Calvinism

Its Varieties, Vices, and Virtues

Are you a Calvinist?

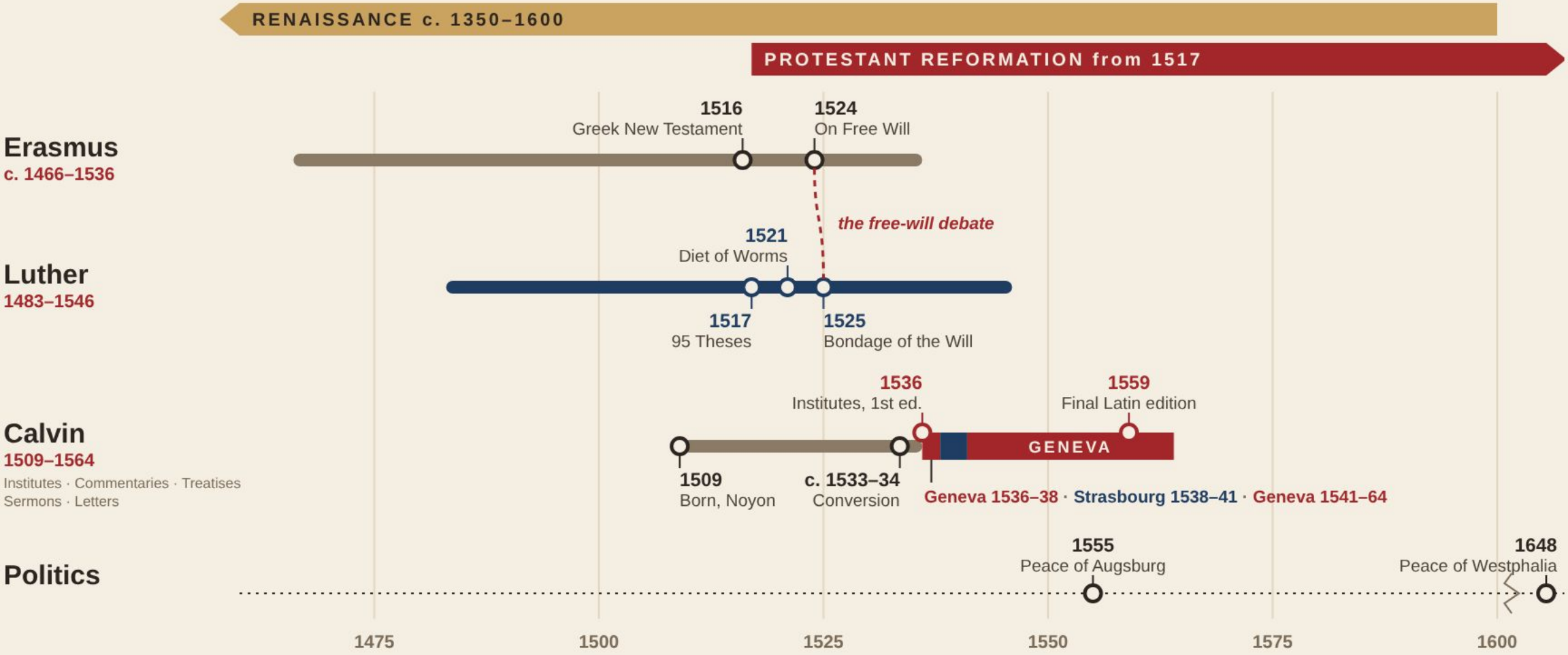
Can you explain Calvinism?

