Reformed Theology in Modern Europe (19th and 20th Centuries)

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Abstract

The history of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe is one of upheaval. How did modern European Reformed theologians and theologies fare as the social, political, cultural and intellectual ground upon which they stood was shifting? This chapter explores developments in Reformed theology in Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, and Hungary. It argues that the nineteenth century saw Reformed theology coming to terms with the Enlightenment – conforming to it, in the case of classical liberal theology, and challenging it, in the case of the Réveil. In the twentieth century, the two most historically important attempts to reimagine the Reformed faith in a culturally modern Europe were neo-Calvinism (Bavinck and Kuyper) and neo-Orthodoxy (Barth). The story of twentieth century European Reformed theology, for the most part, was the story of Reformed theologians reorienting themselves in relation to Basel and Amsterdam, as the ground moved beneath their feet.

Key Words


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*Introduction*

The history of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe is in every sense a story of upheaval. Wide-ranging and often dramatic social, political, and cultural transformations produced a late twentieth century setting markedly different to its early nineteenth century antecedent. The Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the rise of European nationalisms, the peak (and subsequent collapse) of the age of Euro-centric world empires, the emergence of liberal democratic political ideals, the Great Depression, World Wars, the move from modernisation to globalisation, and the emergence of diverse species of European secularism serve as markers to a fascinating period in Western cultural history. This was context in which Europe transitioned from classical to late expressions of cultural modernity, which in turn was superseded (in some places, at least) by postmodernity. Blanning has aptly noted that modern Europeans were characterised by the conviction that ‘the ground [was] moving beneath their feet’ (1996: 1), a sentiment that seems equally true of Europeans as they move into the twenty first century.

This upheaval, of course, took place across the continent that, in its early modern period, birthed the Reformation. How did nineteenth and twentieth century European Reformed
theologians and theologies fare as the social, political, cultural and intellectual ground upon which they stood was shifting?

In attempting to answer that question, the historical theologian faces problems substantially similar to those acknowledged by Rietbergen’s more general work, *Europe: A Cultural History* (1998). The attempt to develop a pan-European account of anything is, in essence, to aim at a number of frenetically moving targets, and requires a careful initial identification of that which one is aiming to describe. In describing ‘Reformed’ theologies and theologians, this chapter employs a fairly broad descriptive methodology: little substantive theological consensus can be found between many of the figures described (for example, Schleiermacher, Barth, and Schilder), and the same is true regarding their subscription to the historic Reformed confessions of faith. Their most common trait, however, is that they are all European Protestants whose fundamental theological trajectories, in one way or another, can be traced to the heritage of the Reformed, rather than Lutheran or Anabaptist, traditions.

This essay plots the development of a range of localised European Reformed theologies in the early modern period along the lines (primarily of increasing regionalisation) identified in Benedict’s *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (2004: 426). In the build up to the nineteenth century, two closely related developments affected the development of Reformed theology in Europe considerably: the practice of academic peregrination had largely ground to a halt in the eighteenth century (Benedict 2004: 426; Almási 2014: 17-34), and Latin fell out of favour as the Europe-wide language of university instruction (Boekholt 1999: 301). Although it would be historically inaccurate to portray Reformed theology in modern Europe as exclusively nationalised, it remains true that together, these factors accompanied the establishment of a new set of norms in
theological education: that of staying in one’s own country throughout one’s theological education, and of no longer having an academic lingua franca with which to communicate with theologians in other European countries. Against that backdrop, Europe’s move into classical modernity made plain the presence of various localised Reformed theologies. (This is not to imply that Reformed theology in early modern Europe was somehow homogenous or univocal. The likes of Lindberg and Holder have elsewhere advanced the claim that the Reformation itself would be more accurately characterised as the ‘Reformations’ (Lindberg 1996; Holder 2009)).

The complexity of this picture, particularly as one moves into the late nineteenth century, is that the development of European regionalism (as found in relation to the earlier Napoleonic Wars) then developed into globalisation (Daudin, Morys, and O’Rourke 2009: 5-29). New steam technologies enabled safe, cheap and relatively quick international transport, leading to nineteenth century movements of mass human migration from Europe to the New World, and to European cultures both influencing and being influenced by non-Western cultures through the colonial efforts of various European nations. The distinctive strands of Reformed theology active and developing in Europe in this context thus evinced particularised local identities, whilst reflecting their period in its increasing sense of international and global connectedness.

In following Benedict’s analysis, then, this essay will engage with European Reformed theologies as they took shape (and related to each other) in geographical settings focused on Western and Eastern Europe as distinctive geographical-cultural locations, and in the particular historical-cultural epochs of classical and late modernity.
The division of Europe along ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ lines must be handled with care. Europe’s geographical and political regions are variously and often arbitrarily defined. In this case, the choice of ‘East’ and ‘West’ is deliberate, and is not an attempt to conflate the numerous distinct nations and cultures of either ‘Eastern’ or ‘Western’ Europe (or to impose an ‘Eastern’ European identity on those who self-identify as ‘Central’ European). Rather, it is a choice based in an historic divergence in European Reformed theology rooted in the Synod of Dort, as identified by Benedict.

