
Pro Rege

Volume 20 | Number 1

Article 9

September 1991

Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Williams, Michael (1991) "Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 20: No. 1, 42 - 43.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol20/iss1/9

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the way mathematics is taught in a Christian school?

The book is divided into two sections. The first six chapters give a brief history of mathematics, especially looking at the various worldviews that influenced its development. In this section of the book Mr. Nickel also addresses the questions listed above. These questions have been around for a long time, and there have been several attempts to answer them, some more successful than others. The author has done an excellent job of collecting, from a wide variety of sources, both Christian and secular, a number of ideas which allow him to state unequivocally that mathematics is not "neutral," that there is a God glorifying way of viewing mathematics, and that the subject itself testifies to the Creator in a way that leaves the secular mathematician and scientist openly mystified.

Mr. Nickel does a thorough job of marshalling the answers that a number of Christians have given, but I particularly appreciated his documenting a number of sources where secular mathematicians are mystified by the fact that though mathematics is a human inven-

tion (their view) discovered over many centuries by many different people, yet it is coherent throughout and finds applications throughout creation.

The second section deals with how the teaching of mathematics in a Christian institution will be affected by our view. This section treats a wide variety of topics in mathematics and will be of particular interest to secondary and postsecondary teachers.

The book is intended for a general audience, for teachers, parents, students, and any Christian interested in a biblical approach to mathematics. As such the mathematics used is very general, understandable by all. It is must reading for all Christian mathematics teachers, and I recommend it to parents with students attending a Christian school. Each chapter has a number of discussion questions, making it useful for group study.

The book documents all its sources with footnotes and includes an extensive bibliography. The book lacks an index, which I think would have been useful, but in all other respects is an excellent book on the topic.

Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation, by Mark A. Noll (ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House) 1991. 227 pages. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

This introduction to the confessions of the sixteenth century is meant to serve as a college theology text or as a guide for pastors or laypeople who want to understand their heritage. It's for people who want "to know what the fuss was all about in the sixteenth century" (II). Noll writes introductions for, and presents the texts of ten confessions. From the Lutheran tradition he takes Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and Small Catechism, and the Augsburg Confession. Three Reformed confessional statements are included: Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles, the Genevan Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism. The English Reformation is represented in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, and the radical Reformation is reflected in the Anabaptist Schleithem Confession. Noll also includes two Roman Catholic documents for comparison: the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent and the Profession of the Tridentine Faith. Thus, we see that the texts run the gamut from Lutheran to Roman Catholic, from Reformed, to Anabaptist and Anglican.

The introductions are solid, if sparse. Noll does not seek interpretation here, but merely historical and theological contextualization. The texts are left to speak for themselves. The introduction to the work as a whole includes a short discussion on the definition of a confession, confessional authority, historical nature, and limitations.

Noll admits that there is nothing in his book that is not obtainable in John H. Leith's *Creeds of the Churches*, which is still in print. "The only justification" he can offer for the publication is that it limits its scope to, and therefore highlights, the confessional documents of the Reformation era. Each chapter includes a short bibliography of principal secondary literature relevant to each confession, but Noll himself leans most heavily on Philip Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*. In fact, the articulations sometimes look as if they have been taken over almost whole-cloth from Schaff.

It is to be admitted that Schaff is, as Noll himself says: "the greatest resource in English for anyone interested in creeds and confessions." Yet Noll's parroting of Schaff gives the book the look of having been thrown together quickly. That perception is reinforced by a major mistake and a subsequent omission in the work. The reader may have noticed from the above list that the Belgic Confession is not included in the collection. Noll comments: "By limiting selection to the first two generations of the Reformation, significant documents like the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and other important statements had to be omitted" (p.22). Noll works with confessions that were produced between 1517 and 1571, yet Guido de Brey (1523-67) wrote the Belgic Confession in 1561, two years before the production of the Heidelberg

Catechism. Is it possible that Noll, who is otherwise an extremely careful scholar, confused the Belgic Confession with the Canons of Dort, which belongs to the seventeenth century along with the Westminster Confession? The omission of the Belgic Confession is a major oversight, for no other Reformed symbol of the sixteenth century (or the seventeenth) so closely captures the spirit and breadth of the concerns of Calvin's Institutes.

