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The New Ethicist and the Old Bookkeeper: Isaak Dorner, Johann Quenstedt, and Modern Appropriations of Classical Protestantism

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'Dead orthodoxy' (*die todt Orthodoxie*) is currently one of the most popular catchphrases [...]. But there is a great mistake in saying this. The Lutheran orthodoxy was not dead in Germany – on the contrary, as long as it existed it was extremely lively [...].

Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger¹

Introduction

On 26 August 1858, H. L. Martensen (1808–84) wrote from Copenhagen to his close friend Isaak August Dorner (1809–84) in Göttingen: “As I received your [last] letter, I had just finished reading your essay on the immutability of God [...]. This essay belongs, in my opinion, among the most meaningful doctrinal accomplishments and must have an intervening influence on every future dogmatic treatment.”² Dorner’s *Ueber die richtige Fassung des dogmatischen Begriffs der Unveränderlichkeit Gottes*, the essay garnering Martensen’s praise, appeared in three parts between 1856 and 1858 in the *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie*, the journal that Dorner co-edited with Theodor Lieber (1806–71), and again in a volume of collected writings in 1883.³ Though

¹ Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, *Kirche und Kirchen, Papstthum und Kirchenstaat. Historisch-politische Betrachtungen*, München: J. G. Cotta, 1861, 376. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

² Letter from H. L. Martensen to Isaak A. Dorner, 26 August 1858, in *Briefwechsel zwischen H. L. Martensen und I. A. Dorner 1839–1881: herausgegeben aus deren Nachlass*, 2 vols., 1, 304 f. Berlin: H. Reuther’s Verlagbuchhandlung, 1888.

³ Isaak A. Dorner, “Ueber die richtige Fassung des dogmatischen Begriffs der Unveränderlichkeit Gottes, mit besonderer Beziehung auf das gegenseitige Verhältnis zwischen Gottes übergeschichtlichem und geschichtlichem Leben.” *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 1 (1856): 361–416; “Die Geschichte der Lehre von der Unveränderlichkeit Gottes bis auf Schleiermacher, nach ihren Hauptzügen historisch-kritisch dargestellt.” *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 2 (1857): 440–500; “Dogmatische Erörterung der Lehre von der Unveränderlichkeit Gottes.” *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 3 (1858): 579–660; and

Martensen judged the work principally with an eye to the future, Dorner himself had cast a prolonged look to the past, interacting surprisingly with the confessional or classical Protestant orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly the Lutheran scholastic Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617–88). The new dogmatic outlook heralded in Martensen's reading of the essay, in other words, had a Janus-face.

Various recent scholars sensitive to the subject of modern appropriations of "old Protestantism" have concentrated on such luminaries as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Karl Barth (1886–1968) to an extent that those falling in between have not always received attention on their own terms.⁴ Others, such as Richard A. Muller, have focused instead on what they perceived to be nineteenth-century misinterpretations and misrepresentations of post-Reformation Protestant thought, particularly that which Hermann Bauke once called post-Enlightenment "systemic monism", as well as the "central dogma" theory, the notion that Protestant orthodoxy represented a deductive system of doctrine based on predestination for the Reformed or justification for the Lutherans.⁵ Consequently, a number of other figures – no less important for understanding the era's intellectual presuppositions and reception of the Protestant orthodox traditions (Lutheran and Re-

Isaak A. Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften aus dem Gebiet der systematischen Theologie: Exegese und Geschichte*, Berlin: W. Hertz, 1883, 183–377.

⁴ On Schleiermacher's relation to the Protestant tradition, see, for instance, Walter E. Wyman, Jr., "The Role of the Protestant Confessions in Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*." *Journal of Religion* 87 (2007): 355–85; Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996, 2; and B. A. Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 48. On Barth's eclectic *ressourcement* of classical Protestantism – mediated through the compendiums and *Lehrbücher* of early modern Reformed and Lutheran theology edited by Heinrich Heppe (1820–79), Alexander Schweizer (1808–88), and by Heinrich Schmid (1811–85), respectively – see the overview provided in Ryan Glomsrud, "Karl Barth as Historical Theologian: The Recovery of Reformed Theology in Barth's Early Dogmatics." In *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange, 84–112. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008; reprint, T&T Clark, 2009. See also H. Heppe, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche*, Elberfeld: Friedrichs, 1861; Alexander Schweizer, *Die Glaubenslehre der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche dargestellt und aus den Quellen belegt*, 2 vols., Zurich: Orell, Füssli, und Comp., 1844–47; and H. Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutheranischen Kirche dargestellt und aus den Quellen belegt*, 7th ed., Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1893.

⁵ Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 97; and Hermann Bauke, *Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1922, 22, 30 f. Cf. Richard A. Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy." *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 345–375; 31 (1996): 125–160; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003; and Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World*, 99–150. See also Alexander Schweizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der reformierten Kirche*, 2 vols., Zurich: Orell, Füssli, und Comp., 1854–56.

formed) – remain neglected.⁶ Dorner’s engagement with Quenstedt thus adds an important new dimension to the discussion and helps to elucidate the complex and myriad ways in which Protestant theologians of Europe’s revolutionary century approached their early modern predecessors.

In this paper, I argue that Dorner’s essay evidenced a complex synthesis of Quenstedt’s doctrine, receiving, revising, and rejecting the classical thinker. To borrow a term from Joseph Schumpeter’s (1883–1950) economic theory, Dorner’s relationship to Quenstedt was one of “creative destruction.”⁷ Embedded in Dorner’s treatment is an important polemically charged rhetorical move that served to obfuscate critical nuances in Quenstedt’s thought. Nevertheless, the essay points up some of the diverse appropriations of classical Protestantism in the nineteenth century and documents the lasting significance of overlooked seventeenth-century confessional figures like Quenstedt.

This paper unfolds in four main parts. First, I sketch very briefly the ways in which historians and theologians have analyzed Dorner’s immutability essay over the past few decades. Second, I contextualize Dorner’s conception of the divine “ethical principle” (*das ethische Prinzip*) in his essay before examining his use of Quenstedt. Third, concisely introducing Johann Quenstedt’s life and thought, I follow this with an exposition of Quenstedt’s own construction of divine immutability as contained in his Herculean work, *Theologia didactico-polemica* (1685; 2nd ed., 1691), from which Dorner extensively gleaned.⁸ Finally, I offer some concluding comments on the nature and significance of Dorner’s interaction with the confessional Lutheran.

1. *The Immutability Essay’s Recent “Rezeptionsgeschichte”*

Though Martensen did his part to promote Dorner’s work, it was Barth who likely brought more attention to Dorner than any other modern theologian or historian of religion. In *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, Barth wrote that Dorner’s “great essay” on the subject of divine immutability connected the doctrine with God’s *Lebendigkeit* (liveliness or vitality) “in a way that is illuminating for the whole doctrine of God [...]. Those who know the essay will recognize

⁶ Cf. Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 4 f.

