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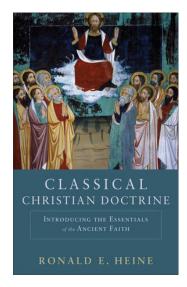
Ronald E. Heine
Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013

Pp. x + 182. ISBN: 978-0801048739. $21.99 [Paperback]. Purchase

Coleman M. Ford
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Proper doctrine has been a concern for Christian faith from its inception. Paul instructs Timothy to "teach what accords with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Following this charge, Paul provides a list of actions that flow from adherence to "sound doctrine." The importance of transmitting proper teaching (doctrine) has been a consistent task from the beginning of Christian faith and practice. Ronald E. Heine, professor of Bible and Christian Ministry at Northwest Christian University and notable Patristic scholar, takes up the Pauline charge to teach sound doctrine in *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith*. His goal is simple: since Christians have always held doctrinal beliefs, it's important to understand the foundational—that is "classic"—doctrines of the Christian faith. Looking back to the Nicene Creed in order to look forward to today, Heine provides readers not with "a commentary on the creed" but

rather a focus on "central topics in the early Christians' understanding of their faith" (p.vii). Young minds and new believers are his intended audience, and as a skillful master who can take complicated material and produce a delightfully simple product, Heine provides a noteworthy introduction to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith.

Heine begins with two introductory chapters on doctrine and Scripture showing that from a classical Christian perspective, the importance of doctrine and Scripture are assumed. Doctrine, in classical perspective and for today, "marked the boundaries of what was acceptable and what was unacceptable to believe about [Jesus Christ]" (p.7). Regarding Scripture, it was "the source from which [the early church] mined the ore of their doctrines" (p.11). These chapters set the foundation for Heine's walk through Nicene Creedal declarations. With Heine, unlike texts that may focus on the Creed's place in fourth century doctrinal controversies, he shows readers a brief background to each doctrinal position. Perusing the pages of greats such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and others, *Classical Christian Doctrine* gives readers the principal actors on the stage of early Christian doctrinal formation. Heine also highlights the antagonists of the story while delicately weaving his needle through the fabric of various early Christian doctrinal formulations. Justin Martyr and Logos Christology, the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's nature, and creation *ex nihilo* are all covered in the span of a few pages. The introductory nature of this text necessitates this approach, but it is refreshing nonetheless seeing how Heine is able to handle such massive topics with ease.

Heine leaves plenty of latitude for discussion, especially with the help of questions at the end of each chapter. I found Heine charitable with sources and conversant with the key players. Chapter 11,

however, is somewhat surprising given the nature of the text. For Heine, the *Christus Victor* view (à la Gustav Aulen) is *the* classical view. This supposed "dominant view in the classical period of Christian doctrine" seems somewhat isolating and might leave some readers with significant questions. There is little doubt that this view is present within a significant portion of Patristic writing, but it seems shallow to neglect the overwhelming evidence for additional perspectives on the atonement in classical perspective. Michael Haykin has provided an excellent analysis on definite atonement in ancient Christianity.[1] Brian Arnold, in an unpublished dissertation, shows how additional themes of justification arise from early Christian texts, particularly in the second century.[2] This is not to say that Heine is wrong to highlight *Christus Victor* motifs of atonement and justification, but the exclusion of other views is jarring in comparison to the tenor of the remaining text. The discussion questions, however, give readers room for discussing alternate viewpoints.

With this caveat, Heine's *Classical Christian Doctrine* is sound and useful for contemporary readers. New Christians, young Christians, and older Christians who lack a doctrinal foundation for their faith will find this book beneficial. Those teaching introductory courses in church history and Christian doctrine at universities, bible colleges, and seminaries will find this book helpful. It will make a great addition to the pastor's shelf as well the teacher's. Heine does what few are able:

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[1] See Michael A.G. Haykin, "'We Trust in the Saving Blood': Definite Atonement in the Ancient Church" in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 57–74.

[2] Brian John Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years After Paul" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

distill classical Christian doctrinal development into a rich blend to suit the novice's palate. Cheers!

Coleman M. Ford, Th.M.
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary