

[MJTM 16 (2014–2015)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Franciscus Junius. *A Treatise on True Theology: With the Life of Franciscus Junius*. Translated by David C. Noe. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014. lii + 247 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-1-60178-341-7.

David C. Noe has labored to resurrect one of the great Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century from the footnotes of history books. Franciscus Junius was a prominent figure of his day, and even long after his death. Junius was an erudite thinker and teacher whose writings have not been accessible to most modern readers until now. For the first time, *A Treatise on True Theology* has been translated into modern English.

Junius lived during an interesting period of European civilization from 1545 to 1602. He studied Law at Bourges and theology at Geneva during John Calvin's final years. Over the course of his life, he served as pastor and professor of Hebrew, and later, as professor of theology. He also became an advisor to King Henry IV concerning Protestant affairs. While Junius is perhaps largely unknown to many today, the book's introduction explains the significance and impact of his work on Continental Reformed theology. Some of the theologians who directly adopted Junius's distinction of archetypal and ectypal theology and epistemology include Amandus Polanus, Petrus van Mastricht, Francis Turretin, Johannes Cocceius, Johann Heinrich Heidegger, John Owen, Jacobus Arminius, Herman Bavinck, and Karl Barth.

The book has three main sections, excluding the preface and forewords. The first section is an introduction by Willem J. van Asselt, an expert in historical theology of that time period. Van Asselt puts Junius's theological contribution into perspective, and while he does not attempt to summarize all the thirty-nine

theses mentioned later in the book, he does show their value for understanding early Reformed theology. Most important is van Asselt's assessment of Junius's work for later theological developments. For example, he uses Junius's work as grounds for disproving a modern thesis. Some claim that the underlying philosophical tendencies of humanist-trained writers in the latter Reformed period set the stage for Enlightenment rationalism—specifically, the rational critique of a distant and unknowable God. But the distinctions Junius proposed entirely undermine this critique. In the assessment of van Asselt, the role Junius played in setting the trajectory for “Reformed dogmatics cannot be overestimated” (xlvi). For many readers, this section will perhaps be viewed as a valuable stand-alone essay. In fact, I believe the introduction can be used as a helpful class handout for a historical theology class on the Reformation Period in both undergraduate and seminary settings.

The next two sections are works by Junius translated by David Noe. The first is a 59-page autobiographical piece that was originally published posthumously in the seventeenth century. It recounts the important events of Junius's life with a focus on his education and maturation as a Christian. Junius lived during dangerous times. It was a period when Europe was in religious and political tumult. Despite the times, Junius shows himself to be a daring servant of the church, who is willing to publicly debate a Franciscan and a Jesuit on their terms. Though the piece is autobiographical, Junius does not hide his struggles and the testing of his faith. He concludes by briefly revealing that his life was not always easy. He had four wives and eight children. But as was common in that time period, childbirth was a mixture of death and life—his first three wives died on account of it, and so did his three children.

This autobiographical piece gives vivid insight into Junius as a person. However, it will probably only be appreciated by those who enjoy church history. Most readers will find this section unnecessary. Nothing in it offers insight into the following theological work other than showing that Junius was a well-educated person. Furthermore, while some historical details are mentioned, this section does not provide enough information for us to learn about the historical climate of the time. For instance,

though Junius was in the midst of the Counter-Reformation, the passing mention of iconoclast riots and debates does not provide enough information for the book to be used as a purely historical textbook. So while I enjoyed learning about Junius, I can see this section being skipped by most readers and not assigned in classroom settings.

The third and final section contains Junius's famous work, *A Treatise on True Theology*. First published in 1594, this piece made Junius famous and respected during his lifetime. The work consists of thirty-nine theological theses that he explained and defended. Though it was written long ago, modern theological students can still benefit from it. The straightforward manner of argumentation with a simple layout shows this work to be more than just a historical-theological book. It could still be used in classrooms today as basic prolegomena to systematic theology courses. For instance, theses 1 to 3 define and defend the idea that theology exists and that it exists because God has revealed himself. Thesis 5 and the explanations of it can be used as a substantial classroom lecture: "Theology is wisdom concerning divine matters" (85). In Junius's opinion, the task of theological reflection requires growth and learning, especially by drawing from an outside source. He explains how intuitions are not enough for doing proper theological reflection. His remarks can challenge students living in postmodern times.