This Synod, called in 1618 to resolve the Arminian controversy, was attended by Reformed theologians from a number of European contexts: England, Scotland, Geneva, Basel, Bern, Schaffhausen, Zurich, as well as numerous German Reformed territories. The notable Western European omission was France, whose participants were barred from participating by the French crown. The most significant absence, albeit one often forgotten, was that of the Eastern European Reformed traditions of Hungary and Poland, whose theologians did not participate at all. ‘Lacking prestigious universities, the Reformed churches of these countries evidently stood in a semiperipheral relation to their sister churches in the West.’ (Benedict 2004: 289)

This essay’s focus on ‘East’ and ‘West’ should be viewed against that backdrop, with these terms being used to view the divergence already evident in the early seventeenth century, and as highlighting the longstanding existence of streams of the Reformed tradition in historically distinct European cultural poles. Accordingly, this attempt to trace their nineteenth and twentieth century descendants will focus on Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, and Hungary. Such a focus does not deny the existence and influence of Reformed theology elsewhere in Europe (England and Wales, or Italy (Coletto 2010), or in other Eastern European countries (Payton 2010:...
and recognises at the outset that the trajectories set by Reformed theologians in each of these countries regularly transcended national borders. Nonetheless, its exploration of Reformed theology in a Europe modernised precisely by its division into modern nations follows a Hobsbawmian view of said nations as the central ‘novelty’ birthed by modern Europe’s cultural strivings (Hobsbawm 1990: 14-45). The story of modern Europe is inherently one of nations and nationalisms. Accordingly, the nations focused on in this chapter were the most important loci in the development of nineteenth and twentieth century European Reformed theology.

Reformed Theology in Western Europe

i. Scotland

The nineteenth century saw Scotland undergo distinctive social change, much of it painful. The brutality of large-scale coerced human migration in the Highland Clearances, the Potato Famine blighting the Highlands and Outer Hebrides from 1846 to 1856, the mass urban poverty accompanying Scotland’s booming industrial urbanisation, and the Disruption of 1843 (in which the Free Church of Scotland separated from the established Church of Scotland, being joined by 450 ministers and all but one of the Church’s overseas missionaries) left deep marks on Scotland’s cultural heritage. The twentieth century would go on to see Scottish culture transform in a melting pot of secularisation, political realignment and devolution, a revived sense of Scottish nationalism, and plummeting levels of attendance amongst Scotland’s increasingly fractured Reformed denominations (Brown 2014: 278-325).

Against that backdrop, the course of Scottish Reformed theology followed two principal lines: the continuation of the earlier federal theology of the Westminster Confession of
Faith, and the development of an alternative Scottish Reformed theology centred on
John McLeod Campbell in the nineteenth century, and upon Thomas F. Torrance in the
twentieth.

The move away from the aforementioned earlier form of federalism can be seen in the
emergence of Edward Irving (1792-1834) in the early nineteenth century. Licensed to
preach in 1815, Irving first served as assistant to the noted eighteenth century preacher
and social reformer Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) in Glasgow. In 1822, he accepted a
call to the Caledonian Chapel in London. There, Irving’s theology began to contrast what
he perceived to be a ‘contract God’ as found in Westminster’s federal theology, with the
notion of a God who loves in freedom (Irving 1864: 4.444). Irving’s life was nothing if
not colourful. Following a celebrated pulpit ministry in London (which included notable
controversies regarding charismatic gifts and the sinlessness of Christ, as well as the
formation of the Catholic Apostolic Church), he was eventually excommunicated by the
Church of Scotland on the grounds of his Christological commitments. Although
Irving’s life ended in sad circumstances relatively early in the nineteenth century (dying at
the age of forty two), his significance to subsequent developments in Scottish Reformed
theology should not be underestimated. In that light, McFarlane has rightly portrayed
Irving as a theologian before his time, noting that his Karl Barth would eventually give
his Christological emphases widespread currency in various later theological debates
(McFarlane 2010: 363). With regard to his particular importance for the development of
a distinct tradition within Scottish Reformed theology, however, Irving preceded John
McLeod Campbell (1800-1872), a Church of Scotland minister whose similar unease with
federal theology would play a key role in the development of an alternative Scottish
Reformed tradition.
In 1830, McLeod Campbell, then the Church of Scotland minister in Rhu, was tried for heresy in relation to his universalist account of the atonement. During his early ministry in Rhu, McLeod Campbell perceived his parishioners as lacking active, assured faith. His attempts to diagnose this spiritual malaise turned to the federal theology of the Westminster tradition. In short, McLeod Campbell viewed the theologies of Christ’s incarnation and atonement within this covenantal system as flawed, and argued that they robbed Christians of their assurance of faith and, in the case of Rhu at least, led to a deadened nominalism. The subsequent heresy trial resulted in McLeod Campbell’s excommunication from the Kirk, following which he pastored an independent congregation in Glasgow. His theological output continued unabated, with his most significant work, *The Nature of the Atonement*, being published in 1856. He received academic recognition in the award of a Doctor of Divinity from the University of Glasgow in 1868. Although McLeod Campbell has been recognised as having few theological allies during his own lifetime, the Episcopalian Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870) stands out as an important supporter of his revised Scottish Calvinism.

