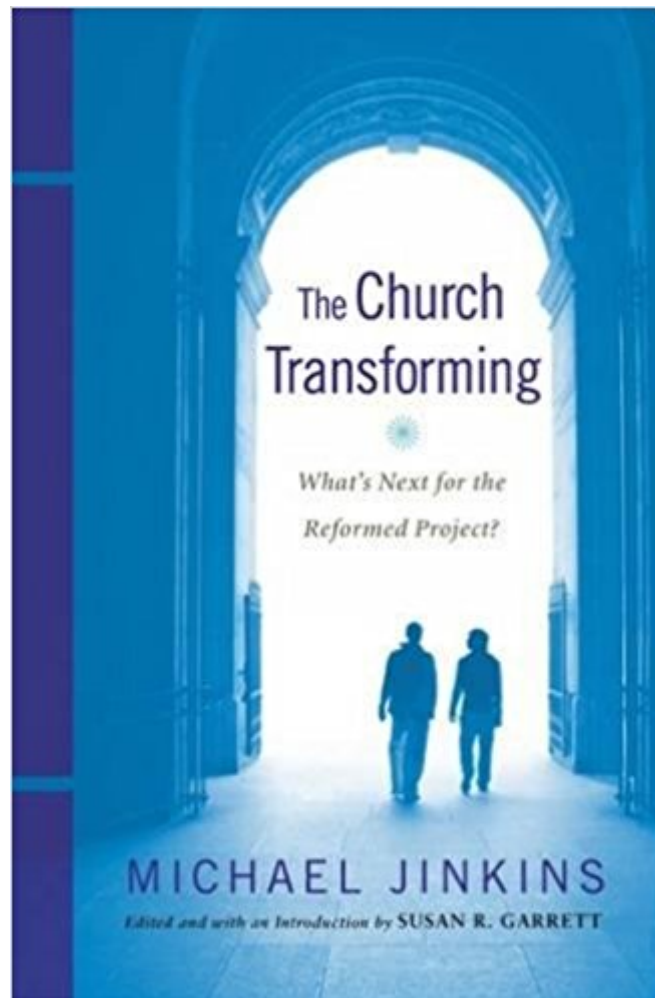




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# The Church Transforming: What's Next For The Reformed Project?



## Synopsis

In this book, theologian and author Michael Jenkins probes the present state and future of the Reformed faith. Addressing increasing division over scriptural authority, ordination and marriage of gay and lesbian people, and other social issues, Jenkins looks at some of the hallmarks of the Reformed faith and discusses how these can be viewed anew. Topics covered include scriptural interpretation, the place of Christ, living in community, the life of the mind, unity versus schism, and spirituality and mystery. He concludes by showing how the Reformed faith is not a castle to be defended but a living treasure of great gifts.

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## Customer Reviews

Michael Jenkins is President and Professor of Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books, including *Called to Be Human*, *Invitation to Psalms*, and *Letters to New Pastors*.

In this book, *The Church Transforming*, Dr. Michael Jenkins packed a lot of information into only 136 pages. It is an outstanding book on the state of the Christian Church (2012) in general and the Presbyterian Church in particular. The Presbyterian Church PCUSA, professes to be reformed and transforming, hence the word "transforming" in the title. Dr. Jenkins made this profoundly insightful declaration. From his vantage point as President of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary,

he stated that ministers must be prepared to have an interfaith multicultural ministry in the context of an increasingly pluralistic world. I think this is a fantastic statement, but I question, “How can interfaith multicultural ministry take place while the adherents of one religion [namely, Christians] profess to have a monopoly on salvation?”

President Jinkins wisely addresses this interfaith impediment – a looming roadblock – as well. Jinkins was so bold as to address the problem of which other church leaders see but do not want to deal, expressed in the words of the old saying, “the elephant in the living room.”

This author plainly stated that John Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian Church – the reformed tradition – had a limited view of salvation due to the fact Calvin believed Christ’s atonement for sin was limited to only an “elect” – few whom God sovereignly chose to save to the exclusive of the vast majority of the human race. If the atonement is, in fact, limited this casts God, who is love, as being very partial although The Holy Bible proclaims that God is impartial showing no favoritism to anyone. Indeed, Jinkins called this “the weak link” in Calvin’s doctrine of election. To resolve this thorny theological problem, Jinkins pointed to the Karl Barth who, per Jinkins, is often remembered today as “the greatest modern Reformed theologian.”