⁷ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 3rd ed., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950, 81–86.

⁸ Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica, sive, systema theologicum, in duas sectiones, didacticam et polemicam, divisam, in quarum prima: Omnes & singuli fidei Christianae articuli iuxta causarum seriem, perspicue traduntur [...] In secunda sectione: In quavis controversia I. Verus quaestionis status, remotis falsis statibus, rite formatur; II. Orthodoxa sententia verbis simplicibus proponitur*, Wittenberg: Sumptibus Johannis Ludolphi Quenstedtii, 1691.

as they read this subsection how much I owe to Dorner's inspiration."⁹ Carefully noting Barth's brief reference to Dorner, Claude Welch did much to rescue from oblivion Dorner's essay by translating a section of it into English in 1965.¹⁰ Since then, Welch's translation has served as the primary point of entry into the essay in British and North American contexts.¹¹

Before Barth's appropriation of it, the essay had suffered a similar somewhat ignoble fate as Dorner's other systematic efforts. By the time Dorner published the first volume of his *Glaubenslehre* in 1879, Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89) had inaugurated a cataclysmic seismic shift, unsettling the theological landscape for over six years. Ritschl, thirteen years younger than Dorner, had forestalled the critical success of Dorner's *Glaubenslehre* with the appearance of his own monumental study, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (1870–74).¹² In Barth's summary, Ritschl's "work on *Justification and Reconciliation*, free of metaphysics, did more justice to the change in the times, so that from the start Dorner's book had to fight against a prejudiced view that it was old fashioned and out-of-date." A "thick layer of dust" thus covered the name of Dorner soon after his death.¹³

In the decades after Barth, Dorner's treatment of divine immutability – often in connection with his broader trinitarian formulations – experienced an upsurge of interest.¹⁴ A number of scholars have since highlighted Dorner's fusion of Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), and G. W. F.

⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957, 493.

¹⁰ Claude Welch, *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology: G. Thomasius, I. A. Dorner, A. E. Biedermann*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, 115–80.

¹¹ Robert R. Williams translated the remaining sections of the essay and published it with Welch's translation in 1994. See Isaak A. Dorner, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*, trans. Robert R. Williams and Claude Welch, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

¹² Albrecht Ritschl, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 3 vols., Bonn: Marcus, 1870–74.

¹³ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, 2nd ed., trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden, London: SCM Press, 2001, 564.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Matthias Gockel, "Mediating Theology in Germany." In *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson, 301–18. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010; Jonathan Norgate, *Isaak A. Dorner: The Triune God and the Gospel of Salvation*, London: T&T Clark, 2009, 45 n184; John Webster, "God's Perfect Life." In *God's Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, 143–52. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006; Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Immutability and Simplicity*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 198, passim; Thomas Koppehl, *Der wissenschaftliche Standpunkt der Theologie Isaak August Dorners*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997, 176 ff.; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 156 ff.

Hegel (1770–1831), while others have attempted to tease out connections between Dorner and twentieth-century Process theology.¹⁵

Underscoring the turnabout in Dorner’s legacy, Muller suggested, “In all honesty, Dorner’s essay [...] on the problem of divine immutability is a brilliant exposition and must be seen as a primary dogmatic source for all subsequent reflection (cf. Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg) on change in God.”¹⁶ Pressing the point, Gockel claimed that “Dorner’s theology represents the climax of trinitarian thinking in the nineteenth century.”¹⁷ As Jonathan Norgate contended, Dorner demonstrated himself to be “an innovative and independent theologian” who pulled freely from “various strands of ecclesiastical – or philosophical – tradition [...] without being a *derivative* thinker.”¹⁸ In spite of the recent focus on Dorner’s trinitarianism, unanswered questions remain concerning the nature of that eclectic “tradition” from which he drew, especially over the role that he assigned to Quenstedt.

2. Dorner, “das ethische Prinzip”, and Divine Immutability

The son of a Protestant minister, Dorner was raised in the small town of Neuhausen ob Eck in South Germany (Württemberg). After studying at the Tübingen *Stift* (1827–32), where F. C. Baur (1792–1860) was one of his teachers and David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) a colleague, he returned to Neuhausen

¹⁵ See, e.g., Robert F. Brown, “Schelling and Dorner on Divine Immutability.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (June 1985): 237–49; Robert R. Williams, “I. A. Dorner: The Ethical Immutability of God.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (Winter 1986): 721–38; Robert R. Williams, introduction to *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*, by Isaak A. Dorner, trans. Robert R. Williams and Claude Welch, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 1–37; Robert Sherman, “Isaak Dorner on Divine Immutability: A Missing Link between Schleiermacher and Barth.” *Journal of Religion* 77 (1997): 380–401; Matthias Gockel, “On the Way from Schleiermacher to Barth: A Critical Reappraisal of Isaak August Dorner’s Essay on Divine Immutability.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2010): 490–510; Piotr J. Malysz, “Hegel’s Conception of God and its Application by Isaak Dorner to the Problem of Divine Immutability.” *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (Fall 2006): 448–71; Gockel, “Mediating Theology in Germany,” 314; Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought, 1778–1860*, Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1985, 266–74; and Jorg Rothermundt, *Personale Synthese. Isaak August Dorners dogmatische Methode*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968. See also the lack of attention to Dorner’s immutability essay in Christine Axt-Piscalar, *Der Grund des Glaubens: Eine theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Glaube und Trinität in der Theologie Isaak August Dorners*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990.

¹⁶ Richard A. Muller, “Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 23 n3.

¹⁷ Gockel, “Mediating Theology in Germany,” 313.

¹⁸ Norgate, *Isaak A. Dorner: The Triune God and the Gospel of Salvation*, 4 (emphasis original). Yet the “innovative” theologian is still sometimes passed over in modern histories. For instance, as Norgate noted, the major volume, Martin Greschat, ed., *Theologen des Protestantismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978, did not include Dorner.

in order to assist his father in the ministry. After two years, Dorner circled back to Tübingen and worked as a tutor. In 1837, he was made professor *extraordinarius* at the University of Tübingen and two years later, full professor of theology at the University of Kiel, where he remained until 1843.¹⁹ Influenced by his Tübingen professor Christian Friedrich Schmid (1794–1852) and to counter the growing popularity of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (1835), Dorner produced his first major publication on the history of Christology in 1839.²⁰ He held professorships in Königsberg (1843–46), Bonn (1847–53), Göttingen (1853–62), and Berlin (1862–83), and served for a time as Prussian Chief Church Councillor.²¹

In the final year of the reign of Maximilian II, King of Bavaria (r. 1848–64), the Historical Commission of the *Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften* at Munich undertook the vast enterprise of producing a complete history of the sciences in Germany. For the fifth volume of the series, which continued until 1913 and encompassed 24 volumes overall, the Commission engaged the loosely considered *Vermittlungstheologe* (mediating theologian) Dorner to write a history of Protestant theology.²² Dorner's *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie* appeared three years later. "Unless we first of all obtain a faithful picture of the Reformation and its aspirations," he wrote in the opening pages, "it is not possible to place the historical movement of evangelical theology in the right light."²³ For Dorner, the Reformation was a "creative period," furnishing "clear [...] basic ideas rather than finished and thoroughly connected" ones. To this, "the seventeenth century brought the enclosing walls and analysis of formal logic" and the eighteenth century, the "dissolution by negative criticism." Yet, he stated, "the nineteenth century is endeavoring, more consciously than any other time before, to take posses-

¹⁹ On the intriguing circumstances by which Dorner received his appointment at Tübingen, see Horton Harris, *The Tübingen School*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 41–43.

