J. J. Rambach and the dogmatics of scholastic pietism

Richard A. Muller
The Pietist movement of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries reacted powerfully against the dogmatism of late Protestant Orthodoxy. Spener and those who followed him protested loudly against the dry, rigid formulae of Lutheran scholasticism and against the reduction of religion to the acceptance of a system of carefully defined theological propositions. This is certainly the standard view of the relationship between Pietism and Orthodoxy, and it contains, undeniably, an element of truth.¹ Orthodox Protestantism did tend to debate the finest points of doctrine and to assume that deviation from the orthodox position even on secondary issues was tantamount to an attack on fundamental doctrines—and Orthodoxy could, all too often, appear to equate acceptance of a detailed confessional statement with right religion. Against this historical truism, however, several writers have argued the piety of the Orthodox Lutheran theologians and have noted the emphasis of Orthodox Lutheran dogmatics on the Christian life.² Beyond this, a closer scrutiny of Pietism reveals both its relationship to the piety that had been developed in Orthodox Reformed circles—most notably in England, the Netherlands and Geneva—and its theological roots in the central concerns not only of the Reformers but also of many of the Orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians.³ It is also the case that Pietism itself moved away from its initial non-dogmatic and even antidogmatic approach and adopted both the style and the method of the older Orthodox, scholastic dogmatics. This theological development of Pietism has received only cursory treatment at the hands of historians of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁴
The notion of a “scholastic Pietism” or a “pietist Orthodoxy” might seem a bit incongruous until it is placed into the context of a phenomenology of religious movements: in the history of virtually all successful reform-movements, the initial stage of insight and protest is followed by a stage of codification and institutionalization that marks both the success of the movement and an alteration in its style and self-consciousness. Precisely such a development is seen in the transition from the era of the Reformation to the era of confessional orthodoxy. The impact of the theological polemic levelled against the movement by a technically sophisticated scholastic opponent, the need to state positively one’s own “right teaching”, and the academic nature of theological training all resulted in the rise of a Protestant orthodoxy. The same forces were present in the early history of Pietism and, there too, resulted in the rise of a fully enunciated theological system and, ultimately, of an orthodoxy.

Eminent among the thinkers who brought about this alteration in Pietism was Johann Jacob Rambach (1693–1735). Rambach studied from 1708–1712 at the Lateinschule established at Halle by August Hermann Franke. In the latter year he matriculated at the University of Halle. His early interest in medicine soon faded before the appeal of theology, particularly the study of the Old Testament. By 1715, Rambach had so demonstrated his linguistic abilities that he was appointed assistant to J.H. Michaelis, the renowned orientalist and Old Testament scholar, in the preparation of Michaelis’ edition of the Hebrew Bible. From 1719 to 1720, Rambach studied under Johannes Buddaeus (1667–1729) at Jena, and was awarded the M.A. in theology in 1720. Three years later he was appointed the inspector of the Halle/Glaucha orphanage. In 1726 he was called to be assistant professor of theology at Halle. On the death of Francke in 1727, Rambach became Professor Ordinarius. After being awarded the doctorate by the university of Halle in 1731, he was called to Giessen to the post of professor of theology, church superintendent, and, in the following year, director of the Paedagogium. His career was cut short by a fever on 19 April 1735.

In the twenty years that elapsed between the completion of his B.A. and his death, the prolific Rambach produced an enormous body of writings that evidence in their scholarship, character and variety a dedication to academics and church and a
commitment both to the Pietism of Halle and to the theology of orthodox Lutheranism. His *Erbauliches Handbüchlein für Kinder* (1734), a devotional manual for the young, was widely used in the eighteenth century. He wrote over 180 hymns, most of which appear in his *Geistreiches Haus-Gesangbuch* (1735) and in the Hannover and Lüneburg *Gesangbücher* of 1740 and 1767 respectively. Of a more scholarly nature are Rambach’s exegetical and hermeneutical works, his *Commentatio theologica* (1732)—a compend of theology—and his five major posthumous works, the *Collegium historiae ecclesiae veteris testamenti* (1737), *Collegium introductorium historico-theologicum* (1738), *Moral-Theologie oder christliche Sittenlehre* (1738), *Schriftmässige Erläuterung der Grundlegung der Theologie Herrn Johann Anastasii Freylingshausens* (1738), and the massive *Dogmatische Theologie oder christliche Glaubens-Lehre... über... D. Joachim Langens... Oeconomium salutis dogmaticam* (1744). Several volumes of Rambach’s sermons were also published.

