

HM 4.1 – Puritan Perspectives on Ministry

Reformed Scholasticism

"Hostility against scholasticism is the mark of the false prophet. The true prophet would not shy away from submitting his message also to this test." - Karl Barth (cited in Asselt/Dekker, p.20 from KD II/1, 296)

- Karl Barth's Foreword to Heppes's *Reformed Dogmatics*
- Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, Q.94, arts 2-3
- Richard Muller, "Orthodoxy, Reformed" from D.McKim & D. Wright (eds.) *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith*, 1992
- Richard Muller - *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca.1520 to ca.1725* - 4 vols, (vols 1-2, 2nd edn 2003; vols 3-4, 2003).
- Richard Muller, "Calvin and the "Calvinists": Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy", *Calvin Theological Journal*, 30 (1995), 345-375 esp 358-9
- Willem J van Asselt & Eef Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, 2001
- Sebastian Rehnman, Lecture to CH 3,3, "An Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism" (9 Oct 2001)

1. "Reformed" was the favoured word in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
 - sometimes used for "Protestant" (to 1660)
 - usually meaning "more radical", going further than Luther
 - always about the supreme authority, the prior authority, the only ultimate authority – putting things right, reconstructing all things according to the Word
2. "Calvinist" is a later usage and misleading for a number of reasons
 - before Calvin was converted, there were Reformed theologians
 - Calvin was one of a number of key Reformed thinkers in the sixteenth century

John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, (CUP, 1997), p.75:

"He clearly had great respect for the French Reformer, calling him a 'man endued with the Spirit of God above any Papist'. [The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication, 1646, p.62] However, Rutherford never called himself a 'Calvinist', and the tendency of historians to prefer the term 'Calvinist' to the more accurate 'Reformed', suggests a movement dominated by a single man, rather than one shaped by a group of like-minded theologians as was in fact the case. Much of the debate over Calvin and the theology of the 'Calvinists' would be avoided were we to realise that seventeenth century Protestants aimed to be faithful not to Calvin but to Scripture as interpreted by the Reformed tradition in general."

- Reformed theology was a multi-centred, international phenomenon
 - "The theologies of Knox and Rutherford, Perkins and Owen are first and foremost European events in terms of their sources, content, dialogue partners and means of expression, as well as their authors' self-understanding as being part of a Europe-wide movement for the reformation of the church." (Trueman in A-D 260)
 - thus to the extent that by "Calvinism" we mean "Reformed thought" then we should not think of it as an "ism" which came first or solely out of Calvin
 - and remember that "sola Scriptura" means "Scripture standing alone above all others as the ultimate authority" not "Scripture and nothing else" (nuda Scriptura?)
3. The Reformation was not against philosophy
 - some extreme statements in Luther / Calvin have to do with the abuse of philosophy or with false philosophy rather than philosophy as such. The claim that Calvin was anti-scholastic needs revising. He was against some particular scholastic conclusions and more often than not it was contemps at Sorbonne not older ones - "Calvin sought not a rejection but a reform of school theology in the service of the church" (52-3)
 - the Reformers simply presupposed much of the teaching of the great medieval theological systems of Lombard, Aquinas etc

4. The Reformation was not against scholasticism as a method but rather against “scholasticism” as standing for some medieval capitulation to pelagianisms and semi-pelagianisms. And scholasticism as speculative beyond what is useful. The Prot scholastics were emphatic that theology was a practical discipline – see Ames chapter 1.

5. Scholasticism as a method:
 - “Scholasticism is a dialectical program or method of inquiry in which logical clarification took a prominent place; it is the precise, detailed, and disputative methodological and didactical enquiries undertaken by academics” in the medieval and early modern period (Rehman)
 - grew out of the study of ancient and authoritative texts
 - use two or more authoritative texts and find conflicting statements in them – what to do ?
 - either one statement is true or both are true in two different senses or both are false
 - when authorities are in disagreement then try out different senses
 - this makes precision of definition very important and requires logical accuracy

6. The scholastic method developed
 - the “quaestio” method is these sorts of principles taken beyond the use of authoritative texts
 - “a dialectical genre devoted to the solution of difficulties. (1) the pursuit of truth is greatly promoted by questioning and, (2) conflicting statements can often be solved by carefully considering and distinguishing between various senses or meanings” (Rehman)
 - Muller discerns four aspects of the *quaestio* method:
 1. the presentation of a thesis or *quaestio*, a thematic question
 2. the indication of the subjects that stand to be discussed in that *quaestio*, the so-called *status quaestionis*;
 3. the treatment of a series of arguments or objections against the adopted positions, the so-called *objectiones*;
 4. the formulation of an answer (*responsio*), in which account is taken of all available sources of information, and all rules of rational discourse are upheld, followed by an answer to the objections, which is as comprehensive as possible. (cited in Asselt/Dekker, 26)

