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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One of the strongest motivators many of us have for writing and editing books comes from teaching. When, after consistently teaching a course, we determine that there is a hole in the literature that leaves our students less than ideally prepared, we are moved to act. Teaching on modern theology over the past decade, I noticed such a need. There are strong books covering modern theology, but they are primarily arranged chronologically and/or around particular theologians or movements. There was no study covering this period that was also arranged around the classic theological loci. One could read books on systematic theology, or on modern theology. But synthesizing the two was a burden often borne by the student. Consequently, I found that students (and even teachers) could tell you about a theologian or movement, but rarely could they adequately trace particular loci through the tumultuous period of the past 150–200 years. They had a larger sense of the story of modern theology, but when it came down to specific theological themes, they too often lacked the tools necessary to fully understand the key issues, reactions, and developments that took place. Out of this need Mapping Modern Theology was born. While there is no question that more topics and chapters could be added, we hope that these fifteen chapters will serve students—of all sorts—who have felt the vacuum we sought to fill.

While preparing this volume for publication, one step we added was to test the majority of the material on a set of my students taking an upper division course on modern theology. They read earlier versions of many of the chapters and offered helpful feedback: our hope is that the extra time this took in the production process makes the volume stronger. Special thanks in particular go to former students Matthew Baddorf, Justin Borger, Cameron Moran, and Grady Dickinson who provided even more detailed assistance and feedback. Thanks also to the assistance of librarians John Holberg, Tom Horner, and Tad Mindeman, each providing different forms of support for this project.
We would like to thank the various contributors to this volume. Each was willing to take time out of their demanding schedules to add their voice and skill to this work, showing great grace as they listened to various forms of editorial feedback (including student feedback). Each contributor has shown admirable patience, ability, and insight in the contributions they have made; clearly they are the heart of this volume.

Bob Hosack and the team at Baker Academic deserve special mention. Over countless meals and conversations Bob has proven to be both a conscientious editor and a delightful friend, for which I am deeply grateful. Additionally, the editorial team at Baker has been unfailingly accommodating and productive, helping carry much of the heavy load associated with such a large and complex manuscript.

And what can I say about Bruce? I am so thankful. Through various circumstances, Bruce was a compassionate and timely voice in my life when my mentor Colin Gunton died; for such kindnesses I remain deeply in his debt. In terms of this project, from early on Bruce was a great supporter helping to see this project through. That is saying something given the astonishing scholarly demands that have been on him over these years of preparation. Yet not only did Bruce lend his scholarly skills to this venture, but his friendship proved just as meaningful, especially as my family has faced various health challenges during this period. Thank you, Bruce, for your grace, encouragement, and prayers through these years.

As usual, it was my wife, Tabitha, and children Jonathan and Margot who provided laughter, love, and perspective during the season in which this book was completed. When the waves of challenge and discouragement come, your smiling faces and warm embraces inevitably provide needed hope and rest. You three are so beautiful.

Finally, Bruce and I would like to dedicate this volume to our students, both past and present. They are a living bibliography: their questions, struggles, zeal, and genuine love of the things of God always humble us even as they stir us to press on. Let there be no doubt, they are great gifts to us, and so as a small token of our appreciation we dedicate this volume to them. Thank you for putting up with us, for offering words of encouragement, and for allowing us to be a small voice in your lives.

Kelly M. Kapic
The present work intends a new approach to organizing the study of the Christian theology of the last two hundred years or so. There are a number of very fine histories of doctrinal development that set forth the pivotal moments in which Christian theology in the West is understood as a whole.¹ There are also works that take as their focus leading theologians and/or spheres of influence.² Our idea is to organize modern theology along the lines of classical doctrinal topics or themes so that more complete coverage of significant developments in each area of doctrinal construction might be achieved. In this way, students might be introduced to the problems that


have been basic to reflection on all the major doctrines treated by modern theologians.

The purpose of this introduction is to address the basic question of the meaning of a term central to this project, namely, “modernity.” To do so will help to establish a rationale not only for the temporal limits of our inquiry but also for what it includes and excludes. Not everything that has happened in the last two hundred years is “modern.” There have always been some who are quite willing to defend “premodern” trains of thought more or less unchanged (though the ways in which they have gone about this often say more about their historical location—within modernity—than they would care to admit). And the last fifteen years or so have seen the emergence of trends of thought that can only be described as “anti-modern” (“paleo-orthodoxy” is the new neo-orthodoxy). And yet, establishing what it means to be “modern” in the realm of theology is no easy task. The theologies rightly covered by the term are diverse, and what unites them is not easily captured. No definitive definition can be offered here—that would be the proper subject of a book-length treatment. What I can do is simply point out certain defining moments in which those commitments emerge that will help us in identifying “modern” theologies.3

The Meaning of “Modernity”

To ask after the meaning of “modernity” as a strictly theological concept is already to distinguish its use among theologians and historians of Christian doctrines from its use by, say, sociologists, political scientists, natural scientists, or even philosophers. Sociologists typically point to the shift in the West from largely agrarian economies to capitalism, industrialization, and secularization. Political scientists discuss the importance of political theorists going back to Machiavelli and of epochal events like the French Revolution. Natural scientists speak of the destruction of the biblical-Aristotelian cosmology that took place between Copernicus and Newton. Philosophers quite rightly begin their story with Cartesian rationalism and the internal development of their discipline through great thinkers like Leibniz, Hume, and Kant. “Modernity” as a cultural concept is all of these things. As a theological concept, however, the meaning of “modernity” is not finally reducible to any of these elements (though some have more to do with our subject than others).

