



1 ■ Introduction

I'm a plain simple Christian.

Motto on a T-shirt

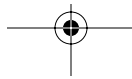
One cannot be a "Christian in general." Christians are earthed saints.

Alan P. F. Sell, in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*

When I was about ten years old, I had a very brief conversation with my mother that turned out to be far more significant than either of us could have imagined. After playing with some neighborhood friends, I came home and told her that Danny was Roman Catholic, Chuck was Methodist, and Larry was Presbyterian. Then I asked, "What are we?" My mother paused, thought a bit, and said, "Well, I guess we're just Christians."

I have recalled this exchange many times over the years, and I have come to view my mother's response as beautiful and exemplary. In her own mind and heart, my mother was "simply" a Christian. Her theology was uncomplicated, and her faith was simple. She trusted in Jesus as Savior and was guided by a desire to live a life that honored him. Furthermore, my parents, who were charter members of a denominational Protestant congregation, never spoke in a disparaging way about another Christian tradition. This is the beauty of my mother's response. Without arrogance or uncharitable criticism of Christians who differed from us in certain matters of doctrine, worship, polity or lifestyle, she articulated something of the identity that all followers of Jesus Christ have and must claim: we are, first and foremost, *Christians*.

By the time I reached my twenties, however, I found the viewpoint summarized in my mother's response less than satisfying, less than adequate. In the years since that early exchange, I continued, by God's grace, in the Christian faith and, by my own choice, in the denominational tradition of my childhood home. I also had the opportunity to study the history of Christianity and to have substantive interactions with Christians from a variety of traditions. Among the phenomena I observed was that some groups of Christians, both past and present, have tried to occupy an ecclesiastical or spiritual high ground, claiming



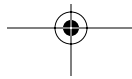


to be—unlike other churches—nothing other than the descendants of Jesus Christ and “the New Testament church.” Over the course of time, however, it repeatedly has become clear that each of these groups is the same as all other Christian groups in a fundamental way: they are a tradition of like-minded Christians, not necessarily any more or any less authentically Christian than any other tradition. They seek to follow Jesus, to believe and obey the Bible, and to be a genuine expression of the church. Furthermore, Christians—including, of course, Protestants—have historically believed and worshiped in the context of specific ecclesio-theological traditions, and my mother’s response had left me without any idea as to where we fit, where we belonged.¹ I was confident that I was a Christian, but had little, if any, idea where I was located in the landscape of the diverse expressions of Christianity. Increasingly, this troubled me. As Susan Felch notes, “One does not simply live in tradition abstractly considered but within specific traditions, among distinctive voices, entangled in concrete ways of talking, acting, and being in the world.”²

I was also troubled by questions of Christian tradition and identity shortly after I began to teach theology. Two episodes will serve to illustrate. In one instance, a student from a Wesleyan-Holiness tradition expressed curiosity about Dispensational theology. She had some contact with Dispensational teachings on “the end times,” and over the years she had several friends who belonged to independent Bible churches that nurtured them in Dispensational theology. I loaned her a copy of Charles Ryrie’s book *Dispensationalism Today* and suggested that she read it as an example of Dispensational thought. The next week, when the student returned the book, she stated with considerable relief and surprise, “They aren’t heretics after all. They’re very serious about studying and following the Bible.” As the chapter below on Dispensationalism will show, it is an understatement to say that Dispensationalists are very serious about studying and following the Bible, and whatever disagreements one may have with Dispensational theology, it is not heretical.

In another instance, a Mennonite student indicated that he was interested in doing some reading in Calvinist theology. So, with the qualifying observation that not all Calvinists agree with everything John Calvin wrote, I gave the student the first volume of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and identified selected portions to read. Several weeks later the student said, almost in a confessional tone, “I haven’t ‘converted,’ but I sure enjoyed reading this.” He went on to tell me that he had obtained his own copy of the *Institutes* and was reading it in conjunction with his daily devotions.

