

The TANC Manifesto

Permanent Demise of New Calvinism

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The Contemporary Rediscovery

In my first attempt to publish a book for the purpose of contending against New Calvinism, I wrote the following in the introduction:

The purpose of this collection of essays is to pull the elephant out of the barn and display it before the whole animal ends up digested unawares.

And in the second edition:

It hides behind orthodox verbiage: the gospel, obedience, justification, sanctification, repentance, etc., but what they mean by these terms is far from orthodox. Its proponents wax eloquent on all the vertical aspects of Scripture while leaving out the parts that contradict their Quietist, *let go and let God* doctrine. And this being largely unnoticed as they spoon feed their antinomian doctrine to the masses, a bite at a time.

Those first books were a collection of essays that focused on the tentacles of this octopus-like monster wreaking havoc on the church. Those books supply a service for documenting the massive contradictions of New Calvinism to the plain sense of Scripture. And “plain sense of Scripture” equals *freedom for the saints to interpret the Bible for themselves*. Let there be no doubt about this; the true intellectual freedom of the saints to pursue life changing truth is at stake in this issue.

But something more was needed. No monster is destroyed by cutting of the ends of his tentacles. To reveal the intellectual center of the monster presents the possibility of thrusting a spear through its brain. Not only that, the species that gave it birth can also be avoided in the future. Therefore, my focus has been the contemporary history of New Calvinism. The thesis set forth in volume one of *The Truth About New Calvinism* has been tested over and over again and found accurate. The book was the culmination of four years of intensive research.

The doctrine came from the Australian Forum which was a product of the Progressive Adventist Movement. The founder, Robert Brinsmead, claimed that he had rediscovered the true

Reformation gospel as taught by Luther. I ignored such claims; my focus was to establish the fact that the Australian Forum gave birth to present-day New Calvinism. My research included a formal email interview with Robert Brinsmead. He insisted that the rediscovery that launched the Progressive Adventist *Awakening Movement* was based primarily on the writings of Luther and other Reformers. He also stated he believed that the Forum packaged it in a way that launched it into the evangelical psyche of that day:

I didn't really say anything that was original - I gathered up jewels that others here and there had mined, and just put it together in a way that seemed clear and important to me. If I could, it would be easier to reply that I had copied the package from somewhere in particular, but I am not able to do that. What I was on about impacted others and sharpened others up-like Paxton and Goldsworthy-and Jons [Jon Zens] and a guy called Edward Fudge and others along the way (p. 37, *The Truth About New Calvinism* [TANC]).

What was not original is where Brinsmead got this theology:

In 1971, Brinsmead scheduled a flurry of summer institutes to bring us his latest emphasis. There was more excitement than usual; the latest round of tapes had prepared us for something big. Bob had been studying the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, comparing it to Roman Catholic doctrines. Reading Luther, he saw that justification is not just a means to the end of perfect sanctification. When we are justified by faith, not only does God impute Christ's righteousness to us but we also possess Christ Himself—all His righteousness and all His perfection. Eternity flows from that fact (P. 33, TANC).

But what was the “package” that the Forum developed to launch this rediscovery of the Reformation gospel?

Author: What do you think the unique theological findings of the Forum were in light of history?
Robert Brinsmead: “Definitely the centrality and all sufficiency of the objective gospel understood as an historical rather than an experiential event, something wholly objective rather than subjective - an outside of me event and the efficacy of an outside-of-me righteousness” (p. 94, TANC).

The centrality of the objective gospel outside of us, or COGOUS. That is the soul of New Calvinism. That is the brain of the octopus. In preparing for the second volume of TANC, my intention was to continue to amplify the findings of volume one, while articulating the “practical application” of this doctrine. Many who have read volume one of TANC ask: “Paul, how in the world do they say that this works in real life?” I have that figured out based on solid documentation, I just didn’t know what it was. I would explain it to them, and almost always the response was, “That sounds like Gnosticism.” Indeed.

Platonism, Mysticism, and the Failed Recovery Movements

Then something else has happened. I have been referred to others who have focused on different areas of influence that effect the Christian thinking of our day. These others see that we live in perilous times, but their focus is on a different cause and effect. I have met with one such person who focuses on the European theology that oppressed many generations and incited counter movements that pursued the freedom to interpret the Scriptures for ourselves. During our meeting, this person, who I consider to be a foremost authority on Reformation history, informed me that in fact, a COGOUS-like doctrine was the primary theology of Luther, and it was based on: *we will get to that later.*

This person concurs with Brinsmead's claim. I never doubted it much; it just wasn't my primary concern at the time. The connection between the Forum and Luther's theology is long and wide as the Forum published volumes of documentation to validate their claim. This was in the early 70's, and the Reformed community took note because of the Forum's documentation and the obvious explosive results that were taking place in the Adventist community. The result was a perfect storm of cultural indoctrination. But take note: one of the major aspects of this particular species of Reformed doctrine is "tyranny," and spiritual abuse.

