

# Theology Matters

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## On Reconciliation Honoring the Work of Jesus Christ

by James C. Goodloe IV

“Christ Jesus . . . has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2: 13–14). Can you hear the good news in that? Christ Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility! That is not a faraway promise. That is not good hope for the distant future. No, it is written in the present perfect tense, indicating both that something was done in the past and also that it continues in full effect all the way to the present: Christ Jesus has broken down the dividing wall, and it is still broken down! It is a done deal. Finished. Complete. Accomplished. Taken care of. Signed, sealed, and delivered.

### Proclamation

What a wonderful and powerful formulation of the *gospel*, at once ancient and contemporary! The gospel has to do with the facts of the work of God in Jesus Christ. We are not asked whether we like it. Our opinions are neither sought nor valued. It is not up to us to say whether it was called for. We are asked only this and this alone: we are asked to believe and to obey. Belief is not a necessary human response. Obedience is certainly not automatic. But we were chosen before the foundation of the world to believe and to obey. That is who we are. It would be a shame for us to oppose our pre-destiny by falling into unbelief and disobedience. It would be a crying and damnable shame for us to believe instead the lie that Jesus Christ has not broken down the wall or for us to obey the evil one by continuing to honor the dividing wall of hostility. I proclaim to you this good news, that Christ has broken down the wall, and I urge us all to believe and obey.

I think you know what I am talking about. We usually preach salvation in terms of *reconciliation to God*. That is pretty comfortable as long as we keep God at a good distance. But the letter to the Ephesians is clear that reconciliation to God comes in a package deal with *reconciliation to each other*. We cannot have one without the other! And we in the Presbyterian Churches desperately need reconciliation across many boundaries: rich and poor, small and large, male and female, city and country, and especially those painfully obvious and obviously painful racial, ethnic, and sometimes linguistic boundaries of whether our origins are in the Americas, Europe, Africa, or Asia.

The language in Ephesians is clear: “Christ Jesus . . . is our peace, who has made us both one . . . by abolishing the law of commandments . . . that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, . . . and might reconcile us both to God in one body. . . . So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners.” I submit to you that this is the only foundation upon which we can build. None other will be adequate. This alone will be sufficient.

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Now what, you may be asking, has Ephesians to do with *us*? Ephesians is about Jews and Gentiles, not us! It is a fair question, if it seeks an answer. I am glad that the Gentiles were brought in. That is where most and perhaps all of us were brought in. This reconciliation simply cannot be accounted for on human terms. The Jews dispersed throughout the empire were despised, and they despised others. Ancient hostilities of religion, race, war, ethnicity, language, and blood kept them separated from the Gentiles, all the other nations. And yet, through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Jews and Gentiles came together to worship and sing the praise of the one Lord, one Savior, one God and Father of us all.

And according to this letter, this stands close to the *heart* of the gospel, not out at the edges. This is not an extra or a bonus. This is what the work of Christ is all about. The significance of this is that the reconciling work of Christ extends to other human divisions, even our own.

### Explication

We are not the first in the church to have dealt with this. It does not appear likely that we shall be the last. Let it not be said of us, however, that we presumed that our hostilities were too great for the Lord to overcome, that we presumed our problems were too great for God to solve, or that we presumed our situation was so unique as to be beyond the reach of the gospel.

In fact, I am convinced that we are, in the providence of God, in a special time in history so we can and need to hear more clearly than ever before precisely this gospel from Ephesians: Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.

For centuries in the life of the early church, (1) *death* was the overriding problem of human existence. The gospel was, accordingly, framed and articulated in terms of the resurrection of Jesus Christ being the promise of our own.

During the medieval church and into the Protestant Reformation, there was a shift of attention toward the problem of (2) *sin*: how can a sinner stand before the righteous God? The gospel was, accordingly, framed and articulated in terms of the forgiveness of sin, salvation by grace through faith.

In our own century the problem of human existence has been voiced in terms of the sheer (3) *meaninglessness* of human life, so the gospel has been announced in terms of meaning, purpose, direction, and hope.<sup>1</sup>

None of these are exclusive, of course. They build upon one another. They continue to be important and valid formulations of the gospel. And yet, the problem of death, though still universal, does not seem to be so

pressing as when the average life span was under twenty-five years. The problems of sin and guilt are not very pressing in an age when it is difficult to find a conscience at all. And the people I know are not burdened by a lack of meaning in their lives but are instead harried by a multiplicity of demands calling them in different directions and assigning them different, conflicting meanings to their lives. Faith assigns one meaning, family calls for another, work imposes a third, while race and economics and community and society and nation pile on to add others.

I submit to you that the overriding problem of human existence today is (4) *fragmentation*. We are being torn into a thousand pieces—individually, as families, as society, and even as the church. That is why we need to hear again this formulation of the gospel for today: “Christ Jesus . . . is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” Jesus Christ is the only one who can overcome the fragmentation of our lives, the disintegration of community, the failure of the church, and so re-integrate us into the unity of his one body.

### Application

So how do we *apply* the gospel to the church? As I have already urged us all, we are to believe and obey. But no sooner have I said this than many voices cry out that I am naive and an idealist, living in a fantasy world, pointing to things that are not real.

That accusation could be a serious affront to the gospel, but let us hear what these voices are saying. The point of the protest is that the dividing wall of hostility is high, and wide, and long, and deep, and hard, and ancient, and impenetrable.

That is all true, of course. If it were not, Christ would not have had to have died on the cross to break the wall down. To deny the reality of the dividing wall of hostility is to belittle the work of Christ and, indeed, to make God a liar. To say that we are forgiven is to say that we are sinners; to say that we are saved is to say that we were lost; to say that we are redeemed is to say that we were enslaved.

And yet, while we are painfully aware of, and believe in, the continuing reality of sin, we believe even more in the greater reality of *forgiveness*.<sup>2</sup> That is to say again, in the present perfect tense, Christ has broken down the wall. We can believe it or we can deny it. But we cannot change what has already been done, and we should not look to the future for something that is in the past. Our choice is to honor the wall or to honor the gospel, but we cannot do both! That is impossible. So, which will it be?