With such eager and interested students, what troubled me? Obviously, it was not their curiosity or their readiness to study for better understanding. Rather,



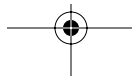
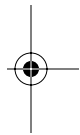
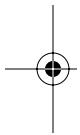


what was troubling were the sincere yet uninformed stereotypes and postures of criticism—and fear—that these and other students held prior to their modest investigations into primary sources. This was troubling because I had enough experience in “the Christian world” to know that such ignorance of and apprehension toward traditions outside one’s own are far too common. Most Christians have a rather restricted view of the rich and diverse landscape of Christianity. Protestants’ posture toward Roman Catholicism often is based on second-hand stories or on someone’s rather extreme reaction against the experience of having been raised in a Roman Catholic home. Similarly, despite the fact that Eastern Orthodoxy has made significant inroads into North America in recent decades, Orthodoxy is by and large still a mystery to most North American Protestants, often being viewed as a more exotic version of Roman Catholicism. Many Protestants would do well to acquaint themselves, firsthand, with the liturgical, devotional and theological resources of these Christian traditions. If the reader does not already have a firsthand acquaintance with Roman Catholic Christianity and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, some well-chosen reading³ and, more important, several visits to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches undertaken in conversation with the clergy of these churches will more than reward the time and energy invested.

At the same time, there is also the need for many, perhaps most, Protestants to acquaint themselves with even nearer neighbors: other Protestants. Many Mennonites and other Anabaptists do not understand why anyone, such as Anglicans or Episcopalians, would, in the name of Christ, baptize infants. Many Lutherans are puzzled how anyone, such as Wesleyans, can preach salvation by grace alone and at the same time call upon people to constantly work toward greater personal holiness. Many Dispensationalists cannot comprehend how anyone, such as Reformed Christians, can take promises and practices given to God’s Old Testament people and directly apply them, perhaps in a spiritualized form, to today’s New Covenant church. Many Baptists are troubled when some Christians, such as Pentecostals, so assertively pray to God in expectation of quick and miraculous healing of a physical illness. In these and dozens of other ways, Protestants simply do not know, understand or learn potentially valuable lessons from one another. This book seeks to address in some small measure this lack of knowledge, understanding and appreciation.

Eight Traditions

The chapters that follow introduce eight traditions of Protestant theology that have provided orienting landmarks on the Protestant Christian landscape for the better part of the past five centuries: Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed, Anglican,

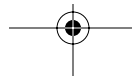
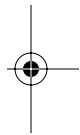




Baptist, Wesleyan, Dispensational and Pentecostal. These eight traditions will be presented in this order, which approximates the chronological sequence of the historical emergence of these movements as distinct traditions.⁴ This list is not to be regarded as exhaustive. There are Protestant churches and denominations that would not explicitly identify with any one of these theological traditions. However, most major Protestant ecclesiastical and theological traditions are linked, either directly or indirectly, to one or more of these traditions.