It seems to me that if there was one Reformed symbol from the sixteenth century that one would certainly want to include in such a collection, it would be de Brés Confession. No other Reformed document is as close to the cutting edge of the Reformation. And it is most certainly more historically and theologically significant than Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles or the Genevan Confession.

Confusing the Calvinist movement with the anachronistic Anabaptists, Philip II, the devout and fanatical Roman Catholic king of Spain, sent his Grand Inquisitor, the Duke of Alba to the Lowlands in order to return it to the Roman Catholic fold. The number of Calvinist martyrs produced by the Duke's mid-sixteenth century reign of terror exceeded those of all

other Protestants killed during the Reformation period, and probably exceeded the number of all martyrs of the primitive church under Roman rule. De Brés, who penned the Belgic Confession as a prisoner in a Spanish jail, wrote to define the Calvinists in distinction from the feared and detested Anabaptists, and thus defend Calvinists against the charge of treason. Yet his Confession also sets out the hope that beats in the Calvinist faith in the clear, unhurried, and unqualified terms of a man who is ready to become a martyr for the cause of Christ. In 1567, six years after writing the Confession, de Brés was hanged by the Spanish for administering the Eucharist to Reformed congregations.

Noll's omission of the Belgic Confession is understandable in a way; Reformed people generally tend to slight de Brés most precious gift to the Reformed tradition, this crown jewel of Reformed confessions. We send our kids to catechism, and sometimes still we sit on the porch and debate TULIP over coffee, but we let the Confession lie quietly in the CRC Psalter. It begins on page 817 in the new gray Psalter, page 2 in the back of the blue Psalter. Pick it up and read it as a supplement to Noll's otherwise useful survey of Reformation era confessions.

Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America 1935-1985, by David W. Lotz (ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans) 1989. 376 pages. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

An eighty-six year old farmer goes by on an Independence Day float with all of his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren in tow, some of the sons and grandsons driving the different tractors and farm machinery the family farm has collected over the past half century or more. Seeing the now antique tractors, combines, and bailers, one cannot help but consider the changes that great-grandfather must have witnessed during his lifetime. That kind of change is common to us. To turn Alvin Toffler on his head, we are no longer shocked by the future. We have been acclimated to technological change. Laptop computers, multi-channel cable TV, and anti-lock brakes notwithstanding, however, we really think that we live our lives, and understand those lives, pretty much as we always did. Most certainly, we think that we believe and worship just like we always have, just like great-grandfather did.

There have been no Ecumenical Councils during the last half century. The twentieth century has not seen any major ecclesiastical realignments. There have been no new Reformations. No major denominations have been born. The confessional and denominational map is still pretty much the same as it was fifty years ago. The Southern Baptists are still in the South; and the

South remains Southern Baptist. Lutherans still enjoy the cold Minnesota Februarys. And Grand Rapids, Michigan, is still half Roman Catholic, half Baptist, and half Reformed. Does all this mean that we haven't changed? No. The change in confessional America has not been the sudden or drastic change that we usually think of as making up the stuff of history. On the contrary, it has been slow, gradual, subtle, glacial, but no less historic. The great shifts in American religion have largely been non-event-centered. They have been changes in attitude, confessional commitment, theological technique, and lifestyle.

In a series of twenty-one articles written in tribute to Robert T. Handy, the contributors to this volume chart those changes and note the continuities. How has the mass media, the cold war, the rise and fall of labor unions, upward social and economic mobility, and the demise of the American frontier affected American Christians, their church going habits, and their self-identity? What sense do we make of the transmutation of values that has transformed the modernist culture-Protestant into a critic of the American way of life, and the fundamentalist separatist into the new worldly Christian? The American church of the middle to late twentieth century has experienced the rise of black-