

All in all, the essays in *Reading Scripture with the Saints* offer varied, well-documented, and stimulating reflections on how to read the Bible theologically in the church. Though not in agreement with every single idea offered here, the present reviewer finds this journey into the past of the larger tradition of the church greatly rewarding.

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John W. de Gruchy. *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. Pp. 240.

Following on the five hundredth anniversary of John Calvin's birth, this book by theologian John W. de Gruchy attempts to restate Calvin's legacy in positive terms for the twenty-first century. De Gruchy points to the legacy of Calvin's Christian humanism to counter the caricature that Calvin was a grim moralist with a tyrannical God, to counter both Christian fundamentalism and secularism, to provide a transforming force that helps oppose the evils of slavery and apartheid, and to encourage struggles for liberation and transformation. His understandings of the weaknesses and strengths of Calvinist legacy were learned in the years of apartheid in South Africa and through his own wide study of modern Reformed theology. Without doubt, these understandings of Calvinism have also been shaped by his continuing interaction with Reformed theology in broader ecumenical conversations since the end of apartheid. This book on John Calvin was first published in South Africa in 2009 and is now reissued for a wider audience with Cascade books.

Early in the book de Gruchy sets up the following contrast: "Calvin, Calvinism and Reformed seem at first sight synonyms for dour, dull, puritanical and iconoclastic, quite the opposite of what Christian humanism is about" (p. 14). He notes that this picture of Calvinism is a caricature, but also that "it contains sufficient truth to keep sticking" (p. 14). To counter the part of this caricature that "keeps sticking," de Gruchy notes about Calvinism that "there is much to retrieve and celebrate that is of importance for the ecumenical Church and global society in the twenty-first century." At this point he points to the many stories from *Reformed World*, the journal of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, in which the "Reformed family of Churches are rethinking, restating and seeking to embody the Reformed faith tradition in the new millennium" (p. 14, n. 7).

The book is presented in two parts, the first sketching Calvin among the Reformers and the second exploring key themes in Calvin's legacy. Key to

understanding the book are the personal preface (pp. 11–20) and the epilogue on the experience of the Reformed tradition in South Africa (pp. 219–31). This frame helps the reader appreciate the book despite the notable weakness in the chapters of the first and second parts, which rely heavily on older Calvin or Reformation scholarship. (Besides the author's own books or republications of earlier works, only three books from the 2000s are listed in the bibliography.) Nonetheless, the interpretation of Calvin is helpful at many points and mostly consistent with scholarly studies from the last generation. The strength of de Gruchy's work is the lively prose and overt links to his South African theological history.

The Reformation for de Gruchy was inspired especially by humanism, and this is to be cherished. "My conviction," he writes, "is that when the Reformed tradition loses touch with its humanist origins and fails to maintain the creative tension between them, it becomes trapped in a dogmatic fundamentalism and moralism—to the detriment of the Church, humanity and society. This tendency has been responsible for the image of Calvinism as rigidly dogmatic, narrow-minded, hypocritical and iconoclastic" (p. 40). For this reason the Reformed tradition needs to study Calvin's humanism again: "Christian humanism helps keep the Reformed tradition vibrant and open to renewal and, in doing so, enables it to contribute to the transformation and humanization of society" (p. 40).

One who knows de Gruchy's own scholarly pursuits will not be surprised that much of the book is filtered through his experience in South Africa and especially through the works of a handful of modern Protestant theologians, especially Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth.

The former influence is important for de Gruchy, who cites a number of "Calvinist" theologians of the latter half of the twentieth century in South Africa who wanted to distance Calvinism from everything but the preaching of the gospel (p. 41). De Gruchy strongly argues against them, but he does not wish to reject that Calvinist tradition: "Tradition does not renew itself by jettisoning the past, but by critically retrieving it, for the past has made us who we are" (p. 220).

The latter influence—that of Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the historical theology influenced by them—runs throughout the book. Indeed, de Gruchy lets Barth or Bonhoeffer have the last word of synthesis or critique in many of the chapters, and so this work might just as easily be placed on a library shelf with scholarship on neo-Orthodoxy rather than Reformation studies. This is not necessarily a critique, for de Gruchy is quite overt in his interest in having Calvin converse with modern Reformed theology throughout.

In his conclusion de Gruchy wishes to affirm—as Calvin would have, were he alive, he argues—a “critical ‘African humanism’”: “By ‘critical’ is meant a humanism that is more chastened and sober than that which characterized the liberal secular humanism that arose out of the Enlightenment. By ‘African humanism’ is meant a social humanism that embodies relationality as central” (p. 229). De Gruchy writes, “We should affirm this, it is in continuity with Calvin’s legacy. In renewing contact with Calvin and Christian humanism, it can be in touch with the real human predicament, our fallenness, but also the hope we have in Christ” (p. 229).

Despite its over-reliance on older Reformation scholarship and the clear indebtedness to certain categories of modern Reformed theology that might not helpfully explain Calvin, this work does have a place. No doubt, in the few years between the five hundredth birthday of Calvin and the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, there have been many other studies of the Reformation, Calvin, and Reformed theology that have a much more nuanced grasp of Renaissance and Reformation scholarship. Yet, read as a kind of testimonial about how one theologian in the Reformed tradition reclaimed a helpful reading of Calvin—despite a good deal of pressure to jettison that part of his tradition—this volume is worth reading.

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Bruce Gordon. *Calvin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi + 398.

I was walking through the streets of Paris in 2009 during the flurry of conferences on John Calvin in celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of his birth. As was my habit, I wandered into a number of bookstores for the joy of browsing. Much to my surprise I found shelves full of works by or about Calvin—not only the classics, including, foremost, the *Institutes*, but fresh biographies by scholars not known to be personally Calvinists, such as Bernard Cottret and Olivier Millet, and even specialized studies on his sermons and his political views—all were apparently selling quite well. What had provoked this outbreak of interest?

Heretofore Calvin has been either ignored or disdained. The school I attended in Paris as a boy in the 1950s prided itself on the glories of French literature. The great classic textbook all of us used, Lagarde et Michard,