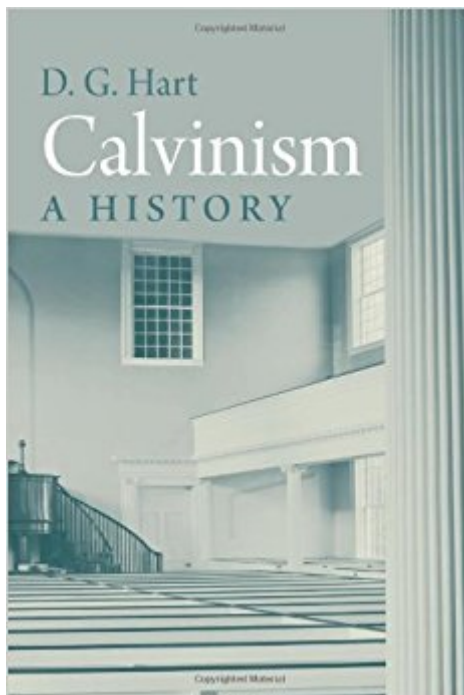


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Calvinism: A History



Synopsis

This briskly told history of Reformed Protestantism takes these churches through their entire 500-year history—from sixteenth-century Zurich and Geneva to modern locations as far flung as Seoul and São Paulo. D. G. Hart explores specifically the social and political developments that enabled Calvinism to establish a global presence. Hart's approach features significant episodes in the institutional history of Calvinism that are responsible for its contemporary profile. He traces the political and religious circumstances that first created space for Reformed churches in Europe and later contributed to Calvinism's expansion around the world. He discusses the effects of the American and French Revolutions on ecclesiastical establishments as well as nineteenth- and twentieth-century communions, particularly in Scotland, the Netherlands, the United States, and Germany, that directly challenged church dependence on the state. Raising important questions about secularization, religious freedom, privatization of faith, and the place of religion in public life, this book will appeal not only to readers with interests in the history of religion but also in the role of religion in political and social life today.

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Customer Reviews

“Calvinism covers its imposingly diverse subject with scholarly precision and the kind of charity and balance one hopes for in any historian. [In Calvinism, Mr. Hart skilfully combines political and institutional history, on the one hand, and theological developments and the history of ideas, on the other. —Barton Swaim, Wall Street

Journal (Barton Swaim Wall Street Journal 2013-08-23)“The great merit of this book is that it pulls so many threads together in a coherent tapestry. The writing is clear and efficient.”
•James Bratt, Christian Century (James Bratt Christian Century)

This brisk single-volume history explores Calvinism from its origins in the sixteenth century through today, assessing political and social dynamics as the church grew and evolved. The book also raises important questions about the relation of church and state in our own times.

A good written history how thinking people acted on their knowledge of Christianity when they were able to read the bible in English, how they tried to reform the cities in which they lived, Jesus in the first century taught his followers not to involve themselves in politics and government for good reason. the catholic church created havoc on the world because of their taking over the roman empire, when the reformed church followed the same pattern similar results, Luther also. I did enjoy the historicity of the subject. thanks for your work.

Good review of the development of this branch of Protestantism. Many of us need to learn more of the historical aspect of our heritage and beliefs.

This will be the book I'll recommend to friends interested in Reformation history. This is just a first rate book. Quality research and documentation, superb writing style.

Hart-Calvinism-A-History-1017x1476To write a history on what D.G. Hart notes as an, accidental movement, would need to include the study of a broad swath of theologians from an array of countries. Hart has done a great service to the church by providing a synthesis of Reformed history and thought into a manageable number of pages for the common reader with Calvinism: A History. Hart goes beyond merely recounting a history of religion but relies on the context of political and religious circumstances which helped to open up doors for the spread of the Reformed faith across the globe.Hart begins by introducing the reader to the theological epicenters of the Reformed faith, namely Geneva, Basel, and Zurich. He highlights moments in history which have moved lay people and clergy away from a Roman Catholic worldview into that of specifically Reformed thought As the shape of the Lutheran and Reformed church began to emerge, Huldrych Zwingli contrasted a true religion as over against the false doctrine of Rome by saying, "Faithfulness demands, first, that we learn from God in what way we can please Him, in what manner serve Him. Next, it demands that

we should add nothing to what we have learned from Him, and take away nothing..The things...on which faith hinges should be brought out without delay, but the things that militate against it need to be demolished with skill, least they do harm in their downfall and bury the little that has already been built (24).From the epicenter we see the shock waves reach westward as the Reformation came to places like France and England. In these places, Hart notes, that the spread of Calvinism under the monarchy infrastructure which these countries produced was heavily dampened by Calvinism's impact on the magistrate. He also points out an intense time of persecution of these Reformed folk under the rule of these monarchs who were largely under the influence of Rome or, at a later time, under the hand of the Church of England.Hart moves us in the direction of Northern Europe by tracing the spread of this accidental movement through the Palatinate and into Scotland. He makes the shift into these areas by observing the confessions and creeds which flowed from the localized Reformed Church. He takes into account the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Scottish Book of Common Order. While taking these documents into account over against the local religion, Hart also brings the men who helped shape these countries into focus. He takes figures like John Knox and others and contributes their success in ministry largely to the, "spadework of Zwingli or Calvin" (71).As Hart begins to trace the missionaries who were pushed to leave the continent, he begins by showing us how the Dutch used the call of God on their lives to plant churches across the globe. One way he charts the spread is to focus on a colony of the Dutch in North America named New Netherland. Among it's low morality was it's low focus on evangelizing a new world for Christ. As the East India Trading Company began to venture out into the new world for commercial gain, one pastor noted how difficult it was in ministering to those on the frontier. "There are many hearers, but not much saving fruit...The people are rather reckless..[and] the taverns and villainous houses have many visitors...The Company says that the congregation must pay the preacher. But they prefer to gamble away, or lose in best, a ton of beer at twenty-three or twenty-four guilder, or some other liquor. I will say nothing against the better class; but of these there are too few to make up the salary (101).After documenting well the rise and fall and rise again, Hart does an excellent job of bringing the reader up to speed on the current situation Calvinists find themselves in. Part of a confessional movement, the Calvinist today has a rich heritage which is often misunderstood at least and accidental at best. Drawing this volume to a close, Hart recounts the history of Calvinism as "remarkable and diverse" (304).Included at the end of this book is a very helpful timeline of Calvinism beginning in 1525 and bringing us up to speed all the way to 2010. While not comprehensive in it's history of each and every stream of Calvinism, Hart does a great job of documenting where this movement began and how far it's come since the great sausage debacle in

