

Willis, D & Welker, M (eds) 1999 – Toward the future of Reformed theology: tasks, topics, traditions

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Reviewer: Prof I W C van Wyk

This volume contains thirty-one articles from well-known theologians – mainly from North America and Europe. All these articles contribute in one way or another to the debate on the future of Reformed theology. This volume promotes, within an ecumenical framework, the development of Reformed theology. Men and women here creatively contribute to the task from the most diverse cultural, historical and social contexts. It is a delight to see contemporary Reformed theology presents itself with a richness of theological orientations and styles of thought, and an ecumenical openness that can serve as models for all the churches. At the same time, the distinctive contours and coherence of Reformed theology is not lost in this book.

The contributors to this volume agree that the ecumenical contribution of Reformed theology lies in its calm, persistent, critical and constructive resistance to the many attempts to empty God's Word of its content and to bring it under the dominion of metaphysics, morality, mysticism or the dictatorship of a "spirit of the age". They also agree that God's Word possesses the power to be an illuminating, liberating and creative force in this world of today. In order to be that, theology must concentrate on Christology, eschatology and pneumatology. Another precondition is to close the bridges between systematic and exegetical theology on the one hand, and systematic theology and social ethics on the other hand. A very positive aspect of this volume is that "pluriformity" within the Reformed tradition is taken seriously, but that the enthusiasm for a vague postmodern diversity is resisted. There is therefore an enthusiasm for a creative "pluralism of the Spirit", but not for a disintegrative relativism.

This volume is a must for every Reformed theologian. We have here contributions to Reformed theology of exceptional quality and importance. I am convinced that only in looking at the contents of this volume, everyone will realise that this is a book of great value. It must be read and read again.

It is impossible to say something about all the articles. It would also be unfair to discuss only certain articles. I can assure everyone, that this volume contains contributions of the highest quality. I am sure that people interested in Reformed theology will therefore be satisfied to be informed on the contents only.

Part 1: Tasks and contexts

- Tradition in the modern world: The Reformed habit of mind (Brian Gerrish – Richmond).
- The catholicity of Reformed theology (Janos Paztor – Budapest).
- Reformed theology in East and West (Nobuo Watanabe – Tokyo).
- Christian theology: Toward an Asian reconstruction (Choan-Seng Song – Berkeley).
- The challenge to Reformed theology: A perspective from Myanmar (Edmund Za Bik – Yangon).
- The ecumenical responsibility of Reformed theology: The case of Egypt (Wafiq Wahba – Cairo).
- Toward a Reformed theology of liberation: A retrieval of Reformed symbols in the struggle for justice (John de Gruchy – Cape Town).
- Theologia reformata et semper reformanda (Jürgen Moltmann – Tübingen).
- Travail and mission: Theology reformed according to God's Word at the beginning of the Third Millennium (Michael Welker – Heidelberg).

- Potential contributions of Reformed theology to ecumenical discussion and praxis (Beatriz Melano – Buenos Aires).

Part 2: Topics and transformations

- The substance of faith (Thomas Torrance – Edinburgh).
- The ecumenical future of Reformed theology (David Willis – Princeton).
- The vulnerability of God (William Placher – Crawfordsville).
- The logic of faith (Alexander McKelway – Davidson).
- Toward a new typology of Reformed doctrines of atonement (Leanne Van Dyk).
- The notae ecclesiae: A Reformed perspective (Christian Link – Bochum).
- The church – mother of the believers (Lukas Vischer – Geneva).
- Presbytery and leadership in the church (Walter Herrenbrück – Leer).
- Reformed theology and medical ethics: Death, vocation, and the suspension of life support (Nancy Duff – Princeton).

Part 3: Traditions and practices

- The contemporary relevance of Calvin's theology (Hans-Joachim Kraus – Göttingen).
- Calvin's theological realism and the lasting influence of his theology (John Leith – Richmond).
- Revelation and experience in Calvin's theology (Willem Balke – Amsterdam).
- The contemporary relevance of Calvin's social ethics (Hans-Helmut Esser – Münster).
- The incarnation and the sacramental word: Calvin's and Schleiermacher's sermons on Luke 2 (Dawn De Vries – Richmond).
- Radical and reformed: The ecumenical contribution of the Czech Reformation (Jan Milli-Lochman – Basel).
- Some distinctive contributions of the Dutch-American Reformed tradition (John Hesselink – Holland).
- Jonathan Edward's dispositional conception of the Trinity: A resource for contemporary Reformed theology (Sang Hyun Lee – Princeton).
- The future of Reformed theology: Some lessons from Jonathan Edwards (Amy Plantinga Pauw – Louisville).
- The sum of the Gospel: The doctrine of election in the theologies of Alexander Schweizer and Karl Barth (Bruce McCormack – Princeton).
- Reforming the theology and practice of baptism: The challenge of Karl Barth (Daniel Migliore – Princeton).
- The closeness of the distant: Reformed Confessions after 1945 (Eberhard Busch – Göttingen).