



Classic Reformed Theology

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Introducing the Classic Reformed Theology Series

The Reformed faith has deep roots in the patristic and medieval church, but its emergence as a distinct tradition, growing out of the Lutheran Reformation, may be traced to the early 1520s. The development of Reformed theology as distinct from Lutheranism is represented by documents such as Sixty Seven Theses written by Huldreich Zwingli (1584–1531) and the Ten Theses of Bern (1528).¹ By 1530, in the wake of the failure of Luther and Zwingli to agree on the Supper at Marburg (1529), the Swiss Reformed were attempting to position the Reformed churches alongside the Lutheran churches as fellow Protestants with a common doctrine of justification but with significant differences over topics such as Christology, the Lord's Supper, and worship. These sorts of

¹ E. F. Karl. Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften Der Reformierten Kirche*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: A. Deichert Verlag, 1903; reprint Walrop: Spenner, 1999), 1.1–6, 30–31. English translations are available in Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 36–44, 49–50; James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 1–8, 40–42.

developments are represented by the Tetrapolitan Confession (1530), drafted in part by Martin Bucer (1491–1551).²

Reformed theology, piety, and practice continued to mature in the second stage of the Reformation. For example, in 1539, John Calvin (1509–1564) published the second edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The development of the *Institutes* from a relatively simple, bipartite, common places, to a more elaborate and detailed summary of his ongoing biblical study and exposition of the Apostles's Creed symbolizes the growing theological maturity of the Reformed movement.³

Despite the impression sometimes created by both popular and academic literature, the theology, piety, and practice of the Reformation ended neither in 1546 (with Luther's death) nor in 1564 with Calvin's death. Rather, the ecclesiastical, civil, and theological developments of the Reformation were gradually secured and elaborated. By 1530, a pattern of ecclesiastical-confessional consolidation was well underway. With the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, that confessional definition was also reflected in and refracted by a process of civil confessionalization (*cuius regio, eius religio*).⁴

After Calvin, the Reformed reformation continued and was adapted from a predominantly ecclesiastical setting to an increasingly academic setting in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Scholars of Reformed orthodoxy have identified three periods of Reformed orthodoxy: early (1565–1640), high (1640–1725), and late (post 1725).⁵ In the early phase, Reformed theologians began to achieve a degree of precision and to create the categories and vocabulary that would mark the period of orthodoxy. A significant example of this process was Franciscus Junius's development

² See, for example, chapters 3, 11, 18, and 22 of the Tetrapolitan Confession (1530) in Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften*, 1.57, 64, 72, 75–78; Cochrane, *The Reformed Confessions*, 57–58, 66–67, 75–76, 80–81; Dennison, *Reformed Confessions 1523–1552*, 142–43, 150–51, 158–59, 163–65.

³ See Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ For an excellent orientation to this question, see Ute Lotz-Heumann, "Confessionalization," in *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*. ed. David M. Whitford (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008), 136–57.

⁵ See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1.30–32. Hereafter, *PRRD*.

of Luther's distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross and Calvin's distinction between the Creator and the creature into the distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology.⁶ In the high orthodox phase, Reformed theology developed its definitive responses to the Roman Catholic counter-reformation, Arminianism, and faced the internal crisis created by the Amyraldian movement. In this period, Reformed covenant theology also reached its highest level of development articulating a pre-temporal covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), a temporal prelapsarian covenant of works (or covenant of life, covenant of nature, or legal covenant), and a covenant of grace with the elect administered in a series of covenants through the history of redemption. Where high orthodoxy was grappling with the rationalism of René Descartes (1596–1650) in the late period, Reformed theology underwent little development but had to address the growing tidal wave of rationalism represented by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716) and Christian Wolff (1679–1754). The late orthodox responded to modernity in three ways: by resisting, by seeking a middle way, and finally, by re-stating the achievements of the earlier phases of orthodoxy. If early and high orthodoxy were eras of confessionalization, late orthodoxy was an era of “deconfessionalization.”⁷

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, critical research has focused upon the initial stages of the Reformation. In modern scholarship, until quite recently, Reformed orthodoxy has been relatively neglected. The approach of two significant nineteenth-century scholars dominated the perception of Protestant orthodoxy generally. Alexander Schweizer (1808–1888) argued that there was in Lutheranism and in Reformed theology a series of “central dogmas.”⁸ The Lutheran

⁶ Willem J. Van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2003): 319–35; Muller, *PRRD*, 1.225–69; R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 119–51; idem, “Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology At the Westminster Seminaries. Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004), 152–61.

⁷ Muller, *PRRD*, 1.32.

⁸ Alexander Schweizer, *Die Glaubenslehre Der Evangelisch-Reformirten Kirche*, 2 vols. (Zürich: Orell, Füssli und Co, 1844–47). See also Muller, *PRRD*, 1.124.

central dogma was said to be justification by grace alone through faith alone. The Reformed central dogma was said to be predestination from which the Reformed orthodox deduced a speculative theology. Schweizer's account of Reformed theology was not organized according to the logic of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century systems, but according to the requirements of his own Schleiermachian theological system."⁹ This approach was followed by the so-called "mediating" (between the tradition and the historical-critical method) theologians I. A. Dorner (1809–1884) and Paul Althaus (1888–1966) in 1914.