Rambach and the Pietist Theological Program

Although much of the historical course of Pietism was characterized by debate, frequently bitter, with the proponents of strictly confessional, Lutheran Orthodoxy, the leading Pietist thinkers themselves were trained in theological Orthodoxy and, even in the midst of their most heated polemics against the Lutheran scholastics, intended to propound an essentially Orthodox form of Christian doctrine. Spener, for example, wrote words of praise for his Strasburg mentor, Johann Schmid, and for that profoundly Orthodox custodian of Wittenberg’s confessional integrity, Abraham Calovius. Spener even cites at length and with approval Calovius’ counsel to theological students from the latter’s *Paideia theologica, de methodo studii theologici* (1652). What makes the citation all the more remarkable is that Calovius is the theologian most typically singled out by historians as an example of the most doctrinally rigid and polemically unyielding of the Lutheran Orthodox, the theologian who, against the irenic, ecumenical and unionistic writings of Georg Calixt, attempted to make virtually all of the technical definitions of theological system into confessional requirements—the theologian who is said to have begun
each day with the prayer, *Dominus imple me odio haereticorum*. And seldom in the historical record of Christianity do we find so clear an example of answered prayer! Throughout the *Pia Desideria*, the reader is impressed by Spener's consistent and positive recourse to the works of a great number of Orthodox Lutheran writers. Beyond this and more importantly, Spener's own theological writings bear witness to the beginnings of a doctrinal program within Pietism itself: his *Die evangelische Glaubens-Lehre* surveys the liturgical year in a series of doctrinal sermons, and the posthumous *Consilia et judica theologica* presents discourses on a wide range of theological topics only a few of which would raise the dogmatic eyebrows of the Orthodox.

In addition to the more doctrinally oriented of Spener's writings, the early Pietism of Halle also produced a series of major essays in theological system, virtually all of them related to the task of teaching theology in the university. Joachim Breithaupt (1658–1732), the first professor of theology at Halle, wrote a two-volume system of faith and morals, *Institutiones theologiae de credendis atque agendis* (1694), the moral emphasis of which certainly reflects the Pietist program and its critique of Orthodoxy. The work as a whole, however, points toward the academic systematization of Pietism. Breithaupt's successor, Joachim Lange (1670–1744), is famous for his polemical battles with the Orthodox, but his theological influence at Halle must also be understood in terms of the extensive use of his theological compendium, the *Oeconomia salutis dogmatica* (1733), which served both as a textbook and as a foundation of a massive systematic elaboration by Rambach. A similar comment can be made of the *Grundlegung der Theologie* (1703) by Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen (1670–1738), who assisted Francke in his pastoral work at Glaucha: the volume was a highly influential text and, like Lange's dogmatics, the subject of a major systematic elaboration by Rambach.

Rambach's two vast systematic essays, the *Schriftmässige Erläuterung* and the *Dogmatische Theologie*, expand on materials provided by Freylinghausen and Lange and consciously draw Pietist dogmatics into the domain of Orthodoxy and Protestant scholasticism through specific use of the patterns and definitions of the great Lutheran Orthodox dogmatic systems. The *Dogmatische Theologie*, as both its extended title
and its methodological prologue manifest, rests not only on the
work of Lange but also on the Compendium theologiae positivae of Johann Wilhelm Baier (1647–1695), the Lutheran Orthodox theologian of Jena who, for one year at the very end of his career, taught rather unhappily at Halle alongside of Breithaupt. The theology of the two works is much the same, but they also, quite clearly, represent two stages of Rambach’s career: the Schrifftmässige Erläuterung was completed during Rambach’s year of study and adjunctive study at Jena and it reflects both an early period of this thought and the earlier model of the Halle theology, resting on Freylinghausen’s manual rather than on the later pattern of Lange’s. The Dogmatische Theologie, on the other hand, reflects both Rambach’s maturation as a professor at Halle and Giessen and also the progress of dogmatic system among the Orthodox and the so-called “transitional theologians” of the day, most notably the theology of Rambach’s teacher at Jena, Johannes Buddaeus. Thus, the developing language of an ordo salutis, found for the first time in Buddaeus’ Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae of 1723 and typical of the late Orthodox systems of the eighteenth century, can be found in the reorganized discussion of salvation in Rambach’s Dogmatische Theologie. Whether Rambach took the point directly from Buddaeus during his year at Jena or learned it later on first reading the Institutiones it is impossible to tell. In either case, as with the use of Baier’s Compendium, the cross-fertilization of Pietism and Orthodoxy is significant. Significant, also, is the fact that Buddaeus’ Institutiones also draws much of its inspiration from Baier.

The difference in form and content between Spener’s doctrinal sermons and Rambach’s elaborate systems should not be minimized. The theology of Pietism had undergone a major formal and attitudinal change in barely four decades. Spener had avoided technical theological language and the fine distinctions of scholastic Orthodoxy even when his teaching stood easily within the bounds of the Lutheran confessions—Rambach, quite to the contrary thrived on the precise language of the Orthodox. The difference between the two styles is almost as great as that between the early Reformation style of a Luther or a Melanchthon and the early Orthodox style of a Johann Gerhard. Rambach himself seems to have realized the distance that Pietism had traversed in reaching the point of his systematic efforts and to have recognized both the problem that an
unabated scholasticism posed for Pietism and the problem that some of his colleagues and students would have in accepting a scholasticized form of Pietist theology. At the beginning of the Schrifftmässige Erläuterung, after identifying his task as the “thetical collation” (collegium theticum) of theological materials, Rambach argues the necessity of “thetical study” despite the dangers inherent in a “scholastic theology” that examines “many subtleties and unprofitable questions.” “May the abuse be removed,” comments Rambach, “and the use remain”—tollatur abusus et maneant usus.  