“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

INIGO MONTOYA, *The Princess Bride*

Renaissance & Reformation Basics

A complex movement: INTELLECTUAL · THEOLOGICAL · POLITICAL · ECCLESIASTICAL



Like a philosophical debate held amid a fairground mob, alongside con men, policed by an army that kept changing sides. C. S. Lewis (paraphrased in Needham)

Luther & Calvin

TEN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO REFORMERS

Martin Luther

1483–1546 · Wittenberg

John Calvin

1509–1564 · Geneva

Martin Luther		John Calvin
First-generation Reformer	01 GENERATION	Second generation, 26 years younger
Prophet, blazing new paths	02 ROLE	Systematician, ordering the insights
Outgoing; loved company	03 PERSONALITY	Reserved; served out of duty
Pastor: spoke to the heart	04 APPEAL	Professor: spoke to the mind
Robust and vigorous	05 STATURE	Frail and thin
Justification by faith	06 GOSPEL FOCUS	The glory of God
Christ physically present	07 LORD'S SUPPER	Christ spiritually present
State may oversee the church	08 CHURCH & STATE	Church governs itself
Regenerates and saves	09 BAPTISM	Sign of entry into the church
Chiefly condemns, drives to Christ	10 THE LAW	Also guides the believer's growth

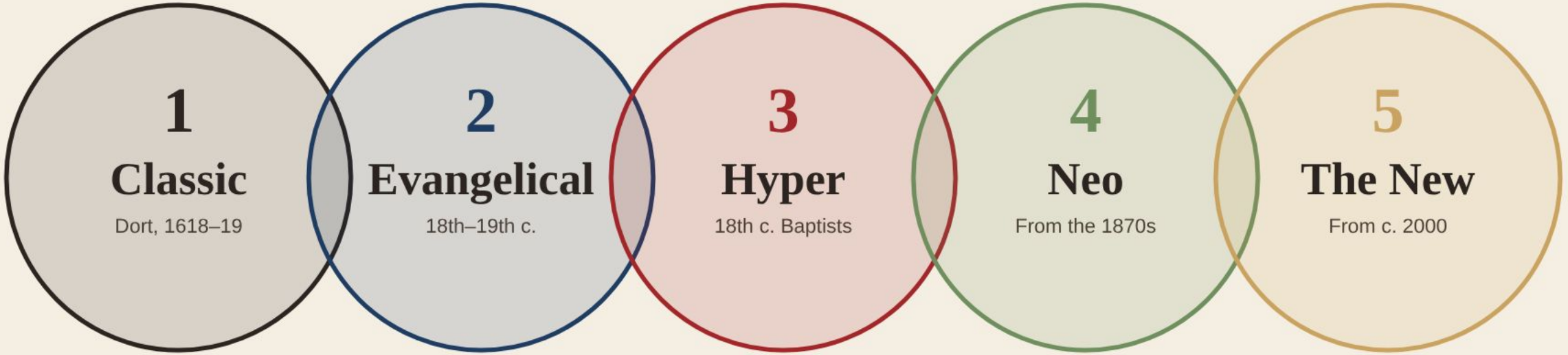
I

The Varieties of Calvinism

History, definitions & five movements

Five Varieties of Calvinism

Somewhat overlapping



Classic Calvinism

The Synod of Dort: grace defined & defended, 1618–19

1560–1609 — **Jacobus Arminius**
Dutch professor

1610 — **The Remonstrance**
His followers raise five objections

1618–19 — **Synod of Dort**
The Canons answer point by point

HEAD I · ELECTION

U Unconditional Election

REMONSTRANTS

God chose those he foresaw would believe.

DORT

God chose freely, not because of works or foreseen faith.

HEAD II · CHRIST'S DEATH

L Definite Atonement

REMONSTRANTS

Christ died to make salvation possible for all.

DORT

Sufficient for all, offered to all, effective for the elect.

HEADS III/IV · CONVERSION

T·I Total Inability & Irresistible Grace

REMONSTRANTS

Grace helps, but the sinner can resist it.

DORT

The Spirit regenerates; faith follows as his gift.