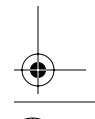
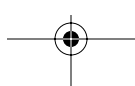
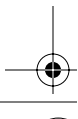
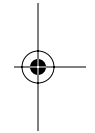
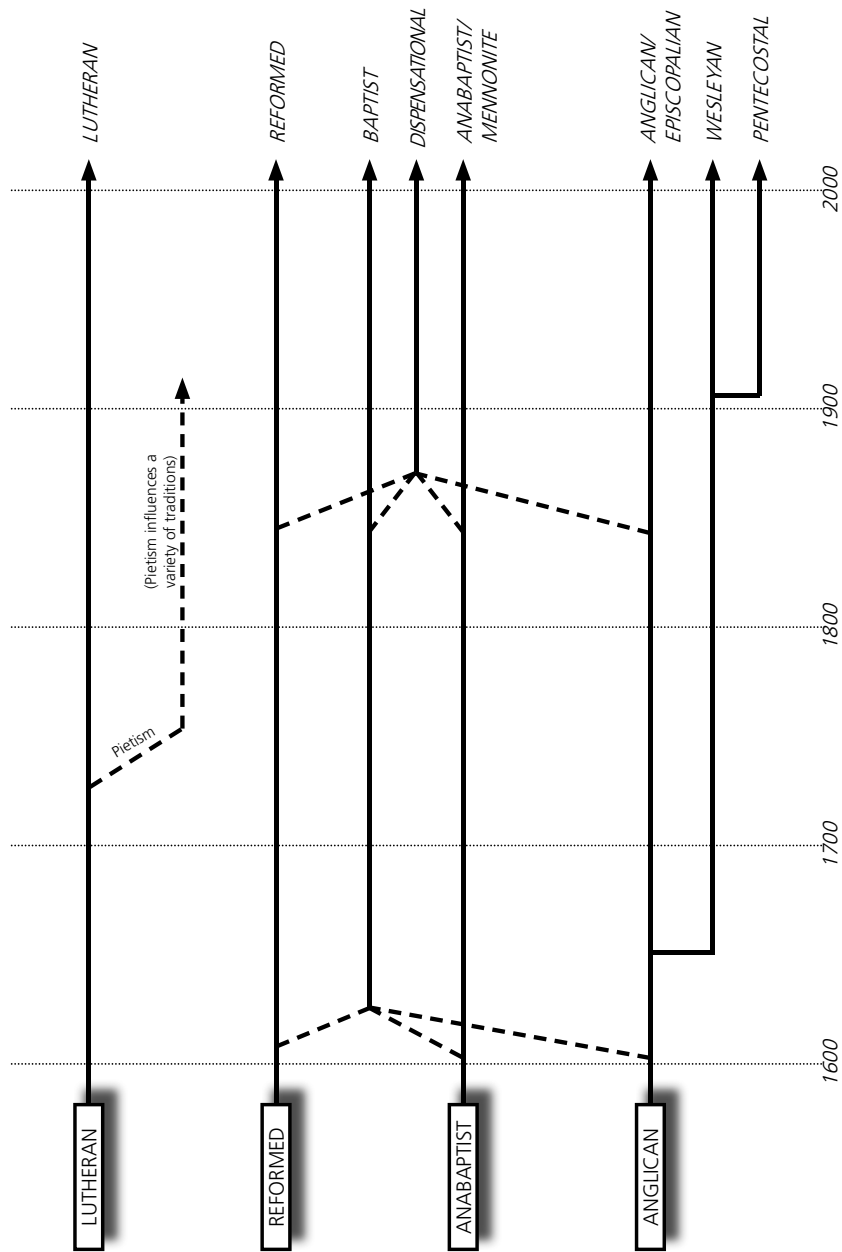
Some of the traditions examined here are related historically in their origins, with one emerging from another. These would include, for example, the Wesleyan tradition in England emerging from the Anglican Church, or the Pentecostal tradition in North America emerging, both directly and indirectly, from the Wesleyan. Other traditions considered here, such as the Anabaptist and Dispensational, have no substantive historical relation with respect to their origins. Christians in some of these traditions prefer not to be described as “Protestant,” because the term connotes to them principles or historical events with which they do not want to be associated. For example, the persecution of early Anabaptists by “Reformed” Christians contributes to many Anabaptists’ hesitancy to be associated with “Protestantism,” and the nearly four centuries of what Pentecostals regard as the failure of Protestants to fully embrace the person and work of the Holy Spirit leads some Pentecostals to view themselves as standing outside of Protestantism. Nonetheless, each of these traditions traces its origins either directly (Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed, Anglican) or indirectly (Baptist, Wesleyan, Dispensational, Pentecostal) to the European reform movements outside of the Roman Catholic Church in the early-to-middle sixteenth century.

There is considerable theological diversity not only among the traditions presented here but also within each of them. In most, if not all, cases, diversity was evident in the early stages of the tradition. For example, by the middle of the sixteenth century, three major groups were seeking to lead the Lutheran movement: the Gnesio-Lutherans, who sought to preserve the integrity of Martin Luther’s teachings; the Philippists, who advanced the more conciliatory views of Philipp Melancthon; and a third, moderating group led by Martin Chemnitz. Similarly, three subtraditions emerged early in the development of the Baptist tradition, and each of these is still manifest today: Particular Baptists are Calvinistic in their theological orientation, General Baptists are Arminian in orientation, and Seventh-Day Baptists continue to observe Saturday as the sabbath. This kind of diversity is found in both the history and the present expressions of each of the traditions presented in this book. In some cases, the diversification that has developed in recent decades has been so great that there is increas-





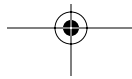
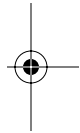
STREAMS OF PROTESTANT TRADITIONS

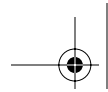




ing discussion of “identity” and even of “identity crises” in publications with titles such as *Anabaptist-Mennonite Identities in Ferment*, “Debating Reformed Identity,” “The Rise and Fall of the Thirty-Nine Articles: An Inquiry into the Identity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States,” and “Conflict and Identity in the Southern Baptist Convention: The Quest for a New Consensus.”⁵ As will be observed in the chapters that follow, the development of diversity within each tradition is part of the story of the traditions.