The origins of what historians of theology refer to as “modern” theology are to be found in Germany—a country to which industrialization came quite

3. It should be noted that because this is a textbook, written for students rather than academics, the criterion for selecting secondary literature relevant to the interpretation of the figures and themes treated below will be accessibility in the first instance, rather than what might be considered “best” in the view of specialists. This will, in some cases, mean pointing to older works.
late in comparison with England especially; a country in which secularization of the kind that took place in France was resisted with a measure of success; a country which only became a democracy in 1918 (and even then, in a tragically flawed form). The truth is that these social and political developments took root only after the advent of modern theology; they conditioned its further development but not its creation. We come closer to the truth when we look for the preconditions that helped pave the way for modern German theology in the scientific revolution, in the growth in knowledge of non-European cultures and their histories as a consequence of the voyages of discovery, in Hume’s devastating critique of natural religion and Kant’s limitation of knowledge to the realm of phenomenal appearances—in other words, in the intellectual rather than the material conditions of life. These are, however, preconditions only; they are not yet the thing itself.

“Modern” theology emerged, in my view, at the point at which (on the one hand) church-based theologians ceased trying to defend and protect the received orthodoxies of the past against erosion and took up the more fundamental challenge of asking how the theological values resident in those orthodoxies might be given an altogether new expression, dressed out in new categories for reflection. It was the transition, then, from a strategy of “accommodation” to the task of “mediation” that was fundamental in the ecclesial sphere. In philosophy, as it relates to the theological enterprise (on the other hand), the defining moment that effected a transition entailed a shift from a cosmologically based to an anthropologically based metaphysics of divine being.

The transitions I have in mind, insofar as they registered a decisive impact on Christian theology, were effected by means of a few very basic decisions in particular. Every period in the history of theology has had its basic questions and concerns that shaped the formulation of doctrines in all areas of reflection. In the early church, it was Trinity and Christology that captured the attention of the greatest minds. In the transition to the early Middle Ages, Augustinian anthropology played a large role—which would eventually effect a shift in attention from theories of redemption to the need to understand how God is reconciled with sinful human beings. The high Middle Ages were


6. The meaning of these terms will be made clear in the following section.
the heyday of sacramental development, in which definitions of sacraments were worked out with great care, the number of sacraments established, and so on. The Reformation period found its center of gravity in the doctrine of justification. In the modern period, the question of questions became the nature of God and his relation to the world. Basic decisions were thus made in the areas of creation, the being of God and his relation to the world, and revelation, which were to become foundational for further development in other areas of doctrinal concern. It is to a consideration of these basic decisions that we must now turn in our efforts to understand what it means to be “modern” in Christian theology.

**The Doctrine of Creation: From Accommodation to Mediation**

Rumors of the ideas set forth in Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* were in circulation for some years before its publication in 1543. That is why Martin Luther was able to adopt a tentative position as early as 1539. He did not see how it could possibly be that the earth moves through the heavens since Joshua had commanded the sun to stand still, not the earth (Josh. 10:12–14).7 And, in any case, the “fit” between what could be known of the physical universe with the help of Aristotle and the biblical cosmology set forth in the early chapters of Genesis especially would continue to make the synthesis of the two compelling to theologians for a good while yet. In the interim, it fell to Andreas Osiander to create the conditions that made possible a certain peaceful coexistence between the churchly theology and free scientific inquiry. In an unsigned preface attached to Copernicus’s great work, Osiander asserted that astronomers cannot discover the true causes of the movements of heavenly bodies. That being the case, their observations help only in understanding how such movements have appeared to one firmly planted on the earth, and they lay the foundations for calculating how they must appear in the future. Their work is “hypothetical” only; it does not correspond to the way things truly are.8

As unhappy as these claims made later astronomers like Kepler (since they believed their hypotheses to be true and not merely an exercise in artistic construction), Osiander had done natural science a favor of sorts. Until Galileo laid claim to having seen the movements described by Copernicus and Kepler with his own eyes (with the aid of a telescope), church officials in both of the great communions (Catholic and Protestant) were content to regard the work of astronomers as merely “hypothetical” and, therefore, as posing no threat to received orthodoxies. The consequence was that scientists could pursue their investigations in relative freedom, unhindered by the churches.

8. Dillenberger, *Protestant Thought and Natural Science*, 42. (It should be noted that a large excerpt from Osiander’s preface appears here.)
Kepler unintentionally returned the favor. He was not happy to have his work characterized as “hypothetical,” so he pointed to a rather different basis for a negotiated peace between the churches and natural science, a basis lying in the nature of revelation itself. A one-time member of the famous Tübingen Stift, Kepler was well trained in theology. He understood that the worry among theologians was that we make the Holy Spirit, the ultimate author of Holy Scripture, to be a liar if we say that the earth moves around the sun. Kepler solved the problem this way: “the Holy Scriptures already speak with men of ordinary things (about which it is not their intention to teach them) in a human way so that they may be understood by men; they use what is indubitable among them in order to communicate higher and divine things.”