HEAD V · PERSEVERANCE

P Perseverance of the Saints

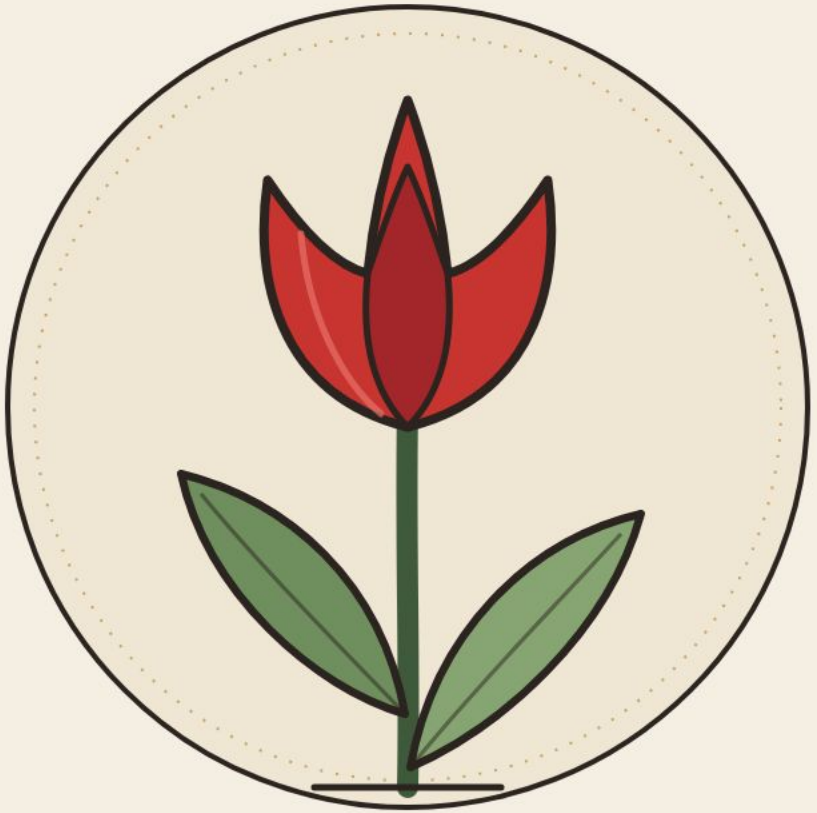
REMONSTRANTS

Whether believers can fall away is unsettled.

DORT

God keeps to the end those he has saved.

"Did the Son of God die to make salvation merely possible or to make people saved?" Kevin DeYoung



T·U·L·I·P

THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

T **Total Depravity**
Sin touches every part of us; we cannot save ourselves. **Rom 3:10–12**

U **Unconditional Election**
God chooses his people by grace, not by merit. **Eph 1:4–5**

L **Limited Atonement**
Christ died to truly redeem his people. **John 10:11**

I **Irresistible Grace**
The Spirit effectively draws those God calls. **John 6:44**

P **Perseverance of the Saints**
Those God saves, he keeps to the end. **Phil 1:6**

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE · SYNOD OF DORT, 1618–19

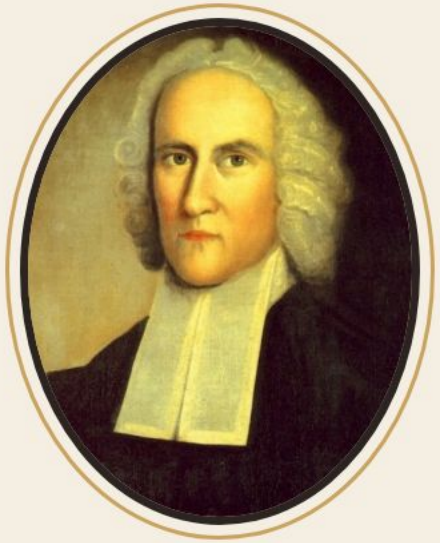
Evangelical Calvinism

REFORMED THEOLOGY ON FIRE

George Whitefield

1714–1770

Open-air evangelist on both sides of the Atlantic



Jonathan Edwards

1703–1758

Pastor-theologian of the Great Awakening

John Newton

1725–1807

Former slave trader; wrote “Amazing Grace”