In other words, the technique of theological system, in itself, apart from its abuses, ought to be of service to Pietism.

Still not quite satisfied that he has justified his enterprise, Rambach notes that Spener had been incorrectly viewed as condemning “compendia, systemata und das studium theticum.” Spener had, after all, written a preface to Dannhauer’s Hodosophia in which a body of thetically stated theology was organized into tables: according to Rambach, Spener viewed such compendia as guides to theological truth, resting on biblical study. Things to be believed, credenda, are to be gathered into a “system of thetical theology” just as things to be done, agenda, are to be drawn together into a “system of moral theology” and “conclusions against adversaries” into a “system of polemical theology.” The result of such gatherings, of course, is a scholastic orthodoxy—and the question it raised, the question obviously in Rambach’s mind, is whether it can remain an essay in piety.

Rambach, therefore, points to the problem of overemphasis on the scholastic approach, by way of a critique of several of the more famous theological text-books of his time:

Some of the writers of compendia have invested everything in scholastic terminology and have used this language to excess, especially Johann Hülsemann in his Breviarum theologicum, Sebastian Schmid in his Compendium theologicum, and above all Johann Friedrich König, the Rostock theologian, whose Theologia positiva acroamatica is so thoroughly inundated with scholastic terms that scarcely a line of print is free of them.

Others, continues Rambach, like the eminent Breithaupt, have abstained as much as possible from the use of scholastic terms, drawing only on certain crucial forms like essentia, persona, and natura, stating their theology primarily in phrasiologia biblica. It is, of course, one of the ironies of Rambach’s own style that he opposes the introduction of an excess
of scholastic terms with an alternative approach to theological formulation—the use of *phrasiologia biblica*—that he identifies not with a phrase in the vernacular but with one of the many Latin technical terms that crowd his system! Indeed, Rambach's theological systems, although written in German and obviously reflective of his class-room lecture style, evidence such a prominent use of the technical Latin vocabulary of Protestant scholasticism that they very nearly approximate Rambach's description of König's *Theologia positiva acroamatica*.

There is, however, a fundamental difference in attitude, if not always in style, between Rambach's work and König's. Although Rambach uses the technical language of scholasticism with a virtuosity that was considerable even in an era of scholastic theology, he consistently tempers his usage with a meticulously enunciated analysis of the dangers of scholasticism. He also offers an exacting discussion of the correct manner of approach to theology and theological system.²⁶

**The Problem of Theological Method**

According to Rambach there are seven distinct methods that have been followed in theological systems: the catechetical, the aristotelian scholastic, the federal or covenantal, the comparative, the mathematical, the practical, and the ecclesiastical. By *methodus*, Rambach means primarily the "way through" the materials of theology, the approach by which the materials are made known, as distinct from the order or architectonic arrangement of materials. His usage, in other words, is more like that of Melanchthon and the Orthodox dogmaticians than modern discussion of "method" in theology.²⁷ Although, as Rambach notes, all of these methods can be used in the construction of a system of "theoretical theology", only the scholastic and the mathematical methods bear directly on Rambach's work—the other five can be noted briefly with some of Rambach's reflections on them.

The *methodus catechetica*, as described by Rambach, follows the order of the catechism, but adapts it to the needs of *theologia acroamatica*, the detailed or "high" theological system taught in the university. Rambach offers no principal objections to this method, but he clearly objects to the way
in which some of the Orthodox Lutheran theologians had applied it: such is the method of Dannhauer's *Catechismus-Milch* which requires a strong stomach for its digestion!\(^{28}\)

By way of contrast, Rambach offers explicit praise for the *methodus foederalis* or covenantal method used primarily by Reformed theologians like Cocceius, Momma, Witsius, Braun and Lampe, but also by Lutherans such as Christian Reuter and Zeltner. The covenantal approach leads to a theological exposition that is highly biblical and, therefore, has the effect of purging the system of "scholastic vagaries". In view of the ties between Reformed federal theology and Pietism, witnessed by the number of works cited by Rambach and by his editor, it is surprising that Rambach makes no direct use of the federal model. Nor does he point toward the similarities in approach between the federal model and the emphasis on *oeconomia* taken over into his *Dogmatische Theologie* from Lange.\(^{29}\)