Then there are others who have yet another concern. They see the pervasive Platonism in today's contemporary doctrines. They don't necessarily attach any of this to New Calvinism, but the Platonism that saturates New Calvinist thought is apparent (if you know what to look for) and propagated in broad daylight. A theme of one of the most prominent New Calvinist ministries of our day is "Between Two Worlds." That's not even ambiguous! Yet another is, "Between Two Spheres, Gazing at Christ—Our Heavenly Destiny." At some point, if my understanding is correct, Gnosticism came out of Neo-Platonism, but the kinship of Gnosticism and Platonism is apparent in their philosophical dualism. Plainly, to a large degree, the practical application of New Calvinism's COGOUS is Gnosticism. I will cite the following quote from a New Calvinist to illustrate this:

There are several problems with that essentially Legalistic view of Sanctification, as reflected in the following observations:

- 1) Our flesh cannot get better. In Romans 7:18 Paul wrote, "For I know that NOTHING good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh..." Your flesh cannot be improved. Flesh is flesh, and spirit is spirit.
- 2) Our new nature, on the other hand cannot get better, because it has already been made new and perfect through regeneration. We have been given a "new heart" (new nature, or new spirit), and not a defective one, which would be absurd. This new spirit has been made "one spirit with Him" (1 Corinthians 6:17), such that when we "walk according to the Spirit" (i.e., the Holy Spirit), we also walk according to our own new spirit.

3) Those who deal with Sanctification by zeroing in on so-called “Progressive” Sanctification as the main point of Sanctification, are at best in Kindergarten.

Anyone that is the least bit familiar with Gnostic-like doctrines can see this for what it plainly is. And this brings us back to the individual that I met with who reminded me that it is no big secret that Augustine was heavily influenced by Platonism. And in turn, greatly influenced Luther. And, Calvin drew heavily from both Augustine and Luther. Such influence on Calvin can be seen in part on page eleven of Henry Beveridge’s *John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

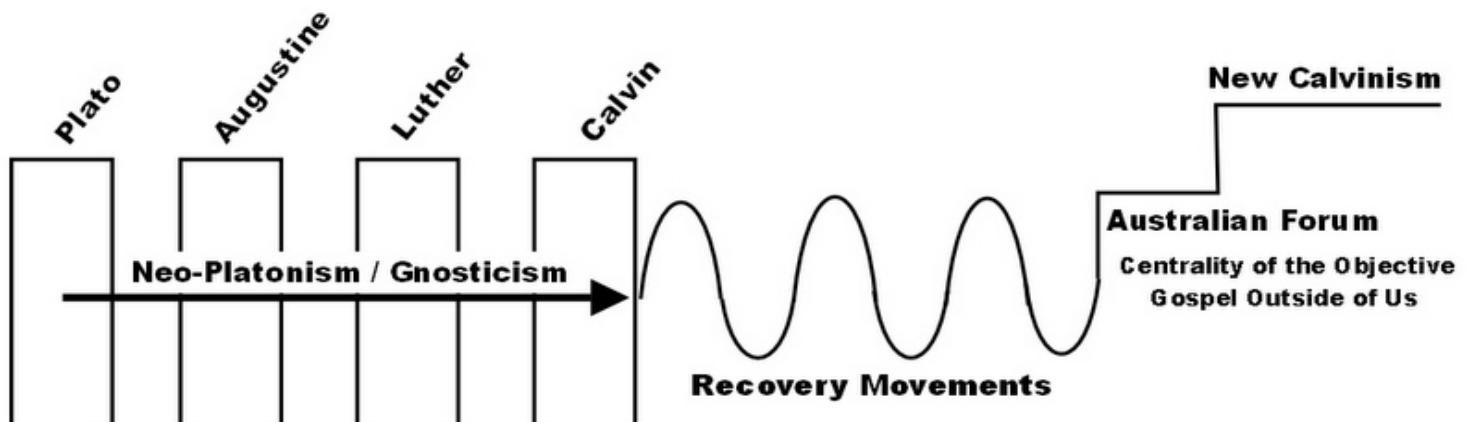
Moreover, if all are born and live for the express purpose of learning to know God, and if the knowledge of God, insofar as it fails to produce this effect, is fleeting in vain, it is clear that all those who do not direct the whole thoughts and actions of their lives to this end fail to fulfill the law of their being. This did not escape the observation of even of philosophers. For it is the very thing which Plato meant (*in Pheod. et Theact.*) when he taught, as he often does, that the chief good of the soul consists in the resemblance of God, i.e., when, by means of knowing him, she is wholly transformed unto to him.

