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THE REVIEW

Gratitude or Greed?

By Dr. Bob Payne, Moderator IBFNA

I am writing this moderator's column a few weeks before Thanksgiving. We have so much for which to be thankful in our country. God has indeed shed His grace on us. Material blessings abound. Even the poorest of us is rich in comparison with many others who live in other countries. Like no other country, we have every reason to be grateful for what we have.

In Deut. 8:12-14, Moses shares with Israel some things that they were not to forget when they entered the prosperity of the promised land. They were to beware to keep the Lord's commandments, "Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

Greedy Christians

I wonder if believers in our nation today have not fallen into the same trap that Israel did. We too have forgotten God. Instead of embracing an attitude of humble thanksgiving, we have become greedy and avaricious.

The author of Hebrews writes in 13:5: "Let your conversation [conduct] be without covetousness [without the love of money, without greed]; and be content with such things as ye have." Paul wrote in 1 Tim. 6:10: "For the love of money is the root of all [kinds of] evil." We are not to have a greedy fondness for the "almighty" dollar. Indeed, it leads to the committing of many other sins: immorality, stealing, dishonesty, selfishness, covetousness, etc. The question is, "Have we fallen into the trap of materialism and greed?"

Some say, "Of course I'm not greedy! I don't have enough money to be greedy!" They would relegate this kind of attitude and behavior to money-grabbing charlatan preachers on TV and to the super-rich. I would remind those who think that way of two things. First, recall what was said at the beginning of this article. Even the poorest of us is rich in comparison to someone in another country. Compared to much of the world we are the super-rich. Second, the attitude of greed can rear its ugly head in the hearts of both rich and poor. You do not need to have riches to love and lust for more.

The manifestation of "all kinds of evil" associated with this love of riches among believers is abundant today. Sometimes it shows up in shady business dealings or



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CALVINIST AND
NEW CALVINISM

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dishonesty in order to avoid paying taxes. Other times it is not so overt, but it manifests itself by stingy giving to one's local church.

Sadly, some believers are willing to compromise their convictions for the sake of the dollar. Praise God that some are not! When I was a young man, I recall my father pulling out his retirement investment from a Christian organization that was tolerating immorality in its ranks. Although he faced significant financial penalty for rolling over his funds, he did it anyhow, because it was the right thing to do. We need to stand up for what is right no matter what the cost.

Avarice in Leadership

It is perhaps most distressing to see pastors and deacons in local churches struggle with this insidious sin of the love of money. The Word of God is very pointed when it comes to the qualifications for church leadership in relation to wealth. In 1 Tim. 3:3, the pastor is commanded to be "not covetous." The Greek word here means *to not love money*. It is the same Greek word used in Heb. 13:5. The qualifications for pastor laid out in Titus 1:7 present a similar idea. The Greek word is different, but the concept is the same: *not given to filthy lucre*. According to the standard lexicon the idea of being given to filthy lucre means to be "shamelessly greedy for money."

It is sad and despicable to see a shepherd fleece his sheep and steal from the Lord. At times pastors will bilk a congregation by demanding more and more compensation or benefits. A pastor should

not pursue wealth. The man of God must be an example of one who lives by faith, not by the accumulation of riches. He needs to be characterized by a spirit of thanksgiving.

The Scriptures also tell us in 1 Tim. 3:8 that deacons need to be "likewise" qualified: "not greedy of filthy lucre." It is same word used of the pastor in Titus 1:7. Deacons need to have the same high character and not have their minds set on possessions or fortune. Keep in mind that it is not the riches themselves that are evil, but the wrong attitude toward them.

So Which Will It Be?

So which will it be: gratitude or greed? Col. 3:2 says, "Set your affection [or mind] on things above, not on things on the earth." Let us ask ourselves honestly: "Do we have a heavenly mindset and a heart of gratitude; or do toys, possessions, and money mean far more than they should?"

Fully surrendered—silver and gold,
His, who hath given me riches untold.

All, all belong to Thee,
For Thou didst purchase me,
Thine evermore to be, Jesus, my Lord.

Fully surrendered—Lord, I am Thine;
Fully surrendered, Savior divine!

Live Thou Thy life in me;
All fullness dwells in Thee;
Not I, but Christ in me, Christ all in all.