At the same time, continuities and commonalities abide amidst the diversity, and the handing-on of these continuities and commonalities from one generation of Christians to the next has constituted various traditions. Even the discussion of diversity itself takes place among people and within publications that bear descriptors such as “Lutheran,” “Mennonite,” “Reformed,” or “Baptist.”⁶ *Tradition* in its most fundamental sense refers to the handing-on of beliefs or practices from one generation to the next. *Christian tradition* simply refers to the handing-on of beliefs with respect to God in Christ and practices associated with life in Christ, both individual and corporate. Thus, in at least a minimal sense, any group of people, ecclesiastical organization or set of beliefs that endures more than one generation constitutes a tradition. The traditions considered in this book have helped to sustain millions of Christians through many generations, and they continue to do so today. Each tradition has provided context and community, guidance and grace. Furthermore, theology at its best is closely related to the life of the church and its churches, and each of the *theological* traditions considered here has been closely related to the life of specific *ecclesiastical* traditions. Many theological schools of thought that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries emerged from the halls of the academy. However, most of the theological traditions considered here arose in conjunction with the emergence of specific ecclesiastical traditions, and these theological traditions subsequently nourished and guided these ecclesiastical traditions. To be sure, sometimes denominations merge or form new subtraditions. And, there are examples, such as the United Church of Canada, of churches of differing traditions entering into ecclesiastical unity. Yet, by and large, the theological traditions discussed here have helped to sustain, and have themselves flourished in conjunction with, specific ecclesiastical traditions.⁷ For example, Reformed theology is one of the historically defining components of Presbyterian and Reformed churches, while Wesleyan theology has provided the framework for Wesleyan and most Methodist churches. Baptist churches are the ones that have most consistently taught and embodied distinctively Baptist theology, while Mennonite, Brethren and related groups are the ones that have continued to develop theology in the Anabaptist spirit. Though most, if not all, of the theo-





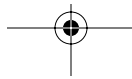
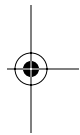
logical traditions considered here emerged in a context of reaction against or separation from an existing church, each of these theological traditions has nonetheless drawn life from and contributed to the life of specific churches.

A word is in order about one of the traditions included here that may be completely foreign to some readers. Historically speaking, Dispensationalism is relatively young, and dispensational theology has not been a prominent school of thought in what can be regarded as “mainstream” academic and ecclesiastical circles. Personally, I do not subscribe to Dispensational theology. And, although my appreciation for the tradition is enhanced by a familial connection to it (as I will note below), this indirect lineage does not explain the inclusion of Dispensationalism in this book. It is included because any book that seeks to survey, without undue prejudice, major Protestant theological traditions with particular attention to North America would be incomplete without it. Dispensationalism entails a comprehensive and integrative approach to interpreting the Bible. It is informed throughout by attention to the relationship between Israel and the church, and thus also the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. As an identifiable theological tradition, it is older than the youngest tradition considered here—Pentecostalism—and the full-scale assessment of its influence has yet to be adequately calculated.⁸ Although Dispensational theology has not been predominant in certain corridors of power, through scores of Bible institutes, Bible churches, independent churches, media broadcasts, study Bibles, popular books and several seminaries, it has been, and continues to be, a widespread, distinctive and influential tradition of Protestant theology. In short, for the purposes of this book, Dispensationalism should not be left behind.

Structure of the Chapters

This book explores eight traditions of Protestant theology by considering each one under three headings—historical, methodological and doctrinal. First, the historical story is told, describing the origins and development of the tradition. Where did it come from? Who were the people that began the tradition? What were the events and beliefs that help explain why and how it came into existence? Once established, how was it handed on from one generation to the next? As it was handed on, what type of unity and diversity developed within the tradition, and what have been its most prominent ecclesiastical homes?

