

allofliferedeemed

Contours of the Neo-calvinist tradition

MIKE GOHEEN AND CRAIG BARTHOLOMEW



1. Neo-calvinism begins with *Christ*, and this focus opens up into a full Trinitarian faith.
 2. Christ is rendered to us truly in *Scripture*, which is fully trustworthy as God's Word.
 3. Christ stands at the centre of the biblical story and the *good news* he proclaimed is about the *kingdom*, as the goal

of history—God restoring his rule over the whole of human life and creation.

4. Since Christ has revealed and accomplished the end of history the Scriptures have a storied shape, and as such tell the true *story* of the whole world.
5. A central theme in the biblical story is God's election of a people to embody the kingdom, to be a preview of the goal of history, and thus to bear witness to Christ's rule over all of life – this constitutes *mission*.
6. The comprehensive gospel of the kingdom has been narrowed and consigned to a very minor place within the dominant Western humanist worldview, and this calls for a conscious articulation of a biblical *worldview* in relation to the cultural worldview to enable the church to recover the all-embracing scope of the good news.
7. The good news reveals the restoration of the creation from sin, and thus a neo-calvinist worldview insists on a comprehensive and integrated understanding of *creation, fall and restoration*.
8. The fundamental backdrop of God's drama of restoration is *creation*, and thus neo-calvinism articulates a rich doctrine of creation including its good and dynamic creation order and humanity's place within it.
9. *History* is part of God's order for creation and thus neo-calvinism affirms the historical development or differentiation of creation.

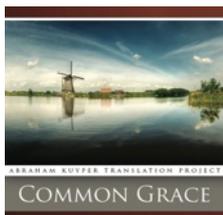
10. The implication of *the fall* is that the power of sin and evil now radically twists every part of creation, and while the structures of creation remain good the distorting power of sin means they have been radically misdirected.
11. The Bible tells the story of *restoration*, centred in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the recovery of God's originally good purposes for the whole of his creation and all of human life.
12. Since God's restorative power is at work in the creation by the Spirit, and the forces of evil remains at work in the creation, neo-calvinism recognises an ultimate *religious conflict* in the whole of human life.
13. God is at work leading his creation to its destiny of a *new heavens and a new earth*, and only then will the kingdom finally come. Until then the church is called to participate in God's redemptive mission—the *missio Dei*—as *witnesses* to his victory, but since we await the final victory there is no room for triumphalism in neo-calvinism.





These contours were first presented at the first [Paideia Gathers](#) conference. Three of the keynotes from that conference can be found here:

- Craig Bartholomew: [Carrying the Christ-Light into His World](#)
- Michael Goheen: [Neocalvinism, Mission and Scholarship: Ongoing Reflections](#)
- Cal Seerveld: [The Import of Biblical Wisdom Literature for a Conception of Artistic Truth](#)



The Acton Institute and Kuyper College are collaborating to bring for the first time to English-

language audiences a foundational text from the pen of the Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper's three-volume work, *Common Grace* (*De gemeene gratie*) appeared during his tenure as prime minister in the Netherlands, from 1901 to 1905.

These works are based on a series of newspaper editorials intended to equip common citizens and laypersons with the tools they needed to effectively enter public life. The doctrine of common grace is, as Kuyper puts it, "the root conviction for all Reformed people."

"If the believer's God is at work in this world," says Kuyper, "then in this world the believer's hand must take hold of the plow, and the name of the Lord must be glorified in that activity as well."

PHILOSOPHY IN THE MAKING

D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and the Emergence of Reformed Philosophy by Anthony Tol

Dordt College Press, 2010; ISBN 978-0-932914-86-6

549+vi pp; pbk; US\$30

Recent years have seen a number of works by and on Vollenhoven. This by Tony Tol is the result of his PhD promoted by A. P. Bos from the Free University (VU). It looks at the development of a neo-calvinist philosophy. Tol pays particular attention to the part played by Vollenhoven in this development.

Dr. Stephen Grabill, director of programs at the Acton Institute, serves as general editor of the project, and he points to the contemporary need to understand Kuyper's comprehensive and cohesive vision for Christian social engagement.

"There are a host of current attempts to try to describe how evangelicals should be at work in the world. Kuyper's articulation of the project of common grace shows how these efforts must be grounded in and flow naturally from sound doctrine."

The translation and publication project will cover a two year period, and the three volumes total over 1,700 pages in the original. Dr. Nelson Kloosterman of Worldview Resources International and translator of numerous Dutch texts serves will oversee the translation of the texts. The completed translation will be published by Christian's Library Press, the recently acquired imprint of the Acton Institute. Volume one of *Common Grace* is scheduled to appear in the fall of 2012.

