

Oliver D. Crisp. *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. xi + 260 pp. £22.99/\$34.00.

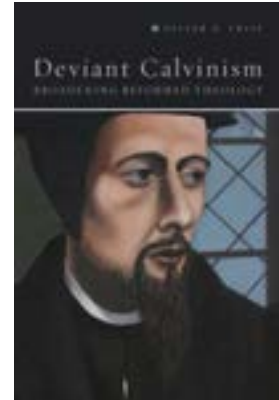
In his most recent contribution, Oliver Crisp, Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, provides a precisely argued, theologically thoughtful, and philosophically rigorous case for the broadening of “what is regarded as appropriately Reformed doctrine” (p. 238). In this “constructive theological project in Reformed theology” (p. 3), Crisp seeks to resource the contemporary church with tools for its “challenges and difficulties. . . about matters vital to the Christian faith in general and the churches of the Reformation in particular” (p. 3).

Chapters 1–3 specifically seek to dispel three widely held myths about Reformed theology, while Chapters 4–8 explore the “scope and nature of salvation” (p. 3), culminating in the reconstitution of (a specific version of) hypothetical universalism.

Using the colloquial term “Calvinism” to refer to the diverse Reformed branch of the Christian church (including Anglicanism), Crisp begins with a chapter on tradition, faith and doctrine. After refuting the myth that Arminians were synergists in their understanding of how faith is acquired, he explains the sources of and hierarchy of authority in Reformed dogmatics. Along with Scripture as the “norming norm” (p. 17) in matters of doctrine, the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions are subordinate authorities that witness to and clarify the truth of Scripture. He appeals to the Reformed confessions as authorities throughout the book.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Crisp seeks to dispel two more Reformed theology myths. In Chapter 2, he demonstrates that the justification-in-history view and the two Reformed versions of the justification-in-eternity view are equally viable options for describing the connection between election and justification. In Chapter 3, Crisp dispels the myth that the Reformed tradition (particularly the Westminster Confession) teaches a “hard determinism” in which God specifically causes every human action (p. 75–79). Beyond that, over and against the typical Reformed assertion of compatibilism (that God causes everything *and* humans freely choose that which is God’s will), Crisp builds the case for a “libertarian Calvinism,” in which God “ordains” (knows in advance and permits) all that comes to pass but allows human freedom of choice in all “mundane” actions that do not directly lead to salvation (p. 87). Crisp perceives his work in Chapters 1–3 as providing ecumenical bridges between Reformed and non-Reformed churches.

In Chapters 4–8, Crisp examines various questions relating to the scope of the atonement, culminating in his demonstration that definite atonement is not the only viable description in the Augustinian tradition. In Chapter 4, Crisp shows that “the central moral and metaphysical intuitions behind Augustinianism are compatible with universalism” (p. 97). In the Augustinian universalist view, God punishes Jesus, thus displaying his justice, while extending mercy to all humanity. However, this universalist possibility leaves the Augustinian with the problem of soteriological evil, namely why a good God would choose to condemn some people (as Scripture seems to indicate) if it were not necessary. In an attempt to rescue Augustinianism from this problem, Crisp sets out in Chapter 5 to rebut Augustinian universalism. In sum, he shows that God is not obliged to create a universalist world in order to act according to his divine nature because creating humans is in itself an act of benevolence



(pp. 148–50). In Chapter 6, Crisp sets out to analyze Karl Barth’s non-analytic teaching on election and the extent of salvation from the perspective of analytic theology, finally providing a helpful construction of the “spirit” of Barth’s account that identifies all humanity as already elect in Christ and yet leaves open the possibility that some may reject that election (pp. 170–73).

Chapter 7 is the constructive climax of the volume. In what he calls a “theological clarification,” Crisp forwards an account of hypothetical universalism (along the lines of English Bishop John Davenant, not Moïse Amyraut) “not to endorse the doctrine but to show that it is a viable theological option for those in the Reformed tradition, which should be taken more seriously than it is in current systematic theology” (p. 183). Crisp describes it this way: “According to the hypothetical universalist, Christ really does die for the sins of the world, in keeping with Scripture. His death is ordained as a conditionally sufficient satisfaction for human sin, that is, the sin of all fallen humanity. Those who have faith are redeemed. Yet God provides this gift to the elect alone” (p. 210). The advantage of this position is that it maintains the clear tension in Scripture that Christ’s salvific work is for the whole world (John 3:16) *and* that God directly elects some to life (Eph. 1:4–5). In contrast, the advocates of definite atonement must explain away the Scripture passages that imply the universal scope of Christ’s redemptive work (pp. 196–97).