The Holy Spirit did not intend to teach us how things really are with regard to the movements of bodies in space when he inspired Joshua to command the sun to stand still; he was accommodating revelation to the level of what could be comprehended at the time. Since it was not his intention to teach Joshua anything where natural science is concerned, the Holy Spirit made himself guilty of no falsehood.

Now the idea of “accommodation” is a rather old one, as Kepler was undoubtedly aware. Both Augustine and Calvin had made use of the notion in interpreting the six days of creation in Gen. 1—with strikingly different results! In fact, Calvin made it central to his understanding of divine revelation. Kepler’s use of it was not intended, however, simply to resolve “difficulties” in biblical texts; it was intended to purchase the space needed for free scientific inquiry. But he unintentionally had also shown conservative exegetes how to avoid conflicts with the natural sciences once the results of specific inquiries had been rendered indisputable. One simply took the truth of science for granted and insisted that no passage of Scripture could possibly bear a meaning that conflicted with such truth. Given that the sun is the center of the solar system, the real problem posed by Josh. 10 has to do (now) with the movement of the sun to stand still.

9. Scholder, Modern Critical Theology, 55, here citing from Kepler’s introduction to his Astronomia nova.

10. Augustine held that an omnipotent God did not need six days to create, that God created all things simultaneously (in a single moment), and that the revelation of God’s creative activity in terms of “six days” was an accommodation to human understanding designed to convey certain logical or causal relationships among the creatures. See Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, vol. 1, trans. John Hammond Taylor, SJ (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 36–37, 154. Cf. Augustine, City of God, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1980), 435–36. Calvin disagreed, maintaining that divine accommodation does not always have to do with what God says but sometimes with what God does. That God took six (literal) days to complete his work was itself the divine pedagogy. See John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 78.

11. Edward A. Dowey Jr. makes the idea of divine accommodation to be one of the defining characteristics of Calvin’s understanding of the knowledge of God and demonstrates its pervasiveness throughout his writings. See Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3–17.
earth, not the sun (as a literal reading might imply). Thus, the passage itself is “accommodated” to what is known from another source—which means that exegesis is controlled to a greater or lesser degree by science. This is not yet modern theology, but it is a significant concession to the intellectual conditions that finally gave birth to modern theology.

The biblical-Aristotelian cosmology was finally laid to rest by Newton’s demonstration that phenomena throughout the universe can be explained by a single law, that is, gravity. In the century that followed the publication of Newton’s *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in 1687, no great step forward in theological engagement of the natural sciences took place. Theologians sought to find “gaps” in scientific explanation, places in which God might be thought necessary if a more complete explanation was to be had. But this was hardly an adequate engagement, and the “gaps” were steadily being reduced in number.

What finally moved things forward was Kant’s work in the field of philosophical epistemology. For Kant, there can be no knowledge in the strict sense without empirical data. It is the senses that provide the content of our knowledge; the human mind provides its forms. What then are we to make of Gen. 1, a passage that bears witness to things for which there was no observer, no one to receive sense data? That fact alone was sufficient to call into question the scientific value of this narrative for many. But if Gen. 1 was lacking in scientific value, it might still have theological value in a doctrine of creation—if seen in the right light. For churchly minded Christian theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher, to see Gen. 1 in the right light meant this: to interpret it with the help of a tool that was devised not in order to address this specific problem (which must surely seem an arbitrary proceeding) but in order to aid the theologian in thinking through the content of all Christian doctrines. Such a “material principle” (if use of later terminology may be permitted) must itself belong to that movement of mind and heart that Christians understand as the experience of redemption; it is not an a priori principle from which the contents of other doctrines are deduced, but rather is an a posteriori description of how all doctrines (including redemption) ought to be generated and organized. Schleiermacher himself found this principle in “the feeling of

12. Gleason Archer says, for example, “It has been objected that if in fact the earth was stopped in its rotation for a period of twenty-four hours, inconceivable catastrophe would have befallen the entire planet and everything on its surface.” See Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 161. Archer seeks to solve the problem he thinks this passage poses by means of the suggestion that the rotation of the earth was merely slowed, not stopped. What is interesting about this is that Archer shows no awareness that even to understand the problem posed in this way is to allow the natural sciences a degree of influence on exegesis. Critics will say: “not nearly enough influence!” But my point here is that Archer is a long way from Luther in making the rotation of the earth to be the “difficulty” in the text—and a long way from understanding how Joshua and his readers would have understood the implications of the command that the sun should stand still.
absolute dependence” as modified by the redemption accomplished in and by Jesus of Nazareth.¹³

We touch here upon something that is basic to at least one major strand of “modern” theology, namely, the use of a material norm as both a heuristic device and a critical principle. As heuristic device, this norm functioned to give the theologian access to the material treated in a particular doctrine that is disciplined and consistent with his/her approach to other doctrines. As critical principle, it functioned to bracket off speculation, to establish the limits of what properly belongs to dogmatics. Taken together, these two functions contributed to a “mediation” of traditional teaching under the conditions of modernity.

