

American Council of Christian Churches
75th Annual Convention, October 18-20, 2016
Faith Baptist Church, Kittery, Maine
“Resolution on New Calvinism”

In September 2006, Collin Hansen reported for *Christianity Today* on a new religious movement of professed Christians who took a renewed interest in Reformed theology. At that time, Hansen called the movement “Young, Restless, Reformed” (YRR), but later, he termed it “New Calvinism” and claimed that it was a “revival” of biblical Christianity.¹ By 2009, *Time Magazine* declared New Calvinism to be one of the “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now,”² and since then, the movement’s popularity has increased. All of this success seemed to validate Hansen’s claim of another spiritual awakening.

Hansen’s three adjectives (“Young, Restless, Reformed”) provide a rather fair description of this movement, and one adjective in particular explains its popularity. Even though most YRR leaders are age fifty or above, New Calvinism is mostly comprised of young adults in their twenties, thirties, or forties, as can be seen in two of the most popular YRR expressions: The Gospel Coalition (TGC) and Together for the Gospel (T4G). To an extent, the movement can also be called “Reformed” in that its constituents are, at a minimum, committed to the five points of Calvinism (TULIP) and appreciate the works of deceased Calvinists like John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, or Charles Spurgeon.

“Restless” though is the key descriptor of this movement, and it shows why New Calvinism is so popular. New Calvinism is restless in that it is dissatisfied with the godly standards and confessional theology held by previous generations of Calvinists. It is known for being culturally progressive and flaunts itself as such. In its worship, preaching, and evangelism, New Calvinism embraces popular culture, a man-made system of customs which is incapable of bearing the weight and gravity of the Gospel.³ TGC authors, in particular, blog about “redemptive” elements they supposedly have found within Hollywood films, and YRR evangelists in the vein of Tim Keller (TGC cofounder) integrate pop culture in their community outreaches,⁴ hoping to gain a better hearing from their unregenerate audiences. YRR leaders also endorse “worship music” composed by modern, pop-rock hymnists⁵ and “holy hip-hoppers” / “Reformed rappers.”⁶

Pop culture, a vital YRR ingredient, is one of the many characteristics which differentiates New Calvinism from godly Reformed movements, past and present. New Calvinism also refuses to adhere strictly to biblical truths expounded in the confessions and catechisms of historic Calvinism. Unlike most professed Calvinists since the sixteenth century, a number of New Calvinists push beyond the standard creeds and subscribe to Neo-Kuyperian postmillennialism, an eschatological position which claims that God has given His Church an institutional social mandate to redeem culture and promote social justice to help usher in the kingdom.⁷ Unlike the Puritans and Reformed fundamentalists who affirmed chapter four of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *London Baptist Confession of 1689*, New Calvinism embraces theistic evolution or joins hands with those who do.⁸ Likewise, in direct defiance of chapter one of both confessions, New Calvinism’s large umbrella⁹ includes non-cessationists.¹⁰ Furthermore, John Piper, the designated “father” of the YRR, has distorted Scripture, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, and the works of Jonathan Edwards to promote a brand of hedonism that makes God’s glory contingent on man’s pursuit of pleasure.¹¹

Finally, New Calvinism differs from traditional Calvinism in that it refuses to separate from heretics and disobedient Christians. Keller has affirmed Roman Catholic mystics such as Ignatius Loyola, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Teresa of Ávila.¹² 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.” Mohler also had Billy Graham (an ecumenical evangelist) conduct a crusade in Louisville, KY in 2001, just four years after Graham publically declared that some Muslims, Buddhists, and non-believers who do “not even know the name of Jesus . . . are saved.” Just this year at a “Christian” social justice conference,¹³ Russell Moore (TGC) spoke alongside a Roman Catholic priest (Michael Louis Pflieger) and a progressive “Evangelical” (Tony Campolo), who accepts “Christian gay couples into the Church.”¹⁴ Piper has likewise shared Passion Conference platforms with Beth Moore and Christine Caine (charismatic women “preachers”), and affirmed the ministries of Rick Warren, Daniel Fuller, and Mark Driscoll.¹⁵ Indisputably, the parameters of “Young, Restless, and Reformed” are not sufficient grounds for obedient Christian fellowship and cooperation. Like the New Evangelicalism of past generations, today’s New Calvinism lacks purity protected by a Bible doctrine of separation.