While the likes of Irving and McLeod Campbell were plotting a new course within the nineteenth century Scottish Reformed tradition, federal theology continued to find noted exponents throughout the nineteenth century. Scottish federalism had gained widespread acceptance in the eighteenth century, when it was asserted amongst Church of Scotland and Secession theologians, Thomas Boston and James Fisher being prime examples (Boston 1797; Fisher, 1753). In the nineteenth century, its most significant advocates were theologians of the then new Free Church of Scotland. William Cunningham (1862: I.502; II.261) and Hugh Martin (1882) provided the Free Church with considerable intellectual impetus rooted in a strong commitment to the tradition of Westminster federalism. The nineteenth century Free Church also contained Reformed theologians
who made outstanding contributions to preaching and social work (Thomas Chalmers and Thomas Guthrie) and the natural sciences (Hugh Miller). With regard to the latter, the geologist Hugh Miller (1802-1856) served as editor of the Free Church magazine *The Witness*, in its heyday amongst the most widely read publications in Scotland (Shortland 1996: 287-300).

It should be noted, of course, that nineteenth century Scottish Reformed theology developed as a spectrum, rather than a system of binary opposition. While the likes of McLeod Campbell and Cunningham assumed positions at either end of that spectrum, a number of theologians attempted to stand somewhere between the old adherence to federalism and the new revised Calvinism. Archibald Hamilton Charteris (1835-1908), William Muir of St. Stephens (1787-1869) and Norman Macleod (1812–1872) represent articulations of Scottish Reformed theology that occupied some kind of middle ground (Fleming 1927; 1933). The development of distinct Reformed theologies in this context was also intertwined with the changing nature of subscription to the Westminster Confession in the Scottish Reformed churches (Hamilton 2010) and the increasingly significant influence of German higher critical thought in the late nineteenth century.

The twentieth century’s two most outstanding Scottish Reformed theologians also positioned themselves as constructive inheritors of, respectively, the heritages of McLeod Campbell and Westminster federalism: the Church of Scotland’s Thomas F. Torrance (1913-2007) and the Free Church of Scotland’s Donald Macleod (b. 1940). Both men spent the greatest part of their academic careers at institutions on the Mound in Edinburgh: the Free Church College and New College. The emergence and continued separate existence of these neighbouring institutions throughout the twentieth century
highlighted the on-going divergent accounts of Scottish Reformed theology found in the previous century (Macleod 1996: 221-238).

The significance of Torrance to twentieth century Scottish Reformed theology can perhaps be best traced along two lines. In the first place, he brought the trajectory followed by Irving and McLeod Campbell into the twentieth century, planting it at the theological centre of the Church of Scotland. In so doing, he followed McLeod Campbell in reimagining a form of Scottish Reformed theology that played Calvin and the Church Fathers against Westminster’s federalism. In addition, he leaned on the brilliance of his mentor Barth, then at the peak of his powers, in order to articulate a twentieth century theological vision. Indeed, the role of Barth in the development of Torrance’s theology ensured that it was no mere repristination of McLeod Campbell’s nineteenth century work. Torrance affected Reformed theology globally by mediating Barth to the English-speaking world (McGrath 1999: 113-146), and changed the course of Scottish theology by marrying a Barthian theology to the aforementioned developments away from federal theology in nineteenth century Scotland.

In 1978, Donald Macleod was appointed Professor of systematic theology at the Free Church College, a position he held until 2011 (Macleod 2011: 15-54). Macleod stands out as twentieth century Scotland’s foremost challenger to Torrance’s continuation of McLeod Campbell’s revised Calvinism (Macleod 2000: 57-72). Profoundly influenced by the Old Princeton school and the Dutch neo-Calvinism of Bavinck and Kuype (Macleod 2006: 261-282), and an appreciative critic of Barth (Macleod 2008: 323-345), Macleod’s work represents the high point of the twentieth century Free Church’s constructive appropriation of its own federal tradition (Macleod 1974: 21-28; 1975: 22-28; 1993: 214-218).
ii. The Netherlands

In 1815, the Batavian Republic came to an end as William I ascended to the throne of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands (Koningrijk der Nederlanden). The new King was tasked with providing political unity between the Netherlands and Belgium. His ideal was to join the Kingdom’s Roman Catholics and Protestants in a single, enlightened denomination that would serve the state by educating the people in civic virtues (Harinck and Winkler 2015: 445). This unification proved impossible, leaving William I to work with the pre-existing Christian division. However, as the Enlightenment did not produce widespread anti-clerical sentiment in the nineteenth century Netherlands, the King saw himself as well positioned to work through the Dutch Reformed Church, through which he could promote a practically-oriented, enlightened ‘Christianity above doctrinal division’ (Harinck and Winkler 2015: 450).