(Alfred C. Snead)

Concerns with the *Calvinist* Documentary Film and the New Calvinism Movement

By Jonathan Peters*

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Les Lanphere and Filming Preparations

Les Lanphere is a young man who has worked in

the film industry for some time.¹ He has worked as the stereoscopic compositor on *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011: "Rated PG-13 for intense prolonged sequences of sci-fi action violence, mayhem and destruction, and for language, some sexuality and innuendo") and *The Smurfs* (2011), and as compositor of *Epic* (2013). He was also digital painter for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), a film rated R for brutal,

sexual content.

Lanphere is also a self-described Calvinist, and he wanted to use his film expertise to create a new documentary on Calvinism.² Therefore, he launched a Kickstarter campaign in June 2016 to raise funds for such a project. He even offered donors the opportunity to receive a T-shirt, coffee mug, and TULIP beer glass if they pledged a certain amount of money. The initial goal to cover basic costs was \$35,000, and Lanphere achieved this within a few days of starting his campaign. In the end, he had 1,024 backers donating \$82,838, allowing him to do extended interviews and to produce DVDs and Blu-Rays.³ The first trailer for the film premiered at the January 2017 G3 Conference, and the film was officially released on October 2, 2017.

Cast and Purposes of the Film

As the promotion video explains, Lanphere had three purposes for this film: (1) to “explain Calvinism,” (2) to “celebrate the Calvinist movement over the last 10 years or so” [Young, Restless, and Reformed movement/New Calvinism/Reformed Resurgence], and (3) to “encourage Calvinists to keep going.”

In order to help him achieve these goals, he interviewed “the most interesting teachers he could get a hold of,” which included R. C. Sproul (now deceased), Paul Washer, Steve Lawson, Shai Linne, Kevin DeYoung, James White, Ligon Duncan, Joe Thorn, Collin Hansen, Joel Beeke, Michael Horton, Timothy Brindle, R. Scott Clark, Carl Trueman, Jeff Durbin, Tim Challies, Josh Buice, and Summer White. Clips of other self-professed Calvinists were also inserted in the film, which included John Piper, Al Mohler, Mark Dever, John MacArthur, Thabiti Anyabwile, Matt Chandler, Mark Driscoll, Tim Keller, and D. A. Carson.

The Film’s Explanation of Reformed Theology and Early History

After an introduction on the rise of New Calvinism, *Calvinist* gives an explanation of the theology and early history of Calvinism. Lanphere does this through interviews and with cartoon and retro Nintendo-style animation. Many watching the film will likely concur that the gospel and TULIP are propositionally stated in the film.

Lanphere’s Take on the Rise of New Calvinism

The film then shifts back to talking about the

Young, Restless, and Reformed (YRR) movement. In the introduction, Lanphere’s film seems to state that New Calvinism was a reaction to the church-growth movement by young people in the early 21st century who were dissatisfied with shallowness. These young people then took to the internet to find something with more depth. They could see the Emergent Church movement, but they shied away from its liberalism. Instead, they turned to Reformed theology, being allegedly attracted to the doctrinal clarity and expositional preaching of figures who would eventually become leaders in New Calvinism.

As was mentioned, after the introduction, Lanphere examines Calvinism’s theology and early history, and then shifts back to examining the Reformed Resurgence. In this reprisal, the film suggests that the movement had its roots in Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Banner of Truth, and then later J. I. Packer, James Montgomery Boice (Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology [PCRT]), and R. C. Sproul (Ligonier Ministries).

Just as the Reformers and the Puritans, Lloyd-Jones and Banner of Truth may have had some influence on the Reformed Resurgence of the 21st century, but that influence has been only tangential at best. The YRR are not flocking to Banner Conferences (or Ligonier and PCRT for that matter), in comparison to the two large, “Reformed” organizations discussed further below.

Other figures such as John MacArthur (Grace to You Ministries and The Master’s Seminary), John Piper (Desiring God Ministries and former pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church), Al Mohler (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), Mark Dever (Capitol Hill Baptist Church and 9Marks Ministries), Tim Keller (Redeemer City to City and former pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church), D. A. Carson (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and Mark Driscoll (former pastor of Mars Hill Church and former head of Acts 29 Network) were listed in the film as key influential figures, and these (with the exception of MacArthur to a great extent)⁴ plus a number unlisted truly have had a greater influence on the New Calvinism movement.

Missing Personnel and Organizations (T4G and TGC)

Some may say that a 90-minute film cannot possibly cover everything about this movement, but the film was clearly missing some important personnel,

conferences, and institutions. Probably the greatest omission from the film is the absence of any explicit discussion of Together for the Gospel (T4G) or The Gospel Coalition (TGC).

