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Synopsis of a Purer Theology by Walaeus et al., edited by Henk van Den Belt, translated by Riemer A. Faber, Volume 2

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Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (Synopsis of a Purer Theology), by Walaeus et al., edited by Henk van Den Belt, translated by Riemer A. Faber, volume 2. Leiden: Brill, 2016, 738 pages, \$154.00.

This is the second volume in the anticipated translation of the so-called *Leiden Synopsis*. This work represents a “survey of academic theology” immediately following the Synod of Dordt and in response to the theological system of the Remonstrants, or, Arminians (1). As such, it is a compendium of Reformed thought by four renowned Professors of theology that brings the English-speaking world into contact with the key ideas of the Reformed system of theology in one of its classic expressions.

Volume 2 of the *Synopsis Purioris* treats a wide range of issues including predestination, Christology, the application of redemption, and the doctrine of the church and its ministers. The translation is clear and accurate. The inclusion of the Latin text alongside the English translation makes this volume even more useful, since many key theological terms are difficult to translate in a way that retains the technical vocabulary current in Reformed orthodoxy. For example, the translator renders *habitus spiritualis* as “spiritual disposition,” correctly capturing its meaning (276–77). However, readers unfamiliar with Latin theological terminology will not likely pick up on the technical language of habits and acts that was rooted in Medieval theology and flowed seamlessly into Reformed thought. Comparing key terms in the original text with their English equivalents enables readers to build a Reformed theological vocabulary in a way that furnishes them with vital vocabulary and its meaning and function in seventeenth-century theology. The footnotes added by the editors are helpful as well, since they provide historical background related to the authors cited, they explain the historical context at key points, and they include comparisons to contemporary authors across confessional lines. This increases the value of the translated text by making it serve as an introduction to early seventeenth-century High Orthodox theology.

Another useful feature of the *Synopsis* is the consistent application of Trinitarian theology to the entire theological system. The authors appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity and to the appropriate works of all three divine persons in relation to each locus treated. Doing so was a standard feature of Reformed orthodox systems of theology that gradually disappeared in later times. This fact provides insight into the robust way that Reformed orthodox authors employed Trinitarian theology in relation to the entire system of doctrine, which should offset the common criticism that Reformed theology treated the Trinity merely as an appendix to the doctrine of God.

As I noted in relation to the first volume of the *Synopsis Purioris*, this work does not include a full treatment of every relevant scholastic question in relation to each locus. The authors of the Leiden Synopsis often included less material in the chapters of their work than other authors, such as Wollebius, did in shorter theological systems. Moreover, they omit many theological distinctions that appeared in later systems, such as Turretin’s *Institutes*. Questions that other authors addressed at length with extensive proofs and arguments, the *Leiden Synopsis* sometimes stated in a single sentence. However, the subjects treated by its authors clarify many important theological distinctions by providing clear definitions of terms and their use in Reformed thought. This means that while the *Synopsis* is somewhat incomplete compared to comparable

Reformed systems, it nevertheless introduces readers to many key concepts in the context of the early seventeenth century.

In spite of the cost of these volumes, this ongoing translation of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* has potential to serve a diverse body of students. It will be invaluable to scholars of Reformed orthodox thought. Those familiar with the Latin language can use this publication to gain access to a carefully developed semi-critical text of the *Synopsis*. The translated text will provoke thought and fruitful research as scholars interact with the Latin original. This work can serve Reformed pastors as well. The fact that many Reformed ministers no longer gain proficiency in the Latin language in their theological training means that they are effectively cut off from most of the classic systems of theology in their own theological tradition. It is important to understand how this system developed historically if ministers hope to understand where expressions in historic Reformed creeds came from and what they mean. Such material is also vital for evaluating continuities and discontinuities between classic and modern Reformed thought. This provides readers with more theological options to draw from as they grapple with interpreting Scripture in conversation with the church. For both scholars and pastors, these volumes are a welcome addition to Reformed literature in the English-speaking world for those who are willing and able to obtain and read them.

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