furthermore, the belligerence and harsh tones displayed by some in doctrinal controversies are not confined only to those who are Reformed or Calvinistic. Anti-Calvinists are capable of such behaviour.¹⁴ We have noted that some vocal Calvinists have been mistakenly thought to be Reformed when

they are not recognised as such in mainline Reformed circles. Being Calvinist is not necessarily being Reformed.

2.3 Conclusion

Let us not fear losing members to other churches, nor engage in stealing sheep from other churches! There are numberless souls to be won for Christ. There is much work to be done for the Lord. There are also dangers and challenges that we face as we serve our God. It is right to be thankful when other churches are making progress spiritually. Any church that engages in unethical and disruptive practices must be confronted privately by those affected, before doing so publicly. In our own churches, we have had to confront so-called Reformed churches. (Yes, plural, ‘churches’, one in the Klang Valley, another based in Singapore.) Happily, we have had good fellowship with other Reformed churches and other conservative churches. Suffice for us to be reminded of Philippians 2:3, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

The Reformed faith is not characterised by the Five Points of Calvinism alone. It includes the Five Principles (Sola’s) of the Reformation. It includes the practical outworking of these doctrines. There are individuals and churches who call themselves ‘Reformed’ when they are far from being so. There are other individuals who are Fundamentalist and never claim themselves to be Reformed, but have been mistaken as being Reformed. We rejoice when non-Reformed individuals and churches adopt the Five Points of Calvinism. Our wish is for them to continue reforming until they become truly Reformed.

In the attempt to stop, and correct, the perceived harm done by a church (CERC) that claims itself to be Reformed, the Reformed faith has been misrepresented in the book MCTC. The misrepresentation has come about by omission of facts, misinterpretation of events, making sweeping assumptions, misunderstanding Reformed doctrine, and ignorance of certain historical events. In charity, we would want to believe that the misrepresentation of the Reformed faith has been done inadvertently rather than deliberately. The mis-

¹⁴See, for example, Vance, Laurence M. 1994. *The Other Side Of Calvinism*. Vance Publications.

representation of the Reformed faith, however, gives us the right to set the record straight. Indeed, it might be said that there is a responsibility laid upon us to correct that misrepresentation.

Of greater concern to us is the ecumenical agenda which is camouflaged under the outrage against the antics of CERC. We believe that ecumenism is an error, and danger, that must be exposed and warned against. The ecumenical agenda of the Neo-evangelicals has been around since the Fundamentalist-Liberal Clash, of which many are ignorant. Its pervasive influence through writing, and teaching in universities and seminaries, is seen in every nation. It is not just hardline Reformed theology that is found everywhere, but ecumenism as well! It will be naive to deny its presence in Malaysia.

We acknowledge the right of others to hold to their views. Our disagreement with them does not call into question their faith or sincerity. We posit the Reformed faith as the system of theology closest to the Bible's teaching. We have noted that "the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy word (John Robinson)". The way forward is not to create an amalgamation of Reformed teaching with other systems, or to accommodate Reformed theology to the charismatic, or other, movements. The sure foundation that has been established during the Reformation should be built upon by turning "to the law and to the testimony (Isa. 8:20)". Do we not believe in 'sola scriptura'? Does not the Spirit of God speak to His people via the Scriptures? Are not all true spiritual experiences those prompted and regulated by the word of God? We would humbly call upon brethren from other streams to search the Scriptures, like the Bereans, to see whether these things are true (Acts 17:11).

Three

An Overview Of Reformed Theology

The book *More Calvinistic Than Calvin?* (MCTC) attempts to present Reformed theology in a brief and fair way. However, the attempt fails because the writers of the book rely on questionable sources for an understanding of Reformed theology. Conclusions are drawn from tentative assertions to build up cases which will not stand honest scrutiny. Here, we show how Reformed theology has been misrepresented and what Reformed theology really teaches.

3.1 Who were Augustine and John Calvin?

In the previous chapter, we have shown that there were many players before and during the Reformation which gave rise to the theology of the Reformation. Reformation theology may be summarised by the Five Principles (or Sola's) of the Reformation, viz. *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, and *solus Deo gloria*. Lutheranism then departed from Reformation theology to become what it is today, while Reformation theology was upheld by the followers of John Calvin and developed to become the Reformed theology of today. Reformed theology should not be considered a child of Reformation theology but the matured development of Reformation theology, for it still holds strongly to the Five Principles of the Reformation. The claim that Reformed theology has *departed* from the theology of

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John Calvin, therefore, is unfounded. To *develop* upon Calvin is not the same as to *depart* from Calvin. The claim also has been made that Calvin departed from Augustine's doctrine of predestination to a more rigid position compared to Augustine's more biblical position. This again is not true, as we shall show below. Before that, it will help to have a brief introduction to Augustine and Calvin.

Augustine of Hippo

Aurelius Augustine (354-430) was born at Thagaste in Roman North Africa (corresponding to the town of Souk Ahras, Sudan). His father was a pagan while his mother was a devout Christian. Augustine lived a profane life and joined the Manichaean religion when he was nineteen years old. Manichaeism taught the need for the human soul to be liberated from the body, which is in bondage to darkness and evil, in order to attain enlightenment. Augustine's distraught mother, a widow named Monica, prayed for him. Augustine recalled this in his book, *Confessions*, saying, "For nearly nine years were yet to come during which I wallowed deep in the mire and the darkness of delusion. Often I tried to lift myself, only to plunge the deeper. Yet all the time this chaste, devout, and prudent woman, a widow such as is close to your [God's] heart, never ceased to pray at all hours and to offer you the tears she shed for me."¹

Augustine taught grammar and rhetoric in Carthage, and then in Rome. While there, he absorbed Neo-Platonic philosophy and rejected Manichaeism. While in Milan in 386, he was brought under deep conviction of his sins. He was weeping under a fig tree in a garden when he heard what seemed like a child's voice from a home nearby, saying, "Tolle lege, tolle lege" repeatedly. In Latin, this meant "Take up and read, take up and read." Augustine opened the Bible and his eyes fell on Romans 13:13-14 which says, "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts." Augustine described his own conversion in these words, "In that instant, with the very ending of the sentence it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in my heart and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished."²

¹Pine-Coffin, R. S (translated). 1961. *Saint Augustine Confessions*, Bk. III:11, Penguin Books.

²Bentley-Taylor, David. 1980. *Augustine: Wayward Genius*, p. 40. Hodder &

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Augustine was ordained a presbyter at Hippo in 391, and a bishop in 396. He was a prolific writer, engaging in disputes with the Manichaeans, the Donatists, and Pelagius. He was an original thinker, who developed on the teaching of earlier writers. Belonging to the Catholic (Establishment) Church before it split into east and west, he is appealed to by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. The Roman Catholics appeal to his doctrine of the church which he had refined from the teaching of earlier writers. The Protestants appeal to his doctrine of salvation, which B. B. Warfield assessed as follows:³

“For the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace over Augustine’s doctrine of the Church. This doctrine of grace came from Augustine’s hands in its positive outline completely formulated: sinful man depends, for his recovery to good and to God, entirely on the free grace of God; this grace is therefore indispensable, prevenient, irresistible, indefectible; and, being thus the free grace of God, must have lain, in all the details of its conference and working, in the intention of God from all eternity.”

John Calvin

John Calvin was born at Noyon, France, some fifty miles northeast of Paris, in 1509. He died in 1564 when only fifty-four years old. He was from a Roman Catholic family. After completing his bachelor’s degree at the University of Paris, he earned his master’s degree in philosophy in 1526. His father, who was facing financial difficulties, insisted that he left Paris for the university at Orleans, which was famous for its law faculty. Calvin gave an account of his conversion in these words:⁴

“And so it happened that I was called away from the study of philosophy and set to learning law: although, out of obedience to my father’s wishes, I tried my best to work hard, yet God at last turned my course in another direction by the secret rein (or curb—*freno*) of his providence.

Stoughton.

³Warfield, B. B. 1981. *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. 4, Chap. II, p. 130. Baker Book House.

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What happened first was that by an unexpected conversion he tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years—for I was so strongly devoted to the superstitions of the Papacy that nothing less could draw me from such depths of mire. And so this mere taste of true godliness that I received set me on fire with such a desire to progress that I pursued the rest of my studies more coolly, although I did not give them up altogether. Before a year had slipped by anybody who longed for a purer doctrine kept on coming to learn from me, still a beginner, a raw recruit.”

Calvin was forced to leave Paris in 1533 when he was suspected of being the one behind the address given by his friend Nicholas Cop, the rector of the university, which infuriated the Roman Catholics. In 1535 he arrived in Basel where he completed the first edition of his masterpiece, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The *Institutes* was to undergo many editions, during which the doctrine of predestination became more prominent as he learned more from the writings of Augustine. The final, eighth, edition was completed in 1559. After completing the first edition of the book, Calvin travelled to Geneva in 1536 for a much needed rest. He was met by William Farel who invited him to stay on to help establish Reformed teaching in the city. When Calvin turned down the invitation, Farel said to him, “And may God curse your rest!” Convicted by these words, Calvin stayed on to help establish the city under Reformed teaching. His commentaries on many books of the Bible arose from his teaching in Geneva. John Knox, a Scottish refugee in Geneva, learned Reformed theology from Calvin. He was used by God to introduce Reformation to Scotland upon his return in later years.

The good reputation of Calvin in history is marred by his insistence to have Michael Servetus tried and burned at the stake for heresy. Servetus was an erratic genius who courted controversy over many issues raised in his writings. He was put to death for his belief in two doctrines that were deemed heretical: anti-trinitarianism and anti-paedobaptism. It is clear that John Calvin was a child of his time. Although we have benefited much from his writings and work, we recognise the need to test all things by the Scripture.

⁴Parker, T. H. L. 1975. *John Calvin: A Biography*, p. 163. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

3.2 Misrepresentation of Reformed Theology

Case 1: That Augustine did not teach double predestination.

The book MCTC (pp. 16-17) claims that “Augustine opposed him [Pelagius] and argued that the will, due to the Fall, is in bondage to sin. Those elected are saved through God’s impartation of his prevenient grace (grace which goes before and preceding human action) without which we are incapable of repentance and turning to God.” Alister E. McGrath is referred to as the source of this information. The book MCTC concludes from this, saying, “Thus, in line with the New Testament, Augustine taught the doctrine of predestination but not double predestination. The latter came much later and asserts that some are elected to salvation and others predestined to damnation.”

By ‘double predestination’ is meant the belief that God predestined the elect to salvation and also predestined the reprobate to damnation. It is claimed that Augustine believed God predestined the elect to salvation but did not predestined the non-elect to damnation. The question may be raised, “Then what happen to the non-elect?” The common argument is that God cannot be so cruel as to predestine the non-elect to damnation. Instead, He permits them to act according to their free will which nevertheless never results in their salvation since the grace of God is extended only to the elect. In answer to those who claim that the non-elect perish in their sin by the permission of God and not by the will of God, Calvin answers,⁵

“Nor, indeed, is there any probability in the thing itself – viz. that man brought death upon himself, merely by the permission, and not the ordination of God... I will not hesitate, therefore, simply to confess with Augustine that the will of God is necessity, and that everything is necessary which he has willed... Moreover, though their perdition depends on the predestination of God, the cause and matter of it is in themselves.”

Calvin also wrote,⁶

“I say with Augustine, that the Lord has created those who, as he certainly foreknew, were to go to destruction,

⁵ Calvin, *J. Institutes*, Bk. III, Ch. 23:8.

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and he did so because he so willed. Why he willed it is not ours to ask, as we cannot comprehend, nor can it become us even to raise a controversy as to the justice of the divine will. Whenever we speak of it, we are speaking of the supreme standard of justice.”

Calvin believed in ‘double-predestination’, just as Augustine did. The book MCTC is wrong in claiming that Augustine did not teach double predestination, and that double predestination came much later, in the teaching of John Calvin (pp. 17, 21). The highly respected Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof, confirms this, saying, “Calvin firmly maintained the Augustinian doctrine of an absolute double predestination.”⁷ It is worth noting what Berkhof says about Lutheranism, which supports our claim that it developed away from the theology of the Reformation:⁸

“The Reformers of the sixteenth century all advocated the strictest doctrine of predestination. This is even true of Melancthon [Luther’s successor] in his earliest period. Luther accepted the doctrine of absolute predestination, though the conviction that God willed that all men should be saved caused him to soft-pedal the doctrine of predestination somewhat later in life. It gradually disappeared from Lutheran theology, which now regards it either wholly or in part (reprobation) as conditional.”

The claims that Augustine did not teach double predestination and that Calvin went beyond Augustine by believing in double predestination are not true. They both believed in double predestination.

Case 2: That Calvin did not treat double predestination as primary. The claim is made in the book MCTC (p. 18), “But many scholars have argued that Calvin never intended predestination to be central to his theology but was merely making an observation of the way things are. For example, the Oxford evangelical theologian, Alister McGrath, asserts that ‘Calvin’s analysis of predestination begins from observable facts. Some believe the gospel. Some do not. The

⁶ Calvin, *J. Institutes*, Bk. III, Ch. 23:5

⁷ Berkhof, L. 1949. *Systematic Theology*, p. 110.

⁸ *ibid.*

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primary function of the doctrine of predestination is to explain why some individuals respond to the gospel and others do not... Calvin's predestinarianism is to be regarded as reflection upon the data of human experience, interpreted in the light of Scripture, rather than something which is deduced on the basis of preconceived ideas concerning divine omnipotence... Far from being a central premise of Calvin's thought, predestination seems to be an ancillary doctrine, concerned with explaining a puzzling pastoral aspect of the consequences of the proclamation of the gospel of grace.' But what Calvin treated as secondary, founded on his exposition of Scripture and his pastoral concern to explain why some come to faith in Christ and others do not, was reformulated under the impact of subsequent intellectual developments into the controlling center of Reformed theology."

We must note the tentative manner by which McGrath puts forward his thesis. First, it is speculated that Calvin's teaching on predestination begins from observable facts. Then, it is claimed that predestination "seems to be an ancillary doctrine". When Calvin's *Institutes* is consulted, it is found that he based his teaching wholly on Scripture. He quotes Augustine only for confirmation. This is what Calvin says concerning predestination: "Let it, therefore, be our first principle that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than that which is expounded by the word of God, is no less infatuated than to walk where there is no path, or to seek light in darkness."⁹ Calvin devoted four chapters to expounding predestination – viz. Book III, Chapters 21-24. He begins his exposition by answering the objections of critics to this doctrine as a matter of style in writing. He could have placed this at the end of his exposition but he did not. A matter of style in writing should not be understood as the purpose of his exposition. There is a certain warmth in Calvin's style, but he was writing a formal systematic theology. An examination of the contents will show that it sets the pattern that has been followed by subsequent systematic theology books up to today:

The reader can determine where the chapters on predestination are found. The claim that Calvin did not consider the doctrine of predestination as primary in his system of belief is not true.

⁹ Calvin, J. *Institutes*, Book III, Chap. 21:2.

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Book I, Chaps. 1-10	Prolegomena (Introductory Discussion)
Book I, Chaps. 11-18	Theology Proper (Study on the Godhead)
Book II, Chaps. 1-6	Anthropology (Man and his fall into sin)
Book II, Chaps. 7-17	Christology (The Person of Christ)
Book III, Chaps. 1-25	Soteriology (The doctrine of Salvation)
Book IV, Chaps. 1-20	Ecclesiology (The doctrine of the Church)

Fig. 1: An Analysis Of Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion"

Case 3: That Beza went beyond Calvin through Aristotelian philosophy.

It is claimed in the book MCTC (p. 19) that Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, reshaped Calvin's teaching into what is now referred to as the Five Points of Calvinism. We quote: "Calvin's approach is analytical and inductive, and with the exposition of the Bible being primary. Beza, in contrast, begins with general principles and then argues towards their logical conclusions, using a deductive and synthetic approach. Using this approach, Beza begins with the divine decrees of election or double predestination as his starting point and controlling principle; the rest of his theology logically flows out of his discussion of these decrees." The source for this information on Beza is McGrath, in his book *Reformation Thought*, pp. 197-204. McGrath has been referred to in all the other cases considered above.

Who is Alister McGrath? Born in Northern Ireland, he studied Biochemistry at Oxford University before being ordained an Anglican priest. He served as lecturer, researcher, and writer in various universities, including at the Anglican theological college, Wycliffe Hall which is a part of Oxford University. McGrath belongs to that group of professing evangelicals of the twentieth century in Britain

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and America who hold academic posts but have leaned towards liberalism. This group included men like F. F. Bruce, James Barr, James D. G. Dunn, Alan Richardson, David Bebbington, Ian Howard Marshall, Richard France, and others who were mostly connected with the Tyndale Fellowship in the United Kingdom. These men had the ambition to get evangelicals into the theological departments of the universities to exert an influence in the intellectual world. Along the way, they succumbed to the ‘higher criticism’ of Scripture of the liberals, to the extent of being indistinguishable from them. The quest for intellectual respectability showed itself in the United States as well. Some of the leading names have been Edward Carnell, Mark A. Noll, J. Ramsey Michaels, David A. Hubbard, and others.¹⁰ These Neo-evangelicals constantly attack the old evangelical view of the inerrancy of Scripture by labelling them as ‘fundamentalists’.¹¹

In America, Noll attacked biblical inerrancy as taught at Princeton Seminary in the days of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, claiming that it “was molded by the eighteenth century Enlightenment”. In other words, it was the product of the ‘rationalism’ of that ‘Age of Reason’. Alister McGrath adopts the same thesis and expands on it, claiming that “The Enlightenment forced evangelicalism into adopting approaches to spirituality which have resulted in rather cool, detached, and rational approaches to Scripture.”¹² McGrath further claimed that verbal inspiration and biblical inerrancy should not be insisted on in order to preserve intellectual respectability and to justify the presence of evangelicalism in the academic community. Iain H. Murray exposes the fallacy of this claim, saying, “This thesis rests on a fallacious definition. The use of the mind is not ‘rationalism’; it all depends on whether that use is right or wrong. Rationalism is a use of the mind which trusts in its own ability to arrive at truth about God without his aid and apart from revelation: it treats the mind as a source of knowledge rather than as a channel. The Enlightenment was a classic demonstration of innate human pride in the exaltation

¹⁰Iain H. Murray traces the quest for intellectual respectability among the Neo-evangelicals that led to compromise and disillusionment in *Evangelicalism Divided*, pp. 173-214. Banner of Truth Trust.

¹¹Fundamentalists generally are dispensational premillennialists who use only the KJV Bible, and may be Calvinist or Armenian in soteriology. Unlike the Fundamentalists, the Reformed would hold to covenant theology, Calvinism, and one or more of the Confessions of Faith that came from the Reformation and the Puritan Age.