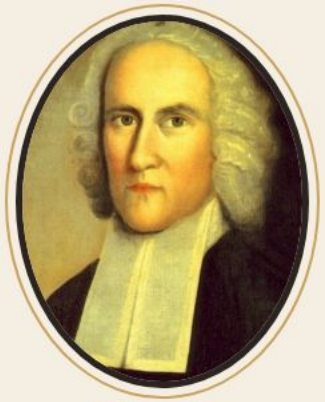
Charles Spurgeon

1834–1892

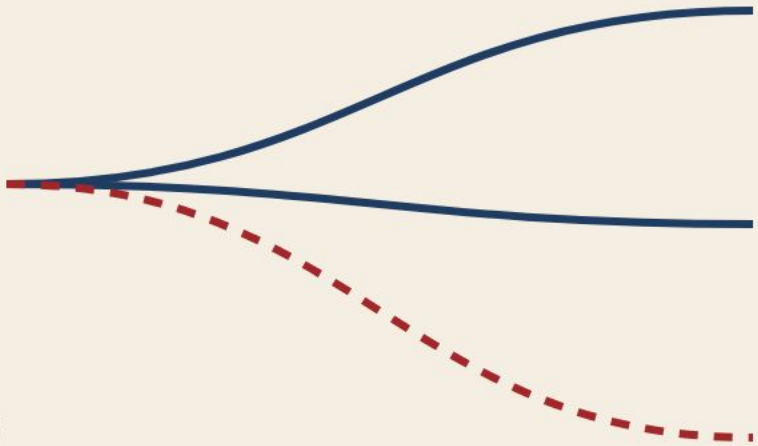
“The Prince of Preachers” of Victorian London

Edwards's Legacy Divided

Piety and theology lived on; the vision that held them together did not



Jonathan Edwards
1703–1758



HIS PIETY → **The revivalist tradition**

HIS THEOLOGY → **Academic Calvinism**

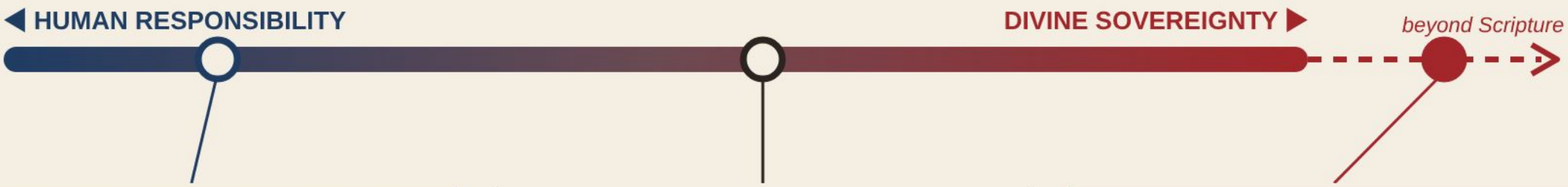
HIS GOD-ENTRANCED WORLDVIEW → ***No successors ✕***

> *"Edwards's piety continued on in the revivalist tradition, his theology continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to his God-entranced worldview or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards's perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy."*
>
> MARK NOLL (b. 1946)

Hyper-Calvinism

When one truth swallows another

HELD TOGETHER IN SCRIPTURE



Arminianism

Grace enables everyone; the sinner's choice decides.

THE GOSPEL CALL

"Christ is offered to all. It's up to you."

Calvinism

God saves his elect, *and* sinners are truly called to believe.

THE GOSPEL CALL

"Christ is freely offered to all. Come!"

Hyper-Calvinism

ENGLISH BAPTISTS, C. 1700–1800

God saves his elect, *so* sinners have no duty to believe.

IN THEIR WORDS

"God will save the elect without our help."

to young William Carey

HYPER-CALVINISM RESTRICTS	God's love	Gospel preaching	The gospel offer
	to the elect only	to those already showing signs of grace	to those already convicted of sin

Neo-Calvinism

DUTCH NEO-CALVINISM · FROM THE 1870S

Abraham Kuyper
1837–1920

Herman Bavinck
1854–1921

> ***"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"***
>
> — ABRAHAM KUYPER, FREE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM, 1880

A HOLISTIC WORLDVIEW			
	1 Orthodox, yet modern	2 Self-consciously holistic	3 Organic, not mechanical