A clip of Anyabwile preaching is shown, which appears to be from a T4G platform (and maybe one of Chandler), but that is it. T4G and TGC are the premiere conferences/institutions of New Calvinism, and an omission of this magnitude is inexplicable (T4G had 12,500 people in attendance at its 2018 conference, more than any other known “Reformed” conference). Hence, other prominent “Reformed” figures associated with these organizations were missing from the film.

This reviewer may have accidentally missed something, but there appeared to be no mention of charismatic Sovereign Grace Ministries/Churches (SGM/C) and its prominent figures, particularly C. J. Mahaney and Bob Kauflin. While Reformed rap (“holy hiphop”) is mentioned and broadcasted in the film, no discussion is given to the pop-rock hymnody composed by Kauflin (or other SGM/C musicians) or Keith and Kristyn Getty. Non-cessationist Wayne Grudem, whose systematic theology is well-known and used in the YRR movement, was also not mentioned.

Some may also wish that there was coverage of David Platt (author of *Radical* and president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board) and Russell Moore (president of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission [ERLC]). Although the film talks about John Piper, there was no extensive coverage of his Christian Hedonism philosophy and embrace of charismaticism (many New Calvinists cling to these two philosophies). Tim Keller was mentioned in the film as an apologist, but no mention was made of his embrace of theistic evolution (which a number of the YRR also tolerate).

Lanphere’s Insufficient Critique

As the film progresses, Lanphere’s cast offers various encouragements for people in the movement. The cast encourages New Calvinists to refrain from “the cage stage,” i.e. belittling anyone who is not Calvinist. After a portrayal of Driscoll’s failed ministry at Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA, the film exhorts listeners to beware of celebrityism (this is rather a strange exhortation, for the film implicitly encourages celebrityism by its display of the “who’s who” in New Calvinism). The film also encourages

Calvinists to be a part of a local church ministry and to adhere to confessionalism. Lastly, the film critiques the racism that some Calvinists have adopted and promotes racial reconciliation.

Some of these encouragements are necessary, but overall, the film’s exhortations are woefully insufficient and at times mishandled. The main reason the film’s exhortations fall short is that the film does not expound the full breadth of historic Calvinism and Reformed figures, churches, and movements between the Protestant Reformation and New Calvinism, nor does it exhibit contemporary Reformed figures like Peter Masters (Metropolitan Tabernacle), who oppose New Calvinism from a historic, Reformed standpoint.

Had these figures and movements properly been shown, viewers would understand that the movement would better be labeled Young, Restless, and *Deformed*. This appellation sounds harsh, but upon careful examination, one will see that “New Calvinism is a truncated form of [historic] Calvinism, syncretized with deviant doctrines and worldliness.”⁵ New Calvinism is not a revival of biblical Christianity, nor are many of its adherents the rightful heirs of the Protestant Reformers or the Puritans.

Anti-confessionalism, Charismaticism, and Theistic Evolution

New Calvinism, as is exemplified by many of the youth in their twenties, thirties, and forties (as well as a number of its older leaders), claims to be committed to the five points of Calvinism (TULIP) and gives hat tips to the works of deceased Calvinists such as John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Beyond this, the “Reformedness” of the YRR gets fuzzy.

Anti-confessionalism is a problem in the YRR, particularly when it comes to charismaticism⁶ and theistic evolution⁷ (not mentioned as problems in the film). A number hold to these aberrations, which directly contradict the historic creeds and confessions of Calvinism. Others within the movement may not cling to these aberrations, but they embrace those who do, thus signifying that charismaticism and theistic evolution are insignificant issues (i.e., not really important to the essence of Calvinism). These deviant doctrines however are not unimportant. They are subtle attacks against the inerrancy, inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture, the foundation of all fundamental doctrines.⁸

Ecumenism

A number of the leaders of New Calvinism also veer from historic Calvinism by joining hands ecclesiastically with Roman Catholics and other false religionists, and by treating deceased unbelievers as if they were Christians. Much of this may stem from the fact that New Calvinist leaders look back to Billy Graham as their hero.

Although overlooked by many, Graham's violations of 2 John 10-11 were possibly the most notorious of any in the history of evangelicalism. He partook in the evil deeds of unbelievers by having them sponsor his evangelistic crusades, appear on religious platforms with him, and offer prayers on those same platforms. Furthermore, Graham sent crusade "converts" back to apostate churches and repeatedly spoke well of Roman Catholicism and the Pope.