The *methodus comparativa*, used by such Orthodox Lutheran theologians of Rambach's time as Gaerdenus and Förtsch and by the transitional theologian Pfaff, is simply noted without evaluation: its intention, Rambach notes, is to examine the weight and significance of each dogmatic approach and to measure as well the influence of the practice of faith and of piety on dogmatics.\(^{30}\) Here, too, one would expect more comment from Rambach, granting his support for the Pietist theological program—but the method is not his and he offers neither praise nor critique. Still less attention is given to the *methodus practica* followed by Breithaupt's *Theses credendorum et aggregorum fundamentales*, where the importance of each doctrine for the praxis of piety and the relationship of *credenda* to *agenda* provide the basic pattern for discussion.\(^{31}\) Rambach also notes a *methodus ecclesiastica* discussed by Johann Ernst Gerhart, "the nephew of the great Gerhard", that exposit the basic doctrines of the church without reference to "subtle distinctions and controversies", a method capable of persuading the intellect and moving the heart. One might expect Rambach to advocate this method above all others—but once again he moves on without comment, presumably because the formulation of a "theatical theology" requires reference to some of those troublesome "subtle distinctions and controversies".\(^{32}\)

The method that receives by far the most attention—most of it negative—and that, somewhat paradoxically therefore,
appears to have the greatest influence on Rambach's thought is the *methodus Aristotelico scholastica*. This is the method, Rambach notes, of Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. It is called aristotelian because it accepts the aristotelian definition of theology as a practical discipline that must be exposited analytically.\(^{33}\) In the language of scholasticism, practical knowing corresponded to the Augustinian concept of love as *uti*: practical knowledge is not gained in and for itself as an end but is gained for the sake of attaining to an end that lies beyond it. Since theology is known for the sake of drawing the knower toward God as the highest good or *summum bonum*, it is a practical knowing.\(^{34}\) It follows an analytical method, as defined not merely by Aristotle but by aristotelian logicians of the late Renaissance like Zabarella, inasmuch as it does not proceed deductively from first principles but moves "resolutely", in a teleological fashion, toward a known goal.\(^{35}\)

This analytical approach, as defined by Rambach, identifies first the objective and formal goals of theology, God and the final blessedness of the human race; second, the subject of the praxis, human beings; and third, the means by which the end is attained, the articles of the faith.\(^{36}\) As used by the scholastics, Rambach argues, the method approached all of the articles of the faith in the language of metaphysics and attempted to reduce theology to a discussion of the kinds of secondary causes—efficient, instrumental and final. The method, thus, bound sound doctrine to numerous improprieties and, in particular, by excessive reference to problems of secondary causality, turned simple concepts into excessively complex and intricate reasonings. By an unnecessary and constant use of "*termini metaphysici*" and "*logomachia*", the scholastics obscured the divine science of theology. Nonetheless, concludes Rambach, the analytical method itself ought not to be entirely set aside because of the abuses to which it has been subjected.\(^{37}\)

The reason that Rambach treads so carefully in his treatment of the analytical method is not a lingering respect for the medieval theologians mentioned in his discussion. Rather it is his own kinship to a large body of unmentioned theologians who also held to the analytical method: as he acknowledges elsewhere in the *Dogmatische Theologie*, the method is typical of Orthodox Lutheran dogmatics, notably of the domatics of
Johann Wilhelm Baier, used as a fundamental point of reference in Rambach's own theology. Baier had followed an aristotelian "ordo systematicus" by arranging his theology into the three basic divisions of goal, subject, and means. Rambach clearly retains a genuine respect for the work of Baier—nor does he wish to alienate himself entirely from the tradition of Lutheran dogmatics to which he hopes to make a contribution. Nonetheless, he does reject, albeit gently, Baier's strict analytical order: "Ordo ist res arbitraria, darin man jedem seine Freiheit läßet." Theology cannot be bound to a philosophically determined order. Rather it must seek out a "more natural arrangement" that is more agreeable to its content: those who read his dogmatics will find that he has "diligently" compared his work with Baier throughout, but that he has also adopted "eine ganz andere Ordnung".

The last remaining method of the seven identified by Rambach is the methodus mathematica. The application of this method to theology was surely delayed by its close association throughout the course of the seventeenth century with Cartesianism. Rambach associated the application of the method to theology with a published letter of counsel from the great jurist Samuel Pufendorf to his brother Esias where the former had proposed that theology be drawn out in a demonstrative manner (in formam demonstrationis redigenda). The method was adopted among the Reformed by Pierre Huet in his apologetic treatise Demonstratio evangelica—but, as Rambach notes, despite his praise of Pufendorf, and despite his adoption of the method, Huet had expressed some reservations, indeed, had noted the "insuperable difficulty" facing the pure application of such a method: theology has no direct evidence of its object (evidentia obiecti) but only the evidence of testimony (evidentia testimonii) to its object. Despite such difficulties, the mathematical method was also adopted by such Lutheran writers as Heinrich Wideburg in his Systema theologiae positivae (1698) and Rambach's own colleague, Joachim Lange in his Oeconomia salutis dogmatica, in iusto articulorum nexu, methodo demonstrativa digesta.