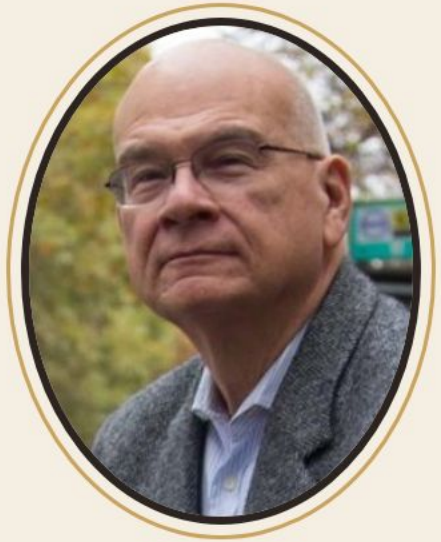
Neo-Calvinism Today

KUYPER & BAVINCK'S VISION IN OUR TIME

Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

b. 1946

Former president, Calvin Seminary;
Engaging God's World



Tim Keller

1950–2023

Redeemer Presbyterian, NYC;
Every Good Endeavor

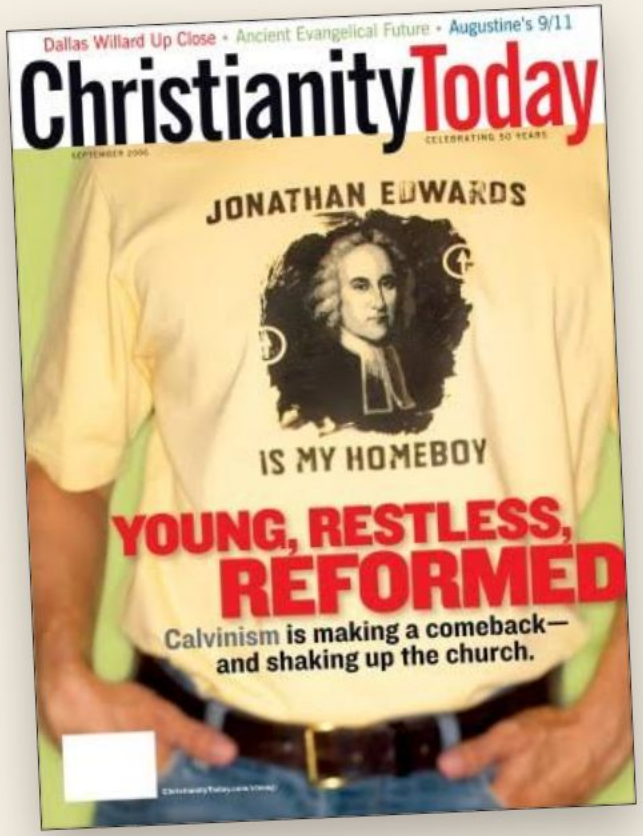
Craig Bartholomew

b. 1961

Kirby Laing Centre;
Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition

The New Calvinism

The Young, the Restless, and Reformed



Christianity Today
September 2006

TIME
March 2009 · “10 Ideas Changing the World”

The New Calvinism

The Young, the Restless, and Reformed

TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL (T4G)