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches at its 75th annual convention, October 18-20, 2016, at Faith Baptist Church of Kittery, Maine, resolves to exhort all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ to beware of the leaven of New Calvinism. While some of the writings of New Calvinists can be appreciated with caution, Christ's people should rebuke and separate from the movement. New Calvinism is a truncated form of traditional Calvinism, syncretized with deviant doctrines and worldliness. Spurgeon, Edwards, and the apostle Paul would not recognize this movement as a revival of biblical Christianity. Finally, we affirm the words of Peter Masters, the current pastor of Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, who said: "You cannot have Puritan soteriology without Puritan sanctification. You should not entice people to Calvinistic (or any) preaching by using worldly bait. We hope that young people in this movement will grasp the implications of the doctrines better than their teachers, and come away from the compromises."¹⁶



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¹ Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed," *Christianity Today* 50, no. 9 (September 2006):

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>. Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Guide Journey with the New Calvinists*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 156.

² David Van Biema, "10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now: No. 3: The New Calvinism," *Time Magazine* (March 12, 2009): http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html.

³ See Abraham Kaplan, "The Aesthetics of the Popular Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1966): 351-364 and Kenneth A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 120.

⁴ Samuel G. Freedman, "Evangelists Adapt to a New Era, Preaching the Gospel to Skeptics," *New York Times* (March 4, 2016): http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/05/us/evangelists-adapt-to-a-new-era-preaching-the-gospel-to-skeptics.html?_r=0.

⁵ Such as Keith and Kristyn Getty, Stuart Townend, Bob Kauflin, Steve and Vicki Cook, and other Sovereign Grace Church musicians.

⁶ Such as Lecrae, Shai Linn, Trip Lee, Curtis Allen, Marcus Gray, and Timothy Brindle.

⁷ For a critique of this position, read Jon Anderson's series on "Center Church," The CrippleGate Blog: <http://thecripplegate.com/center-church-summary-and-contextualization/>.

⁸ See the 2014 ACCC "Resolution on Young Earth Creationism."

⁹ See the 2012 ACCC "Resolution on the Theological Danger of Non-cessationism."

¹⁰ Such as C. J. Mahaney (Sovereign Grace Churches), D. A. Carson (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), John Piper (Desiring God Ministries and Bethlehem College and Seminary), Matt Chandler (The Village Church and Acts 29 Network), and Wayne Grudem (Phoenix Seminary).

¹¹ Peter Masters, "Christian Hedonism: Is It Right?" *The Sword & Trowel*, no. 3, (2002): 10-16.

¹² "Keller and the mystics," The New Calvinists Blog: <http://www.newcalvinist.com/kellers-affinity-with-rome/keller-and-the-catholic-mystics/>.

¹³ "Speakers," The Justice Conference 2016, <http://www.thejusticeconference.com/speakers.html>.

¹⁴ Tony Campolo, "Tony Campolo: For the Record," Tony Campolo Blog (June 8, 2015): http://tonycampolo.org/for-the-record-tony-campolo-releases-a-new-statement/#.V_wObsmgs7H.

¹⁵ In fact, up until 2014, almost all New Calvinists affirmed Driscoll, the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA who was widely known for his vulgar preaching and teaching. Driscoll only lost favor with New Calvinist networks when stories of his deceitful and dictatorial leadership surfaced.

¹⁶ Masters, "New Calvinism – The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness," *The Sword & Trowel*, no. 2, (2009): <http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/Christian-Article/New-Calvinism-Merger-of-Calvinism-and-Worldliness/Sword-and-Trowel-Magazine>.