

New Evangelical Calvinism: Repeating the errors of New Evangelicalism

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Armed with God's Word and transformed by the Holy Spirit, these churches' leaders faithfully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ week after week, through tragedy and triumph. Culture has conspired to give their message a wider audience. Desire for transcendence and tradition among young evangelicals has contributed to a Reformed resurgence. [1]

A phenomenon is growing and spreading within the churches in the USA. Spurred on by the degradation of culture, the downgrade of [New] Evangelicalism, the passion and appeal of charismatic personalities such as Pastor John Piper, C.J. Mahaney and the Sovereign Grace Movement among others, and above all to the providence of God, a renewed interest in Calvinism and the reformed worldview is spreading within the Evangelical movement. Journalist Colin Hansen has researched this phenomenon and published his results in his book *Young, Restless, Reformed*, truly an illuminating book which shows us the growing resurgence in Calvinism in myriad sectors of the Visible Church.

As Reformed (and reforming) Christians, the current resurgence in Calvinism surely is cause for gladness. Believing with Spurgeon that "Calvinism is the Gospel and nothing else" [2], the turning away from the destructive errors in modern-day bankrupt Evangelicalism with its embrace of semi-Pelagianism and Pelagianism is indeed cause for joy. Nevertheless, as I have observed the movement, many areas of concerns, some serious, have come up and it in this spirit that these concerns are brought up for our consideration.

Concerns:

Will we learn from history? — The New Evangelical failure to heed the doctrine of separation

On pages 13-16 in the first chapter, the example of an Adventist student named Robin attending a Passion conference was highlighted.

I asked Robin how Calvinism meshes with the Adventist church he attends. "It doesn't," Robin answered. He spent his first semester of college studying theology at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee. His increasing unwillingness to go along with unique points of Adventist theology led to conflict with faculty. He returned home to Orlando rather than cementing an unwanted reputation as the only non-Adventist theology major.

But if he's not Adventist, why does Robin still attend an Adventist church? Because that's where he can make a difference and maybe even teach others with his Calvinist theology. Besides, since Adventists meet on Saturdays, he can spend his Sunday mornings in Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Florida, where R.C. Sproul preaches. [3]

As it can be seen, this student Robin has one leg in Seventh-Day Adventism (which is not orthodox) [4], and one leg in Christian orthodoxy. This sounds exactly like the New Evangelical practice of non-separation from those manifestly in error and thus a violation of Scriptural principles as stated in 2 Cor. 6:14-18, which says

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

(2 Cor. 6:14-18)

Just like the Billy Graham crusades whereby new converts went back to their Gospel-denying churches [5], Robin apparently did not see any

need to separate from his Seventh-day Adventist church and join a Bible-believing church. Instead, a reason with the aim of evangelism was given, which is the exact same reason given to excuse the same New-Evangelical practice half a century ago

New converts with a genuine experience of grace are planted in those liberal churches as a New Testament witness.... Furthermore, Christ, Paul, and all the great evangelists followed a similar pattern. [6]

There is a reason why the doctrine of separation [7] exists, and it is not because Reformed folks delight in disunity within the Body of Christ, but that true biblical unity only occurs among those who believe the Gospel, NOT all who profess to be Christian [8]. The failure to realize what true biblical unity is and pursue false ecclesiastical unity proved disastrous for the Church in the second half of the 20th century, as both Iain Murray [9] and Ernest Pickering [10] demonstrates, the former coming from a Reformed perspective and the latter coming from a Fundamentalist perspective. Neo-Evangelicalism has evolved in the last 50 years of church history, and its fruit is anything but good. It has given us serious doctrinal compromise and the blurring of what the Gospel is, of which a significant error was in considering Liberals and Roman Catholics Christians. The doctrinal rot precipitated the Inerrancy controversy of the 1960s to the 1980s as Evangelical students came back from liberal colleges tainted with the error of Liberalism [11]. Fuller Theological Seminary embrace the error of Feminism soon after [12], and New Evangelicals found a new openness to the pseudo-scientific theory of evolution [13], and even sexual 'liberation' [14]. This is not to mention the pragmatism and market-drivenness that has crept into Christian ministry, best seen in the Seeker-Sensitive [15] and Purpose Driven [16] brands [17] which can be found even within the 'conservative' wing of modern-day so-called "Evangelicalism". All of these are the bad fruit of the New Evangelical movement, with her failure to practice the biblical command of separation in her attempt to 'win the culture' resulting in little change towards orthodox Christianity outside while she loses her soul in the process.