The great problem that Rambach now faces is that both of the dogmatic models that underlie his theology—Baier and Lange—rest on methods of arrangement and argument that Rambach himself finds problematic. The other methods mentioned, the catechetical, federal, comparative, practical and
ecclesiastical, as Rambach’s examples indicate, were all used by Orthodox Lutheran theologians of the seventeenth century and had, indeed, been discussed as systematic models in most of the Protestant scholastic systems, specifically in their theological prolegomena. As a quick perusal of the prolegomena manifests, the catechetical, comparative, practical and ecclesiastical methods were all viewed as adequate for the basic purposes described by Rambach, but were not understood as suitable to the development of a full, academic theology in which fairly abstruse questions were asked, theological debates conducted, and various heterodox opinions defined and refuted. The federal or covenantal method, as evidenced by the several systems written in that form, was somewhat limited inasmuch as it gathered all of theology under a single dogmatic rubric and made difficult the display of all dogmatic topics in a useful order: the most successful of the federal systems tended to follow a standard analytic or synthetic pattern and to use the doctrine of covenant as a major focus of the system between creation and redemption rather than as an organizing principle for the whole system of theology. Granting these problems, not noted, but most certainly registered, by Rambach, a systema theologiae theticas such as he wished to construct for use in the university was left with the two problematic options, the scholastic and the mathematical, and with the task of adapting those methods to a renewed form of theology.

**Judicium de theologia systematica**

“Judgment concerning systematic theology” stands as the title of Rambach’s final sub-section in the discussion of the method suitable to theological system. He has chosen his terms carefully: “judicium” carries with it the connotation of a decision handed down by a law-court—and it is Rambach’s intention to pass judgment on the problems presented by theological method before passing on to his own “Monita de theologia systematica recte tractanda”, “admonitions concerning systematic theology rightly handled”. Some, Rambach begins, like the Quaker writer Robert Barclay, have confounded systematic with scholastic theology and, in their error, have attributed to both the “warts and blemishes” of “the old scholastics”, wrongly calling all systematic theology a “christianization of
pagan philosophy” and a “paganization of Christian knowledge”. The two approaches do have in common the desire “to draw the doctrines of Christianity (Glaubens-Lehren) into a conscious ordering and connection (in einer gewissen Ordnung und connexion), but the older scholasticism overstepped five boundaries (Grenzen) that must be observed for the right handling of theology and its doctrines. First, it mingled and confused “reason with revelation” and “philosophy with theology”. Second, it approached Holy Scripture with Hindansetzung—backwards application—using traditions, councils and the fathers as norms for the interpretation of the text; and similarly, third, it substituted a frequently inept human rationalization for the testimony of Scripture. Fourth and fifth, it involved theology in foolish questions, setting aside its purpose of edification for the sake of ingenious ostentation, and purposely discussed simple things in barbarous and obscure terms.46

Protestant theology, Rambach asserts, was delivered from these abuses by Luther’s Reformation. Luther’s attacks and cautions regarding scholasticism were gathered for instruction by Johann Zierold, Rambach notes, under the title Lutheri Aufmunterung zur Liebe des Wortes Gottes wider das Aristotelische scholastische Christenthum. This work, together with Erasmus Sarcerius’ De inutilitate theologiae scholasticae, manifest the original intention of the Reformation, over against the scholasticism that was reintroduced into Lutheran theology by “some of the theologians of our church” who “read assiduously” the writings of the older scholastics and admired—far too much for Rambach’s taste—their technical terminology (technologia).47 It is the task of Lutheran theology, Rambach continues, to develop a systematic presentation without erring either in excessu or in defectu. On the one hand, in order to avoid excess, too much value must not be placed on “human systems” that are “chilly” toward God’s Word but “fervent” about their own ideas, as if human systems were inspired—while on the other, in order to avoid defective teaching, one ought not to set aside systematic teaching entirely and to “pretend that one can learn the doctrines of the faith simply by the exegesis of Scripture.”48 Spener had warned against this latter problem. Rambach adds, in the preface on “impediments to theological study” that he affixed to his edition of Dannhauer’s Hodosophia.
It ought to be clear, then, that systematic theology can be rightly taught—particularly if certain rules and procedures are followed. The discipline ought to be presented “in a natural and unaffected order that recommends itself to memory”, so that “the connection between doctrinal pronouncements, which together like the links of a chain, are properly exhibited.”

Even so, there ought to be an exceedingly careful use of “metaphysical terms”—not that they be entirely excluded, but that they not be permitted to “accumulate without necessity” or to obscure doctrines that are in themselves clear. Definitions ought to be clear and adequate and, like the ordering of the system itself, suitable for memorization. What is more, the “dogmas” of theology must not only be explained clearly, but also in such a way as to draw the understanding toward assent: there must be rational arguments, of course, but the truths of theology ought to be presented with an emphasis on the biblical testimony—and these testimonies ought not to be simply alleged but displayed in an energetic demonstration, such as theologians like Muhlius and Calovius were wont to call “apodixis articulorum fidei, ex solis scripturae locis deducta.”

