

25) and shows that Torrance was admired more from afar than at home in Scotland. From within, Badcock sees the theology as ‘a story of conflicted relationships and loyalties’ (p. 349). Following an examination of the two main streams of theology identified in Edinburgh and Glasgow, Badcock comments that ‘we may have cause to wonder whether there ever was such a great gulf fixed between the theologies of Glasgow and Edinburgh [...]’. For the leading representatives of both schools shared not only much the same education and experience, and assumed terms of debate provided by relatively limited theological movements of the twentieth century, but the two sides shared many of the same objectives’ (p. 353). However, Badcock does identify one dissident voice: John McIntyre. From McIntyre he draws the point that much theology in McIntyre’s lifetime was preoccupied with a set of questions already proven to be dead ends. Badcock ends suggesting the need to ponder McIntyre’s ‘diagnosis of the theological situation’ and ask whether it could ‘be in great measure the fault of the dominant theology of the later twentieth century that the Church has proven so ineffectual in proclaiming the Gospel in recent decades’ (p. 357).

There are many excellent chapters contained within this volume and choosing which to focus on was a difficult task. The work deserves closer attention and study from all who are interested in the history of Scottish theology. I expect that this three-volume work will become a standard reference for many years to come, and inspire students with the breadth of issues they can pursue within the history of Scottish theology. I happily commend this work.

Philip D. Foster,
University of Edinburgh
<https://doi.org/10.15664/tis.v27i2.2141>



Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions: Tracing the Development of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2019), pp. xi + 396, ISBN 978-0801098161. £22.99

This well-researched introduction to the history of the Christian faith takes a novel approach. Rather than simply providing the reader with a



chronological list of dates and names (though there are plenty of dates and names, to be sure!), Donald Fairbairn and Ryan Reeves focus on the theological development found in Christian creedal and confessional documents as a method for plotting the winding path of Christianity throughout history. Indeed, as the subtitle suggests, this is not truly a history of the Christian church, but a history of the Christian *faith*, traced in all its beauty and complexity from the primitive creedal statements in the pages of the New Testament to the modern confessions of the late twentieth century.

After an introductory chapter, the book progresses through five major units, the first two of which were written by Fairbairn and the latter three by Reeves. In Part 1, Fairbairn traces the development of the Christian faith in the patristic era through careful comparison of the various creedal statements, beginning with the baptismal creeds of the second and third centuries (such as the Old Roman Creed) and continuing up to the Definition of Chalcedon in 451. In Part 2, Fairbairn explores the divergent paths taken by Eastern and Western Christianity in the early medieval period. In a programmatic statement, he asserts, 'From 500 to 900, as the East was consolidating the heritage of Nicaea and Chalcedon by going deeper into Christology, the West was consolidating the heritage of Augustine's thought' (p. 161). In Part 3, Reeves posits a shift in the later mediaeval era (900–1500) away from 'creeds' (short expressions of the universal faith with a Trinitarian structure used in liturgical contexts) to 'confessions' (detailed explanations of the universal faith written by and for specific communities within the broader church which outline specific doctrinal commitments). He observes that the Roman Catholic Church made a number of confessional statements with regard to the sacraments and papal authority and explores how these statements set the stage for the Reformation. In Part 4, Reeves continues this trajectory by examining the major confessional documents of the various groups of Reformers (Lutheran, Reformed, and the Radical Reformation) and the confessional response by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent. Part 5 rounds out the book as Reeves considers various confessional developments between the close of the Reformation and the twentieth century. He especially focuses on the American context but also provides brief analyses of the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar Confession.

There are a number of admirable qualities in this treatment of the creeds and confessions. First, Fairbairn and Reeves employ a wide variety



Reviews

of primary sources (both the text of the creeds themselves as well as the works of early church fathers and theologians throughout history) in addition to standard secondary works. The footnotes will prove useful for intrigued readers. This is especially important since Reeves and Fairbairn explore several topics not often treated in Protestant church history textbooks, such as the creedal developments of the final three ecumenical councils and the splits over creedal language among the Eastern church, the Church of the East, and the Oriental Orthodox Church. The authors incorporate an impressive amount of material into this book, and, in so doing, they expand the historical horizons of their readers.

Second, Fairbairn and Reeves do a masterful job of situating the creeds and confessions in their historical time and place. They weave together accounts of imperial politics, societal fracturing and upheaval, and theological controversy to produce an engaging storyline from which the various creedal formulations arise organically. Unlike some works of history, this is not a dry read.

Third, this work displays a commendable emphasis on the fundamental unity of the various branches of Christianity. As they conclude, the authors sound a cautious note of optimism: ‘without obscuring the failures of theologians, we have sought in our story to emphasize the common heritage that we share—the creeds first, and then the confessions that have shaped our various Christian traditions’ (p. 386). By demonstrating the historical continuity of creedal and confessional development, Fairbairn and Reeves enable readers to trace their own theological tradition back to its creedal roots, whether one categorizes oneself as charismatic (p. 369) or Scottish Presbyterian (p. 353). This common creedal foundation forms the core of Christian identity.

However, there are also some unfortunate aspects to this book as well. First, the dual authorship of the book is evident in a myriad of examples. Some information is repeated unnecessarily (e.g., in a footnote on p. 321, Reeves summarises the Donatist controversy, even though it had been addressed in detail by Fairbairn on pp. 166–67). Stylistically, Fairbairn and Reeves write quite differently, and Fairbairn is prone to pastoral or apologetic digressions when encountering events that are problematic for Protestants (for example, see the bottom of p. 36). Such digressions can have a legitimate place in the classroom, but they seem out of place in a monograph. This is especially egregious in the introductory chapter; at



Reviews

times the prose is painfully informal, exhibiting a conversational style and only a loose logical structure.

This mix of academic prose and informal style raises another issue: for whom precisely is this book written? Pastors? Laypeople interested in church history? The length, repeated references to primary source material, and detailed discussions would suggest the book is intended for a more academic audience. Since both the authors are professors at a seminary, one could presume it is intended to be a text for students, but surprisingly the question of audience does not appear to be addressed in the book.

A third quibble has to do with the authors' (in particular, Reeves's) understanding of the 'third use of the law' in the Lutheran Formula of Concord (namely, that God's law acts as a guide for obedient living post-conversion). According to Reeves, the Formula of Concord is self-contradictory on this point; it first advocates and then rejects the usefulness of God's law in the lives of Christians (see p. 335 for his discussion). This is a surprisingly poor reading of 'Chapter VI: The Third Use of the Law' in the Formula of Concord. I would suggest that Reeves's misunderstanding comes from taking individual phrases out of their larger context.

Finally, there are several minor issues with the presentation of material. A number of the illustrations are distracting (for example, the poor-quality picture of an open Bible on p. 3 and the perspectively-awkward bust of Maxentius on p. 40) or unnecessary (a floor-plan of the monastery of Lérins on p. 129 is irrelevant to the surrounding discussion). Further, the map on p. 177 is factually incorrect, labelling modern-day Bulgaria as the ancient province of Illyricum, even though ancient Illyricum was on the western side of the Balkan peninsula.

These quibbles notwithstanding, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions* is a solid, readable, and engaging introduction to the history of the Christian faith. The authors know their material well. The story they narrate is compelling and clear, concluding on an inspiring note of increasing Christian unity on a consciously creedal foundation.

Benjamin Castaneda,

PhD candidate, University of St Andrews
<https://doi.org/10.15664/tis.v27i2.2142>