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of the human intellect. To equate that spirit with the teaching of the Princeton men, who believed that it is the grace of God alone which sets men free to understand, is to stand truth on its head.”¹³

Alister McGrath’s credibility as a spokesman for evangelicalism is called into question. At best, he does not believe that biblical inerrancy should be insisted on in order to gain intellectual respectability, especially in academic circles. At worst, he does not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture and, therefore, the Reformation principle of ‘sola scriptura’. He is ecumenical-minded, desiring unity among Christians at the expense of truth. The same charge levelled at those who hold to Reformed theology is levelled at Beza, viz. that he was influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment to the extent of departing from the theology of John Calvin. However, a difference in belief between Beza and Calvin must be allowed for, for which two men will agree on every point of doctrine? Furthermore, Calvin would not have wanted anyone to stop at where he arrived in the understanding of Scripture. The Separatist, John Robinson (1576-1625), bemoaned the situation where, “The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented, for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received...” Beza was not one of those who got stuck at where Calvin stood. Instead, he dug deeper into Scripture to discover more truth. He was a close associate of Calvin.¹⁴ To use Aristotelian logic as a tool in the study of Scripture is different from deriving truth from it instead of from the Scripture. Beza is honoured as one of the four great preachers of the Reformation whose statues grace the Reformation Wall in Geneva, the others being John Calvin, William Farel, and John Knox.

Happily, Beza did go beyond Calvin, and he did use Aristotelean logic as a tool but not as the source of his doctrine. His source of

¹²Murray, Iain H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*, p. 197. Banner of Truth Trust.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴See Baird, Henry Martin. 2022. *Theodore Beza: The Counsellor of the French Reformation*. Banner of Truth Trust.

doctrine was God's word.

Case 4: Lutheranism and John Wesley.

Little space is devoted to Lutheranism in MCTC (p. 20), although posited as a reaction to Reformed theology. It is claimed that Lutheranism and Reformed theology are agreed on many key issues. However, this was true only with the Lutheranism during the Reformation, in the days of Luther and Melanchton. The claim that Lutheranism rejected two essential points of Reformed theology, viz. double predestination and limited atonement must be assigned to the Lutheranism after the Reformation. Luther and Melanchton are numbered among the architects of Reformed theology, summarised by the Five Principles (Sola's) of the Reformation. We have noted Louis Berkhof's assessment of Lutheranism, which we repeat here at the risk of labouring the point: "The Reformers of the sixteenth century all advocated the strictest doctrine of predestination. This is even true of Melanchton in his earliest period. Luther accepted the doctrine of absolute predestination, though the conviction that God willed that all men should be saved caused him to soft-pedal the doctrine of predestination somewhat in later in life. It gradually disappeared from Lutheran theology, which now regards it either wholly or in part (reprobation) as conditional."¹⁵

John Wesley (1703-91) is also put forward as a reaction to Reformed theology in MCTC (p. 22). Although a prolific writer, Wesley did not produce any book on systematic theology – anything close to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This is no dishonour to the man but it becomes difficult to gauge his belief if there is no explicit declaration of adherence to any system of theology, apart from his Anglican background. In contrast, it is easy to gauge the belief of C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) – another prolific writer and powerful preacher who did not produce a systematic theology – because he declared adherence to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith and the theology of the Puritans and Reformers. It is therefore difficult to categorise John Wesley, who has been labelled an outright Arminian, a semi-Arminian, an evangelical Arminian, an inconsistent Arminian, and a moderate Calvinist. The Methodist writer, Thomas C. Oden (1931-2016), had attempted to systematise John Wesley's theology based on his writings, in the book *John Wesley's Scriptural*

¹⁵Berkhof, L. 1949. *Systematic Theology*, p. 110. The Banner of Truth Trust.

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Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine. This is different from a systematic theology produced by John Wesley himself, for the elements of bias and selective emphases would have crept in. Oden was one of those who tried to resist liberalism in academia but became disillusioned in later years. Writing about his experience in the book, *Requiem: A Lament In Three Movements*, he revealed a swing to Orthodox Christianity (yes, Orthodox spelt with a capital 'O'). The book *Requiem* was published in January 1995, while the book on John Wesley's theology was published in October 1994. Oden was assessing Wesley's theology in the same period of his life when he was disillusioned with Neo-evangelicalism and was leaning towards Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Oden wrote:¹⁶

"After a lifetime of teaching in orthodoxly retrogressive seminary settings, I am very nearly convinced that the present system is practically irreformable... I truly regret having to make these symptoms a matter of public record. Why? Because I am describing an institution I have spent my life in trying to build, to nurse, and to some extent fundamentally repair. So there is a heavy sense of private failure and personal loss and principled emptiness in this discussion."

His experience reminds us of the Anglican curate at All Soul's Church, London, Michael Harper who was a leader of the charismatic movement from the 1960s to the 1980s. Disillusioned with the liberal leaning of the Anglican Church, and the failure of non-denominational evangelicalism to arrest the decline into liberalism, he joined the Greek Orthodox Church. The same happened to the American teacher, Thomas Howard.¹⁷

The book MCTC relies totally on Oden's book for an assessment of John Wesley's theology (pp. 21-22). The upshot of it is that Wesley's Arminianism, a term which he applied to himself, is interpreted as "a moderated Calvinism, tempered in the direction of synergism, over against absolute double predestination... Wesley's theology retained most other standard features of Reformed exegesis excepting its hyperAugustinian elements." Wesley, however, rejected predestination outrightly by removing Article 17 ('On Predestination') from

¹⁶Quoted in Murray, Iain H. *Evangelicalism Divided*, pp. 207-208.

¹⁷Murray, Iain H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*, p. 286, 287. Banner of Truth Trust.

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the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church. This is noted in the book MCTC (p. 47), but interpreted as a misstep on the part of Wesley. When we consult Wesley's own writings, we find unequivocal rejection of predestination in statements like the following:¹⁸

“Call it therefore by whatever name you please, Election, Preterition, Predestination, or Reprobation, it comes in the end to the same thing. The sense of all is plainly this: By virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved and the rest infallibly damned; it being impossible that any of the former should be damned, or that any of the latter should be saved. But if this is so, then is all preaching vain... This, then, is a plain proof that the doctrine of Predestination is not a doctrine of God... A second is, that it directly tends to destroy that Holiness, which is the end of all the ordinances of God... Thirdly: This doctrine tends to destroy the comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity. This is evident as to all those who believe themselves to be reprobated, or who only suspect or fear it... Fourthly: This uncomfortable doctrine directly tends to destroy our zeal for good works... But fifthly, This doctrine not only tends to destroy Christian holiness, happiness, and good works, but hath also a direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation.”

We would have thought that these objections have been answered by the apostle Paul in the book of Romans. John Calvin answered similar objections in his *Institutes*.¹⁹

It needs to be pointed out that Wesley denied the doctrine of predestination in ‘hardline’ words which his admirers today will think he never, and couldn’t have, uttered. The reader can check up on the internet what he said about the doctrine of predestination:²⁰ “...yea, it represents the most holy God as worse than the Devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust... This is the blasphemy clearly contained in *the horrible decree* of Predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with everyasserter of it. You represent

¹⁸Wesley, J. 1825. *Sermons on Several Occasions*, London: Kershaw, p. 117-120.

¹⁹Beveridge, Henry (trans.). 1975. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Ch. 23. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

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God as worse than the Devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust.” [Emphasis original.]

John Wesley believed in God’s sovereignty, the total depravity of man, and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. His understanding of the mechanics involved in salvation, however, was Arminian. Like all hardline Arminians, Wesley refused to listen to what the Calvinists were teaching, that God sovereignly saves the elect through the *means* of preaching the gospel to all alike, both to the elect and the non-elect. Calvinists do believe in divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Christians have a responsibility to preach, and hearers have a responsibility to obey the gospel to be saved. God alone saves, through the instrumentality of preaching, and by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the word of God (Rom. 10:14, 17). The preacher does not know who are elect until they are saved. All hearers are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) and, therefore, unable to repent and believe in order to be saved. The elect are given repentance and faith by God so that they are saved (Acts 11:18; Eph. 2:8-9). The inability of the non-elect to repent and believe does not absolve them of their responsibility for their sins. Human ability and human responsibility must not be confounded. They do not belong to the same essence. Human ability concerns human nature, while human responsibility concerns moral obligation. A father may not have the ability to control the behaviour of his teenage son outside the home, but he is held responsible for the wrong the son inflicts on other people. While man in his natural state is unable to repent and believe, he is able to, and does, refuse to repent and believe. He is held responsible for his sins, including his refusal to repent and believe.

I am not alone in noting John Wesley’s prejudice against the Calvinists. Arnold Dallimore documents the many occasions when Wesley preached and wrote against the doctrine of predestination, despite the protestation and correction from George Whitefield.²¹ The Reformed Presbyterian writer, Iain H. Murray, says, “Reading Wesley we may ask, How could a Christian be so prejudiced against Calvinism as he was? Part of the answer has to be that he did not understand the term as Whitefield, or you and I, understand it. But I believe it is profitable to remember that prejudice and distorted

²⁰Wesley, J. 1825. *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 2, pp. 122-123. London: Kershaw.

vision is common to us all as fallen men. It can exist in the best and most sincere of Christian men. This does not excuse Wesley's prejudice. It was a serious fault. As J. C. Ryle wrote, 'That Wesley would have done better if he could have thrown off his Arminianism, I have not the least doubt; but that he preached the gospel, honoured Christ, and did extensive good, I no more doubt than I doubt my own existence.' ”²²

Lutheranism and John Wesley's theology are not good alternatives to Reformed theology.

3.3 Conclusion

The claim that Reformed theology has *departed* from the theology of John Calvin is unfounded. Instead, Reformed theology should be considered the mature development of Reformation theology, characterised by the Five Principles (Sola's) of the Reformation. The claim that Calvin departed from Augustine's doctrine of predestination to a more rigid position compared to Augustine's more biblical position is also not true. During the Reformation of the sixteenth century Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other people contributed to the recovery of many important truths of the Scripture lost in the Medieval age. After the Reformation, Lutheranism departed from Reformation theology. Reformed theology developed upon Reformation theology to encompass the clearer expression of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) summarised by the Five Points of Calvinism, also known as the Doctrines of Grace. It follows that to be truly Reformed, one must hold to the Five Points of Calvinism and the Five Principles of the Reformation, including their practical implications.

The claim that Beza went beyond Calvin by relying on Aristotelean philosophy to derive later Reformed theology is not true. The claim is based on the speculation of men like Alister McGrath who were engaged in an ecumenical agenda to influence the churches through the theological faculties of the universities. In the process, they succumbed to the more dominant influence of liberalism in academia such that many of them departed from believing in the

²¹Dallimore, Arnold. 1980. *George Whitefield*, Vol. 2, pp. 20, 27-29, 55-62, 541. Banner of Truth Trust.

²²Murray, Iain H. 2005. *The Old Evangelicalism: Old Truths for a New Awakening*, p. 142. Banner of Truth Trust.

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inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. Others from among these Neo-evangelicals became disillusioned by the lack of success in their endeavour, and joined the Orthodox Churches, apparently because of their antiquity and stability.

Similarly, the claim that later Lutheranism and John Wesley's teaching were reactions to Reformed theology is not true. It was Lutheranism that departed from Luther's teaching, and therefore from Reformation theology, due to influence of the rationalism of the Enlightenment (also known as the Age of Reason) in the seventeenth century. Based on the writings of the Methodist Neo-evangelical, Thomas C. Oden, John Wesley has been put forward mistakenly as teaching a more accurate theology of the Bible. Oden was one of those disillusioned by the lack of success of the ecumenical agenda, and eventually became enamoured with Orthodox theology.

Reformed theology should not be understood or assessed by the writings of Neo-evangelicals who are prejudiced against it.

* * * * *

Four

A Response To Reformed Theology

In the book *More Calvinistic Than Calvin* (MCTC), the most serious misrepresentation of Reformed theology is found in the chapter bearing the above title. It seems ridiculous that the common criticisms against Reformed theology made over the centuries, which have been answered time and again, are raised in the book. It is obvious that these writers have refused to read up, or to understand, what the Calvinists have been saying, just as John Wesley had refused to hear or understand what George Whitefield and other Calvinists had been saying. But let us be patient with one another and at least hear out what is said here. Before answering the issues raised in MCTC, let us give an overview of Reformed soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). It is to be noted that we are focusing on soteriology, for Reformed theology is much broader than this – encompassing Covenant theology, the inspiration of Scripture, hermeneutics (the interpretation of Scripture), ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church), worship, sanctification, eschatology (doctrine of the last things), etc. Some of these other aspects of Reformed theology will be touched on as and when necessary.

4.1 The Five Principles of the Reformation

Sola scriptura

Scripture alone is the authority in all matters of faith and practice. This stands in contrast to the position of the Roman Catholic Church which holds that Scripture together with the oral traditions of the church determine faith and practice. This principle, declared so powerfully by Martin Luther when he was placed on trial at Worms, has been called ‘the formal principle of the Reformation’, for it is the underlying principle of all doctrinal discussion. All Protestant churches, i.e. churches that arose directly from the Reformation, held to this principle. Sadly, some of these churches, as well as the churches (denominations) founded later, departed from this principle.

Sola gratia

Salvation is by the grace of God alone, i.e. by God showing His mercy freely to undeserving sinners. Underlying this principle is the belief in ‘total depravity’, which means that the whole human person – including his will – has been affected by sin. Left to himself, fallen man naturally inclines to sin. In order to be saved, God must show His grace to him. From Augustine (354-430) onwards, the Orthodox Churches in the Medieval age believed in *prevenient* grace, i.e. that God’s grace frees the human will from bondage to his sinful nature so that man is able to choose whether or not to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. During the Reformation, Martin Luther advanced on this belief to teach that the will is in bondage to the sinful nature until set free by God’s grace at conversion. The grace of God, therefore, is not split into two parts – one part of which is ‘*prevenient*’ and given to all individuals, and the other part is given to those who believe the gospel and are saved. The idea of ‘*prevenient* grace’ is not found in the Scripture but has been argued out based on human logic and supported by indirect scriptures, such as John 16:8 (the Holy Spirit convicts the sinner), Luke 24:45 (the Spirit opens the mind), and Acts 16:14 (the Spirit opens the heart). While accusing the Calvinists of using human logic to arrive at their doctrine, the Arminians themselves have been guilty of this!

Sola fide

Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by works performed by the sinner. After much internal struggle, Martin Luther

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came to understand that the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to (counted as that of) the sinner by faith. The sinner is justified (declared not guilty) before God by faith, and not by works of righteousness. This contrasted with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church which taught justification by the righteousness that is produced in the individual upon his baptism. The definition of justification was also changed by the Roman Catholic Church from “a judicial act of declaration” to “pardon plus renewal”. This position was formalised at the Council of Trent (1547, session VI) which, to this day, has never been repealed. The book MCTC (p. 30) compares Protestant teaching on salvation with that of Roman Catholicism and adds the following qualification: “...the reader is well advised to note that what is described here of Catholic teachings in the 15th and 16th centuries no longer applies in the same way to Roman Catholicism today. Under the challenge of the Protestant Reformation, Roman Catholicism also underwent fundamental reforms internally, although major differences of doctrine remain.” This is an attempt to overlook the big difference between Roman Catholic teaching and Protestant teaching. The ecumenical tendency of the authors of MCTC appears here.

Solus Christus

(The personal noun requires ‘solus’ instead of ‘sola’.) Salvation is by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Although the word ‘alone’ is not used, the plain meaning of the sentence is obvious. The Roman Catholic Church changes the meaning of the words ‘grace’ and ‘faith’ such that salvation is accomplished by Christ but including the works of the individual. The individual must be baptised, attend mass, and engage in confession of his sins to the priest in order to be saved. Justification (being declared not guilty) is confounded with sanctification (the process of becoming holier). In the time of the apostles, some Jews were teaching salvation by faith in Christ *plus* keeping the law of Moses such as getting circumcised (Gal. 5:11-12; Acts 15:1). Paul condemned that as a perversion of the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Today, many Arminian preachers practise the ‘altar-call’, asking the hearers to walk forward to be prayed over, in order to ‘accept Christ’. The hearers are given the impression that coming to faith in Christ is associated with the act of walking to the

front where the preacher is. Similarly, many Arminians use the booklet ‘The Four Spiritual Laws’ to lead the person they are witnessing to into saying ‘the sinner’s prayer’. Again, the impression is given to the individual that coming to faith in Christ is associated with the act of saying that particular prayer. Reformed Christians would consider the alter-call and saying ‘the sinner’s prayer’ as a perversion of the gospel – a ‘faith plus’ gospel. While recognising that these practices are done out of good intention, they have to be honestly examined in the light of Scripture. Reacting in anger to such criticism will accomplish nothing good. Our criticism of Roman Catholic teaching and Arminian evangelism is done with due respect to the people concerned. We desire to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

Soli Deo gloria

All true Christians should do all things to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). We often fail in this because of ignorance and immaturity. There is such a thing as “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2). We are urged to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). The Lord says, in John 14:15, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Love for God requires that we know His word and obey it. By this chain of arguments, we see that the Principle of ‘soli Deo gloria’ is directly linked to the principle of ‘sola scriptura’. We must not focus on some aspects of truth at the expense of other aspects. Sadly, many who regard themselves as Protestant and evangelical no longer hold to the principle of ‘sola scriptura’. At best, they pay lip-service to it. At worst, they deny the principle in words and/or deeds. Then, there are those who call themselves ‘Reformed’, simply because they hold to the Five Points of Calvinism, failing to see that being Reformed requires adherence to the Five Principles of the Reformation as well, together with the practical implications. They should rightly be labelled as ‘Calvinistic’ and not ‘Reformed’.

4.2 The Five Points of Calvinism (The Doctrines of Grace)

Total depravity

Fallen human nature is totally depraved – in extent, not in degree. We all are capable of becoming more evil than what we have been,

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if the restraints placed upon us by God are removed. These restraints include the presence of civil authorities, social expectations, the providence of God, and our conscience. The truth of total depravity requires that we accept the inability of man doing anything to get himself saved from God's wrath for his sin. God must intervene to enable man to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. We are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) until saved by God's mercy "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5).

Unconditional election

Ephesians 1:3-6 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." If God has chosen certain people to be saved in His Son, according to the good pleasure of His will, what condition required of man is there to speak of? The Arminians like to pick on Romans 8:29 to support their view of conditional election, claiming that the 'foreknew' is fore-knowledge, i.e. referring to knowing in advance information about those who are saved. Verse 29 and 30 say, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

The Calvinists understand 'foreknew' to mean 'loved beforehand' for the verb 'to know' is used in the Bible to mean 'to love intimately', as in Genesis 4:1, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain..." So who is right, the Arminian or the Calvinist? We would say the Calvinist's case is supported by: (i) the immediate context, which shows that God's love is the theme (see verses 28, 31-39); (ii) the wider context, which argues for justification by faith and not by works, in the earlier chapters of the book of Romans, followed by Chapter 9 which powerfully argues out the truth stated in verse 16, "So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy"; (iii) the consistency with teaching

found elsewhere in the Bible, such as Ephesians 1:5, "...according to the good pleasure of His will..."; (iv) the fact that it is the *persons* God foreknew, not what they would do. The Arminians claim that God chose those whom He had known before hand would do good, such as repenting and believing the gospel. However, that requires reading into the passage what is not there, for the passage does not say, "...whom He foreknew *would do good, etc.*" but "...*whom* He foreknew..." The focus is not on the future actions of the elect but on the persons.

