

account of John Prideaux that contextualises this important but understudied figure within the university and college *milieu* that defined his life and work.

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*Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) on God, freedom, and contingency. An early modern Reformed voice.* By Andreas J. Beck. (Church History and Religious Culture, 84.) Pp. xvi + 616. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022. €189. 978 90 04 50438 7; 1572 4107

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This magnificent work is a revised edition of the author's German dissertation, defended in 2007 at Utrecht University. Andreas Beck, professor of historical theology at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, is a leading expert in the field of Reformed Orthodoxy. He is the director of the Institute of Post-Reformation Studies in Leuven and chair of the international Research Group on Classic Reformed Theology.

This work is the first English monograph that is entirely devoted to the theology of Gisbertus Voetius, the first professor of theology at Utrecht University and one of the most prominent Reformed orthodox scholars of his day. After the introduction the work consists of three parts. First, a biographical introduction 'Voetius in Context' that also covers the theological debates and the discussions with Cartesian philosophers in which Voetius was involved. Second, an assessment of Voetius' theological method, covering natural and supernatural theology and communion with God as the goal of life. And, third, an extensive treatment of Voetius' doctrine of God, covering the divine attributes and the doctrine of the Trinity and zooming in on the relationship between divine omniscience and omnipotence on the one hand and human freedom on the other hand. This focus is better expressed in the English title than in the original German: *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): sein Theologieverständnis und seine Gotteslehre*. The question of how consistent Voetius was in his view on God and the contingent nature of creation 'is not a question imposed on the material from the outside, for it runs like a red thread throughout Voetius's most important and comprehensive works' on the doctrine of God (p. 1).

The revision of the book consists mainly of updating the annotations; the structure and the main text have hardly been amended. In any case the rich material is far from outdated and Beck does include some of the recent discussions – for instance, with Paul Helm on contingency – in the footnotes. Although the main text of the extensive discussion of 'Voetius as a representative of the Nadere Reformatie and Pietism' (pp. 127–45) does not question the concept of 'Nadere Reformatie', in the footnotes the author mentions the changed views of Fred van Lieburg, one of the editors of this Brill series, who now interprets the Dutch 'Further Reformation' as an invented tradition.

An interesting debate regards the function of 'natural theology' in Reformed orthodox theology. The author correctly emphasises that Voetius – like John Calvin – gives natural theology a Christological foundation, basing it on the Logos (p. 157) and that natural theology in unbelievers has a distorted form

and remains without the intended effect. The background of Beck's emphasis lies in the claim – originating in the nineteenth century – that natural theology was a preparation and a kind of substructure for supernatural theology. Karl Barth's polemic against natural theology must be seen against the background of this misunderstanding.

Beck is right in stating that 'in Voetius's construction, natural theology is thus not turned into the epistemological precondition for supernatural theology in any way' (p. 166), because Voetius denies that supernatural knowledge of God can only be accessed through natural knowledge of God. Still natural knowledge is a possible, or perhaps even the most likely route to supernatural knowledge.

It is a question for further debate how the strong rejection of Barth's analysis that the Reformed orthodox deviated from the Reformation in this respect – an analysis that indeed needs some historical correction – relates to the fact that the Reformed orthodox were convinced that monotheism could be proven on general grounds and that an acknowledgement of divine providence was a preparation for conversion to Christianity. Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617–66), one of Voetius' students and colleagues, for instance claimed that belief in one God and in his providence belongs to the propaedeutic phase of *humanitas* that precedes that of *fides* in his *On the conversion of Indians and heathens*. At least the technical discussions of *theologia naturalis per se* – which indeed were nuanced – should be compared with the rather optimistic view of using rational arguments to prove the truths of Christianity. Thus, in a more systematic theological sense, Barth still has a point.