It is the step from “accommodation” to “mediation,” I want to suggest, that helps us to catch sight of the emergence of a fully “modern” theology. That it happened first in the area of creation theology is an accident of history. But once it happened, it became basic to the construction of Christian dogmatics. Even Karl Barth, who frequently protested against the use of a “material principle” in Christian theology, made use of a material norm in the sense I have just described—and in doing so, testified to the fact that he is rightly viewed as belonging (loosely at the very least) to the mediating tradition in Christian theology. In the first phase of his dogmatic activity, his critical norm was to be found in his concept of revelation. And so his guiding question in elaborating his doctrine of creation was, What must creation be if revelation is as I have described it? Expressed another way, Given that in revelation God both is and is not given to us objectively in a medium of revelation (let us say, the flesh of Jesus), that he is able to make himself objective without ceasing to be the divine Subject he is, what light does this shed on the question of God’s relation to the world in creating?¹⁴ After his revision of his doctrine of election, Barth’s critical norm was to be found in a largely “historicized” Christology (which signals the emergence of the “christocentrism” with which he is frequently associated). But throughout his dogmatic activity, he did what Schleiermacher had done before him. He made use of a heuristic and critical (a posteriori) principle.

At the dawn of the modern period in theology, Schleiermacher was concerned that the day might come when the natural scientists would be in a position to provide a complete explanation not only of the movements of heavenly bodies but even of the origins of the physical universe. He writes,

I can only anticipate that we must learn to do without what many are still accustomed to regard as inseparably bound to the essence of Christianity. I am

¹³. To put it this way is to suggest that Schleiermacher’s “material principle” was a function of his definition of the essence of Christianity in §11 of his dogmatics. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 52.
not referring to the six-day creation, but to the concept of creation itself, as it is usually understood, apart from any reference to the Mosaic chronology and despite all those rather precarious rationalizations that interpreters have devised. How long will the concept of creation hold out against the power of a world view constructed from undeniable scientific conclusions that no one can avoid?15

By means of his heuristic and critical norm, he found a way to limit a theology of creation so as to obviate a conflict with the exact sciences16 but also to make a reasoned use of the creation story found in Gen. 1.

This is not the place for a comprehensive exposition of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of creation. It will suffice here to allow Schleiermacher to describe his approach in his own words and to briefly sketch its results. “The doctrine of creation is to be elucidated preeminently with a view to the exclusion of every alien element, lest from the way in which the question of Origin is answered elsewhere anything steal into our province which stands in contradiction to the pure expression of the feeling of absolute dependence.”17 Since everything that exists must be absolutely dependent upon God, a Christian doctrine of creation must oppose “every representation of the origin of the world which excludes anything whatever from origination by God,” and it must oppose all conceptions of the origin of the world that would place “God under those conditions and antitheses which have arisen in and through the world.”18 From this state of affairs, Schleiermacher draws the following conclusions, all of which are supported by exegesis of Gen. 1: (1) God does not work with preexisting materials in creating. For if God found material ready to hand that he himself had not created, such material would be independent of him and the feeling of absolute dependence would have been destroyed. So the idea of a Divine Architect is ruled out of court. (2) If it is the case that the Christian doctrine of creation excludes anything that would place God “under those conditions and antitheses which have arisen in and through the world,” then God could not possibly be seen as having deliberated before acting. To be sure, creation

16. See ibid., 64:

Unless the Reformation from which our church first emerged endeavors to establish an eternal covenant between the living Christian faith and completely free, independent scientific inquiry, so that faith does not hinder science and science does not exclude faith, it fails to meet adequately the needs of our time and we need another one, no matter what it takes to establish it. Yet it is my firm conviction that the basis for such a covenant was already established in the Reformation. . . . Since I am so firmly convinced of it, I thought I should show as best I could that every dogma that truly represents an element in our Christian consciousness can be so formulated that it remains free from entanglements with science. I set this task for myself especially in my treatment of the doctrines of creation and preservation.
18. Ibid., 149–50.
is a “free” act of God, but divine “freedom” is wrongly construed where it is seen to entail “a prior deliberation followed by choice” or as meaning that “God might equally well have not created the world.” To define “freedom” in God in this way is to play it off against “necessity”—which is to bring God under an antithesis that is proper to the conditions of life in the world God creates. God’s freedom consists in his “otherness” and in his capacity to be who and what he is in all of his activities. It does not consist in a choice among options over which he must first brood before deciding upon the one he thinks “best” (as Leibniz had it). And in any case, as Spinoza put it (in a passage Schleiermacher would have approved), “because in God, essence and will are one, then the claim that God might possibly have willed a different world would be the same as saying that he could have been Another”—that is, a different God.19 (3) God cannot be conceived as having begun to create. Now this might seem to make creation “eternal,” but Schleiermacher resists this formulation of the relation. The reason is that if we say that creation is “eternal,” we seem to make it independent of God, which would destroy the feeling of absolute dependence. So Schleiermacher wants to uphold two values: (a) that God has never been without the world, and (b) that the world has always been absolutely dependent upon the divine activity for its existence. His conclusion is that God alone is “eternal” (in the sense of transcending time); the fact that the world does not transcend time but is structured by it is sufficient, in his view, to preserve a proper distinction between Creator and creature. But how then to speak of a creation that has no beginning without resorting to the term “eternal”? Alexander Schweizer would later use the word Semptertiunität (from the Latin sempiternitas—meaning “everlasting” or “perpetual”) to describe the existence of a world that knows of no beginning. Such a world is “everlasting,” but God alone is “eternal.”20 I should add, perhaps, that this is not a linguistic trick but a real distinction, rooted in the differing kinds of being that God and the world are (God as a being transcending time and the world as a being structured by it). (4) Schleiermacher is willing to use the phrase creatio ex nihilo (“creation out of nothing”) so long as its meaning is restricted to the understanding that God used no instrument or means in creating. That, he believes, is the force of the New Testament phrasing according to which God created “by His Word” alone. Such a phrase is to be taken in a critical sense, rather than as a positive explanation of how God works. Now there was another way to address the problems created for the Christian doctrine of creation by the lack of a human observer to God’s creative activity, namely, the way of speculation pursued in philosophy by the great