Will we therefore learn from history? Already in the early stages of the Calvinist Resurgence, this doctrine of separation does not seem to be practiced. Besides the case of Robin, it should be remembered that the author of the book Collin Hansen himself is an editor with the largest New Evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*. In an article for Reformation21 [18], the online magazine (ezine) of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Hansen has written

As for fundamentalists, I have heard testimonies of college and seminary students who tell me something big is stirring. Perhaps there is hope that these young Calvinists will rebuild the bridges burned generations ago between evangelicals and fundamentalists.

It is definitely a good thing that largely Arminian Fundamentalists discover the biblical truths of the Reformed faith. Nevertheless, notice what Hansen has said with regards to the "bridge burned generations ago". The historical fact was that the bridge was burned by the New Evangelicals, not mere evangelicals, who repudiate the biblical doctrine of separation. This failure to understand the initial issue of contention half a century ago, together with his work as editor for the New Evangelical flagship magazine *Christianity Today* seems to show that Hansen himself is a New Evangelical.

Seeing the destructive fruit of New Evangelicalism in the second half of the 20th century, it is sad that New Evangelical Calvinism, what Hansen calls the New Calvinists or New Calvinism, is moving in the exact same direction as New Evangelicalism half a century ago. Similar to New Evangelicalism [19], modern-day New Evangelical Calvinism talks about redeeming the culture [20]. Both ignore the doctrine of separation, and time will tell how strong the present emphasis on the Gospel and being Gospel centered would last. If the history of New Evangelicalism is any guide, the focus on the Gospel would last only one generation, with the next generation running into various errors though still claiming to be Gospel-centered.

References

[1] Colin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's journey with the New Calvinists*(Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 156

[2] Charles Spurgeon, *A Defense of Calvinism*. Accessed online at <http://www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm>

[3] Hansen, p. 16

[4] "The issue of the Seventh-Day Adventists" in Daniel H. Chew, *Book Review: The Kingdom of the Cults* (http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd_chc82/articles/thekingdomofthecults_review.html#SDA)

[5] See Ernest D. Pickering, *The Tragedy of Compromise: The Origin and Impact of the New Evangelicalism*(Greenville, SC, USA: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), p. 66-67.

[6] W. R. White, "Modern Pharisees and Sadducees," *Baptist Standard*, 2 July 1958, p. 5. As quoted in Pickering, p. 67

[7] Daniel H. Chew, *The Doctrine of Separation* (http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd_chc82/theology/separation.html)

[8] This point was succinctly put by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones in his address to the Evangelical Alliance meeting in 1966, as narrated by Iain H. Murray in his book *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000*(Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA: Banner of

Truth Trust, 2000), p. 44-46.

[9] Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*.

[10] Ernest D. Pickering, *The Tragedy of Compromise*.

[11] To gain intellectual respectability, bright students from evangelical churches were sent to liberal theological colleges, where they were contaminated by Liberalism. On the inerrancy controversy, as recounted in Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*,

With some subtlety and slight dealing with crucial texts, [James] Dunn presented a case that the Bible does not teach that it is inerrant and that it is indeed more honoring to Scripture and to the Holy Spirit to recognize that fact. He also saw the text of the Bible as 'historically relative'. He argued that because some of its teaching was once true it does not necessarily follow that it is true for all time. Further, the Holy Spirit may give a text a meaning for us now which was not the original meaning, and to accept this, he claimed, is to 'exalt the Spirit' over the letter. Simply to be bound by 'the letter' is 'Pharisaic legalism', and when evangelicals attribute to Scripture the authority which belongs only to God they are guilty of 'bibliolatry'. As far as the teaching of Warfield and Princeton on Scripture was concerned, Dunn's language was unmeasured. It was 'exegetically improbable, hermeneutically defective, theologically dangerous, and educationally disastrous'. (p. 182)

[12] Pickering, pp. 78, 83

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 81-81

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87

[15] For example, see Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary: How to Reach Friends and Family Who Avoid God and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 1993)

[16] Bob DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity: Understanding the Purpose Driven Movement* (Springfield, MO, USA: 21st Century Press, 2006)

[17] A good book exposing the false "Christianity" of modern times would be Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternate Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Books, 2008)

[18] Collin Hansen, *Reflections on Young, Restless, and Reformed* Reformation21 ezine, Feb 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/reflections-on-young-restless-and-reformed.php>.

[19] Pickering, pp. 9-10

[20] Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev. — Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 2006, 15-16. Also Mark Driscoll, *Times Magazine names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea* The Resurgence (http://theresurgence.com/new_calvinism)

<http://christianresearchnetwork.com/?p=10795>