Introduction to Johann Gerhard's Life and Thought

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Introduction

Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) is considered one of the greatest Lutheran theologians of the seventeenth century.[1] Many within the Lutheran tradition view his theological genius to have been surpassed only by the authors of the Lutheran confessions (Martin Luther, Philipp Melanchthon, and Martin Chemnitz).[2] Gerhard established this high theological reputation by generating a vast theological literature covering many different genres. In this brief introductory essay, we will present a biographical sketch of Gerhard's life and then move on to examine his place in the early modern intellectual tradition known as "Protestant scholasticism."

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[1] See the following important studies on Gerhard: Jörg Baur, "Johann Gerhard," in *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Martin Greschat, vol. 7 *Orthodoxie und Pietismus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), 99–119; Bengt Häglund, *Die Heilige Schrift und Ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhard: eine Untersuchung über das altlutherische Schriftverständnis* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1951); Robert Scharlemann, *Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964); Johann Anselm Steiger, *Johann Gerhard (1582–1637). Studien zu Theologie und Frömmigkeit des Kirchenvaters der lutherischen Orthodoxie* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1997); Johannes Wallmann, *Der Theologiebegriff bei Johann Gerhard und Georg Calixt* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1961).

[2] Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, trans. C. W. Heisler (1896; repr., Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2000), 9.

Gerhard's Life

Johann Gerhard was born in Quedlinburg, a city located in the prosperous farm country of Upper Saxony, on Wednesday, October 17, 1582.[3] Gerhard's parents Bartholomäeus and Margareta were part of the town's upper-middle class. Gerhard's mother was the daughter of an aide to the municipality of Halberstadt, whereas his father was the prefect of senatorial treasury of the city. Gerhard's family owned an estate employing numerous day laborers and domestic servants.[4]

Gerhard's life was fraught with trials even before his birth. While Gerhard's mother was pregnant with him, his father instructed an intoxicated servant to unload a grain wagon and the servant refused to do so. In order to properly motivate him, Bartholomäeus threw a piece of wood at him, which the servant dodged, but instead it hit Gerhard's mother Margareta in the abdomen. Although it was feared that as a result of Margareta's injury Johann would have a terrible birth defect, this did not occur, much to the joy of his family. Gerhard was born healthy and was baptized into the Christian faith the next Sunday.[5]

Gerhard's education began in the local public school, which was known for its high level of education.[6] At an early age, as a sign of his budding theological interest, Gerhard composed a Gospel history in Latin verse.[7] In 1597, at age fifteen, Gerhard contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and edema (commonly known as dropsy) and was ill for an entire year. As a result, he was completely unable to attend school or do work. In this period, Gerhard became considerably more serious about his faith and he composed his own prayer book for spiritual comfort. Part of the reason for this is that Gerhard was not only tormented by physical pain, but also by spiritual temptation.[8]

In the midst of his suffering he was ministered to by the town's pastor Johann Arndt,[9] an orthodox Lutheran who was nevertheless attracted to a quasi-mystical

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[3] Erdmann Fischer, *The Life of John Gerhard*, trans. Richard Dinda and Elmer Hohle (Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2000), 14.

[4] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 14–15.

[5] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 15.

[6] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 21.

[7] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 24.

[8] Steven Parks, "Johann Gerhard (1582–1637): Morning Star and Arch-Theologian of Lutheranism," in *Lives and Writings of the Great Fathers of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Timothy Schmeling (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016), 165.