It is with profound regret that we have to admit that we still have not seen the prophetic dream of our brother, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., realized in our communities, our society, or even the church. It was almost sixty years ago, in Washington D.C., that he shared his dream with us. Listen again to these words:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made a plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire! let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York! Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain in Georgia!

Let freedom ring from every hill and mole hill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!"<sup>3</sup>

It is time to *honor* the dream and to *dishonor* the wall. It is time to *let go* of the wall. We can believe in and cling to the dividing wall of hostility between us, or we can believe in and cling to the cross of Jesus Christ, but we cannot do both. Which will it be?

There are many differences among us, and there always will be. At least some of them have to do with the beauty of the diversity of God's good creation. We rejoice in and give thanks for these. But those stubborn differences and divisions which deny and contradict the gospel are to be eradicated.

It was centuries ago that Augustine, that wonderful African pastor and bishop, the greatest theologian with whom God has yet graced the church, dealt in his massive work, *The City of God*, with the issue of openness to diversity limited only at the point that it might contradict the gospel. We would do well to listen to and learn from him again:

While this Heavenly City, therefore, is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages. She takes no account of any difference in customs, laws, and institutions, by which earthly peace is achieved and preserved—not that she annuls or abolishes any of those, rather, she maintains them and follows them (for whatever divergences there are among the diverse nations, those institutions have one single aim—earthly peace), provided that no hindrance is presented thereby to the religion which teaches that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped. Thus even the Heavenly City in her pilgrimage here on earth makes use of the earthly peace and defends and seeks the compromise between human wills in respect of the provisions relevant to the mortal nature of man, so far as may be permitted without detriment to true religion and piety.<sup>4</sup>

The openness to compromise with political realities is important; the refusal to betray the gospel is even more important. Augustine understood how radically and fundamentally different the church is from the world.

Let us be very clear and to the point. It is a part of the irony of human existence that some of our best

intentions lead to actions which have results that run exactly opposite of our intentions.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, some of the things we do to resist racism and sexism end up embodying and institutionalizing racism and sexism. We run the very grave danger that anything we do to acknowledge the difference between us will spill over into acknowledging and honoring and exacerbating and perpetuating the dividing wall of hostility between us, and then we will be found to have been opposing the gospel.

It occurs to me that we are *not* called upon to overcome the wall. We are called upon to believe and to obey the good news that Christ has already broken it down. It is incumbent upon us, so far as it lies within our power, to structure the life of the church in ways that are in accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ and not in ways that are antithetical to it.

In this regard, it is significant that Ephesians says that Christ Jesus “has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” Christ abolished the law; yet we continually write new ones to separate and bind ourselves, as if our rules and regulations could save us! They will not! They cannot! We run the risk of idolatry with them and as we use them

to reconstruct the dividing wall of hostility, we do so to our own damnation.

I understand that the constraints of rules are easier than the terrible responsibility of freedom. But we who worship the Christ of the cross ought to know better than to try to take the easy way out. We have labored too long under the failing premise of trying to do things the easy way. It is time for the church to do things the right way.

In conclusion, I proclaim again this gospel: “Christ Jesus . . . has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” That which we could not do for ourselves, Christ has done for us. We are called upon to believe and obey. If we do not believe this, we might as well pack up and go home right now, and quit pretending to be the church of Jesus Christ. But if we do believe it—and that is my fervent hope and prayer—if we do believe the gospel and obey Christ and honor the victory he has won for us, it is incumbent upon us to begin living and embodying and acting upon this gospel. Let us get on with being the church of Jesus Christ!

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*James C. Goodloe IV, Ph.D., is Executive Director of the Foundation for Reformed Theology, Richmond, VA, and a member of the Board of Directors of Theology Matters.*

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967, 1968), 539–41.

<sup>2</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al., four vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), vol. II: *The Doctrine of God*, second half volume, 167, 490, and especially 742–63.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have A Dream,” in Lerone Bennett, Jr., *What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, with an introduction by Benjamin E. Mays (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), 162.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, with an introduction by David Knowles (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), Book XIX, chapter 17, 878.

<sup>5</sup> See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), especially vii–ix, 151–74.

# Is Theology Practical?

By Sara Jane Nixon

I made an off-hand comment to Richard Burnett one day, about three months into pastoral ministry, that my theology courses in seminary were proving to be far more practical than the so-called “practical theology” courses I had taken. His interest in that comment resulted in this paper. I’m still very new to pastoral ministry, and believe me, I feel every bit of the irony that in this paper I’m addressing many people who have decades of experience in congregational leadership on me.

However, I’m not proposing to teach you something you don’t already know, or to lecture you. Rather, I want to bear witness to what I’ve seen and learned as I’ve attended and finished seminary and begun to work in a congregation, and why what we normally think of as academic theology matters to the people of God. I’ve come to think of my theology courses as not only the most important courses I took in seminary, but also as the most *practical*.

For the sake of full disclosure, I will confess that from the beginning of my time in seminary I was far more interested in theology or history of doctrine courses than I was in practical theology, even though I felt a little bit guilty about it. I had the impression that a good pastor, a real pastor, would be excited to take the required courses on pastoral care, and would jump at the chance to take classes on youth ministry or ministry to older adults. And I will freely admit, now that I have a sliver of experience, that given more time those classes would have been very helpful. But my time in seminary was limited, and I took as few as I could get away with. The sense of mild guilt persisted. From what I knew, good pastors took pastoral care courses. Theology courses were for the people who wanted to be theologians, who were looking at Th.M. or Ph.D. tracks.