Zurich. I appreciated this overview of my heritage as a Calvinist and am glad that I come from such a diverse group of people who often made the same mistakes I make today. Hart, D. (2013). *Calvinism: A History* (p. 352). New Haven: Yale University Press.

As a student of typical MDiv seminary studies, my exposure to church history during and after the Reformation came in broad swaths of all varieties of important people, doctrinal developments, authors, denominations and movements, with the organizing center being a linear time-line approach. While helpful and necessary to get that massive scope of denominational and doctrinal trajectories, I've never taken a class or read anything quite like Hart's synthesis of a gigantic scope of historical and geopolitical Reformed church data into a readable work of history that also draws out some lessons to teach us about the historic development of the various strands of Reformed denominations in various countries and their failures to replicate or their successful efforts to plant Reformed movements in other countries. How much we take for granted that church is separate from state in the US, given the multiplied tragedies of 900 plus years of church-state enmeshment in Europe's war-torn history. Hart has helped me see more clearly the American Reformed church debt to the sacrifices and gifts of particular individuals in their historical moment, how hard it was for churches to forsake cultural or political privileges when doctrine was being compromised, and more of the limitations and mistakes of various strands, and see how Hart's book indirectly points us to the need for coining a sixth sola of the Reformation: *Solus Ecclesia*, (he does not use this term), the church alone, in the senses that salvation is mediated through Christ's true body in earth and that the church must be free from worldly entanglements (such as with the state or with popular culture). The original Reformers wanted a total reformation of doctrine, worship AND church government. The five solas relate to the key points of doctrine and to eliminating all that was not biblical (thus, *Sola Scriptura*). But the five existing solas fail to capture a major Reformation goal of reforming the church government structures and seeing Christ perfect his bride as a corporate body, not simply a scattered collection of godly individuals. What Hart shows us clearly through the trajectories of geopolitical Reformed church expansion and dissolution, is that where the corporate church as a body of assembled individual national churches were financially self-supporting (not dependent on state or overseas funding), winning converts by cultural apologetics and evangelism, maintained their localized (that is, not run from an assembly in another country) doctrinal authority to be faithful to Scripture, especially in the training and ordination of confessionally subscribing ministers and discipline of any leaders who fail to uphold Reformed doctrine or live according to its principles, its health remained and could continue to another generation. Hart shows us how the New England

Congregational Reformed movement could not sustain itself as a scattered, disassociated group of independent churches, but the Irish-Scottish missionary-ministers like Francis Makemie who founded Reformed Presbyterian churches in the US, recruited more pastors, saw the link between the local wealth of towns and cities and the need to plant churches in those centers first, founded the first presbytery in Philadelphia in 1706 with the localized freedom to train and ordain ministers according to the doctrine of the Westminster Standards and to assemble in presbyteries and national assemblies--these became Reformed movements that saw successive generations flourishing. The early US Dutch Reformed missionaries who had to submit to the torturously slow overseas oversight of the Netherland's assemblies, who felt overseas resistance to local US training and ordination of its ministers, who persisted in their foreign language worship in a majority English-speaking US, also failed to flourish. Hart also points us to the sovereign hand of God in orchestrating the international expansion of the Reformed churches as they tagged along (so erasing much boasting about missions prowess) with larger politico-religious persecutions, demographic upheavals, emigration and colonial expansion of world trading, international treaties and military powers. In this regard, the Scottish & English Presbyterian Churches seem to have spread most rapidly around the world in the 1800's, in part due to the corresponding expansion of the British empire to those same regions, while the American Presbyterian churches grew in mission work from about 1837 onwards, also in part due to the expanding influence of American economic, political and military power. Overall Hart offers us a heart-stirring challenge to be thankful to our forefathers in the Reformed faith, to "consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7), to learn from history lest we repeat its mistakes, but also a heart-warming story of God-in-Christ building a church that the gates of hell cannot prevail against!

Darryl does a great job interweaving the impact of political developments during the Reformation with the spiritual and ecclesiastical developments especially showing how the combination of persecution in some realms coupled with support and sponsorship in other realms greatly aided the growth and spread of the Reformed Christian denominations. A must read for those interested in understanding how Calvinism and the Reformation were born and grew to greatly influence our modern world. Toward the end of the book Darryl allows the current academy bias against European colonialism to dominate his comments, but overall the book is full of insightful commentary about Calvinism and the many forms it grew to include over the centuries.

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