Second, having observed where the tradition has come from, we examine the approach to theology taken within the tradition. How important is formal theological reflection, and what role does theology play? What are the sources of authority for theology, and how are these sources viewed and used in relation

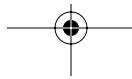


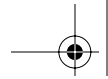


to one another? What are the principles and practices that are employed in reading and interpreting the Bible?

Third, against this historical and methodological backdrop we examine the theological beliefs that flow from the particular history and the particular method. What are some of the defining theological beliefs of the tradition? How does a consideration of two illustrative doctrines illuminate the distinctive character of the tradition? A comprehensive description of all of the fundamental tenets of each tradition is not possible here. Rather, we focus on two doctrines within each tradition that illustrate the distinctive character or emphases of the tradition. In some cases, the doctrine is unique to the tradition, such as the Pentecostal belief that speaking in tongues is the initial sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit, and that this baptism is normative for the life of all Christians. In other cases, such as the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrine is not unique to the tradition, but it is formulated and emphasized in such a way that one cannot fully understand or appreciate the tradition without understanding its distinctive approach to this doctrine. Thus, *illustrative* and *distinctive* do not necessarily refer here to beliefs held exclusively, or virtually so, by one tradition alone; rather, they suggest beliefs that are formulated in a distinctive way and beliefs without which one cannot understand or appreciate the particular tradition being considered. While this approach highlights distinctive theological beliefs, it is pursued in the context of a firm commitment to the unity of the church. Indeed, as will be advanced later in this introduction and more fully in the concluding chapter, a proper understanding of and appreciation for this type of diversity is a necessary part of a greater realization of Christian unity.

Clarification is also in order with regard to the theological resources that are in focus here. Theologians of many persuasions recognize that there are multiple levels of theology. For example, Clodovis Boff, a South American liberation theologian, identifies “professional,” “pastoral” and “popular” liberation theologies.⁹ Similarly, North American theologians Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson delineate a spectrum of five levels of theology, from “folk” through “lay,” “ministerial,” and “professional” to “academic.”¹⁰ And these theologians rightly affirm the respective value and contribution of each level. The nature and scope of this book are such that, for the most part, the descriptions of theologies reflect what would be regarded as professional theology and, to a lesser degree, ministerial or pastoral theology. Comprehensive systematic theologies, books and articles on discrete theological topics, and doctrinal statements of various sorts weigh heavily among the sources cited in the notes.¹¹ Such documents usually are the work of theological scholars, educators or pastoral ministry professionals. Historians and theologians also recognize that until relatively recently in the history

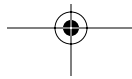


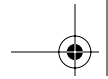


of Christianity, women and persons of color in North America were by and large deprived of the specialized formal education and the professional opportunities ordinarily needed to write and publish these kinds of theological works.¹² “We must admit,” writes Anthony Carter, “that American theology has lacked cultural or racial diversity and has been the poorer for it.”¹³ This should be borne in mind as the theologies presented here are described and assessed.

Furthermore, the historical and theological descriptions of the traditions explored here give particular attention to the early history and the eventual North American expressions of these traditions.¹⁴ Each of the traditions has a rich history, the most recent of which (the history of Pentecostalism) extends for over one hundred years. These histories brim with interesting people, events, movements and ideas—and these are only the ones that historians have recovered to date. Thus, the development and dissemination of a tradition is best understood in conjunction with a comprehensive and contextually informed history of the tradition. For example, some knowledge of the violent Russian revolution in the first quarter of the twentieth century combined with an understanding of the historically agrarian character of the Mennonite movement can shed light on why and how Mennonite colonies came to be established in Argentina. More comprehensive history such as this is beyond the scope of this book. Additionally, as also suggested by this Mennonite example, each of the traditions explored here has been carried to many places around the world. Some Christians are surprised to find that there are Anglicans in Singapore, or large Baptist churches in Russia, or the aforementioned Mennonite communities in Argentina. Yet the fact is that each of the traditions represented in this book is found on every continent, and in an increasing number of cases denominations within these traditions are now numerically larger outside the Euro-American arena. Although the historical and theological surveys in the chapters here can be neither geographically nor chronologically comprehensive, the tradition-specific bibliography at the end of each chapter directs the reader to resources that can help with a more historically and geographically comprehensive introduction.