In like manner, "Ligon Duncan and Al Mohler (TGC members and T4G participants) both signed the Manhattan Declaration which affirms that Evangelicals, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox leaders are all 'Christians.' . . . At a [2016] 'Christian' social justice conference, Russell Moore (TGC) spoke alongside a Roman Catholic priest (Michael Louis Pfleger) and a progressive 'Evangelical' (Tony Campolo), who accepts 'Christian gay couples into the Church.'"⁹

In 2017, Tim Keller spoke at a religious conference at the theologically liberal (PCUSA) Princeton Seminary.¹⁰ John Piper even has shared Passion Conference platforms with Beth Moore and Christine Cain (charismatic women preachers) and gay-affirming singer Carrie Underwood. He has also ineptly assessed the ministry of N. T. Wright, proponent of the heretical New Perspective on Paul.¹¹ Within the last couple of years, some New Calvinists have also treated the late Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. as believers, even though they were liberal/neo-orthodox theologians.¹²

Hedonism

Piper, the designated "father" of New Calvinism, also declares an unbiblical/un-Reformed philosophy, which essentially says that God is most glorified by men when they chiefly pursue pleasure (which he would say, of course, must be "in God"). Although some would try to contest this assessment, Piper ultimately makes a god out of pleasure (contrast II Tim. 3:4). In fact, Piper's barometer for men to measure their effectiveness in glorifying God is how much pleasure they get ("out of Him"). In other words,

man and man's emotions are the center of Christian Hedonism.¹³

Therefore, this philosophy at its core is anthropocentric, not theocentric (in contrast to Piper's philosophy, read Puritan Thomas Manton's *A Treatise on Self-Denial*, p. 128). Piper, in his pursuit of pleasure, also fails to differentiate between passions and godly affections, which contributes in part to the problem in the next paragraph.¹⁴

Bohemianism

A vital ingredient to New Calvinism is Bohemianism.¹⁵ The YRR by and large believe in the cultural neutrality postulate (aesthetic relativism), which says that art (especially aural) is amoral. Many also hold to multiculturalism, a philosophy which links culture inherently with ethnicity (more on this later) and calls all cultures (ways of life [which include artistic expressions] based on beliefs and values) equally good.

The YRR then combine these two philosophies with neo-Kuyperian transformationalism in order to "redeem" all art forms for Christ (often by infusing them with "Jesus-language") for the advancement of "human flourishing" and "effective evangelism."

The problem is that art is not neutral, culture is not intrinsically tied to ethnicity, and wicked artistic expressions cannot be redeemed (wicked people, however, are redeemed by God's grace, and they will mortify their wicked expressions, artistic or otherwise [Rom. 8:13, Col. 3:5]). Since the YRR embrace these aberrant philosophies, they often then end up imbibing various forms of Bohemianism: smoking, tattoos, profane language, violent/sensual film-viewing, flaunting celebration of alcohol consumption, and especially pop music (and similar genres).

Multitudes of New Calvinists promote rock-n-roll and rap. But these man-made cultural expressions, to put it mildly, are "incapable of bearing the weight and gravity of the Gospel."¹⁶ In fact, these musical compositions, regardless of their word content, express sensuality, triviality, fragmentation, and/or unbridled rage (contrast Ps. 29:2, Phil. 4:8, James 1:20, II Pet. 2:11), all of which are antithetical to the Gospel.¹⁷

Multiculturalism and Marxism

The YRR view of culture has even affected their misunderstanding of racism and racial reconciliation. Racism, properly defined, is viewing and treating

some ethnicities as inferior to others. But a number of New Calvinists, in an attempt to combat racial division, go beyond this definition and link culture intrinsically to ethnicity. Therefore, in their minds, “anyone . . . who criticizes a culture not his own must be labeled a racist, ethnocentrist, paternalist, or microaggressor, and anyone who claims to depart from the intrinsic culture of his ethnicity must be treated as an inauthentic traitor.”¹⁸

As was stated earlier, culture is not intrinsic to ethnicity. There are no “unique ethnic, cultural genes.” Or, to put it another way, offspring of a particular ethnicity do not have innate, group proclivities for one art form or another. A man could lovingly criticize another person’s culture, not because he thinks that person comes from an ethnicity that is allegedly inferior (he may, in fact, come from the same ethnicity), but rather because that person is enraptured with ungodliness and is in need of the Gospel. Therefore, New Calvinists who stretch the definition of racism, in order to denounce all critics of culture as racists or inauthentic traitors, commit race-carding and slander (Ex. 20:16, Lev. 19:16, Deut. 19:16-20).

