



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

One vociferous issue in the evangelical church today, which continues to raise its stubborn voice, is the proper balance between the moral will/action of man and the sovereignty of God. Though I cannot solve this for you today, I can direct you to a book I am reading this month: *The Bondage of the Will*, by Martin Luther. In one lengthy paragraph Luther asks (p. 54), "Are there problems raised by this Biblical doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God in providence and grace?" His measured response is worth hearing: "Of course there are! Everything that God reveals of Himself transcends man's comprehension....God does not tell men more of His purpose than man needs to know....Faith [then] will wait patiently ... till the coming of greater light." These are well-thought words from Luther. So I ask, am I content to wait?



Michael & Brenda Rouleau

Atlantic Shores Baptist Church

Alumni In Ministry Spotlight

The *Master of Biblical Studies (MBS)* is a growing degree at VBTS. The 39 credit-hour Master of Biblical Studies was designed to equip laymen and women to be a substantive support member in their local church ministry. Michael Rouleau (*MBS, 2010*) is an outstanding example of one of our MBS graduates making a difference in his local church. Michael and Brenda have been married for 34 years; for the past 21 years, they have faithfully served in Atlantic Shores Baptist Church, Virginia Beach. Michael serves as a deacon in the church, leads multiple weekly Bible Studies specifically targeting the Millennial generation, directs a small study group of Filipino-Americans, and is a key teacher in the Shores Bible Institute. Michael and Brenda are model servants at ASBC, and we are thankful for them.



Last month in Richmond, VBTS Professors participated in a roundtable discussion on the Reformation.



Truth for the Agora: R.T. France's Perspective on Matthew's Conclusion

One of my favorite commentators on Matthew is the Englishman, Richard Thomas (R.T.) France (1938-2012). He was a keen scholar whose life's journey allowed him the distinction to teach at Oxford, pastor several churches, and serve as a missionary to Nigeria with his wife Curly. He wrote three books of significance on Matthew: a weighty exegetical commentary (NICNT series), a perceptive devotional commentary (Tyndale series), and a stimulating book titled, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*. His life was a model of service and scholarship.

I consider France's work on Matthew to be extraordinary. Although he and I hold some differing positions,¹ his exegesis of Matthew's text is persuasive and provides the reader with rich insight. One illustration that displays his strength is his discussion of Matthew's final paragraph: *The Great Commission* (28:16-20).

France viewed the final paragraph of Matthew through two lens: (1) It is "the key to understanding Matthew's gospel"; and (2) It gives the story about Jesus "a sense of completeness," for in these final words, "many of the most central themes of the gospel reach their resolution and culmination." France uncovered *eight threads* which Matthew wove together to provide a beautiful conclusion to the glorious ministry of Jesus. These are masterful; and in short order, here are his thoughts:

1. **Reversal of Disciples' Disaster** – Without rebuking their failures, Jesus entrusts the Eleven with the responsibility of carrying out his global mission (26:56b).
2. **Unchanged Eschatology** – As the risen Lord, his expectation to rule the world is in full sway, sealed by his resurrection (25:31; 26:64-66).
3. **Expanded Scope of Ministry** – Jesus expanded his earlier commission to the Eleven (10:6; 15:24) to now include all the nations.
4. **Baptism Redefined** – Baptism identified a new beginning for those Jews who would repent (3:1-12), but now it is to be extended to all nations to identify a new beginning for those who will follow Christ.
5. **Heart of Discipleship** – No longer slavish obedience to the written code of the OT (5:17-20), the heart of discipleship is obedience to Jesus's commands.
6. **Jesus's Authority** – "All authority in heaven and earth" is far greater than the initial offer by Satan, which Jesus refused (4:8-10).
7. **Object of Truth** – Jesus is no longer the Teacher of truth (22:18); he is now the Object of truth of which all nations will be taught.
8. **Matthew Concludes as he Began** – He introduced Jesus as "God with us" (1:23), and his final words of Jesus are: "I am with you always, to the end."

Thank you, Dr. France, and may your thoughts on Matthew continue to encourage each of us to be Christ's teacher-evangelist *without hindrance*.

¹ One illustration of our differences is how France treats the five major sermons of Jesus in Matthew (Chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; and 24-25). France views Matthew as a thematic collator "marshaling material" from various times when Jesus taught "to form a coherent literary composition," rather than a transcriber of what Jesus actually said at specific times in his ministry. Though this position is unconvincing to me, his understanding of Matthew's text as a whole pushes me to know and to love the Lord Jesus.