Finally, we should note the rationale for the particular threefold structure employed here. This structure—history, method, theology—is employed not only because it offers a representative description of each tradition, but also because it serves to highlight a coherence that exists within traditions. Once one knows about (1) the historical origins and development of a tradition and (2) the role and method of theology in that tradition, then (3) characteristic theological beliefs of the tradition often make perfect sense. By “make perfect sense” I do not mean to suggest that the validity or truthfulness of the theological beliefs is logically proven, but rather that whether or not one agrees with a tradition, one





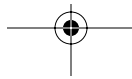
can readily understand how and why someone within a particular tradition can hold beliefs and engage in practices that might seem strange or wrong to those outside that tradition. The theological beliefs that characterize a tradition are conclusions that one could readily expect, given the particular historical background and methodological approach of the tradition. This is not to suggest some kind of theological determinism whereby any particular group of Christians, given their history and method, have no choice but to believe as they do. It is, however, to suggest that there is an internal coherence in the traditions presented here—an existential or phenomenological coherence. This combination of historical development, theological method and characteristic beliefs goes a long way toward elucidating the content and character of Christian traditions.

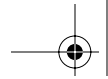
“Classical” Traditions of Theology

As we have noted, each tradition is marked by both unity and diversity. The unity, consisting in commonalities shared in historical continuity, is what primarily gives identity to the tradition. The diversity, usually consisting in either long-held differences or diversifying developmental changes, can pose a challenge—sometimes real, sometimes only perceived—to that identity. This *combination of both unity and diversity* is one of the characteristics that distinguish genuinely Christian traditions from cultic distortions of Christianity. One of the marks of a cult is enforced conformity and lack of diversity; one of the marks of authentic Christianity is genuine diversity (see 1 Cor 12:4-26). Recognition of this diversity informs the chapters that follow. The story of the history of each tradition, told in the first section of each chapter, reflects some of the diversities that have developed within each tradition. In noting this diversity there is a recognition that, for example, Reformed Christians do not agree on everything, nor do Dispensationalists. And the same must be said for each of the traditions. This past and present diversity serves as a caution against making generalized statements that, for example, all Wesleyans or all Pentecostals hold to a particular belief.

At the same time, there is unity within the traditions such that they do exist as identifiable schools of Christian belief. There are denominations, churches, organizations and publications that bear descriptors in their names such as “Lutheran” or “Reformed” or “Anglican.” There are commonalities and continuities that can be identified, and these are most readily observable in what can be referred to as “classical” expressions of the traditions. These classical expressions will be in focus in the second and third sections of each chapter, dealing with the approach to theology and characteristic doctrines.

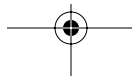
Patrick Henry rightly cautions that the designation “classical” can become a synonym for “what I like best.”¹⁵ Harold T. Lewis, an African American writing

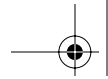




from within the Anglican tradition, asks, “Who determines . . . what should be classified as a Christian classic? If the sermons of Donne and Andrews, why not the sermons of Absalom Jones or George Freeman Bragg? If the writings of Calvin, why not the writings of Martin Luther King?”¹⁶ There is a tendency for one’s personal preferences or biases to dictate what one recognizes as a standard. Furthermore, no clear scholarly consensus exists as to what the terms “classic” and “classical” mean with respect to theology. Consequently, it will be helpful here to make explicit the understanding of “classical” that guided the selection of material for inclusion in the sections on the approach to theology and characteristic doctrines of the traditions.

First, classical expressions of theological traditions are characterized by a continuity that extends back to the origins and early expressions of the tradition. Just as all traditions are marked by a combination of unity and diversity, so too the historical path of all traditions consists of a combination of continuity and change. Change is an inevitable part of the church’s earthly existence, and over the course of time theological traditions change. Classical theological traditions are not static. They undergo change. Complex theological constructions are elaborated and informed by new contexts, challenges and ideas. At the same time, a classical expression of a theological tradition also will be marked by significant continuity.¹⁷ This is inherent in the notion of tradition—a handing-on from one to another. And, continuity is also inherent in the notion of the classical. It refers to something that has been held in high regard by many people over an extended period of time.¹⁸ Thus, in combination with change, there is a substantial sameness, a substantial constancy. There is continuity. This does not mean that consistent or unbroken historical development always exists, but whenever and wherever classical theological expressions occur, they are recognizably related to a defining theological tradition of the past. This continuity extends back to the earliest expressions of the tradition as identified by those who stand within the tradition. A tradition per se is as old as its earliest proponents—it is neither older nor younger. Continuity with “the founders” of a tradition, as identified by those who stand within it, does not constitute a proof of the truthfulness of the tradition’s beliefs, but it does constitute a key component of identity. If one claims certain persons, events, documents or ideas as marking the beginning of a tradition, then a classical expression of that tradition will bear a substantial resemblance to those persons, events, documents or ideas. It would be rather odd for a theological belief that categorically contradicts defining beliefs of, for example, Luther and Melancthon to be described as embodying classical Lutheran theology, or for a school of thought that overturns John Wesley’s foundational teachings regarding the Christian life to be referred to as an