Limited atonement

Both the Calvinists and the Arminians believe that Christ's death is 'sufficient for all and efficient for some'. The crux of the matter is, 'What was the purpose of Christ's death – was it to make atonement for the sins of the elect or was it for the sins of every individual in the world?' We have seen that after the Evangelical-Liberal Clash from 1910-1930, the Neo-evangelicals attempted to influence other churches through the theological faculties of the universities and seminaries. By the end of the twentieth century, a number of them were admitting their failure in their endeavour while others succumbed to liberal influence and loosened on their belief in the authority of Scripture.¹ The idea was propagated by the Neo-evangelicals that Reformed theology has departed from that of Calvin due to the influence of human philosophy and the use of Aristotelian logic. The book MCTC takes up this line, saying (p. 39), "Unfortunately, later Reformed writers in the 16th and 17th centuries increasingly incorporated Aristotelian philosophy and methodology into their theologies. These were highly systematized, often with predestination as the controlling center and, at times, moving beyond the plain teachings of the Bible." MCTC relies much on the writings of Alister McGrath (pp. 15, 17, 18, 19, 32), Richard A. Muller (pp. 26, 27, 28), and Robert Letham (pp. 28, 29, 39, 44).

One such person not quoted in MCTC is R. T. Kendall, whose views have been countered by Paul Helm, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion at Kings's College in the University of London. Paul Helm's answer to Kendall is also the answer to the other Neo-evangelicals and the writers of MCTC (e.g. p. 35), for they share the same view that Reformed theology departed from the

¹ Documented in Murray, I. H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*, Banner of Truth.

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theology of John Calvin. Helm summarised Kendall's case as follows (pp. 6-7):²

“In the *first* place, Kendall holds, the ‘followers’ of Calvin from Beza onwards developed the doctrine of limited atonement, the idea that Christ did not die for all, but only for the elect. Kendall claims that Calvin did not teach limited atonement. He taught what is clearly incompatible with it, namely, general or universal atonement.

In the *second* place Kendall believes that Calvin's doctrine of faith came to be modified beyond recognition. His view that faith is a passive persuasion of the mind is replaced, gradually but unmistakably, by the view that faith is an act of the will. On Kendall's view, whereas for Calvin faith is something that is given, for his ‘Calvinistic’ followers, from Perkins onwards, faith is something that is solely a matter of the will.”

Our interest here is with Calvin's teaching on Limited Atonement. Paul Helm quoted many passages from Calvin in answer to the question, *For whom did Christ intend to die?* Here, we reproduce one of the many quotes made from Calvin:

“For our present question is, not what the power or virtue of Christ is, not what *efficacy it has in itself*, but *who those are* to whom he gives Himself to be enjoyed. Now if the possession of Christ stands in faith, and if faith flows from the Spirit of adoption, it follows that he alone is numbered of God among His children who is designed of God to be a partaker of Christ. Indeed the evangelist John sets forth the office of Christ to be none other than that of ‘gathering together all the children of God’ in one by His death. From all which we conclude that, although reconciliation is offered unto all men through him, yet, that the great benefit belongs peculiarly to the elect, that they might be ‘gathered together’ and be made ‘together’ partakers of eternal life.”

²Helm, Paul. 1982. Calvin and the Calvinists, pp. 6-7. Banner of Truth Trust.

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Calvin was answering specifically the question ‘Who those are to whom Christ gave Himself?’ His answer, based on the teaching found in John’s Gospel was “all God’s children who are to be gathered in one by His death.” Paul Helm says, “Christ, according to Calvin, has the task of gathering together all the children of God, the elect, in one by his death. Is it not reasonable to conclude that Christ did this knowingly and intentionally, and that by his death he intended to save the elect only?”³

Irresistible grace

This does not mean that the gospel is not ever resisted by the elect but rather that despite resisting, the elect will finally be overcome by grace and are saved. A better word instead of ‘irresistible’ is ‘invincible’, i.e. ‘too powerful to be defeated or overcome’. However, since ‘irresistible’ has been used since the formulation of the Five Points of Calvinism at the Synod of Dort, it continues to be used today. The Holy Spirit uses the hearing of the word of God to bring the elect to saving faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Perseverance of the saints

The elect who have come to faith will persevere in the faith despite trials that come their way because “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).” God sovereignly preserves the elect in the faith through the means of the elect persevering in the faith. The Holy Spirit’s power is at work when the elect come to faith, and continues to work by enabling them to persevere (Eph. 1:19-20). Apostates, i.e. professing Christians who drop out of the faith and die without repenting, never had saving faith in the first place (Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-29). Perseverance in the faith requires living a righteous life (Rom. 6:1-2, 11-14). God’s sovereignty encompasses human responsibility. It is not true that a belief in predestination will hinder holy living or hamper evangelism. God is in control and will ensure that His will is carried. God often uses the obedience of His children as means to accomplish His purposes. The book MCTC acknowledges that the Reformed tradition has produced some of the best-known Bible preachers and expositors (p. 38). The book doesn’t seem to be aware that some of the best known mission-

³*Ibid.* p. 22.

aries were from the Reformed tradition as well – including William Carey to India, Adoniram Judson to Burma, William Burns to China, John Paton to the New Hebrides, etc. The book MCTC (p. 42) mistakenly represents William Carey as a hyper-Calvinist when he was a true-blue Calvinist!

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Case 1: No place for human freewill.

Misrepresentation of Reformed theology had begun in Chapter 3 of the book MCTC, entitled “An Overview of Reformed Theology”. The book asserts (p. 35) that “Reformed theologians who hold to a strict predestinarianism allows no place at all for human freewill. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to speak of those who are not saved as being morally responsible for their own condemnation.” Indeed, Reformed theology, starting from Martin Luther, teaches that the human will is in bondage to the sinful nature. This is not based on human philosophy and derived by Aristotelean logic but on Scripture. e.g. Ephesians 2:1, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins...” The human will is free only in the sense that no external compulsion causes it to make choices leading to actions. Since the will is in bondage to the sinful nature, the choices made are inclined in the direction of sin. We have seen in the previous chapter that human inability should not be identified with human responsibility. A father is held responsible for his teenage son’s behaviour although he has no ability to control his son’s behaviour outside the home. A sinner is held responsible for his sins although he has no ability to obey the gospel. By denying the bondage of the will to sin, the reality of ‘total depravity’ is denied. By claiming that prevenient grace has counteracted the effects of sin, making all men able to freely choose to obey or not obey the gospel, ‘total depravity’ is rendered inconsequential. As has been noted, the idea of prevenient grace arises from human logic, and has no concrete support from the Scripture.

Case 2: Confounding free will with human responsibility.

The book MCTC makes the claim (p. 35) that “Arminianism, on the other hand, takes seriously the Bible’s teaching on human responsibility and free will. Because of the total depravity of our sinful na-

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ture, humans cannot by our own strength and effort turn to God in repentance and faith. But God has provided prevenient grace which enables all who avail themselves of it to turn to Him in repentance and faith.” We have shown above that the idea of prevenient grace is not a teaching of Scripture. The Bible teaches salvation by grace, not salvation by prevenient grace. The idea of prevenient grace was introduced by Augustine when he countered Pelagianism, which denied the doctrine of total depravity. Pelagianism taught that every individual is born innocent, i.e. free from sin. Augustine, while attempting to reconcile the doctrine of total depravity with God’s grace in salvation, introduced the idea of prevenient grace.⁴ Augustine’s teaching on prevenient grace was the dominant teaching of Medieval Christianity. It took the Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin to bring the understanding of salvation to the biblical position of ‘by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone’. Hence the Five Principles of the Reformation. Reformed theology denies free will as understood by the Arminians but not human responsibility. We have noted that human responsibility belongs to the realm of moral obligation while the human will concerns the human nature. While inter-related, they are distinct and should not be confounded.

Case 3: Implying that Reformed people hold to an extreme position.

The book MCTC claims (p. 35) that “...not many who take the Bible’s teaching seriously would defend Arminianism pure and simple, because they too firmly believe in the sovereignty of God. Rather, like Wesley, they would hold to a modified or moderated Calvinist position wherein both divine sovereignty and human free will are held together firmly, as taught in the Bible, without trying to resolve the tension between them.” By claiming themselves as ‘modified or moderated Calvinist’, it is implied that the Calvinists are extreme. The writers of MCTC are declaring themselves to be semi-Arminian. Unlike the full-fledged Arminian who holds to conditional election, i.e. that God chooses those whom He foresees or foreknows will respond to the call of salvation, they (the semi-Arminians) would hold to divine predestination and human free will, without making an attempt to reconcile the two. The Calvinists would respond by saying that human free will is not taught in Scripture, as we have seen above.

⁴The Works Of B. B. Warfield, Vol. 4, *Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy*, pp. 404-409.

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Passages like Ephesians 2:1; Romans 5:12-17; and John 6:44 deny free will. Instead, the Calvinists hold to the biblical teaching of God's sovereignty and human responsibility (not human free will). Many Calvinists would not try to reconcile the apparent tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, while others see human responsibility as subsumed under divine sovereignty. In other words, God's sovereignty involves human responsibility without the necessity of tension between the two truths.

Case 4: Caricature the Reformed position.

Chapter 3 of the book MCTC (p. 33) ends with the claim that Reformed theology "is especially appealing to intellectuals, the 'left-brained' types, who prefer a Christian faith that appears fully rational and systematic." It is further claimed that "this has given rise in some circles to a sense of spiritual superiority, where some consider others who disagree with their version of Reformed theology to be less than biblical and rational." It is advocated that a much better way is to "seek to understand the reasons for the differences between the various church traditions, and to help believers of different denominations see each other as 'gifts' rather than as 'competitors'." The distasteful caricature of Reformed theology as appealing to the 'left-brained' types is to be noted. In the concluding chapter, this point is raised again (p. 93), "Reformed theology emerged and was shaped in the context of... Greek philosophy and classical learning... it is probably fair to say that it thrives largely among the more educated and left-brained types." The ecumenical disposition of the writers of the book is also to be noted. The implication is that those of Reformed persuasion are cold and narrow-minded, and prone to create division between Christians.

Case 5: A loss of Calvin's biblical dynamism.

When we come to Chapter 4 of the book MCTC, entitled "A Response to Reformed Theology", the misrepresentation of Reformed theology becomes more blatant. Three supposed weaknesses of the Reformed position are put forward. Firstly, it is claimed that there was a loss of Calvin's biblical dynamism from the 17th century, which presumably has continued to today. It is claimed (p. 39) that, "...later Reformed writers in the 16th and 17th centuries increasingly incorporated Aristotelian philosophy and methodology into their theologies. These were highly systematized, often with predestination as the control-

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ling center and, at times, moving beyond the plain teachings of the Bible.” Robert Letham is quoted in support of this allegation. We have seen that the Neo-evangelicals of recent days have been propagating this highly questionable idea, of which a few things can be said.

Firstly, the cold and academic approach to the Christian faith seen among the followers of Luther and Calvin was not necessarily due to Reformed theology *per se* but due to the decline in spirituality of the Christians and the churches at that time. In the book of Revelation, the seven churches of Asia were admonished for holding many things correctly but lacking in warmth and spiritual vitality. That occurred in less than fifty years after the founding of the first church in Asia, viz. that in Ephesus. We have noted the observation of the Separatist leader, John Robinson, who said this in 1620, “The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented, for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received...”

Secondly, while spiritual decline was seen among the followers of Luther and Calvin, Reformed theology flourished among the Puritans in Britain and the Dutch divines of the Second Reformation during the seventeenth century. There was such spiritual vitality in the midst of political turmoil that many books and commentaries were written, and powerful preaching like that of John Bunyan (1628-1688) was having an impact on the people. In 1662, two thousand preachers were expelled from the Church of England for their stand on biblical truths, strengthening the cause of Nonconformity.

Thirdly, we have noted that the Neo-evangelicals of the twentieth century had a definite ecumenical agenda of influencing the churches by counteracting the liberals in their view of Scripture on the one hand, and to provide a more genial approach in contrast to the Fundamentalists on the other hand. There was an attempt made to advance their ecumenical agenda by infiltrating the theological faculties of universities and seminaries. In the process, many of them were influenced to adopt a compromised view on the authority of Scripture, while others became disillusioned and joined

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the Orthodox Churches. These Neo-evangelicals were the ones who put forward the idea that John Calvin became more rigid than Augustine, and that Reformed theology departed from Calvin's theology to become cold and academic due to the influence of human philosophy and Aristotelian logic. They have to counteract the quiet but obvious recovery of interest in Reformed theology from the 1960's. They have put forward the idea that Reformed thinkers have become 'more Calvinistic than Calvin', without giving any proof. Tentative suggestions are made, from which others draw conclusions which amount only to assertions, not proofs. For example, Robert Letham stated that, on the doctrine of limited atonement, "Calvin was somewhat ambiguous, if not contradictory, on the matter and may have leaned towards universal atonement... it is doubtful whether Calvin's distinctive theology, rooted in biblical exegesis, was properly grasped by many who came later." From these tentative suggestions, the writers of MCTC draw the conclusion (p. 44), "This raises a crucial question: To what extent do key aspects of Reformed theology come more from logical arguments and Aristotelian methodology than from the clear teachings of the Bible?" We have shown above how R. T. Kendall's thesis on this matter was shot down by Paul Helm. While the Neo-evangelicals have been active in pursuing their own agenda, it should not be forgotten that Reformed theology has been advancing to this day – with many significant books and commentaries published, powerful preachers impacting many lives, churches being planted, and many serving in the missions field. Why assess Reformed theology from the prejudiced perspective of the Neo-evangelicals rather than from the perspective of mainline Reformed theology itself?

Case 6: Negative consequences for evangelism and missions.

It is claimed that the doctrine of double predestination leads to negative consequences for evangelism and missions. The claim is made that Calvin formulated his understanding of double predestination from a pastoral perspective, and that the strongest argument for double predestination is based on logical deduction (MCTC, p. 40). We have seen in the previous chapter that Calvin based his teaching of predestination fully on Scripture. Here are some quotes from Calvin:

"Let it, therefore, be our first principle that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than that which is ex-

pounded by the word of God, is no less infatuated than to walk where there is no path, or to seek light in darkness.”⁵

“We come now to the reprobate, to whom the Apostle at the same time refers (Rom. 9:13). For as Jacob, who as yet had merited nothing by good works, is assumed into favour; so Esau, while as yet unpolluted by any crime, is hated...At last, he concludes that God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth (Rom. 9:18). You see how he refers both to the mere pleasure of God. Therefore, if we cannot assign any reason for his bestowing mercy on his people, but just that it so pleases him, neither can we have any reason for his reprobating others but his will. When God is said to visit in mercy or harden whom he will, men are reminded that they are not to seek for any cause beyond his will.”⁶

It should be noted that among the mainline Reformed Christians, not all hold to double predestination. The 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith of the Presbyterians says, in Chapter 3 on God’s Eternal Decree, Article 3, “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.” Its equivalent in the 1689 Baptist Confession states that “By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory some men and Angels, are predestinated, or foreordained to Eternal Life, through Jesus Christ to the praise of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice.” The Westminster Confession teaches double predestination, while the 1689 Baptist Confession teaches that God actively decreed the salvation of the elect and passively allowed the non-elect to continue in their sin. The present writer subscribes to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. However, the end result of both views of predestination is the same – all the elect will be saved while the non-elect will perish in their sin. Only the hardline anti-Calvinists, including the likes of John Wesley, will persist in making too much out of the difference

⁵ Calvin, *J. Institutes*. Book III, Ch. 21:2.

⁶ *Ibid.* Book III, Ch. 22:11

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in the two views. George Whitefield, the Reformed preacher, was in some sense more mightily used by God than John Wesley in winning souls during the revival of the time.⁷ The claim made in the book MCTC (p. 42) that John Wesley “saw clearly that the doctrine of double predestination cut the nerve of evangelism and militates against the glorious work of God in revival” is based on Thomas C. Oden’s account of Wesley’s teaching.⁸ The element of bias must not be discounted, as we have noted earlier. Furthermore, we have shown that John Wesley strongly denounced predestination all together, regardless of double predestination or ‘single predestination’.

Both views of predestination are found in mainline Reformed theology. Mainline Reformed theology holds to God’s sovereignty which encompasses human responsibility. The sovereign God uses preaching as the means of accomplishing the salvation of the elect. The Reformed preacher preaches to all hearers alike, without knowing who are elect until they are converted. The realisation that there are elect among the hearers, for whom Christ died, encourages him in evangelism. Notable missionaries have come from both the Baptists and the Presbyterians who do not hold to exactly the same understanding of predestination.

Case 7: Limited atonement and Aristotelian logic.

The book MCTC makes a parody of Aristotelian logic as applied to the doctrine of Limited Atonement. One can imagine the reader smiling in glee at the foolishness of Reformed people! Here is how Reformed logic is parodied (p. 44):

- A. Christ died for sinners.
- B. God cannot demand punishment twice – from Christ and again from the condemned.
- C. Therefore, Christ only died for the saved and not the condemned; thus the atonement is limited only to the saved.

The book MCTC (p. 44) goes on to quote Robert Letham, “Calvin was somewhat ambiguous, if not contradictory, on the matter and

⁷Dallimore, Arnold. 1970. *George Whitefield*, Vols. I & II, Banner of Truth Trust.

⁸Oden, Thomas C. 1994. *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

may have leaned towards universal atonement... it is doubtful whether Calvin's distinctive theology, rooted in biblical exegesis, was properly grasped by many who came later." Based on this tentative suggestion from Letham, the writer raises 'a crucial question': To what extent do key aspects of Reformed theology come more from logical arguments and Aristotelian methodology than from the clear teachings of the Bible? We have noted that Letham is numbered among that band of Neo-evangelicals who have been making the claim that Reformed theology is 'more Calvinistic than Calvin'. Letham's tentativeness concerning Calvin should be noted. To use the uncertain and unproved statement from Letham to draw a definite conclusion about Reformed theology is not sound scholarship.

The so-called Aristotelian logic of Reformed theology is contrasted next with the totally different conclusion of a so-called Reformed scholar, Karl Barth (1886-1968). Karl Barth, a leading Neo-orthodox scholar, was never regarded as Reformed by those in mainline Reformed circles. Neo-orthodoxy does not regard the Bible as the inspired word of God but a human document. God spoke through 'redemptive history', and He speaks to people today when they have an 'encounter' with Jesus. Karl Barth is supposed to have arrived at his universalism – that all are saved already in Christ whether or not they repent and trust in Him – via Aristotelian logic. The logic follows steps A and B as previously but the conclusion, D, is different.

