



The Remnant Spirit: Conservative Reform in Mainline Protestantism

Douglas E. Cowan

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Over the past few decades, mainline Protestant denominations in North America have been experiencing a significant decline in membership, active participation, and financial contributions. In the midst of this decline, these denominations have been caught up in a variety of controversial religious, ecclesiastical, and social issues—a shift from neo-orthodox to liberal theology, the advent of inclusive liturgical and biblical language, denominational support for often controversial social issues, and heated debates around human sexuality, particularly the place of homosexuals in the church. To address these issues and concerns, and to recapture the traditionalism many feel their churches have abandoned, the remnant faithful, those who choose to stay in their churches, have formed a number of reform and renewal movements. Cowan examines these emergent social movements, providing anecdotal and lively examples of their activities, their arguments, their identities, and their approaches to strengthening their churches.

Rather than leave denominations which they regard as increasingly hostile to theological and ecclesiastical traditionalism, many mainline Protestants have chosen to stay and fight for their churches, forming reform and renewal movements intended to address hot-button issues in the way their churches function and practice. These conservative reform movements, however, are often vilified by their more liberal co-religionists, and not infrequently regarded as theologically immature, doctrinally stagnant, and ecclesiastically belligerent. *The Remnant Spirit* demonstrates that these are simplistic and reductionist analyses that only serve to avoid the very issues around which reform movements emerge and evolve. The author provides an in-depth examination of four major North American denominations, and the various conservative reform and renewal movements taking place in each, while acknowledging that every mainline Protestant Church in the U.S. and Canada is contending with similar issues and addressing them in similar fashions. Here, the voices of the remnant faithful, those that contribute to denominational discussions as they are experienced by ordinary church members and leaders alike, are presented and discussed in a thoughtful and lively manner.

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