T4G SPEAKERS

TGC THE GOSPEL COALITION

desiringGod

Five Varieties of Calvinism

One root, many branches

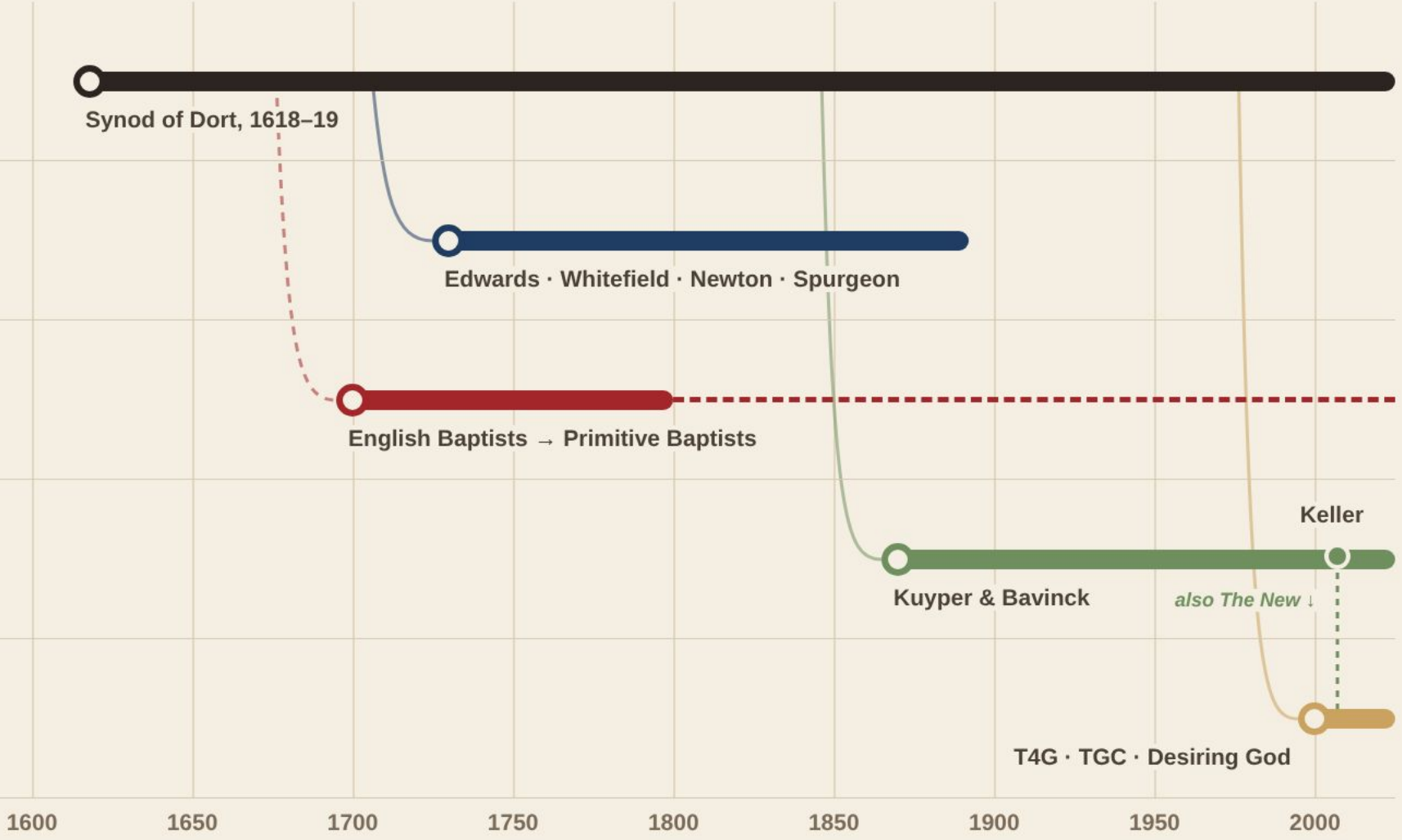
Classic Calvinism
The five points defined

Evangelical Calvinism
Reformed theology on fire

Hyper Calvinism
No free offer, no duty to believe

Neo Calvinism
Every square inch: a whole worldview

The New Calvinism
Young, restless, Reformed



II

The Vices of Calvinism

When biblical truths fall out of balance

Vices

Errors and the need for theological balance

When one truth outweighs another…

1 **System over Scripture**
Reason and logic outrun the text.

2 **A lopsided emphasis**
Sovereignty over responsibility; election over justification by faith.

3 **Intellectualism & pride**

> ***"A humble Arminian can be a good Christian. But a proud Calvinist cannot be a good Christian or a good Calvinist."***
> RAY ORTLUND, HUMBLE CALVINISM, p. 10

4 **Narrow-mindedness**
Sectarianism toward other believers.

