

Amazing Grace: The History and Theology of Calvinism - A Review

Written by Tim Black

Wednesday, 27 October 2010 11:57

A fellow pastor on the URC discussion list asked,

Someone in my congregation asked about this series and particularly some of those named as contributors to it. Could anyone give a recommendation or comments by way of review of this series?

<http://www.monergismbooks.com/Amazing-Grace-The-History-Theology-of-Calvinism-DVD-p-16342.html>

We showed the video and used the printed study guide, one chapter per week, at our Wednesday night Bible study & prayer meeting recently. It worked well in that format. Several points of review:

1. In general it's very well done--a correct presentation of scripture, theology, and church history, making good use of the Westminster Standards and Three Forms of Unity (and the London Baptist Confession, but it isn't given the most prominent position), in an attractively produced video.

2. To my surprise, I learned that its host, Eric Holmberg, was also the host of the video called "[Hell's Bells](#)" back in the early 90's. He claims to be an ordained minister (I don't know in what denomination, but I have no reason to doubt the claim), and has lots of videos on YouTube under the username "[VorthosForum](#)," in some of which he's doing street evangelism / street preaching.

3. Many of the people in the video are professors or students at Knox Theological Seminary, so they lean in the direction of Evangelism Explosion and postmillennialism (and maybe theonomy?), though those emphases are not very evident in the video. So, though I have nothing against Evangelism Explosion, I would hesitate to recommend our church members go and read more works from each of those professors with an uncritical eye, yet I have no serious qualms about the accuracy of their presentation of Calvinism itself.

4. I wasn't excited about the presence of many Calvinistic Baptist speakers in the video, but I recognize that may help Calvinism gain traction with Arminians by helping to give them the impression that Calvinism is not restricted to NAPARC churches alone, but is maintained by other kinds of Christians too.

5. A fellow OPC pastor who is studying for a D.Min. at Knox said he wished the presentation of Calvinism was more focused; I agree. Yet the presentation is still quite good.

6. The DVD is a very appropriate way to promote the Reformed faith to friends--give them the DVD to watch at home, or invite them over to watch it with you. It doesn't have to be posed as a Bible study; it's just watching a DVD together. I do think Bible studies are one of the best

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outreach methods we have today, but for those who don't like reading books as much as watching a DVD, and who have worries about the commitment involved in a Bible study--and that probably amounts to the majority in today's culture--a DVD may be just the right vehicle for reaching them.

7. The study guide is well-written, but doesn't include questions for discussion. Rather, it is mostly a transcript of the video, and it includes blanks for key words which you can fill in as you watch the video. It does include occasional topical excurses whose content is not found in the video. At some points I found that the video and the study guide did not actually present the content in the same order, but that wasn't too bothersome. At some points I also found the video's transition between one chapter and the next went by without my noticing the transition; that problem can be fixed by paying careful attention to the playing time of each chapter, which is written at the beginning of each chapter in the study guide.

8. For those who do like to read books, I recommend Joel Beeke's "[Living for God's Glory; An Introduction to Calvinism](#)," for two great reasons: 1) Beeke's presentation is more squarely in line with what NAPARC churches consider to be consistent Calvinism, so can be recommended without hesitation, and 2) (which is almost the same point) Beeke's book shows that Calvinism is much more full-orbed than just the 5 points of Calvinism--it is richly biblical, deeply orthodox, fully faithful Christianity. Its chapters are numerous but manageable in length: each is 10-15 pages long, and ends with study questions. I'd be interested in other people's reviews of Beeke's book; I'm trying to find the best way to use it in our congregation.