The book started life as a project to edit Vollenhoven's seminal work the *Isagoge Philosophiae* a text Vollenhoven was continually changing and revising; there about a dozen different versions of the text! This book then traces Vollenhoven's thought as it changed and evolved.

This is a welcome addition to the burgeoning interest in reformational philosophy. Vollenhoven's work is often dense and opaque. Tol has done much of the hard work in helping us understand Vollenhoven and his ideas better.



ANNOUNCEMENT

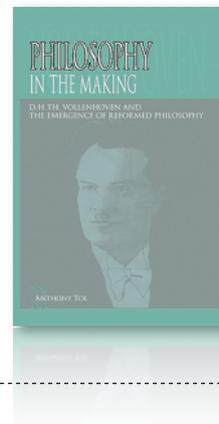
International Conference of the Association for Reformational Philosophy in association with the Free University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Title: Christian Philosophical Conference 2011 (CPC2011).

Theme: "The Future of Creation Order".

Date: 16-19 August, 2011. For more information: Professor Gerrit Glas, chairman of the Executive Committee, Free University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Philosophy and Education, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: g.glas@vu.nl. Or visit the conference website: www.cpc2011.org.

Position Paper: Gerrit Glass '[The future of creation order](#)'



The reformational Daily

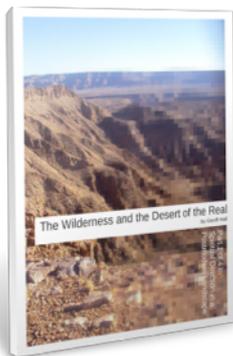
Available daily [here](#)

BOOK REVIEWS

The Wilderness and the Desert of the Real
Geoff Hall
Upptackka Press
ISBN 978-0-9568034-0-5

What is Christian art? How does spirituality and art relate? What does it mean to be a Christian artist? Is it more than painting biblical scenes or painting a sheep in each picture?

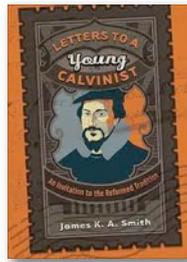
Geoff Hall maintains that it is more than that. In this, the first of four books, he looks at the calling of the Christian artist. A calling that involves desert and wilderness: 'between the Call and its realisation, comes The Wilderness' p. 14. In the wilderness God can create a depth of



character and experience that will help shape the artists work - and hopefully move beyond painting sheep in the picture!

Hall is not advocating an interaction of art and spirituality - an icing of spirituality on the cake of art - he is seeking a robust integration of spirituality and art, of art and spirituality. Neither is he wanting an art-through-theology approach, as he rightly observes 'art is not theology' (p 33).

This is a great brief book; it can be read in less than an hour but will take hours to digest and meditate on the wisdom and insight it contains



Letters to a Young Calvinist.
James K. A. Smith
Brazos Press

In *The Devil Reads Derrida* Smith offers an apologia for writing popular works: he sees it as 'a responsibility to function as public intellectuals for the church as "public"'. This popular book does just that - it serves the church; it provides an accessible and erudite introduction to the Reformed faith in an epistolary format.

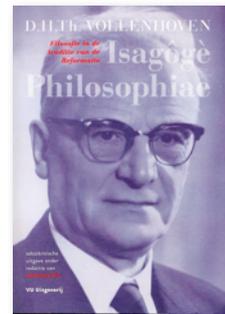
He has traveled from Plymouth Brethren to Pentecostal and Reformed. He knows popular evangelicism.

This book provides, in part, insights from the journey. As one who has traveled to neo-calvinism from traditional anglicanism to free church to house church charismatics I appreciated Smith's helpful advice. As one unfamiliar with the different streams of Reformed in the US I found this a helpful and insightful guide. I particularly appreciated his comments on the different 'Reformed confessions' (Letters XX-XII). He also has some useful comments about the justification 'debate' and Tom Wright.

Thankfully Smith doesn't focus on TULIP, election and predestination - not that they aren't important issues - but there are other issues: 'I have a hard time believing that the denial of limited atonement is the most pressing matter of discipleship right now. We should be more worried about Walmart' (p. 91).