Granting the citation and use of Calovius, the identification of proper method, once again, leads Rambach into a positive relationship with scholastic Protestantism.

Beyond the Lutheran scholastic model—indeed, reflecting the approach of English Puritan and certain Dutch Reformed theologians—Rambach insists that a theological system “must especially demonstrate and inculcate with all diligence, not merely in passing, the application of each dogma to the practice of Christian life.” To this end, unnecessary digressions ought to be avoided—so that the course of study will not be so protracted that students despair of its conclusion! Students ought, moreover, to be spiritually disposed to theological education evidencing, among other characteristics, a desire to know the truth, to develop an experimental knowledge of themselves, and to hold the mystery of faith—or of the teaching of the faith (Glaubens-Lehre)—in a pure conscience, as the Apostle Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 3:9. The reading of theology, then, will take place with “a heartfelt prayer” and in a “godly illumination” arising out of a knowledge of and reliance upon Scripture as the sole foundation of Christian doctrine and on Luther’s catechism as a statement of the “idea of Christian
doctrine" and of "a general representation of the foundation and order of salvation." Rambach also insists on the study of biblical languages for the sake of sound exegesis—and on the use of sound German-language theological models, like the German version of Nicholas Hunnius' *Epitome credendorum* and Freylinghausen's *Grundlegung der theologie* for the communication of theological ideas in the church. Rambach's theological approach, in other words, attempts to emphasize the Pietist program of individual and corporate religiosity, of the impact of the faith on Christian life, indeed, to press the program into the very workings of theology, without losing the substance or the technique of the great Lutheran Orthodox systems.

The difficulties inherent in this approach, particularly in view of the "transitional" character of the theology of Rambach's contemporaries, are well illustrated by Rambach's discussions of natural theology and of doctrine of the divine essence and attributes. Indeed, a comparison of the *Schrifttmässige Erläuterung* with the later *Dogmatische Theologie* indicates not only Rambach's increasing sympathy with the "transitional theology" of his teacher Buddaeus but also the relative rapprochement between the Pietist theological style and a somewhat more rational or rationalizing approach to theology. Rambach retains, even in the vast detail of the latter work, his commitment both to the language of piety and to the vernacular as the basic linguistic vehicle of theology: Hollaz, Buddaeus, Weissmann and other Orthodox or "transitional" theologians of the day typically wrote their major systems in Latin. Nonetheless, Rambach's own theological development led him toward an increasing dependence on the technical terms of scholastic Lutheranism.

Thus, Rambach's earlier system discusses natural knowledge of God, both *insita* and *acquisita* in four pages, one of which is entirely devoted to the outline or conspectus of the discussion and then, after defining and discussing the revealed knowledge of God, presents the doctrine of name, existence and attributes of God in somewhat more than nine pages, beginning with a note of piety: as God said to Moses, Rambach writes, so also ought one to begin the discussion of the doctrine of God, "Zeuch die Schuh aus von deinen Füssen"—a symbolic act of reverence is called for on entering this holy ground. In the later work, Rambach engaged in a discussion
not of "natural knowledge of God" but of "natural theology and religion"—and did so to the length of ninety-seven pages, followed by twenty-one pages on "revealed theology and religion", another twenty on "Jewish revealed religion" and some twenty-seven more on "the Christian religion". Some ninety pages now develop the doctrine of the essence and attributes of God, with the discussion of proofs and arguments for the existence of God having been removed to the discussion of natural religion and theology and expanded from two to some twenty-two pages. Of course, sheer bulk is hardly a perfect index of importance—but it does give a partial index to the movement of Rambach's thought when we note that the system as a whole only doubled in size in moving from the early Schrifttmässige Erläuterung to the later Dogmatische Theologie.

Rambach continued to view natural theology, particularly natural theology known by human beings in their fallen condition, as utterly insufficient for salvation. Nonetheless, in his later theology, Rambach both omits the reverential warning as he moves from natural to revealed theology and places considerable stress on a distinction between theologia naturalis and theologia gentili. The former is a form of vera theologia that is not sufficient for salvation but is useful to the Christian in identifying preliminary truths of God, whereas the latter is eine falsche Theologie in the creation of which human error has played a major role. Natural theology, strictly defined, directs natural religion toward belief in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul and toward certain norms of ethical conduct. It also has the pedagogical use—similar to the so-called second use of the law—of drawing those who accept its truths toward theologia revelata.56

It is significant to Rambach, therefore, from the point of view of natural theology and religion, that before Christ, not only the Jews but also the ancient Greeks, the Celts and Gauls, the Roman philosophers, and even the farflung peoples of the world—Turks, Chinese, Hindus, Malabars, and Americans in Peru, Mexico, Brazil and Virginia—understood the immortality of the soul by means of the light of nature. It is, therefore, absolutely futile for anyone to dispute the existence of the immortal soul.57 Within a decade of Christian Wolff's notorious lecture (1720) on the natural theology of the Chinese and his expulsion from the University of Halle by the Pietists, we find a
Pietist theologian arguing the relative merit, if only in a pedagogical sense, of the religious perceptions of non-Christian nations, including the Chinese.