²⁰ The work was expanded and republished five years later. See Isaak A. Dorner, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Lehre von der Person Christi, nach dem Reformationszeitalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., Stuttgart: Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1846–56. Dorner based his history of Christology on two earlier articles in which he critiqued the views of both Baur and Strauss; see Dorner, "Über die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Christologie, besonders in den neuern Zeiten. Eine historisch-kritische Abhandlung." *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1835): 81–204; 6 (1836): 96–240.

²¹ Jörg Rothermundt, "Dorner, Isaak August." In *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 36 vols., ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller, 9, 155–58. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977–2004; Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 564; and J. Bobertag, *Isaak August Dorner: Sein Leben und seine Lehre, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner bleibenden Bedeutung für Theologie und Kirche*, Gütersloh: G. Bertelsmann, 1906, 34.

²² Isaak A. Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie, besonders in Deutschland, nach ihrer principiellen Bewegung und im Zusammenhang mit dem religiösen, sittlichen und intellectuellen Leben betrachtet*, ed. Königl. Academie der Wissenschaften, München: J. G. Cotta, 1867. For more on Dorner in relation to mediating theology, see Ragnar Holte, *Die Vermittlungstheologie: Ihre theologischen Grundbegriffe kritisch untersucht*, trans. Björn Kummer, Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1965.

²³ Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie*, 6.

sion of things in their principle, and of the principle in its fruitfulness and power, and to continue the analysis to synthesis in a newer and higher form.”²⁴ The modern drive for a “newer and higher” synthesis, he added, was thoroughly appropriate; for Protestant or “evangelical truth is no dead treasure, but a lively (*lebendiges*), fructifying principle.”²⁵

Throughout Dorner’s *Geschichte*, the “lively principle” of Protestantism assumed an almost entirely ethical character. This is perhaps most clear in the German preface to the 1871 English language edition of the work.²⁶ There he lauded the “most recent and very hopeful developments” of German theology, which “increasingly perceived how the ethical principal (*das ethische Princip*) must be incorporated into the doctrine of God, anthropology, Christology, and Ecclesiastics, in order to secure a firm basis as well as sure progress.”²⁷ Ethics contained the key not only to the future of theology, but also to the successful development of German civilization and cross-cultural exchange with Great Britain and North America.²⁸ “Why has a civilization that is turned away from evangelical truth assumed such large dimensions among us in Germany?” Dorner asked. “Because the desire for knowledge was indeed alive, but not saturated enough with the ethical spirit. To this the degeneration of our national, political, and civic relations, their uneasy obscurity and incompleteness, has not a little contributed.”²⁹ Ethics remained one of Dorner’s dominating interests during the rest of his life. He toiled over his *System der christlichen Sittenlehre*, a companion volume to his earlier *Glaubenslehre* (1879–81), until his last weeks, which he spent in Wittenberg in view of the famous *Lutherhaus*.³⁰

Among the leading representatives of seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism – which the *Geschichte* generally looked upon unfavorably as an age of “wall building,” impeding theological development by fashioning Protestantism into an “impregnable citadel” – stood another Wittenberger, the theologian Johann Andreas Quenstedt.³¹ Quenstedt’s penchant for exhaus-

²⁴ Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie*, 6 f.

²⁵ Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie*, 8.

²⁶ Isaak A. Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology, Particularly in Germany, Viewed According to its Fundamental Movement and in Connection with the Religious, Moral, and Intellectual Life*, trans. George Robson and Sophia Taylor, 2 vols., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871, 1, v–xi.

²⁷ Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, 1, vi.

²⁸ Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, 1, vi.

²⁹ Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, 1, vii.

³⁰ Isaak A. Dorner, *System der christlichen Sittenlehre*, Berlin: W. Hertz, 1885. August Dorner (1846–1920), Isaak A. Dorner’s son, edited and published the work shortly after his father’s death. For the earlier dogmatic work, see Isaak A. Dorner, *System der christlichen Glaubenslehre*, 2 vols., Berlin: W. Hertz, 1879–81. See also Philip Schaff and D. S. Schaff, “Dorner, Isaak August.” In *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 13 vols., ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, 3, 492 f. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977.

³¹ Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie*, 520.

tively cataloguing the views of his numerous interlocutors earned him a prominent mention in Dorner's *Geschichte*. Following F. A. Tholuck (1799–1877), Wilhelm Gaß (1813–89), and Gustav Frank (1832–1904), Dorner bestowed upon Quenstedt the sobriquet, “the bookkeeper (*Buchhalter*) of Lutheran orthodoxy.”³²

The *Geschichte*, however, was not Dorner's first work to combine a discussion of ethics and careful engagement with Quenstedt and Protestant orthodoxy. That place belongs arguably to Dorner's immutability essay.

The specific occasion of Dorner's essay concerned the kenotic controversy in Christology.³³ While dogmatic interest in the question of how the human being Jesus of Nazareth could at the same time be considered divine dated back to the early church (see, for instance, the Chalcedonian Creed, promulgated at the fourth ecumenical council in AD 451), it became especially acute after the rise of post-Enlightenment historical criticism of the Bible, the spread of German idealism, and, pointedly, in the repercussions following the appearance of Strauss's life of Jesus.³⁴ How can the divine, pre-existent Logos (*logos asarkos*) take on human flesh and live an authentically human life without damaging his divine nature? This was the crux of the “kenotic” problem.³⁵ It posited a reversal of the orthodox Lutheran *communicatio idiomatum*, with the Logos now becoming finite.³⁶ Gottfried Thomasius (1802–75) and others pushed their readings of biblical texts like John 1:1–18 and Phil. 2:7, asking, If God is involved in history, then to what extent was God affected by the incarnation (for in the incarnation God had “become” an historical individual, participating in the historical process)?³⁷ Immutability, one of the divine attributes or perfections, was thereby drawn into the discussion.

³² Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie*, 530. Tholuck identified Quenstedt as the “bookkeeper (*Buchhalter*) and secretary (*Schriftführer*)” of early modern Lutheranism. Gaß and Frank similarly described Quenstedt as the “bookkeeper and secretary of his companions.” See F. A. Tholuck, *Der Geist des lutherischen Wittenbergs im Verlaufe des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg und Gotha: Perthes, 1852, 218; F. A. Tholuck, “Quenstedt, Andreas.” In *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, ed. Johann Jakob Herzog, vol. 12, 421. Gotha: Rudolf Besser, 1860; Wilhelm Gaß, *Geschichte der protestantischen Dogmatik in ihrem Zusammenhange mit der Theologie überhaupt*, vol. 1: *Die Grundlegung und der Dogmatismus*, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1854, 357; and Gustav Frank, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie*, vol. 2: *Von Georg Calixt bis zur Wolff'schen Philosophie*, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1865, 30.

³³ See David R. Law, “Kenotic Christology.” In *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson, 251–79. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010.

³⁴ Cf. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, 233 f.

³⁵ See Gottfried Thomasius's two works, *Beiträge zur kirchlichen Christologie*, Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1845, and *Christi Person und Werke. Darstellung der evangelisch-lutherischen Dogmatik vom Mittelpunkt der Christologie aus*, Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1856–61. Cf. Welch, *God and Incarnation*, 23–102.

³⁶ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 206 f.; *Divine Immutability*, 43 f. I cite the 1883 edition of Dorner's text, followed by a reference to Williams's and Welch's 1994 English language edition, from which the translations appear.

³⁷ Law, “Kenotic Christology,” 252, 254.

Dorner responded to the kenotic proposals with his immutability essay, culling from his massive study on the history of the doctrine of Christ's person. The first part of the essay evaluated and ultimately rejected the kenotic position.³⁸ The second part, recalling the kenotic link to immutability, constituted an historical survey of the claim that God cannot change, beginning with the patristic era and concluding with an extended discussion of Schleiermacher.³⁹ In the third part, he defended a qualified immutability, arguing that divine immutability should be seen in ethical, not metaphysical terms, and that love (an ethical quality) held primacy in God's character.⁴⁰ Indeed, his later *Glaubenslehre* spoke of God's "absolutely ethical essence."⁴¹

Developing the views of Liebner, Dorner contrasted God's moral attributes – preeminently divine love – which cannot change, with God's being, which is seemingly changing and conditioned by the world.⁴² Liebner had asserted that God is "absolute love eternally realized in itself, or the good that is eternally real; both are identical."⁴³ Love represented a form of active self-communication in the Trinity.⁴⁴ The God of the Bible, furthermore, is actively involved in the affairs of the world. For Dorner, this meant that one's conception of divine immutability must account for God's actions, his vitality (*Lebendigkeit*), and, perhaps more importantly, a specific reciprocity between God and humans. "Without participation in God, man cannot attain the concept which God formed of him, and without the developed actualized receptivity of men for God, God cannot dwell and move in men."⁴⁵ He claimed as well that "not only does humanity change in its relation to God, but the living relations of God to humanity – his being and will – also undergo changes, as both are manifest in the world."⁴⁶ Accordingly, he sought out places where he might revise the classical doctrine of divine immutability as it was described, he said, in "the old ecclesiastical dogmatics."⁴⁷ With some irony, Jay Richards esteemed the work as the "classical defense" of the view that God's moral consistency alone satisfied the requirements of the biblical texts (such as James 1:17 and Malachi 3:6) as traditionally understood in defense of God's immutability.⁴⁸

³⁸ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 188–241; *Divine Immutability*, 49–81.

³⁹ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 241–99, especially 287 ff.; *Divine Immutability*, 82–130, especially 120 ff.

⁴⁰ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 299–377; *Divine Immutability*, 131–95.

⁴¹ Isaak A. Dorner, *System der christlichen Glaubenslehre*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., Berlin: W. Hertz, 1886–87, 1, 294 f.

⁴² See the first volume of Liebner's *Christliche Dogmatik*: Theodor Liebner, *Christologie, oder die christologische Einheit des dogmatischen Systems*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1849. Cf. Axt-Piscalar, *Der Grund des Glaubens*, 108.

⁴³ Liebner, *Christologie*, 71.

⁴⁴ Gockel, "Mediating Theology in Germany," 306 f.

⁴⁵ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 315; *Divine Immutability*, 145.

⁴⁶ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 274; *Divine Immutability*, 110.

⁴⁷ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 299; *Divine Immutability*, 131.

⁴⁸ Richards, *The Untamed God*, 198.

At the heart of the second, historical section Dorner contemplated the meaning of the material principle of the Reformation for the concept of an ethical God in the modern age. The doctrine of justification by faith alone, that great “article by which the church stands or falls” (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*), as pan-Protestant orthodoxy held or the “main hinge on which religion turns,” as John Calvin (1509–64) put it, had an “original and fundamental insight into the relation between God and the human.”⁴⁹ New Protestant emphases on human identity and personality arising out of the sixteenth-century recovery of the gospel subverted old neoplatonic schemes of emanation, which “not only fail to secure human personality but threaten it,” Dorner argued. “For the person justified by faith knows himself to be confirmed in his personhood by God, as eternally favored by God. The Reformation advances beyond the standpoint which regards God to be merely lawgiver and judge.”⁵⁰

Even so, the seed of justification by faith planted by the Reformers had not yet yielded all of its fruit.⁵¹ In some cases, tracing out the ramifications of *sola fide* would mean uprooting other long-cherished doctrines, such as God’s *decretum absolutum*, to make way for putatively more ethically-grounded dogmas. Double predestination, Dorner believed, cast a long shadow and “dark remnant” over God’s immutable and ethical being. The Reformed corner of Protestantism egregiously persisted to confess the doctrine, resulting in a “lack in ethical self-identity” in which “God does not remain self-identical vis-à-vis sinners, but rather relates to them unequally: meeting out justice to the damned, and mercy to the rest.”⁵² Lutheran dogmatics, however, gradually shed the doctrine, thereby securing an essential role for human freedom in the process of salvation. Thus, Dorner still concluded, “the Reformation acknowledged and legitimated human personality.”⁵³

The problem of God-human relationality, however, always has two sides: God’s and humanity’s. For Dorner, redefining faith and rethinking human personality targeted the human side, and should have had a corresponding impact on the divine side as well. But such was not the case. Although Protestant orthodoxy placed special emphasis on the ethical when it came to justification in particular and the entire sweep of salvation in general, its traditional doctrine of God did not.⁵⁴ He complained that theology proper since the *Spätreformations* had grown tired, stale, and in light of other doctrines, radically underdeveloped. Lutheran scholastics Johann Quenstedt and Quenstedt’s uncle, the

⁴⁹ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 261; *Divine Immutability*, 99. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, 3.11.1; and Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, vii.

⁵⁰ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 261; *Divine Immutability*, 99.

⁵¹ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 261; *Divine Immutability*, 99.

⁵² Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 262, n 1; *Divine Immutability*, 99, n 34.

⁵³ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 262; *Divine Immutability*, 100.

⁵⁴ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 263; *Divine Immutability*, 100.