Finally, in a postscript to the previous chapter, Crisp rebuts the primary criticism of Universal Atonement, namely the problem of double payment for sins. In short, he argues that even though Christ died for the sins of all, faith is still the condition for appropriating Christ’s work. Those who do not meet that condition are condemned for their lack of faith without an unjust double condemnation of sins.

In order to appreciate Crisp’s contribution, one must recognize his goal and method. This constructive, analytic, and historical work is *not* a work of constructive systematic biblical theology. Instead, using the tools of analytic theology, Crisp argues for the logical and philosophical *possibilities* of various theological concepts, not necessarily advocating for their adoption.

Once one acknowledges the specific goals and methods of the book, the reader can appreciate its various strengths. For one, along with employing his sharp analytical tools, Crisp also calls forward voices from the past through “theological retrieval” (p. 214), gaining insight from the work of Jonathan Edwards, B. B. Warfield, Abraham Kuyper, John Owen, Robert Dabney, and Thomas Aquinas (to name a few). Second, in characteristic fashion, Crisp writes in clear, logical prose illuminated by plain, concrete, and often lighthearted illustrations. Third, Crisp forwards the work of Christ-centered ecumenism as he seeks to free Reformed theology from overly narrow interpretations (p. 240). Although not mentioned by Crisp, this is a Reformed goal that directly follows the example of Calvin, who tirelessly sought unity in the Christian church. Finally, in concert with recent work by Richard Muller and others that has substantiated that the Reformed tradition emerged from a variety of theological voices over a number of years, this volume highlights the fact that the resultant Reformed doctrine is similarly not limited to one narrow set of interpretations.

One addition that would have made the book even stronger would be a more overt explanation of the ecumenical benefits of Crisp’s conclusions. For example it is not immediately apparent why removing the barrier between being justified in/from eternity and being justified in time enables ecumenical common ground. Perhaps some of these ramifications and even further systematic and biblical constructive work will be included in a future piece.

In sum, this work by Crisp provides a clear, timely, and worthwhile addition to Reformed theological scholarship today.

Forrest H. Buckner
University of St Andrews
St Andrews, Scotland, UK

John V. Fesko. *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 411 pp. £18.49/\$28.00.

The seventeenth century stands distant from us—almost another world in many aspects of culture and society. Yet, the theological debates, discussions, and formulations of the English Civil War era remain close at hand for many of us. Whether Presbyterians holding to the Westminster Standards, or Baptists holding to the significantly similar London Baptist Confession or its derivatives, the theology of the Westminster Standards still shapes the faith commitments of denominations, congregations, and individuals around the globe. Undoubtedly, this is in part because these doctrinal declarations closely cohere to the rich truth of God’s enduring Word.

It is for this and other reasons that John Fesko’s *The Theology of the Westminster Standards* provides a substantial contribution to the field of historical theology. At just over four hundred pages, the book goes beyond an evening read, but the effort to read it yields significant fruit. Fesko proves an able guide as he patiently and engagingly unfolds aspects of the contexts surrounding a number of the substantial points of doctrine found in the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms*.

After a brief, interesting, and somewhat eclectic historical survey that carries the reader from the Reformation to the 1640s, Fesko progresses to a thematic approach to the content of the Westminster Standards. Like the Standards themselves, he begins with the doctrine of Scripture. As he does so, it quickly becomes clear his contextual approach is not narrowly restricted to the writings of the members of the Westminster Assembly and their immediate contemporaries. Moving from Ulrich Zwingli and the early Reformation to William Whitaker in the late Reformation era, Fesko further incorporates reference to numerous Reformed confessions along the way as he steps into a discussion of natural and special revelation. He also introduces B. B. Warfield, who serves as a steadily cited companion through the volume.

Any attempt to grapple with the content and historical context of an extensive doctrinal statement leaves the author in the role of deciding with what and what not to engage. Readers ought not expect the author to address everything, and reviewers face a perennial danger of reviewing the book they wished had been written. Yet, considering this volume is entitled *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, developed from the author’s seminary lectures for a course on the same, the omitted areas are surprisingly substantial in relation to the title. The doctrine of the Trinity, including the attributes of God, receives only brief mention even though the *Westminster Confession* devotes an entire chapter to understanding who God is, and though Reformed orthodox theologians engaged substantially with varieties of Socinian or Unitarian thought. The same is true as the reader moves beyond the chapter

