

Book Review

Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649, by R.T. Kendall (London, England: Paternoster, 1997). 263 pages. Originally published by Oxford, 1981.
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“Salvation (Justification/Reconciliation) is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.” I have rarely met any Protestant who does not, in some way, affirm that phrase. Yet, what one means by this varies widely. These words were proclaimed as part of the Reformation and affirmed in the creeds and are proclaimed throughout the church to the present day. Yet, as early as Beza, Calvin’s successors began to append “but faith that saves is never alone” to “faith alone saves.”

Christianity Today rightly calls Kendall’s republished Oxford doctoral dissertation “an epoch-making book.” He examines the doctrine of faith from Calvin to Perkins to the Westminster Assembly to determine the degree to which Westminster theology is Calvin’s theological legacy versus that of Perkins. After reviewing Calvin’s doctrine of faith, Kendall traces the interactions of Theodore Beza, William Perkins, Paul Baynes, Richard Sibbes, John Cotton, John Preston, Thomas Hooker, Jacobus Arminius, and William Ames with Calvin.

Kendall claims that Puritanism’s central figures drew their theology, not from Calvin, but from Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor in Geneva. Even J.I. Packer defends the Synod of Dort (1618–19) by putting words into Calvin’s mouth that he did not say [“Calvin the Theologian,” in *John Calvin* (Abingdon, 1966), 151]. Specifically, Packer asserts that the Dortian formula of Limited Atonement says what Calvin “would have said *if* he had faced the Arminian thesis.” Therefore, Kendall perceives a fundamental shift between Calvin and Beza. Consequently, the

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whole Puritan tradition, from Perkins to the Westminster Confession of Faith, followed the wrong (non-Calvinistic or anti-Calvinistic) track concerning the atonement and the nature of saving faith.

Paul Helms [*Calvin and the Calvinists* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 9] visually displays his construct of Kendall’s comparison of Calvin with the Puritans:

Kendall’s 1997 edition includes a new preface as well as an additional appendix extracted from Kurt Daniel’s Ph.D. thesis from New College, Edinburgh, 1983. Daniel sought to answer Kendall’s critics concerning a single

passage that Cunningham attributed to Calvin defending limited atonement. Daniel demonstrates that it was not Calvin's statement after all.

Paul Helms highlights the importance of Kendall's work when he said: "No one can doubt the seriousness of the charge that Kendall levels against Puritanism. He [Kendall] makes the bold and controversial claim that the Puritans, the professed followers of Calvin and the Reformation doctrine, were in fact undoing the work of the Reformation. If this then could be shown, then whole epochs of church history would have to be reinterpreted" (*Calvin and the Calvinists*, 9).

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I agree with J.I. Packer in his endorsement of this book: "Dr. Kendall's exciting study ... is a major step forward in the reappraisal of Puritanism ... no student in the Puritan field can excuse himself from reckoning with this important contribution." I recommend this book, especially this edition, for any and all interested in the theology attributed to Calvin.

The more my reading delves into the struggle to determine what Calvin or Luther actually said or taught, the more the notion strikes me that the church has attempted to validate its beliefs, not as biblical, but as conforming to one of the "great ones." By contrast, we have an almost historically unprecedented opportunity to develop a biblical theology that understands Scripture from its historical-theological contexts, not from the context of Dort, Westminster, or any post-biblical context. Thus, biblical theology contrasts with a typical definition of systematic theology, "A science which follows a humanly devised scheme or order of development and which purports to incorporate into its system all truth about God and his universe from any and every source" (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:5). Instead, we should inductively discover universal scriptural principles, rather than imposing our categories of usage onto scriptural terms.

In biblical theology the text determines its own theological categories; whereas "the analogy of faith" often imports commonly accepted dogma into the text of Scripture. Theology ought not to not derive from Beza's understanding of Calvin (nor from any other outside system), but from the Bible itself. The lesson we learn from Kendall's work is that he clearly distinguishes Calvin from Beza and his successors. We must go even further— to distinguish both of these theologians from the Bible itself. Many imagine that all three are identical.

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