[9] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 22.

piety.[10] As a result of these interests, Arndt composed the famous spiritual work *True Christianity* (1606).[11] It should be noted that *Pia Desideria* (1685), the founding document of Lutheran Pietism, was originally composed by Philipp Jakob Spener as an introductory essay for a collection of Arndt's sermons.[12] Arndt administered effective pastoral care to Gerhard in his spiritual trials and in response Gerhard vowed to study for a career in theology on the condition that God would allow him to live. This vow was faithfully fulfilled after his recovery.[13]

In the next year, 1598, an unspecified plague swept through Quedlinburg and killed roughly three thousand people in a three-week period.[14] When Gerhard showed signs of having contracted the illness, he was accidentally given a double dose of the antidote by his mother and an unknowing doctor. Gerhard began to sweat out a yellow substance, but after a few hours he recovered.[15]

In 1599, after his recovery from his second catastrophic illness, Gerhard entered the public school at Halberstadt for a term, where he wrote a history of Christ's Passion in Greek verse.[16] Gerhard then immediately entered the University of Wittenberg, where he began a course of study in philosophy and theology.[17] In his program of study Gerhard heard the lectures of the significant early Lutheran scholastic theologian Leonhard Hütter.[18] Nevertheless, Gerhard drifted away

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[10] See Daniel van Voorhis, *Johann Arndt: A Prophet of Lutheran Pietism* (Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2018).

[11] See Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. and ed. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist, 1978).

[12] See Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 14–15. Also see Johannes Wallmann, *Philipp Jakob Spener und die Anfänge des Pietismus* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck,1986); idem, *Der Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

[13] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 165.

[14] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 22.

[15] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 22–23.

[16] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 23–24.

[17] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 165.

[18] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 165. See Walter Wangelin, "Leonhard Hütter (1563–1616): Redonatus Lutherus," in *Lives and Writings of the Great Fathers of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Timothy Schmeling (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016) 67–79. Also see Leonhard Hütter, *Compendium Locorum Theologicorum Ex Scripturis Sacris et Libro Concordiae: Lateinisch-Deutsch-Englisch*, trans. Henry Jacobs, 2 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 2006).

from the study of theology and became interested in medicine instead. From 1600 to 1601 he exclusively engaged in medical training and for a time became a practicing physician, even going so far as to give out prescriptions to patients.[19]

In February 1603 Gerhard transferred from Wittenberg to the University of Jena, where he remembered his vow to study theology if he recovered from his illness. As a result, he reapplied himself to the task of studying that field. Gerhard threw himself into the study of both philosophy and theology, prayerfully reading the Bible and the church fathers continuously. Because of his hard work, Gerhard was able to gain a master's degree in philosophy in June 1603.[20]

During Christmas of that same year, Gerhard fell ill yet again, this time so severely that he believed that he might be at the point of death.[21] In response, he wrote out his last will and testament, which included a lengthy and comprehensive confession of faith touching on all individual doctrines of the Christian faith.[22] Nevertheless, Gerhard recovered from his illness within three weeks.[23]

In May 1604 Gerhard entered the University of Marburg in order to pursue advanced theological studies. At Marburg, Gerhard enrolled in three courses (Genesis, Proverbs, and Christology/justification), and then began to teach two courses on philosophy and theology.[24] Ultimately, he left Marburg on August 10, 1605, because of an uprising in the city.[25]

In 1606 Duke Johann Kasimir of Coburg called Gerhard to become the bishop of Heldburg. It should be noted that this invitation suggests that Gerhard's intellectual gifts were already viewed as being extraordinary since he was then only twenty-four years old and had not been ordained to the office of ministry.[26] Gerhard accepted the commission on the condition that he would be allowed to finish his doctorate in theology at Jena, something to which the duke agreed.[27] On July 28 Gerhard first delivered his dissertation on Paul's epistle to the Ephesians in front of three hundred students, and later, on August 15, he gave his inaugural

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[19] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 28.

[20] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 29–32.

[21] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 166.

[22] Fischer transcribes the whole confession of faith: *Life of John Gerhard*, 33–40.

[23] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 40.

[24] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 41.

[25] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 42–43.

[26] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 167.

