

Three Theological Methods of the Reformation

Scholastic methodology required theologians to approach theological questions through integrating their interpretations with existing commentaries and glosses on the Bible, since these represented the tradition of the church. These glosses and commentaries left the Bible text so encrusted with extra material that it was difficult to get to the meaning of the text itself. Renaissance humanists objected to scholastic methodologies and freed the text from its accumulated apparatus to allow it to speak for itself. Unfortunately, however, the humanists tended to be highly pragmatic and were uninterested in theological questions. As a result, humanist reformers tended to focus on practice, not theology. When the new humanist methods were used to answer traditional theological questions, however, new answers emerged, including the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone. This explains why the French humanist scholar Lefèvre d'Étaples, German theologian Martin Luther, and Swiss humanist priest Huldrych Zwingli all discovered this doctrine independently in the space of less than ten years. This approach is the foundation for modern exegetical methods, and when used consistently will reinforce core evangelical doctrine.

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I. Justification by Faith

A. Rediscovery in the 1510s

1. Lefèvre d'Étaples 1512

2. Luther c.1516

3. Zwingli c.1519

B. Question: Why?

II. Scholastic Methodology

A. Origins

1. Platonic Humanism (12th Century)

2. New Aristotle

B. Assumptions on nature of truth

1. Truth Exists

2. Truth is Knowable

3. Truth is Necessary

4. Corollary: Truth is found in the past

C. *Quaestio* Method

1. Ask a question

2. Assemble authorities under *sic* and *non*

3. Analysis

4. Resolution

5. Full Scholastic method adds objections and responses

D. Implications

1. Ideal system for integrating large quantities of material into existing worldview.

2. Text always studied via glosses and commentaries

III. Renaissance Humanism, a.k.a. “the New Learning”

A. Medieval Education

1. Seven Liberal Arts

2. Focus: Dialectic

B. Petrarch (1304-1374)

1. Cult of Antiquity

2. Practical learning, anti-speculative

3. *Studia humanitatis*, hence *Umanista*

4. Focus: Rhetoric

C. Implications

1. Literary analysis of texts
2. New approach to apparatus
3. Focus on practicality

D. Humanism and Religion

1. Lorenzo Valla
2. Erasmus
3. Lefèvre
4. Focus on practice, not theology (anti-speculative)

IV. Hybrid Methodology

A. What is distinctive about Lefèvre, Luther, and Zwingli?

1. Share with humanists new methodology of study

2. Share with scholastics interest in traditional theological questions

3. Unlike scholastics, not tied to traditional glosses and commentaries

4. Unlike humanists, not committed exclusively to practice

B. Old questions + new methodologies = new answers

1. Modern literary analysis leads to core Protestant and Evangelical doctrines

2. Test case: Colloquy of Poissy (1561)

V. Application Today

A. Scholasticism: Catholicism (in modified form)

B. Humanism: Liberal theologians

C. Hybrid: Conservative/Low Church Protestants and Evangelicals