7. Owen’s characterisation:

In the preface to *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance* (1654, vol XI, one of his best), Owen runs through ancient and medieval authorities showing what they believed on the matter. He wonders about adding “the concurrent witness of all the reformed churches, with that of the most eminent divines” but decided it was pointless because everyone (apart from his opponent John Goodwin) knew full well what they thought. At this point, by the way, he refers to “the system of that doctrine which, with so much pains, diligence, piety, and learning they promoted in the world, with the clearness of their judgments in going forth to the utmost compass of their principles which they received and their constancy to themselves in asserting the truths they embraced...” (p.73)

8. Given 3 & 4 above, it is possible to put 1 & 2 together with 5 & 6. The result is “Reformed Scholasticism”. Two hundred years of theological endeavour, 1560-1790. Survey Muller article.

Early

- respond to RC crits of Reformers – polemical drive to more precision, comprehensiveness, thoroughness, clarity, internal consistency etc
- go beyond catechisms and confessions to greater detail
- Prot-m now has its own institutions – unis etc

High

- fine-tuning the system
- assuming early orthodoxy
- hermeneutical debates on covenant
- beginning to struggle with new advances in science
- move from church governing the academy to the church battling the academy

Late

- under attack from latitudinarianism, pietism etc
- somewhat sterile and pointless
- increased reliance on reason

9. Study of Reformed Scholasticism has moved on.

Old prejudices: “presupposition that post-Reformation scholasticism was not much more than a rigid and inflexible complex of dogmas involving a regression to outdated medieval patterns of thought. The vital kerygma of the reformers, it is claimed, was replaced by the dead letter of a dogmatic system, which, as a Procrustean bed, obscured the gospel. ... [O]rthodox theology got caught up in the dangerous rationalistic tide, thereby resulting “inevitably” in the rationalism of the Enlightenment.” (A/D 11-12)

An extract from Muller setting some things straight:

“The task of the dogmatic theologian, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, consisted in the identification and elicitation of the basic theological topics or *loci* from the text of Scripture, the arrangement of these *loci* in a suitable order, and the explication of their contents in terms of the implications of the biblical text, the traditionary development of the doctrine (with specific recourse to the patristic materials), and the contemporary issues and adversaries of orthodoxy. Given the grounding of Protestant “scholastic” theology in Scripture and their specific limitation of the role of reason to an instrumental function, it should come as no surprise that the reputed “Aristotelianism” of the Protestant scholastics was not a matter of wholesale appropriation. Rather their Aristotelianism was the modified Aristotelianism of the scholastic tradition which excluded such features of Aristotle’s philosophy as the eternity of the world and the finitude of God, and which had, in addition, been filtered through the debates of the Reformation and Renaissance.

The usual *methodus* or “way through” the topics was the so-called “synthetic” order which began with first causes, proceeded to examine means, and concluded with final causes or goals. This model, however, was not a matter of logical deduction: as Paul Helm has pointed out this would be to confuse “a logically necessary condition, consistency, with a logically sufficient condition, deducibility.” The doctrines of creation and redemption were not, for example, inferred from the essence and attributes of God. Rather, they were set forth because they were understood to be biblical teachings or, indeed, doctrinal *loci* drawn from Scripture - and placed after the doctrine of God inasmuch as God is prior to both as the necessary condition for any creation or redemption. The standard order of Reformed orthodox theology, moreover, that begins with God, moves on to creation, human nature, the fall, sin, covenant, Christ, the order of salvation, the church, and the last things, is fundamentally reflective of the canonical order of the biblical narrative which, on the assumption of God, moves to creation, through the history of sin and redemption, to the last things.