William I had inherited governmental Departments for Religious Affairs established in 1808 (Vandenbosch 1959: 141), and a state that had taken upon itself the task of providing stipends for Reformed ministers in 1814. The state’s influence on Protestant worship, particularly through its promotion of the moralistic hymnbook Evangelische Gezangen (1807), produced a context within which the evangelical Réveil movement spreading through France and Switzerland would also see growth amongst Dutch Protestants. Conventicles were formed, increasing numbers of Reformed preachers began to emphasise the Réveil’s ‘sin and grace’ religion, and the works of the older Further Reformation (Nadere Reformatie) theologians experienced renewed popularity.
A further reaction to the state’s appropriation of the Dutch Reformed Church for its own goals was seen in the Secession of 1834 (*Afscheiding*). Hendrik de Cock (1801-1842), a Reformed minister who had experienced a pietistic conversion, began to protest and preach openly against the new doctrine of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1834, he and his congregation formally seceded from the Church. Within two years, approximately 2-3% of the Dutch Reformed Church’s membership had joined the newly formed Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland*), which had gathered some 130 congregations. The first Secessionists faced considerable state persecution on account of their departure from the Dutch Reformed Church. Indeed, they were the last Europeans to experience the state sanctioned billeting of troops in their homes (and be charged for the cost of the billeting ([Fokkema and Grijzenhout 2004: 331]). As a result, many emigrated to North America, founding Dutch Reformed colonies in the United States and Canada. Those who remained eventually came to occupy a more settled place in Dutch society, and saw their denomination grow rapidly.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the formation of two distinct appropriations of Dutch Reformed theology centred on the Universities of Groningen and Leiden. In Groningen, a group of disciples of Philip Willem van Heusde (1778-1839) came to espouse a nationalistic ‘pure Dutch’ theology that supported the state’s *volkskerk* ideals and assumed an antagonistic posture towards Calvin on the grounds of his apparent foreignness ([Eglinton 2012: 6-11]). The Leiden theologians, centred on the outstanding Old Testament scholar Abraham Kuenen (1828-1921) and van Heusde’s nephew, the systematic theologian Johannes Scholten (1811-1885), developed an alternative account of the Dutch Reformed tradition. Theirs was a strictly mechanical form of determinism (rooted, according to Scholten, in Calvin’s doctrine of predestination), a view of
Scripture as a purely human text, and a belief that church’s role in society could be better fulfilled by a secular state (Eglinton 2012: 13-18).

While many former students of the Leiden school would go on to abandon the Christian faith or resign their pastoral charges, two of the school’s most famous former students came to prominence in the formation of another branch of Dutch Reformed theology: the neo-Calvinist school led by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921).

After his studies at Leiden, Kuyper, then a typically liberal theologian, became the pastor of a rural Dutch Reformed congregation in Beesd. While there, he underwent a pietistic conversion, eventually coming into contact with the Réveil inspired, anti-Revolutionary statesman Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876). Kuyper’s correspondence with him would prove crucial to the development of Kuyper’s eventual understanding of Calvinism as a life-system as found in his 1898 *Lectures on Calvinism*.

Kuyper founded a Reformed newspaper (*De Standaard*) in 1872, and established the Netherlands’ first modern political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, in 1879. In the following year, Kuyper began the Free University of Amsterdam (*Vrije Universiteit*), a Christian university founded on Reformed principles but not affiliated with any particular denomination. In 1885, while serving as a minister in Amsterdam, Kuyper (along with 80 members of the consistory) was suspended by his local classis for insisting that Dutch Reformed ministers and church members subscribe to the Church’s confessions. In response, Kuyper led a movement of congregations out of the Dutch Reformed Church. By 1889, this movement, which referred to itself as the *Doleantie* (‘the grieving ones’), had grown to over 200 congregations, with approximately 180,000 members and 80
ministers. (It is worth noting that the Christian Reformed Church, by this point, had an estimated 187,000 members, thus signifying the widespread, grassroots change occurring in Dutch Reformed theology in the late nineteenth century (Harinck and Winkler 2015: 494)).

In the same time period, Herman Bavinck, a Seceder theologian working at the Christian Reformed Church’s Theological School in Kampen, was rising to prominence. As a teenager, Bavinck, the son of a Christian Reformed pastor, had made the controversial decision to leave Kampen in order to pursue a scientific training in theology at Leiden. Following the completion of his doctorate and a short stint as a pastor, he returned to Kampen as Professor of systematic theology, where he wrote his magnum opus Reformed Dogmatics (Dutch edition, 1895–1901; English edition, 2003-2008). Arguably the most important volume of systematic theology produced in the Netherlands in that century, it has come to stand alongside Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism as one of the defining texts in the neo-Calvinist tradition.

The personal histories of Kuyper and Bavinck became closely intertwined in 1892 when the Doleantie and Afscheiding Churches united to form the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland), and further in 1902 when Bavinck accepted the Chair of Dogmatics at Kuyper’s Free University.

The impact of neo-Calvinist theology on Dutch national life at the beginning of the twentieth century was considerable. Kuyper served as Prime Minister between 1901-1904. The neo-Calvinist notion of ‘sphere sovereignty’ (a vision of society composed of distinctive spheres, each with its own responsibilities and competences) influenced the reordering of Dutch society via the system of ‘pillarisation’ (verzuiling). Reformed,
Catholic and social-democratic ‘pillars’ were created within Dutch society, each having its own educational institutions, political parties, media (newspapers, and eventually television channels) and so on. Pillarisation continued to define Dutch society into the twentieth century, until the process of depillarisation began in the aftermath of World War II.

The twentieth century saw further movements of ecclesiastical division and unification in the Dutch Reformed churches: the Liberation of 1944 (*Vrijmaking*), a movement led by Klaas Schilder (1890-1952), saw a large section of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands separate to form the Reformed Churches (Liberated) (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*).

