Jonathan Hoglund


Effectual calling has long been integral to Reformed soteriology. While Reformed authors have argued that God calls sinners to salvation through preaching, however, it has often been less clear how this persuasive speech relates to the immediate work of the Spirit in their hearts. Jonathan Hoglund argues that the triune God works this immediate change in sinners through divine speech, using human instruments as an act of divine rhetoric. He retains the idea that effectual calling is a divine act while seeking to explain how this act includes the transformation of people through divine speech. His exegesis is full and satisfying, including careful interaction with a wide range of sources from varying theological traditions. Whether or not readers are persuaded that he succeeds in bridging the gap between the persuasive aspect of the effectual call and the immediate work of the Spirit in the heart, serious students of theology will find this volume thought-provoking and engaging.

Hoglund defines the effectual call as “an act of triune rhetoric in which God the Father appropriates human witnesses to Christ the Son in order to convince and transform a particular person by ministering, through the presence of God the Spirit, understanding and love to Christ” (4). While his conclusions harmonize with Reformed teaching, his purpose is not to defend Reformed doctrine so much as to analyze and to modify it (213). He establishes his definition of effectual calling gradually by answering the questions: Who calls? What is the content of the call? and, What change occurs in the person called? (21). He treats calling in scripture carefully, particularly through the lens of Paul (especially in chapter 3). He includes theological analysis, such as how effectual calling is related to the broader category of illumination (79; chapters 5 and 6) and to the narrower issue of regeneration (chapter 7). His historical sources include Dort (23–31), Schleiermacher (110–117), Barth (192–194), John Gill (68–71) Michael Horton (71–73), John Owen (94–101), Claude Pajon (101–110), Jonathan Edwards (chapter 8), and many others.

In terms of who calls, he answers that the Father is the authoritative source of the call (191–194), the Son is the argument of the call who is active in it (194–201), and the Spirit graciously creates an audience for the call, enabling sinners to be persuaded by its content (201–205). He states the content of the call as “Jesus is your saving Lord” (74). While this definition appears to omit many things, he argues that it includes oral expression, cognitive content, an implied summons, a required human response, and that it must lead to “belief
or faith” (75–77). The change in the person called includes, subjectively, faith in Jesus Christ and, objectively, union with Christ through faith (215). This brings an eschatological change in which believers participate in the age to come, and it results in spiritual resurrection now. Building on Edwards, he concludes that the effectual call cannot be reduced to the “semantic content of the gospel” (225), but that through it God persuades and enables sinners to embrace Christ by affecting the entire person. While interacting heavily with speech-act theory, he attempts to move beyond it by stressing that the effectual call is an interpersonal encounter with God through what is spoken (logos), the speaker (ethos), and the audience (pathos; 186, 189). He asserts the immediate action of the Spirit in effectual calling while pressing the idea that God accomplishes this act through divine speech employing human instruments (226).

Given the impressive range of content in this book, it is difficult to provide more than a cursory evaluation. This reviewer limits his evaluation to the author’s treatments of Owen and Edwards in order to raise the question of how far beyond the Reformed tradition his definition of effectual calling takes us. Hoglund shows the nuanced ways in which Owen addressed illumination in relation to the effectual call (94–100). He appreciates Owen’s distinction between saving and nonsaving illumination, but he mildly criticizes him for narrowing our focus too much to the cognitive aspects of the call to the partial neglect of its affective aspects. He then uses Edwards to supply these defects (chapter 8). One should remember, however, that in his work on Apostasy, Owen argued that some nonbelievers were “enlightened” by the Holy Spirit, both cognitively and affectively, without this resulting in genuine conversion. This presents a broader understanding of illumination from scripture as a whole. Hoglund also emphasizes the idea that Edwards modified the Reformed concept of infused habits of grace by substituting the Spirit as the habit of grace in believers (152). However, his appeal to Edwards as modifying earlier Reformed formulations by making the Spirit the habitus of grace (160) requires fuller historical evaluation. For example, Owen asserted consistently in his Pneumatologia that the Spirit’s indwelling constituted habitual grace in the soul, but that this habit was insufficient to carry believers forward without continual and direct acts of the Spirit. In his book on perseverance, Owen noted that the Spirit’s indwelling in believers constitutes their union with Christ, which initially produces faith in them in their effectual calling. Moreover, in his work on the marks of saving faith, Owen stressed the Spirit’s work in creating delight in and love for the beauties of God in a way that anticipated Edwards’s emphases. This means that the effectual call, for Owen, was more than “the cognitive content of the gospel.” This idea that effec-