University of Jena theologian Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), stood as test cases for Dorner’s assertions. He turned to the two towering figures of confessional orthodoxy to illustrate classical Protestantism’s supposedly obsolete idea that God does not change. “It may suffice to have a brief look at Gerhard and Quenstedt in order to see that while the heart of reformed dogmatics is animated by a new conception of the relation between God and the world,” he avowed, “the doctrine of God still puts on the same old traditional face that is in no way compatible with the new thinking, namely, the traditional concepts of divine infinity, eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and blessedness.”⁵⁵ Dorner’s work would leave no doctrinal stones of the seventeenth-century “tradition” of Quenstedt and Gerhard unturned.

The key to providing a “new face,” as it were, for God’s attributes revolved around privileging the divine ethical will over against Protestantism’s traditional and confessional understanding of the divine being. Referencing the eighteenth-century Cotta edition of Gerhard’s *Loci Theologici*, which amounted to a colossal 22 quarto volumes, Dorner reviewed Gerhard’s defense of divine immutability as a consequence of the claim that God was simple: “the divine attributes are really one among themselves and identical with God’s essence.”⁵⁶ Hence, there could be no “synthesis” of essence and accidents in God. Like Thomas Aquinas’s construction, God was said to be *actus purus* – pure act. God may manifest his presence according to different degrees or levels (*praesentia, potentiae, gratiae, gloriae, incarnationis*), but “none of this implies any change or difference in God’s presence itself,” Dorner summarized. “If a difference in the effect implies a difference in the cause, and if the effective divine causality is supposed to be identical with the divine being, we are left in the lurch in reference to the incarnation.” For Gerhard could not mean, he noted, that God related to his creation only “in the mode of self-incarnation” or that Christ’s appearance in the flesh was “due merely to a difference in degree of human receptivity.”⁵⁷

Dorner then painted a familiar metaphor of sun and earth, standing for God and creation, respectively. As the sun sends its rays throughout the heavens, it remains always the same. But the earth is illumined and warmed only when it turns toward the sun. The point for Gerhard was that God’s essence does not change, only his effects.⁵⁸ Gerhard “sticks to the basic position that God is neither diminished by human sin, nor augmented by human conversion; any change occurs only on the human side.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 262 f.; *Divine Immutability*, 100.

⁵⁶ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 263; *Divine Immutability*, 100. Cf. Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologi, cum pro astruenda veritate tum pro destruenda quorumvis contradicentium falsitate per theses nervose solide et copiose explicati*, 22 vols., Tübingen: I. G. Cotta, 1762–87.

⁵⁷ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 265; *Divine Immutability*, 102.

⁵⁸ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 265; *Divine Immutability*, 102.

⁵⁹ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 264; *Divine Immutability*, 102.

Should this be true, Dorner queried, then “are we supposed to say in reference to the person of Christ and the kingdom of God that there is no new act of God not previously in existence [...]. That everything remains unchanged as far as God’s will and doing are concerned and that change has occurred only on the human side, namely, in human receptivity?”⁶⁰ Unequivocally, he answered a resounding “no.” The doctrine of “the old dogmatics, Reformed and Lutheran alike,” hindered any positive relation between God and time, God and history.⁶¹ The absolute ethical love of God, in Dorner’s counter-formulation, qualified, conditioned, and ordered the divine attributes.⁶²

A fundamental oddity characterized “the old dogmatics.” In the “old” system, Dorner protested, “all divine attributes are coordinated, but the *strange coordination* of physical and metaphysical attributes with the ethical provokes little reflection on the part of theologians; it is simply taken over uncritically from the past. Thus Quenstedt: God’s attributes [...] are contained in him in such a way that nothing precedes and nothing follows.”⁶³ His clarion call in response was rather straightforward: “it is urgent and necessary to continue the work of the Reformation by reconstructing the doctrine of God.”⁶⁴

In Dorner’s appraisal, Quenstedt provided the quintessential “strange coordination” of God’s morality (including his love, justice, and veracity, among other attributes) with physical and metaphysical attributes. In Quenstedt’s words, “The immutability of God is the perpetual identity of the divine essence and of all its attributes, negating altogether all [change or] motion [*motum*], both physical and ethical (James 1:17, Malachi 3:6).”⁶⁵ Quenstedt, branded by Dorner as “the John of Damascus of orthodox Protestant dogmatics” of the seventeenth century, appeared to amalgamate the idea that God cannot go back on his word (ethical immutability) with the idea that God cannot move (immobility or “physical immutability”).⁶⁶

One centuries-old statement in particular stood behind Dorner’s purported bewilderment over and rhetorical dismissal of Quenstedt. St. John of Damascus had famously declared, “The Deity, then, alone is motionless moving the

⁶⁰ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 272; *Divine Immutability*, 108.

⁶¹ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 269–72; *Divine Immutability*, 105–8.

⁶² Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 352; *Divine Immutability*, 176.

⁶³ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 263; *Divine Immutability*, 100 (emphasis added); cf. Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 6 (p. 285). “Nullum ordinem attributa Dei habent a parte rei, quia ita in ipso (Deo) ut sint ipsum, ita in sunt, ut nihil antecedat, nihil subsequatur.” I am grateful to Casey Carmichael for making some helpful suggestions on the translation of Quenstedt’s Latin.

⁶⁴ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 287; *Divine Immutability*, 120.

⁶⁵ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 20 (p. 288). “Immutabilitas Dei est perpetua essentiae divinae et omnium eius perfectionum identitas, negans omnem omnino motum, cum physicum tum ethicum.”

⁶⁶ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 265; *Divine Immutability*, 102.

universe by immobility.”⁶⁷ Dorner proposed solidarity between the eight-century Syrian polymath and Quenstedt on this point, as though Quenstedt’s definition of divine immutability meant either the incoherent or deistic exclusion of all divine relations with creation. In Dorner’s eyes, this construction dominated the Protestant orthodox traditions and produced within the doctrine of God a trajectory mired in an inexorable oscillation between pantheism on one hand, and deism on the other. If the Reformers “failed to overcome the tendencies toward deism and pantheism” that “traditional” immutability elicited, such tendencies only became fully “explicit in the post-Reformation period.”⁶⁸ What, then, lay behind Quenstedt’s linking of ethics and physics?

3. Quenstedt’s “Strange Coordination”

Only two months prior to the signing of the treaties of Münster and Osnabrück on 24 October 1648, which brought an end to the Thirty Years’ War, Johann Quenstedt had just marked his thirty-first birthday and the fourth anniversary of his initial appointment as a lecturer at the University of Wittenberg. Like his uncle Gerhard, he was born in Quedlinburg, the medieval town in the west of present-day Saxony-Anhalt. In his early years he hoped to matriculate at the University of Jena and study theology there with his uncle. Yet on account of Gerhard’s death in 1637, he enrolled instead at the nearby University of Helmstedt. After six years in Helmstedt (1637–43), he continued his studies at Wittenberg, where he also became professor of several subjects, including logic, metaphysics, and theology. He remained at Wittenberg for the rest of his life.⁶⁹

Quenstedt’s crowning theological achievement, the *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologiae*, distilled his more than three decades of theological reflection at Wittenberg. He first published the work in 1685, and it was republished in 1691, 1696, 1702 and 1715. The work stood at the pinnacle of the highly systematized dogmatics produced during the era of “high orthodoxy” in Lutheranism.⁷⁰ Its breadth renders its description as the product

⁶⁷ John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond (A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd Series, vol. 9), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973, 2.