German idealists. This strategy, however, entailed the subordination of creation to a thoroughly revised understanding of the being of God in relation to the world. So it is to the second of our themes that we must turn.

**The Being of God in Relation to the World: The Speculative Theologies**

The turn to the “modern” in the realm of philosophical (meaning strictly academic rather than ecclesial) theology presupposes the challenge posed to the knowledge of God by Immanuel Kant’s epistemology. Though a wide range of theologians today are inclined to downplay the significance of Kant’s achievement, they will not find support from many philosophers in doing so.

For Kant, what is rightly called “knowledge” comes about through the application of what he called “the categories of the understanding” to data received through the senses. The “categories” are like hermeneutical rules that govern the construction of the “objects” of our knowledge from the raw material provided by the senses.21 Kant believed that the categories were a priori in nature and fixed in number. In fact, he simply read them off of Aristotle’s “table of logic” (e.g., quantity, quality, and relation).22 The net effect of this view was momentous. It meant that the human subject knows only how things appear to her, once they have been processed by the categories of the understanding; she does not know “things in themselves,” how things truly are. The result is, therefore, a noetic “split” (an unbridgeable chasm) between a human knower and objects as they truly are.

Now it has to be said that even if Kant was wrong to think that the forms of human knowledge (the so-called categories) are exclusively a priori and fixed in number, he was on to something important in his belief that the human mind contributes something to what we think of as knowledge. The process of knowing has a constructive element. We construct toward the objects of our knowledge. A completely “objective” knowledge lies beyond our grasp.

In establishing the limits of human reason in this way, Kant brought an end to Enlightenment confidence in the existence of a “ready-made world”23—that is, the idea that the order of the cosmos was simply “out there,” waiting to be discovered. The objective ground of the unity of the cosmos (“God”) could not be known, for one thing, since we have no sense data in his case with which to work. He could be postulated—and must be, in Kant’s view, for the sake of moral living—but he cannot be known. And if God cannot be known, then the very idea of a “world” (as a totalizing concept) must finally be a construct.

of the human imagination. In coming to this conclusion, Kant had put in place the conditions necessary to effect a shift from a cosmologically based metaphysics to an anthropologically based metaphysics. From this point on, metaphysics could survive only to the extent that it took human consciousness (its nature and its history) as its starting point.24

After Kant, the great German idealists sought to overcome the split between the epistemological subject and her objects by positing the existence of an unconditioned ground out of which both emerge, an originating point of identity, in other words. For Hegel, the history of the world is explicable as a history of divine Self-knowing. In order to come to full Self-consciousness, God must “go out” from himself, positing a mode of being in himself that is “other” than himself.25 This act of Self-positing results initially in “alienation,” in a differentiation that as yet knows of no higher reconciliation. If reconciliation is to occur, the belonging-together of the Infinite Subject and the finite world (their original identity) must be comprehended. For this to happen, human beings need to have the originating identity revealed to them. The implicit unity of divine and human must be made explicit (revealed). For Hegel, the Self-revelation of God takes place in Jesus of Nazareth. In him, the turn takes place from alienation to reconciliation. In that the originating unity of divine and human is made known in time, it becomes possible for human beings to know God, to overcome their fear of him through a recognition of the Self-love that sets the entire process in motion, a Self-love in which they can now participate.

The key to this entire “system” of thought lies in the basic claim that God comes to full knowledge of himself in and through human knowledge of him. There is a deep-lying ontological connection of God with human beings and, indeed, with the world. In that what takes place in human consciousness is made the vehicle for God’s own Self-realization in time, the being of God is made concrete. It is not merely an Idea but the fullness of reality. As a consequence, the ordering of the world is no longer conceived as simply “out there”; it is a historical ordering whose end has been disclosed but which has not yet come.

As for the concept of God that anchors this “system,” what Hegel did was to substitute an infinite Subject for Spinoza’s infinite substance.26 In taking this step, the being of God is no longer located in an unchanging “essence” lying in back of or beneath his activities. God is what he does. Hegel could agree with Aquinas that in God, essence and existence are one. But now, it is God’s lived existence that defines essence rather than the other way around.

24. Even the process philosophies and theologies of the twentieth century, which often give the appearance of being cosmologically driven, tend to understand the God-world relation in personalistic terms—thus testifying to the significance of anthropology to these projects.

Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack, eds.
That the God-world relation implied in this conception tends in the direction of pantheism is clear. But it also has to be said that what most people think of as “pantheism” rests on a deduction drawn from the Spinozan formula *Deus sive natura* (“God or nature”) rather than anything Spinoza actually said about the God-world relation. Already in Spinoza, the infinite substance is distinguished ontologically from all particulars as that which alone is “in itself, and is conceived through itself.”27 All other things are through Another; they are “modes” of this one substance.28 In the case of Hegel, “pantheism” certainly did not mean that God is identifiable with any and every particular. It meant rather that God is the power at work in all things.29 And the fact that the meaning of the word “pantheism” could also be extended even further by Schleiermacher to embrace a radical Creator-creature distinction (even to the point of affirming the critical value resident in the notion of a *creatio ex nihilo*) shows just how far most casual definitions of the term are from its actual usage.

Hegel’s attractiveness to Christian theologians to this day is due, above all, to three considerations. First, Hegel overcame the agnosticism of Kant. Hegel’s God could be known by human reason. Second, in positing the existence of an ultimate ground to natural and historical processes, Hegel had found a way to subordinate the natural sciences to philosophy. The apologetic value of this way of thinking was immense. Hegel’s philosophical theology has been called “speculative”—which refers to the fact that the knowledge of the ultimate ground of reality is to be found solely in itself, in its Self-giving. One cannot reason from the order one thinks herself to perceive in the world back to a First Cause; she must begin with God, thinking consistently “from above,” or she will not end with the God who is. But it would be a mistake to think that taking God as the starting point for thought requires an irrational leap. The reasonableness of this procedure is guaranteed by the explanatory value of the starting point adopted in this way—its power to explain all else that exists. That is why Hegel was so tempting to theologians with apologetic concerns. Those theologians would always tend to see the “independence of religion” purchased by Schleiermacher’s rooting of religion in “feeling” as a

27. Ibid., 59.
29. See on this point Peter C. Hodgson’s editorial introduction to Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 28–29. Hodgson makes the important remark that “the tendency of Spinoza’s philosophy is toward acosmism [denial of the reality of the universe] rather than atheism, since above all it is the actuality of God that is affirmed by this philosophy rather than the actuality of the world.” Spinoza’s “acosmism” finds an interesting echo in Karl Barth: “Pre-supposing the certain knowledge of God in His Word, it is actually the case that the existence and being of the world are rendered far more problematical by the existence and being of God than vice versa” (*Church Dogmatics* III/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [New York: T&T Clark, 2004]), 6. Barth’s point is that it is easier to believe in God than it is to believe in the world. With that much Spinoza would have agreed.
step toward irrationality. Third, Hegel’s “system” provided a basis for a robust theodicy. Hegel’s “sublation” (Aufhebung) of the finite in the Infinite reaches its goal in God’s act of taking the most extreme limit of finitude—death—up into his own being in order to conquer it there. The meaning of Christ’s cross and resurrection is that God, not death, is our future. That this provides a powerful solution to the problem of evil is clear where it is realized that God does not merely empathize with us but takes the threat to our being and meaning in this world in hand and overcomes it in himself. God does not remain at a distance but enters fully into our situation, transforming it from within.

Hegel’s concept of God marked a large step beyond Schleiermacher in one crucial respect. Schleiermacher could still affirm with classical theism an utter simplicity (or “lack of composition”) in God as well as the impassibility (or “nonaffectivity”) of God. Not so with Hegel. After Hegel, modern theologians have typically bid farewell to classical theism. From that point on, even Schleiermacher was regarded as something of a transitional figure from whom one had much to learn, but who had been surpassed by Hegel. It was Hegel who, more than anyone else, defined what it meant to be “modern” in this area of doctrine.

The Concept of Revelation: From Information Transfer to Self-Revelation

Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose talents as a historian of doctrine exceed even those of Karl Barth, has noted that two significant changes occurred in the concept of revelation at the dawn of the modern period in theology. The first was the introduction of a distinction between “an outer revelation” consisting in the manifestation of God in and through historical events, and “inspiration as the effect and interpretation of these events in the subjectivity of the biblical witnesses.” In making this distinction, Pannenberg “naturalized” the word “inspiration” to a significant degree. Inspiration is, in part at least, the effect of revelatory events on human interpreters of them. This need not exclude the more traditional understanding that the Holy Spirit is the agent of “inspiration,” but it does tie the Spirit’s work to historical events that are themselves witnessed. And in the process, the older view, of revelation consisting in revealed information about events to which there were no witnesses, is quietly set aside. To the extent that the subjective experience of “inspiration” remains unrelated to historical events, its result will tend to be understood either as the poetic expression of that experience or as an imaginative reflection based on material (theological) considerations. It is the relating of biblical witnesses to historical events that has the more secure foundation. At this stage, historical criticism was still in its infancy and its more radical possibilities were not
foreseen. Still, the distinction between the objective and the subjective helped to create space for it and opened the door eventually for more critical scholars like David Friedrich Strauss.

The second and arguably more significant development sketched by Pannenberg had to do with the linking of “a historical revelation that is distinct from inspiration” with “the notion that revelation has God not merely as its subject but also as its exclusive content and theme.” God does not, in other words, reveal information about this and that; he reveals himself. The concept of a divine Self-revelation can be found in John 1:1 and Heb. 1:1. But the phrase itself is first employed by the German idealists “in the sense of the strict identity of subject and content.” To say that God is both the subject and the content of revelation is to say that God is the One who acts in revelation and is himself the act. God’s being is a being in the act of revelation.

