

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

Grow Up. Settle Down. Keep Reforming. Advice for the Young, Restless, Reformed

Scripture: Ephesians 4:13; Hebrews 5:12–14

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It has been five years since *Christianity Today* published Collin Hansen's article titled "Young, Restless, Reformed." Hansen later expanded the article into a book with the same title (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). He has carefully documented a very encouraging trend: large numbers of young people (college age and younger) are discovering the doctrines of grace, embracing a more biblical and Christ-centered worldview, and beginning to delve more deeply into serious theology than most 20th-century evangelicals were prone to do.

In short, Calvinism, not postmodernism, seems to be capturing the hearts of Christian young people.

Hansen cites evidence that Calvinistic seminaries are growing. Several new national conferences feature speakers committed to reformed soteriology (R.C. Sproul, John Piper, Al Mohler, Mark Dever, and others)—and these conferences are consistently full to overflowing with students. Books rich with meaty doctrinal content rather than relational fluff have begun to show up on Christian best-seller lists. There is even a surge of interest in Jonathan Edwards.

Hansen's original article gave some definition and a name to this developing movement. That article finally brought attention to a powerful trend that theretofore had been all but ignored by *Christianity Today's* editors. (They had been preoccupied for a decade or more with Emergent and postmodern fads, open theism, and various currents drifting in a totally different direction.) But (in Hansen's words): "While the Emergent 'conversation' gets a lot of press for its appeal to the young, the new Reformed movement [is arguably] a larger and more pervasive phenomenon [with] a much stronger institutional base."

Five years later, the so-called Emergent Church is now in a state of serious disarray and decline. Some have suggested it's totally dead. Virtually every offshoot of evangelicalism that consciously embraced postmodern values has either fizzled out or openly moved toward liberalism, universalism, and Socinianism. Scores of people who were active in the Emerging movement a decade ago seem to have abandoned Christianity altogether.

But young, restless, Reformed students (YRRs) still seem to be multiplying and gaining influence. I'm very glad for *most* of what this movement represents. It seems to be a more biblically-oriented, gospel-centered, theologically-grounded approach to Christian discipleship than this generation's parents typically favored—and that is most certainly to be applauded.

YRRs have by and large eschewed the selfishness and shallowness (though not all the pragmatism) of seeker-sensitive religion. They are generally aware of the dangers posed by postmodernity, political correctness, and moral relativism (even if they don't always approach such dangers with sufficient caution). And while they sometimes seem to struggle to show discernment, they do seem to understand that truth is different from falsehood; sound doctrine is opposed to heresy; and true faith distinct from mere religious pretense.

It is overall a positive development and a trend to be encouraged—but the YRR movement as it is shaping up also needs to face up to some fairly serious problems and potential pitfalls. So I have some words of encouragement and counsel for YRRs, and I want to take a few days here at the blog to write to them about their movement, its influences, some hazards that lie ahead, some tendencies to avoid, and some qualities to cultivate. (A few men on our staff will also join the discussion with a few thoughts of their own.)

Our chief concerns have to do with *immaturity, instability, and inconsistency* in the YRR movement. It is clear from Scripture, of course, that people who are **young** need to aim for maturity (2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 4:13; Hebrews 5:12-14)—not perpetual adolescence. Scripture likewise makes clear that it's better to be “like a tree planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:3) than to be constantly **restless**. And one cannot be genuinely “Reformed” and deliberately worldly at the same time. The two things are inconsistent and incompatible. To embrace the world's fashions and values—even under the guise of being “missional”—is to make oneself God's enemy (James 4:4). Many supposed reformations have faltered on that rock.

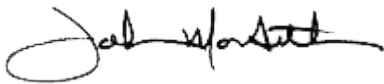
No one is truly **Reformed** who is not constantly *reforming*.

In all candor, some of the ideas YRRs seem most obsessed with—starting with their standard methods for reaching the unchurched and “redeeming culture”—seem to be holdovers from the pragmatism that dominated their parents' generation. If we profess theology that recognizes and honors the sovereignty, majesty, and holiness of God, our practice ought to be consistent with that.

It is a wonderful thing to come to grips with the doctrines of grace, and it is a liberating realization when we acknowledge the impotence of the human will. But embracing those truths is merely an initial step toward authentic reformation. *We still have a lot of reforming to do.*

And let's face it: the besetting sin of young Calvinists is a brash failure to come to grips with that reality.

I'll elaborate more on these points in the days to come.



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