PART FOUR

SYSTEMATIC STUDIES
CHAPTER EIGHT

ORTHODOXY, HISTORY AND THEOLOGY: RECONTEXTUALISATION AND ITS DESCRIPTIVE AND PROGRAMMATIC FEATURES

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1. Introduction

In this contribution I would like to introduce one of the leading concepts of the interdisciplinary research we have conducted in the past few years concerning the nature and determination of theological truth: “recontextualisation.”¹ In fact, this concept stands for a contemporary systematic-theological approach that intrinsically relates theological truth to context and history. As a concept and an approach, recontextualisation not only reflects the outcome of a theological learning process (which itself can be analysed as a process of recontextualisation), but also qualifies the viewpoint from which systematic theologians may engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue concerning theological truth and history. As will become clear, recontextualisation serves first as a reading key to understand the way in which theological truth has been established; i.e., to describe its history from a theological perspective. At the same time, this approach constitutes the normative framework from which any contemporary and future establishing of such truth is perceived. Proceeding thus, it structures the attempts of systematic theologians to reach at what is theologically true today and tomorrow.

¹ It concerns the GOA-project: “Orthodoxy: Process and Product”, sponsored by the K.U. Leuven Research Fund. In this interdisciplinary research project, Church historians and systematic theologians joined forces in order to investigate the nature of theological truth and the way in which theological truth is determined in Church and theology. An earlier version of the current text has appeared in the collection presenting some major research results of the project: L. Boeve, “Systematic Theology, Truth and History: Recontextualisation,” in Orthodoxy: Process and Product (eds. M. Lamberigts, L. Boeve and T. Merrigan; BETL, 227; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 27–44.