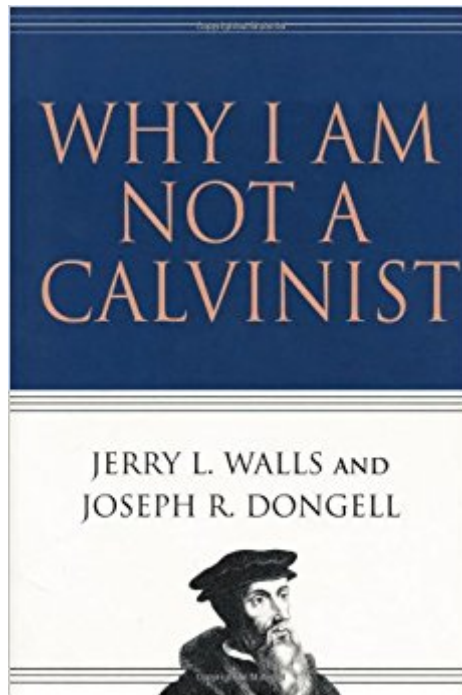




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Why I Am Not A Calvinist



Synopsis

What's wrong with Calvinism? Since the Reformation, Calvinism has dominated much of evangelical thought. It has been so well established that many Christians simply assume it to be the truest expression of Christian doctrine. But Calvinism has some serious biblical and theological weaknesses that unsettle laypeople, pastors and scholars alike. God is sovereign. All evangelical Christians--whether Arminians or Calvinists--have no doubt about this fundamental truth. But how does God express his sovereignty? Is God a master puppeteer, pulling our strings? Or has he graciously given his children freedom to respond to his love? In this eminently readable book, Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell explore the flaws of Calvinist theology. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* is a must-read for all who struggle with the limitations of this dominant perspective within evangelical theology.

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Customer Reviews

"An honest and polite articulation of why these two thinkers are not Calvinists. Useful reading and thought provoking." (Myk Habets, *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*) "Without the usual rancor, hysteria and triumphalism, Walls and Dongell offer a clear and forceful biblical and philosophical case for Arminianism. This book is a welcome and important contribution to the recent upsurge in discussions of Calvinism and Arminianism." (Kelly James Clark, Professor of Philosophy, Calvin College) "The biblical, theological and rational case against Calvinism has never been stated more clearly, concisely, irenically or convincingly." (Roger E. Olson, Professor of Theology, George W.

Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University)"Walls and Dongell present an exceptional blend of careful scholarship, readable presentation, uncompromising conviction, and graceful opposition in their forcefully argued book *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*. Points that make this a book well worth buying and reading include the following: The book demonstrates well the often overlooked fact that the issues between Calvinism and Arminianism are not primarily exegetical but theological and even philosophical. This task is ably accomplished by the combination of an exegetical scholar and a theological philosopher in the authorial team--an ideal amalgamation for such a book. The book clearly identifies and explains the most powerful problems for Calvinism--conceptual problems with the notion of freedom, logical consistency problems and problems of ingenuous application of Calvinist theology to Christian life. While clearly and unapologetically non-Calvinist, the authors are most assuredly not anti-Calvinist. Their treatment of Calvinism and Calvinists is always in the spirit of Christian love, acceptance, understanding and unity. The book is very timely, given the central debates in contemporary conservative and evangelical theology and the resurgence of pro-Calvinist sentiment over the last two decades." (Dr. James F. Sennett, Professor of Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies, Lincoln Christian College and Seminary)

Jerry L. Walls is professor of philosophy of religion at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. His annual C. S. Lewis seminar is one of the school's most popular offerings. He is also author of *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*. Dongell is professor of biblical studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.

This is a good book that critically examines Calvinism's theories.

Excellent book but i call it a heavy read

Buy *Why I Am Not an Arminian* to balance the debate. We used both books as textbooks in a Bible study class.

Enjoyed this book and appreciated the author's attempts to accurately portray Calvinism. There was little that could be said to be "straw man", and instead the authors take on actual Calvinism and try to debunk it philosophically. The tone of the book is genteel and very readable. I enjoyed the articulateness and care with which the author's wrote and developed their ideas. As has been noted by many reviewers already though (so I won't go into detail here), there is too little Biblical exegesis

