Structurally, the book consists of three parts: I: History of the Doctrine; II: Exegesis; and III: Dogmatic Formulation. These are bounded by a general introduction and conclusion, but the reader is also helped by introductions and conclusions to each chapter, as well as separate ‘summaries’ appended to each part. The summaries are particularly useful as Fesko builds his argument and deals with alternative views and objections. His first summary in Part I is in the form of a series of twelve ‘issues’ (questions) raised by his historical study, to which he then offers answers on the basis of his exegetical and dogmatic conclusions at the end of Parts II and III. This structure gives the whole book a sense of direction and coherence.

Fesko’s stated intention is to defend ‘the thesis that the doctrine of immediate threefold imputation (Adam’s guilt to all human beings, the sins of the elect to Christ, and Christ’s active and passive obedience to the elect) is a biblical doctrine’ (p. 22).

In Part I, Fesko explains that it was in fact the Roman Catholic theologians Catharinus and Layñez who first taught the ideas of an Adamic covenant and covenantally imputed original guilt (p. 50; pp. 73-74), although these ideas were picked up and developed by many in the Reformed tradition, following the magisterial Reformers.

Fesko’s survey of the post-Reformation period includes analysis of the controversies surrounding the views of Johannes Piscator and Josua Plaæeus, and the responses of Beza, Rollock, and Roberts, among others. Notable in this section is Fesko’s discovery of a ‘crucial piece of grammar’ (a comma!) in the original of WCF which was removed from later editions of the confession: the comma seems to indicate that chapter XI of the confession contains a clear reference to both the passive and active righteousness of Christ (p. 95).

Fesko’s basic thesis will be familiar to many Reformed readers, perhaps from such works as John Murray’s The Imputation of Adam’s Sin (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977). But, Fesko parts with Murray in his insistence that imputation must be understood in the context of a twofold covenantal structure which, he says, ‘clothes the doctrine in the robe of the blood, sweat, and tears of redemptive history’ (p. 22).

Indeed, it is a covenantal structure which Fesko argues in Part II is the basis for several examples of ‘the individual-corporate dynamic’ in scripture, including Achan’s sin, David’s census, and Daniel’s Son of Man (pp. 177-81). In each case, the covenant binds the one to the many, so that the actions of the one are imputed to the many. Close analysis of other ‘imputation texts’ in the Old Testament (pp. 181-93) amounts to a convincing demonstration that the concept of imputation is not limited to the Pauline epistles.

When Fesko turns to the New Testament, he gives close attention to Romans 4, Romans 5:12-21, and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, arguing that these texts must be interpreted with the Old Testament background in mind.

The final, doctrinal, section is lucid and persuasive, exhibiting the influence of Meredith Kline on its biblical theology, but going beyond Kline (on a nevertheless thoroughly Klinean trajectory) in a fascinating and original section on the role of the Holy Spirit in imputation (pp. 261-63).

According to Fesko, Adam must be an historical person. Fesko does not offer an extended case for Adam’s historicity, but he demonstrates (in response to Barth, Enns et al) that the historicity of Adam is a ‘pillar’ of the doctrine of imputation: move it, ‘and the doctrinal edifice comes crashing down’ (p. 235).

Fesko interacts with contrary views both past and present throughout the book, including, most recently, Oliver Crisp (pp. 266-69). His omission of any representatives of the Federal Vision, while briefly explained in the preface (p. 15) is nevertheless to be regretted, in this reviewer’s opinion.

Fesko’s concluding section on the pastoral value of the doctrine of imputation is useful and heartening, and it comes across with all the more force given the depth and breadth of the foundations laid throughout the book. This is an impressive and comprehensive treatment, and deserves a wide readership.