example of classical Wesleyan theology. Classical expressions of theological traditions are identified with the early expressions that have proved over time to be formative and, to varying degrees, determinative for that tradition.

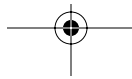
Second, the continuity in classical expressions of theological traditions is primarily one of substance, and secondarily one of aim and form. Marva Dawn suggests, “The faith always needs to be rethought in each age and modified in some particulars, but not in essence.”¹⁹ Some scholars suggest that continuity and change in Christian thought should be analyzed in terms of the degree to which change or development is congruent with the “aim” or “goal” of an earlier set of beliefs.²⁰ By this criterion, the substance of belief (*what* is believed) can change as long as the guiding intent of the belief (*how* and/or *why* it is believed) is congruent with the intent of the earlier belief. However, the understanding of theological continuity that informs the chapters that follow has to do with the substance of what is believed. Thus, from the perspective of the contemporary classical expression of the tradition, fundamental theological beliefs that characterized the early expressions of the tradition are substantially, abidingly true. They are not of “mere” historical interest. The substance of what was believed significantly corresponds to what is believed today, and vice versa.²¹

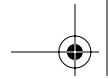
Third, classical expressions of theological traditions may articulate what is currently “a minority view.”²² Classical theological traditions are not constituted by a contemporary majority vote. In the historical development of a tradition it is possible that a classical expression may have occupied “minority” status within the tradition. As indicated above, “classical” as used here refers to a continuity of substance going back to the earliest manifestations of the tradition. Such a view may or may not be the “majority” position today.

In accord with this working understanding of the term *classical*, the descriptions and analyses that follow are contemporary, although no attempt is made here to describe all of the changes or to analyze all of the exploratory proposals being considered in each tradition. Certainly, significant changes have been and are being explored in the traditions, as indicated by the “identity crises” noted above. However, the fact that such changes are being talked about in this way is itself indicative of the fact that there *are* identities to be challenged. The histories and approaches to theology recounted here continue to shape today the traditions to which they belong. The doctrinal beliefs described here continue to constitute within each tradition, at the least, reference points for interacting with and assessing new proposals and developments within each tradition.

Purpose and Agenda

This book is intended to help people who do not identify themselves as Chris-

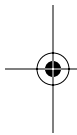


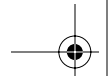


tians to better understand Christianity through studying major theological traditions within one of Christianity's main streams—Protestantism. It is also intended to help Christians better understand and appreciate the theological and ecclesiastical traditions through which many other Christians pursue life in Christ. Such understanding and appreciation strengthens the church. This strengthening need not be equated with “converting” to one of the traditions described here, nor does it come about through well-intended but misguided attempts to ignore or do away with multiple and diverse traditions. Rather, the body of Christ is strengthened through increased mutual learning, charity and cooperation among Christians. It is strengthened through continuing to develop a more complete apprehension of the truth through learning the truth set forth in other traditions. These virtues can be substantially increased through better understanding and appreciation of traditions different from one's own. (And, whether recognized or not, each Christian *does* stand within some tradition.) Thus, the following chapters are primarily descriptive and affirmative rather than polemical or defensive. They are an exercise in theological hospitality.²³

I have made every attempt to present the history, theological method and selected beliefs of the traditions in a way that accurately represents them as understood by people who stand within these traditions. With only a few exceptions, the sources cited here are primary sources—that is, sources written by people who stand within the tradition being considered. No attempt is made either to present critiques of a tradition by those who stand outside that tradition or to anticipate and respond to such external critiques on behalf of a tradition. Rather, each tradition is presented in such a way that it might stand on its own before the reader. Of course, reading alone does not fully introduce one to a religious or theological tradition, and readers are encouraged to follow up reading this book by personally engaging with people and churches that stand within the traditions considered here.