The first hint that I might have been wrong about this came my middler year of seminary, when my father died suddenly. Only two things could speak with any conviction into the chasm that had opened in my life, and they were the 130th Psalm and the eighth chapter of the 1541 *Institutes*, which I was reading for class at the time. Calvin says:

So it is a wonderful comfort to understand that the Lord holds all things in his power, governs them by his will, and regulates them by his wisdom, in such a way that nothing can happen unless He has destined it. Moreover, he has received us into his protection and committed us to the charge of his angels, so that there is no water or fire or sword or anything that can harm us except inasmuch as His good pleasure allows. ... From where does the faithful person get such an assurance which can never be taken away, except that, there where it seems that the world is capriciously turned upside down, he believes that God is working to lead him, God whose works he expects are all salvific and wholesome for him?<sup>1</sup>

Is this academic and cerebral theology? Sure, in one sense. But it's also a great comfort, that even though the worst thing I could imagine had in fact happened, it came to me from the hand of a loving and kind God who meant good for me. I didn't have to know why it happened. I didn't have to make sense of it. I didn't have to tell myself that the grief wasn't really that bad, that things were really going to be okay in the end. I could be as hurt as I was and still, in the end, trust that the gracious and benevolent God was in control. No amount of psychologizing or therapy or Listening-with-a-capital-L (you know the kind!) could have done for me what the doctrine of providence did.

Despite this experience, I managed to come out of seminary with the idea that even though theology is important, it wasn't something my congregation was

going to be inherently interested in. I thought that if I were to teach any theology in my congregation—and I did think it was important to do so—I thought I would have to slip it in here and there, packaged or maybe even camouflaged in a covering of something more “practical.” I wondered if the questions that traditional, old-fashioned theology asked weren't a little irrelevant for the average person whose life didn't revolve around the church and its thinking.

But as I got to know people and they got to know me, as we started talking about scripture or current events or the joys and sorrows of daily life, I found out to my shock that this wasn't true at all. I had people asking me in plain words, without much provocation, the basic questions that theology has sought to answer for years. Because of the way our classes had been split between “theology” and “pastoral care,” I thought that these were two different things. But it turns out, in this vaunted “real life” I heard so much about, where the rubber hits the road, where people are dealing with the deaths of their children or their husband or their own impending death, where people are struggling to figure out what their Sunday morning activities have to do with the rest of their lives, theology *is* pastoral care. What we call “pastoral care” courses aren't bad, but they can only ever offer temporary or preparatory solutions to let people hear the real and final Word of God. They are useful tools, but regarding them as the real content of preparation for pastoral ministry seems to me to be a mistake. The things I learned in my required pastoral care courses—something about how the human psyche works, something about how to speak so that people are able to really listen to and hear what I say—those things are very helpful. I'm not trying to say that they don't matter. But they're primarily useful insofar as they clear the ground so that the work of the gospel can take place.

What the Creed means when it says that Jesus descended into hell matters when people are going through hell. What we mean when we say that Christ defeated death matters when a widow is aching over her husband's death, or when someone decides to stop seeing specialists for their congestive heart failure, or when a father is facing the possibility of losing the fourth of his five children. When the woman who has attended church faithfully for years wants to know how she can be sure that God won't change his mind about her, that she won't one day sin one too many times and make God give up, then the previously hopelessly academic statement that God has no parts is suddenly the life-giving, earthy, practical gospel. Because if God is simple and God is for her, then no part of God is hanging back, waiting to see what she does with her life. All of God is with her and desires to save her. And when people are tired, as of course they are, and anxious, as of course we all are, and worn out from trying to put out all the fires in their life,

God's aseity comes as joy and rest. Because of course, if God is enough in himself, if he's independent from the world, if he needs nothing from it, then the reason that any of us exist is simply and purely because God delights in us. We don't have anything to prove.

There might be a world in which theology wasn't practical for the church or to an individual soul in crisis, but only if the God it told us about were not our highest good and our chief end. But thanks be to God, that's not our world, or our God. Theology, and the classes and books and conferences that teach it to us, matter because they teach us about the God who loves us (and what it means for God to love us), and who despite everything

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, trans. Elsie A. McKee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 454–55.

# A Theology of the Ordinary

By Julie Canlis

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. Romans 12:1–2 from *The Message*

Three years ago, my husband and I moved our family back to America after living seventeen years abroad. Upon our return, our then eight year-old daughter who had been born and raised in Scotland asked, "Mom, why do all the signs in America say, 'the best,' or 'the biggest,' or 'the greatest in the world?'" I, American that I am, had not even noticed. Does one notice the air one breathes? That the grass is green?

Although I had not been aware of the extreme marketing claims that bombarded us far and wide, I was becoming aware of similar language among American Christians, although directed toward a different purpose. It seemed as if all my new acquaintances were reading books called *Radical* (Plass), *Passion* (Giglio), *Crazy Love* (Chan), *Relentless* (Bevere), *Impact* (Whitaker), *Fervent* (Shirer).

has chosen not to be without us (and what it means for God to be with us) and who will redeem the world that he has made and sustains. Theology is practical because at its best, it expounds on the encouragement we hear from the Psalmist, to put our hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

This address was delivered at Theology Matters' first conference on Hilton Head Island, Feb. 19, 2020.

*Sara Jane Nixon, M.Div., is a graduate of Princeton Seminary and pastor of New Dublin Presbyterian Church in Dublin, VA.*

In fact, that year's biggest Christian conference was called Passion. I could not help but notice the fact that it was held in none other than Atlanta's Infinite Energy Center.

Of course, one extreme always calls forth an equal reaction. During this time, I was also detecting a steady counter-trend, both secular and Christian. Against the American mantra 'you were designed for greatness,' there was the 2012 graduation speech that took America by storm: "You Are Not Special."<sup>1</sup>

In Christian circles, blogs celebrating the holiness of ordinary life began popping up all over the internet. Churches were busy re-branding themselves with names like Outcast Fellowship and Salvage Yard to emphasize that they were accessible to ordinary folk. For Christian bookstores, Michael Horton penned a short primer called *Ordinary*, deliberately challenging Plass's *Radical* by featuring an identical book cover. Horton goes even further, noting at long last a cultural "weariness with the cult of extraordinariness" and pointing to its possible roots.<sup>2</sup>

This book emerged from an extended meditation on this cultural obsession with greatness and being 'impactful' (a new word that had cropped up in American usage while we were away) and how it was infiltrating the church. This has made me wonder ... is being 'ordinary' the next frontier for the Christian? Has our culture's

emphasis on supercharged emotions and measurable success blinded us to Romans 12 and the fact that our ordinary lives are our “spiritual act of worship”? As it says in *The Message*, “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking—around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.”