Similarly, Rambach's later theology manifests an enormous interest in the demonstration of God's existence from human nature, the microcosm, and from the nature of the world, the macrocosm. The doctrine of God, Rambach comments, is the *Haupt-Wahrheit* in natural theology, which not only irrefutably knows of the existence of God but which also understands in detail the divine essence and attributes, the creative works of God and the nature of true worship. By way of defect, natural theology cannot know redemptive truths such as trinity, the two natures of Christ, the satisfaction made by Christ as mediator, grace, justification, sanctification and glorification. Nor can natural theology offer a totally adequate view of morals. Only revealed theology offers knowledge of the "foundation, order and means of salvation". 58

In none of these statements does Rambach imply the Wolffian view of natural theology, taught in his time by Daniel Wyttenbach, as the necessary foundation on which the systematic edifice of revealed theology could be built. 59 But he does move away from the anti-philosophical and anti-rationalist attitude of earlier Pietism to the point that he does subsume these discussions of the elements of natural theology under the larger topic of "the primary foundations and sources of our salvation". 60 And he does very clearly identify this natural theology as "an instruction leading toward the knowledge of true salvation", and therefore as of considerable importance to the system of Christian theology. 61 As his distinction between natural and pagan or gentile theology makes clear, moreover, Rambach does not view natural theology as propaedeutic merely in a historical sense as a kind of old covenant for the pagan nations, but also in a rational and methodological sense as a preparatory theological exercise for Christians. In the development of his theology, specifically in the creation of a more or less scholastic system for the exposition of Pietist teachings, he has grown increasingly attached to the tools of reason. The original Pietist warnings against abuse remain and are stated at even greater length, but the models of the older theology and the constraints of rationality in his own time have had their effect.
What then of Rambach’s achievement? Rambach’s two systems remain the most convincing and elaborate attempts of Pietism to produce dogmatic theology that could stand on its own in the context of the highly technical Lutheranism of the late Orthodox era. Like the so-called transitional theology of his teacher, Buddaeus, Rambach’s two systems distance themselves from the Aristotelian philosophical presuppositions of the older Protestant scholasticism, but endeavour to deal with issues of philosophy and reason brought forward by natural theology. Rambach retains the old Lutheran and original Pietist emphasis on mastery of the linguistic tools of theology and he adds to the Pietist theological arsenal much of the technical vocabulary of scholastic Lutheranism even while protesting against it.

We must dissent, therefore, from the long-standing verdict on Rambach pressed by Luthardt’s famous *Kompendium*, that “in the process” of the development of a Pietist system, “dogmatics forefeited its scientific acuity, precision and integrity, but gained a religious warmth.”62 The truth appears to have been almost the opposite—that in gaining for Pietism the scientific acuity and precision of the scholastics, Rambach encountered as the major danger to his enterprise the loss of religious warmth. His method and order could not be, as he desired, *ganz andere*. The tension between theological precision and religious warmth pervades his work. The resulting dogmatic systems were, as his contemporaries, colleagues and posthumous editors recognized, masterful attempts at resolution of the problem.

Notes


9 E.g., *Introductio historico-theologica in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (Halle, 1727); *Commentatio hermeneutica de sensus mystici criterii* (Jena, 1728); *Exercitationes hermeneuticae* (Halle, 1728).

10 E.g., *Betrachtungen über das ganze Leiden Christi und die sieben letzten Worte des gekreuzigten Jesu* (Halle, 1735).


13 Cf. *Pia Desideria*, in *Schrift* _1, 57, 90, 129, 130, 132–133, 137, 139, 143–144.

14 Philipp Jacob Spener, *Die evangelische Glaubens-Lehre: in einem Jahrgang der Predigten...* (Frankfurt am Main, 1741); and idem., *D. Philippi Jacobi Speneri... Consilia et judicia theologica Latina; opus posthumum ex ejusdem litteris singulari industria ac fide collectum...* (Frankfurt am Main, 1709).

15 Johann Jacob Rambach, *Dogmatische Theologie oder christliche Glaubens-Lehre, vormals in einem Collatio thetico über des hochberühmten
J.J. Rambach

Herrn D. Joachim Langens... Oeconomium salutis dogmaticam, mit Zuziehung des gewöhnlichen Compendii theologiae positivae des sel. D. Bayers... aus desselben eigenhandigem Manuscript... gestellt von D. Ernst Friedrich Neubauer (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Wolfgang Ludwig Spring, 1744). Hereinafter referred to as “DT”.

16 Johann Jacob Rambach, Schriftmässige Erläuterung der Grundlegung der Theologie Herrn Johann Anastasius Freylinghausens... aus dessen eigenhandigen MScto... herausgegeben von Christian Hecht (Frankfurt am Main: Wolfgang Ludwig Spring, 1738). Hereinafter referred to as “SE”.