[27] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 167.

address on the Lord's Supper. Finally, three days later he underwent doctoral examinations conducted by Jena's theology faculty, who in turn awarded him a doctorate on November 11, 1606.[28]

After this Gerhard took up his duties as the bishop of Heldburg, an office that, it is generally agreed, he exercised faithfully.[29] In executing his office of ecclesiastical oversight, Gerhard visited the churches of Thuringia and Franconia, examined their public teachings, and exercised discipline over their clergy when necessary. Gerhard served the duke on diplomatic missions as his ecclesiastical advisor as well, which involved significant amounts of travel, which taxed his fragile health. In order to promote academic life, Gerhard conducted weekly disputations at the Coburg *Gymnasium*.[30] It was also during this period that Gerhard began to write some of his most famous devotional and academic works.[31]

During his service as a bishop, Gerhard was engaged and married. On April 29, 1608, at age twenty-five he was engaged to Barbara Neumaier, who was thirteen. The couple was married on September 19 of the same year. Although Gerhard prayed for a long and fruitful union, the marriage did not last. On Christmas Eve 1610 Barbara gave birth to their first child, Johann Georg. Sadly, the child became ill and only lived seventeen days. Later, Barbara became ill with tuberculosis and died on May 30, 1611.[32] Although these events tested Gerhard's emotional stability, he nevertheless eventually remarried on July 13, 1614. The union to Maria Mattenberg was a happy one and yielded ten children.[33]

The duke was so pleased with Gerhard's work that he called him to be the pastor and superintendent general in 1615.[34] Gerhard was not interested in the post and wished to be released from his office in order to take up an academic position offered to him by the University of Jena. Nevertheless, the duke used coercive measures to place him in the new office. After the university repeated its call to Gerhard through the elector of Saxony, Duke Kasimir finally released him in April 1616.[35]

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[28] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 53.

[29] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 167.

[30] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 51–60.

[31] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 167–68.

[32] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 214–17.

[33] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 220–22.

[34] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 72.

[35] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 77–79.

Gerhard arrived at Jena in May and was warmly received by the faculty. It had long been his ambition to be a professor of theology.[36] His teaching focused primarily on biblical exegesis and systematic theology. In the area of biblical exegesis, he taught courses on 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and the Gospel of John. Gerhard later moved on to systematic theology topics taken from what would become his dogmatic magnum opus, *Loci communes theologici* (1610–1625).[37] Although Gerhard's reputation as an academic theologian grew considerably during this period, he nevertheless wished to remain in Jena instead of being promoted to a more prestigious university. As a result, Gerhard was compelled to turn down offers to teach from twenty-four European universities, including the highly acclaimed Lutheran University of Uppsala in Sweden.[38]

In spite of having a successful academic and ecclesiastical career, Gerhard's later life continued to be fraught with illness and physical weakness.[39] Beyond his medical problems Gerhard and his colleagues at Jena also lived through part of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), which devastated central Europe for generations and gave rise to the modern nation-state.[40] In one incident Gerhard and his colleague Johann Major were called upon to dissuade a group of soldiers from destroying Jena, and they were successful.[41] Later, in 1636, Gerhard's estate was burned to the ground and his cattle were stolen by the Swedish army.[42]

Gerhard died on August 15, 1637, after a brief illness. His colleagues Johann Major and Johann Himmel stood by his side on his deathbed, while Gerhard prayed and confessed his faith in the teachings of Scripture that he had expounded in his writings. His last words are recorded as being: "Come, come, Lord."[43]

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[36] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 86.

[37] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 88–90. See the three main editions of this work: Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, 12 vols., trans. Richard Dinda and Joshua Hayes (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006–); idem, *Loci Communes Theologici*, 31 vols., ed. Eduard Preuss (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1863); idem, *Loci Communes Theologici*, 32 vols., ed. Johann Cotta (Tübingen, 1762).

[38] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 156–211.

[39] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 139–40.

[40] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 141–47. For an excellent description, see Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011).

[41] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 94–95.

[42] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 146–47.

[43] Parks, "Johann Gerhard," 171.