⁶⁸ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 275; *Divine Immutability*, 110. In fact, Koppehl claimed that pantheism and deism represented the only two overarching types of heresy that Dorner explicitly identified. See Koppehl, *Der Wissenschaftliche Standpunkt*, 74 f.

⁶⁹ Johannes Kunze, “Quenstedt.” In *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd ed., 22 vols., ed. Albert Hauck, 16, 380–83. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1896–1909. Lamentably, no standard or major biography of Quenstedt exists.

⁷⁰ Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols., St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970–72, 1, 45, 62. On the divisions of Lutheran orthodoxy, see Robert Kolb, introduction to *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture 1550–1675*, ed. Robert Kolb, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 1–14.

of an expertly attentive and scrupulous “bookkeeper” not far from the truth, though an irenic spirit softened the blow of Quenstedt’s careful polemics. As Johann Matthias Schröckh diplomatically put it in 1808, if one generally considered the *Theologia didactico-polemica* to be laborious and “overly cumbersome,” one should also “admire the extremely patient diligence and zeal of the author.”⁷¹

Robert Preus described the general Lutheran scholastic discussion of divine immutability as centered on an edifying application of the doctrine, as refraining from philosophical speculation, and as grounded firmly in considerable exegetical commentary on the biblical evidence.⁷² “The immutability of God means that he is free of accidents, whims (*affectus*), composition, and change [...]. Viewed positively, God’s immutability is generally linked with his truthfulness (*veritas essentialis*) and considered by the old Lutheran theologians in connection with his grace and promises” which cannot be frustrated and which he will always uphold.⁷³ Preus’s summary connected the Lutheran scholastic treatment of divine immutability to God’s ethical constancy, especially when considering topics of soteriology. On at least a *prima facie* reading, that connection challenges Dorner’s claim that while Quenstedt evidenced “a new conception between God and the world,” displayed clearly in the Protestant orthodox handling of the “problems” of nature/grace and condemnation/justification, no corresponding “special emphasis on the ethical” occurred within the understanding of God’s being and relationality.⁷⁴

As Dorner perceived, the first clause in Quenstedt’s statement on God’s immutability was simply a gloss on the definition of divine simplicity: “the perpetual identity of the divine essence and of all its perfections.” The second clause denied every sort of mutation, whether by corruption, change in knowing or willing, changes in “motion,” or any other change.⁷⁵ Quenstedt’s prior explanation of simplicity in the *Theologia didactico-polemica* was highly nuanced, involving several theses.

First, God is not complex, composite, or divided. “The unity of God is that according to which he is not only undivided in essence but absolutely indivisible.”⁷⁶ In other words, God’s essence must always be identified with his attributes. Second, a corollary to the first point, God’s attributes are not “superadded” to his essence, but are only “inadequate concepts of an infinitely perfect essence. The divine essence is like an incomprehensible ocean of all

⁷¹ Johann Matthias Schröckh, *Christliche Kirchengeschichte seit der Reformation*, vol. 8, Leipzig: Schwickert, 1808, 12.

⁷² Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2, 100–3.

⁷³ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2, 100.

⁷⁴ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 262 f.; *Divine Immutability*, 99 f.

⁷⁵ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 20 (p. 288). “Immutabilitas Dei est perpetua essentiae divinae et omnium eius perfectionum identitas, negans omnem omnino motum, cum physicum tum ethicum.”

⁷⁶ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 10 (p. 285 f.). “Unitas Dei est, quae ipse essentia indivisus non tantum, sed [...] et absolute indivisibilis est.”

the infinite perfections which the human intellect is not able to exhaust in a single and simple concept,” but by means of multiple limited concepts, “sip by sip, as it were, it draws something out of that infinity.”⁷⁷ Third, both affirming God’s simplicity and admitting that human speech about God is always inadequate does not reduce distinctions among the divine attributes to mere semantics. “If the attributes differ from one another only in the mind,” Quenstedt stated, then “those words wise, just, merciful, when spoken about God, will be synonyms, just as among us sword and saber are synonyms. But this is absurd.” One distinguishes between sword and saber “by an active thinking process,” while one distinguishes between the divine attributes “by a receptive thinking process, which has a basis in a thing.”⁷⁸ For instance:

The infinity of God is the divine essence itself apprehended as having no end or limit [...]. One must distinguish between an objective concept, which is the conceived object itself, and a formal concept, which is a quality produced by our mind, representing the thing known by means of an idea or picture impressed [on the mind] [...]. The essential divine attributes are distinguished, neither from the divine essence nor from one another in reality or because of their nature, as things clearly different or as two or more parts of one and the same simple thing, or in any other way, but only in our thinking.⁷⁹

Thus, God’s attributes are the divine essence itself “represented to us” by means of many inadequate concepts.⁸⁰

There are, moreover, two types of attributes: essential or absolute attributes and relative attributes. The classification is premised upon an *ad intra-ad extra* distinction, differentiating both the *ad intra* absolute and necessary knowledge held only by God and each absolute attribute God has apart from any relationships besides those within the divine life (that is, including only the relationships between the persons of the Trinity); with both the *ad extra* relative knowledge held by creatures and each relative attribute God

⁷⁷ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 2, obs. 5 (p. 297). “Attributa divina non notant aliquid essentiae divinae superadditum, sed sunt tantum inadaequati conceptus essentiae infinite perfectae. Est essentiae divinae instar incomprehensibilis infinitarum perfectionum omnium oceani, ad quem uno simplicique conceptu exhauriendum non sufficit intellectus humanus, ideoque conceptibus variis sorbillatim quasi haurit aliquid ex illa infinitate.”

⁷⁸ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 2, q. 3, obj. 10 (p. 330). “Si attributa ratione tantum inter se differunt, voces illae, sapiens, iustus, misericors, cum de Deo efferuntur, synonymae erunt, sicut apud nos gladius et ensis, sed hoc absurdum. Ergo sola ratione non differunt. Non est par ratio; gladius et ensis distinguuntur ratione ratiocinante, attributa divina ratione ratiocinata, quae habet fundamentum in re.”

