congregation. Thus, the book will bear fruit in the lives of those willing to put the time and effort into reading it.

Jeffrey A. Stivason
Pastor, Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church
Gibsonia, Pennsylvania


A lot of journalistic water has flow under the bridge since Christianity Today magazine heralded the arrival of the so-called New Calvinism in September 2006. Collin Hansen, author of that piece, followed it up with a book of the same name in 2008 (reviewed in Presbyterion 34, no. 2 [Fall 2008]). Since then, major daily newspapers have continued to trumpet the resurgence of Calvinism as evidenced in bustling churches and crowded conferences. But while there has been ongoing discussion about the merits and demerits of this movement in the blogosphere, there has been little assessment of this trend in print form.

Enter Jeremy Walker, a UK pastor within the Grace Baptist Association, a long-standing movement loyal to historic Reformed Baptist standards. While positioned outside North America, Walker shows himself to be an astute observer of developments in the subculture we call the Reformed world as it exists on both sides of the ocean. The writer is a representative of what might be called older Calvinism. With this allegiance disclosed, one might jump to the conclusion that his analysis of recent developments will be shrill and nit-picking. But the reader who takes up The New Calvinism Considered will quickly be disabused of such a notion.

This is so because the opening chapters of the work show the author to be proceeding calmly and dispassionately to take the measure of this burgeoning movement now spurring the Atlantic. He has frequent great conferences; he evidently knows personally many principal leaders. He bends over backwards, one might say, to assume the stance of a humble observer. The entirety of chapter 3 is given over to "Commendations." Walker lauds the movement as Christ-honoring, grace-soaked, and missional (in the sense of going and making new disciples). He praises the movement for being supportive of the complementarian understanding of gender, innovative in its use of technology, and committed to the serial exposition of Scripture.

But there are concerns—and hence, this book. Two chapters, in particular, probe perceived weaknesses. In listing the "Characteristics of the New Calvinism" (ch. 2), Walker notes with concern (1) a readiness to equate belief in the sovereignty of God in salvation with being Reformed or Calvinistic; (2) an alarmingly strong focus on key leaders (it is a movement "built around names"); (3) an overly-differential attitude toward the opinions of these "names"; (4) a strong tendency toward slavish imitation of the views and practices of the movement’s luminaries; and (5) a trend toward interlocking "conglomeration," whereby one conference gathering will promote attendance at another, hosted elsewhere (one author in the movement similarly promotes the books of another, etc.). About these concerns, the fair-minded reader will want to insist that there is nothing that makes these observed tendencies unique to the particular stream of Christianity under Walker’s magnifying glass. These are tendencies which the sociologist of religion might find in a myriad of Christian movements.

And then (in ch. 4) Walker cites evidence of unhealthy pragmatism, an exaggerated reliance on statistics, and a determination to be hip at all costs (here the author mistakenly attributes the drive for cultural relevance to an exaggerated Kuyperian influence; this reviewer doubts that the latter is at all pervasive in New Calvinism). Of greater moment is his singling out unresolved questions within the New Calvinism about the nature of holiness and sanctification. Those familiar with the online tilting between Kevin DeYoung and Tullian Tchividjian at the Gospel Coalition (www.thegospelcoalition.org) about these issues will know that this question is far from resolved. This reviewer felt especially the force of Walker's singing out for comment what he sees as a New Calvinist evangelical ecumenism which—having insisted on divine sovereignty in salvation and full inspiration of the Scriptures—leaves in suspense questions over which sincere evangelical believers have strongly disagreed: baptism, gifts of the Spirit, and Federal Vision thinking. It is not simply that various such convictions are accommodated within New Calvinism; it is that holding diverse convictions on these matters is no barrier to assuming a prominent role (so long as the few doctrines deemed essential are maintained). One takes the point the writer is making, and yet reflects on the fact that without some such forbearance by evangelicals, we would each be left to converse only within the denominational circles we already inhabit.

Walker has genuine admiration for the New Calvinism and so should we all. He notes in closing his work that "if we can learn from those whose faith and love and hope exceeds ours, then we should not be too proud to do so" (108–09). Yet his parting counsel is an insistence that those who have long held to Reformed distinctives should continue to do so with determination: "we must be Calvinists." This is to say that the validity of our adherence to Reformed distinctives is not made or broken by our posture toward this emerging movement. This saine closing reflection might have been extended further. Church history shows helpful examples of assimilation of Reformed movements. On the one hand, the pre-Reformation Waldensian movement was eventually assimilated into the Swiss Reformation in 1532. Might the New Calvinism engulf the old? On the other hand, there is the example of the New Calvinist movements which emerged in Britain and America in light of the Great Awakening. These were by and large absorbed into pre-existing older Reformed movements—whether Baptist, Presbyterian, or Congregational. Which is the scenario that will unfold? Whatever it might be, let us be involved in it, and not look on from a distance.

Kenneth J. Stewart
Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College