There is more than one way to explain the significance of this claim. It could mean that the being of God is constituted in and through the historical process of Self-differentiation and reconciliation. Hegel, for example, understood the “becoming” of God in his Self-revelation in time to be “necessary” to him in the sense that his becoming is the result of a “determination” that is intrinsic to the being of God as such. God cannot be God in any other way than through this becoming. But the claim could also be understood as the consequence of an eternal (in the sense of pretemporal) act of Self-determination that constitutes God’s being as a being for revelation in time. This is the view of Karl Barth. And the difference between his view and that of Hegel is that Barth understands the immanent Trinity to be fully realized in the pretemporal eternity (i.e., before creating the world), whereas Hegel understood it as a strictly eschatological reality. For Barth, God’s being is grounded in an Urentscheidung (i.e., a “primordial decision”) in which he gives to himself his own being as God. That decision is election—which is another point of difference from Hegel, since the latter has no concept of election.

In any event, to understand revelation in the first instance as the Self-revelation of God is to understand the Bible as witness to revelation, as revelation in a secondary and derivative sense. In some ways, this move had been well prepared for in the Christian tradition prior to modern times. From the earliest centuries,

31. Pannenberg finds an early instantiation of the distinction here treated in an 1805 essay by Carl Ludwig Nitzsch on the nature of revelation. See ibid., 200–221.
33. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1:222.
34. Ibid., 222–23.
35. Barth, Church Dogmatics II/1, 50, 168. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, God’s Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 86: “we have to understand God’s primal decision as an event in the being of God which differentiates the modes of God’s being.”
Christians had taken for granted a distinction between the results of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father and the inspiration of the prophets and apostles, though they rarely thought through the consequences of it. The concept of an eternal generation of the Son secures for the Son a participation in the being of the Father; all that the Father has (in the way of being and attributes), he gives to the Son so that the Son is “fully God.” On this basis, it also became possible to speak of the hypostatic union of human and divine natures—so that of Jesus Christ alone it could be said (as the Creed puts it) that he is homoousios (“of one substance”) with the Father as regards his divinity and homoousios (“of one substance”) with us as regards his humanity. Neither of these things can be said of the writers of Scripture. They are not hypostatically united to the Holy Spirit who indwells and inspires them, and they do not share in the being of God. What is added to this (in itself quite fundamental) distinction in modern theology is the negation of the thought of a divine “instrumentalization” of the writers of Scripture that had, from time to time, tempted premodern theologians to downplay the human contribution to the composition of the Bible.36

The net result of this development was, initially, the same as the first. Space was created for a more critical approach to the study of the Bible. In the long run, however, it drew greater attention to Christology as the arena of basic decisions in Christian dogmatics. Pannenberg believes that Karl Barth went too far in linking the idea of Self-revelation with uniqueness, so that Christ alone was seen as the only source of revelation and the knowledge of God.37 Personally, I think the roots of this linkage were already present in Hegel, so that Barth’s move is not entirely unprecedented.38 Be that as it may, Barth’s “christological concentration” had a decisive impact on the theology of the late twentieth century, finding an echo even in the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.39

36. A rather extreme example of the kind of “instrumentalization” I am referring to may be found in Athenagorus, Embassy for the Christians [and] The Resurrection of the Dead, ed. Joseph Hugh Crehan, SJ (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1956), 39: “I expect that you who are so learned and eager for truth are not without some introduction to Moses, Isaias, Jeremias, and the rest of the prophets, who, when the Divine Spirit moved them, spoke out what they were in travail with, their own reasoning falling into abeyance and the Spirit making use of them as a flautist might play upon his flute.”

37. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1:223.

38. For Hegel, as we have seen, the teleology that is essential to the Idea by means of which the world process is generated is a teleology in which the Infinite takes up the finite into itself and overcomes its limitations. For this to be achieved, the Infinite had itself to “become” finite; the Infinite had to “experience” the furthest extreme of finitude, which consists in death. Now death is something that is experienced concretely in an individual. It is something that, in the nature of the case, God could only “experience” by means of complete identification with an individual. Christians believe this individual to have been Jesus. It is precisely here that Hegel’s “principle of concretion” attains coherence and viability.

39. Vatican II—which embraced the concept of Self-revelation and gave it authoritative standing in the Roman Catholic Church—posited the existence of two streams by means of which
In Place of a Definition: Defining Moments

We set out to uncover the “defining moments” that gave birth to “modern” theology. Our efforts have not resulted in a comprehensive definition, but they were not intended to. This much can be said with all due tentativeness. First, “modern” theologians will share a commitment either to mediation or to speculation—if they do not tend simply to bracket off the problems created for Christian theology by the natural sciences altogether. “Mediation” as I have employed the word here has a broader significance than one might think if one knew only the “school” to which that name was applied in the nineteenth century. The originating form of “mediation” found in that school was driven by apologetic concerns and usually consisted in the attempt to “mediate” between Schleiermacher and Hegel.40 That meant there was a strong element of speculation in their theologies (in Isaak Dorner, for example), which was anathema to the “antimetaphysical” thinking of an Albrecht Ritschl. But Ritschl, like Barth after him, tried to think out of a center in God’s Self-revelation in Christ. That this “concentration” opened out in his case into a series of material “viewpoints” that linked the elements of his thought together (i.e., vocation, justification, and reconciliation) shows that he was engaged in reconstructing Christian doctrines with the help of a few, carefully chosen “principles.” That means that Ritschl too was engaged in a form of mediation as I am defining it (loosely) here.