Gerhard left behind a vast theological literature covering the subjects of apologetics, dogmatics, biblical exegesis, and Christian devotion.[44] His dogmatic and exegetical works served as a model for later Lutheran scholasticism. Likewise, his devotional works were influential not only among orthodox Lutherans but also in the later Pietist movement.[45]

Gerhard's Intellectual Context: Protestant Scholasticism

Johann Gerhard's theology is properly understood as an exemplar of the confessional Lutheran variant of a wider movement called "Protestant scholasticism."[46] This movement flourished within Reformed and Lutheran circles from roughly the mid-sixteenth century into the early eighteenth century.

Many authors use the terms "Protestant orthodoxy" or "age of orthodoxy" and "Protestant scholasticism" interchangeably. As Richard Muller has pointed out, this is a misnomer, since "orthodoxy" denotes a close adherence to the Protestant confessional documents of the period (e.g., The Book of Concord, Thirty-Nine Articles, Three Forms of Unity), whereas "scholasticism" refers to a specific method for engaging in theological investigation that coordinates faith and reason. Hence, many authors of the period who wrote devotional or exegetical literature might be described as orthodox theologians since they wrote in harmony with public teachings of the Protestant confessions. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to describe them as "scholastic" since they did not specifically write using a scholastic methodology.[47]

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[44] Fischer, *Life of John Gerhard*, 308–411.

[45] Ulrike Gleixner, "Pietism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Protestant Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 332.

[46] See the following English language studies: Willem Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520–1720*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970–1972).

[47] Richard Muller, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: Definition and Method," in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27–36. Although what Muller primarily addresses is Reformed scholasticism, his comments are applicable to Protestant scholasticism in general.

There have been a variety of theories as to why Protestant scholasticism arose as an intellectual tradition. One of the most influential theories can be found in the work of the mid-nineteenth-century Swiss theologian Alexander Schweizer. Schweizer argued that Protestant scholasticism could best be understood as an organic development out of the two main Protestant systems of thought, namely, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. Each tradition had a "central dogma" (*Centraldogmen*) from which all other doctrines were deduced. For the Reformed tradition, this doctrine was predestination. For Lutheranism, the central dogma was justification through faith.[48] As we will see below, the major difficulty with this theory is that neither the Lutheran nor Reformed scholastic theologians spoke of central doctrines or developed their dogmatic system in the manner that Schweizer described. What Schweizer appears to have done is projected the methodology of much of post-Enlightenment Protestant theology onto the work of early modern thinkers.[49]

Probably a more historically plausible model for understanding the development of Protestant scholasticism is that suggested by Richard Muller. Muller has argued that Protestant scholasticism should be viewed as part of the larger phenomenon of the institutionalization of the great Protestant confessions. After the Reformation, the Lutheran and Reformed confessions had established themselves in much of the territory of northern Europe. Because of this, there was a need to build up institutions to sustain the church in these regions. This meant creating a university curriculum in the form of dogmatic textbooks and biblical commentaries that utilized accepted intellectual tools of the day (e.g., humanist literary and textual analysis and scholastic methods of reasoning) as a means of teaching the Reformation to university students and others.[50]

In developing lengthy multivolume dogmatic textbooks for use in early modern universities, Protestant scholasticism also fulfilled the need to present a complete system of Christian doctrine to students. Although the Reformers thought it imperative to modify the doctrines of justification, the sacraments, and the church that they had inherited from the late medieval church, they left most of the other articles of the faith (e.g., creation, providence, Trinity, and Christology) essentially unchanged.[51] Therefore, it was necessary to develop systems of the-

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[48] Alexander Schweizer, *Die Protestantischen Centraldogmen in Ihrer Entwicklung inerhalb der Reformirten Kirche*, 2 vols. (Zürich: Orell, Fuessli, 1854–1856).

[49] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:124–27.

[50] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:27–84.

[51] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:34.

ology that would integrate the great insights of the Reformation with the basic creedal truths established by the councils of the early church in order to present a complete "body of doctrine" (*corpus doctrinae*) to students.[52]

Gerhard's Theological Methodology as a Development of Melanchthonian Dogmatic Tradition[53]

One of the key figures in this movement to institutionalize the Reformation was Luther's co-reformer at Wittenberg, Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560).[54] Melanchthon is in many respects appropriately regarded as the founder of both the Lutheran and Reformed dogmatic traditions.[55] Although Melanchthon did not create all the unique features of Protestant scholasticism, he developed key methods for doing dogmatic theology that were widely adopted by both Lutheran and Reformed theologians in the early modern period.[56] Here we will examine the main aspects of Melanchthon's methods and how Gerhard appropriated and built upon them.

The first significant methodological innovation established by Melanchthon was the *loci* method.[57] The *loci* method took its original inspiration from the fifteenth-century humanist Rudolf Agricola (1443–1485). Agricola suggested that models of correct argumentation could be gleaned from examples found in classical authors. These authors provided the best arguments for the establishment of the truth of certain propositions. The passages in their works were referred to by Agricola as the "seats of argumentation" (*sedes argumentorum*). Agricola

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[52] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:49–61, 446–50.

[53] Lengthier discussion of these same themes in Gerhard can be found in Jack Kilcrease, "Johann Gerhard's Reception of Thomas Aquinas's *Analogia Entis*," in *Aquinas among the Protestants*, ed. Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 109–23.

[54] See the following works on Melanchthon's life and theological contribution: Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); James William Richard, *Philip Melanchthon: The Protestant Preceptor of Germany, 1497–1560* (London: Putnam, 1898).

[55] See discussion in the second chapter of Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950).

[56] Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 87–92.

[57] See Robert Kolb, "The Ordering of the *Loci Communes Theologici*: The Structuring of the Melanchthonian Dogmatic Tradition," *Concordia Journal* 23, no. 4 (1997): 317–37.

anticipated Melanchthon by suggesting that this method could be applied to theology and provide the most probable arguments for the articles of the faith.[58]

This method passed from Agricola through Erasmus to Melanchthon in the early 1520s.[59] Melanchthon modified the method in light of the Reformation reverence for the self-authenticating nature of revelation and the importance of the literal sense of Scripture (*sensus literalis*).[60] He asserted that, unlike philosophy, theology does not rest on demonstration but rather on clear testimonies from Scripture.[61] Hence Melanchthon argued that to establish a doctrine from Scripture one should look for all the grammatically clear passages that relate to the articles of the faith. Melanchthon referred to these passages as the "seats of doctrine" (*sedes doctrinae*). Once these passages had been discovered testifying to a particular doctrine, they should be brought together and allowed to mutually interpret one another. From their mutual exegesis, one could establish a particular doctrine of the Christian faith (e.g., the Trinity or baptism). The individual treatises on Christian doctrine that work on the basis of this method were called *Loci communes theologici* or "Theological commonplaces/topics."[62] In Melanchthon's own work, as well as the work of the other Protestant scholastics, these treatises were bundled together into lengthy dogmatic collections that were ordered according to the schema provided by the Apostles' Creed.[63] The extensive use of this method was the basis of Gerhard's system and the other great dogmatic systems of Lutheran orthodoxy.[64]

Gerhard's own development of theological methodology started with the Melanchthonian foundations and added new edifices onto them. Gerhard agrees with Melanchthon that the doctrines of the faith are established by the *sedes*

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[58] Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 109–10.

[59] Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 110.

[60] See Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 148–66.

[61] Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 110.

[62] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:96–102, 177–79.

[63] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:178–79.

[64] Kenneth Appold, "Academic Life and Teaching in Post-Reformation Lutheranism," in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675*, ed. Robert Kolb (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 95.

doctrinae present in Scripture.[65] Beyond this, following the Aristotelian concept of knowledge,[66] Gerhard speaks of theology needing first principles (*principium*) much like other areas of academic investigation. In theology there is a principle of being (*principium essendi*), which is the Triune God, and a principle of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi*), which is Holy Scripture.[67] These principles are correlative. To know the eternal God, one must have a means of doing so (i.e., God's self-communicating Word). Likewise, the epistemic medium of Scripture would be meaningless if it were not the communication of the Triune God who stands behind it. As can be observed, contrary to the teaching of Schweizer that we examined earlier, Gerhard does not hold that any doctrine of the faith serves as a principle of theology.