In terms of twentieth century developments, both Dutch neo-Calvinism and Barthian neo-orthodoxy were developed critically (and from a range of viewpoints) by the likes of Gerrit Berkouwer (1903-1996) and Schilder. Berkouwer and Schilder serve as good examples for the varied Dutch responses to Karl Barth in the twentieth century: in Schilder, Barth found his most vocal Dutch critic (Hennecke 2014: 102-105; van den Brom 2006: 262-264); and in Berkouwer, he found one of his most prominent Dutch advocates (Berkouwer 1956; Harinck 2003: 189-206). Other Dutch theologians to be significantly influenced by Barth include Kornelis Miskotte (1894-1976), Opeke Noordmans (1871-1956), Gerrit van Niftrik (1904-1972), Alexander Bronkhorst (1914-1994) and Theodorus Haitjema (1888-1972). Schilder’s critique of Barth was focused primarily on Haitjema’s interpretation of him.

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iii. Switzerland
Switzerland began the nineteenth century having been ravaged by the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, its independence only being definitely reasserted by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. It was engulfed in civil war in the early 1840s, and emerged as a federal state in 1848. The early years of the nineteenth century saw Switzerland as the centre of the Réveil, an evangelical awakening stemming from contact between Swiss Protestants and missionaries from Scotland, and itself then having a considerable impact across much of northern Europe. In early nineteenth century Switzerland, Henri-Louis Empaytaz (1790-1853), César Malan (1787-1864), Louis Gaussen (1790-1863) and Merle d'Aubigné (1794-1872) stressed the inspiration of Scripture and the doctrine of election, and called the Swiss Reformed Church to a stricter adherence (in doctrine and life) to its heritage (Bavinck 2003: 194).

As the century progressed, the likes of Daniel Schenkel (1813-1885) and Alois Emanuel Biedermann (1819-1885) came to the fore as Swiss Protestant theologians who espoused a rationalist theology inspired by Hegel's metaphysical philosophy. Both published volumes under the title Christliche Dogmatik (Schenkel 1858-59; Biedermann 1869), works that were more or less contemporaneous with the Dutchman Scholten’s De leer der Hervormde Kerk (1861), which advanced a similar brand of Hegelian, liberal Protestant rationalism.

Although this variety of Reformed theology was dominant in mid-to-late nineteenth century Switzerland, it would go on to be challenged by the resurgent conservative theology of Adolf Schlatter (1852-1938), and the neo-orthodoxy of Emil Brunner (1889-1966) and Karl Barth (1886-1968).
Schlatter, born in St. Gallen as the son of a Reformed mother and pietist father, taught New Testament and systematic theology at the Universities of Bern (1881-1888), Greifswald (1888-1893), Berlin (1893-1898) and Tübingen (1898-1922). His historical significance lies in his rejection of the liberal theology dominant in the Swiss and German universities at that time, and his reassertion of conservative theology in that context (Neuer 1996). Although his most famous students (the most important being Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer) did not go on to replicate his particular brand of conservatism, his ability to deny liberalism within the academy nonetheless served to inspire their own subsequent efforts.

The move away from classical nineteenth century liberalism in twentieth century Switzerland continued apace with the emergence of Emil Brunner, a Swiss Reformed pastor who rose to prominence with the publication of *Mysticism and the Word* (1924). There, Brunner offered a strong critique of the German Friedrich Schleiermacher’s thought (which he saw as typical of post-Enlightenment Protestant theology) as more indebted to ‘heathen paganism’ than to the Christian faith. As such, Brunner heralded the advent of a new attempt to formulate Reformed orthodoxy in the twentieth century. However, Brunner (whose thought did not experience a fundamental break from its early Kantian influence until 1937) did less than his contemporary Karl Barth in distancing himself from the old liberalism.

Widely regarded as the most important Christian theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth’s theology moved away from the German liberalism of his education during the First World War. This decisive shift became clear with the publication of his *Römerbrief* (1922) in a reworked form starkly challenging the previous century’s German liberal theology. His *Church Dogmatics* (1936-61), an expansive and unfinished lifework
addressing the doctrines of revelation, God, creation and redemption, is often viewed as the most important constructive work in Christian theology in the twentieth century. Barth’s mature theology, a dialectical, thoroughly Christocentric reworking of the Reformed tradition, articulated a distinctive new account of the doctrine of election (whereby Christ himself is the subject of double predestination, as both elect and reprobate, and is furthermore the one in whom all humanity is elect). As is evident at various points in this essay, Barth’s thought would quickly come to exert a near matchless influence across twentieth century Reformed thought.

The advent of National Socialism in Germany, particularly in its attempt to the co-opt the Christian church towards its own ends through the Deutsche Christen movement, prompted Barth, as a member of the Confessing Church, to pen the Barmen Declaration – perhaps the twentieth century’s most important Protestant confession of faith – in 1934 (Busch 2010: 1-18). A powerful declaration of the church’s spiritual independence from the state, it reflects its author’s own theological emphases throughout.

iv. Germany

In the early nineteenth century, German Reformed theology was dominated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the son of a Reformed Church chaplain in the Prussian army. After an education amongst Moravian pietists, Schleiermacher went on to study at the University of Halle, abandoning traditional orthodox Christianity during those years. He remained highly active in theology, however, and served as a pastor and theology professor (and played an important role in the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810), preaching regularly for much of his life. His most important constructive theological work, The Christian Faith (1922), is an attempt to rework Christianity entirely
around the notion that theology should be grounded upon a feeling of absolute
dependence on God (*Gefühl schlechtinniger Abhängigkeit*), rather than assertions of dogma.
Central to this was a highly original move to view theology as stemming from human
self-consciousness (Roy 1997: 217-232); a shift later described by Bavinck as the single
most significant development in nineteenth century Christian theology (‘since
Schleiermacher the whole of theology has changed, mediating, confessional, and
liberal… into a theology of consciousness’ (Bavinck 2003: 78)).

