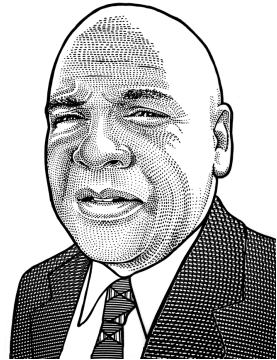


Introduction

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A number of years ago General Motors launched an ad campaign for its line of Buick automobiles in an effort to dispel the notion that Buicks were more suited for senior citizens. The slogan adopted for this campaign was “This Is Not Your Father’s Oldsmobile.” In many respects American Protestants are doing the same thing with historic Protestantism. It is as if we take great pride that this is not the Protestantism of Martin Luther, John Calvin, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and others. This is not the Protestantism of the historic confessions and catechisms. In short, only a fraction of the millions of professing evangelical Christians in America would identify themselves as Reformed, reformational, intentionally Calvinistic, or by whatever label that could be attached to those who embrace the theology of our Protestant forefathers. This volume, however, is not just about contemporary Christians who are not ashamed to embrace reformational Christianity. The contributors to this volume are African-American churchmen who openly adhere to historic Protestantism and the doctrines of grace. If it is rare for an American Christian in general to hold such convictions today, it is twice as rare for an African-American Christian. For the

contributors to this present work, the doctrines they embrace and expound are truly “not their father’s doctrines.”

When one thinks of an African-American Christian, a number of things might come to mind: a Baptist (freewill, of course), a Methodist, a Pentecostal, a quasi-Pentecostal, or even perhaps an adherent to the Prosperity Gospel or the Social Gospel. What one does not routinely expect to encounter is an African-American Christian who consciously embraces the theology of Luther, Calvin, and Edwards. These contributors don’t just enjoy reading these theologians of the past, and they do not simply glean their writings for good preaching material. No, they have plumbed the depths of systematic and biblical theology and have come out on the side of those who stand under the banner of Reformed or reformational theology. They have consciously rejected the anthropology of Pelagius, the soteriology of Wesley, the pneumatology of Azusa Street, the methodology of Finney, and similar systems of religious thought and expression.

So what do we mean by Reformed theology or the doctrines of grace? It is almost impossible to do justice to this broad theological subject in just a few short paragraphs. But I will try.

The most common summation of Reformed theology is the five points of Calvinism, couched in the acrostic TULIP: T=Total depravity, U=Unconditional election, L=Limited atonement, I=Irresistible grace, and P=Perseverance of the saints. What permeates these five points is the sovereignty and glory of God in our salvation. It begins with man’s total depravity, a result of the fall, which renders him utterly incapable of responding to the gospel, and ends with God persevering with his people to the end in spite of endless temptations and failures that face them. At the end of the day all glory is directed to the sovereign God who saves. It is his plan of salvation that is efficacious.

Reformed theology is also covenantal; God’s plan of salvation as revealed in Scripture is presented in a covenantal framework. Covenant is not superimposed on the Scripture as some may charge, but is interwoven throughout its narrative. Reformed theology unwraps the covenant language of Scripture, bringing to light important concepts and terms such as covenant of works,

covenant of grace, covenant mediator, federal head, and signs and seals.

Finally, Reformed theology is christocentric. All of God's saving works are accomplished in and by his only begotten Son. Jesus did not just die for our sins; in his life he performed the righteousness that God requires of us. Christ is the theme of all of Scripture. He is the prophet that proclaims the Word of God to his people for salvation (gospel) and to the world for judgment (law). All prophets that came before Christ prefigured and pointed to his unique prophetic office. And every faithful preacher since his coming declares his Word and stands in his authority.

Christ is our High Priest who has offered the one acceptable sacrifice for human sin. All other priests and their sacrifices pointed to Christ, and it is the promise of his coming that gave them significance, but Christ is the substance. Christ is our King who conquers our enemies, provides for our needs, and governs us through his Word. Reformed theology stresses union with Christ because in him are all the riches of God's grace. Without union with him we are still in our sins and under the condemnation of a just and holy God. Reformed theology is offensive to other doctrinal systems because it lays the ax to the root of human works and ability as the means of being justified before God.

The question this volume seeks to answer is, how? How did these men come to their theological and doctrinal understanding and conviction? But as the question of "how?" is addressed, the greater question arises—why? Why have these men chosen to part ways with the religious traditions and system that served as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement? On the surface it would appear that these African-American churchmen have sided with a system of religion that provided theological support for the oppression of our forefathers, and that they stand in opposition to traditional African-American Christianity that has been hailed as the impetus for our liberation. Of course, that view is shortsighted, superficial, and simplistic to say the least. But it still leads to the question of, why? The answer that permeates each chapter is the conviction from the Word of God. These men have

reached a point in their Christian walks where they are convinced that Christianity as articulated by the Protestant Reformation is the Christianity of the Bible. Though surrounded by inconsistent application and gross misrepresentation of the doctrines of grace, these writers have chosen to stand in the rich biblical and systematic theology of men with whom there are significant differences and disagreements on very important social and ethical issues. In some cases taking that stand has caused others to label them “pariah” or “sell-out” along with other derogatory and denigrating remarks. But nonetheless they remain undaunted in their conviction that the gospel is properly understood only through the doctrines of grace. This has emboldened them to take the road less traveled, so to speak.

This bold stance has led some of them to step outside the bounds of denominations traditionally associated with African-American Christians and join historically Reformed denominations such as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Some have remained within their denominations, but have committed to a different message and a different vision of the church from what they previously held. Still others have decided not to be denominationally affiliated and seek to pave new avenues for Reformed theology among African-American Christians.

Having considered the unique challenges inherent in bringing reformational theology to the context of the African-American church, I must hasten to add that this book is not just “a black thing” with no relevance or bearing outside the black church. As I stated before, the doctrines of grace are noticeably absent in most American evangelical churches. Therefore the essays in this volume can be helpful for any Christian or preacher who has recognized that something is drastically missing in American evangelicalism. It is my prayer that in reading this volume, those who have taken on the challenge of “reforming” a church will be greatly encouraged and assisted in their work. And may others be challenged to discover the more excellent foundation of the doctrines of grace and join us on the journey along the glory road.