and too few attempts to wrestle with original languages. Further, what philosophical arguments are made, they are not made adequately (to my mind). Most reviewers have already noted the problems, so I won't reinvent the wheel here. Only say that I agree there are serious problems in the refutation (as I have found in every book I have read about Arminianism to date, unfortunately; I keep reading hoping to be persuaded but come away wanting every time). The *best* refutation of Calvinism that I have read to date did not come from an Arminian at all but from a Thomist! The book from the Thomist was exegetical, philosophical (what do you expect? it's Thomas Aquinas), thorough, and careful to examine original languages. While it is perhaps not as irenic as *Why I am Not a Calvinist*, it is not ad hominem either and basically deals with the actual tenets of Calvinism, not straw-man Calvinism. That book is called: *The Mystery of Predestination: According to Scripture, the Church, and St. Thomas Aquinas*, by John Salza. An excellent read that gave me much food for thought. What you have in that book is one predestinarian refuting another. But to get back to the original topic at hand, *Why I am Not a Calvinist* does one thing that I find positively shocking: after drawing fine lines between various strains of Arminian thought, even delving into the particulars of Molinism for quite a few pages, it basically does not even mention Thomism as one stream in this debate at all (aside from one sorry footnote). This is disappointing and misleading for a number of reasons: one, Calvin imbibed some of this thinking and methodology from Aquinas. Two: it potentially confuses people's understanding of Church history. The subject of predestination has been in the Church well before the time of Calvin and Luther (I am saying this as a Calvinist; it is simple Church history). It would be helpful for readers to know that there exists in Catholicism the same debate (though with different variables) as exists in Protestantism! And in Catholicism, the debate was going on well before Calvin was even alive. (In Catholicism, the debate has been now boiled to the Thomistic interpretation v. the Molinist, just as in Protestantism, it has been Calvinism v. Arminianism.) Why the authors left Thomism out altogether is beyond me. It at least deserves fair mention. And I am saying this as a Calvinist. A Calvinist still utterly unconvinced by Arminianism, though intrigued by Thomism.

Why I AM Not A Calvinist by Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell is really a tale of two authors and one book. At the time of the writing, both Dongell and Walls were professors at Asbury Theological Seminary, with Dongell taking on the theological arguments and Walls the philosophical arguments. I enjoyed Walls' chapters and preferred his writing style. However, in reviewing my highlights in preparation for this review, I gained a new appreciation of Dongell's writing style. The book is a balanced cogent polemic that will not leave the reader wondering where the authors stand.

Unfortunately, I read *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* immediately after reading Robert E. Picirilli's book *Grace, Faith, Free Will*. Picirilli's book is outstanding and virtually any book read in its wake would be diminished. I found it quite interesting how Dongell and Walls chose to systematically dissect and deconstruct Calvinism using scripture and logic to expose inconsistent and incomprehensible theology. Of the books I have read on this subject, few elaborated on Martin Luther or scrutinized the Reformed creeds, i.e., Westminster Confession, like Dongell and Walls. In chapter 3, *Calvinism and the Nature of Human Freedom*, Walls writes, "... let's consider a classic Calvinistic document, namely, the Westminster Confession, a standard statement of faith for churches in the Reformed tradition. The chapter on God's eternal decree begins with the following words: 'God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever come to pass.' Now this is a rather strong claim of all embracing determinism. Everything is ordained by God's unchangeable will from all eternity. This is not a matter of impersonal fate but rather of a determinism flowing out of the will of a personal being who is most holy and wise. But notice that everything is determined by the will of God according to the Westminster Confession. Now consider what immediately follows in the Confession: 'Yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established (art. 3.1).'

In other words, despite the fact that God ordains everything, he is not responsible for sin since he does not cause people to sin against their will."(1) Dongell writes, "... whenever we hear the claim that a single verse of Scripture 'absolutely proves'" a given theological position, we must conclude that the speaker either is unaware of the nature of interpretive enterprise or has engaged in rhetorical flourish, and neither alternative holds the promise for advancing fruitful dialogue. Conversely, though we disagree with his conclusions, we commend the tone modeled by Wayne Grudem in his study of Hebrews 6:4-6. In addressing this passage, Grudem admits that the Arminian interpretation (i.e., that some true Christians may fall forever from grace) is well founded on the cumulative force of the words and grammar of that passage. He then suggests that 'a different interpretation ... is possible' ... Grudem demonstrates throughout his study that the practice of interpretation involves weighing carefully the nearly balanced options, discerning probabilities hinted at by the surrounding literary context and using one's best powers of reason. Given the degree of play possible within each of these parameters, we should all speak with a measure of care and reserve when delivering our interpretive conclusions."(2)

Why I Am Not A Calvinist is lucid and erudite and ultimately an impeachment of Calvinism, wrought upon itself by Calvinism's incomprehensible and indefensible doctrines that are not representative of the nature and character of God. I'm sorry, I didn't read

Grudem's book. Many of the reviews I have read concerning authors who write on this subject, and particularly Arminian authors, have complained that they (authors) often cite "dead guys," implying the authors are not engaging their contemporaries and the culture. This is not the case with Walls and Dongell. In defense of "dead guys," if their theology is truth, then it is timeless and eternal and should be like Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday and today and forever." (New American Standard Bible Heb. 13.8) And, any of the aged or deceased forerunners in their tradition should be every bit as relevant today.-----1. Dongell, Joseph R., Jerry L. Walls, "Why I Am Not A Calvinist" Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2004, 1122. Dongell, Joseph R., Jerry L. Walls, "Why I Am Not A Calvinist" Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2004, 38

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