Jinkins referred to Barth’s “remarkable Christological interpretation of election” in which his doctrine of Christ being the one whom God elects for us, supplying precisely that which Calvin’s theology needed. Thus, per Barth, “In Jesus Christ alone is our election sure, because he is the electing God and he is our election.”

Just as Barth’s conception of election heralds the Good News of universal salvation, it also provides the solid basis of Christian evangelism in our increasingly pluralistic world. In regard to door-to-door evangelism, generally held in very low esteem by the American public, Dr. Jinkins asked a very important question, which he admitted, is not funny but is very illustrative. The question: “What do you get when you cross a Jehovah’s Witness [widely known for door-to-door evangelism] with a Presbyterian?”

You get a person who will knock on a door, but, when the resident comes to the door, doesn’t know what to say. The point is that Presbyterians, like other mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox do not evangelize while Fundamental and the more conservative Evangelical Christians are strong on personal evangelism. Examples of such evangelism are these printed evangelistic materials: Dr. D. James Kennedy’s “Evangelism

Explosion, Dr. Bill Bright and Dr. Billy Graham. The Four Spiritual Laws, and Dr. Billy Graham. Steps to Peace with God. All of these materials are predicated on the erroneous belief that human beings will be eternally separated from God unless they personally accept Jesus as their Savior [even the billions who have never heard of Christ and even though The Holy Bible declares that there is no place in heaven, on earth, or Sheol (Hell, KJV), the grave or place of departed spirits, where one can go from God's presence since God is omnipresent] (Ps. 139:7-8). To help Presbyterians and other Christians know what to say, from a totally positive perspective, in sharing the Gospel of Good News of Christian Universalism, I have written the outreach booklet, "SALTED WITH FIRE: Five Liberating Truths in a Nutshell." This booklet is actually a super-condensed version of my two books, both of which are 5-star rated on . This perspective is a confirmation of the logical belief that, according to Jinkins, God's grace will ultimately proved to be irresistible for all humanity. Therefore, Jinkins stated, "To confess the irresistibility of God's grace is to reaffirm the Christian belief that no power under heaven is greater than God's power to redeem; that even the forces of sin, suffering, evil, and death yield ultimately to God's grace." To this logically irrefutable truth and the quotation in the next paragraph, I say a heartfelt, "Amen!" Rather than closing ourselves to interfaith communication and cooperation, we would benefit the church by learning more about the distinctive faith of others. The more we discover about the faiths of others, the more we also discover about our own. And, ironically, the more we understand the differences among us, the better able we are to appreciate our common humanity before God. The great challenge of our age may well be religious pluralism. If we do not learn to live together with respect for others and their faiths, the future looks very bleak for all of us. If we do, however, we may discover yet unimagined depths in our own reverence for God. Wow, what a wise, insightful, and prophetic statement! In regard to discovering "unimaginable depths [or heights] in our own reverence for God" when the word "fire," as used in The Holy Bible and the sacred literature of other religions, is commonsensically understood to symbolize purification, not eternal torment, it is my informed opinion that all major religions and various minor ones teach universal salvation! This is spiritual fire which, universally understood, will have a greater impact on the world than the discovery of fire! This truth will free people from morbid

fear of God and eternal damnation, create unity in the human family, and bring about a just and tolerant society. "swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks" [weapons of war recycled into implements of agriculture] (Isaiah 2:4)

•PEACE ON EARTH GOOD WILL TO ALL!

Boyd C. Purcell, Ph.D.,  
Author  
"Spiritual Terrorism: Spiritual Abuse from the Womb to the Tomb"  
"Christianity Without Insanity: For Optimal Mental/Emotional/Physical Health"  
•Website: ChristianityWithoutInsanity.com

At this point in time, the Sunday School class is only half way through the book. The class indicated that this book is one of the top three discussed in the past few years. William M. Harris

This exciting book set my head buzzing with new ideas. The implications of this helpful book can enliven any congregation.

As a congenital Presbyterian, I found Jinkin's treatise that strategically avoids the term "Reformed Tradition" in favor of a newer and more poignant phraseology for a persistent theme, to be refreshing and challenging...or perhaps I should write, to be 'transforming.' I confess to not being able to stop reading this book. I read it in less than one day and I heartily recommend all Christians grab this book ASAP. It will turn your faith on (or perhaps, back on).

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