- A. Christ died for sinners.
- B. God cannot demand punishment twice – from Christ and again from the condemned.
- D. Therefore, since Christ has died for all, then all are saved and no one needs to be condemned.

The writer concludes that both universalism and limited atonement are wrong since they ignore "the clear New Testament references to Christ's atonement as being effective for all and that his death brings 'justification and life for all men' (Rom 5:18; cf. also 2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 Tim 2:6; etc.)." The writer is revealing himself to be a hardline anti-Calvinist who refuses to listen to the answers given by the Calvinists to the oft-repeated objections against them down the centuries. John Calvin had answered critics in his *Institutes*,⁹ and so had the Puritan John Owen,¹⁰ and many others. A recent, modest,

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and readable book on this subject is by Jeff Riddle which the reader might want to peruse.¹¹

A responsible teacher would ensure that he is “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The writer in MCTC has failed to do that. He claims that passages like Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, and 1 Timothy 2:6 clearly teach universal atonement. However, a careful examination of those passages will reveal that the “all men” is a reference to “all categories of people” and not “every individual in the world”. Let’s consider 1 Timothy 2:6, “(Christ Jesus) who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time...” Three basic rules of hermeneutics (biblical interpretation) are: (i) to take the words plainly; (ii) to understand the words in context; and (iii) to compare with other parts of Scripture. Taken plainly, 2 Timothy 2:15 says that Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. The “all” can mean either “all individuals in the world” or “all categories of people”. Next, we take the words in context. Verse 1 of the passage calls for prayer to be made for “all men”, which can only mean “all categories of men” because it is practically impossible to pray for “every individual in the world”. Verse 2 gives an example of the categories of people to pray for, viz. “for kings and all who are in authority”. Verses 3 and 4 show that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The “all men” can mean “every individual in the world” or “all categories of people”. Practically, it is not likely that every individual in the world will be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. As in the earlier verses, the “all men” here must mean “all categories of people”. Verse 7 shows that Paul was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher, not just of the Jews but of the Gentiles as well. Since the verses before and after verses 5 and 6 use the expression “all men” to mean “all categories of people”, it must be the same for verse 5 and 6. Finally, we apply the third rule of interpretation, which is comparing with other relevant parts of Scripture. Passages like Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, and John 6:39 teach a limited atonement. Matthew 20:28 says, “...the

⁹Calvin, John. Beveridge, Henry (trans.). 1975. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Eerdmans, Bk. III, Ch 23.

¹⁰Owen, John. 1647. *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, Works, Vol. 10. Banner of Truth Trust. An abridged version is *Life By His Death*. 1992. Evangelical Press.

¹¹Riddle, Jeffrey T. 2019. *The Doctrines of Grace: An Introduction to the Five Points of Calvinism*. Trumpet Books. 2019.

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Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Universal atonement is not the teaching of Scripture.

We come now to the so-called Aristotelian logic supposedly used in Reformed theology to derive the doctrine of Limited Atonement. The writer seems to twist the logical process deliberately to suit his purpose of showing how ridiculous it is. He uses bad (or invalid) premises to derive at illegitimate conclusions that contradict each other. In Aristotelian logic, the second premise of the syllogism (reasoning) must have either the subject or the predicate similar to either the subject or the predicate of the first premise. The conclusion is then determined by the relation of inclusion, exclusion, or overlap of categories. These syllogisms may be represented as follows:

Syllogism 1:

Premise A: Subject A + Predicate A

Premise B: Subject A + Predicate B

Conclusion: Relation between A and B (inclusion, exclusion, or overlap)

Syllogism 2:

Premise A: Subject A + Predicate A

Premise B: Subject B + Predicate A

Conclusion: Relation between A and B (inclusion, exclusion, or overlap)

The writer of MCTC uses mismatched premises. The correct premises, and conclusions, should be:

A: Christ died to save sinners.

B. God punishes most sinners.

Conclusion: Christ died to save sinners who are not punished by God, or, Christ did not die to save all sinners.

The doctrine of Limited Atonement is proved, while universalism is excluded. This is using logic correctly, based on the teaching of Scripture.

Another possible syllogism is:

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A: God demands that sinners be punished.

B: God cannot punish a sinner twice.

Conclusion: Sinners who are not punished have had their sin paid for (by Christ), or, Sinners who are punished have had sin not paid for (by Christ).

Again, the doctrine of Limited Atonement is proved while universalism is excluded.

It is not wrong to use Aristotelian logic as a tool, when the substance is derived from Scripture. We go wrong when the substance is derived from human philosophy. It is incredulous to suggest that Reformed theologians have derived their theology from human philosophy and Aristotelian logic. Basic honesty and common courtesy will require one to acknowledge that the mainline Reformed theologians and preachers have been great expositors of the Bible. They include the Puritans of the 17th century; the Baptists like John Gill, Andrew Fuller, John L. Dagg, James P. Boyce, A. H. Strong, and C. H. Spurgeon; the Presbyterians like Loraine Boettner, Gresham Machen, R. L. Dabney, J. H. Thornwell, B. B. Warfield, and John Murray; the Dutch Reformed men like G. Vos, L. Berkhof, A. Kuyper, J. H. Bavinck, Hermann Witsius, Wilhelmus a' Brakel, and William Hendriksen; the Anglicans like John Newton, Charles Simeon, J. C. Ryle, and J. I. Packer; the Congregationalists like John Cotton, Jonathan Edwards, Robert and James Haldane, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones – to name but a selection.

Case 8: Making double predestination the hallmark of Reformed theology.

We have made clear that Reformed theology is much more than the doctrine of predestination. We have also made clear that mainline Reformed theology encompasses both double predestination and 'single predestination' (for want of a better term). In double predestination, God decreed the elect to be saved and also decreed the non-elect to perish in their sin. In single predestination, God decreed the elect to be saved while bypassing the non-elect so that they are not saved. In mainline Reformed theology, the difference between these views has never been an issue, for the end-result of both views is the same. The book MCTC, however, singles out the difference between these views as a bone of contention between Reformed theology and non-Reformed theology, and puts forward John Wesley's theology

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as the supreme expression of evangelicalism. It is claimed (p. 47) that “The Bible teaches both predestination, which is rooted in God’s sovereign will, and human responsibility or freewill, because we are moral beings. But the interaction between God’s action and human choice takes place at the intersection of eternity on God’s side and space-time on ours. This means that we cannot fully and logically explain how the interaction occurs because we have no real conception of God’s action in eternity.”

We note a number of issues related to this case:

- i The writer confounds human responsibility with freewill. The reality is that Reformed theology teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Furthermore, Reformed theology distinguishes between freewill and free agency: man has no free will because it is in bondage to his sinful nature but he is free to act according to his own nature, without external compulsion. The writer of MCTC misrepresents ‘hardline Reformed theology’ – meaning those who hold to double predestination – as denying human responsibility, which is patently not true for we have seen that Reformed theology encompasses both double predestination and single predestination, at the same time holding to human responsibility.
- ii The writer fails to see that hyper-Calvinism is a perversion of true Calvinism. William Carey is wrongly referred to as a hyper-Calvinist (p. 42) when he was actually a Particular Baptist who upheld the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. In his days, a number of Particular Baptists were drawn away to hyper-Calvinism. Carey and his associates attempted to draw them back to the biblical Calvinism of their Confession of Faith. Through the centuries, Calvinists have contended with hyper-Calvinism as much as they have contended with Arminianism.¹² Reformed theology holds to Calvinism as the biblical doctrine of salvation, and sees Arminianism as a departure to the left while hyper-Calvinism is a departure to the right. Hyper-Calvinism emphasises divine sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility, while Arminianism emphasises human responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty. By imputing the aversion to evangelism and missions of the hyper-Calvinist to the Calvinists (pp. 42-43), the

writer misrepresents Reformed theology.

- iii The writer fails to see that the Five Points of Calvinism (the Doctrines of Grace) stand or fall together. It is claimed that only double predestination (and therefore Unconditional Election) and Limited Atonement stand in the way of greater agreement between evangelicals of all traditions. Reformed people, however, see the issue as more serious than that. As with C. H. Spurgeon, we hold that “Arminianism does not merely affect a few doctrines which can be separated from the gospel, rather it involves the whole unity of Biblical revelation and it affects our view of the whole plan of redemption at almost every point.”¹³ Those who adhere to Reformed theology takes seriously the biblical responsibility “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). This does not mean we disown other Christians as brethren in Christ or adopt a belligerent posture towards others who differ from us. The odd individuals who behave this way gives no justification to paint every Reformed person with the same brush.
- iv The writer’s ecumenical agenda is clear when we note the steps taken to dismantle doctrinal differences in favour of mutual acceptance between Christians (pp. 46-51). Firstly, he attempts to draw John Calvin and John Wesley closer together despite their doctrinal differences. This is done by claiming that Calvin was probably unwise in going “beyond the unambiguous teachings of the Bible in speaking of double predestination”, while “Wesley opened himself up to a clear misunderstanding of his position by removing Article 17 (‘On Predestination’) from the 39 articles of the Anglican Church without further clarification.” Secondly, he suggests (p. 49) that “there are very few [Christians] who do not affirm divine sovereignty and predestination.” This claim is made based on a quote from J. I. Packer, an ecumenically-minded Reformed theologian. This quote from Packer seemed to favour the writers of MCTC for it included the statement, “What causes this odd state of affairs? The root cause is the same as in most

¹²See, for example, Murray, Iain H. 2010. *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching*. Banner of Truth Trust. Also, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* by the same author, 1966.

¹³Murray, Iain H. 1966. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, Banner of Truth Trust, p. 78.

cases of error in the Church—the intruding of rationalistic speculations, the passion for systematic consistency, a reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men, and a consequent subjecting of Scripture to the demands of human logic.” This statement seems to refer to ‘hardline Reformed theology’ as this is what is said about it in MCTC. A careful reading of the quote from Packer, however, reveals that he is actually referring to Arminians who focus on human responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty! This misapplication of Packer’s words is also found on page 87 of MCTC. No doubt, what Packer says applies to the hyper-Calvinists as well, who emphasise divine sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility. However, the writers of MCTC misapplies it to all who hold to double predestination. Thirdly, it is proposed that (pp. 49-50) “If double predestination and limited atonement are not insisted upon, most present-day evangelicals of all traditions would not have much problem in agreeing on the basics of our faith.”

4.4 Conclusion

Serious misrepresentations of Reformed theology have been made in the book MCTC. The writers of the book have relied heavily, if not wholly, on the writings of Neo-evangelicals for an assessment and understanding of Reformed theology. They have put forward Arminianism, at least of the Wesleyan kind, as the more accurate system of theology of the Bible. We have shown that the views of the Neo-evangelicals on Reformed theology and its development are flawed and unreliable. We have also shown that Wesleyan Arminianism falls short of the Bible’s teaching. We acknowledge that God had mightily used John Wesley despite the deficiencies of his theology. That, however, should not be made an excuse to overlook his doctrinal flaws.

While it is within the rights of the writers of MCTC to promote John Wesley and his teaching, it should not be done by denigrating Reformed theology. A few sentences of praise for the achievements of Reformed people in the past cannot make up for the unfair misrepresentation of the Reformed faith. It is also within the rights of those writers to promote ecumenism but they must allow others the right to refute their attempt. We believe that Christian unity should

be promoted in the truth, not at the expense of the truth.

* * * * *

Five

Principled Yet Generous

In the previous chapter, we listed J. I. Packer as an Anglican mainline Reformed theologian. This is so far as his theology was concerned. In his practice, he was not ‘mainline’ but ecumenical in spirit to such an extent that he was castigated and marginalised in some mainline Reformed circles. A statement like this about Packer will not go down well with his admirers and loyal supporters but, again, I plead a rational hearing from them. Although I strongly disagree with his ecumenism, I do not write as an enemy of Packer but as one who has benefited from his writings. Early in my Christian life, I was given his book, *Knowing God*¹ which I found to be ‘strong meat’. I had to read it again some years later to appreciate better the substance of the book. I number his book, *A Quest For Godliness*² among the top three doctrinal books I have enjoyed reading.

The book *More Calvinistic Than Calvin?* (MCTC) puts forward J. I. Packer as the epitome of a ‘principled yet generous’ Reformed man, while taking the opportunity to advocate his ecumenism (pp. 54-56). The biographical details and anecdotes of his life are taken from Alister McGrath’s biography of J. I. Packer.³ Yes, the Alister McGrath we have noted in the earlier chapters! Anyone who has

¹Packer, J.I. 1975. *Knowing God*. Hodder and Stoughton.

²Packer, J. I. 1991. *A Quest For Godliness* (also published as *Among God’s Giants*). Crossway. The others of the top three books are *The Christian Ministry* by Charles Bridges and *The Anatomy of a Hybrid: A Study In Church-State Relationships* by Leonard Verduin.

³McGrath, Alister. 1996. *J. I. Packer: A Biography*. Baker.

read McGrath's biography of Packer will realise that the controversies he (Packer) was involved in are all assessed to his favour. Not surprisingly, the worst controversy Packer was involved in is put in a positive light when it actually cast a shadow over Packer's integrity as an evangelical for the remainder of his life (pp. 61-63). This concerned the signing of 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT)' of which Packer was one of the signatories. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who is mentioned favourably elsewhere in MCTC (pp. 11-12), does not feature in the chapter that carries the same title as the present chapter. However, to mainline Reformed Christians, Lloyd-Jones sits comfortably in their company, in contrast to Packer. Who was Martyn Lloyd-Jones?

5.1 Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a Welshman who gave up a potentially lucrative medical career to become a minister of the gospel. His first pastorate at Sandfields, Aberavon, South Wales, was blessed by God to the conversion of many. After eleven years of ministry at Sandfields, he moved to London to become minister of Westminster Chapel, one of the leading Congregational churches in the city. He maintained a powerful pulpit ministry for thirty years, from 1938 to 1968. Regarded as the finest preacher of the twentieth century, his ministry was appreciated far and wide to the end of his life. In his time, he was a giant in the eyes of the Reformed constituency who overshadowed others such as J. I. Packer, who was 27 years his junior. Unlike Packer who was basically an academician, Lloyd-Jones was an evangelist, a preacher, a pastor, a conference speaker, an encourager and initiator of gospel enterprises, a counsellor to pastors, a writer, and a highly respected leader among the evangelicals. I was finishing my postgraduate studies in the UK when he died. One newspaper reporting his death referred to him as "a man who became a legend in his lifetime". His influence continues today through the people he taught, the institutions he encouraged to start, his books, and his recorded messages. His sermons are available online at the Martyn Lloyd-Jones Trust.⁴ Underlying his powerful preaching were three personal characteristics of significance which may be represented by three words beginning with 'C' – Conversion, Conviction, and Con-

⁴The Martyn Lloyd-Jones Trust: <https://www.mljtrust.org/>.

tention.

Conversion

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a man who preached for true conversion. He was, first and foremost, an evangelist. His wife, Bethan, said this of him, “No one will ever understand my husband until they realise that he is first of all a man of prayer and then an evangelist.” His Sunday evening sermons at the Westminster Chapel were dedicated gospel messages, based on the Gospels, the book of Acts, and various Old Testament passages. He considered himself a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist, whose gospel preaching was clearly grounded in the Calvinism of George Whitefield rather than the semi-Arminianism of John Wesley. This did not mean he treated those who differed from him as non-Christians. Numbered among his close friends was W. H. Aldis, Home Director of China Inland Mission (CIM), who was a Wesleyan Methodist.⁵ Lloyd-Jones was to interact with CIM throughout his ministry in London through his connection with Aldis. His preaching was marked by an unction of the Holy Spirit, in which was ‘light and heat’, i.e. substance and passion. On many occasions, the audience was reduced to silence after his preaching, awed by a sense of the presence of God. (One of the authors of MCTC testifies to this from personal experience, p.12.) Lloyd-Jones was concerned that souls should be soundly converted by the hearing of God’s word. His own conversion exemplified that concern.⁶

When Lloyd-Jones entered his early twenties, he came to the realisation that he had never been a Christian at all. “For many years I thought I was a Christian when in fact I was not. It was only later that I came to see that I had never been a Christian and became one. But I was a member of a church and attended my church and its services regularly.”⁷ A series of events awakened him to the uncertainty and changing character of life – including the sudden death of his brother Harold, and the death of his much-loved father four years later.⁸ A second factor driving him to seek salvation was the truth of predestination which he learned while reading Scripture⁹ – the doctrine much controverted in many circles, and ironically in the book MCTC. The most powerful influence that completed Lloyd-

⁵On the two branches of Methodism, see Dallimore, Arnold. 1980. *George Whitefield*, 2 Vols. Banner of Truth Trust.

⁶Murray, I. H. 1990. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, pp. 766-767. The Banner of Truth Trust.

5. PRINCIPLED YET GENEROUS

Jones conversion was the fact of sin, the realisation that something was profoundly wrong with man. He was to say, "I am a Christian solely and entirely because of the grace of God and not because of anything that I have thought or said or done... He brought me to see that the real cause of all my troubles and ills, and that of all men, was an evil and fallen nature which hated God and loved sin. My trouble was not only that I did things that were wrong, but that I myself was wrong at the very centre of my being."¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones did not put any date to his conversion. His conversion occurred progressively, similar to the experience of many with a Christian upbringing.

We have noted that many notable soul-winners and missionaries were of the Reformed persuasion. In a conference address, Lloyd-Jones expounded on the doctrine of Unconditional Election from Scripture, then proceeded to answer the commonly raised objection, "If God is sovereign, and chooses who will be saved, no evangelism is necessary. We can sit back and do no preaching." He used a lesson from history, saying, "Do you not know of Augustine, of Luther, of Calvin, of George Whitefield, of Jonathan Edwards and of Spurgeon? All these men held the sovereignty of God... Think of the missionary activity in modern times – of Carey in India, of Thomas Charles and the founding of the Bible Society. Nothing so promotes evangelism as the consciousness that salvation is all of God."¹¹ Lloyd-Jones's concern to ensure that souls are genuinely saved challenges us to ask, Do we have a concern to preach the gospel and to win souls to Christ? Is there a concern over whether a distinct gospel message is preached regularly from our pulpits? Is there a concern that many in our congregations may not be truly converted but are only nominally Christian? Indeed, are we not concerned that some pastors and preachers are not born again of the Spirit?

Conviction

Lloyd-Jones was a man of deep conviction regarding the truth. His ministry was undergirded by a firm foundation in Reformed theol-

⁷Lloyd-Jones, M. 1971. *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 146.

