

Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran  
and Reformed Theology in Conversation by  
Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman.

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 ***Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed  
Theology in Conversation* by Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman  
(review)**

Meg H. Madson

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

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*Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation.* By Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 250 pp.

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Seminary students are confused—so say two Reformation scholars, one Lutheran, the other Reformed. The Reformation was long ago and far away. Why not join the modern Evangelical movement? Why be confessional today? Moreover, while Lutheran and Reformed traditions are rooted in the same reforming movement of the sixteenth century, they are different. Students are confused. What do they share, and how are they different from their Reformation cousins? Inquiring minds want to know.

These questions were the impetus for Lutheran Robert Kolb (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), and Reformed Carl R. Trueman (Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia), to write a book together that focuses on the common Reformation heritage that unites and divides Wittenberg and Geneva. Their hope is to "represent the starting point for future dialogue—in the classroom, in the local church context, perhaps even at the denominational level" (xi).

Kolb and Trueman do not waste time with trivia; they take up eight classical Reformation loci where the rubber meets the road: Scripture and Its Interpretation, Law and Gospel, the Person and Work of Christ, Election and the Bondage of the Will, Justification and Sanctification, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Worship.

Their essays, paired in each chapter, reflect a distinctive difference in their traditions. Kolb gives a lucid and engaging account of Lutheran identity, using Luther's writings themselves. In contrast, Trueman draws from Luther, Calvin, Knox, Bullinger, and others, an approach reflecting the more broadly historical nature of the Reformed tradition. **[End Page 217]**

What Wittenberg and Geneva do have in common: Luther's rediscovery of the gospel that salvation is by grace through faith alone. Both place the preaching of this Word at the heart of the public ministry of the church. Both have a high view of the Bible as the written Word of God and view the preached Word as a means of grace. To be sure, they differ in their use of scripture. "Luther did not use the phrase 'use of the law' frequently and did not develop a formal third use or employ that terminology" (41, Kolb). The Reformed give the third use of the law "a much more robust role" (58).

Both traditions have a high view of baptism, especially infant baptism. Trueman writes: "To use the terminology favored by the Reformed, baptism is a means of grace, not a reaction or response to grace" (162). Yet differences remain "because of the proximity of the Reformed to other Protestant Baptist groups on issues of soteriology" (170, fn 88). Nevertheless, infant baptism is "a vital part of the theology and theological practice" (174) of Lutheran and Reformed churches.

Both traditions regard the Lord's Supper as a means of grace and celebrate communion regularly. While the Reformed reject a localized presence of Christ "in with and under the elements of bread and wine," they teach: "Attached to the Word, Christ is really present in the Supper" (204). "Over against Protestant Evangelicals who tend to downplay or even ignore the Lord's Supper, they [Lutherans and Reformed] understand its importance theologically, pastorally, and historically" (205).

Kolb and Trueman should not be faulted for not dealing with modern scholarship on Lutheran/Reformed differences because it is not within the scope of what they are doing. At the same time it is useful to recall that in the 1958 Arnoldshain Theses Lutheran and Reformed New Testament luminaries began to come to an agreement on the Lord's Supper because the divisive philosophical battles of the sixteenth century were over. Arnoldshain led over time to the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 in which over 100 European Lutheran and Reformed church bodies have by now declared pulpit and altar fellowship.

Kolb and Trueman challenge Lutheran and Reformed readers "to revisit settled solutions" and "set aside misimpressions" (235) in **[End Page 218]** order that these two classical traditions of the Reformation might strengthen their confessional identities, particularly in the face of the modern Evangelical movement.

*Meg H. Madson  
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continues to play an indispensable political role. On this point, the contributions of Moltmann remain especially significant.

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Craig L. Nesson

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