In light of this agenda and the spirit of theological hospitality it encourages, it is fair and fitting for me to identify at the outset my own theological location. The church in which I had the privilege of being nurtured from the cradle through my twenties, a congregation of the Evangelical Free Church of America, was one of those that did not explicitly claim identification with any particular theological tradition, claiming, rather, to be a church “for all believers, but believers only.” In conjunction with a teaching appointment following graduate school, my wife and I fellowshipped and served for ten years in the context of a denomination that shares some ecclesiastical affinities with Presbyterianism and some theological affinities with Charismatic and Holiness traditions: the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Throughout this sojourn, including my formal ed-





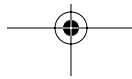
ucation, I have always been appreciative of and drawn to the Reformed tradition, and for some years now we have been members of congregations in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. We are thankful for and deeply appreciative of our church home.

To the Reader

Some readers come to this book possessing a clear sense of identification with a particular Christian tradition, whether or not it is among the traditions considered here. I hope that these readers will be both deepened in their commitment to their own tradition through a comparison with other traditions and enriched in their faith through an increased understanding of and appreciation for other traditions. Other readers do not come with this clear sense of identification. Increasingly, Protestant Christians in North America do not have a clear or strong sense of identification with a particular Christian tradition, and many are quite cynical about the very notion of “tradition” or identifying with a particular ecclesiastical heritage.²⁴ I hope that these readers will both cultivate an increased appreciation for the potential value of “tradition” and be deepened and enriched in Christian faith by the diversity of beliefs and practices represented in the traditions discussed here. (Perhaps some of these readers will even take particular interest in and further explore one of these traditions.) Thus, all readers are encouraged to look for lessons that might be learned from these traditions with respect to Christian faith and life.

Some of these lessons will involve dissent, while others will take the form of assent. Lessons of dissent reflect the spirit of George Santayana’s well-worn, yet nonetheless wise, adage that those who are ignorant of history are doomed to repeat it. Thoughtful study can clarify through leading one to identify beliefs and practices that one will *not* accept, and each reader will find in the chapters that follow beliefs and practices that they do not accept. Thus, it is important to ask questions such as, “What beliefs or practices in this tradition are erroneous and, if embraced, harmful?” At the same time, there are affirmative lessons to be learned. This follows the way of the humble recognition that all traditions of Christianity contain an admixture of truth and error, of wisdom and weakness. The fact that one’s own theology or tradition contains some error and weakness means that each of us has room to grow, gaps to fill and lessons of assent to learn. And, the fact that other traditions contain some truth and wisdom means that potentially we can grow, fill gaps and learn constructive lessons from them. Thus, in studying other traditions, one should also ask, “What beliefs or practices are true and, if embraced, would enrich Christian faith and life?”

Each tradition bears the potential for both types of lessons—lessons of dis-





sent and lessons of assent. Both types of questions should be asked of each tradition. Without denying the need to stay critically alert for lessons of dissent, I encourage all readers to be humbly receptive to lessons of assent. (In the epilogue I describe some of the lessons I have learned, lessons of both dissent and assent.) Each of the traditions presented here has made and is making enriching contributions to the body of Christ, to the lives of individual Christians and the lives of Christian communities. Resources that contribute to the enrichment of all Christians can be found in each tradition.

Most of the creeds and confessions cited in the chapters that follow are available from multiple sources, both hardcopy and online digital. For each citation here, reference is made to a standard hardcopy source. Some of these sources are books published by or under the auspices of ecclesiastical denominations. When such a source is not used, reference is made to a readily available collection of creeds and confessions, J. Gordon Melton, ed., *The Encyclopedia of American Religions: Religious Creeds*, 2 vols. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1988-1994). References to articles or sections of confessional documents guide the reader regardless of the particular form in which a document is consulted; references to page numbers direct the reader in the specific hardcopy source cited.

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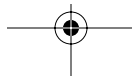
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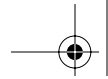
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