⁸Murray, I. H. 1982. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, p. 59. The Banner of Truth Trust.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹Murray, I. H. 1990. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, p. 244.

ogy. He was not content to be vague in doctrine but pursued it in Scripture to the utmost of his ability. He could describe preaching as 'logic on fire' without fearing criticisms such as 'using Aristotelian logic' or 'scholastic Calvinism', which was actually levelled at him towards the end of his life.¹² He read the Puritans widely and attempted to benefit others by starting the Puritan Conference with a number of younger men, including J. I. Packer, in 1950. He also encouraged the founding of the Banner of Truth Trust to republish Puritans books and the Evangelical Library to encourage wider reading of these books. When a minister asked for advice on books, he replied, "With regard to books which I would recommend to you I would suggest the following: *Systematic Theology* by Charles Hodge, 3 vols... On the Word, I recommend *Revelation and Inspiration* by B. B. Warfield, or else *The Infallible Word*. It would also be good for you to obtain the recently re-published *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin, 2 vols. price 30/-. If you master these you really need no more, but of course there are many lesser books which are of great value."¹³

The ten volumes of *The Works of B. B. Warfield* had a profound influence on Lloyd-Jones. B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) was a professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and a well-respected man in mainline Reformed circles. Lloyd-Jones wrote a review on Warfield's Works, saying, "Such was Warfield's own knowledge and experience of the truth, and of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that more than most writers he gives a profound impression of the glory and wonder of the great salvation we enjoy." Warfield gave Lloyd-Jones the conviction that doctrinal teaching was needed, while not ceasing to be an evangelist. We will refer to Warfield again in the next chapter of this book. Here, we note that Lloyd-Jones's ministry was firmly grounded in Reformed theology, with no doubt and no apology for it, while lesser men who came after him raised doubts about Reformed theology being "more Calvinistic than Calvin".¹⁴

Contention

Lloyd-Jones believed in the necessity of contending for the truth. What Lloyd-Jones wrote about Warfield in later years could be said

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 724-726.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 421.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 721-726.

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of his own ministry, “He not only asserted the Reformed faith; he at the same time demonstrated its superiority over all other systems or partial systems.”¹⁵ When the Oxford Group Movement was propagating the Higher Life teaching of the Keswick Convention in the early 1930’s, Lloyd-Jones was almost a lone voice in speaking against it. Lloyd-Jones was convinced that the truth must come first, regardless of what experiences people claimed to have received.

Another controversy Lloyd-Jones was involved in concerned the teaching of Karl Barth (1886-1968), a Swiss theologian who was gaining the attention of the Christian world. Barth contended against theological liberalism by calling for a recognition of the supernatural as well as a restoration of ‘the Reformed Faith’. However, as noted earlier, Barth’s understanding of the Reformed faith was unorthodox. He claimed that God speaks to people through ‘redemptive history’, and that one must seek an ‘encounter’ with Jesus. The Scripture is not the inspired word of God but a human document. All persons in the world will ultimately be saved, regardless of their relationship with Jesus Christ. This was ‘universalism’, which would be regarded as heresy by most evangelicals today. To put forward Karl Barth as a Reformed man in the debate over Reformed theology, as is done in MCTC, is to cast aspersion on Reformed theology. It is to hit below the belt.

Through Lloyd-Jones’s warnings, many were delivered from the subjectivism of the Oxford Group Movement and the Neo-orthodoxy of Barth.¹⁶ However, Lloyd-Jones’s greatest battle was against the ecumenism that was promoted by the Neo-evangelicals in the 1970’s. After the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910 to 1930, the Evangelicals broke into three camps – the Fundamentalists, the Reformed, and the Neo-evangelicals. The Pentecostals arose to form the fourth camp, in reaction to the perceived spiritual deadness of the churches. In Britain, the prominent Neo-evangelicals were mostly in the Church of England. They held to the doctrinal content of evangelicalism but reacted to the ‘narrow’ and ‘exclusive’ spirit of the Fundamentalists by wanting dialogue and interaction with the liberals and all others who called themselves Christian. The Anglicans proposed closer unity with the Anglo-Catholics and eventual union with the Roman Catholic Church. They also initiated a move towards the re-

¹⁵Murray, I. H. 1982. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, p. 287. The Banner of Truth Trust.

5.1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

unification of the Methodist Church with the Anglican Church.¹⁷ As things turned out, reunification did not succeed because the Roman Catholic Church insisted that its teaching on the eucharist (the mass) should be spelled out and accepted.¹⁸

The ecumenical movement was given a tremendous impetus by the Billy Graham Crusades from the 1950's to the 1970's. Younger men in the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVF) in Britain and North America began to promote the idea of influencing the churches by placing themselves in the theological faculties of universities and seminaries. We have noted that Lloyd-Jones encouraged the formation of many gospel enterprises to promote the Reformed faith. At the same time, he was promoting unity among evangelicals by speaking at their meetings and supporting various institutions – including the IVF, the London Bible College, the London Theological Seminary, the Christian Medical Fellowship, the China Inland Mission, to name but a selection. As the ecumenical movement gained momentum, Lloyd-Jones sounded out the warning against it, much to the chagrin of his many friends and admirers in the wider evangelical circles. The old evangelicalism had united around the truth to resist theological liberalism. The new evangelicalism was calling for dialogue with liberalism, and in the process, accepting those who denied fundamental truths of the faith as fellow Christians. Lloyd-Jones saw that this situation had come about because of two main reasons. First, doctrinal commitment had become so weakened in evangelical circles that the leaders were more concerned about success and wider influence. Second, and related to the first reason, there came an excessive fear of being thought negative, controversial and belligerent.¹⁹

The charismatic movement arose in the 1960's, merging with the Pentecostal movement which had been around since the 1930's. The charismatic movement transcended denominational barriers, bringing together the Pentecostals, the Anglicans, the Methodists, the Bap-

¹⁶Murray, I. H. 1982. *The First Forty Years*, pp. 289-291. The Banner of Truth Trust.

¹⁷See Part 3 of *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, and Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of the Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000*.

¹⁸Murray, I. H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of the Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000*, p. 220. The Banner of Truth Trust.

¹⁹Murray, I. H. 1990. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, pp. 440, 444. The Banner of Truth Trust.

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tists, the Roman Catholics, etc. To Lloyd-Jones, there was nothing astonishing about this new unity. When evangelicals played down the distinctive and unacceptable emphases of biblical Christianity, traditional barriers would disappear. The old evangelicalism had looked for unity in doctrine, while the charismatic movement was experience-orientated. Up to today, both the Pentecostals and the charismatics have wrongly claimed that Lloyd-Jones was in agreement with their views of the extraordinary gifts, prophecy, and the baptism of the Spirit. They are badly mistaken. Lloyd-Jones declared, "I was against Pentecostalism and still am. My doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit is that it gives full assurance. I have never been satisfied with any speaking in tongues that I have heard."²⁰ In contrast, the ecumenical-minded J. I. Packer attempted to help the charismatic movement by proposing how its theology may be strengthened.²¹ Another Anglican, John Stott, opposed the charismatic movement when it first appeared in the Church of England. Ten years later, he was finding common cause with the charismatic movement in his pursuit of ecumenism.²²

Lloyd-Jones's opposition to the ecumenical movement came to a head in 1966. He was the invited speaker at the opening meeting of the Second National Assembly of Evangelicals on 18 October. The chairman that evening was John Stott, a well-known Anglican minister in London. The Church of England at that time was much compromised. Liberals who denied the substitutionary atonement, the physical resurrection, and the virgin birth of Christ were among the leaders of the church.²³ The Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, said, "I do not pretend our church is the only one worth joining. But I remain convinced it is a broad church combining the catholic, evangelical, charismatic and liberal in joyful harmony – even if at times we get the balance wrong." Elsewhere Carey wrote, "For many of us in the Church, liberalism is a creative and constructive element for exploring theology today... It would constitute the end of Anglicanism as a significant force in world-wide Christianity

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 695

²¹In the Anglican journal *Churchman*, 1980. Packer's book, *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, approves of much that is seen among the charismatics.

²²Murray, I. H. 1990. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, p. 665. The Banner of Truth Trust.

if we lost this vital ingredient.”²⁴

With this background in mind, we come to Lloyd-Jones address at the National Assembly of Evangelicals. Lloyd-Jones gave a forceful and pointed message. “Here is the great divide. The ecumenical people put fellowship before doctrine. We, as evangelicals, put doctrine before fellowship.” He challenged the evangelicals to come together and express unity in the truth. He was aware that that would necessitate some leaving their churches. He was wrongly reported later as calling for evangelicals to come together to form a new Evangelical Church. John Stott, who had given his view of Christian unity before Lloyd-Jones spoke, stood up to express his disagreement with him.²⁵ Despite the unbecoming intervention of John Stott to repudiate Lloyd-Jones, the latter’s call was heard by many present, whose subsequent ministries were to take on a different course from ecumenism.²⁶

Lloyd-Jones’s firm stand on doctrine, and his consistent opposition to wrong teaching and practice that undermined the fundamentals of the Christian faith, must not be misunderstood to mean he was belligerent towards those he disagreed with. He distinguished between those who were in error out of ignorance, and those who persisted in holding wrong teaching and practice. Three instances of his compassionate and generous heart may be cited to illustrate this.

The first instance concerned his treatment of those caught up in the charismatic movement. Lloyd-Jones could speak strongly on the negative tendencies of the movement – its subjectivism, its confusion, and the divisions it caused. He would not accept invitations to charismatic meetings. At the same time, he would not speak out in opposition to all things which might be regarded as charismatic. Instead, he would follow his policy of trying to educate and win those who were in the movement for lack of knowledge of anything better. When it was suggested that the charismatic movement was going to be a passing phenomenon, he replied that it was all the more important to help these brethren. Such help would not be received if it was given in a spirit of denunciation. Furthermore, we must remember

²³Murray, I. H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*, Chap. 5. The Banner of Truth Trust.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 522-528.

²⁶Howlett, Basil. 2016. *1966 And All That: An Evangelical Journey*. Evangelical Press.

that we ourselves are lacking in “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”.²⁷

The second instance concerned an American Fundamentalist preacher who spoke at the Westminster Ministers’ Fraternal, on the subject of ‘the new evangelicalism’. The speaker delivered his message with such force and belligerence that it stunned the audience. When he finished, Lloyd-Jones rose from his chair to say to him, “One is always ready for the unexpected. I knew what you would say but not how... You and I have arrived at the same position in different ways. On the general position we are agreed. The difference between us concerns *how* we bring men to that position.” Lloyd-Jones went on to illustrate what he meant by reference to Paul’s method in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 – “to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” After spending lunch with Lloyd-Jones, the man returned to the meeting much pacified and good-humoured. As he answered the questions, the people present could hardly believe he was the same man who spoke earlier. Lloyd-Jones’s combination of winsomeness and strong conviction had thoroughly disarmed the man.²⁸

The third instance concerned his relationship with J. I. Packer. Lloyd-Jones’s practice of separation from serious errors cost him on a personal level. The relationship between Lloyd-Jones and Packer had been much like that between Paul and Timothy. The older man had guided and encouraged Packer as they served together in the Puritan Conference, often arranging opportunities for the younger man to speak. Packer admired, spoke, and wrote much about the Puritans but was not prepared to follow their example of making a stand for the truth. In the Great Ejection of 1662, about two thousand Puritans had chosen to be ejected from the Church of England, rather than wound their conscience by accepting the unbiblical elements in the Book of Common Prayer of the church. When Packer insisted on staying in the doctrinally compromised Anglican Church, and became actively involved in the ecumenical movement, Lloyd-Jones had to part ways with him in great sadness. Packer was one of four authors who wrote the book, *Growing into Union: Proposals for*

²⁷Murray, I. H. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, pp. 689-690. The Banner of Truth Trust.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 680-682.

Forming a United Church in England, published by SPCK in May 1970. In the book, the authors agreed to overlook differences of doctrine between the Anglo-Catholics and the evangelicals. This was to lead to rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church.²⁹ In view of this turn of events, Lloyd-Jones called for the annual Puritan Conference to be dissolved. At the prompting of members of the Westminster Ministers' Fraternal, the Puritan Conference was reconstituted as the Westminster Conference in 1971, leaving out Packer and others who shared his conviction on ecumenism. Lloyd-Jones acted on principles publicly but he did not treat Packer with animosity personally. In the unfolding of events, there was not a sadder man than Lloyd-Jones.³⁰

5.2 Ecumenism and Compromise

More must be said about J. I. Packer. His active involvement in ecumenism led him to sign *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (ECT)³¹ in 1994, together with twenty-four other evangelical and Catholic leaders. The ECT was a twenty-five page document prepared by a fifteen-strong group from both sides, with the aim of promoting united action between evangelicals and Roman Catholics at the 'grass-roots' both on the social-moral front and in witness to the gospel. The book MCTC gives a simplistic account of the controversy, based on Alister McGrath's biography of Packer. McGrath himself is an ecumenist who favours the ECT.³² The ECT kicked up a storm of protest despite its claim that "Our common resolve is not based merely on a desire for harmony. We reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth." The document itself lists down a number of major differences between the evangelicals and the Roman Catholics, including (among others):

- The sole authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) or Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church.?
- The Lord's Supper as eucharistic sacrifice or memorial meal.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 655-660.

³⁰Murray, I. H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*, pp. 110-111. Banner of Truth Trust.

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- Baptism as sacrament of regeneration or testimony to regeneration.

Packer and the evangelicals who signed the document were prepared to overlook these, and other, differences in doctrine which have traditionally divided Protestants and Catholics. The signing of the ECT caused evangelicals everywhere to be divided. Fundamentalists and Reformed leaders, including John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul openly spoke, and wrote, in protest of the ECT. Packer wrote quite extensively to justify his action but the difference between the evangelicals over this matter was now too wide to be healed.³³

The writers of MCTC have picked the wrong man to be the epitome of a 'principled and generous' Christian. Packer has betrayed the Protestant-evangelical cause. He was a compromiser who acted contrary to the Reformed faith he professed. He caused evangelicals to be divided by his ecumenism, more so when he signed the ECT and continued to defend his action. Mainline Reformed theology has always acted in obedience to the principle of separation from sin, heresy, and worldliness (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; James 4:4). We are commanded to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them (Eph. 5:11)." The Reformers separated from the Roman Catholic Church. The Separatists left the Church of England over its refusal to engage in true reformation. The Puritans chose ejection from the Anglican Church rather than compromise their convictions over the truth. C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) separated from the Baptist Union because it absorbed liberalism. E. J. Poole-Connor (1872-1962) withdrew from the Evangelical Alliance when it adopted an attitude of 'benevolent neutrality' towards the World Council of Churches, an ecumenical body, to found the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC). Gresham Machen (1881-1937) separated from Princeton seminary and the Northern Presbyterian Church when they turned liberal, to found Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Lloyd-Jones stood in the line of Re-

³¹*Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/05/evangelicals-catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium> (last accessed, 7 Dec. 2023).

³²Murray, I. H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*, pp. 222, 247. The Banner of Truth Trust.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 215-249.

formed men who shared the same spirit when he called for separation instead of fraternisation with liberals and Roman Catholics. In contrast, Packer, in spite of his Reformed theology, chose the broad road of ecumenism and compromise of the truth. Despite having benefitted from his writings, I find it hard to recommend his writings to others. A qualification has to be added each time, “Read with care. There is much that is good but he compromised with the charismatics, the liberals, and the Roman Catholics.”

The book MCTC uses Packer to promote ecumenism (p. 63), saying, “When we consider how Protestants and Roman Catholics sometimes find it difficult to fully recognize each other as fellow disciples of Christ, Packer’s approach is both challenging and refreshing. And if believers from these two Christian traditions, which have clashed so much in the past, can recognize each other and work together, how much more should fellow Protestants do the same, even if we disagree on issues such as predestination and other lesser matters?” Like Packer, they are prepared to regard Roman Catholics as ‘fellow disciples of Christ’ despite the Roman Catholic insistence on the authority of Scripture *with* the traditions of the church, the mass being a sacrifice of Christ, and the necessity of baptism and penance (confession to the priest) for salvation.

5.3 Conclusion

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was principled and generous in the truest sense of the words. Iain H. Murray, who authored the authorised biography of Lloyd-Jones, wrote this concerning Lloyd-Jones’s defence of the faith. “Even those who could not agree with him could often see that he exemplified the distinction between ‘contending’ and ‘contentiousness’. Where Christians disagreed with him or opposed him, he aimed to win them by consideration and friendship as well as by truth. Controversy born out of mere intellectual interest in doctrine, or still worse, by party spirit, he viewed as utterly unworthy of real Christians.”³⁴ If there is anyone in modern times who is the epitome of a ‘principled yet generous’ Reformed man, he is Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

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³⁴Murray, I. H. 1990. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, p. 767. The Banner of Truth Trust.

Six

Reformed Theology and the Supernatural

We have shown that the book *More Calvinistic Than Calvin* (MCTC) is misleading on many counts. If Chapter 4, 'A Response To Reformed Theology', most blatantly misrepresents Reformed theology, Chapter 6, bearing the above title, most blatantly misrepresents the men who are regarded as Reformed. Not all the men referred to are necessarily Reformed. Their views on the miraculous gifts are mistakenly, or deliberately, misrepresented. The writer's personal opinions are put to the fore stridently, and the ecumenical agenda is given an additional push forward.

6.1 Reformed Theology: Miracles or God's Providence

The book MCTC acknowledges that the Reformed tradition holds to a very high view of Scripture. Reformed theologians hold firmly to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. It then says (p. 68),

"They also strongly believe in the miracles mentioned in the Bible, for to deny them is to deny essential elements of the Christian faith.

However, when it comes to miraculous claims today, such as someone being supernaturally healed of cancer, hard-

line Reformed theologians take a different stand and deny them to be true. They understand that a miracle is an extraordinary work performed by God's power that goes against the law of nature."

A few points need to be noted concerning the subtle insinuations against Reformed theologians. First, those who deny the miracles that occur today are regarded as 'hardline Reformed theologians'. In the earlier parts of the book, a hardline Reformed theologian holds to a theology that is at variance with that of John Calvin, that has been developed based on human philosophy and the use of Aristotelian logic. A hardline theologian is one who holds to the doctrines of double predestination and limited atonement. He is also intolerant towards others who differ from him and is convinced that his position is the correct one. He is not open and generous to others who may not agree with him on everything, and he is not open to collaborate with them. Now, it is added that the hardline theologian does not believe miracles occur today. When these characteristics are put together, we are left with very few 'principled and yet generous' Reformed theologians, since the bulk of those who hold to mainline Reformed theology would be written off as 'hardline'! Even the attempt to include Martyn-Lloyd Jones as a 'principled and yet generous' Reformed man would not pass this test as he was a separatist and not an ecumenist, he held strongly to the Reformed doctrines of predestination and limited atonement, and he never accepted the charismatic claims of healing and prophecy and would never attend a charismatic meeting.