Nevertheless while I am flagging the danger in a cultural obsession with passion and impact, I am equally wary of rejecting it. As encouraging as is the trend toward recovering the holiness of ordinary life, it will be lifeless if it is animated only by a reaction against fundamentalist dualism. We must be on our guard, lest a recovery of ordinary life becomes no more than a blessing of the status quo, devoid of sacrifice or hope for the future. In that case, a tonic of fundamentalist fervor might not be that bad after all.

These meditations aim to articulate the theology that lies beneath all this talk of the ‘holy ordinary’ ensuring that it is not just a reaction to fundamentalism or to extreme burnout. This theology must be marked by the benediction of the Father, the sacrifice of the Son, and the overflow of the Spirit. A robust trinitarian theology of the ordinary will not undermine being passionate or sold-out but will ground and purify it. The chapters will unfold as follows:

### THE TRINITARIAN STORY

The blessing of the Father on ordinary life and creation  
The inhabitation of the Son in ordinary life as the rule, not exception, for redemption  
The ways the Spirit works in our ordinary lives to bring us into the new creation

### THREE COUNTER-STORIES

We will also look at three competing stories that are always lurking in the church, seeking to undermine our “spiritual act of worship” in ordinary life. These are:

The Gnostic Story, which tries to overthrow the blessing of the Father

The Docetic Story, which casts suspicion on the common humanity of the Son

The Platonic Story, which removes the ‘spiritual’ from ordinary life and puts it on a higher plane

But first, a little bit of history to situate ourselves ...

Setting the Stage, circa 1792

It was the year 1792 when America was in its infancy. George Washington was president. This year two important things happened that are pertinent to our story—one in England and one in the States. First, in England, an unknown Baptist preacher preached a sermon that forever changed a small, growing movement called evangelicalism. He said, “Do great things for God; expect great things from God.” From this sermon, the modern missions movement was born and with it, evangelical fervor.<sup>3</sup>

(If you’ve ever heard it said that if you want to get something done, go ask a busy person—know that the same holds true for evangelicals! Essential to the evangelical nature is activism, particularly if it is the opportunity to do something great for God).

The second thing that happened during America’s infancy was the birth of a real flesh and blood infant named Charles Finney. Finney grew up to change the religious landscape of America. He was the first marketer of the gospel who made a ‘scientific’ study of the human emotions in order to manipulate them.

Finney was known for his “new methods” among which were revivals, tent meetings, and altar calls. What was common about these revivals was the sensationalism of the preaching, the high emotionalism, and the centrality of the “anxious bench.” The anxious bench was a literal bench that was placed at the very front of the revival hall, where those who were particularly worried about the status of their salvation were singled out to receive the special attention of the revivalist. It was where, in the intensity of public limelight, they could “give in” to Jesus. Finney’s autobiography is filled with reflections on how to tweak the means of evangelism to produce the desired ends. The measured success or failure of the methods were based on sheer numbers of converts. As Finney himself said, “It is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means.”<sup>4</sup>

What this has to do with us is ... everything. Two hundred years ago, Finney’s sensational movement swept our country. ‘True’ religion began to be associated with the extreme, the emotional moment, the passionate choice, the mountaintop experience. There even developed a quasi-science of the human personality and how to motivate it “for Jesus.”<sup>5</sup> What was happening in your local church was suddenly suspect; what was needed was a new personal revival. Your faith, heretofore growing by slow degrees, was seen to be too slow, too ordinary, lacking immediate and measurable results.

This sensational movement did not just limit itself to the East Coast but moved to the frontier and walked hand-in-

hand with westward expansion over the Rockies to the coast. As Richard Hofstadter remarked, “The star system was not born in Hollywood but on the sawdust trail.”<sup>6</sup> The ‘star’ here, the focus of these revivals, in case you were wondering, is not God but the revivalist.

There were contemporary critics of Finney, of course, who were not blinded by the emotional and dramatic results. John Nevin, a Reformed professor-pastor, was deeply worried and wrote that “at the bottom” was nothing less than “two different theories of religion.” Nevin summarized these as the “system of the [anxious] Bench” and “the system of the Catechism.”<sup>7</sup> I want to call these two systems by another name: they are simply the ‘extraordinary Christian’ vs. ‘the ordinary Christian.’ The extraordinary Christian is one who is fueled by their personal spiritual experience, and often sees this as opposed to ‘everyday’ Christianity found in the church. The ordinary Christian, on the other hand, also has a personal relationship with God, but trusts that the structures set up by the apostles—baptism, teaching of the young (catechism), the sacraments—are not opposed to growth.<sup>8</sup>

This is our heritage. Have you ever had to do family research to find out if there are any medical conditions to which you might be prone? I’m providing some nineteenth-century family research for you to understand some of the spiritual conditions to which you may be prone, given that Charles Finney is in your spiritual DNA. Charles Finney, in a moment of unexpected self-scrutiny, was actually the first to wonder about the negative effects of revivalism upon one’s spiritual health. Toward the end of his life as he reflected back upon the success of his revivals (and re-revivals) (and re-re-re-revivals), he wondered if this endless craving for emotional experiences might lead to spiritual exhaustion. Even today, the area of New York where Finney worked as a revivalist is called the ‘Burned-Over District,’ as it had been scorched by so much religious enthusiasm and could no longer produce new spiritual fruit.

Without a theology that values slow growth over dramatic change and the ‘ordinary’ as essential to our spiritual maturity, we are in danger of living in a burned-over district or a burned-over spirituality. Michael Horton, in an interview about his book *Ordinary*, remarks:

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<sup>1</sup> David McCullough Jr., “The ‘You Are Not Special’ Graduation Speech Is Just As Relevant Today” in *Time*, 17 Nov 2015 (<http://time.com/4116019/david-mccullough-jr-graduation-speech-wellesley-high/>). Accessed 1 Nov 2016.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Horton, “The Ordinary Christian Life” in *Tabletalk Magazine*, 1 Aug. 2014 (<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/ordinary-christian-life/>). Accessed 1 November 2016. I have Mike to thank for pointing me to the Anxious Bench.

