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The Science of Theology

Gillian R. Evans, Alister McGrath, and Allan D. Galloway
in *The History of Christian Theology*

edited by Paul Avis

Basingstoke, England and Grand Rapids, Michigan

Marshall Pickering, Wm B. Eerdmans, 1986

xi + 363 pp. U.S. \$14.95 paperback

The "history of individual doctrines" is an important sub-category of the history of Christian doctrine and, as such, certainly deserves the attention proposed by this new, projected series on *The History of Christian Theology*. The series, fittingly, begins with a volume intended to discuss the developing concept of theology—its methods, its norms and its relation to exegesis, hermeneutics, and philosophy—down through the centuries. Here again we note an important sub-topic, well deserving of scholarly attention. In view of the importance of the subject, the present volume can only be a disappointment. The three authors provide a survey of materials and concepts in the history of the discipline of theology without breaking any new ground and, indeed, without even drawing on the best of extant scholarship. There is little to be found in this volume that could not be gleaned from a combination of one of the standard histories of dogma, a major religious encyclopedia and perhaps a survey history of philosophy. It is remarkable that such a volume could be written without so much as a reference to Yves Congar's magisterial history of the concept of "theology" or his equally important *Tradition and Traditions*. Similarly, the volume omits reference to de Margerie's important two volume history of patristic exegesis and to de Lubac's massive history of medieval exegesis.

Even more surprisingly, given the title of the volume, no attention is paid by its authors to the transition from the early medieval view of theology as *doctrina* roughly equivalent to an exposition of the *sacra pagina* to the analysis, typical of the high scholastic era, of theology as *scientia*. Indeed, the paragraph-long comment on the contribution of Alan of Lille (p. 80) does not even note that Alan was the first major teacher to describe theology as a "science". Here, too, the volume is sadly lacking on the bibliographical front: both Beumer's essay on the history of theological method and Koepf's study of the beginnings of the idea of theology as *scientia*—not to mention de Vooght's essay on the sources of doctrine in the later middle ages—are omitted. The chapters on the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestantism are, perhaps, the most sadly out-of-date: here we find a view of radical discontinuity between the Reformation and later orthodoxy characteristic of the scholarship of the first half of this century, in no way tempered by the recent reappraisals of Protestant orthodoxy by Donnelly, Maruyama, Fatio and Raitt. The bibliography is marred by omission of reference to Wallmann's classic essay on the concept of theology

in early Lutheran orthodoxy. In addition, the author of this section, Alister McGrath, manifests a distinct lack of acquaintance with the sources: he notes, for example, that the *locus* method prevented Lutheranism from adopting any single doctrine as a systematizing principle and then comments that the Reformed used predestination as a central dogma—without recognizing that the Reformed, also, had a heavy investment in the *locus* method and the rather loose organization of system that it produced.

We must be content with one final point of critique. The volume is concerned with theological method and the development of the theological discipline, but it studiously avoids discussion of documents and sections of documents in which theologians typically discuss such issues in their own theology. There is no discussion of the prolegomena to theological systems anywhere in the book—despite the fact that the rise of prolegomena after Alan of Lille in the middle ages and after Calvin in the sixteenth century mark the rise of interest in theology as a discipline. This problem carries over into the modern section of the book where no mention is made of the nineteenth century development of “theological encyclopedia” as a methodological analysis of theology and its sub-disciplines— and there is no analysis either of Schleiermacher’s *Brief Outline* or of the prolegomena of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Thus, both at the level of secondary works on the subject of the history of the theological enterprise and at the level of the primary sources that bear most directly on this discussion, *The Science of Theology* is startlingly silent. If this new series hopes to survive, the succeeding volumes will have to be far more attentive to the state of scholarship in their chosen fields and far more aware of the parameters and implications of the topic chosen for analysis and exposition.

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Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work

Bernhard Lohse

Translated by Robert C. Schultz

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986

\$23.75 paperback

The field of Luther studies has become so vast that even those who devote the whole of a scholarly career to it cannot keep up. There are now so many and such thorough specialized studies of aspects of Luther’s context, life, and thought that for some years no one seemed willing to take up the task of providing a useful introduction to the picture of Luther presented by recent research. That changed in 1981 when Bernhard Lohse