Second, the book MCTC assumes that the Reformed definitions of a miracle and the providence of God are wrong without offering any scriptural proof or argument against these. Reformed theologians understand that a miracle is an extraordinary work performed by God's power that goes contrary to (we wouldn't say 'against') the law of nature. Based on passages of Scripture such as Hebrews 2:1-4 and Ephesians 2:19-22, Reformed theology believes that miracles were performed by the prophets and apostles to authenticate the revelation of God given to them, and to confirm that they were the messengers of God. The written word of God is now complete, with no more new revelations given. There are no more apostles and prophets. What we need to know about God's plan of salvation has been fully revealed in Christ. It is claimed also that "Reformed

thinkers believe that miracles have ceased with the close of the apostolic age. This is called the ‘cessationist’ view” (p. 69). We will show that this charge made against Reformed theology is not quite accurate. The question that arises is, Do not the writers of MCTC believe in the doctrine of ‘sola scriptura’ – the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice? It would appear that the particular writer of this chapter of MCTC does not hold to ‘sola scriptura’.

Similarly, the definition of divine providence is assumed to be wrong, although not stated explicitly as such. The providence of God is the outworking of His sovereignty in upholding and governing His creation. Nothing in life is left to chance with some unexpected event taking God (not us, as claimed in MCTC) by surprise. Whatever happens is the outworking of God’s will, to accomplish His purpose, so that no one may boast (Eph. 1:11; James 4:13-17). “From this perspective, answered prayers, such as receiving financial provision, are not considered miracles but simply examples of God’s providence and care for his people. This also fits in neatly with the Reformed cessationist view and the denial of miracles today” (p. 60). We will show that this charge against Reformed theology is wrong. The question we would ask the writers of MCTC is, Do you not believe in the sovereignty of God and, therefore, in divine providence? Elsewhere in the book, there is the claim of belief in divine sovereignty (p. 49) and in “the Bible’s supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct” (p. 36), but these are implicitly denied in Chapter 6 of MCTC.

Third, it is insinuated that Reformed people do not believe in all healings and the possibility of God answering prayers in miraculous ways. Reformed people are “locked in unbelief”, “favoring rationalistic arguments and building neat and well-defined theological systems”, which hinder them from “coming to terms with God’s works of ‘signs and wonders’ in the world” (p. 78). The writer would want everyone to hold to his charismatic view that signs and wonders are always occurring and failure to agree with him would come under his stricture of being a ‘hardline’ Christian.

6.2 Understanding the Cessationist View

What does Reformed theology teach about signs, wonders, and miracles? As mentioned above, Reformed theology teaches that the signs, wonders, and miracles were performed by the prophets and the apos-

ties to authenticate their calling as messengers of God and their messages which were from God. Now that the Scripture is complete, and there are no more prophets and apostles around, the extraordinary gifts have been withdrawn, *so that no person may claim that he has the ability to perform signs, wonders and miracles as, when, and how he likes*. Reformed theology never teaches that God is no longer able to perform miracles, for that would be claiming that God has changed. Rather, Reformed theology claims that the Scripture, i.e. the written word of God, is now complete and there are no more new revelations to be added to it. Scripture is sufficient to guide us in life and to know God's will. The offices of prophets and apostles have been withdrawn, together with the ability to perform miracles, as their task of revealing God's will is no longer needed. No individual, after the completion of Scripture, may claim to have new revelations from God or to have the gift of performing miracles.

On the cessation of the offices of prophets and apostles, and of miracles accompanying the revelations given to them, the 1689 Baptist Confession says¹, "...it pleased the Lord at various times and in various ways to reveal Himself, and to declare His will to His church. Afterward, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, He committed it wholly to writing, which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of revealing His will to His people being now ceased."

On the immutability and power of God, the 1689 Baptist Confession says,² "The Lord our God is... immutable, ...almighty, ...working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory..."

On the providence of God, the 1689 Baptist Confession says,³ "In relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, so that there is not anything that happens by chance, or without His providence. By the same providence He orders them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently."

On the ability of God to perform miracles, the 1689 Confession

¹ 1689 Baptist Confession, Chapter 1:1.

² 1689 Baptist Confession, Chapter 2:1.

³ 1689 Baptist Confession, Chapter 5:2.

says,⁴ “God, in His ordinary providence makes use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure.”

All these truths are also found in the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians and in other Confessions of Faith that arose in Europe during, and following, the Reformation. Sadly, many churches today only pay lip service to their Confessions of Faith, or do not have one at all. Those who do not have a Confession of Faith will often claim that they believe in ‘no creed but the Bible’, which sounds pious but is a convenient way of not facing up to the scrutiny of Scripture on their belief and practice.

The *ability* of God to perform miracles must not be confused with the *purpose* of God in performing miracles. Since the Scripture is now complete, the purpose of apostles and prophets, and the miracles they performed, are no longer needed. Under normal circumstances, there is no reason to expect God to perform miracles. He is in sovereign control and will ensure that His will is carried out without the need to dazzle people with miracles. Under extraordinary circumstances, He may perform miracles according to His own good pleasure. When God performs a miracle, such as healing someone of cancer we are not surprised. Instead, we give God thanks and praise. Indeed, we have known of genuine cases of people being healed of cancer and being preserved from harm in extraordinary ways. Furthermore, God may answer prayers such as providing financial needs by a combination of ordinary events, the timing of which amazes us. The charismatics call this a ‘miracle’, using the word in a loose way. They are loose in their theology and refuse to be precise in their thinking. The Reformed Christians will say God has answered the prayers of His people miraculously but they will not call that a miracle. To say that the prayers have been answered miraculously is different from saying that the provision of money constitutes a miracle. One is a reference to the *manner* the prayers have been answered, the other has to do with the *object* concerned. If the person in need of money finds that the empty plate in front of him suddenly changes into money, we would say God has answered prayers *by a miracle*.

We reject the claims of the charismatics that among them are people who can heal when, how, and as they will. If these people truly have such gifts, why are the hospitals still full of the sick and the infirm? Why are Christians in their own congregations still see-

⁴1689 Baptist Confession, Chapter 5:3.

ing the doctors and taking medicines? They would claim that faith is needed before one can be healed. Doesn't that sound familiar? The inability of the faith healers to heal are conveniently blamed on the victims! How cruel they can be! The healings they claim to have performed are of the nature of headaches and toothaches, and not of polio victims and cancer patients healed. We have known of people who claimed they were healed of cancer but died not long after because of cancer!

6.3 John Calvin and miracles

The writers of MCTC put their competency and Christian integrity on the line when they misrepresent John Calvin. In his Prefatory Address to King Francis of France, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John Calvin countered the demands made by the Roman Catholic Church for miracles from the Reformers to authenticate their teaching. Calvin answered saying that the Reformers had not coined a new gospel but retained the very one confirmed by the miracles of Christ and the apostles. This was supported by passages such as Mark 16:20, Acts 14:3, and Hebrews 2:4. Calvin warned that "Satan has his miracles, which, although they are tricks rather than true wonders, are still such as to delude the ignorant and unwary." "Magicians and enchanters have always been famous for miracles, and miracles of an astonishing description have given support to idolatry.." The Roman Catholics claimed that their miracles were wrought by saints, to which Calvin responded, "as if we did not know it to be Satan's wiles to transform himself 'into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).' " In this context, Calvin went on to say, "What, then, shall we say but that it has been, and always will be, a most just punishment of God, to send on those who do not receive the truth in the love of it, 'strong delusion, that they should believe a lie'? (2 Thess. 2:11). We, then have no lack of miracles, sure miracles, that cannot be gainsaid; but those to which our opponents lay claim are mere delusions of Satan, inasmuch as they draw off people from the true worship of God to vanity."⁵

It is so obvious Calvin is claiming that the gospel the Reformers were preaching had been confirmed by the miracles of Christ and

⁵Calvin, J. 1536, translated by Beveridge, Henry. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. 8-10. Eerdmans.

the apostles, which miracles therefore were those of the Reformers. Calvin was not saying that the Reformers *themselves* were performing miracles but that they had the miracles of Christ and the apostles to confirm the gospel they (the Reformers) were preaching. On the basis of Calvin's words, "We, then have no lack of miracles, sure miracles, that cannot be gainsaid..." the writers of MCTC claim (p. 71) that "Calvin cannot be a cessationist and, at the same time, assert that the Reformers also have miracles!" This assertion is made again in the concluding chapter (p. 88), and embellished, saying, "Calvin is not a strict cessationist and clearly affirmed miracles in his day, even if, in his view, they did not carry the same authority as the apostolic miracles." Incredibly, the writers of MCTC (or at least the writer of the said chapter) were aware that Calvin said elsewhere in his *Institutes* that the miracles of Scripture, and the power to perform them, have ceased since they are directly linked to the ministry of Jesus and His apostles (p. 71).⁶

What could have caused the writers of MCTC to be so careless? It has to be their persistence in wanting to prove that the Reformed people today are 'more Calvinistic than Calvin'. This is connected with their commitment to ecumenism and the continuation of signs, wonders, and miracles, over against commitment to the truth. There is the failure to understand Calvin's words in context. Worse, there seems to be a deliberate attempt to wrest Calvin's words out of context. The writers of MCTC then asserts (p. 71), "...for Calvin, miracles still exist today even if such miracles do not have the same authenticating power as those of the apostles." This assertion is made again in the concluding chapter (p. 88). An assertion does not constitute proof. To make an assertion based on a misunderstanding of Calvin's words is embarrassing. To make an assertion by distorting Calvin's meaning is downright dishonest. In charity, we would like to think that the writers have made an honest mistake.

6.4 Benjamin B. Warfield and Counterfeit Miracles

We have considered B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) and the influence of his writings on Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Warfield, a professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote his book *Counterfeit Miracles* to expose the claims of miracles in the Medieval church, in

⁶*Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 19:6, 18.

the Roman Catholic Church, in the Pentecostal movement, and other claims of faith-healing and mind-cures. The book MCTC presents Warfield as one who does not believe in miracles of any kind in the post-apostolic age. This is a misrepresentation of Warfield. It must be remembered that Warfield was a mainline Reformed theologian who held firmly to the Westminster Confession of Faith. What is taught in that Confession of Faith concerning the cessation of the miraculous gifts, miracles, the providence of God, and His power to heal have been presented briefly above. Warfield made clear in his book *Counterfeit Miracles* that he held to the ‘cessationist view’ presented in the Confession of Faith, which does not exclude the power of God in performing miracles today. After showing how various passages of Scripture had been wrongly used to support the spurious miracles, Warfield wrote:⁷ (pp. 192-193):

“And now let us very briefly sum up from our own point of view what it seems that we ought to think of Faith-Healing. First of all, as regards the *status quaestionis*, let it be remembered that the question is not: (1) Whether God is an answerer of prayer; nor (2) whether, in answer to prayer. He heals the sick; nor (3) whether His action in healing the sick is a supernatural act; nor (4) whether the supernaturalness of the act may be so apparent as to demonstrate God’s activity in it to all right-thinking minds conversant with the facts. ***All this we all believe.*** The question at issue is distinctly whether God has pledged Himself to heal the sick miraculously, and does heal them miraculously, on the call of His children—that is to say without means—any means—and apart from means, and above means; and this so ordinarily that Christian people may be encouraged, if not required, to discard all means as either unnecessary or even a mark of lack of faith and sinful distrust, and to depend on God alone for the healing of all their sicknesses. This is the issue, even conservatively stated. For many will say that faith gives us as clear a title to the healing of our bodies as to the salvation of our souls; and this is often interpreted to mean that it is the heritage of every Christian,

⁷ Warfield, B. B. 1918. *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 192-193. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

6.5. John F. MacArthur: Charismatic Chaos and Strange Fire

if a true Christian, to be free from all disease and bodily weakness, and it is a proof of special sin in a Christian if he is a special sufferer from disease.” [Emphasis added.]

Warfield was a cessationist who did believe that God is able to heal supernaturally, and that He does heal supernaturally. As a cessationist, he believed that there is no person who may claim to have the ability to heal when, how, and as he desires, in the name of the Lord.

6.5 John F. MacArthur: Charismatic Chaos and Strange Fire

The writer of the chapter of concern in MCTC castigates John MacArthur, claiming that he “often uses rather excessive language that reveals both lack of scholarly objectivity and Christian charity.” The writer himself displays excessive language towards MacArthur, saying, “Is MacArthur therefore defending a clearly defined Reformed framework rooted in Scriptures, or merely betraying his own prejudices towards the Pentecostal-charismatic movement of which he has little or no understanding?” Is such language necessary? Is not such language excessive?

The fact is MacArthur never claims himself to be Reformed although he is Calvinistic, holding strongly to the Five Points of Calvinism (also known as the Doctrines of Grace). We have noted in the earlier chapters that it takes more than holding to the Five Points of Calvinism to make one a Reformed person. A Reformed person, or church, would uphold the Five Points of Calvinism, the Five Principles of the Reformation (the Five Sola’s), subscribe to one of the Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation and the Puritan Age, uphold the Regulative Principle of worship, and hold to Covenant Theology. MacArthur does not subscribe to any of the traditional Confessions of Faith, while holding firmly to the sole authority of Scripture. He holds to Dispensationalism instead of Covenant Theology. Although he has been invited to speak at some Reformed platforms such as the Ligonier Ministry conferences and the Banner of Truth conferences, he never identifies himself as Reformed and is never owned by mainline Reformed people as one of them.

The writer in MCTC acknowledges that “MacArthur is to be com-

mended for highlighting and exposing some of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement's abuses and excesses. His insistence that all teaching must be rooted in Scripture, and not based on experience or some revelation supposedly received apart from the Bible, is much needed." That being the case, can we not give MacArthur the benefit of the doubt that he is writing out of zeal for the Lord rather than out of personal malice? Which Pentecostal-charismatic writer has exposed the many (not some, as claimed) abuses and excesses of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement? Are those who practise such excesses and abuses not part of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement? Is there a clearly defined 'mainline Pentecostal-charismatic movement' that is distinct from those who hold to 'abuses and excesses' on its periphery? While I would personally not use some of the language employed by MacArthur, my sympathy is with him in so far as this issue is concerned. To claim that "...staunch cessationists, such as Warfield and MacArthur, ...trust too much in their human arguments..." (MCTC, p. 74) is to misrepresent them and to underestimate them, and to use language that reflects on oneself.

6.6 Martyn Lloyd-Jones and J. I. Packer

The writer in MCTC acknowledges (p. 76) that "Lloyd-Jones is a firm believer in the power and manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the church today." He seems unaware that all mainline Reformed people like B. B. Warfield, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and C. H. Spurgeon believed in the power and manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the church today. Many of them lived in times of revival. The writer further claims that "Lloyd-Jones believes that spiritual gifts such as healing, miracles, prophecy, tongues, signs and wonders continue today." That, however, is not true. The said writer did not provide proof. We have seen in an earlier chapter that Lloyd-Jones did not believe the claims of the charismatics and would not attend their meetings.⁸ Lloyd-Jones personally declared, "I was against Pentecostalism and still am. My doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit is that it gives full assurance. I have never been satisfied with any speaking in tongues that I have heard."⁹ This is found in the official biography of Lloyd-Jones, by Iain H. Murray who was closely associated with Lloyd-Jones. Another close associate of Lloyd-Jones, Eryl Davies, similarly declares that Lloyd-Jones was never a charis-

matic.¹⁰

While Lloyd-Jones, who belonged to mainline Reformed theology, castigated those on the periphery who were ‘hardline cessationists’, we have never read of any ‘mainline Pentecostal-charismatic’, if ever there is such a category of people, who castigate those who engage in excesses and abuses in the charismatic movement – such as dancing, being ‘slain by the Spirit’ (falling down at a touch from the preacher), ‘holy laughter’ (rolling on the ground in uncontrollable laughter), mooing like cows, writhing on the ground like snakes, etc. Only Reformed and Fundamentalist theologians have done so to those of their own camps. The fact is that the charismatic movement has no substantial theology to speak of. It took a Reformed, ecumenical-minded, theologian like J. I. Packer to suggest lines along which the charismatics must work to come up with a credible theology to support their claims and practices,¹¹ and even helping them in the effort.¹² Today, the charismatics would rely on the writings of such men as Wayne Grudem¹³ to support their so-called ‘secondary prophecy’ which is ‘not on par with Scripture’. It is no surprise to us that many charismatics, who are aware of the doctrinal shallowness in the movement they are involved with, have embraced the Five Points of Calvinism. They have even begun to call themselves by the self-contradictory name of ‘Reformed-Charismatics’.

The book MCTC (p. 77) considers J. I. Packer as a Reformed theologian who “does not thereby discount that God is still at work miraculously to heal” and who is “fully open to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit today”. That is to state the obvious, for which mainline Reformed theologian would deny that God is still able to heal miraculously? Which mainline Reformed theologian is not fully open to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit today? To imply that Packer endorsed the healings performed by men who claim to have the ability to heal is another matter. It is to claim too much.

⁸Murray, I. H. 1990. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, p. 688. The Banner of Truth Trust.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 695.

¹⁰Themelios, Vol. 25, Issue 1, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/dr-d-martyn-lloyd-jones-an-introduction/> (last accessed Dec. 2023).

¹¹Packer, J. I. *The Churchman*, 1980.

¹²Packer, J. I. 1984. *Keep In Step With The Spirit*. IVP.

¹³Grudem, Wayne, 1994. *Systematic Theology*. Zondervan. pp. 1016-1088.

6.7 Reformed Theology and the West

The book MCTC (p. 77) sweepingly claims that the views of John Calvin (MacArthur was intended?) and B. B. Warfield “were conditioned in part by the theological controversies and challenges of their time.” It then writes off Reformed theology by claiming that “Reformed theology emerged in the West, which in the past few centuries have been strongly influenced by Enlightenment thought and modern science. Together these have contributed to a skepticism about the supernatural and a rejection of belief in post-apostolic miracles.” Not satisfied with that, a broadside is launched on ‘hardline Reformed thinkers’ (p. 78). “Their tendency towards favouring rationalistic arguments and building neat and well-defined theological systems has been a major hindrance to their coming to terms with God’s works of ‘signs and wonders’ in the world.” Doesn’t the writer sound exasperated?

We have noted that the Neo-evangelicals were keen on portraying themselves as genial and accommodating after the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930. Those in the 1960’s had the ambition of influencing the church at large by positioning themselves in the theological faculties of universities and seminaries. In Britain, the majority of such Neo-evangelicals were from the Church of England. The writers of MCTC have imbibed their spirit and ambition. The books they favourably quote from are by ecumenical-minded Neo-evangelicals who have been active in academia.¹⁴ At least one of the writers was studying in Britain in the 1970s, during the period when top Anglican clerics were denying key doctrines such as the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ, and the inerrancy of Scripture.

The particular writer on supernatural gifts in MCTC then proceeds to lecture his apparently ignorant readers that the ‘center of gravity’ of the global church shifted from the West into the Majority (non-Western) World sometime around 1980. The church in the Majority World has grown by more than a billion members, with a majority coming to Christ through the ‘signs and wonders’ of the Holy Spirit, especially in healing and deliverance from demonic power. It is claimed that there are two key reasons why this is happening. First, most of the people live in an animistic context in which the powers of darkness and the world of spirits control the day-to-day

¹⁴Murray, Iain H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*. Banner of Truth Trust.

lives of the people. Second, many live in highly restricted situations where any open sharing of the gospel is hardly possible. In such places, the power of the Holy Spirit in signs and wonders, visions and dreams, and other manifestations play a key role in evangelistic breakthroughs and church growth. Anecdotes are given from Korea, China, and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysia. It is concluded that, given all these, to dismiss the role of miracles is not only to limit God but also to deny the amazing work of God in the parts of the world today where churches are growing fastest. Throughout, there is no exposition of any Scripture passage, and no reference to Scripture to support the claims.