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Readers eager to know more about the renowned Philip Doddridge (1702-51), pastor of Castle Hill Church, Northampton and tutor in a notable Dissenting Academy associated with it have not been particularly well served in recent decades. After a series of publications regarding Doddridge emerging from the researches of Geoffrey Nuttall between 1950 and the late 1970’s, there was only—until very recent times—the biography of Doddridge by Malcolm Deacon (1980) added to the store. The dearth of attention would appear to have been part of a general decline in the study of Nonconformity in the eighteenth century—a tendency perhaps reflective of a decline in the vitality of this once-formidable movement. Since the passing of Nuttall in 2007, there have only been the several insightful studies of Alan Sell to shed light on eighteenth century Nonconformity’s significance for theology and church history.
Yet this review has begun with the qualifier, ‘until very recent times’. Strivens’s fresh investigations, which are reflective of his doctoral research carried out through the University of Stirling, can be seen to be part of a renaissance of investigation of Doddridge and eighteenth century Nonconformity unfolding across the last decade. On the one hand, there is the collaborative arrangement now existing between Dr. Williams’s Library Centre for Dissenting Studies and the Queen Mary University Centre for Religion and Literature in English with which is associated the work of Prof. Isabel Rivers. This collaboration has already produced several important volumes with the all-important volume A History of the Dissenting Academies in the British Isles soon to be released. Strivens, while working independently of this consortium, shows himself to have been abreast of this scholarship and conversant with the resources at Dr. Williams’s Library. On the other hand, there does seem to be some recent stirring among historians of Nonconformity as reflected in the recent volume edited by Robert Pope, the T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity (2016).

Strivens’s approach to his subject can be categorized as one of re-assessment. As he makes clear in an illuminating introductory section (pp. 1-19), Doddridge and his legacy are contested. His interpreters have been divided between those who have construed Doddridge as standing largely in continuity with the preceding Puritan Nonconformity which endured the ‘Great Ejection’ of 1662. and those who have seen in the Northampton tutor the harbinger of the eventual theological latitude which more and more characterized Nonconformity in the nineteenth century. While Strivens’s loyalties are with the first group, the methodology he employs in reaching a fresh assessment often requires him to take a revisionist stance as and when the evidence calls the conventional wisdom into question.

As the subsequent chapters make plain, Doddridge was (chap. I) a great admirer of Richard Baxter (1615-1691) whose practical works he especially treasured. Yet in matters theological, his position was more akin to that of the ‘moderate Calvinist’, John Howe (1630-1705). This position stood in closer continuity with the earlier Reformed position, yet without any predilection for the use of confessions of faith or creeds. Doddridge could also be on friendly terms with confessional Calvinists such as Thomas Ridgley (1667-1734) without occupying strictly identical ground. Doddridge’s position was also carefully staked out so as to safeguard against the high Calvinist error of antinomianism.

Though Congregational Independents such as Doddridge had a confessional legacy to draw on from the preceding century (i.e. the Savoy Confession of 1658), the Northampton tutor espoused the belief (chap. II) that everything important to be believed for salvation was evident in Scripture. Strict creedal subscription might drive apart persons who—agreed on the heart of things—might differ over the articulation. As regards the doctrine of the Trinity, Doddridge’s position cannot be described as robust; as to the divine Sonship, he was content to navigate between the twin heresies of Socinianism and Arianism.

A reader will not be surprised to learn that Doddridge (along with other tutors in the Dissenting Academies) interacted with John Locke (1632-1704). His volume, Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), soon challenged older, more Aristotelian works for a place in the academy curriculum (chaps. III-IV). While Doddridge and other Nonconformist tutors welcomed the new and refreshing emphasis represented by Locke, they were at the same time alert to the limitations of Locke’s approach as it impinged upon theological questions. Locke’s approach was so dependent on empirical observation and so wedded to the employment of reason in weighing what was believable that it did not sufficiently safeguard the reality of things known only by revelation. Doddridge, like Isaac Watts before him, insisted that the soul of man is to be accepted as eternal on biblical grounds—even though empirical observation cannot buttress this confidence.

Doddridge both in voice and in print was accustomed to extol the importance of proclamation; he was insistent that Christian prose (spoken or written) should be characterized by simplicity and plainness—while eschewing things coarse. He wanted his young charges to find acceptance in polite society while focusing above all on clarity in gospel communication (chap. V). Yet Strivens feels bound to acknowledge that Doddridge both as a very young man, and subsequently, often fell below his own articulated standard. His sermons and practical writings were quite capable of displaying artifice and literary flourish—even when the author conceived of a purer ideal.

Doddridge both by his own devotional habits and by his practical writings inculcated a quite intense devotional ideal entailing private adoration of God, meditation on Scripture and sung praise (chap. VI). He was just as keen that there be devotional exercises for the entire household; one of his most popular publications, the Family and Closet Expositor (commencing 1739) was intended to supply help for thoughtful family Bible readings. In this respect, Strivens shows that Doddridge’s ideas were essentially those of his Puritan forbears.