Furthermore, when New Calvinists “imply that culture is inherent to ethnicity, they [actually] fuel racial divide instead of solving it” for they 1) force people “to rigidly adhere to ethnic biological proclivities which do not exist” and 2) “prohibit . . . people from legitimately appreciating, appropriating, and/or condemning . . . cultures” embraced by others (contrast I John 4:1).¹⁹

As has been seen particularly over the last year, many New Calvinists have also imbibed tenets of Marxism and the conspiratorial critical race theory. This was especially seen at the TGC/ERLC sponsored MLK50 Conference and the 2018 T4G Conference, where a number of men seemed to “conflat[e] racial injustice with racial disparities . . . [without] identify[ing] distinctly oppressive laws” (contrast Lev. 19:15-16).²⁰

Much of this may stem from an undiscerning acceptance of Michael Emerson and Christian Smith’s 2000 book, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, a book which Darrell Harrison says slanderously paints “a broad and accusatory brush” for “an entire ethnic population.”²¹

Around the same time as these conferences, Anabwire on TGC’s website implicitly displayed his affinity for these theories by accusing all white

Americans living in the 1960s as “complicit” in the murder of MLK and demanding that their offspring repent by proxy (contrast Deut. 24:16).²² At times, acceptance of these theories has also led men to advocate for racial quotas in ministry (contrast James 2:1, 8-9), and it could potentially lead to a demand for a forced distribution of wealth (contrast Exod. 20:15).

Conclusion

The question then is: “What should be done with New Calvinism?” The movement has been confronted multiple times over the last decade, yet without any substantial changes being made from within. Therefore, in the simplest terms, one should separate from the movement and warn others about it (Ps. 1, Matt. 18:15-17, II Thess. 3:6, 14-15, Titus 3:10-11).

Godly men who are in the movement, or who have given a tacit endorsement to it by appearing in this film, should forsake their involvement. Such a bold and biblical move might encourage others to do the same. It might wake up the YRR in the lethargy of their sin.

Charismatics, evolutionists, ecumenists, Marxists, hedonists, and Bohemians (like Lanphere) should repent of their ungodly doctrines and lifestyles. A number of these worldly “Calvinists” may even be without Christ (Matt. 7:15-23, I John 2:15-17). But if they likewise “repent . . . and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15), they will find that God “will have mercy upon [them,] and . . . will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).

Godly men outside the movement have several options before them. If they know someone personally in the movement, they may feel burdened to pray for him and to exhort him to come out. Likewise, pastors and seminary professors may wish to warn people of the dangers of this movement (II Tim. 4:1-5). Young people particularly need instruction (II Tim. 2:22) since they are often prone to following worldly fads like New Calvinism. Although one cannot be exhaustive in his coverage of the movement, it may be very beneficial to mention specific names and organizations from the pulpit, Sunday school platform, or classroom lectern to provide greater specificity and guidance (as the Apostle Paul did, i.e. II Tim. 2:17).

Godly, Reformed men could furthermore shepherd those under their care away from New Calvinist materials (particularly those which propound the



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errors listed above), and instead, encourage the reading of the Scriptures, the Reformers, the Puritans, and other great Reformed individuals in the same historic vein (II Tim. 1:13, 2:2, 3:14-15). These options, in tandem with regular expositional preaching, reverent worship, fervent prayer, discipleship, and evangelism by local churches, may be God’s instruments to bring a great revival to Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8).

Endnotes

- 1 www.imdb.com/name/nm4814046.
- 2 www.missionalwear.com/calvinist-movie-disc.
- 3 www.kickstarter.com/projects/calvinist/calvinist-documentary-film/description.
- 4 Since the original publication of this article in June 2018, John MacArthur wrote a series of articles and signed a statement denouncing the infiltration of Marxism and the critical race theory into Christianity. The author of this review would like to commend MacArthur for his recent stand.
- 5 acc4truth.org/2016/11/22/new-calvinism.
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- 10 thetab.com/us/princeton/2017/04/14/prestigious-award-rescinded-church-leader-still-lectured-princeton-theological-seminary-4867. Evangelicals played up Princeton’s revoking its decision to give Keller the Kuyper Award due to the PCA’s stance on women and homosexuality (which is now deteriorating). But the more amazing thing is that Keller would have accepted the honor from Princeton had they bestowed it upon him, and that he still spoke at the liberal seminary.
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