We have to ask this writer, and the other writers of MCTC, what has become of 'sola scriptura'? Do you now determine what is true and what is false by your feelings and the stories that you hear? How many of the "more than a billion" converted people have you interviewed before you come to the conclusion that they are all genuinely converted? For ourselves, we would rather rely on the teaching of Scripture. It says in Romans 10:17, "Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It does not say that faith comes by seeing signs, wonders and miracles, or by dreams and visions. The signs, wonders and miracles of the Bible authenticated the messengers of God and the messages that they were bearing. Hearers were saved not by the miracles they saw but by the message they heard, which was authenticated by the miracles. In Matthew 7:21-23 we are told, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' " Note that the Lord says, "Many will say to Me in that day..." who will be rejected by Him. They will claim the very things claimed by today's charismatics – prophecy, casting out demons, doing wonders in Christ's name.

If Reformed theology comes from the West and is not to be trusted because it is supposed to have been influenced by rationalism and science, what about Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement? Have they not come from the West? The subjectivism, shallowness in the understanding of Scripture, and worldliness that characterise much of the charismatic movement in the West are also seen in the Majority World. Granted that there may be some genuine

conversions among those who profess belief in Jesus Christ, despite the wrong teaching and distracting antics of the charismatic movement, are they to remain in their shallow understanding of Scripture and ignorance of true Christian experience? Reformed theology has been forged in the fires of persecution and controversies of various kinds such that it is what it is today. It is firmly rooted in the word of God, and displays a stability, consistency, and proportionality that arise from much careful and laborious exegesis, and watered by much prayer. It is my humble and considered opinion that the Pentecostal-charismatic movement is likely to be consigned to the pages of church history, while Reformed theology will continue to be refined “for the edifying of the body of Christ...” (Eph. 4:13). May I extend a personal invitation to charismatic Christians to come study Reformed theology for what it is, and embrace it, because it is the closest expression of the system of teaching taught in the word of God?

6.8 Conclusion

I write as a mainline Reformed pastor who is a cessationist of the Reformed and scriptural sense,¹⁵ and not in the sense defined by the writers of MCTC. I believe that God is able to perform miracles today and He does answer prayers miraculously according to His own will. The writer in MCTC quotes from the Gospel Coalition website an article entitled “Why Charismatics and Calvinists Need Each Other”. We will say more of the Gospel Coalition in the last chapter of this book. Here, we would only say that charismatics and Calvinists do not need each other. They both need Jesus Christ for salvation, and the fulness of the Holy Spirit to live God-pleasing lives. They both need to know the Scripture better, and to be more faithful to their Lord.

¹⁵See my book, *Cessationism or Continuationism?* 2020. Good News Enterprise. Available at Amazon Books.

Seven

Conclusions

The book *More Calvinistic Than Calvin* (MCTC) ostensibly has the purpose of countering the belief of a particular church in the Kuala Lumpur area that has been causing unease among other Christians and churches. That church goes by the name of ‘Christ Evangelical Reformed Church’ (CERC). Instead of focusing on its practice, MCTC focuses on Reformed theology which is supposed to be held by CERC. A careful reading of the book reveals that it denigrates Reformed theology by misrepresentation, while promoting the writers’ ecumenical agenda. The book will have the effects of putting off Christians from further pursuing Reformed theology, and causing Christians of other persuasions to smile condescending at Reformed people, and perhaps clucking privately and shaking their heads at any reference to them. It will also encourage Christians at large to have a more accommodating attitude towards other Christians and churches who differ from them, regardless of how serious those differences may be.

We summarise the ways by which Reformed theology has been misrepresented and propose a model for true Christian fellowship.

7.1 Misrepresentation of Reformed theology

The writers of MCTC attempt to say some positive things about Reformed theology obviously with the intention to show themselves fair, but their attempt cannot make up for the broadsides launched against it. They should stop and refrain from spreading their repre-

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hensible misrepresentation of the Reformed faith. In particular we would point out these areas they should stop harping on:

- 1 That Reformed theology has developed by the incorporation of Aristotelian philosophical methodology, through deductive logic, and a rigid doctrine of double predestination. That is patently not true. The writers of MCTC seem to be ignorant of mainline Reformed theology, church history, and Aristotelian logic. The reader needs only to turn to any volume of Systematic Theology produced by mainline Reformed theologians¹ to realise that they revere God's word and exercise careful exegesis of Scripture, producing works that enlarge our understanding of God's revealed will while humbling the proud who are often shallow on Scripture. Furthermore, in the study of theology, the mind has to be used and logic is involved. Logic is only a tool, not the storehouse of truth. It is not wrong to use logic correctly in the study of the substance of Scripture. We go wrong when we use logic to produce conclusions that contradict Scripture. We go wrong also when we fail to use our mind logically in the study of Scripture.
- 2 That Reformed thinkers have gone beyond Calvin, being influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment and science. This is patently not true. This allegation concerns the persons, and is related to the earlier allegation which concerns their belief. The claim is that Reformed people have gone beyond John Calvin by holding rigidly to the doctrines of double predestination and limited atonement, with the result that they become 'hardline' – being censorious of others, thinking themselves the only ones right, and refusing to collaborate with others. This allegation has been made by the Neo-evangelicals from the 1960's, including the likes of Robert Letham and Alister McGrath, who are quoted much in MCTC. The claim that "there are strong grounds to assert that hardline Reformed scholars have gone beyond biblical limits on important issues and taken their theology beyond Calvin on crucial points" is patently untrue. The "strong grounds" are actually tentative suggestions made by Neo-evangelicals without proof, who have an axe to grind towards Reformed scholars. The definition of 'hardline Reformed scholars' are those who hold to the cessation of the extraordinary gifts, and to double predestination and

¹Examples are Louis Berkhof, Charles Hodge, J. L. Dagg, and James P. Boyce.

limited atonement. In other words, all mainline Reformed scholars are 'hardline'. Why are Neo-evangelicals fixated at misrepresenting Reformed theology? A possible reason is that they have portrayed themselves as constituting the genial, accommodating, and tolerant branch of Christianity which stands in contrast to the wantonness of liberalism on the one hand, and the belligerence of Fundamentalism on the other. When Reformed theology stands in the way, offering a robust doctrine coupled with serious spirituality as an alternative, it has to be maligned.

- 3 That Reformed Christians hold to the sovereignty of God at the expense of human responsibility, which in turn has the tendency to kill off evangelism and missions. That is patently not true. The book MCTC confuses free will with human responsibility and mistakenly uses examples from hyper-Calvinism to represent the supposed weaknesses of Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism, however, is not the same as Calvinism. Reformed theology holds to Calvinism as its doctrine of salvation. It teaches that the sovereign God uses means to accomplish His purposes, and He holds man responsible for his actions. Man has no free will since the will is in bondage to sin. Man is a free agent, with no external force compelling him in his actions. God's purposes will come to pass, regardless of the decisions of man. All the Reformed Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation and the Puritan age show a healthy belief in divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Reformed preachers have been greatly used by God in times of revival, for example George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Asahel Nettleton, William Burns, and C. H. Spurgeon. Reformed missionaries have been active in many parts of the world, for example William Carey in India, Adoniram Judson in Burma, Henry Martyn in India and Persia, and John G. Paton in the New Hebrides.
- 4 That there is a big difference between 'double predestination' and 'single predestination', such that those who hold to double predestination are prone to a 'hardline' stance towards others. This is patently not true. The writers of MCTC have failed to understand that most of the Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation and the Puritan age teach some form of double predestination, and that whether one holds to 'double predestination' or 'single predestination' is not a matter of contention within mainline Reformed theology. Reformed people are more concerned

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over the wrong understanding of predestination, or the rejection of the biblical doctrine of predestination, among other evangelicals. John Wesley was one of those who denied predestination outrightly but inconsistently held to doctrines of 'human depravity' and 'salvation by grace, through faith, in Christ, alone'. His semi-Arminianism and his confusing teaching on perfectionism have caused Christians much consternation down the centuries. While acknowledging that his zeal for the Lord and his organising ability were commendable qualities, his combative character and confusing doctrines should be noted as well.

- 5 That J. I. Packer is the epitome of a principled and generous Reformed man who should be imitated by all Reformed people. We have to strongly disagree, believing that Packer was not consistent in his stand on the truth and had set a bad example of compromising the faith by his ecumenical activities. We acknowledge with thankfulness to God the good books he has written and the good that has come out of his teaching ministry, but disagree strongly with his ecumenism. We see his rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church as a betrayal of the Protestant-evangelical cause, which has caused deep division within evangelicalism and confusion concerning the definitions of 'church' and 'Christian'. This is not to be misunderstood that we are advocating animosity towards the Roman Catholics. Rather, the reverse is the case. We should be friendly and compassionate towards them, many of whom do not know any better than the teaching they are brought up in. We should evangelise them by speaking the truth in love – the truth of the unadulterated gospel. We have put forward Martyn Lloyd-Jones as the epitome of a principled and generous Reformed man instead, at the same time reminding ourselves that every man has 'feet of clay'.
- 6 That men such as John MacArthur and B. B. Warfield are examples of 'hardline' (read 'bad') Reformed Christians who spoke out against the charismatic movement, while men like Martyn Lloyd-Jones and J. I. Packer are examples of good Reformed Christians who believed in the continuation of the extraordinary gifts and the fulness of the Holy Spirit. We have to strongly disagree and point out the misunderstanding and ignorance of the writers of MCTC. To my knowledge, John MacArthur has never claimed himself to be Reformed although he is comfortable with Reformed

people and has spoken at some Reformed platforms. He is actually a Calvinistic Fundamentalist who holds to dispensationalism instead of covenant theology, who is cessationist with regard to the extraordinary gifts, and does not subscribe to any of the Reformed Confessions of Faith. Instead of criticising him for his strong language against the charismatics, we should perhaps see him as imitating the Lord in His zeal in cleansing the temple, and acting in faithfulness to the command to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). Warfield was a sterling Reformed man of whom Lloyd-Jones said, “He not only asserted the Reformed faith; he at the same time demonstrated its superiority over all other systems or partial systems.” Warfield believed that God does perform miracles today according to His will but rejected all claims of faith-healing and miracles performed by men at their will. Lloyd-Jones has been claimed as supporting the beliefs and practices of the Pentecostals and charismatics, but this has been refuted in his authorised biography. Packer did not agree with much of the claims made by the charismatics but attempted to help them in formulating a theology of their own.

- 7 That Reformed theology came from the West, that it probably thrives largely among the more educated and left-brained types, that it is rationalistic and highly intellectualized, that it will not be appreciated by people from the Majority World who are by nature more subjective and more tuned to the spirit-world, that it will not be understood by the indigenous peoples or the non-university educated members of our churches, that it is only a contextual theology like all other theologies, that it is rigidly bound by 17th century European history and culture. A heavy dose of ideas from the Modern Church Growth movement is evident, especially in the last chapter of MCTC. There is the emphasis on cultural relevance and contextualisation. Statistics and numbers are the indications of effectiveness of a method, rather than faithfulness to biblical principles. Meeting the ‘felt needs’ is more important than giving understanding of the truth. Ridiculous arguments are used to shoot at the straw men erected by the writers of MCTC themselves.

7.2 The Ecumenical Agenda

The writers of MCTC are promoting their ecumenical agenda by calling for churches to be united despite differences in doctrine and practice. Following J. I. Packer, this is being pursued at the expense of truth. Packer was one of the evangelicals who signed the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* in 1994. He was also its chief defender. The book MCTC not only puts forward Packer as a model Christian, but also openly approves (p. 61) of the ECT as “a programmatic (*sic.*, ‘pragmatic’ intended?) statement and collaboration between evangelicals and Roman Catholics for Christian witness and mission... The statement itself is an example of a principled yet generous approach...” Roman Catholics are recognised as “fellow disciples of Christ” (p. 63). Not mentioned in MCTC is the fact that Packer was subsequently to sign ECT II in 1997, by which was affirmed that the partnership is in fact between ‘Evangelicals who thank God for the heritage of the Reformation’ and ‘Catholics who are conscientiously faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church.’² We have seen that the Roman Catholic Church has not changed its doctrine. Salvation is still by works – through baptism, confession of sins to the priest, and attendance at the mass. Salvation is found only within the Roman Catholic Church. Scripture is not the only authority of faith and practice but is held alongside church traditions.

The book MCTC appeals for Christian unity in the following words (p. 95): ‘When the truth of the gospel is at stake, sometimes division cannot be avoided (e.g. Gal. 1:8-9). But when secondary issues are made into primary truths, then such divisions are unnecessary and unchristian (e.g. Rom. 14:1-12), and only serves Satan’s purposes. One main reason for this book is to issue a plea to those who are strongly Reformed-minded ‘to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:3). This means that all of us need a greater measure of humility in our life and ministry, and in the way we relate to other fellow believers. Can the Malaysian church, which is already facing so many serious challenges in our national context, afford to do otherwise?’

It is precisely here that we differ from the writers of MCTC. We see the Malaysian church as weak and doctrinal shallow, making sec-

²Murray, I. H. 2000. *Evangelicalism Divided*, p. 231. The Banner of Truth Trust.

ondary issues primary, while primary issues are treated as secondary. The Malaysian church is not clear on what is the gospel, and what is the church. The Malaysian church is easily swayed by every wind of doctrine and tends to over-react to situations, while leaving the primary matters unattended. The book MCTC itself provides examples of these. The denial of the gospel of 'justification by faith alone' by the Roman Catholic Church, and the claim of prophecy, tongue-speaking and interpretation by the charismatics that undermines the sole authority of Scripture, are treated as secondary issues. Hyper-Calvinism, which is not Calvinism at all, is used as an example of the weaknesses of Reformed theology. J. I. Packer is portrayed as a model of being principled and generous when he compromised the truth by his ecumenical activities, betrayed the Protestant-evangelical cause, and went from bad to worse with the years. Reformed theology is misrepresented and maligned instead of being appreciated for what it really is. The malicious insinuations of the ecumenical-minded Neo-evangelicals against Reformed theology are mindlessly accepted and followed. Christianity in the East is pitted against that in the West when it is convenient to do so. Ideas from the Modern Church Growth movement are absorbed and applied indiscriminately. No doubt, there will be churches that constitute the exceptions but I believe this observation is true of the vast majority of churches. This sounds like a harsh judgement but can these points be denied?

Apart from accepting Roman Catholics as 'fellow disciples of Christ', the writers of MCTC are prepared to lower the standard of 'sola scriptura' – the formal principle of the Reformation – in order to accommodate the charismatics. In Chapter 3 of the book ('An Overview Of Reformed Theology'), a truncated definition of the principle is first given: "...the Bible is *the sole source of doctrines*, not the traditions or the authority of the Church (2 Tim. 3:16)." (Emphasis added.) It then says, "Apart from those that have come under the influence of modern liberal theology, all Protestant churches are agreed on this central principle of the Reformation. These also include Pentecostal and charismatic churches which practice (*sic.*) the gift of prophecy, because such prophecies, not being from the Bible itself, in principle are never used as a basis for doctrine." After allowing for the Pentecostals and charismatics to get pass, the bar is raised again to where it should be at the end of the chapter, saying, "This chapter does not aim to deconstruct Reformed theology or to dissuade people from it.

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Instead, it is to help believers to have a better understanding of the diverse perspectives in Christian theology, even among those who are completely agreed on the Bible's supreme authority *in all matters of faith and conduct.*" (Emphasis added.) A similar sleight of hand (MCTC, p. 88) has been referred to, which we reproduce here: "But as we showed in Chapter 6, Calvin is not a strict cessationist and clearly affirmed miracles in his day, *even if, in his view, they did not carry the same authority as the apostolic miracles.*" (Emphasis added.) Calvin is wrongly claimed to be 'not a strict cessationist', after which is added the embellishment. We find that reprehensible.

By this point it should be clear who is a Neo-evangelical, and what is the ecumenical agenda. Before the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930, the evangelicals were united on certain core beliefs and values – including the sole authority of Scripture, the gospel of 'justification by faith', reverence in worship, honouring the Sabbath Day, a burden for evangelism and missions, the avoidance of worldliness, etc. They differed among themselves on such matters as baptism, church polity, assurance, sanctification, head-covering, etc. After 1930, when liberalism was somewhat contained, the evangelicals became divided into three camps – the Fundamentalists, the Reformed, and the Neo-evangelicals. The Pentecostals emerged to form the fourth camp. The characteristics of the various camps, or constituencies, may be summarised as below:³

- Fundamentalist: Tendency to be over-literal in Bible interpretation, practises aggressive separation, holds tenaciously to dispensational premillennialism, cessationist, and lacks patience with those who do not hold to the King James Version of the Bible.
- Reformed: Adheres to the Five Sola's of the Reformation, the Five Points of Calvinism, covenant theology, cessationism. Confessional, upholds the primacy of preaching, and the Regulative Principle of worship.
- Neo-evangelical: Tendency to be ecumenical-minded, emphasises social concerns, non-cessationist. Open to contemporary worship, church-growth approach to missions, and Postmod-

³This is discussed more in my book *Thoroughgoing Reformation*. 2017. Good News Enterprise, available from Amazon Books.

ernist in outlook (seeker-sensitive, progressing with the times, etc.).

- Charismatic: Historically, not evangelical. In spirit and doctrine, not conservative. Instead, Postmodernist in outlook. Emphasises subjective experiences at the expense of propositional truths. Non-cessationist, practises contemporary worship.

In each category, there will be shades of difference. For example, among Reformed people, there are Baptists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Congregationalists who differ in church polity. Similarly, among the Neo-evangelicals, there are those who are more conservative than others, holding on more closely to beliefs and values of the old evangelicalism compared to other more liberal Neo-evangelicals. Our concern is the ecumenical agenda that is being promoted by quite many Neo-evangelicals today, including the likes of Alister McGrath, Richard A. Muller, and Robert Letham, who are quoted much in MCTC. In the process of promoting ecumenism, they run down Reformed theology and caricature Reformed teachers. There is a tendency in them to become progressively more liberal. This is not surprising given how compromise over the truth tends to lead to further compromise.