During the nineteenth century Germany moved away from its former feudal patchwork
into distinct phases of unification: the Confederation of the Rhine (1806-1807), the
*Deutscher Bund* and *Zollverein* (1815-1834), the Revolutions and Frankfurt Assembly (1848),
the North German Federation (1867-71), the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), and the
creation of the German empire (1871). In that context, German Protestantism, in both
its Lutheran and Reformed branches, experienced notable revival movements
(Beyreuther 1977: 30-44).

A significant development in the mid-nineteenth century, albeit one often neglected in
accounts of Protestantism in Germany, was a considerable and renewed interest in the
life and doctrine of Calvin. The three volume, 2,200 page *Das Leben Johann Calvins des
grossen Reformators* (1835-44) by Paul Henry, the then pastor of the French Church in
Berlin (Laube 2009: 133), became the first full length biography of Calvin to be published
in Europe since Theodore Beza’s sixteenth century *Ioannis calvini vita* (1575; Rutgers 1901:
46-7). Henry’s biography would be translated in English and Dutch, and marked the
beginning of a period of Europe-wide Reformed interest in its tradition’s own great
Reformer. This development has been attributed variously to Europe falling under the
sway of Thomas Carlyle’s ‘great man’ model of history (Laube 2009: 134; Eglinton 2014: 153).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Heinrich Heppe (1820-1879) published the *Reformed Dogmatics* (German 1861; English 1964), a work that soon became the standard text on Reformed systematics within the new dialectical school of thought, and also influenced Barth (Busch 2005: 153-4; van den Belt 2008: 119). Schleiermacher’s influence continued to unfold into mid-nineteenth century German Reformed theology through the likes of Johann Peter Lange (1802-1884) and Karl Ullmann (1796-1865). Schleiermacher’s intellectual dominance would only be countered by the monumental impact of Barth’s critique of his thought. Indeed, for Barth the starting point of a renewed modern Reformed theology would become a decisive ‘no’ to Schleiermacher.

As has already been outlined, Barth’s impact on German theology was exceptional. After teaching at the Universities of Göttingen (1921–1925), Münster (1925–1930) and Bonn (1930–1935), his stay in Germany ended when he refused to swear allegiance to Hitler. As a consequence, Barth was forced to return to Switzerland, where he received a Professorship at the University of Basel (1935–1962).

Despite this, the development of German Reformed theology under the shadow of Barth, rather than of Schleiermacher, continued unabated, and can be seen particularly in the work of Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926). Having come to faith while a prisoner of war (1945-1948), Moltmann returned to Germany to study theology at Göttingen. There he was profoundly influenced by Barth, before adding to this an eclectic range of other influences: Otto Weber, Ernst Wolf, the Lutheran Barthian Hans Iwand, the dialectical theologian Ernst Wolf, the Lutheran Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad,
Dutch Reformed theologian Arnold van Ruler (himself a critic of Barth), and the Jewish Marxist Ernst Bloch, among others (Bauckham 1995: 1-28). Moltmann’s work is typically characterised as a theology of hope centred on the resurrection of Christ, as the crucified God (Moltmann 1973). The centrality of a more typically Lutheran willingness to speak of a ‘crucified God’ within Moltmann’s Reformed theology serves well to highlight the often overlapping, intertwined nature of Reformed and Lutheran theologies throughout German Protestantism in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

v. France

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the longstanding persecution of France’s Reformed (Huguenot) community had largely come to an end. Under the increasingly aggressive persecutions of Louis XIV (1724-64), many eighteenth century French Reformed Christians had emigrated or been forced to convert to Roman Catholicism. Although this persecution officially ended in 1787, and while the French government issued a law giving the foreign descendants of exiled French Huguenots the right of return to France in December 1790, the French Reformed community at the start of the nineteenth century was small in number (the common term used to refer to the French Protestant community at that time was ‘le petit nombre’) and largely composed of peasants (Wolff 2001: 13).

France’s history throughout the first half of the nineteenth century was one of on-going political reorganisation and upheaval. From the years of the First Empire (1804-1814), through the period of the Restoration (1814-1830), to the years of the July Monarchy (1830-1848), the Second Republic (1848-1852) and the Second Empire (1852-1870), France’s small community of Reformed Christians lived in a regularly changing society.
In this setting, French Protestantism reflected its geopolitical context in being consumed by reorganisation and confrontation (in this case, between evangelical and liberal forms of Protestantism). In short, each form of reworked political organisation required a new articulation of French society’s relationship to its Protestant community (Wolff 2001: 44-51). In the early nineteenth century, many pastors within the French Reformed Church (l’Eglise Réformée de France) came under the influence of the conservative, evangelical Réveil theology moving throughout much of Northern Europe in response to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, which had also affected the French Reformed Church.

France’s move into the Third Republic (1870-1940), however, saw the shape of French Reformed theology begin to change. The 1918 annexation of the German Alsace-Lorraine to France changed the demographics of French Protestantism considerably, bringing many Reformed and Lutheran Christians into France (Latourette 1961: 375). The particular significance of this to the development of Reformed theology is that the 1901 laws concerning the separation of Church and state (which made university-level theological study impossible in France) were not applied to this newly acquired territory: it had become possible to be a French Reformed theologian at a French university, despite the French Republic’s otherwise thoroughgoing commitment to strict secularism (laïcité).

