



## 5

# A Call for Discernment

TIM CHALLIES



IT is too early to confidently predict how history will regard New Calvinism. It is possible that it may be only the smallest footnote in the long and storied history of the Christian faith. It is equally possible, though, that it will be viewed as a significant chapter in which God used very ordinary people to accomplish his extraordinary work. In my contribution to this book I focus on the future of New Calvinism. If New Calvinism is to have a sweeping impact that will last for years to come, what strengths must it continue to build and to emphasize? What sinful temptations must it avoid?

To answer such questions we first need to consider the nature and history of New Calvinism. Is it a trend? Is it a movement? Is it organic or planned? Is it merely a money-making scheme for publishers or an influence-creating scheme for ministries and their leaders? And from where did it arise from in the first place?

In many ways New Calvinism had its genesis as a response to the church growth movement, which, heading into the new

millennium, was a dominant force within Evangelicalism. Leaders like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels were writing books and leading conferences that advocated a form of Christian pragmatism. Church leaders were told that if they followed the programs and mimicked the successes of megachurches they, too, could see wild growth. This led to a programmatic, big-box Christianity that could be bought and sold, transferred and duplicated. *The Purpose Driven Church*, the manual for the pastor, spawned *The Purpose Driven Life* as the manual for the individual. Sermons became short and topical instead of long and expositional, pastoral prayer was removed from worship services in favor of prayers of response and commitment, the old hymns were neglected in favor of new choruses, doctrine was displaced by felt needs.

A growing number of people began to express concern with this movement and they responded in at least two very different ways. One group determined that they would focus on recovering authentic Christian *community* and began to refer to themselves as the Emerging Church. They called for a new kind of Christianity that downplayed theological distinctions in favor of authenticity and community. They met in small, local gatherings and fostered online communities. But theologically they soon drifted back to the familiar liberalism of the early twentieth century. The authenticity they advocated too often came at the expense of the theology the Bible demands. Without robust theological grounding and without sound institutions the movement quickly drifted, then faded.

The second group determined that they would look back to the theology of the Reformers and recover authentic Christian *doctrine*. They called for the recovery of doctrine that had been forgotten, neglected, or displaced – doctrine known as Calvinism or Reformed theology. They began to

gather around a handful of notable Calvinist preachers with John MacArthur, John Piper, and R.C. Sproul most notable among them. Soon they began to gather in conferences like Together for the Gospel while organizations like The Gospel Coalition began to define and organize the movement. A new generation of leaders rose up, led by men like Albert Mohler, Mark Dever, C. J. Mahaney and behind them the next generation – Kevin DeYoung, Matt Chandler, and David Platt among them. Christian publishers turned their attention to the movement, releasing hundreds, then thousands of books by and for this group. Christian and mainstream publications described and defined the movement with monickers such as *Young, Restless, Reformed and the New Calvinism*. Josh aptly defined it for us in his opening chapter saying,

New Calvinism as a movement can be defined as an eclectic and at times edgy group of multi-ethnic, multi-denominational, and age-diverse Reformed people from all parts of the world who are hungry for a big sovereign God. These people are Christ-exalting, Spirit-driven, missions-motivated, and Bible-believing Christians who are seeking to know God, worship God, serve God, and bring glory to God.

New Calvinism began as an organic movement and grew by connections made through the Internet and, in particular, through the new medium of social media. Social media led people to books, to podcasts, to sermon archives, to conferences, to churches. At its best, this New Calvinism is an organic, worldwide movement of Christians who long to know and serve God. But New Calvinism is also a relatively new movement and one that is dominated by young people. It is an untested movement that has not yet been challenged by ‘the next big thing.’ It is in many ways an undefined movement that continues to negotiate its boundaries to determine who