

Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). 160 pages. \$14.99. ISBN-10: 1-581314-940-8. John J. Murray, *Catch the Vision: Roots of the Reformed Recovery* (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 2008), 191 pages. ISBN 0-85234-667-0 \$15.60

Our city's daily newspaper, the *Times-Free Press*, is currently aiming to bolster sagging circulation by taking and publishing random photographs of area residents. Their promotional slogan is now, "Have you been spotted?" Implicit in the campaign is the hope that we will purchase and read the daily paper in hope of catching just such a glimpse. This clever approach crossed my mind as I read these two titles, each of which attempts to describe the resurgence of conservative Reformed theology in recent decades.

"Have we been spotted?" may seem a rather egocentric approach to appraising these two books. But when one considers that our P.C.A., since its inception in 1973, has grown to be the largest confessional Presbyterian denomination in North America and in the English-speaking world, the expectation that we might find our church, or elements within it, investigated and explored by these writers has a certain warrant. Our rise in the 1970's, as well as our steady growth, would seem to place us squarely in the time-frame the two writers have targeted. Yet in fact, the P.C.A. is barely mentioned in either. Why is this, and what does the omission tell us about the two volumes in question and about ourselves?

Both *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (hereafter YRR) and *Catch the Vision* (hereafter CTV) are books focused upon significant pastors and theologians who have wielded extensive influence in the resurgence of Calvinist theology since the middle of the twentieth century. Yet, there are strong differences of focus: CTV is concerned with a half-century of developments beginning with the 1950's; YRR, by contrast concerns itself primarily with trends since 1990. There is also a markedly different geographic focus: CTV is exclusively taken up with persons hailing from the United Kingdom (beginning with the late D.M. Lloyd Jones [1899-1981], long

associated with London's Westminster Chapel), whereas YRR is exclusively concerned to highlight American figures (beginning with John Piper, long associated with Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis).

Such differences of chronology and of geographic focus, though notable, are not the most striking contrasts. Surely it is of significance that CTV is concerned exclusively with leaders who had long associations with British conservative evangelicalism (in Westminster Chapel, or the Banner of Truth Movement, etc.) whereas YRR is taken up with select individuals in America who have come to prominence with very large, usually independent churches and movements (e.g. C.J. Mahaney and the Sovereign Grace churches, and Mark Driscoll of Mars Hills Church, Seattle). One could go on.

Some reader may insist that while the noted differences are real, they are in the end not significant; all that matters is that the trans-Atlantic movement of Calvinism is growing and visible. I beg to differ, and maintain that each of these books – for all their insight and keen observation – are still flawed because they offer only fragmentary portions of a large, still-unfolding story. Let me be pointed. The selectivity of these volumes (admittedly each in its own way) introduces serious elements of distortion into our understanding.

If the author of CTV had wished to do so, he could as easily have provided examples of highly-contemporary forms of Calvinism from the United Kingdom as did the author of YRR, from within the U.S.A. One thinks, for example, of the ministry of Peter Lewis of Cornerstone Evangelical Church, Nottingham, United Kingdom and of Ian Meredith of Smithton-Culloden Free Church of Scotland. But author John J. Murray did not do so, not because he was unaware of such other streams of Calvinism, but because he did not choose to give them a part in the story he meant to tell. CTV is a story of *succession*, and Murray is not ready to acknowledge that

all and sundry who owe allegiance to evangelical Reformed theology (even within the U.K.) are a part of the line of succession which he traces to Martyn Lloyd Jones, Arthur Pink, and Prof. John Murray.

