Keith D. Stanglin (Ed.)


Keith Stanglin, professor of Historical Theology at Austin Graduate School of Theology has assembled a rather comprehensive reader addressing the theological traditions of the Reformation and Modern eras. Stanglin has arranged these contributions into nine chapters that range from the ‘Late Medieval Contexts’ (of the Reformation) to ‘Late Modern Fragmentation and Ecumenism.’ Writings of specific theologians and church leaders predominate, but there are several broader documents including conciliar settlements and confessional statements. Stanglin introduces each of his segments with a brief and helpful overview of the identified era and the selected documents. In addition he includes short biographical sketches for thirteen of the more recognizable individuals in the book, again ranging from Erasmus and his sixteenth-century contemporaries (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Ignatius) to several modern theologians (Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, and Barth). Rounding out this list of leading theological voices are Arminius, Descartes, Kant, Edwards (the lone representative from North America) and Wesley. Although several women writers are included in the volume—nearly one for each of the nine chapters—none of them receives one of Stanglin’s brief biographies. This list of representative theologians characterizes the thrust of the reader, with a nearly exclusive focus on the Western Church and a notable commitment to traditional theological voices.

In the preface to the volume, Stanglin notes, somewhat pejoratively that “the second half of church history is in many ways a series of footnotes to Luther.” Overall, his _Reader_ bears this out, with the largest chapter of the book focusing on the ‘Outbreak of Reform’ (chapter 2), with lengthy selections from both Luther and Calvin. The materials featured here are not all predictable—he includes parts of Luther’s Table Talk and Calvin’s _Treatise on Relics_—but features small samples of their more prominent works as well. Zwingli also appears in this chapter, with an interesting section on conflicting reports from the Marburg Colloquy (selection 24). Chapter 3 continues these themes from the perspective of the Radical Reformers and is organized using the typology of George Williams: Spiritualists, Anabaptists, and Evangelical Rationalists. Two women are included in these chapters: Katharina Zell’s defense of clerical marriage and the martyr account of Janneken van Munstdorp, from the _Martyr’s Mirror_.

The next chapter—on the Roman Catholic Reformation (chapter 4)—is one of the shortest and probably most disappointing sections of the book. Stanglin
has neglected the broad array of Catholic reform alternatives in favor of a few controversial writings, primarily against Luther, and the canons of Trent that condemned various aspects of Protestant teaching and practice. Very short selections from Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila add a focus on Catholic spirituality to this section. A rather significant overview of the confessional age appears in chapter 5, including Reformed, Anglican, and Lutheran documents. Several of these give particular attention to the contentious issue of divine election and human free will. This topic receives further consideration in a substantial selection from Jacob Arminius, which reflects the expertise of the editor. Overall, the focus on the ‘long’ sixteenth century, from Erasmus to Arminius consumes just about half of the entire book.

The shift to theology in the modern era begins with a discussion of the Enlightenment and skepticism (chapter 6). An escalating climate of doubt, notable in writers like Descartes and David Hume, challenged fundamental notions of the divine and the reader includes significant contributions from these and other philosophers of the era. Stanglin traces the quest for a ‘reasonable’ faith from John Locke to Immanuel Kant’s revised application of ‘universals’ in religious discourse that avoided the ‘ditch’ of historical certainty asserted by Lessing. The preferred alternative of Christian faith grounded in experience follows these Enlightenment critiques in the chapter on Pietism and Revivalism (chapter 7). Although Stanglin includes important European writers like Philipp Jakob Spener and John Wesley, he gives particular attention to the American scene in this section. Not only America’s ‘first’ theologian, Jonathan Edwards, but revivalists ranging from Thomas Campbell and Charles Finney to Joseph Smith underscore the diversity of Christian experience in the early United States.

The divisive theological climate of the later nineteenth century appears in chapter 8, focusing on liberal Protestant thought and reactions to it. Important nineteenth-century theologians represented in this section include critical thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Søren Kierkegaard. Harriet Beecher Stowe is included here as well, although her criticism of American slavery really grew more naturally out of the nineteenth-century revivals that strongly linked evangelical Pietism with social holiness. Resistance to the modernist agenda is represented from both the Protestant (Warfield) and Roman Catholic (Pius IX) perspective.

Stanglin’s final chapter offers the widest array of theological sources and begins to erode the dominant strands of Western Christian theology. Although he gives attention to usual suspects like Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Karl Rahner, the challenges presented by theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza reveal an emerging climate of critical reflection.