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Book Review

Leder, Arie C., and Richard A. Muller, eds. *Biblical Interpretation and Doctrinal Formulation in the Reformed Tradition: Essays in Honor of James De Jong*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014. 338 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9781601782861.

This book is a *Festschrift* for James A. De Jong who served as president of Calvin Theological Seminary from 1983 to 2003, and made significant contributions to Reformed theology.

The book consists of fourteen chapters on various topics relevant to Reformed theology and has a bibliography of the works of De Jong, giving a snapshot of the varied interests and streams of study within the Reformed tradition. In chapter 1, Calvin P. Van Reken gives a helpful introduction to De Jong and his work.

In chapter 2, Joel R. Beeke discusses John Calvin's teaching office and the Dutch Reformed *Doctorenambt*. Beeke explains Calvin's positions and concludes that the problem of the *Doctorenambt* has never been satisfactorily resolved. He writes: "The Reformed Church owes it to itself to reinvestigate, scripturally and historically, the Calvinian/Dutch concept of the teaching office and its bearing on the life and work of the churches today" (32).

In chapter 3, Richard A. Muller explores biblical and homiletical oratory in Calvin's sermons on the history of Melchizedek and Abraham. Muller provides key insights into Calvin's methodology and structure of biblical preaching. In comparing Calvin's approach to Melanchthon's, Muller explains:

> As opposed to Melanchthon, whose topical method strove to draw out only the central issues of each section of a biblical book, Calvin understood the entirety of the text as normative and in need of exposition, both in its narrative flow and in its varied issues and

themes (44).

In chapter 4, Al Wolters discusses the textual notes in Calvin's lectures on Zechariah. This chapter is quite different than others in the book as Wolters presents numerous examples from the various editions and texts from Calvin's work.

In chapter 5, Keith D. Stanglin explores Calvin's interpretation of the Maccabean Psalms related to the themes of adoption in Christ and how that relates to being appointed to the slaughter. Stanglin explains Calvin's method of exposition for Psalms, how it differs based on the content of each psalm, and how Calvin focuses on the context of a given psalm.

In chapter 6, Mark J. Larson explains Peter Martyr Vermigli's and Aquinas's doctrine of the justice of war. Larson chooses to explore Vermigli because of how the renewed interest in Thomist theology that arose in the sixteenth century affected him. Larson reveals the influences of Aquinas on Vermigli throughout this chapter.

In chapter 7, Lyle D. Bierma discusses Beza's two confessions as sources for the Heidelberg Catechism. After demonstrating the relationship between these documents with numerous examples, Bierma concludes: "There seems to be little doubt, then, about the influence of Beza's two confessions not just on the HC but also on Olevianus's early 'commentary' on the HC, A Firm Foundation" (126).

In chapter 8, Raymond A. Blacketer identifies Henry Ainsworth as a "harried Hebraist" (129). After introducing Ainsworth and where he fits into the rise of Christian Hebraism, Blacketer explains Ainsworth's method: "For Ainsworth, meticulous attention to the literal sense of the text, which he intends his annotations to facilitate, actually has the potential to reveal mystical or spiritual meanings that were hidden to Moses under the 'veil,' as well as to refute false doctrines" (140). These annotations were of various kinds and produced by various methods, including rabbinical methods. The overall purpose was to stir people to study and understand God's law.

In chapter 9, Jay J. Shim covers the interpretation of Christ's descent into Hades in the early seventeenth century. Shim seeks

"to illumine the pioneering biblical scholarship . . . as reflected in Hugh Broughton, James Ussher, and John Lightfoot; and to show that their biblical scholarship was theologically contextualized so as to reveal distinct details of the article [on Christ's descent into Hades], despite general agreement based on their shared Protestant confession" (160).

In chapter 10, John S. Bergsma explains critical and Catholic exegesis in the seventeenth century. Although this chapter may seem initially out of place in a book from the Reformed tradition, Bergsma's main point is: "the exegetical practices of these two traditions, the critical and the Catholic, are at polar extremes concerning the role of the church in the interpretation of Scripture, or what may be called an ecclesial hermeneutic" (184), the preferred interpretive approach for Bergsma as explained further in this chapter.

In chapter 11, Won Taek Lin covers John Flavel's model of biblical interpretation and doctrinal formulation. Lin writes this chapter because "English Puritans have been largely neglected in studies of Protestant orthodoxy, although their teaching falls generally within the bounds of mainline Reformed theology" (209). Lin provides numerous examples of Flavel's model in this chapter.

