The Reformatio centennial, now past, delivered a vast array of titles: some were biographical treatments of the Reformers while others were explorations of how pivotal that era was for both civilizational and Christian history. Not so plentiful were volumes like that which is now under review: a fresh exploration of how the doctrine of grace articulated at the Reformation both was a fresh statement of teaching earlier supplied by Augustine and Aquinas and is a needed tonic for the church of today. The approach taken is biblical, historical, and theological.

Trueman, the widely quoted writer, church historian, and pastor associated 2001–2018 with Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, demonstrates considerable versatility in exploring his subject. Initially he investigates the prominence given to God’s grace in both testaments; it is his voluntary and costly provision for human sin, a provision regularly associated with the offering of sacrifice. Trueman proceeds to examine how this biblical teaching about grace (which not only provides a way of forgiveness but also prevails on disinclined sinners to embrace it) was transmitted across subsequent centuries. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin are shown to be in very substantial agreement over the vastness and efficacy of grace. The author is keen to draw attention to this concurrence of teaching across the centuries, given the steady tendency to suppose that the Reformers’ teaching on this subject constituted a novelty. Trueman acknowledges that there were defections from this teaching across intervening centuries yet insists that the succession of faithful witnesses to it never utterly vanished.

A second major section of the work is taken up with the question of how this grace of God, embodied in the mission of the Son of God on earth and the culmination of it in his death, resurrection, and ascension is extended to us now through the divinely instituted church of Jesus Christ. This divine society, called into existence by the grace of God, employs “means of grace”: the preached word, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and prayer. In this, the more theological portion of the volume, Trueman comes closest to addressing what he perceives to be the imbalances and shortcomings of an American evangelical Protestantism that because it has become
less conversant with clear teaching about grace as God’s saving initiative is excessively guided by pragmatic concerns. Especially notable is the author’s insistence in chapter 10 that prayer—whether corporate or individual—is as surely a means of divine grace as preaching or the sacraments inasmuch as it, too, is dependent on a divine initiative (in this case, the intercession offered by Jesus Christ at God’s right hand). Given the paucity of rich teaching about prayer in theological works written by recent Reformed theologians, this material is especially noteworthy.

Appearing in conjunction with the avalanche of “remember the Reformation” literature produced last year, Trueman’s book (and its companions in the “5 Solas Series”) may stand in danger of being swept aside because they will be deemed to have been produced for an occasion, now past. This would be a great shame. For what we have in *Grace Alone* is an excellent example of historical theology, seasoned with pastoral insight, carried out in service of today’s church.

The book’s tone is measured and moderate. Given its underlying conviction that today’s evangelical Protestantism stands in need of a recovery of the doctrine of grace, it might have fallen into a scolding tone. Yet, undue stridency is avoided: one observes no attempt to demonize Augustine’s opponent, Pelagius (chap. 3). While the author’s sympathies are clearly with Luther rather than Erasmus in a discussion about their controversy over free will (chap. 5), he at the same time is ready to acknowledge that Luther’s opinions sometimes approach what could be called “determinism.” The predestinarian views of Calvin (more strident) and Bullinger (more moderate) are described dispassionately (chap. 6).

And yet, what we have in *Grace Alone* is at bottom an unconstrained monergism. The God of our salvation has prepared a way of salvation through his Son for reasons of his own; humans not only do not deserve it, they do not desire it. They are included in this salvation by the working out of purposes of God traceable to eternity and implemented in history through the representative death and resurrection of the Son and the secret calling of the Holy Spirit. The faith by which we are saved is as nothing—the opposite of working. The reviewer also affirms this and yet wonders whether such an understanding of the operation of grace has not allowed divine omnipotence to crowd out all other considerations. Yes, the initiative has always lain with God, yet sinners still require persuasion; their routes toward conversion are highly unique; thoughtful converts are not heard to
complain of divine coercion. *Westminster Confession* X.ii speaks of sinners being “effectually drawn to Jesus Christ: yet, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.” I am not satisfied that *Grace Alone* has safeguarded these important nuances. Are we not zealous to insist that in biblical inspiration, while the initiative has clearly come from the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), there has nevertheless been a concurrence of human and divine factors? If we do not seek to explain inspiration solely with reference to divine omnipotence, why would we be satisfied to do so with reference to calling?

And if one’s objection to the understanding of the operation of sovereign grace traceable back through Augustine to Paul would be moral, that is, that it supposes a partiality toward some fallen humans by the God whom Scripture describes as being impartial and opposed to favoritism (Rom. 2:11; Acts 10:34), what then? The monergist claims to be motivated by a God-centered desire to let God be God. Yet this moral objection is no less motivated by a concern to advance the glory of God. Issues of this nature are more sensitively explored in the thought-provoking work of the Ulster theologian, Stephen Williams, *The Election of Grace* (2015), than they are here.

—KENNETH J. STEWART