According to Gerhard, although humans can have a genuine knowledge of divine truth through the Bible, this knowledge is limited compared with God's own infinite and eternal self-knowledge. In order to better conceptualize the manner in which God's knowledge differs from the kind that he communicates to human beings, Gerhard adopted a distinction established by the Reformed theologian Francis Junius between the "archetypal theology" and "ectypal theology."[68] Junius appears to have taken this distinction from Duns Scotus's earlier and similar distinction between God's eternal self-knowledge (*theologia in se*) and our finite participatory knowledge of the divine (*theologia nostra*).[69] Working from similar premises, Junius (and later Gerhard) posits that God eternally knows himself and is therefore in possession of the only true and complete archetypal theology. God is therefore himself the only true and proper theologian. By contrast, humans and angels possess a derivative and finite theology communicated to them through the media of nature and Scripture (i.e., ectypal theology). The theology that humans possess will become clearer when the redeemed reach heaven at the eschaton.

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[65] Johann Gerhard, *On the Legitimate Interpretation of Holy Scripture*, trans. Richard Dinda (Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2015), 38.

[66] See Terrence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

[67] Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 43. Also see a discussion of Gerhard on these points in Richard Schröder, *Johann Gerhards lutherische Christologie und die aristotelische Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 49–50. See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:430–45; Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:257–58, 310–11.

[68] Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 33–34.

[69] See Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:227–28.

Nevertheless, because of its finitude, human knowledge of God will still be a limited participation in God's eternal self-knowledge even in eternity.[70]

Gerhard recognized that beyond the ontological gap between God and creatures as explained by Junius, there was the further difficulty of explaining how humans with their finite and fallen cognitive capacities could understand divine truth when it was presented to them in Holy Scripture. Following the Aristotelian theory of cognition,[71] Gerhard posited that there was a "passive intellect" (*intellectus possibilis*) that took in representations (*phantasms*) of objects of cognition and filtered out their accidental qualities, and an "agent intellect" (*intellectus agens*) that then identified the formal reality of the object of cognition. Because the doctrines of the faith spread throughout the various *sedes doctrinae* in the Holy Scriptures were divine and heavenly, the agent intellect did not possess a built-in capacity to identify their formal reality and therefore could not comprehend their true meaning unless it was granted a special spiritual illumination from God. God the Holy Spirit communicated a "practical habit" (*habitus practicus*) to theologians so that they would be capable of reading and understanding the true doctrinal content of Scripture.[72] Following Luther,[73] Gerhard held that the best way of studying Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was through the threefold (*trias*) practice of prayer, meditation, and suffering/testing (*oratio*, *meditatio*, *tentatio*).[74]

The second area where Melanchthon proved influential on Gerhard's theology and on Protestant scholasticism in general was through his hand in the revival

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[70] Franciscus Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology*, trans. David Noe (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 107–20.

[71] Aristotle, *De Anima*, III.5; Aristotle, *On the Soul and On Memory and Recollection*, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe: Green Lion, 2004), 142–43.

[72] See summary and discussion in Glenn K. Fluegge, *Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) and the Conceptualization of* Theologia *at the Threshold of the "Age of Orthodoxy": The Making of a Theologian* (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2018), 83–103.

[73] Gerhard, *On the Legitimate Interpretation of Holy Scripture*, 33. See a good description in Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 32–37; John Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2002): 255–68; Martin Nicol, *Meditation bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 91–101.