17 Cf. Stoeffler, German Pietism, 43 with Preus, Theology, I, 64.

18 Neubauer, Rambachische Lebens-Geschichte in DT, II. 53.

19 See Koch, Der ordo salutis in der alt-lutherischen Dogmatik (Berlin, 1899) 5, who believes the term to have been first used by Jacob Carpov in 1737; Reinhold Seeberg, “Heilsordnung,” s.v. in RE notes the earlier usage in Buddaeus’ Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae of 1723. The concept of an ordering of the work of salvation—from election and calling to repentance, justification, adoption, renovation, sanctification and glorification—had, of course, been developed earlier but had not been either thoroughly defined or given a technical designation, i.e., ordo salutis. The foundational essay by Schröder, “Über die Lehre von der Heilsordnung: ein kritisch-dogmatischer versuch,” in Theologische Studien und Kritiken, 1857 (Heft 4), 689–734 rightly saw Quenstedt’s Theologia didactico-polemica (1702) and Hollazius’ Examens theologicum acroamaticum (1718) as the dogmatic systems most instrumental in moving Lutheran dogmatics from a less strictly organized order of salvation toward the point that the doctrine became so clearly defined that a term was applied to it: Quenstedt gathered together the topics found in Salovius’ Systema locorum theologorum (1655–77) into a locus de gratia spiritus sancti applicatrice a pattern in which he was followed by Hollazius. Buddaeus merely gave a name to a pattern that was already in the process of becoming normative in Lutheran theology—nonetheless, the creation of a technical term does mark a recognition that the doctrinal model has become standardized, and Rambach’s adoption of the term is quite significant in the Pietist context. Cf. Dorner, History of Protestant Thought, vol. II, pp. 252–263 and Bengt Hägglund, History of Theology, trans. Gene Lund (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 342–344 for a brief discussion of the “transitional theology”; also, Hirsch, Geschichte, II, 318–390.

20 DT, II, 1472–1473: cf. ST, 12–14 where Rambach offers an outline for his discussion of the redeemed life under the rubric of status refectiosis and divides the topic into Gnaden-Wohltäten, Gnaden-Mittel, and Gnaden-Ordnung without attempting to argue a strict ordo.

Cf. Ibid. 131–153 with SE, 2–9.


Desgleichen hat Io. Conr. Dannhauerus diese methode in seiner Catechismus-Milch... welche zu verdauen ein starcker Magen erfordert wird.

Cf. Ibid. 144–145; cf. 7–9; on the relationship between Federalism and Pietism see Stoeffler, German Pietism, 217–236. Note that Friedrich Adolf Lampe’s Geheimnis des Gnadenbundes and Delineatio theologiae activae were quite popular among Lutheran Pietists as were the exegetical works of the Federalist theologian Campmegius Vitrinja.

On the analytical method in Renaissance philosophy see John Hermann Randall, “The development of Scientific Method in the School of Padua,” Journal of the History of Ideas, 1 (1940), 177–206; the impact of the method on Lutheran dogmatics in the seventeenth century is discussed at length in Hans Emil Weber, Der Einfluss der protestantischen Schulphilosophie auf die orthodox-lutherische Dogmatik (Leipzig, 1908) 20–74.

DT, I, 147, 149.

Ibid. 147-148.

Ibid. 148.

Ibid. 148-149: “1) In excessu. Da ist vermeiden *ne plus, quam par est, humanis systematibus tribuamus*. Das thun aber diejenigen, die Gottes Wort *frigide*, ihr *compendium* aber *fervide* tractiren, alles, was darin stehet, blindlings glauben und annehmen als wenn es *ex theopneustia* geschrieben sey...: 2) In defectu, wenn mann die *systema theologia* gänzlich verwirft, und *praetendirt*, das man die *dogmata fidei* allein aus der *exegesi scripturae* lernen...”

DT, I, 149: “Muss er sich befehlssigen alles in einer natürlichen und ungezwungenen Ordnung, die sich der *Memorie recommendirt*, vorzutragen, und die Verbindung der Glaubens-Articul, welche wie die Glieder eine Kette zusammen hangen, recht zu zeigen sich zu behmühren.”

DT, I, 149-150.

DT, I, 150: “Er muss insonderheit den Nutzen, den ein jedes *dogma in prazi vitae christiana* hat, nicht obiter, sondern mit allem Fleiss zeigen und *inculcireny*”

DT, I, 150-151.

DT, I, 151-152.


SE, 23.

DT, I, 11-14.

DT, I, 24-25.

DT, I, 58, 82ff, 101-102, 109.


DT, I, 10: “*Membrum I. De salutis cognoscendi principio*. Oder, Von den ersten Gründen und der Quellen unsers Heyls.”

DT, I, 11: “Unterdessen da doch auch *ratio* sampt der *theologia naturali*, eine *paedagogia as cognitionem verae salutis*, oder eine Handleitung zur Erkentniss des wahren Heyls.”