My concern is that the activist impulse at the heart of evangelicalism can put an enormous burden on people to do big things when what we need most right now is to do the ordinary things better. We can miss God in the daily stuff, looking for the extraordinary Moment outside of his Word and conversation with Him in daily prayer, family worship, and especially the public gathering of the saints each Lord’s Day. If we were more serious about these ordinary means of grace, I’m convinced the church would have a much stronger witness in the world today.<sup>9</sup>

With Finney and the star system in our religious DNA, the normal faithful things of our lives feel, well, ordinary. Who wants to be bound to other Christians who are paying their mortgages, raising kids, or suffering depression when we can be blazing a trail with God on our own? As Horton wryly remarks, “It’s more fun to be part of movements than churches. We can express our own individuality, pick our favorite leaders, and be swept off our feet at conferences. We can be anonymous.”<sup>10</sup>

Scripture, on the other hand, teaches that our growth is bound to that of others (Eph. 4:13) and other people take time we don’t always want to give. Being anonymous, or an ‘individual Christian,’ is not an option for those of us who follow a God who Himself refuses to be alone.

How many conferences have you attended that emphasize Paul’s command to the mature and growing church in Thessaloniki, “Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we have instructed you” (1 Thess. 4:11)? These modern conferences and movements give people an expectation that growth happens only when we are away from our local church, away from the people whom God has placed in our lives. Paul’s command to the Thessalonians is not bare-minimum Christianity; it holds out ordinary life as a life that pleases God and sets one on the road for fulfilling the Great Commission.

*Julie Canlis, Ph.D., is author of Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension, teaches at Whitworth University, and works with her husband Matt on their GODSPEED project (livegodspeed.org).*

<sup>3</sup> See George Marsden’s *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in William B. Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties: Nurture and Conversion in American Christianity,” in *Reformation and Revival Journal* 13:3 (2004): 61–75.

<sup>5</sup> J.I. Packer writes, “If we regard our job, not simply to present Christ, but actually to produce converts—to evangelize, not only faithfully, but also successfully—our approach to evangelism would become pragmatic and calculating” Packer, *Evangelism and*



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*the Sovereignty of God* [Downers' Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991], 27.

<sup>6</sup> Reference thanks to Michael Horton.

<sup>7</sup> John Nevin, *The Anxious Bench, the Anti-Christ, and the Sermon on Catholic Unity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), originally published in 1843.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther faced a similar pastoral crisis in the sixteenth century. His parishioners were looking for more exotic forms of discipleship and so gave a spiritual excuse for their dissatisfaction: *pilgrimage*. They roamed all over the country and beyond, believing that their local church did not have all that they needed. Luther counseled, "Let every man stay in his own parish. There he will find more than in all the shrines. In your own parish you will

find baptism, the sacraments, preaching, and your neighbor." Even for one as convinced as Luther as to the necessity of a personal faith, he saw that as soon as people "despise" the normal ways that God works, there comes an insatiable hunger for bigger and better experiences of spirituality. See his "An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility: Proposals for Reform II" in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 77.

<sup>9</sup> Horton, Michael, "On Being an 'Ordinary' Christian," interview with Alex Duke, *9Marks* (<http://9marks.org/article/on-being-an-ordinary-christian-an-interview-with-michael-horton/>). Accessed 1 Nov, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

# Calvin Meets Voltaire

## An Interview with Jennifer Powell McNutt

By Randy Working

*Editor's note: Since we are not the first Christians or congregational leaders in the Reformed tradition to swim against strong cultural and intellectual currents, what can we learn from those who have tried to do so in the past? Jennifer Powell McNutt, Professor of Theology and the History of Christianity, has written an important book that provides helpful insight into one group of congregational leaders who sought to do so faithfully and, in retrospect, not without some success, it appears. The book is entitled, Calvin Meets Voltaire: The Clergy of Geneva in the Age of Enlightenment, 1685–1798 (London: Routledge, 2016), and Randy Working, the President of Theology Matters, recently interviewed Professor McNutt to find out what motivated her to write this book and how it might be of help and encouragement to congregational leaders today.*

TM: How did you come to this topic?

McNutt: The topic emerged from my time working on my M.Div. at Princeton Theological Seminary. I was able to take some advanced courses because of my undergraduate work, and I took a fabulous class on European Christianity with Professor James Deming, an expert on 19th century France. He talked about European history in a way that I had never learned before. The history of the church and of the world were interconnected, and it was as if a lightbulb went on for me. I took every class I could from him after that, including an independent study on the Enlightenment. I learned that Voltaire moved to Geneva, and that intrigued me. I wondered why he would move to Calvin's city, and what that meant for Calvin's theological legacy. As I discovered there was not a lot of writing on Calvin's

ongoing legacy in that time, I felt it was an area where I could contribute.

TM: What surprised you in the course of your research?

McNutt: I had been shaped in my studies of the Enlightenment by the classic texts: Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment* and Paul Hazards' *The Crisis of the European Mind*, for example. So, I really expected to find that Geneva turned its back on the Reformation and Calvin, and that I would be writing the story of the decline of the church there. Instead I found a much more complicated picture that challenged my own assumptions about the historical basis for secularization theory—the idea that the rise of modernity led to the inevitable decline of religion in its authority and presence in society and in the beliefs of individuals. It has helped me to think more critically about growth and decline in religion and how we quantify and evaluate the health of the church whether I'm thinking about the past or today

TM: Where did you conduct most of your research?

McNutt: The majority of my research took place at the *Archive d'État de Geneve*, and at the special collections at the University of Geneva. The city archives contain the Registers of the Company of Pastors, which are a key part of the church records of Geneva. Nearly every waking moment in Geneva meant sitting in the archives except Sunday when I enjoyed worship in French at St. Pierre Cathedral and in English at the *Auditoire*. Thankfully, they allowed me to use a digital camera, which I had bought for the first time after I graduated from Princeton. Digital cameras were brand new so it was very clunky,

but I could not have done my project without it. The digital databases available today are amazing, but there is nothing like holding the document in your hands. Extended time in Geneva also meant connecting with the people at the University of Geneva, who treated me like a colleague, mentored me and even funded my research. I could not have done this project without the support of the *Institut d'Histoire de la Reformation*, and I am forever grateful!