Something must be said, in addition, concerning the larger task of the Protestant scholastic theologian. The school-theology of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth century was, in marked contrast to its rumored rationalism, highly biblical and exegetical. This point has already been available to us from consideration of the foundation of the *locus* method of theological formulation, but it is worth drawing out into the broader context of the Protestant theological faculty, in which biblical studies occupied so prominent a place. Over against, moreover, the often-heard modern objection that this was a purely dogmatic biblicism for the sake of theological system, we can only note here that the era of Protestant orthodoxy was an age of vast linguistic and textual expertise on the part of theologians: it was not only the age of Protestant scholastic theological system, it was also the age of the great polyglot Bibles and of the beginnings of Christian targumic and talmudic study. Many of the systematic or dogmatic theologians of the era—perhaps most notably Voetius and Witsius—were skilled not only in the basic biblical languages, Greek and Hebrew, but also in the ancient cognate tongues, Aramaic, and Syriac.” (A-D 58-60)

Finally, scholastic Protestantism was a fundamentally biblical movement that drew both on the principal *sola Scriptura* of the Reformation and on the burgeoning Protestant exegetical tradition for the heart of its theology. The Protestant theologian of the seventeenth century was assumed to be fluent in Latin and highly competent in classical Greek and Hebrew. Many of the major theologians of the era added to this linguistic paraphernalia a fair ability in the ancient cognate languages, Aramaic and Syriac. The scholastic era of Protestantism produced massive examination of the biblical text and the ancient versions and paraphrases, major lexical efforts, and significant philological advance: the humanist model triumphed in the scholastic context. This linguistic and exegetical ability, moreover, was far more closely tied to the dogmatic task by the scholastic orthodox of the seventeenth century than it has been since that time. Discussions of the era have often missed this point, inasmuch as they have paid even less attention to the so-called “pre-critical” exegesis of the era than they have to the dogmatic theology itself. (A-D 63)

10. Big question in studies of Reformed Scholasticism has been that of continuities and discontinuities with a) medieval scholasticism and b) Reformation thinkers.

See 10 propositions from Muller's *CTJ* article - below

1. The question of continuity and discontinuity between Reformation and orthodoxy must be set against the background of an examination of continuities and discontinuities running through the history of thought from the Middle Ages into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
2. "Scholasticism" and "Aristotelianism" must not be understood as static or as purely medieval phenomena, as if neither underwent a historical development that extended through the sixteenth into the seventeenth century.
3. Descriptions of "scholasticism" must consider the meaning of the term as found *both* in scholarly studies of the Christian tradition prior to the Reformation and in the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant theologians
4. Scholasticism and rationalism must also be clearly distinguished - on historical, philosophical, and theological grounds.
5. Method and content need to be distinguished, albeit not utterly separated.
6. Continuities and discontinuities in the interpretive or exegetical tradition must be given at least equal weight with developments in scholastic method and philosophical usage.
7. Individual Reformation thinkers or treatises ought not to be made a measure either of the whole Reformation era or of the Reformed character of individual orthodox era thinkers or treatises.
8. The diversity of post-Reformation theology must be examined with a view toward relativising standard generalizations about the relationships between the Reformation and post-Reformation orthodoxy, scholasticism and humanism, pietism and rationalism.
9. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century theological assumptions must not be allowed to impinge upon or become the basis of an assessment of the thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly inasmuch as such assumptions have frequently become imbedded in older theological examinations of the Reformation and orthodoxy and have often transformed nominally historical studies into justifications of modern theological views.
10. The various 'forms of the "central dogma" theory, both those that indicate a continuity between Calvin and Reformed orthodoxy and those that indicate a disjunction, must be set aside.

See also 10 propositions from Asselt/Dekker p.39 - characteristic claims of the "new school":

1. Scholasticism is a scientific method of research and teaching, and does as such not have a doctrinal content, neither does it have reason as its foundation.
2. There is a continuity between the Medieval, Reformation and Post-reformation Era (which is of course, not to deny that there are many differences).
3. "Aristotelianism" is exceedingly problematic when applied with a broad brush, and should rather be avoided if used unspecified.
4. Syllogisms are used by any person in a reasoning process (but not always consciously and explicitly), and are therefore, in themselves, not a sign of anything beyond that reasoning process, let alone of Aristotelianism.
5. The scornful way in which Luther and Calvin treated scholasticism is not to be taken as an overall hermeneutical principle to read scholasticism.
6. Let the scholastics themselves define scholasticism.
7. Protestant scholasticism does not proceed by abstracting proof texts out of Scripture, nor does Medieval scholasticism avoid or neglect Scripture and scriptural language.
8. Christian faith, and therefore, Christian theology, has its own view of life, its own frame of thought and is not to be identified with any philosophical system.
9. Parts of that unique Christian frame of thought are the concepts of will and contingency.
10. The relative placement of a *locus* in a system of doctrine does not as such change its content.