He draws upon Augustine, Calvin and Kuyper and makes an excellent case for the virtues and strengths of the Calvinist position. Calvinism he sees as: 'a lens that magnifies a persistent theme in the narrative of God's self-revelation: that everything depends on God (p. 14); as an 'Augustinian renewal movement within the church catholic' (p. 40); as a "'region" of Reformed theology' (p. 44); as a counter to 'the rampant gnosticism that characterises North American evangelicalism' (p. 103); it's 'an entire "complex" or "world- and life-view"' (p. 110). This is a broad and fully biblical view.

There are many introductory books to Reformed thought, but most are dry and dull; this one is full of wit, warmth and wisdom. Buy it, read it and then buy another to give away.



Isagoge Philosophiae 1930-1945: Tekstkritische uitgave
Filosofie in die traditie van de Reformatie

D. H. Th. Vollenhoven
DI. Anthony Tol (editor)
VU Uitgeverij, Amsterdam, 2010
ISBN 978 90 8659 441 2
Vollenhoven's *Isagoge*, has gone through many versions and translations. Tol, as part of his doctoral dissertation, has assembled here the ultimate critical edition. He has compiled and edited together all Vollenhoven's many version to provide the definitive text-critical edition in Dutch. This is a monumental work. All we need now is an English version!

NOTHING MATTERS BUT HE KINGDOM.

BUT BECAUSE OF THE KINGDOM EVERYTHING MATTER.

GORDON SPYKMAN



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UPDATES

Renato Coletto pages added; with:

[The “eclipse” of the object of research in late-modern philosophy of science: causes and possible remedies.](#) *Tydskrif vir christelike wetenskap/Journal for christian scholarship*, 44(1-2):19-38.

[Christian scholarship within reformed circles.](#) *Acta academica*, 41(3):16-41.

[Strategies towards a reformation of the theology-based approach to christian scholarship.](#) *In die Skriflig*, 43(2):291-313

2010. [Traces of neo-Calvinism in France and Italy.](#) *Koers*, (Special Edition: Essays dedicated to Prof. B.J. van der Walt: “Scholarship in the light of the morning star”), 75(1): 149-172.

Johan van der Hoven pages added; with:

The Rise and Development of the Phenomenological Movement. Hamilton, Ontario, ARSS

Hebden Taylor's bibliography has been updated

Mike Goheen's bibliography has been updated

Many of the links to other websites have been updated.



THE GOSPEL'S GREEN LIGHT Report on WYSOCS event March 26 2011

This day conference explored Christian environmental activism in theory and practice. Four speakers gave stimulating talks in very different styles.

Rev. Peter Harris, the founder of [A Rocha](#) (Christians in Conservation), began the conference by recounting some episodes in the foundation and development of this organisation in Argentina and Portugal in his fist talk, **A Rocha's Green Light.**

Prof. Andrew Basden (University of Salford) and Prof Tim Cooper (Nottingham Trent University) each spoke about their experiences in "green activism", both academics having stood as Green Party candidates and participating in many other initiatives aimed at protecting our environment and promoting social justice. Andrew's talk, **Green Activism with Christ**, presented a rationale for integrating creation care into an interconnected [Green Theology](#). Tim Cooper's talk, **Christians in Environmental Discourse: Leaders or Followers?** argued that Christians are too often absent from politics of the environment and that their lifestyles typically fail to show the distinctive ethics that could be expected in this area.

Prof. [Mike Hulme](#)'s talk was provocatively entitled **Should Christians Be Trying to Stop Climate Change?** Claims that, "The science demands X" take so many forms, from changes in lifestyle to technological innovation, and from new politics to updated ethics, that it's clear there are important differences of worldview and it's not the science that demands anything of us in itself. This led to some thoughts on the distinctiveness of Christian views of humanity and the earth and on the kind of virtues we should bring to bear on crises and conflicts. Finally, Peter Harris returned to speak on **Gospel Fuel for Green Lights**, looking at Christian environmental distinctives as manifested in the work of A Rocha projects around the world. Pictures of the transformation of the Bekaa valley in Lebanon provided a graphic illustration of what faithfulness to Christ as Creator and Lord can look like on the ground.

Richard Gunton

Forthcoming events

June 10-11 2011

WYSOCS Leeds, UK: [The sexes and the kingdom](#) with Mary Stewart van Leeuwen

June 15-17 2011

Trinity College, Bristol [Reading the Bible ethically](#) with Craig Bartholomew and Elaine Storkey

July 10-15 2011

Darwin, Australia [Educating for tough times](#)

August 13 2011

WYSOCS, Leeds, UK: 'Creation regained' Al Wolters and Harry Van Dyke

August 14-19 2011

Amsterdam: 'The future of creation order'
Send events information to: allofliferedeemed@gmail.com

Contributors

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