Beginning with thesis 6, Junius indicates why he became famous. He was the first to articulate a distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology. It is an analogical distinction that Junius lays out in a number of his theses. Archetypal theology is divine wisdom about divine matters. It is God's knowledge about himself. The capacity to know God to an infinite degree is only achieved by God. Such an epistemological capacity and knowledge is essential to the Trinity and is uncreated. Archetypal theology, meaning archetypal knowledge about God, is thus an incommunicable attribute. Alternatively, ectypal theology is fashioned from the archetype but is communicated "proportionally to the creatures' capacity" (104). It is true theology and true revelation but is finite and formed for humanity to receive. Perhaps the easiest line of explanation by Junius is, "divine truth exists in two modalities—infinately, by

virtue of its being essential in God, and finitely, by virtue of the fact that God has communicated it with creatures” (185).

This distinction that Junius made has extensive ramifications. It explains the boundaries of epistemology. It establishes the field of theological inquiry and its reliable basis. It defines divine revelation as being a product of the Infinite’s self-revelation in a finite form. It also destroys the critique that Reformed theology lends itself to deism. Junius explains that the essence is out of reach, but the ectypal is before humanity.

There are also christological ramifications. While debates between defenders of Lutheran and Reformed views of the sacraments during the sixteenth century were ongoing, Junius always tried to separate the two groups with reference to the person of Christ. While Lutherans held that the divine nature by and large subsumed the human nature, the union “does not bring about either a confusion or a transfusion of the properties that pertain to the one nature or the other” (122). For Junius, Christ is the point where the archetypal and the ectypal meet. But the human nature is incapable of containing the archetypal, and therefore, in order to be fully human, Christ had to forgo the archetypal infinite essence. By this distinction, Junius firmly established the way Reformed theology until today discusses the *communicatio idiomatum*.

While Junius covers some challenging topics, he also discusses some edifying points. For instance, thesis 32 argues that the highest end of theology is the glory of God. The points and arguments of the remaining theses are quite edifying, as they encourage biblical reflection.

A translated work is not without editorial decisions, however, and a couple of these decisions are puzzling. I enjoy history and historical theology. Having a degree in history has caused me to learn and eventually love old writing styles, but sometimes the translation method is puzzling. In the first paragraph of Junius’s work, there are sixteen archaic words: thee, thou, thy, and hast. Despite discussing his translation methods, Noe does not footnote or explain this paragraph being somehow unique in Junius’s writing, nor is there an explanation as to why moving forward he foregoes his use of the archaic language. Thankfully, Noe stops using it after this first paragraph. Equally curious is

the capitalization of “Father” in various places. For instance, on pages 36 and 42 the word “Father” referring to both Junius’s biological father and God is capitalized for no stated reason. Given that Junius wrote in Latin, it was unnecessary for the translator to use King James English, and hopefully, the unexplained capitalizations are editorial errors.

The reason for such a nitpicky critique brings up the important question of who is the target audience of this book. Scholars are likely to desire a more critical text. While there are some notes, scholars perhaps would want more footnotes about the words used for theological terminology. Hence, critical scholars are unlikely to be the main audience. At the other end of the spectrum, lay readers do not need the Greek and Latin words in the footnotes. And they too, but unlike scholars, would have appreciated more footnotes to help them understand theological and philosophical concepts. The only logical place the book naturally fits is within the advanced undergraduate or seminary classroom. Here students would be able to do primary reading while assisted by professors who can directly consult the Latin. Of course, the classroom is not the only place the book will be appreciated, but it appears to be its primary target.

Overall I believe students will undoubtedly benefit from reading Junius’s work in an accessible format in the English language. Beyond the classroom, both pastors and educated lay readers in English will also benefit from reading one of the foundational sixteenth-century theological writers.

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