

REVIEW ARTICLE

*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 2, Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, by Richard S. Muller. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

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This study is a continuation of Muller's earlier essay on the theological prolegomena of the orthodox or scholastic Reformed systems. In both volumes he has done a splendid job. What Heinrich Heppe did /261/ in his compendium of Reformed Dogmatics in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Muller is doing in the last decade of the twentieth century. In the meantime, this theology of orthodox or scholastic protestantism had seldom been given the attention it deserves, both theologically and historically. It suffered from its interpreters, who too often saw this theology as the embodiment or antithesis of their own ideas. The great achievement of this second volume (of a projected three-volume work) is Muller's lucid presentation of the doctrine of Holy Scripture as taught by the Reformed orthodox and his meticulous analysis of all the elements of their teachings in the context of contemporary scholarly and theological discussion. As in the first volume, part one, the Introduction, is important for understanding Muller's intention and position. The basic issue discussed here is the question of continuity or discontinuity of doctrine and method in the development of Christian thought from the later Middle Ages, through the Reformation, into the seventeenth century. Two points are important here. First, Muller has done much to challenge the popular assumption that the medieval scholastics devaluated or ignored the biblical foundation of theology and the parallel misconception that Protestant orthodoxy ignored exegesis. Second, when discussing the relation between Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy, Muller demonstrates clearly that two positions are no longer tenable:

1. The radical discontinuity model that describes the movement of Protestant theology from the Reformation into the era of orthodoxy as a radical alteration of perspective

and thus as a distortion of the theology of the Reformers (e.g., Ernst Bizer and Walter Kickel); and

2. A simplistic continuity model that maintains an unbroken continuity between the Reformation and orthodoxy.

Both models are in his view erroneous and simplistic. Neither of these two comes to grips with the theology of the Protestant orthodox. They have a hidden agenda — to justify some twentieth-century idea (Cf., also PRRDI 2.42-2.5 with Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 1-14, 79.95-96, 173-182). Their main fault is that they describe the development of Reformed orthodoxy only in comparison with Calvin without taking into account the background of later medieval theology and the context of polemics in the orthodox era. In his view, a much more complex discussion of the whole spectrum of continuities and discontinuities with these antecedents is required and is nowhere more pressing than in the discussion of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture /262/ (p. 5).

True to these remarks, Muller addresses in part one of his book the doctrine of Scripture in medieval scholastic theology from its rise to the end of the fifteenth century (Chapter 1), and the Protestant development of this doctrine from the beginning of the Reformation to the end of the seventeenth century (Chapter 2). Part two of the book is an accurate analysis of all the elements of the doctrine of Scripture that emerged in the period of Early, High and Late orthodoxy. He discusses the orthodox teachings concerning Scripture as Word of God and *principium cognoscendi theologiae* (Chapter 3); the divinity of Scripture (Chapter 4); Scripture according to its properties (Chapter 5); the canon of Scripture (Chapter 6); and the interpretation of Scripture (Chapter 7).

Muller's important study is compulsory reading for all my students. Its main conclusion is that it is not correct to view the orthodox doctrine of Scripture as a monolith. Contemporary discussion often reflects a lack of knowledge of the variety of formulations in the orthodox doctrine of Scripture on such issues as the definition of *analogia fidei*; the use of typological and other figurative patterns of interpretation; the logic and arrangement of the locus *De Sacra Scriptura*; and the relationship of the locus to the system as a whole. Muller warns us 'not to replace the notion of a predestinarian or decretal monolith with the idea of another kind of monolith'. In this variety, moreover, there is no clearly identifiable tendency toward the 'dogmatic exegesis' with which the

age of orthodoxy is typically associated. Most of the orthodox dogmaticians began their careers as exegetes and were still involved in the life of the church as pastors and preachers during their periods of academic activity.

There are, of course, elements of discontinuity. First, the orthodox system does frame its statements about Scripture differently, more technically, and in more strictly defined terms than in the Reformers' writings. This element of discontinuity, however, must be placed in the larger context of a development of terminology. The Reformed scholastics retained the medieval systematic models but altered their definitions on the basis of the arguments of the Reformers. Another element of discontinuity is that orthodox doctrine has consistently moved to rationalize the polemic with Rome into a positive doctrine.

Muller also demonstrates that the orthodox theologians were neither ignorant of nor immune from the advances and alterations in exegetical method and in hermeneutics that took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The advances in textual analysis, linguistic study, and historical-contextual reading of the text of Scripture that took place were really the products of the orthodox exegetes themselves. They /263/ themselves raised (and resolved) many of these issues: e.g., the debate over the vowel points. So the linguistic capabilities of the orthodox exegetes were in fact the source of increasing pressure upon the orthodox system, more than the philosophical and scientific revolution of the seventeenth century (p. 128). According to Muller: 'The Protestant orthodox themselves often contributed positively to the development of exegesis and hermeneutics, even when some of their results would eventually have a somewhat negative effect upon traditional dogmatics' (p. 136).

The path from exegesis to doctrine had taken a methodological turn. It removed many of the traditional *dicta probantia* from the realm of legitimate use. Moreover, the Reformed orthodox did not, as is often assumed, make a rigid identification of the Word of God with Holy Scripture. Much of the theological critique of orthodoxy on this point (e.g., Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, and Paul Althaus) rests on Heppes discussion of the loss of the distinction between *verbum agraphon* and *verbum engraphon* in the era of orthodoxy. Heppe attributed this change to the 'later dogmaticians,' who separated the idea of inspiration from that of revelation. According to Muller, Heppe is misled when drawing this conclusion. Such phrases as 'the Word of God in Holy Scripture' appear

frequently in the works of seventeenth-century Reformed theologians (such as Burman, Marckius, and Pictetus, and in confessions from the same period, such as the Irish Articles 91). The distinction between unwritten and written word was strongly connected with the covenantal aspect of the Reformed doctrine.

Finally, two critical observations must be made. First, Muller argues that Cocceius's federal theology, for all its biblicism and exegetical interest, is thoroughly scholastic in its approach to the dogmatic and systematic task (p. 120 ff.). But Muller's evaluation of Cocceius's exegetical methods and hermeneutics is exclusively based on an analysis of his *Summa theologiae ex Scripturis repetita* (1662) and not on his main work, the *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei* (1648). The first work, originally consisting of lectures on the *loci communes* he delivered at Leiden University, is not representative for his proper method. It does contain (obligatory) scholastic elements, which he critically used, especially in the doctrine of God. The second work, however, reveals no such features. I agree with Muller that Cocceius did not present a 'mere biblical theology' (Does such a theology exist, anyway?). His covenant theology was also a logically argued theology. But I disagree with Muller's claim that Cocceius's theology was as representative of Protestant scholasticism (in a general sense) as the theology of his opponents. Besides, his most original doctrinal structure was not the /264/ *pactum salutis* but the typically antischolastic doctrine of the five gradual abrogations of the covenant of works in salvation history.

Second, it is a pity that a work of such importance is marred by some spelling mistakes in the Latin quotations: *viatorem* (p. 35) instead of *viatorum*; *continent* (p. 35) must be *continet*; Antoinus (p. 130): Antonius (Hulsius); refutation (p. 130): *refutation*; *dipositio* (pp. 171 and 172): *dispositionis*; *quod sit Deus* (p. 177): *quid sit Deus*; *vebum* (p. 204); *verbum*.