Examined last of all is the question of what may be inferred about Doddridge’s eventual legacy (given his short life) by the circle of friendships he maintained. (chap. VII). Here, Strivens is at pains to point out that Doddridge kept at arm’s length persons of speculative theological
views, preferring instead the intimate friendship of those who, like himself, were moderate in their Calvinism as well as those whose orthodoxy was measured by their confessional loyalty. It is here that Strivens comes closest to opening up the question on which the inquisitive reader will be seeking guidance: what of Doddridge’s legacy given the relative fragility of the moderating theological position he chose to maintain? This question, alas, lies beyond the scope of Strivens’s most helpful reassessment. It is to be hoped that on the basis of the even-handedness demonstrated in this work, we may expect a second Doddridge volume from this author. When one realizes that Doddridge’s Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics and Divinity—both in contemporary hand-copied manuscripts and (after 1763) in eventual print format—became a principal resource in Nonconformist academies (whether Presbyterian, Baptist, or Independent) across the land, one senses that there is a further story to be told about the legacy (for good or ill) of this Northampton tutor.

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In The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, Ulrich Lehner, Richard Muller and A. G. Roeber have brought together forty-three scholars to offer an invaluable and wide-ranging overview of theology in the period from (loosely) 1600–1800. This volume contains forty-two essays that introduce readers to a variety of issues in early modern theology, ranging from studies of key theological concepts, such as predestination and providence, through to discussions of the interaction between theology and philosophy.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part I contains three essays that set the context for the rest of the volume. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia’s essay examines the developments in Protestant and Catholic missions from 1500–1800, and serves as a valuable reminder that discussions about early modern theology cannot neglect a global perspective. Ulrich Leinsle’s chapter introduces readers to the various sources, methods and forms for early modern theology, observing that the latter two were often linked. Paul Shore examines the development of the confessional state noting the importance of the ‘interplay of secular and religious forces.’ (p. 54)

Part II contains twenty-six essays that constitute the heart of the volume. The first twenty of these essays explore specific aspects of Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran theologies, while the remaining six offer overviews of Anabaptist, Arminian, Jansenist, Moravian, Pietist, and Socinian theologies. Through these contributions, readers are introduced to the key theological debates in the early modern period, its leading cast of theologians, and the current state of scholarly research.

It is worth mentioning two chapters from this section by way of illustration. Jean-Louis Quantin’s essay on ‘Catholic Moral Theology, 1550–1800’ offers an insightful glimpse into the competing approaches to determining issues of morality within early modern Catholicism. Quantin traces the rise and fall of probabilism as a key form of Catholic moral theology. Probabilism allowed individuals to act against their own conscience if they thought that the opinion of another was more probable. Quantin shows how it grew out of Catholic casuistry, but ultimately fell from favour after it was criticised by the Rigorists, who accorded more weight to Scripture and the church fathers. Quantin’s essay skilfully guides the reader through the key debates in this nuanced area of early modern Catholic theology. Crawford Gribben’s essay on ‘Early Modern Reformed Eschatology’ is a similarly fine example of how a potentially complicated area of theology is introduced clearly and concisely in this volume. Gribben plots the development of Reformed eschatology, showing how it was initially defined in opposition to Catholic beliefs about purgatory and Anabaptist ideas about the millennium, but that ‘millennial theory... became almost creedal’ (p. 267) in seventeenth-century England. Gribben observes ‘a cooling of eschatological hopes’ (p. 268) after the Thirty Years’ War, but notes that the eighteenth-century revivals helped to drive eschatological interest again. The fact that contributors are able to explore the development of theological ideas over two centuries, or more, in their essays is certainly one of the strengths of the volume.

The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology is arguably at its strongest though, when the chapters facilitate some degree of comparison between the different theological confessions. For example, Marius Reiser, Carl Trueman, and Benjamin Mayes each contributed a chapter on scripture and exegesis (in Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran theologies respectively). Since these chapters cover similar ground, it is possible for the reader to consider the similarities and differences between these traditions. That being said, not every topic receives such equal treatment across confessional lines. While the Catholic and Lutheran views on the sacraments are the subjects of dedicated chapters, the Reformed position is simply incorporated into a broader chapter on ‘Church and Church/State Relations in the Post-Reformation Reformed Tradition’. Ian Hazlett’s discussion of the sacraments in this chapter offers a helpful overview, but