Even a casual reading of post-Reformation Lutheran “arch-theologian” Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) shows the enormous role that the early church fathers play in his theology.1 He is often credited (incorrectly!) with coining the word “patrology” in the title of his posthumous 1653 *Patrologia*,2 even though previous books had been printed with that title.3 But there is a truth underlying this fable: Gerhard's fame and extensive use of the fathers surely hastened the adoption of the term “patrology” as a technical name for the science of the church's fathers.

Likewise, Protestants' patristic interest did not end with the Reformation. Throughout the seventeenth century the study and publication of the fathers flourished.4 The overwhelming presence of the fathers in

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Gerhard's writing, in particular, brings up the questions: What authority did the early church fathers have in Gerhard's theological work? And how do the fathers comport with the Protestant emphasis on the authority of *sola Scriptura* in general? Finally, how should one regard and approach the fathers?

Before the 1950s, the common consensus among scholars was that the Reformation set forth two different approaches to the relation of biblical authority and patristic authority: biblicism (set forth by Martin Luther) and traditionalism (set forth by Philipp Melanchthon). But Peter Fraenkel's study of Melanchthon and the fathers changed this general view, placing Melanchthon and Luther very much in the same camp. Since then, studies of this question have tended to treat the Reformers as representing basically the same viewpoint: Scripture alone was the formal norm for matters of faith, while the fathers continued to be used as a resource. This point of view tends to emphasize the lack of patristic authority among sixteenth-century Protestants.

This newer, unified view must not be allowed to camouflage the spectrum of approaches that existed among Reformation-era and post-Reformation-era Protestants. Case in point: Johann Gerhard is usually classified as holding firmly to the authority of *sola Scriptura* for theology, with an extensive use of the fathers as a polemical resource. True as this is, it does not cover all that Gerhard has to say on the topic of patristic

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