⁷⁹ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. vii. 2, q. 3, obj. 7 (p. 330). “Sic Infinitas Dei est ipsa essentia divina, apprehensa ut carens omni termino et finitione [...]. Distinguendum inter conceptum objectivum, qui est ipsum objectum conceptum, et inter conceptum formalem, qui est qualitas ab intellectu nostro facta, repraesentans rem cognitam per modum ideae vel imagines impressae. Ibid. Attributa Dei essentialia neque ab essentia divina neque inter se realiter aut ex natura rei, ut res plane diversae, aut unius ejusdemque simplicis rei duae pluresve quidditates, aut diversi modi, sed ratione tantum distinguuntur.”

⁸⁰ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. vii. 2, q. 3, obj. 7 (p. 330). “Attributa divina sunt ipsa Dei essentia, per plures inadaequatos conceptus nobis repraesentata.”

has in relation to the world.⁸¹ Attributes of the first class, Quenstedt held, describe “the divine essence absolutely and in itself without reference to any activity, and they are called immanent, [...] or quiescent, which, namely, are not directed toward some actions, such as immensity, eternity, spirituality, etc.”⁸² Similarly, attributes of the second class, “energies” or “activities,” describe “the divine essence relatively, with respect to an activity, and extend themselves to the outside [of the divine essence], or those which are recognized to be directed toward definite activities, as are power, knowledge, righteousness, mercy.”⁸³ Immensity is an absolute attribute, while omnipresence is a relative one, since it “implies not only a nearness of the divine essence, or a presence of God with his creatures, but also a certain activity or an active control.”⁸⁴ Divine immutability must be understood within the context of this classification.

There is always a necessary difference between God and his creatures when it comes to immutability, Quenstedt claimed. He considered five ways of understanding change: (1) in regard to existence; (2) in regard to place or location; (3) in regard to accidents; (4) in regard to knowledge; and (5) in regard to the decree or purpose of his will. The first cannot describe God, who is eternal and necessarily exists. The second fails because God is present everywhere and immeasurable. The third fails because of the doctrine of God’s simplicity. The fourth fails because God is omniscient. The fifth also fails, not only because God is immutable in his essence, but because he does not change his decree, nor retract what he has said or done (an ethical concern).⁸⁵ Quenstedt’s argument here bears remarkable similarity to the arguments for

⁸¹ For more on the *ad intra-ad extra* distinction within Lutheran orthodoxy, see Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2, 54–64. On the generally similar *ad intra-ad extra* distinction within Reformed orthodoxy, see Richard A. Muller, “God as Absolute and Relative, Necessary, Free and Contingent: The Ad Intra-Ad Extra Movement of Seventeenth-Century Reformed Language about God.” In *Always Reformed: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey*, ed. R. S. Clark and Joel E. Kim, 56–73. Escondido, CA: Westminster Seminary California, 2010; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1: 225–38; and Willem J. Van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 319–35.

⁸² Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 4 (pp. 284 f.). “Attributorum horum duo sunt genera: Quaedam essentiam divinam describunt absolute et in se citra respectum ad operationem, dicunturque immanentia, [...] seu quiescentia, quae scil. non sunt ordinata ad aliquos actus, ut immensitas, aeternitas, spiritualitas etc.” Cf. *ibid.*, I. ix. 1, th. 16 (p. 326).

⁸³ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 4 (pp. 284 f.). “Quaedam essentiam divinam describunt respective, ratione ἐνέργειας, dicunturque ἐνεργητικά seu cognoscuntur, ut sunt potentia, scientia, iustitia, misericordia.”

⁸⁴ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 19, nota (p. 288). “Differt itaque immensitas ab omnipraesentia; illa est attributum absolutum, haec respectivum [...] cum non solum essentiae divinae propinquitatem, sive adessentiam Dei ad creaturas, sed etiam operationem quandam seu operosum dominium importet.”

⁸⁵ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 20 (p. 288). Cf. Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 265–67; *Divine Immutability*, 102–4.

immutability advanced by Reformed scholastics like Edward Leigh (1602–71) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–69):

A reasonable creature may be changed five ways: (1) In respect of existence, if it exists sometimes and sometimes not. (2) In respect of place, if it be moved from one place to another. (3) In respect of accidents, if it be changed in quantity or quality. (4) In respect of the knowledge of the understanding, as if it now thinks that to be true, which before it judged to be false. (5) In respect of the purpose of the will, if it now decrees to do something, which before it decreed not to do. God is not changed in any of these ways.⁸⁶

God cannot cease to exist, nor can God alter his essential properties, such as his omniscience or his eternal purpose – otherwise, of course, he would not be God. “Similarly, the spirituality of God implies immutability, as opposed to materiality and all its accompanying *predicamenta*, in particular that of ‘movability’ or ‘motion.’”⁸⁷ Therefore, attributes that indicate *ad extra* accomplishments do not imply any change in God (*ad intra*), but only in the thing effected.⁸⁸

Yet for Quenstedt, divine immutability did not mean that God, as *actus purus*, might be static or changeless as creatures might be changeless. Not even the immutability of fallen angels or, alternatively, upright angels in their perfection, he noted, could serve as proper analogies for divine immutability; the immutability of fallen angels is certainly not a perfection or attribute properly considered, while the immutability of upright angels in their perfection is “given by God” and “conferred” to them.⁸⁹ In all, God remained *sui generis*.

In other *loci*, Quenstedt returned often to the ethical component of immutability. Both sinners and the redeemed alike are guaranteed that the exact demands of God’s justice will be fulfilled.⁹⁰ Because God is immutable, the redeemed can take comfort that Christ’s atoning death on the cross truly satisfies divine justice on their behalf.⁹¹ More broadly, he stated that those exercising true faith – the elect – can always be assured of God’s trustworthiness, that God will remain true to his word and promise of salvation.⁹²

Quenstedt’s discussion of divine immutability, like Gerhard’s, recognized an awareness of the inherent inadequacy of human language about God. He also avoided confounding immutability with immobility, a point which Dorn-

⁸⁶ Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London, 1646), II. v (pp. 44 f.); Johannes Cocceius, *Summa theologiae ex Scriptura repetita* (Geneva, 1665; Amsterdam, 1669), III. ix. 46, cited in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3, 315.

⁸⁷ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2, 315.

⁸⁸ Cf. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3, 313.

⁸⁹ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, III. xi. 1, th. 10 (p. 446). Again, there is a remarkable similarity to the Reformed orthodox discussion on this point; see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3, 313.

⁹⁰ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, I. viii. 1, th. 35 (p. 292). “Iustitia Dei est summa et immutabilis voluntatis divinae rectitudo, a creatura rationali, quod rectam et justam est, exigens.”

⁹¹ Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, III. iii. 2, q. 6, ob. 5 (p. 412).

⁹² Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, III. ii. 1, th. 20 (p. 20), *ibid.*, III. ii. 1, th. 32 (p. 23).

er suppressed when he dubbed Quenstedt Protestant orthodoxy's "John of Damascus." The commonly held and conceptually precise *ad intra-ad extra* model undergirded the "strange coordination," from Dorner's perspective, of ethical and essential or metaphysical aspects of immutability. Dorner's metaphor of sun and earth, used to illustrate Gerhard's point – approximated the *ad intra-ad extra* distinction. But he did not apply it when he deliberated over Quenstedt.

