

Diversity within the Reformed Tradition: Supra- and Infralapsarianism in Calvin, Dort, and Westminster by J. V. Fesko. Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 2001. Pp. xxviii + 330. \$20.00 hardcover.

Much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship on Reformed orthodoxy tended to emphasize the dogmatic and methodological divergence between seventeenth-century theologians and their Reformation predecessors, to the exclusion of their widespread correspondence. As an example of the divergence, many scholars have pointed to the doctrine of predestination, opposing Calvin's supposedly mild and Christocentric version to the harsh, scholastic treatments associated with Beza, Dort, and Westminster. J. V. Fesko examines this claim of divergence by comparing and contrasting the lapsarianism taught by Calvin, Dort, and Westminster.

In *Diversity within the Reformed Tradition*, which is essentially his doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Aberdeen, Fesko first explains the meaning of supralapsarian and infralapsarian predestination. On the supralapsarian view of predestination, God's decree to elect and reprobate people logically precedes his decree of the Fall; thus, God elects and reprobates individuals who are considered as creatable and liable to fall (*homo creabilis et labilis*). For infralapsarianism, God's decree to elect and reprobate logically follows the decree of the Fall; thus, God elects and reprobates individuals who are considered as created and fallen sinners (*homo creatus et lapsus*) (xxii-xxv). Fesko then takes the reader chronologically through the lapsarian teachings of Augustine, medieval Augustinians, Calvin, Dort, and Westminster. Leading up to Dort, Fesko surveys Arminius and the Remonstrant controversy, and he examines the Lambeth Articles and Irish Articles as background to Westminster.

Fesko attempts to support three main conclusions (298-99). First, Reformed orthodoxy did not "distort" Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Fesko interprets Calvin's doctrine as supralapsarian and then shows how Dort and Westminster proceeded in an explicitly infralapsarian direction. Fesko does not argue so much for continuity in doctrine as for a shift. The difference is that, contra some modern scholars, he takes the shift from Calvin to the seventeenth century to be a shift to a less harsh doctrine. Although it is unclear what Fesko means by "distort"—for a supralapsarian might say this shift *is a distortion*—he surely is correct in maintaining that Dort and Westminster did not say anything more deterministic or even vastly different from Calvin—in contrast to what

some modern scholars assume. This underlying unity leads to Fesko's second conclusion, that supra- and infralapsarians viewed one another as orthodox and sometimes even recognized that the two views are not mutually exclusive. Third, Fesko reiterates that the Reformed tradition has never been synonymous with the theology of Calvin. Fesko demonstrates this point by noting the other Reformed options during Calvin's time, as well as the shift he sees taking place from Calvin to the later confessions. Hence, the term *Calvinism* is too narrow and should be rejected as an adequate designation of the Reformed tradition. It is therefore of little consequence to the broader Reformed tradition whether a particular doctrine lines up precisely with Calvin. The latter two conclusions are really subordinate to the first conclusion. The success of the argument depends on Fesko's analysis of the lapsarian positions of Calvin and later Reformed orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, Fesko's analysis falls short, for, despite the general truth of the three conclusions, his book shows weaknesses in many details. The main flaw I should point out is the inconsistency in his application of the definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism. Although he gets the homo *labilis/lapsus* distinction correct, Fesko often finds supralapsarianism where there is no evidence of it. For example, he says that because Calvin based both "election *and* reprobation solely in the will of God" Calvin was a supralapsarian (111). On the contrary, all Reformed orthodox theologians based election and reprobation solely in God's will, and damnation always was based on a person's sin. Thus, Fesko's claim that Calvin was a supralapsarian is supported by too many quotations that fail to prove the point. The truth is that Calvin's language in certain places could be judged either way. It is more likely that Calvin was not thinking in the strict supra- and infralapsarian categories of his successors, and Fesko's attempt to read these categories into Calvin's doctrine may be the only real distortion of his theology.

Another example of this same inaccuracy is Fesko's treatment of the Lambeth Articles of 1595. Because of his misunderstanding of what makes a doctrine supra- or infralapsarian, Fesko claims that the Lambeth Articles "won a victory" for supralapsarianism (244). However, Fesko fails to note that Peter Baro, a conditional predestinarian, and Lancelot Andrewes, a Baro sympathizer, both subscribed to the Articles. When theologians as diverse as Baro and the supralapsarian William Whitaker subscribe to the same statement on predestination, it can hardly be called a victory for supralapsarianism.

Finally, Fesko shows a lack of interaction with some important secondary scholarship. His most glaring omission is probably the most foundational twentieth-century work on the lapsarian question in Reformed orthodoxy, Klaas Dijk's *De Strijd over Infra- en Supralapsarisma in de Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland* (1912). Dijk claims that the lapsarian debate was not about the order of the divine decrees or the object of predestination, but the issue was whether the Fall was part of the divine decree and whether reprobation was considered as an act of God's sovereignty. Fesko seems to be unaware of Dijk's claim. Like

Dijk, Fesko says the debate was not so much about the order of the decrees, but, contra Dijk, he says that it was about the object of predestination (303-4). However, the order of the decrees and object of predestination are two different ways of referring to the same issue.

Fesko's work should be commended for its attempt to compare the lapsarianism of Calvin and these two important confessional statements. However, because of its tendency to overlook significant nuances and its overall misapplication of supra- and infralapsarianism, we still await a definitive study of the Reformed orthodox lapsarian question.

—Keith D. Stanglin