So, on the one hand, Platonism is apparent in present-day New Calvinist thought, and on the other, they readily claim Luther and Calvin. In simple terms, Platonism comes part and parcel with Luther and Calvin’s theology. And again, the Forum has done all of the heavy lifting in regard to these connections. One may also note that the Forum’s hermeneutic also had a dualistic, Gnostic prism:

...Christian biblicism is no different from Jewish legalism. It is the old way of the letter, not the new way of the Spirit (Rom. 7:6). Jesus and Paul declare that apart from the Spirit we cannot understand the truth (John 16:13; I Cor. 2:14). This means that unless we are caught up in the Spirit of the gospel, we cannot understand or use the Bible correctly. Apart from the gospel the Bible is letter (*gramma*), not Spirit (*pneuma*). "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Cor. 3:6,17) [Robert Brinsmead: *Freedom From Biblicism*; Verdict essay 14, pp. 9-14].

Dualism can be seen in almost every aspect of New Calvinist theology, especially their strong emphasis on the separation of law and gospel in sanctification.

It is crucial to note that the Forum was one of many “recovery” movements between our present day and the integrated theology of Luther. I have a good idea what three of the movements were. They were typically considered to be antinomian. But where did they go? They died away due to a mistake that the Forum did not repeat: they did not systematize their theology. Once Brinsmead rediscovered the lost Reformation doctrine of Luther, the primary purpose of the



Forum was to systematize the doctrine. Whether their sole intention or not, it gave the doctrine the staying power that the other rediscovery movements did not have:

The want of a theology which has a historical, covenantal and eschatological framework is the real issue behind the issues in the current justification-by-faith debate (Present Truth Magazine: volume 46; part 4).

Others who propagated the Forum's rediscovered Reformation gospel in the beginning were more direct; Jon Zens quoted John H. Armstrong as saying that, "we" (in regard to the Forum recovery movement) will be relegated to a footnote in Baptist history without organization (John Zens: Law and Ministry in the Church: An informal essay on Some Historical Developments, 1972-1984). In this movement's short forty-year history, systematizing has not only been a major theme, but an obsession. The way think tanks populate this movement would be the envy of franchises like McDonalds hamburgers. Organization and theological systems give this movement major staying/growth power.

Spiritual Abuse and Tyranny

The heavy handed, abusive leadership style of New Calvinist leaders is well documented. Some reasons for this are stated in *The Truth About New Calvinism*:

This whole Reformation motif was started by the Forum which taught that all doctrines either fall into the objective gospel or subjective experience. Subjective spirituality was supposedly spawned by Rome and resulted in a reversal of justification and sanctification. Therefore, the Reformers rediscovered the objective gospel which ignited the Reformation, and also taught that the job wasn't done (semper reformanda), and you can imagine who contemporary New Calvinists think that duty has fallen to. This is all covered in chapter four along with documentation concerning the fact that John Piper, one of the "elder statesmen" of the New Calvinist movement agrees with that scenario. This us against them mentality was passed down from the Forum and blossoms in the movement to this very day. They are the children of the Reformers—we are Rome.

And this arrogance translates into a predominant characteristic of New Calvinism: heavy-handed leadership style. As far as New Calvinists are concerned, evangelicals have been leading people into hell for the past 100 years (their estimation of when semper reformanda was lost) and any interference with the "unadjusted gospel" will be dealt with—no holds barred....

Due to the fact that their gospel is “unadjusted,” “underestimated,” and “scandalous,” the attitude is that parishioners need to be spoon-fed the elements of this doctrine until they are “ready” for the full truth. This makes detection very difficult because most of the theological terms are the same by name, but mean different things to the New Calvinists. Couple that with the fact that most of Christianity is unaware of New Calvinism’s doctrine because the movement has had no single focal point in which all of its elements could be identified as one until 2008. That’s when the “New Calvinism” nomenclature began to emerge. Therefore, the pattern is the same: new pastors assume leadership in a church that doesn’t know what New Calvinism is, and the church takes it for granted that their theology is orthodox. Then once in, they replace present leadership with those of like mind, and begin to make vast and rapid changes because they see that church as a bastion of falsehood that has sent many to hell. Then, dissenters are mercilessly mowed down and muzzled, usually via church discipline. In most cases, the dissenters don’t have a full understanding of what they are dealing with, they just know something isn’t right.

All this leads to many New Calvinist churches taking on cult-like tendencies. Exclusiveness (new Reformation), an attitude that some higher knowledge is a part of the movement that many are not “ready” for (the scandalous gospel), and a subjective view of Scripture (a gospel narrative, not instruction) is a mixture that will have bad results, and is the perfect formula for a cult-like church (pp. 131-134).

