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Recovering The Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, And Practice



RECOVERING THE REFORMED CONFESSION

Our Theology, Piety, and Practice

R. SCOTT CLARK



Synopsis

Much of what passes as Reformed among our churches is not. As a class of churches that profess allegiance to Reformed theology, practice, and piety, we have drifted from our moorings. This book is written to facilitate change, specifically reformation according to Godâ™s Word as summarized in the Reformed confessions.

Book Information

File Size: 1349 KB

Print Length: 384 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publisher: P&R Publishing (October 1, 2008)

Publication Date: October 1, 2008

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00BPG5DAK

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #255,865 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #31
inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > New Age > Theosophy #81 inÂ Books
> Religion & Spirituality > New Age & Spirituality > Theosophy #88 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle
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Ceremonies

Customer Reviews

What is a confessional Reformed/Presbyterian church? What is Reformed theology? Piety? Practice? In a clear, concise, and cogent manner, Scott Clark answers these questions in Recovering the Reformed Confession. The book is valuable because in it, Clark demonstrates the qualities of a good historian and a good theologian: he calls a thing what it is. He has done his homework in patristics, medieval theology, reformation theology, post-reformation orthodoxy, the rise of pietism, and the present day Christian church landscape in the U.S. Using these insights, Clark explains some of the main points of what it means - and what it does not mean - to be

confessional today. The book is sort of like a fog-horn. It is the loud noise that cuts through the fog that has settled on many Reformed/Presbyterian churches in the last 50-100 years. Because it does cut, some may not like this book as Clark evaluates the contemporary church situation using a historical/theological Reformed lens. One may also compare this book to a doctor's office: Clark sets today's Reformed/Presbyterian church on the table, tests it, prods it, pokes it, and makes a diagnosis. Not only does he give a diagnosis (the first half of the book), he also gives a prescription (in the second half of the book). Or, in his own terms, the book is structured in a law/gospel fashion - itself a clue that Clark is working with classic Reformed distinctions. More specifically, the first half of the book is called "The Crisis."

For those of us evangelical-exiles who may have come to the Reformation with nothing but the shirt on our backs and a few bucks to spare, it is hard to know where to begin when considering R. Scott Clark's most recent publication, Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice. It might help to start at the beginning of Part 1. I can recall years ago getting an odd sense in my newfound Reformed environs that something was not quite right. I was intuiting that as I had come in the front door that plenty were smuggling their way out the back, down the street to the Evangelical fiesta I just came from and returning with their plunder (some never even returning) only to present it as Reformed. But I had seen that plunder before and it was precisely what I didn't want, no matter how re-packaged in the term "Reformed" it came. So ever since I heard Clark characterize Reformed narcissism ("I am Reformed; I think/say/do x; therefore x is Reformed") I knew he was on to something. It turned out that Reformed narcissism is really a subset of a larger diagnosis, what Clark describes as the QIRC (quest for illegitimate certainty) and the QIRE (quest for illegitimate experience). On these two laws hang all the law and prophets of modernity. Everything that ails the contemporary scene flows out from there. And lest we Reformed think we are magically hedged in from the laws of modernity and fall prey to the siren song of Reformed narcissism, Clarks book serves as a sober reminder that, like sin itself, these things are equal opportunity afflictions and absolutely nobody is immune.

Whether intended or not, Dr Clark's book can be focused around three themes: 1) a distinctively Reformed piety flows from a Reformed theology and this piety will be directly counter to the 2) Quest for Illegitimate Religious Certainty (QIRC) and 3) The Quest for Illegitimate Religious Experience (QIRE). The latter two are evident when people want to have a type of infallible knowledge beyond that which human beings are capable of (QIRC) and a religious experience that

promises more of heaven than is possible in this present age (QIRE). Dr Clark has an interesting chapter on confessional subscription and thoroughly summarizes the debates within conservative Reformdom. To be honest, I couldn't follow it, though I suspect it raised an interesting point for Dr Clark: he wants to hold to a thorough and strict confessional subscription, yet he recognizes the he differs from the Confessions on the civil magistrate and creation. He has a strong chapter on the Regulative Principle and convincingly argues for the singing of only inspired songs (not EP, though). Analysis and Conclusion Regarding Clark's distaste of "revival" scholarship, one must note: There are some inconsistencies and factual errors in Clark's analysis, though. Murray does not simply lump the Arminian and Calvinistic revivals in the same category. He is very critical of the Second Great Awakening towards its end. Further, Murray does not promote experience over doctrine as the basis of unity. Murray is specifically arguing, however, that the communions in North America shared a common, if somewhat broad, doctrinal agreement on soteriological concerns.

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