TM: Why have you paired these two different personalities—Calvin who died in Geneva in 1564, and Voltaire who moved to Geneva in 1755?

McNutt: For those who don't know when these two lived, the title has caused some confusion ("Did they really meet?"), but the pairing is meant to personify the convergence of two eras: the Reformation era—as represented by Calvin—and the Enlightenment era—as represented by Voltaire. Through the title, I am raising the question of what took place when Calvin's clerical legacy encountered the Enlightenment not merely through the ideas of philosophers but through their presence. Did Geneva remain Calvin's so to speak or did it become Voltaire's? I chose the idea of "meeting" in order to emphasize that an exchange took place, and that the encounter was complex. So much of what is said about Christianity during the Enlightenment is stated in a very stark way between two extremes. The reality is that some things changed, and some things did not. It was not always just one way or the other.

TM: The *Encyclopédie d'Alembert* (1757) was a formative work of Enlightenment thinking; in its article on Geneva, it claimed that some Geneva pastors no longer believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ; that some rejected parts of Scripture as contrary to humanity and reason; and that some pastors preached only morality in their sermons—in sum, that Geneva's pastors were more Socinian than Calvinist. What did they mean by that charge?

McNutt: There are many plausible explanations for what the French philosophers intended by labeling Geneva's clergy in that way. I have found it helpful to explore what proponents of the Enlightenment meant by that term in different contexts. Frankly, the term can be difficult to pin down. At times in the period of 17th century Reformed Orthodoxy the term was used to slander Arminian thought, the counter view regarding predestination. The *Encyclopedie* also has an article entitled "Unitaire" where it claimed that the Protestant rejection of Roman Catholicism is a slippery slope leading to atheism. Socinianism is the last stop on the way. Normally this would not be taken as a compliment, and that's why Jean-Jacques Rousseau came to the defense of the clergy. At the time, Rousseau was seeking

to return to the good graces of Geneva, his native home. He was, in fact, briefly restored to the church and to his citizenship before it was lost again for his controversial writings.

It is also important to keep in mind that the French philosophers, or *philosophes* (several thinkers that included Voltaire and Rousseau) were a part of the moderate Enlightenment. My work is using categories developed by Jonathan Israel's work including, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment* and *The Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, and David Sorkin's work, *The Religious Enlightenment*. The moderates did not want to abolish religion, but they did want to water down orthodoxy.

When Voltaire settled in Geneva in 1755, he was trying to make it his own. He regarded John Calvin as intolerant for his role in the execution of Servetus, and he used criticism of Calvin to drive a wedge between the eighteenth-century clergy and their heritage. Some have interpreted his actions as part of a plan to establish a theater in Geneva, which was very controversial at the time. Perhaps with this agenda in mind, Voltaire guided d'Alembert around Geneva to project an image that was desirable to him. Certainly, some clergy were starstruck by his presence since he was both famous and infamous at the time. It is telling that the clergy reacted very negatively to the article that was produced and published their own piece refuting his assessment of their theology, which I found to confirm what I was reading in their sermons (see below)

TM: Chapter three discusses ministerial renunciations during the Enlightenment. What moved certain clergy to leave the ministry, and was that an indication of the church's decline?

McNutt: The reason I studied this group of clergy was because they were cited as evidence of the decline of the clergy in the 18th century, so I wanted to explore further. Why were they leaving their positions? Were they rejecting their faith as was implied by "renunciation"? I studied their group within my complete study, which tracked every ordained clergyman from 1685 to 1798. By developing a prosopography—a statistical analysis of groups by way of biographical details, I was able to determine different dynamics at work within the group and better understand their familial and social connections to each other within the community.

And, of course, there were a few that did leave their ministries, but for various reasons. In the end, I identified that more pastors had resigned rather than renounced their ministries, which meant they were in effect "honorably retired" with a type of pension and available

for pulpit supply. In Geneva's mind, your ordination was something that stayed with you.

There were some colorful stories too: during a popular festival in 1773, one clergyman, Pastor Gasc, put on a dragon costume and paraded through Geneva, which earned the reprimand of the Company of Pastors for behavior unbecoming of a Genevan pastor. Or the story of Robert Dunant who spent eighteen years ministering to the congregation of the Reformed French church in St. Petersburg, Russia, raising funds and building a church, which Empress Anna subsequently tore down! Some of the problems these clergy faced were similar to the problems clergy still face today including low salaries and ill health.

TM: What convinced you of the substantial continuity between the Reformation and the 18th-century faith of Geneva? How was John Calvin's theological perspective carried on by his pastoral descendants? In your study of Genevan preaching, what did you discover about pastoral piety and witness?

McNutt: I had the opportunity to present my work at the 500th anniversary gathering of the Calvin Congress in Geneva during a breakaway session. I had just finished my dissertation and was a very junior scholar, but I learned there that it was widely believed that the 18th century clergy did not defend Calvin's reputation against the *philosophes*. Voltaire had said on more than one occasion that Calvin had an "atrocious soul." So, there was this view circulating that the clergy of 18th century Geneva just turned their back on Calvin. My research required me to study every volume of the Registers of the Company of Pastors from 1685 to 1789 so it was eye opening to discover how the clergy did, in fact, rally to defend Calvin's reputation (though not without critique), and that their many efforts to censor and respond were largely not known or appreciated. They were holding on to him, but to what extent?

The Reformation anniversary sermons from the 18th century were also important examples of how the clergy described their generation as the recipients of the Reformation and as passing on that legacy. So, it was still important to them to maintain that link with their Reformation heritage, and that was eye opening for me.