4. Conclusion

What ought one to make of Dorner's interaction with Quenstedt? Three considerations present themselves.

First, Dorner's use of Quenstedt provides unique insight into some of the ways in which post-Enlightenment, post-revolutionary Protestant theologians approached and engaged with their early modern predecessors and viewed the consolidation and confessionalization of Reformation doctrine. Though they do not tell the full story, modern historical studies like Dorner's *Geschichte* are important resources for understanding nineteenth-century uses of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century figures and ideas. But so too are occasional pieces like the immutability essay – spread throughout the nineteenth century – that certainly warrant more attention.

Modern appropriations of classical Protestantism fell, of course, along a broad spectrum. As mentioned above, Schleiermacher exhibited a peculiar stance toward the Reformation and post-Reformation eras. In the introduction to his *Glaubenslehre* (1821/22; 2nd ed., 1830/31), he opined, "It is obvious that the textbooks of the seventeenth century can no longer serve the same purpose as they did then, but now in large measure belong merely to the realm of historical presentation; and that in the present day it is only a different set of dogmatic presentations that can have ecclesiastical value which these had then; and the same fate will befall the present ones too."⁹³ Even so, a letter from Schleiermacher to his friend in Breslau Joachim Christian Gaß (1766–1831) reveals that as he prepared for his lectures on dogmatics in 1811 at the new University of Berlin – material from which the *Glaubenslehre* would emerge – he consulted closely with the theological *loci* of Gerhard and Quenstedt.⁹⁴

⁹³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt* (1830/31), ed. Martin Redeker, vol. 1, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1960, §19; English translation in Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999, 89.

⁹⁴ Letter from Friedrich Schleiermacher to J. C. Gaß, 11 May 1811, in Joachim Christian Gaß, *Fr. Schleiermachers Briefwechsel mit J. Chr. Gaß*, ed. W. Gaß, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1852, 94. Cf. B. A. Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 194, n 70.

Taking a more explicit, if not substantially different, stance in his work on “the essence of Protestantism,” the controversial Basel and later Heidelberg professor of theology Daniel Schenkel (1813–85) declared in unambiguous terms:

No greater error and no more hurtful notion can be found than that which exists in the fancy that the work of the Reformation was accomplished, and even completed, three hundred years ago, and that every step beyond the original position of the Reformers is apostasy from the Reformation itself; that to go back to the finished theological system of Protestantism, as contained in confessional writings, and to settle down in them for all time to come, constitutes the chief duty of a believing theology and of a church which has attained greater freedom and independence.⁹⁵

Between Schleiermacher and Schenkel lay a number of neglected views – Dorner’s included – on classical Protestant thought and its place in the modern age.

Second, Dorner’s concentrated interest in Schleiermacher’s doctrine of God in the second and third sections of the immutability essay was shaped to a large extent by what he perceived to be Schleiermacher’s own grounding in both the thought of the early church and Protestant orthodoxy. He explicitly mentioned the confessional Lutheran Quenstedt as a superlative representative of classical Protestantism.

It must be conceded that a God whose distinction from the world is developed no further than it is by Schelling, particularly in his earlier period, or by Hegel, cannot satisfy religion and ethics. These figures are to be viewed as confusing God and world and on a monistic basis. In contrast we must dwell upon Schleiermacher, who develops his doctrine of God with special reference to Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, Anselm, and Quenstedt. It seems to be scarcely recognized that he has translated their doctrine of God into the language of our time.⁹⁶

Dorner considered the Lutheran scholastics to be entry points and consolidators of the earlier writers.⁹⁷ At the same time that Dorner dismissed Quenstedt on the grounds that he clung to an old and deficient view of God’s ethical being, Dorner listed him as a major source of influence for Schleiermacher, which may have helped to motivate his attitude toward Quenstedt. What’s more, the American Presbyterian Charles Hodge (1797–1878), well acquainted with Schleiermacher from his study leave in Berlin from 1826 to 1828, would lodge much the same complaint against Quenstedt and also place Schleiermacher as Quenstedt’s heir on the definition of divine simplicity.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Daniel Schenkel, *Das Wesen des Protestantismus aus den Quellen des Reformationszeitalters beleuchtet*, 3 vols., Schaffhausen: Brodtmann, 1846–51, 3, iii f. For more on Schenkel, see David Friedrich Strauss, *Die Halben und die Ganzen*, Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1865, which contrasts the “liberal” Schenkel with the “conservative” E. W. Hengstenberg (1802–69); Horton Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, 213 ff.; and Heinrich Holtzmann, “Schenkel, Daniel.” In *ADB*, 56 vols., 31, 82–89. Leipzig: Duncker und Humboldt, 1875–1912.

⁹⁶ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 287; *Divine Immutability*, 120.

⁹⁷ Dorner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 262 f., 265; *Divine Immutability*, 100 f.

⁹⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., 1, 394, 2, 440 n 1. New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1871–73. Cf. B. A. Gerrish, *Thinking with the Church: Essays in*

Third, the time in which Dorner's essay and its assessment of Quenstedt and the age of orthodox "wall building" appeared bears noting. After the deaths of leading figures like Schleiermacher and Hegel, and in light of the far-reaching Christology controversies attached to the names of W. M. L. de Wette (1780–1849), Strauss, Baur, Schenkel, and others, Dorner found critical resources for creative theological formulation, not only among contemporaries, but also in the high-waters of Lutheran scholasticism. His own interaction with Quenstedt belied his statements to the effect that the dogmatic works of the seventeenth century were antiquated and outmoded, persisting only as theological anachronisms, even if he confounded part of Quenstedt's views.

The theme of "old" and "new" occupied Dorner and many of his contemporaries. Considered in this way, his immutability essay pays dividends both to theologians and historians interested in nineteenth-century postures toward classical Protestant orthodoxy.

Abstract

This paper examines various nineteenth-century appropriations of classical Protestantism, the age of post-Reformation confessionalization and orthodoxy. I focus on an important source from the 1850s, namely Isaak August Dorner's famed essay on the problem of divine immutability. Though Karl Barth and others fixated on Dorner's constructive arguments for God's immutability in ethical and not metaphysical or essential terms, the role that Dorner assigned to the seventeenth-century Lutheran scholastic Johann Andreas Quenstedt remains neglected. I contextualize Dorner's essay and stance toward classical Protestantism and argue that he rhetorically obfuscated Quenstedt's discussion of the claim that God does not change. At the same time, his own interaction with Quenstedt belied his statements to the effect that the dogmatic works of the seventeenth century were outdated. Dorner's essay thus serves as an insightful case study into the complex and myriad ways in which Protestant theologians of Europe's revolutionary era viewed seventeenth-century Lutheran and Reformed sources both critically and constructively.

Historical Theology, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010, 169; and Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 101–19.