This work offers a very rich introduction to Reformed orthodox theology. To mention just one more topic, Beck explains how strong belief in God's overarching will and providence does imply pre-determination of all that happens, including the choices of free agents, but that this still does not lead to a deterministic view of reality. God's will and foreknowledge, after all, are free and contingent in relation to created reality, and the only kind of necessity involved is the hypothetical necessity of 'the "infallibility" following from God's foreknowledge and the "immutability" following from God's will or decree' (p. 387). In other words, the objects of the divine will and knowledge, including human choices, are only necessary in the sense of 'the necessity of the consequence' and thus could be otherwise than they in fact are.

This still seems to be deterministic, at least for those who are not acquainted with the underlying scholastic distinctions. Voetius' theology, however, also leaves room for true human liberty, not in the sense of autonomy, but rather because 'God with his will effectively wills the [human] will not only to act, but also to act freely' (p. 463). Although this might be beyond our comprehension, it is in the notion of divine *concursus* that Voetius relates divine sovereignty to human liberty.

The study ends with two appendices containing an overview of the disputations in Voetius' five-volume *Selectae disputationes theologicae*, first listed per volume and then chronologically. If the author had also provided the titles in English in the second list, the chronology of the topics covered in three and a half decades (1634–69) would show up more clearly. As it is the reader has to turn back and forth between the two appendices to reconstruct that, for instance, the first subject he dealt with was indulgences. The forgotten translation of 'Verteidigt

am 7.11.1634' (p. 491) of the second disputation on this subject, is one of the very few typos in this excellent scholarly work. We thank Beck for making his work available for the broader English audience and Albert Gootjes for the outstanding translation.

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*The Reformed and celibate pastor. Richard Baxter's argument for clerical celibacy.*

By Seth D. Osborne, Pp. 417. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022.

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Richard Baxter (1615–91) has come down to us as 'the late seventeenth century scourge of matrimony' (pp. 18, 347) for his stance against clerical marriage, and even marriage in general, yet he himself married Margaret Charlton in September 1662. In this fine book, a revision of his PhD thesis (for which I was an examiner), Seth Osborne wrestles with this typical Baxterian idiosyncrasy. While he never issued a blanket injunction against clerical marriage, Baxter had no trouble identifying all the ways in which marriage was deleterious to effective and responsible pastoral ministry, leaving the reader to think that clerical marriage was permissible only in the rarest of circumstances. Yet he married, and seems to have gained from his wife's support and partnership, all the while maintaining his stance. How can this be?

The first chapter lays down the challenge. The second explores Puritan views of marriage and the influences on Baxter's thinking. He embraced the kind of spiritual calculus of William Ames in particular, in which the believer must ask in any given moment not just 'What is a *good* thing I can do right now?' but 'What is the *best* thing I can do right now?' While marriage might be good for ministers, it was far from clear that it was the best. As chapter iii makes clear, that was especially true for Baxter's rigorous model of pastoral ministry, which required the minister and his paid assistant to meet with each willing family in the parish to evaluate their understanding of their faith and the condition of their souls. The effective implementation of this ideal was hugely expensive in time and money. It was far easier for the minister to meet these costs if he was unmarried. So while Baxter agreed that clerical marriage was a good thing in itself, it was unlikely to be the best.

The fourth chapter introduces the 'particularities' of Richard Baxter: the human touches that help to round out our understanding of why he thought and acted in the way he did. One of Osborne's most interesting insights is that Baxter's chronic ill health and persistent sense of impending death constrained his ability to think and plan for a long life – a logical precondition for marriage. Also, Baxter's early experience of friendship, which involved grievous disappointment, made him distrustful and cautious about forming deep bonds with any other human, even one's wife. Such profound relationships could easily distract from the only relationship that mattered: the believer's covenant partnership with God.

The next chapter engages with Baxter's *Christian directory* (1673), a massive work in casuistry that encompasses all dimensions of the life of faith, including marriage and family. Here lies one of Osborne's most helpful contributions to understanding Baxter aright. Building on the scholarship of N. H. Keeble and John F. Brouwer,