[74] Gerhard, *On the Legitimate Interpretation of Holy Scripture*, 120–25. Also see discussion in Fluegge, *Johann Gerhard*, 205–25.

of Aristotelianism.[75] Although Luther and much of the Renaissance humanistic tradition had largely (though not totally) rejected Aristotle,[76] Melanchthon, along with figures such as Giacomo Zabarella and Julius Scaliger (Gerhard's favorite philosophers),[77] reasserted the importance of Aristotelianism as the common framework for academic discourse in early modern western European universities.[78]

Prior to his joining the Reformation cause, as a young man Melanchthon had sought to edit a critical edition of Aristotle's works based on the original Greek texts.[79] From the twelfth century forward, the medieval church largely (though not exclusively) had to rely on Latin translations from the Arabic.[80] In spite of Luther's initial objections,[81] Melanchthon successfully made Aristotle the basis of instruction at Wittenberg after the 1530s.[82] He later defended this initiative in

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[75] See discussion of the effects of neo-Aristotelianism in Peter Petersen, *Geschichte der aristotelischen Philosophie im protestantischen Deutschland* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1921); Walter Sparn, *Wiederkehr der Metaphysik: Die Ontologische Frage in der Lutherischen Theologie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1976); Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17 Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1939).

[76] Victor A. Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (Toronto: BPS Books, 2016), 54, 121. Also see Theodor Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001).

[77] Johann Gerhard, *On the Interpretation of Scripture and Method of Theological Study*, trans. Joshua Hayes (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), xvii, 178.

[78] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:184–86, 360–82; idem, "Reformation, Orthodoxy, 'Christian Aristotelianism,' and the Eclecticism of Early Modern Philosophy," *Dutch Review of Church History* 81, no. 3 (2001): 306–25.

[79] Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 311.

[80] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 378–402.

[81] Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 310.

[82] Nicole Kuropka, "Melanchthon and Aristotle," in *Philip Melanchthon: Theologian in Classroom, Confession, and Controversy*, ed. Irene Dingel, Robert Kolb, Nicole Kuropka, and Timothy Wengert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 19–28; Sachiko Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the 1540s in his *Oratio de Aristotle* (1544).[83] In large part due to Melanchthon's influence, Gerhard consistently utilized Aristotelian logic and terminology in developing his vast system of theology.

Beyond his utilization of a (temporarily) revived Aristotelianism, it should also be noted that Gerhard and the theologians of Protestant scholasticism drew heavily on the philosophy bequeathed to them by both the medieval church and the Renaissance. Gerhard's appropriation of this philosophical material is often quite eclectic, in a manner similar to other early modern Protestant theologians.[84] He mixes and matches various bits and pieces of philosophical systems in order to serve his purpose of explicating what he finds in the biblical revelation.

There are numerous examples of Gerhard's sometimes haphazard use of earlier philosophical traditions. As we have already seen, Gerhard approves of Junius's distinction between the archetypal and ectypal theology, which appears to have Scotist philosophical roots. Beyond this Gerhard entered the debate over the analogy of being (*analogia entis*) and the univocity of being (*univocatio entis*) in which Thomists and Scotists had engaged in the Middle Ages. Interestingly, Gerhard appears to misunderstand the concept of *analogia entis* because his reading of Aquinas is filtered through a series of early modern texts that misrepresent the Angelic Doctor.[85] Ultimately Gerhard rejected both concepts in favor of a position that seems to suggest that Scripture gives theology its own distinctive language of being.[86] Likewise, although he rejected Aquinas's position on the issue of analogy, later in the same work Gerhard adopts a slightly modified version of Aquinas's five ways (*quinque viae*) (in spite of the fact that certain proofs presuppose analogy[87]), while adding other proofs of God's existence taken from other early Christian and medieval sources.[88] At the end of his short work on the interpretation of Scripture, Gerhard even utilizes occult Hermetic and Pythagorean philosophical sources in order to prove that for humans to have a knowledge of divine truth it is necessary for them to be spiritually illuminated.[89]

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[83] Philipp Melanchthon, "Oratio de Aristotle," in *Melanchthons Werke*, ed. R. Stupperich, 4 vols. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951–1955), 3:122–34.

[84] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:371–82.

[85] Kilcrease, "Johann Gerhard's Reception," 121.

[86] Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 93–95.

[87] Kilcrease, "Johann Gerhard's Reception," 122.

[88] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 60–61, 78.