I also noticed this line of thinking at work when they removed a key theological document called the Helvetic Consensus Formula, which had been developed during the 17th century during the debates over the doctrine of predestination and dealt with other issues relating to doctrine and the biblical text and required the clergy's signature. The Company of Pastors described the removal of the consensus as a way to return to the original documents of the Reformation including the

Ecclesiastical Ordinances. There was more to the story it seemed.

Finally, evaluating the sermons that the clergy preached in the pulpit, some of which were also published, was the most helpful in exploring continuity between 18th century Geneva and Calvin. It was especially interesting to see how they emphasized important theological themes that Calvin emphasized and how they even followed the logic of his exegesis, at points echoing his *Institutes*. Some elements reflected Enlightenment conversations over matters of morality (i.e., piety), reason, and happiness while other elements were reflective of Reformation era concerns regarding general and special revelation as well as the distinction between creature and the Creator.

Sermons are valuable because Enlightenment scholars tend to focus on the radical and philosophical side of the Enlightenment rather than the history of the church and the worship life of the church. Meanwhile, many Reformation scholars are not examining the legacy of the Reformation in the 18th century, so it is instructive to listen to what the church of that time had to say theologically through the mode of preaching.

TM: If Voltaire was not an atheist, he was certainly anti-institutional church. Were the eighteenth-century clergy able to incorporate some Enlightenment values while retaining orthodox faith? If so, what were those values?

McNutt: Yes, they were able to incorporate Enlightenment values! Toleration was practiced at the end of the 17th century toward other Protestants that enabled an ecumenical or pan-Protestantism to develop. This was in many ways a reaction to the aggressive politics of Louis XIV, King of France. For example, though Geneva had rejected the Gregorian Calendar during the 16th century due to its links to the pope and the Council of Trent, they were interested in revising the calendar by the start of the 18th century in order to maintain their Protestant alliances with Germany. I have a separate article just about that story.

Many scholars have observed, in fact, that there was an increasing desire to build bridges between Protestants, and that could be seen in Jean-Alphonse Turretini's sermon on the very first day of the 18th century. This is another reason why Geneva softened its clerical subscription to the doctrine of predestination in order to form connections with Lutherans. In addition to a revision of the calendar, Geneva welcomed the establishment of a Lutheran church in the city for the first time. It is important to keep in mind that this toleration had limits, and it did not lead to a watering down of the views that distinguished the Reformed from Catholicism.

TM: How did Geneva pastors understand the limits of reason and the need for divine revelation?

McNutt: The Genevan pastors emphasized the importance of reason, but not without the need for divine revelation. They differed from the radical Enlightenment figures who emphasized rationalism and materialism with little to no regard for divine truths. Radical figures believed that faith and reason were incompatible because faith was superstitious. Meanwhile, moderate Enlightenment figures believed that faith and reason could be compatible if faith were evaluated according to human reason. The working assumption here was that an individual's reason could determine what was right and wrong about faith. For the Genevan clergy, there was still a qualitative difference between human reason and divine reason, and this is an important way in which they connected to Calvin as well as Cartesian thought. Faith and reason are compatible, they affirmed, but God's reason is still always above human reason. Geneva's 18th century clergy believed that reason could be misled because of their affirmation of the doctrine of sin, and they denied that humans could ever reach perfection (which Calvin denied on countless occasions). So, even though we cannot have a perfect understanding of our faith, that did not make faith unreasonable. It simply meant that we are not as rational as God.

I found it helpful to see the clergy believed in the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and that special revelation was still necessary. These are some ways they sharply disagreed with the moderate and radical Enlightenment. And yet there was also an increased openness on the part of orthodox clergy to the value of general revelation (which they described as natural revelation) through scientific investigation while at the same time they maintained that special revelation was essential (which is how they indicated general revelation). The book unpacks the specifics of these dynamics further.

They had a positive regard for the rapidly developing field of science, as seen by the establishment of the chair of mathematics at Geneva's academy in the early part of the 18th century (the first chair was held by a Reformed pastor and refugee from France) while the educational curriculum was updated. By the end of the 18th century, Thomas Jefferson would refer to the academy as one of the "two eyes" of Europe along with the University of Edinburgh. From the perspective of the American Enlightenment, then, Geneva and Edinburgh were the two places to go to be educated.

The clergy were enthusiastic about engaging in conversation with the Enlightenment, asking questions and reading the same literature. Yet, they maintained the tradition in important ways. They discussed "morality,"

for example, but their use of the term connected still to the doctrine of sanctification. In the cases I studied, I saw how their church was accommodating to the language of their time, while still retaining the legacy of the tradition.

TM: You have contributed to the growing literature that calls into question the secularization thesis—that the rise of modernity entailed the decline of Christianity—and suggested a greater place for religion in the Enlightenment. Was the Enlightenment a source of renewal and reform within the churches? Did it help the church see the value of reason and toleration?

McNutt: I did not set out to question that theory, but in the end, I began to see that the classic story of Geneva's decline—as had been advanced by the historical narrative—was more reflective of the larger narrative of the Enlightenment as a context for religious decline than of the history of Geneva's church directly. If you define secularization as the decline of religious involvement in the social, cultural, and political life of the city, then Geneva's church and clergy do not fit the model. If you define secularization as religious disenchantment (in reference to adopting a mental worldview that denies divine presence and intervention) then, again, Geneva's story does not fit the model. There were points of renewal and reform within the church, and the church always valued reason and toleration, though it also maintained its theological commitments.

TM: How was the Genevan church able to adapt to changes in the relationship between church and state?

McNutt: Chapter 6 of my book was a completely new chapter that I wrote and published for the book after expanding my research focus. There I traced the ways in which church and state intersected. There were many periods of civil unrest within the city, and it was fascinating to see how the clergy acted and were treated in those moments. Most often, they seemed to act as mediators and peacemakers. They were front and center in the negotiations and yet sought a level of neutrality. They celebrated the Reformation's relationship between church and state and believed in the importance of maintaining that dynamic. They regarded civil unrest as the result of sin rather than systems in need of revision (though some clergy became more politically involved at the very end of the century). Consequently, they acted ultimately as state builders, but still not in a way that alienated the people. The most telling point of what I mean is when the French Revolution began to bleed into Genevan affairs, the city never took out their political resentment on the clergy. There was no residual anger there to ignite between the people and the clergy. They were still the pastors of the city no matter the political situation. Very striking and unexpected for the period and for a francophone context!