A second influential scholar in the same period, Heinrich Heppe (1820–1879), argued that there were two competing strains within Reformed theology, the Calvinists-predestinarian strain and the Melancthonian-covenantal strain.¹⁰ Heppe regarded the latter to be a reaction to the former. Thus, in his view, German Reformed theology was "standing halfway between the Lutherans and the Calvinists."¹¹ Heppe's presentation of Reformed theology became particularly important for two reasons. First, his idiosyncratic source book of quotations from a host of Reformed writers from the classical period was likely the way the most influential twentieth-century Reformed theologian, Karl Barth (1886–1968), became aware of Reformed orthodoxy.¹² Second, the English translation of Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* has been and continues to be used widely by teachers and students of Protestant orthodoxy.¹³ Those who relied upon these summaries, not having read the primary sources in context, often failed to recognize that Heppe's presentation was "marred by a series of profound problems."¹⁴

⁹ Muller, 1.131.

¹⁰ Lyle D. Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 304–21.

¹¹ Muller, *PRRD*, 1.130.

¹² Heinrich Heppe, *Die Dogmatik Der Evangelisch-Reformierten Kirche* (Elberfeld: K. R. Friderichs, 1861).

¹³ Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated From the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1950).

¹⁴ Muller, *PRRD*, 1.130

Beginning with Robert D. Preus's 1955 study of the doctrine of Scripture in Lutheran orthodoxy and continuing with his two-volume survey of the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy, the scholarship in this field matured considerably.¹⁵ In the early 1970s, Reformed orthodoxy also began to receive renewed attention using a more careful, developmental historiography modeled and taught by Heiko Oberman (1930–2001). Jill Raitt, W. Robert Godfrey, Lyle Bierma, and especially Richard Muller applied versions of Oberman's approach to the study of Reformed orthodoxy.¹⁶

There are at least three reasons why classic Reformed theology ought to be studied and thus why this series of critical English translations should exist. First, Reformed orthodoxy forms the intellectual background of modern theology which can only be understood properly in light of its reaction to and rejection of Protestant orthodoxy. Second, Reformed orthodoxy obviously merits attention by those who identify with the Reformed confession; it is their heritage and thus shapes their theology, piety, and practice whether they realize it or not. Third, despite the disdain, disregard, and distortion which Reformed orthodoxy suffered during the Enlightenments in Europe, Britain, and North America, contemporary scholarship has shown that, whatever one's view of the theology, piety, and practice of orthodoxy, on purely historical grounds it must be regarded as a vital intellectual and spiritual movement and thus a fascinating and important subject for continued study.

We call this series "Classic Reformed Theology" because, by definition, a period is classical when it defines an approach to a discipline. During the period of Protestant orthodoxy, Reformed theology reached its highest degree of definition and precision. It was then that the most important Reformed confessions were formed, and the Reformed churches took the form they have today. For

¹⁵ Robert D. Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture. a Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1955); idem, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970).

¹⁶ Jill Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza: Development of the Reformed Doctrine* (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972); W. Robert Godfrey, "Tensions Within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement At the Synod of Dordt 1618–1619" (Ph.D. Diss, Stanford University, 1974); Lyle D. Bierma, "The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevian" (Duke University, 1980), now published as idem, *The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2005); Muller, *PRRD*; idem, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Trueman and Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism*; Willem J. Van Asselt, et al., eds. *Reformation and Scholasticism*, Text and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

these reasons, it is also it is more than surprising to realize that much of the most important literature from this period has been almost entirely ignored since mid-eighteenth century. As difficult as it may be for those in other fields to understand, the list of scholars who have extensive, firsthand knowledge of some of the most important primary texts in the study of Reformed orthodoxy (e.g., the major works of Olevianus, Polanus, Voetius, Cocceius, Heidegger, and van Mastricht, to name but a few) can be counted easily. Further, few of the texts from this period, even some of the most important texts, have been published in modern critical editions. Thus, until recently, even those with the ability and will to read the texts from the classical period of Reformed orthodoxy could do so only with difficulty since some of these texts are difficult to locate outside of a few libraries in Europe and Great Britain. Technological developments in recent years, however, are beginning to make these works more widely available to the academic community. Coinciding with the development of technology has been a growing interest in classic Reformed theology.

Finally, a word about the plan for this series. First, the series seeks to produce and provide critical English translations of some of the more important but generally neglected texts of the orthodox period. The series does not intend to be exhaustive, nor will it be repetitive of critical translations already available. Most of the texts appearing in this series will be translated for the first time. It is the sincere hope of the editor and the board that at least one volume shall appear annually.

The editor thanks the members of the editorial board for their guidance, skill, and scholarship; the publisher for undertaking this series; and especially Jay T. Collier, Director of Publishing, for his tireless and outstanding work toward bringing this series from conception to reality.

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