

Irony of Ironies

Written by Tim Black

Saturday, 10 January 2009 10:46 - Last Updated Saturday, 10 January 2009 11:45



The screenshot shows the Princeton Theological Seminary website for the Calvin 2009 anniversary. The header features the seminary's logo and navigation links: PTS HOME, ABOUT US, CONTINUING ED, and NEWS. The main content area is titled "CALVIN 2009" and includes a portrait of John Calvin. A quote reads, "A heart aflame in the hand of God." Below this, a paragraph states: "John Calvin, the single most important founding theologian of the Reformation was born July 10, 1509. During 2009, Princeton Theological Seminary will celebrate the 500th anniversary of his birth and honor his rich contributions to the church's understanding and practicing the Christian faith." A navigation bar lists dates from Jan 08, 2009 to Jan 11, 2009. On the left, there are links for "Become a Member", "Reading Schedule", and "Read the Institutes". On the right, a notice thanks Westminster John Knox for permission to use the McNeill / Battles translation and states that readings will only be available for the time span above. Below this, the "Reading Section: 1.4.1-4 of The Institutes of The Christian Religion" is highlighted, with a link to "Click here to open today's reading" and a note "Intended to be read on Jan 10, 2009".

Princeton Theological Seminary is hosting "A Year with the Institutes," a daily reading of Calvin's Institutes, on its [website](#). Point three of today's reading is summarized in Battles' heading:

3. We are not to fashion God according to our own whim

And Calvin's first sentence for today reads,

As experience shows, God has sown a seed of religion in all men.

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But the audio recording of that sentence provided by Princeton says this:

As experience shows, God has sown a seed of religion in all people.

You can catch up on the gender-inclusive language debate in the comments on Princeton's site. I'm reminded of Richard Muller's excellent book, "[The Unaccommodated Calvin](#)," which shows how Calvin's interpreters like to fashion Calvin's meaning according to their own whims, and recommends it's better for your soul if you don't do that.

Old school liberal theology is dead in the academy, but it hasn't been replaced by a return to conservative orthodoxy at Princeton. It's been replaced with neo-orthodoxy and varieties of postmodernism, which allow the same practical results as liberalism did: loose views of scripture, Marxist biblical interpretation, social activism, & politics, women in office, approving of homosexuality, etc. So, in my estimation, Princeton understands its roots in the conservative Reformed tradition and considers itself Reformed, but isn't conservative, so isn't Reformed, at least not in a sense of which Calvin would have approved.

So I think it's fine to recommend discerning readers follow the proposed reading schedule, but I wouldn't encourage the average church member to seek spiritual guidance from the plan's organizers at Princeton.