

Lecture 20 – “May Orthodoxy Prevail, May Piety Flourish”: Protestant Orthodoxy

Dorothy Sayers: “It is worse than useless for Christians to talk about the importance of Christian morality, unless they are prepared to take their stand upon the fundamentals of Christian theology. It is a lie to say that dogma does not matter; it matters enormously.” “Creed or Chaos?” in Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World, 31

“Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.” Psalm 119:27

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 19, pp. 175-78

Prayer

From Herman Witsius (following his address “On the Character of a True Theologian”)

“O God, who art the teacher and giver of all wisdom, be Thou present, by Thy Spirit, with us as we engage, yea, that we may engage together in these [seminary] studies. Open Thou our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law. May Thy Holy Scriptures be our pure delight; may we neither be deceived in reading them, nor handle them deceitfully. Sanctify us through Thy truth; Thy word is truth. Preserve, defend, enlarge this seminary, consecrated to Thy glory. Let envy, strifes, divisions, heresies be forever at a distance. May orthodoxy prevail, may piety flourish, let mercy and truth meet together, let righteousness and peace kiss each other. Our beloved country, rescued by Thy wonder-working right hand from so many evils, do Thou preserve in safety and peace...And after our days in this life have been spent in prolonged felicity, do Thou at last transfer us, with all thine elect, to heaven itself. This is the sum of our prayers, this is the sum of our hope. Hear and accept us, O Triune Jehovah! Amen.”

“May Orthodoxy Prevail, May Piety Flourish”: Protestant Orthodoxy

I. What is Protestant Orthodoxy?

A. Orthodox

1. Calvin and the Calvinists: Gap?
2. Theodore Beza

B. Scholastic

1. Scholastic method
2. Aristotelian philosophy

C. Polemic

1. Lutheran George Calixtus (1585-1656)—*The Way to Peace Among Protestants*
2. Reformed Benedict Pictet (1655-1724)—*On Agreement and Disagreement of the Reformed with the Brethren of the Augsburg Confession*

D. Practical—Pastoral

II. Who Were the Protestant Orthodox?

A. Lutheran

1. Johann Gerhard (1582-1637)—*Loci Theologici*
2. Abraham Calov (1612-86)—*Systema locorum theologicorum*
3. Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617-88)—*System of Theology*

B. Reformed

1. Jerome Zanchi (1516-90)—*The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted*
2. Theodore Beza (1519-1605)—*Confession and Book(s) of Christian Questions and Answers*
3. Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629)—*Compendium of Christian Theology*
4. Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676)
5. Johannes Cocceius (1603-69)—*Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*
6. Francis Turretin (1623-68)—*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*
7. Herman Witsius (1636-1708)—*The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*
8. Benedict Pictet (1655-1724)

III. What is the Value of Protestant Orthodoxy for Us?

A. Careful and precise theology

*Charles Hodge in a review of a new book from Germany (1844): “After all the alleged improvements in theological research, we never feel so much disposed to take down one of the old Latin dogmatic writers of the seventeenth century, as immediately on closing a fresh work from Germany. These antiquated writers have a thousand faults, it may be; they are stiff, they are prolix, they are technical, they are intolerant and austere, they are scholastic in their distinctions, but they have one great merit—they always let us know what they mean. Their atmosphere, if wintry and biting, is clear” (*BRPR* 16 [1844]: 182).

*Karl Barth in his foreword to Heppes’s *Reformed Dogmatics*: “In these old fellows [the Protestant scholastics] I saw that it can be worthwhile to reflect upon the tiniest point...and, for the sake of much appealed-to ‘life,’ to be quite serious about the question of truth all along the line. In other words I saw that Protestant dogmatics was once a careful, orderly business, and I conceived the hope that it might perhaps become so again.”

*Paul Tillich: “The vagueness of much theological thinking in modern Protestantism stems from...lack of knowledge of Protestant orthodoxy” (*Christian Thought*, 307).

B. Spiritual nourishment

Michael Horton: “If it is done correctly, orthodoxy builds us a fire that will drive out the darkness and warm the body and soul even in the most gloomy weather.”

Questions from Class

How did Turretin differ from Calvin?

Was Turretin overly certain?

Did Calvin actively reject scholasticism?

Why is the scholastic method continued and recovered?

How did the pastors and people of the time accept these works?

For Further Study

**The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (1970) by Robert D. Preus

The standard work on the Lutheran orthodox.

**Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology* (1987) by Richard A. Muller
Muller is the most dependable scholar dealing with the Reformed orthodox. See also his “Calvin and the ‘Calvinists’: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 345-75 and 31 (1996): 125-60.

**Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (3 vols.) by Francis Turretin

Now available in English. James M. Boice writes: “If ever a great theological work has been unjustly neglected it has been Francis Turretin’s masterful volumes on the whole of Christian doctrine....I heartily commend [them] to preachers, theological students and lay persons everywhere. Let’s all knock off a month from our regular work and study Turretin!”

A. Read *On the Character of a True Theologian* by Herman Witsius (Reformed Academic Press, 1994). “On the Character of a True Theologian” was the inaugural address of Herman Witsius at the University of Franeker on April 15, 1675. It was translated from Latin into English by John Donaldson, a Free Church of Scotland minister, who needed, as he put it, “some employment which would occupy, without fatiguing his mind, during a period of enfeebled health.” It was published in 1856 (with a recommendation by William Cunningham) and distributed by the Free Church to nearly a thousand divinity students and pastors. It was reprinted in 1994 by Reformed Academic Press under the editorship of Ligon Duncan, CTS graduate, with an introduction by Mike Honeycutt, another CTS graduate.

*Reflect on Witsius’s definition of a theologian (page 27).

*What are the three main points of his address?

*Would Witsius agree with the 19th-century slogan “No book but the Bible”?

*What does Witsius mean when he says that the theologian must be “a disciple of the Spirit”?

*What is the difference between innovation and progress in theology?

*What in Witsius’s opinion opens the door to antinomianism and atheism?

*Do you think that Herman Witsius is a “scholastic”?