Thomas Aquinas - Summa Theologica

Question: 94 : Of The Relations Of The Saints Towards The Damned

Article 2: Whether the blessed pity the unhappiness of the damned?

Objection 1: It would seem that the blessed pity the unhappiness of the damned. For pity proceeds from charity [*Cf. SS, Question [30]]; and charity will be most perfect in the blessed. Therefore they will most especially pity the sufferings of the damned.

Objection 2: Further, the blessed will never be so far from taking pity as God is. Yet in a sense God compassionates our afflictions, wherefore He is said to be merciful.

On the contrary, Whoever pities another shares somewhat in his unhappiness. But the blessed cannot share in any unhappiness. Therefore they do not pity the afflictions of the damned.

I answer that, Mercy or compassion may be in a person in two ways: first by way of passion, secondly by way of choice. In the blessed there will be no passion in the lower powers except as a result of the reason's choice. Hence compassion or mercy will not be in them, except by the choice of reason. Now mercy or compassion comes of the reason's choice when a person wishes another's evil to be dispelled: wherefore in those things which, in accordance with reason, we do not wish to be dispelled, we have no such compassion. But so long as sinners are in this world they are in such a state that without prejudice to the Divine justice they can be taken away from a state of unhappiness and sin to a state of happiness. Consequently it is possible to have compassion on them both by the choice of the will--in which sense God, the angels and the blessed are said to pity them by desiring their salvation--and by passion, in which way they are pitied by the good men who are in the state of wayfarers. But in the future state it will be impossible for them to be taken away from their unhappiness: and consequently it will not be possible to pity their sufferings according to right reason. Therefore the blessed in glory will have no pity on the damned.

Reply to Objection 1: Charity is the principle of pity when it is possible for us out of charity to wish the cessation of a person's unhappiness. But the saints cannot desire this for the damned, since it would be contrary to Divine justice. Consequently the argument does not prove.

Reply to Objection 2: God is said to be merciful, in so far as He succors those whom it is befitting to be released from their afflictions in accordance with the order of wisdom and justice: not as though He pitied the damned except perhaps in punishing them less than they deserve.

Article 3: Whether the blessed rejoice in the punishment of the wicked?

Objection 1: It would seem that the blessed do not rejoice in the punishment of the wicked. For rejoicing in another's evil pertains to hatred. But there will be no hatred in the blessed. Therefore they will not rejoice in the unhappiness of the damned.

Objection 2: Further, the blessed in heaven will be in the highest degree conformed to God. Now God does not rejoice in our afflictions. Therefore neither will the blessed rejoice in the afflictions of the damned.

Objection 3: Further, that which is blameworthy in a wayfarer has no place whatever in a comprehensor. Now it is most reprehensible in a wayfarer to take pleasure in the pains of others, and most praiseworthy to grieve for them. Therefore the blessed nowise rejoice in the punishment of the damned.

On the contrary, It is written (Ps. 57:11): "The just shall rejoice when he shall see the revenge."

Further, it is written (Is. 56:24): "They shall satiate [*Douay: 'They shall be a loathsome sight to all flesh.'] the sight of all flesh." Now satiety denotes refreshment of the mind. Therefore the blessed will rejoice in the punishment of the wicked.

I answer that, A thing may be a matter of rejoicing in two ways. First directly, when one rejoices in a thing as such: and thus the saints will not rejoice in the punishment of the wicked. Secondly, indirectly, by reason namely of something annexed to it: and in this way the saints will rejoice in the punishment of the wicked, by considering therein the order of Divine justice and their own deliverance, which will fill them with joy. And thus the Divine justice and their own deliverance will be the direct cause of the joy of the blessed: while the punishment of the damned will cause it indirectly.

Reply to Objection 1: To rejoice in another's evil as such belongs to hatred, but not to rejoice in another's evil by reason of something annexed to it. Thus a person sometimes rejoices in his own evil as when we rejoice in our own afflictions, as helping us to merit life: "My brethren, count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations" (James 1:2).

Reply to Objection 2: Although God rejoices not in punishments as such, He rejoices in them as being ordered by His justice.

Reply to Objection 3: It is not praiseworthy in a wayfarer to rejoice in another's afflictions as such: yet it is praiseworthy if he rejoice in them as having something annexed. However it is not the same with a wayfarer as with a comprehensor, because in a wayfarer the passions often forestall the judgment of reason, and yet sometimes such passions are praiseworthy, as indicating the good disposition of the mind, as in the case of shame pity and repentance for evil: whereas in a comprehensor there can be no passion but such as follows the judgment of reason.