In chapter 12, J. Mark Beach discusses the Hobbes-Bramhall debate on the nature of freedom and necessity. Beach covers this debate to illustrate:

> In the Hobbes-Bramhall debate, then, we catch a glimpse of the collision taking place between the traditional metaphysics of Arminian/Molinist writers, such as Bishop Bramhall, and the new science and philosophy of Hobbes (260).

Beach explains the implications of this debate for the larger debate between Calvinists and Arminians:

> Even though the debate between Hobbes and Bramhall successfully draws the battle lines between the old and new science, I am left wondering how Calvinistic theologians, particularly Reformed Scholastic authors, may have response to Hobbes (and Leibnitz as well) (260–61).

In chapter 13, Arie C. Leder identifies a so-called "Bible commentary for the untutored," the *Bijbelverklaring*, a "commentary on the Bible which Klinkenberg began with colleague Gerard Johan Nahuys" (264). Leder explains the commentary style as follows:

> Commentary on the text begins with a chapter summary, including a segmentation into sense units but always within the inherited chapter divisions of the biblical text. Phrases or verses of the text are followed by running interpretive and explicative commentary in smaller font (271).

The goal of this kind of commentary was to help the untutored grasp the meaning of the text.

In chapter 14, John Bolt claims that Herman Hoeksma was right "on three points that really matter" (295). The three points were:

> that grace is particular; that the doctrine of common grace is an extra-confessional matter on which Reformed people can have different opinions; and that the Reformed Church polity was violated by hierarchical actions (297).

This book has several strengths. First, the reflections on the various aspects of biblical interpretation and doctrinal formulation in the Reformed tradition are fitting tribute to James De Jong; this is an achievement that should certainly be noted.

Second, this book demonstrates that the Reformed tradition is a very rich theological tradition with many scholars who have varied interests that can all serve the larger theological enterprise. Thus, even if someone does not come from this tradition, they can still appreciate this volume and perhaps find applicable insights for their own tradition.

Third, this volume has highlighted several important sources that perhaps many within the Reformed tradition may not have considered heretofore, such as the *Bijbelverklaring*.

Fourth, this volume has also provided room for further research on many of the topics addressed. Ideally scholars within this tradition could explore the historical and theological insights further at conferences and in future publications.

This book also has room for improvement. I will mention only a few issues here. First, most, if not all, of this book consists of merely reporting on the topics rather than critical scholarly reflection. Although the reporting can be helpful—especially on topics that most have never considered—the larger theological enterprise needs critical reflection on how scholars and theologians move from biblical interpretation to doctrinal formulation in a way that is systematic and consistent, rather than being "unsystematic and haphazard" due to a "failure to examine . . . Greek and Hebrew, as a whole" and a "failure to relate what is said about either to a general semantic method related to general linguistics," as James Barr mentioned (James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 21). Instead of making progress on this front, these scholars have mostly reported work that has already happened rather than engaging with that work critically so the Reformed tradition can continue to make progress. This is unfortunate given the Reformed tradition's emphasis on *semper reformanda*, "always reforming." That is, if the Reformed tradition is to be always reforming itself, it must be reflecting critically on the entire tradition, not merely reporting on it. This is especially true regarding biblical interpretation and doctrinal formulation.

Second, the perspective of Bergsma on biblical studies is unfortunate. He writes:

> The modern discipline of biblical studies is an essentially secular academic specialization that treats the Bible as an artifact of human culture to be analyzed by historical and philological methodologies. Biblical studies are taught this way in most Protestant, Catholic, and public universities in the developed and (increasingly) the developing world, with the exception of a few institutions that maintain a strong confessional identity (185).

Biblical studies can certainly be seen in this light at some institutions. Nevertheless, this kind of sweeping generalization is unfortunate because even at some of those kinds of institutions referred to, Christians see biblical studies as a Christian discipline for the glory of God, not merely a secular discipline. This kind of statement is also unfortunate because it may build

disunity within the larger theological enterprise. There are already big enough gulfs dividing biblical studies, biblical theology, and systematic theology, and this kind of statement does not help to build unity.

Third, this volume would likely be better if it included coverage of a mix of recent interpreters instead of focusing solely on the more foundational interpreters. Given that scholars and theologians within the Reformed tradition interpret the Bible and develop doctrines differently than their predecessors, discussing this element would make this volume a more useful snapshot of biblical interpretation and doctrinal development today and, thus, perhaps, show how to improve upon what is already happening.

That said, this book can be used as a good representation of the Reformed tradition, perhaps as an example of one tradition among others in a course on theology, biblical interpretation, or even church history. These authors have reported much of what has been influential in this tradition throughout the centuries. A professor might even use this book as a basis to have students explore their own theological traditions further in similar ways.

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