TM: Did the influx of French refugees after 1685 shape the church and its clergy in Geneva? If so, how?

McNutt: Yes, it did! In fact, as I was working on my dissertation, I quickly came to realize I needed to broaden the parameters of the 18th century to understand the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 as the starting point for the Enlightenment in Geneva. With the influx of refugees in Geneva, which continued in waves throughout the 18th century, the city reprised its role as the mother church and the city of refuge. Once again, Geneva was facing social issues of housing, work, and social services, as well as the reemergence of xenophobia. They needed another church to create room for the increasing numbers of worshippers. French clergy fleeing to Geneva were then taking up the pulpit or positions at the Academy, which followed a dynamic from the 16th century. The clergy continued to find ways to provide funding support for refugees especially through the selling of Bibles. These dynamics and more served to extend Calvin's legacy in the city, which was known as the "Protestant Rome" for three centuries.

TM: You detail the high standards expected of the Genevan pastor in his roles and responsibilities. Which of these do you think may be instructive for pastoral formation today?

McNutt: Probably the greatest benefit the Genevan clergy experienced was that they met regularly with each other—at least every Friday for encouragement and for censure—to pray, to preach to each other, and to grapple with the situation of the church. They worked as a group. Although Geneva was a very special place which can never be quite replicated elsewhere, nevertheless, a sense of fellowship among clergy is always important to clerical wellbeing. It is too easy in our world today for clergy to feel overloaded and isolated from support and friendship. There must be a safe place for clergy to talk with other clergy in these difficult days. We need covenant relationships.

TM: What was the role of the Academy and church of Geneva in training pastors for service in France?

McNutt: There was a continuation from the 16th century in terms of the Academy's role in training pastors and sending them to France, but it was also more and more difficult for the Academy to train and send them back to France because a French diplomat was permanently placed in the city by the King of France to keep an eye on matters. The clergy found ways to get around this, and I have benefited from Otto Selles' work on this topic.

Nevertheless, it shows how the Republic of Geneva was vulnerable to the larger powers that surrounded it. Geneva becomes very good at diplomacy while also secretly helping the "church of the desert" in France, a reference to illegal underground Protestant churches. According to the records—especially the official correspondence of the Company of Pastors—there were still churches in France requesting that Geneva send trained pastors and they also refused pastors that were not trained in Geneva. So, the Academy continued its role of training pastors for service in France.

TM: Why is it important for the church today to know something of the story of the post-Reformation church in Geneva?

McNutt: For those of us whose tradition traces back to the Protestant Reformation and even Geneva, we must know the story of what transpired then and after the Reformation. The links between then and now are there waiting to be known, valued, and appreciated. The post-Reformation story is also an important part of our journey as Christians in the Reformed tradition today.

Moreover, according to the latest research, the Enlightenment was not a period where the church and theological orthodoxy were lost. Faithful Christians—in the Reformed tradition—continued to minister to the church and to grapple with the complexities of a changing context. There are so many helpful parallels for us today when we think about what it means to address our current situation faithfully and to be part of a tradition of the church. Every good pastor seeks to communicate God's Word to people today in ways that they can understand while also preserving the historic faith and the markers of their tradition. There is always a translation that needs to take place as we preach and minister since we are products of our historical moments. The clergy of the Enlightenment in Geneva also reflect the complexity of that mission.

TM: Jennifer, I appreciate you and your contribution to the church of Jesus Christ. Thank you for your time today, and God bless you.

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*Jennifer Powell McNutt, Ph.D., is the Franklin S. Dyrness Associate Professor in Biblical and Theological Studies, Wheaton College. Theology Matters is delighted to feature her as one of the speakers at our next theology conference on Hilton Head Island, SC, March 2–4, 2021.*

# Conference Speakers

**John Azumah** is a Presbyterian pastor, preacher, evangelist, professor of theology at the University of Ghana, and author of many books and articles. After serving from 2011 to 2019 as Professor of World Christianity & Islam at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA, he is now the founding executive director of The Sanneh Institute, Ghana, and serves as visiting professor at Yale Divinity School and presidential visiting fellow at Yale University.

**Richard Gibbons** is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, SC. A native of Scotland and graduate of the University of Glasgow, he is a much sought after preacher and teacher of the Bible and Reformed theology, has led missions in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and currently serves as co-moderator on the ECO denomination's Theological Task Force.

**Jennifer McNutt** is the Franklin Dyrness Associate Professor in Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Calvin Meets Voltaire: The Clergy of Geneva in the Age of Enlightenment, 1685-1798*, a specialist in the post-Reformation period, co-president of McNuttshell Ministries, Inc. with her husband, David McNutt, with whom she also serves as a parish associate at First Presbyterian Church of Glen Ellyn, IL.

**Earl Palmer** has served in pastoral ministries at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA, Union Church in Manila, Philippines, First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, CA, and The National Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C. He has authored many books and commentaries, leads Earl Palmer Ministries, a vibrant writing, teaching, preaching, and mentoring ministry, and has been called "the best expository preacher in America of our times."

**Richard Ray** is chairman of the board of the Presbyterian Heritage Center, Montreat, NC. He has served as a pastor in Arkansas, Virginia, and Tennessee, managing director of John Knox Press, professor at Stephens College and Pittsburgh Seminary, and most recently as president of King University, Bristol, TN. He has also served on the board of the Grandfather Home for Children, Calvin Studies Society, King University, and is on the board of advisors of *Theology Matters*.

**Lorenzo Small** is pastor of First United Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC. After several years in the corporate world, working for companies such as 3M Corporation and Eli Lilly and Company, he was called to the ministry, served as a Baptist minister, and later was ordained and installed as pastor of Pleasant Ridge Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, SC. He is a graduate of Union Presbytery Seminary (Charlotte) and a member of the Foundation for Reformed Theology.

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