[89] Gerhard, *On the Legitimate Interpretation of Holy Scripture*, 125–26.

A final area where Melanchthon was influential was in his deep concern for the catholicity of the Reformation.[90] Melanchthon felt a great deal of pressure to employ this apologetic strategy against the claim of Roman Catholic opponents who decried the supposed theological novelty of the Reformation. According to Melanchthon's interpretation of Scripture and church history, from the garden of Eden to the present, there had only been one Christian church.[91] The true church was preserved by God, although there were periods where most of the institutional church fell into apostasy and needed to be reformed by the remnant of the faithful.[92]

This cycle of reform and apostasy in the history of the church justified both the Reformation appeal to the reforming power of the word of God, as well as the witness of the ancient catholic church. If the Reformation emphasis on the efficacious nature of the word was true, God had always been working faith in his church through the preaching of the word in every age. In light of these premises Melanchthon's quest for patristic precedents for the Reformation was quite logical. He put this apologetic strategy into practice by utilizing an extensive number of citations from the patristic theologians and early church councils in his confessional and private works.[93]

This same strategy was adopted in an even more expansive manner by Melanchthon's student Martin Chemnitz (1522–1586). Chemnitz began his *Loci communes theologici* with a treatise on the secondary authority of the church fathers and their use in the dogmatic task.[94] He also drew on the fathers and ancient councils apologetically in his work *The Examination of the Council of Trent*. There he established an eightfold typology of "Tradition" that encompassed seven valid forms of tradition based on Scripture, with only an eighth illegitimate form based on late and invented human innovations.[95]

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[90] Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 160–61.

[91] Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon* (Geneva: Droz, 1961), 61–62.

[92] Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 69.

[93] Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 86–93.

[94] Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1989), 1:27–34.

[95] Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971–1986), 1:272–307; Arthur Olsen, "Martin Chemnitz and the Council of Trent," *Dialog* 2 (1963): 60–67.

Gerhard built on and further expanded Melanchthon and Chemnitz's apologetic strategy regarding the catholicity of the Reformation. In his dogmatic works Gerhard typically proceeds by establishing the correct doctrinal position from an extensive exegetical engagement with the *sedes doctrinae*. He then gives a secondary proof of his exegesis with lengthy and numerous patristic citations that go on for dozens of pages. Gerhard's goal in following this procedure appears to be to demonstrate that his exegesis of the *sedes doctrinae* in question is not only correct in the historical-grammatical sense but is also in harmony with the catholic consensus of the ancient church.[96]

Beyond writing his dogmatics with a deep concern for the catholicity of his theological formulations, Gerhard also wrote extensive apologetic works arguing in favor of the harmony of the Reformation with ancient catholic teaching. These works include *Confessio Catholica* (1633–1637) and *Patrologia sive de primitivae ecclesiae Christianae doctorum vita ac lucubrationibus opusculum* (posthumously published in 1653).[97] Indeed, some authors have even credited him with coining the term "patrology."[98]

Conclusion

As should be clear from this short survey, Johann Gerhard made a significant contribution to the Lutheran scholastic tradition of the seventeenth century. This contribution can be felt in the sheer enormity of his written works. This vast material includes the genres of devotional literature, biblical commentaries, apologetic works, and dogmatic theology. Gerhard's contribution can be seen in his extension and fresh application of the principles of the Melanchthonian theological tradition to the challenges of the early post-Reformation era.

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[96] See Gerhard's description of the role of the church fathers in theology in Gerhard, *On the Interpretation of Scripture and Method of Theological Study*, 212–29.

[97] See Benjamin Mayes, "Lumina, Non Nomina: Patristic Authority according to the Lutheran Arch-Theologian Johann Gerhard," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor, David Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 457–70. Also see Johann Gerhard, *Confessio Catholica*, 2 vols. (Jena, 1634–1637); idem, *Patrologia sive de primitivae ecclesiae christianae doctorum vita ac lucubrationibus opusculum* (Leipzig, 1653).

[98] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 vols. (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1995), 1:1.