Against this backdrop, constructive Reformed theologians like Louis Auguste Sabatier (1839-1901) and Auguste Lecerf (1872-1943) emerged. Appointed to a chair in Reformed dogmatics at the University of Strasbourg in 1867, Sabatier’s pro-French views during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 eventually led to his dismissal from that Faculty. Together with the Lutheran theologian Eugène Ménégoz, Sabatier founded the Protestant Faculty of Theology of Paris (Faculté de théologie protestante de Paris), in part to
provide an alternative to the evangelical Protestant seminary founded in Montauban in 1808. By combining Reformed dogmatic affirmations with theological methods and content closer to that of nineteenth century liberal theology, Sabatier’s work represents the appearance of the ‘new theologies’ (les nouvelles théologies) which arose in reaction to nineteenth century France’s continuing liberal-evangelical debates, and attempted to plot a course beyond this impasse.

Lecerf, born in London to Communard parents who fled France following the demise of the Paris Commune, became a Calvinistic Christian having read the New Testament and Calvin’s *Institutes* in his teens. He studied at Sabatier’s Protestant Faculty in Paris, going on to complete a dissertation on determinism and responsibility in Calvin’s thought (Lecerf 1894), and eventually being appointed its Professor of Dogmatics in 1936. Lecerf’s constructive theological vision differs dramatically from that of Sabatier. His *Introduction à la dogmatique réformée* (1949) and *Études Calvinistes* (1999) demonstrate the thoroughgoing influence of both Calvin and the more recent Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition of Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd on his thought.

Lecerf’s impact on French Reformed theology continued into the twentieth century through his intellectual disciple Pierre Marcel (1910-1992), who was sent to the Netherlands by Lecerf to study under Dooyeweerd. Like Lecerf, Marcel was eventually appointed to a Professorship at the Protestant Faculty in Paris. In 1950, he launched the francophone Reformed theological academic journal *La Revue Réformée*. As a direct consequence of Lecerf’s influence upon Marcel, a new Reformed theological seminary was established in Aix-en-Provence in 1973: formerly the *Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée*, it has been known since 2011 as the *Faculté Jean Calvin*. 
In the mid-twentieth century – a period encompassing the latter years of the Third Republic, World War One, the interwar years and World War Two – French Reformed theology also saw considerable influence from Barth (Raymond 1985), who gave lectures at the Protestant Faculty in Paris in 1934 (Busch 2005: 243). The most prominent early French advocate of Barth’s theology was the Protestant pastor Pierre Maury (1890-1956) who provided, amongst other works, a significant French translation of Barth’s *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (1933). The most notable twentieth century French constructive thinker to come under Barth’s influence, however, came to the fore towards the end of World War Two, and remained active during the Fourth and Fifth Republics: the philosopher and lay theologian Jacques Ellul (1912-1994). Having converted to Christianity in his late teens and joining the French Reformed Church, Ellul’s subsequent theological thought (particularly regarding the shape of his ethics) came to be profoundly marked by Barth’s dialectical account of the Word of God (Bromiley 1981: 32-51; Clendenin 1987: 10-13; Rognon 2007: 235-271; Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly 2013: 122).

As one moves beyond the beginnings of the Fifth Republic (established in 1958) into the late twentieth century, the two most important constructive Reformed theologians in France were found at the Faculté Jean Calvin in Aix-en-Provence and the Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangelique at Vaux-sur-Seine: respectively, the Presbyterian Paul Wells (b. 1946), and the Reformed Baptist Henri Blocher (b. 1937), both of whom are also strongly influenced by the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition (Wells 2014; Nisus 2015: 321-322).

*Reformed Theology in Eastern Europe*

*i. Hungary*
Having begun the nineteenth century as a province of the Hapsburg Empire, Hungary would quickly become the locus of a significant, albeit initially unsuccessful, Revolution (1848). This Revolution marked the onset of years of social unrest and violence lasting until the 1867 Compromise between the Hungarians and the Hapsburgs established a Hungarian King, granted Hungary a greater degree of political self-governance, and set it on the path towards its eventual emergence as an independent, modern nation.

Although the Reformed faith had been established in Eastern Europe since the sixteenth century, its history in Hungary was not an easy one. In the seventeenth century, Reformed Hungarians struggled under the persecution of the Roman Catholic Hapsburgs and the Muslim Ottoman Turks. Although an edict of toleration was signed by Emperor Joseph II in 1781, the early nineteenth century was nonetheless a difficult period for Reformed Hungarians. Despite the formal disestablishment of Roman Catholicism in 1848, the Austrian Imperial government held Hungarian Protestants as responsible for the Revolution of that year, to which they responded by further repressing the autonomy of the Reformed church (which at that point existed as five separate districts, rather than as a single, united Church). In the second half of the nineteenth century, Hungarian Reformed theology would also come into close contact with its Scottish counterpart through the then newly established Free Church of Scotland’s missionary efforts amongst Hungarian Jews (Kovács 2006).

On the three hundredth anniversary of Calvin’s death (1864) numerous commemorative events were held across the Hungarian Reformed church districts, and a remarkable number of Calvin-themed theological publications appeared in print (Gaál 2009: 109-112). Historically noteworthy amongst these is Imre Révész’s work, Calvin’s Life and
Calvinism (1864). Evidently, mid-nineteenth century European interest in Calvin was not an exclusively Western phenomenon. However, Gaál has argued that Calvin’s influence on Hungarian Christianity and culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries far exceeded anything found in Western Europe: commemorations of a similar scale would be held in 1936, for example, to mark the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of Calvin’s Institutes (Gaál 2009: 123-124).

In 1881, the four pre-existing Hungarian Reformed Church districts and the Transylvanian Reformed Church held a united meeting in Debrecen, at which the modern Hungarian Reformed Church (Magyarországi Református Egyház) was birthed.

The close of World War I saw the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which plunged Hungary into years of political turmoil and social instability. In this period the Treaty of Trianon (1920) divided the Hungarian Reformed Church along new, arbitrary borders, with approximately half of its membership being allocated to Czechoslovakia, Romania, the Serb-Croat-Slovenian Kingdom, and Austria. As was the case throughout Western Europe, Hungarian Reformed theology also saw the influences of both nineteenth century liberal theology and the Réveil (Pásztor 1995). In this regard, developments in Hungary mirrored their Western European counterparts, as early twentieth century Hungarian Reformed theologians tried to reinvigorate new kinds of orthodoxy.

Jenő Sebestyén (1884-1950), a professor of theology in Budapest who had come under the influence of Abraham Kuyper while studying in Utrecht (1907-1910), was of particular importance in trying to develop and popularise Kuyper’s ‘Calvinism as a life-system’ ideas in a Hungarian setting. He oversaw the Hungarian translation of Kuyper’s
Lectures on Calvinism (1914), corresponded with Kuyper, and was even visited by him in Budapest in 1916 (de Bruijn 2014: 384). As a result of Sebestyén’s influence, Debrecen’s theological faculty became strongly influenced by Dutch neo-Calvinism: there, Kálmán Kállay (1890-1959) taught Dutch language classes to theological students, with Benjámin Csánki (1868-1943) teaching courses on the theologies of Bavinck and Kuyper (Gaál 2009: 120). In 1930, Sebestyén was awarded an honorary doctorate at the Free University of Amsterdam in recognition of this influence (Berkelaar 2007: 32).

Following World War II, the People’s Republic of Hungary, a new communist state, emerged. Communism posed considerable challenges to the Hungarian Reformed Church: the only Reformed educational institutions to remain open were the theological faculties of Budapest and Debrecen, and the college of Debrecen. Religious instruction was nationalised, with religious teaching in schools eventually being banned altogether (Kovács 2014: 105-132). Reformed pastors found themselves under close state supervision. Although this persecution was lessened following in the Revolution of 1956, Hungarians were only granted religious freedom in 1990.

Barth also played an important role in the development of Hungarian Reformed theology in the middle of the twentieth century. Barth visited Hungary in 1936 and 1948, and had a number of Hungarian students (István Török, Barna Nagy, Tivadar Rózsai, Sándor Kálmán and Imre Bertalan). The lasting impression of this first visit, made in the midst of Barth’s pre-World War II vocal criticism of National Socialism in Germany, concerned the strength of nationalist feeling in the Hungarian Reformed Church (Hanebrink 2006: 188). His enduring significance for Hungarian Reformed Church, however, concerns his contribution to the Reformed Church’s relationship to the emerging Communist state. In 1948, Barth was asked by János Péter (1910-1999), a
Reformed pastor and socialist politician, to support the candidacy of Albert Bereczky (1893-1966) for the bishopric of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Barth obliged, penning an open letter to the Reformed Church in support of Bereczky (Barth 1954). In this letter, Barth distinguished Nazism and communism (thus drawing fierce criticism from Emil Brunner), which in turn supported the Hungarian Reformed Church’s eventual move to collaborate with the communist party. Although Barth later became critical of Bereczky’s wholehearted support of socialism as theologically naïve (Pungur 1992: 122), his contributions to Hungary would nonetheless face fierce criticism from Reinhold Niebuhr (Bingham 1993: 343). Although Barth’s theology was enthusiastically mediated in a Hungarian context by the likes of János Victor (1888-1954), and while his *Dogmatics in Outline* would be translated into Hungarian, his relationship to the Hungarian Reformed Church would become a difficult one. Only one Hungarian Reformed theologian, László Márton Pákozdy, attended his funeral (1968).

The post-communist context of late twentieth century Hungary saw a renewed interest in Barth’s theology, particularly at the Reformed University in Debrecen, where a Karl Barth Research Centre would be opened in 2007.

*Conclusion*

At the outset, this survey essay set out to engage with a number of frenetically moving targets: the Reformed theologies and theologians developing across Europe during two momentous (and often chaotic) centuries. There is a sense in which the first half of the nineteenth century saw Reformed theology coming to terms with the Enlightenment – conforming to it, in the case of classical liberal theology, and challenging it, in the case of the *Réveil*. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the two most historically
important attempts to reimagine the Reformed faith in a culturally modern Europe were neo-Calvinism and neo-Orthodoxy. The story of twentieth century European Reformed theology, from the Outer Hebrides of Scotland to the eastern plains of Hungary, for the most part, was the story of Reformed theologians reorienting themselves in relation to Basel and Amsterdam, as the ground moved beneath their feet.

**Suggested Reading**


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