The fruit doesn’t fall from the tree. The Reformers that New Calvinists clamor to be identified with also sought to keep a tight ship:

Geneva under Calvin's influence controlled its citizens' lives, including their private lives, well beyond what the medieval Church did. The individual Christian in the Church of Geneva was "free" to interpret the Bible for himself, provided he interpreted it exactly as Calvin did.

Was Calvin a "dictator"? Surely not in the conventional sense. He held no elected office, nor did he exercise direct political power in Geneva. He was mainly a pastor, not a politician. And yet we mustn't go as far as some of Calvin's supporters, who say he was "simply" a pastor. He possessed tremendous influence in the political community, well beyond that of a mere civic leader. And that influence translated directly into civil law strictures and punishments. Geneva was not an absolute State, in the modern sense, but neither was it a free state, except perhaps for those who already accepted its rigid norms of conduct.

A prime example of Calvin's influence in Geneva is the case of Pierre Ameaux, a member of the city council, who had criticized Calvin as a preacher of false doctrine. The council told Ameaux to retract his statement, but Calvin wanted a harsher punishment. Ameaux was forced to go through town dressed only in a shirt, with a torch in hand.

Ameaux' fate was a mere embarrassment; the embryonic freethinker Jacques Gruet was executed for criticizing Calvin, for blasphemy and for protesting the stringent demands of Calvin's Geneva. He was tortured and beheaded. Calvin also got Jerome Bolsec banished for the Frenchman's disagreement with Calvin regarding predestination, thus proving that, while Geneva was a haven for Protestants throughout Europe who agreed with Calvin, it could be oppressive for those who did not.

But the most celebrated case is that of Michael Sevetus, who didn't get off as lightly as Bolsec. The Spanish physician-writer took it upon himself to reformulate the doctrine of the Trinity in what were essentially Gnostic categories. But Sevetus made the mistake of sending Calvin an advance copy, which led, by a rather Byzantine route, to Calvin tipping off the Catholic magistrates in Vienna that the heretical Sevetus was practicing medicine in their city. That brought the apparatus of the Inquisition down on him. Sevetus managed to escape and wound up, in all places, Geneva, en route to Naples. Calvin had him arrested, tried and sentenced to death. As an act of mercy, Calvin requested that Sevetus be beheaded, instead of burned, but in this case Calvin's request was not honored (Geoffrey Saint-Clair: *Who's Who in the Reformation* [Catholic Education Resource Center](#), Dossier 7 no. 5 September-October 2001: 4-12).

Therefore, New Calvinism has spawned many organizations who exhibit the same heavy handed control methods. This has created a massive group of organizations that minister to this area of concern.

The Solution

The recovery movements of the past were weak because they did not aggressively focus on theological systems, networking, and duplication. They probably would have died on their own, but were helped to an early grave by those who contended against them according to the truth. New Calvinism presents a formidable challenge because they have not made the same mistakes. They also have a simple, unifying truth that makes everything else secondary: COGOUS.

First, the evangelical community must stop overwhelming Christians with articles and information concerning the tentacles of the giant octopus. They must stop overwhelming

Christians with discussions about the symptoms, and educate according to the cause. Yes, describe the tentacle, but in context of what monster it belongs to. That way, the damage inflicted by the tentacle can be avoided. Identify what the octopus looks like, where he dwells, how he acts, etc., and you avoid the dangers of the tentacles all together.

Secondly, evangelicals must start doing what we should be doing anyway—duplicating. However, the duplication will also be grounded in knowledge that defends us against the most prevalent heresies of our day. The best defense is offence.

Thirdly, we must seek out those who are not yet infected with this doctrine and network with them.

Fourthly, we must systematize our contention against New Calvinism to insure that it is the last recovery movement to emerge. Labeling the movement—identifying its history—its error—its dangers—should be put into a curriculum and assimilated into common theological/doctrinal education material.

In other words, we must do all that the New Calvinists are doing in their successful (presently) endeavor to have dominion over all of Christianity.

Course of Action

TANC proposes this working hypothesis to initiate action. Christians who represent the three major areas of focus (contemporary recovery [CR], Platonism/mysticism [PM], spiritual abuse [SA]) should network together to develop a concise description of this movement. The hypothesis should be sharpened and developed by data sharing so that all three information spheres, CR, PM, and SA are basing their cuUndoubtedly, this will be one of the primary focuses of the June 2012 conference in Germantown, Ohio. Hopefully, the conference will also produce a declaration that will show a consorted effort to supply all services and ministries needed in addressing this movement comprehensively.