John J. Murray hardly explores either the trans-Atlantic role played by North American Calvinist leaders in the half-century of British Calvinist resurgence he reviews. While he allows that American Reformed books, shipped to Britain (often via Belfast) earlier in the twentieth century performed an important service in helping to sustain the Reformed cause until it rebounded there in the 1950's (pp. 40-41), and mentions the early republishing program of Jay Green, this does slight justice to the wider picture. Neglected is the testimony of those who were university students in the U.K. in the early 1950's, and who were taken aback, and eventually charmed by the strident Reformed preaching of Philadelphia's Donald Grey Barnhouse in IVF campus missions. Barnhouse exercised this kind of ministry on both sides of the Atlantic for thirty years at mid-century. And did it count for nothing, in a trans-Atlantic way, that a successor to Barnhouse, James Boice launched in 1972 the series of Philadelphia Conferences on Reformed Theology - a series eventually replicated in multiple American cities (and often utilizing UK preachers)? CTV, in short, gives us a view of the current Reformed resurgence since 1950 from a vantage point somewhere near the Murrayfield, Edinburgh offices of the Banner of Truth Trust. Murray's is an interesting - even intriguing story; but it is at best, a quite selective slice of a picture which is much larger. One might call it 'party history'.

Selectivity is also the besetting sin of YRR; yet with a difference. To be fair, the skillful journalist - author, Collin Hansen, follows a trajectory which never pretends to explain the resurgent North American Reformed movement as a whole; his task has been to explore and document the movement which he typifies as "new Calvinist". Even so, the weakness of the volume is that he displays little curiosity to explain the relationship in which the "new

Calvinists" stand in relation to the "old" (i.e. confessionally Reformed denominations and seminaries). At certain points, Hansen is dismissive of older Calvinism, as when he speaks of the American Calvinism epitomized by Grand Rapids, as "frozen". He might have explored the ways in which the "new Calvinists" need the old, and vice versa. As most of those of the new variety upon whom Hansen focuses are tied to few explicit articles of faith ensuring ongoing allegiance to Reformed theology, the question legitimately arises as to what will ensure the ongoing allegiance of the new Calvinists to their newfound belief-system. Alliances are in the interest of all in the long run.

Can PCA'ers "spot" themselves in the story told by these authors? The answer is "barely". Our exemplary church planter, Tim Keller is mentioned in passing. Past General Assembly Moderator, Ligon Duncan, is mentioned as exemplary in his willingness to forge alliances with representatives of the "new Calvinist" movement. These are, at very least, reminders that journalist Hansen sees us and knows of us.

Yet, as for the vision of YRR, we need to ask ourselves why - when journalist Collin Hansen went looking for examples of passionate younger Calvinists, whose worship and preaching is characterized by fervency, and the increasing thrust of which is evangelism and missions, it did not occur to him to study us more intensely. Is it that his vision was clouded? He would not admit to this. For, in a section of his fascinating book that I wish were longer, Hansen explains that while both his "new Calvinists" and older Calvinists (such as are found in the P.C.A.) are both determined to build on the past, the reality is that the two groups are clearly attempting to emulate different epochs of past Reformed history. His "new Calvinists" see themselves as trying to advance an agenda comparable to what we associate with the eighteenth century awakening ministries of Whitefield and Edwards, whereas "old Calvinists"

(and he uses Westminster Seminary, Escondido's Michael Horton as an example) are more determined to advance a sixteenth century agenda (p.113).

Though I wish Hansen had more shades of color on his artist's palette in drawing this contrast, I think that we must grant that he has pinpointed something which deserves our very careful attention. Is it just possible that in our zeal to recover early Reformed heritage and practice, we have been selective and committed ourselves to a course of theological restorationism which drastically complicates our ability to articulate the gospel meaningfully at a time of drastic cultural shift? Is it the case that our worship services unduly require us to engage in backwards time-travel? The Calvinists honored by Hansen are certainly traveling lighter than we.

Both CTV and YRR deserve our perusal. Yet in my judgment, it is only the latter volume which, because of its North American orientation and focus upon contemporary developments within our culture, provokes us to ask why our own movement cannot be "spotted". If we are not numbered with the "new Calvinists" is that as it should be and are we indeed better off?

Kenneth J. Stewart is professor of Theological Studies in Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, GA.