

# Book Reviews

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W. Bradford Littlejohn and Scott N. Kindred Barnes, eds. *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

The early modern period is a growing area of interest for historians, and particularly for historians of religion. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that theological parties and doctrinal lines were much more complex than was once thought, and not nearly as insular. This appears to be the case in the British Isles because political, ecclesiastical, and theological divisions had significant overlap, cross-pollination, and interplay. There was no neat-and-tidy packaging of thinkers according to theology, ecclesiology, and political stance. Each of these three areas was separate and nondeterminative concerning the others. Richard Hooker (1553/4–1600) was a Church of England cleric who once held the prestigious preaching position at Saint Paul’s Cross in London and who is most famous for his massive book, *Laws of Ecclesiastic Polity*. He is known for being the defender of the Elizabethan establishment and an upholder of liturgical practice according to the *Book of Common Prayer*, and he was credited by the Oxford Movement for being the fountainhead of the *via media* stance of the Anglican Church between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The volume under review addresses some of the issues involved in these claims about Hooker’s historical significance but through the much narrower question as to whether he was a Reformed theologian.

There is an impressive amount of material in this collection of essays, and it will take any careful reader some time to digest it and assess the arguments. The contributors are well aware of the burgeoning discussions in the secondary literature about early-modern Reformed theology and offer substantial engagement with those issues. Perhaps the greatest

contribution this volume makes to broader historical study is that it demonstrates the complexity involved in asking “Was this person *a ...?*” With a growing body of literature about the early modern period, it becomes more difficult to pose these sorts of questions without making nuanced qualifications. This book shows that careful consideration is required in order to define the position of past thinkers by precise categorization. It is a worthy read, not only for those interested in Richard Hooker but for those trying to make sense of historical categories that have shifted over the years and who are seeking to avoid the danger of imposing anachronistically upon figures of the past.

Readers of this review are probably interested to know whether Hooker was Reformed. The answer is that it depends. It depends, in the first case, on what one means by “Reformed.” If one understands Reformed in a broad sense, there are some ways in which Hooker stands within Reformed boundaries. One of the well-executed aspects of these essays is the way they are able to assess Hooker only according to Reformed thought that preceded him, and thus to avoid measuring him according to the confessional developments that occurred after his death. This sound historiographical move helps the reader place Hooker in the context of the Reformed tradition. Additionally, whether Hooker was Reformed also depends on how one reads Hooker. The essays show that he stood in significant and important continuity with Reformed thinking in many ways and on many doctrines and practices. W. B. Patterson’s essay shows that Hooker was in substantial agreement with William Perkins (1558–1603), whom many consider to be a paragon of early Reformed thought. Some of Hooker’s methods and practices, however, were not typical of the Reformed tradition, particularly his high view of the role of human reason. My conclusion is that Hooker was by no means the enemy of Reformed thought. He was also far from being the *via media* theologian proposed by the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement. However, he is hardly a candidate for being the most clear-cut representative of Reformed theology and practice. Hooker was a churchman committed to the Anglican practices and policies of his day, and an avid defender of those positions.

This book is a valuable contribution to the field of historical theology. One need not agree with every conclusion to benefit from its thought-provoking essays. The volume does well in providing a context for Hooker, examining his pastoral approach, and giving introductions to several major areas of his theology. The book presents a further contribution to the literature about the nature of the Reformed tradition and its past. It is a

worthwhile read for those interested in the history of Reformed thinking and the issues involved in defining what “Reformed” implies.

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Chad Van Dixhoorn. *God’s Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653*. Studies on the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017.

Chad Van Dixhoorn, an expert on the Westminster Assembly, has provided a scholarly and readable study of the Assembly’s work toward the reformation of preachers and preaching in England. Here we find the story of ways the Assembly sought to reform both the preachers and the preaching practices that marked the Church of England in the midst of the Assembly’s extensive work during the English Civil War. What emerges is a study of important documents and debates about the ministers who preached and then the theory and theology of preaching. The Assembly believed preaching was the divinely established means by which the will of God is made known, focused on the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Preaching is carried out by ordained ministers who are “God’s ambassadors.”

The Assembly saw preaching as a ministry God instituted for “the gathering and perfecting of the saints” (5). In Assembly documents, such as the Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism, when the term “minister” is used, it is assumed the minister will always be one who preaches. The Assembly frequently expressed belief in the efficacy of preaching in God’s work of salvation in all its dimensions (7; see the question and answer of the Larger Catechism 155). Those of the Assembly who can be called “Puritans,” who wanted the reform of the church and who were what Patrick Collinson called the “hotter sort of Protestant,” were especially zealous to emphasize preaching and its importance.

Van Dixhoorn describes “The Road to Reform,” which began with the Assembly’s call to Parliament for “speedy proceeding” against “scandalous Ministers.” The major complaint was with the many ministers who were perceived as not being able to preach. Some ministers in the church were content only to read the Scriptures and not to proclaim Scripture’s message through preaching. This the Assembly deemed as inadequate. In preaching, God speaks through the person of the preacher as the preacher interprets the Scripture and applies it to the needs of the congregation. To deprive