

Black, Reformed, but Foremost Christian

By Anthony J. Carter

Being Black

This means that we have a distinct, if at times bitter, experience. It means that our parents often drank of the waters of Marah in a land that flowed with milk and honey. It means our foreparents felt the lash of the whip and witnessed the horror of babies and loved ones cast down to the depths of unknown graves in an angry deep during the Middle Passage. It means their sweat and blood were fertilizer for a land upon which they could labor and see but never own. It means being African-American.

It means we are ever conscious of minority status. It means having a face but often no name. It means having a home, but sensing no country. It means having a voice to cry with, but not a voice to vote with. It means having to learn to sing a joyous song in a strange, foreign land. It means learning to live upon a God who is invisible and trusting his purposes, though they seemingly ripen slowly.

Being Reformed

This means that we have a heritage that transcends our skin and ethnicity. It means that the grace of God has appeared to us according to his good pleasure. It means we see our God as sovereign, omnipotent, holy, and right. It means we see our sin for what it is, heinous and worthy of death. And it means we see our Savior as sufficient, immutable, and altogether good.

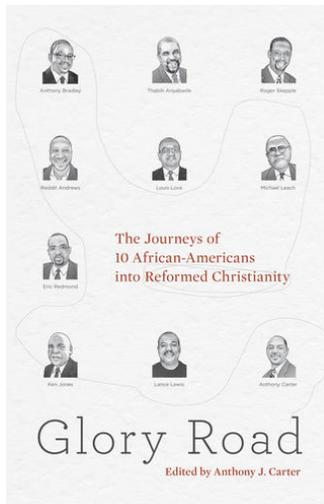
...it means we see our Savior as sufficient, immutable, and altogether good.

It means that our heroes are not only men like Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington, and but they are also and to some degree even more so Martin Luther and John Calvin. It means our legacy is seen from Lemuel Haynes to D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. We understand that we have as much in common with Martin Luther as we do with Martin Luther King Jr. John Bunyan and John Marrant belong to us as much as do Abraham Kuyper and A. Philip Randolph. It means that we can look to J. Gresham Machen and listen to his ability to articulate the dangers of the sin of liberalism and yet question his inability to comprehend the dangers of the sin of racism.

It means that we have solid, historical, and biblical grounds upon which to stand as we seek to be an instrument of God in spreading his righteousness, peace, and joy throughout the world. It means that our ideology is informed by our theology, which is Reformed, because what we are first and foremost is Christian.

Being Christian

This means that we are first and last children of God. It means when you see one of us, you see a black man. But when you hear one of us, you hear a Christian man. It means that Christ is our Lord. It means that we are daily seeking to understand our African-American experience in light of the lordship of Christ. It means that we are nothing apart from the grace of God, and that God has created us who we are—to live during the times in which we live that we might show forth his mercies, while he is daily conforming us to the image of his dear Son.



Glory Road

Anthony J. Carter

Ten African-American pastors and scholars tell how they came to embrace Reformed theology.

It means that our service—yes, our worship and allegiance—is not first to the black cause, though noble it may be at times. It is not first to the Reformed cause, though grand it may appear to be. It means that our service is to Christ first and last, now and at all times. If we can serve Christ while sincerely serving an African-American cause, then let us do it. If we can serve Christ while promoting a Reformed agenda, then by all means let us do so. But if Christ is in conflict with the black cause or the Reformed agenda at any point or at any time, then may we have the courage to say, “Away with blackness and away with Reformedness—give us Jesus and Jesus only.”

It means that we must understand that Martin Luther King Jr. gave his life that we might vote, but Christ gave his life that we might live. Frederick Douglas gave his life that we might be free from slavery, but Christ gave his life that we might be free from slavery to sin and death.

Jesus Christ, Our Creed

We are black; there is no mistaking that. We are Reformed, and make no mistake about that. But these two distinctions have relevance only insofar as they are understood in light of the fact that *we are Christian*. C. H. Spurgeon said, “I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; but if I am asked what my creed is, I reply, ‘It is Jesus Christ.’”

We are proud to be Americans. We are equally proud to be African-American. We even more thank God that our theology is the biblically grounded, historically consistent theology of the Reformation. But if you ask us our faith, if you ask us our creed, if you want the sum of our lives: It is Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ.

We pray that it would be yours as well.

This article is adapted from [Glory Road: The Journeys of 10 African-Americans into Reformed Christianity](#), edited by Anthony J. Carter.



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