5 **Hyper-Calvinism**

Theological Balances

Classic Calvinism needs Neo-Calvinist & Evangelical emphases

CLASSIC CALVINISM		HELD TOGETHER WITH
Total Depravity	+	Common Grace
Unconditional Election	+	Free Offer & Universal Love
“Limited” Atonement	+	The Cross Sufficient for All
Irresistible Grace	+	Human Agency: Faith & Repentance Necessary
Perseverance of the Saints	+	The Reality of False Faith & Apostasy
Intellectual Engagement	+	Experiential Piety

“John Calvin always needs George Whitefield.”

“Calvinism without Methodism tends to lead to intellectualism and scholasticism… men talk more about ‘the Truth we hold’, rather than about ‘the Truth that holds us.’”

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES (1899–1981), *THE PURITANS: THEIR ORIGINS & SUCCESSORS*, pp. 127, 209

Calvin the Church Planter

Hyper-Calvinism is not authentic Calvinism

REFORMED CHURCHES PLANTED IN FRANCE

> *"Calvin was the leading church planter in Europe. He led the way in every part of the process: he trained, assessed, sent, counseled, corresponded with, and prayed for the missionaries and church planters he sent."*
>
> JOHN STARKE

Charles Spurgeon

1834–1892

The Early Years, pp. 173–74

“The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two; and no man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once.”

MAN IS RESPONSIBLE

“Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” — Revelation 22:17

GOD PREDESTINES

“It is not of him that willeth … but of God that sheweth mercy.” — Romans 9:16

“Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other.”

“The fault is in our weak judgment.”

III

The Virtues of Calvinism

Calvinism at its best: all in Christ

Virtues

Calvinism at its best

1

Big God Theology

A God great enough to trust with everything.

2

Gospel-Centric

Preaching Christ crucified; “our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ.”

3

Loving God with Mind + Heart

“Experiential Calvinism”: truth that warms as well as informs.

4

Zeal without Manipulation

For God and the conversion of people: Whitefield, Spurgeon, and missionaries **Brainerd, Carey & Judson**.

5

Humility + Worship

Election and predestination lead to humility, gratitude, holiness and worship. A humble boldness.

6

Catholicity

First a Christian, then a Calvinist: building on the broad foundation laid by Christ.

All in Christ

"We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ (Acts 4:12). We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else."

HIS NAME, BIRTH & LIFE

IF WE SEEK…	…IT IS IN HIS
salvation →	**very name: "of him"** 1 Cor 1:30
any other gifts of the Spirit →	**anointing**
strength →	**dominion**
purity →	**conception**
gentleness →	**birth**

"For by his birth he was made like us in all respects (Heb. 2:17) that he might learn to feel our pain (cf. Heb. 5:2)."

HIS SUFFERING & DEATH

IF WE SEEK…	…IT IS IN HIS
redemption →	**passion**
acquittal →	**condemnation**
remission of the curse →	**cross** Gal 3:13
satisfaction →	**sacrifice**
purification →	**blood**
reconciliation →	**descent into hell**
mortification of the flesh →	**tomb**

HIS EXALTATION & REIGN

IF WE SEEK…	…IT IS IN HIS
newness of life →	**resurrection**
immortality →	**the same**
inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom →	**entrance into heaven**
protection, security, abundant supply of all blessings →	**Kingdom**
untroubled expectation of judgment →	**power given him to judge**

"In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink from this fountain, and from no other."

John Calvin, *Institutes* (1559) 2.16.19

True Catholicity

John “Rabbi” Duncan (1796–1870), Scottish professor

▲ BUILD UP FROM THE FOUNDATION LAID BY CHRIST

“I’m first a Christian, next a Catholic, then a Calvinist, fourth a Paedobaptist, and fifth a Presbyterian. I cannot reverse this order.”

NOT NARROWING CIRCLES, BUT…

“I like better to think of them as towers rising above the other, though narrowing as they rise. The first is the broadest, and is the foundation laid by Christ; but we are to build on that foundation, and, as we ascend, our outlook widens.”

CONCLUSION

Not “Are you a Calvinist?” but…

What kind of Christian character does your theology produce?

GRATITUDE | WORSHIP | HUMILITY | HOLINESS | LOVE | UNITY

Q & A

Calvinism

Its Varieties, Vices, and Virtues