Second, “modern” theologians will have left classical theism behind, however much they may continue to respect it. They will see the relation of God to the world that is made concrete in Jesus of Nazareth to be the result of “Self-determination.” Whether “Self-determination” is then thought of simply as belonging to God “essentially” or in terms of a “primal decision” (as Barth would have it) is a secondary consideration. In neither case will the divine “freedom” be understood voluntaristically (as a choice among options).

Third, divine Self-revelation will be understood to be “revelation” as such. The Bible will be understood in terms of the category of witness to the event of God’s Self-revelation. Critical engagement with the Bible will be affirmed in principle, though “modern” theologians may have serious reservations with respect to how the various kinds of criticism are carried out by biblical scholars. It goes without saying that they may also find the results of critical

40. On “mediating theology” as a technical term descriptive of a “school” of apologetically oriented German theologians in the mid- to late nineteenth century, see Welch, Protestant Thought, 1:269–73.
engagement with the Bible to be unacceptable, but such judgments are often passed by biblical scholars on the work of other members of their guild as well.

While much more could be said, we must content ourselves with the observation that the defining moments we have considered here created a style of doing Christian theology and launched a new period. Other approaches to Christian theology that do not take seriously the need to take steps like these will be found in the “modern” period, but they will not themselves be “modern.” They will show themselves to belong to this period only insofar as they engage directly or indirectly theologies that are “modern” and the cultural conditions that gave rise to the latter.

Conclusion

The story we have told here has focused on the early stages of “modern” theology, at a point when theologians were much more self-conscious of living in a time of change, of crisis even. To understand those changes and to adapt to them was a theological challenge of the highest order. It fell largely to German-speaking Protestants to undertake this challenge in the first instance.41 The basic decisions we have surveyed were made by them. In its further development, “modern” theology became an international story (albeit, one confined largely to the West). The modulations that “modern” theology experienced in being transported to other lands is an interesting story in its own right, in part because the resistance to modernizing tendencies was greater in the United States and even in Great Britain. And even those who thought themselves “modern” were capable of reacting against what they perceived as the excesses of German Protestant theologians. But that story too is one of adaptation and assimilation.

41. In his posthumously published Croall Lectures on modern theology, H. R. Mackintosh anticipated an objection that I as a teacher often hear as well: “To a patriotic Briton there may appear to be some humiliation in the fact that throughout a study like the present nothing, or next to nothing, is said regarding our native contribution to doctrinal history, or even regarding Anglo-Saxon thought in the wider sense. As in the neighbouring field of philosophy, most of the time is spent in recording movements of opinion on the Continent. The air is mostly filled with German names” (H. R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology [London: Nisbet, 1937], 2–3). Mackintosh went on to explain the preeminence of the Germans in nineteenth-century theology in terms of differences in local conditions. He named three. First, German theological faculties were larger than British faculties. The combined efforts of so many talented people were bound to produce significant results. Second, church-state relations in Germany actually served to protect the academic freedom of German theologians, who, on the whole, were less vulnerable to ecclesial examination. And third, there was “the love of thorough and exact knowledge characteristic of the German mind—what we may call its Gründlichkeit.” Mackintosh consoled himself, however, with the thought that although “the Anglo-Saxon mind on average has considerably less learning,” it is still the case that it has quite often exhibited “a much sounder judgment” (Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, 4).
As time went on, theologians became less and less aware of the degree to which their theologizing reflected the cultural conditions of the historical period they were living in. Modern theologians began to take modernity for granted; the excitement bred by the sense of doing something new and unprecedented receded. As a consequence, many of the theologians treated in this volume—those found in the twentieth century especially—will scarcely give a thought to the question of whether their theologies are modern or not. It has only been since the advent of so-called postmodernity that the question of the meaning of “modernity” as a theological concept is once again a pertinent one to raise.

It remains only to say a few words about the contributors to this volume. Each of them has taken a specialized interest in the doctrine about which he or she writes. Each of them is, broadly speaking, “evangelical.” Not all teach in evangelical institutions, though some do; others belong to “mainline” denominations and work in the seminaries of those denominations or in universities.

The contributors were invited to choose their own approach, be it typological, thematic, or more nearly historical. They were given a fair amount of latitude in deciding what should be included and what might reasonably be left out. The discerning reader will also notice that some contributors are inclined to think that the problems dealt with by modern theologians are of largely their own contrivance, that it remains possible to return to more classical trains of thought. Others (I include myself) think that the problems dealt with by modern theologians are problems inherent in classical trains of thought, which must always remain unaddressed where a simple return is attempted. But no attempt was made by the editors to compel contributors to choose one way or the other on this very basic issue. Each contributor was given freedom to describe the lay of the land as he or she sees it. The result is, quite naturally, that the differences of opinion that surround the study of many of the figures and problems treated in this volume are reflections of the contributors. We have not attempted to flatten out such differences, seeing them instead as a way of giving testimony to the richness of modern theology. Our only request was that contributors work descriptively, rather than prescriptively. That way, even the differences of opinion that exist would not become an issue.

For Further Reading