What is the ecumenical agenda? It is the attempt to promote visible expressions of unity among Christians at the expense of truth. This is done through dialogues, joint statements, writings, participation in social concerns, forming ecumenical bodies, and teaching in institutions. In all these, it is necessary to overlook doctrinal differences, show intellectual respectability, and portray a genial and accommodating spirit. On the negative side, there is an attempt to disparage those who appear to stand in their way, namely the Fundamentalists and the Reformed. The Fundamentalists pose not too much of a threat for it is perceived that they tend to be aggressive and belligerent towards those who disagree with them. The genial and accommodating spirit of the Neo-evangelicals is deemed sufficient to counteract the Fundamentalists. The strength of those who are Reformed lies in their theology and the less aggressive front that they present, compared to the Fundamentalists. To neutralise, or weaken, the challenge posed by the Reformed constituency, its theology is attacked by insinuating that it has strayed from that of John Calvin due to influence by humanistic philosophy and logic. Hence

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the constant refrain that Reformed people are ‘more Calvinistic than Calvin’.

Wherein lie the dangers of ecumenism? In the process of interacting with liberals, charismatics, and Roman Catholics, many evangelical leaders have softened their stand on the sole authority of Scripture, the gospel of ‘justification by faith alone’, and radical discipleship. Instead of influencing others for good, a number of them have been influenced to become liberal and adopted universalism or annihilationism. Others have become disillusioned with the lack of progress in bringing about ecumenical unity so that they abandoned the evangelical faith to join the Roman Catholic Church or the Eastern Orthodox churches. We have alluded to instances of these in the present book. By fraternising with those who deny the essentials of the Christian faith, the ecumenists are disobeying the teaching of Scripture to practise separation from sins, heresies, and worldliness (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; James 4:4; Jude 3-4). Fraternisation with such is not the teaching of Scripture. If the leaders have succumbed, what may we expect of the ordinary members of the church who are taught, and led into, ecumenism? A shift away from Scripture will be accompanied by a withdrawal of the Spirit’s power and the loss of the Lord’s blessing. It has to be so for the Spirit works in those who obey the word of God (John 14:15, 26; Phil. 2:13; Col. 1:29).

The Fundamentalist and Reformed constituencies are generally united in rejecting the ecumenism of the Neo-evangelicals, while not having problems in fellowship with the more conservative ones. Does that mean they are against Christian unity? Lest we are accused of being wholly negative, we put forward here a model for Christian fellowship.

7.3 A Model for Christian Fellowship

Many today like to talk about Christian unity but few have thought through the underlying principles nor have any idea how it is to be accomplished. While not claiming to have the answers to all the related issues, we propose here a model of Christian unity based on the teaching of Scripture. Unity between Christians is expressed in union and communion (or fellowship). Our understanding of the Scripture is that union between Christians is found primarily within

a local church (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 4:4-6). Arguments for denominational union cannot be proved convincingly. Fellowship between individual Christians and between local churches exists through faith in Jesus Christ, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and in obedience to the truth (John 17:20-26; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). From this point of view, fellowship is abstract and spiritual in nature, while union is practical and visible, involving membership and commitment in an organisation, namely, the local church. Local churches express fellowship with one another by joint actions in worship, missions, good works, and various other kinds of gospel ministry. The local church plays a central and unique role in the purposes of God (Matt. 18:17-18; Eph. 2:19-22; 3:21; Rev. 1:9-20).

When fellowship is expressed between Christians, the gifts of the Spirit are utilised. Love is the greatest of all the gifts of God, greater than faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13). Before there is faith, hope and love in the person, there must be the hearing of the truth leading to conversion (1 Cor. 13:2-3; Rom. 10:17). So, while love is the greatest of the gifts to the Christian, truth has the priority over the gifts. To compare truth with love is to compare an apple with an orange – they are of different categories. Therefore, it is not right to say love is greater than truth, or that truth is greater than love. On the other hand, we may rightly say we must have truth before we can have love or, in other words, truth has the priority over love. When there is no truth, there is no possibility of having the gifts, let alone the enjoyment of the gifts. The primacy of the truth is taught in such passages as Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Isaiah 8:20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Scripture testifies to its own trustworthiness and completeness (2 Pet. 1:19-21; Rev. 22:18-19). Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's word will remain forever (Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:23). Truth determines the degree of fellowship between Christians and churches. The more of truth is held in common, the greater is the possibility of fellowship. The less of truth is held in common, the less likely is the possibility of fellowship. At no point are we saying that we do not need love, or that love is less important.

While unity between Christians is a constant theme in the Scripture, separation from errors also is a dominant note. The unity taught in the Scripture is often in the context of the life of a local church (1 Cor. 12:12-14 cf. 3:16-17; Eph. 4:1-6 cf. 1:1), while the separation is from those who are in error doctrinally or in practice, both from within and without the church (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor.

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6:14-18; 2 John 10-11). Those who are adamant in error within the local church must be dealt with by corrective discipline which includes limitation in fellowship upon suspension, and withdrawal of fellowship upon excommunication, in the worst case (1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Tit. 3:10-11). Church members must be warned of divisive errors (Acts 20:28-29; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Tim. 4:14-15) while purveyors of errors must be confronted and contended against (2 John 10-11; Jude 3-4), depending on our standing in the circumstances and in relation to the persons concerned (cf. Rom. 14:10-13; 1 Cor. 5:12-13; Gal. 6:1-5). (In the legal profession, this is called 'locus standi'.)

Many factors affect fellowship between churches, including geographical distance, shared interest, available resources, the personality of church leaders, etc. which make selective fellowship necessary. Today, with the advances in communication and transportation, these limitations are minimised while opening up other opportunities. It is not necessary for unity between churches to be expressed in an organisation. Furthermore, fellowship between churches and Christians may be expressed through more than one platform – e.g. on-site conferences, pulpit exchanges, visits, virtual (internet) meetings, etc. What is the lowest common denominator for fellowship between Christians? Like the Reformers, Martyn Lloyd-Jones believed it is the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice.⁴ This is the 'formal principle of the Reformation', upon which the other principles rest.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones differed from J. I. Packer in how Christian unity should be expressed. Packer argued that evangelical unity means either spiritual, inter-denominational unity or it has to be a unity of a denominational nature.⁵ Lloyd-Jones, however, emphasised the expression of unity based on the truth. He said, "Here is the great divide. The ecumenical people put fellowship before doctrine. We, as evangelicals, put doctrine before fellowship."⁶ Ministers who were in agreement with Lloyd-Jones gathered in fellowship around the Westminster Fellowship, while churches and denominations, mostly of Calvinistic persuasion, joined the British Evangelical Council (BEC).⁷ Lloyd-Jones knew that such structures were only temporary and contingent upon the needs of the time. He argued that "The greatest need of the hour is a new baptism and outpouring

⁴Murray, I. H. 1990. *The Fight of Faith*, p. 546. The Banner of Truth Trust.

of the Holy Spirit in renewal and revival... The ultimate question facing us these days is whether our faith is in men and their power to organize, or in the truth of God in Christ Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁸

We have put forward Martyn Lloyd-Jones as the model of a principled and generous Christian man. We qualified ourselves by saying we are aware that all men have feet of clay. We have also made the point that Reformed theology indeed has developed beyond John Calvin, not by going astray along the line of humanistic philosophy as has been claimed by the Neo-evangelicals and the writers of MCTC, but by building upon Calvin on the basis of Scripture. Here, we would propose going a little beyond Lloyd-Jones on Christian unity in three points. We emphasise that it is a *little* beyond Lloyd-Jones as there is no substantial difference with what he had advocated. We are merely tweaking the main principles for greater clarity.

First, we propose that the barest minimum of truths that must be agreed upon by evangelicals should be the doctrines of the trinitarian God, the sole authority of Scripture, and the gospel of ‘salvation by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone’. Lloyd-Jones assumed the orthodox doctrine of the trinitarian God as he was addressing evangelicals who held to that truth. He was calling upon those who held to the ‘old evangelicalism’ to unite around the truth – the minimum of which was the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice. He called for evangelical unity over against ecumenism which, in Britain, was being propelled by the Anglicans. The Church of England was extending its already broad embrace of evangelicals, liberals and Anglo-catholics by attempting to reunite with the Methodists and the Roman Catholics. The attempt at reunion with the Roman Catholics required the acceptance of differences on the gospel, which is a non-negotiable truth of the Christian faith (Gal. 1:9). In reality, there were three non-negotiable truths held by Lloyd-Jones – the sole authority of Scripture which was explicitly stated, the gospel of ‘justification by faith’ which was implied, and the Trinity which was assumed. The implied and assumed truths need to be explicitly stated today because the term ‘evangelical’ is used in a loose sense to mean Protestant, or non-Catholic – encom-

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 557.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 523.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 553-567.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 523.

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passing a host of churches and individuals who profess to be Christians. By extending the non-negotiable truths of the Christian faith to the doctrine of the Trinity, the sole authority of Scripture, and the gospel of 'salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone', unity with the Unitarians, the liberals, and the Roman Catholics will not be possible – as should be the case. As has been repeatedly emphasised, this does not mean we treat those we disagree with as enemies, nor are we advocating an aggressive posture towards them. The reverse is the case – we would advocate respect, courtesy, and compassion towards others as fellow human beings, but we do not regard them as born-again Christians.

Second, we propose that a clear distinction be made between fellowship on the individual level and fellowship on the church level. Martyn Lloyd-Jones did not make this distinction explicit but he was already practising it. He differed from the Arminians, and would not participate in the Billy Graham crusades, but he did not treat Arminians as enemies. Although Lloyd-Jones strongly believed in the doctrine of election, he said, "...I cannot say that a man who does not believe it is not a Christian, or that I cannot have fellowship with him. I say he is seriously defective in his understanding. I do not say that Arminianism is 'another gospel'. It is rather another understanding of the mechanism of how salvation is given to us."⁹ We have noted that Lloyd-Jones unequivocally denied that he approved of Pentecostal beliefs. We also have noted that he would not attend charismatic gatherings. Yet he had friends who were Pentecostals and he regarded differences on the charismatic gifts as among the non-essentials for fellowship between Christians. We disagree with Lloyd-Jones on the last point, concerning the charismatic gifts, as will be explained later. However, like him, we would want to be careful to distinguish between teachers of errors and new believers who do not know any better – who, as it were, "cannot discern between their right hand and their left" (cf. Jonah 4:11). We venture to say that all Reformed people today have friends who are Arminians or charismatics, with whom they have prayed together on the individual level. On the other hand, Reformed pastors who preach in a charismatic church will be frowned upon by the mainline Reformed community.

Third, selective fellowship should be engaged in by Christians

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 547.

and churches based on the degree of truth held in common. Time, opportunity, and interest all limit our ability to interact with everyone equally. Each church should engage in fellowship with the churches of its choice, in the manner they mutually agree on, towards whatever end they agree upon, and as providence directs. There is no command given in Scripture for any church or individual to attempt to unite all churches together in one body. Since the degree of truth held in common determines the closeness of fellowship between churches, and between individuals, we would expect that those who are like-minded in doctrine and practice will be drawn closer together than with others. Martyn Lloyd-Jones drew together men who shared a common interest in the theology of the Puritans in the Westminster Fellowship. He attempted to draw churches together who shared the beliefs and values of old evangelicalism, and who were opposed to ecumenism, under the British Evangelical Council. For various reasons, the churches gravitated back to their traditional groupings, leading to the demise of the organisation. Selective fellowship based on the truth was practised to some degree but with not much emphasis on the word 'selective'. For ourselves, we would emphasise on selective fellowship, allowing for churches to plot the course they deem right, that accords with their belief and burden, without intruding into the harmony, peace and rights of other churches or groupings. Our desire to be useful or helpful to others must be approached with care and respect for them, and subject to their consent. We have no ambition to be of influence over other churches or denominations for carnal reasons. Fame and influence that is God-given is different from fame and influence that is sought.

The above three principles are sufficient to constitute a model of Christian unity that is based on the truth. They are: (i) the irreducible minimum of believing in the trinitarian God, the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice, and the gospel of 'salvation by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone'; (ii) differential fellowship based on factors such as personal or church level, deliberate purveyors of wrong doctrine or innocent followers; and (iii) selective fellowship based on the degree of truth held in common.

7.4 Christian Unity and Ecumenism Today

The organisation called 'The Gospel Coalition' is mentioned at least twice in the book MCTC (pp. 2, 82). That organisation draws together Calvinistic individuals and churches (i.e. those holding to the Five Points of Calvinism), including those who are otherwise Pentecostal and charismatic. It is to be noted that most mainline Reformed churches are not involved. We have noted that the Pentecostals and charismatics deny the sole authority of Scripture by claiming direct revelation from God through prophecy, tongue-speaking, and interpretation. They might redefine prophecy as much as they like, but extra-biblical revelation of some kind is claimed which contradicts 'sola scriptura'. By claiming extraordinary gifts of signs, wonders and healings, they are contradicting the completion of revelation in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2), and the ordinary way of salvation by the hearing of God's word (Rom. 10:17). Many such churches are calling themselves 'Reformed' when, in reality, they are only Calvinistic in soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). While recognising the right of those individuals and churches to be united under The Gospel Coalition, we are unable to endorse it because it is not in line with the principles of Christian unity we have delineated above.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was extra kind to the charismatics at a time when the movement was new, when many were confused and did not know any better. He listed differences among Christians on unfulfilled prophecy and charismatic gifts – together with baptism, assurance, and church polity – as non-essential matters.¹⁰ With time, he came to be concerned that the charismatic movement was disparaging doctrine, encouraging ecumenism, and introducing worldliness into worship.¹¹ Time has passed by since the home-calling of Lloyd-Jones, revealing the excesses of the Signs and Wonders movement, the Toronto Blessing, the Kansas City Prophets, and the like. The likes of David C. K. Watson (1933-1984) and Michael Harper (1931-2010) have come and gone. Both these men were leaders of the charismatic movement and active in promoting ecumenism. David Watson claimed himself healed of cancer in 1983 but died of cancer in 1994. Michael Harper became disillusioned with the Church of England when it became more broad and loose, and joined the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1995. The dust has settled, the time for reflection has come. Charismatics have no more excuse to remain infantile and double minded (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:12-

14; Joshua 24:15). Those who have embraced the Five Points of Calvinism should proceed to embrace the Five Principles of the Reformation. Believing in the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice is inconsistent with holding on to the continuance of the extraordinary gifts.

The Christ Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) in Kuala Lumpur is supposed to be the chief reason why the book MCTC is written. That church has caused unhappiness and distress to other churches and campus Christian organisations because its members have been sent out to poach young people for itself. Disunity has apparently resulted from these members of the church propagating their views dogmatically and in a combative and censorious spirit. Instead of winning souls for Christ they have been stealing sheep from others. Heavy shepherding, i.e. close pastoral oversight that intrudes into personal and family liberties, seems to be practised in that church, as indicated by the revelations and complaints made by former members of the church on social media. The church engages in worship of a peculiar style in which the sermon lasts as long as six to eight hours non-stop. A former member says, "...a lot of those hours are just mere rantings from the speaker which does not edify and it takes hours to get to one point..."¹² Instead of confronting that church on these practical issues, the book MCTC chooses to engage it on its supposed theology. That church, however, does not subscribe to any of the Reformed Confessions of Faith. Instead, it only has a Statement of Faith of some twenty points of doctrine, drawn from various Reformed Confessions of Faith. As such, it is not as comprehensive as a Confession of Faith. The church directly subscribes to other Statements of Faith – including The Consensus Tigurinus (on the Lord's Supper), the Canons of Dort (on the Five Points of Calvinism), the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, the Danvers Statement (on gender roles). A church that is founded on a Statement of Faith, and that subscribes to other Statements of Faith, does not fall into the category of a mainline Reformed church which subscribes to a more definite Confession of Faith. The unethical behaviour and peculiar characteristics of the church should have alerted anyone, more so the writers of MCTC, on its oddity. Its oddity should not have been attributed to Reformed theology. The problem lies with CERC's prac-

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 547.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 660-671.

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tice and ethics, and especially with its leadership.

What should, or could, have been done with CERC? The leaders of the affected churches and organisations could have arranged for a meeting with the leaders of that church to talk things over. If there is no response, a written complaint could have been sent to them. Before problems arise, vigilance in one's own church should be kept so that members of CERC do not come undetected. Any attempt on their part to influence members of our congregation should be stopped immediately. Our own members should be warned about them, and instructed to be on the look out for them. Instead of fearing them, these visitors (predators?) should be taken aside to be challenged and warned concerning their intention. We have encountered another church, based in Singapore, that professes adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and behaved in a similar way to CERC. Their branch in the Kuala Lumpur area had sent a couple of their members to our church who attempted to influence our members by giving them sectarian tracts and inviting them to their meetings. Together with a pastor of a like-minded church, we met with the leaders of the church in Singapore to protest over their actions. This was in keeping with the principle taught in Matthew 18:15-17 concerning dealing with personal offences in a local church but, in this case, applied to inter-church relationship. There is precedence set for this course of action in Acts 15:1-3. While vigilance is needed, we would want to avoid calling attention to such churches more than they deserve. Furthermore, vigilance should not be allowed to nullify trust in the Lord. When our church members are growing well on a strong diet of God's word, joyful in fellowship and service, being filled with the Spirit, our church will not be fixated on the danger that comes from CERC or any other similar churches. Instead, it will be a haven for bruised souls, including those from CERC and similar churches.

7.5 Conclusion

The book MCTC declares as its purpose a pastoral intent, to help all those who have been troubled by the CERC which has been asserting a hardline Reformed theology in an aggressive manner. It

¹²See <https://widowedat25.wordpress.com/2021/04/10/leaving-cerc-christ-evangelical-reformed-church/> (last accessed 13 Dec 2023.)

is claimed that there are other churches or groups that advocate a strong, or even exclusive, Reformed position, even if not as aggressively. The book is meant (p. 3) “to help all who have been affected and are troubled by the matter.” Despite some positive things said about Reformed theology, the book engages in an onslaught against Reformed theology by misrepresentation, exaggeration, and assertions made without proof. The book also promotes ecumenism by advocating unity and acceptance of those who are in serious errors – including the charismatics and the Roman Catholics. While it is the prerogative of the writers of MCTC to promote ecumenism, it is our right to disagree with them, and to sound the alarm to all evangelicals, “Beware of the ecumenical agenda!”

In agreement with Lloyd-Jones, we believe that balance, moderation and self-examination are needed in all matters of controversy. The two extremes of ‘unrestrained laxity’ and ‘egotistical rigour’ must be avoided.¹³ This applies to those who hold to Reformed theology. It applies also to those who disagree with, or are against, Reformed theology. Unity between Christians need not be created, for it already exists through faith in Jesus Christ. Unity needs to be maintained in the truth, and in the spirit of the truth (Eph. 4:1-6). Instead of focussing our attention on *appearing* to be united, our attention should be on the unfinished task of carrying out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, and reforming our churches so as to be ready to meet the Lord (Eph. 5:25-27).¹⁴ The spirituality of a church seldom rises above the spirituality of its leaders. It is incumbent upon the leaders of churches, therefore, to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock” (Acts 20:28).

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¹³Murray, I. H. 2000. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, pp. 687-688.

¹⁴Boon-Sing Poh. 2020. *World Missions Today*. Good News Enterprise, available at Amazon Books.

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