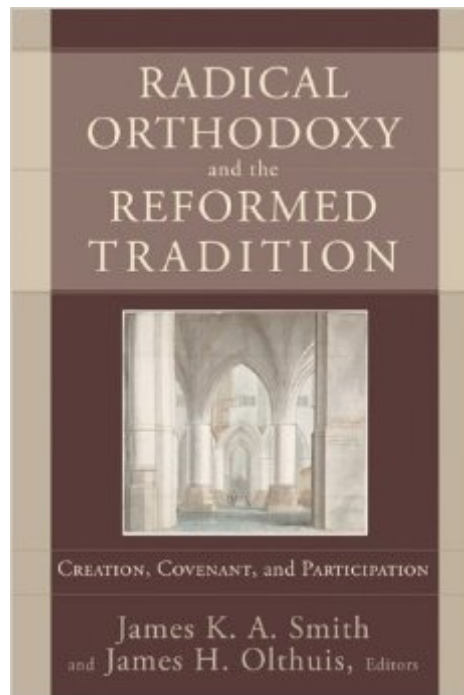


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# Radical Orthodoxy And The Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, And Participation



## Synopsis

In this work, leading scholars compare the differences and points of intersection between the growing Radical Orthodoxy (RO) movement and the Reformed tradition. This timely discussion deals with many of the hot topics currently being debated in theological and philosophical circles, including the material world's participation in transcendence, aesthetics, politics, covenant, and cultural theory. It represents an emerging willingness among proponents of RO to examine and engage the Dutch Reformed tradition, and also reflects the growing influence of RO on the Reformed tradition. This book will be enjoyed by scholars concerned with the intersection between RO and the Reformed tradition. A companion book to Smith's recently published *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, it will also be of interest to students of philosophy and theology.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Edited Review: This is the second attempt by Reformed writers to interact with a movement that appears to have little to do with Reformed theology, is absent from current Reformed discussions, and whose high level of academic erudition will be lost on the average reader in the Reformed pew. Still, Radical Orthodoxy (RO) represents a left-wing, Anglo-Catholic response to modernity and secularism. One more point to mention: this book is purported to be a "reformed" response to Radical orthodoxy. This needs to be qualified a bit. The authors, while confessionally calvinistic, represent the Dutch neo-calvinist vision. While that is a powerful strand within calvinism, it does not represent all of Calvinism. Many Southern Presbyterians will cringe at them. James K. A. Smith

begins the foray by summarizing RO's thought and pointing out key differences between RO and the Reformed Tradition (RT). RO holds to a platonic ontology whereby men relate to God via participation. Michael Horton will later respond that "covenant" is a better category than "participation." RO holds that Calvinism stems from modernity in that it appropriates a Scotist ontology that flattens reality (there might be more truth in this than we would comfortably admit--JA). This translates into a stale Eucharistic theology whereby Christ is absent. Laura Smit gives a good, rich response by means of articulating a truly Calvinian sacramentology. RO rightly wants to see theology take the place as champion among all disciplines. It sees a unified faith that speaks to all areas of life and rightly resists all unbiblical dualisms. Unfortunately, it ends up sounding like socialist rhetoric baptized in Christian categories. At the end I will point out where I think the Reformed writers are correct and where I think RO is correct. I will focus on a few essays from the book. John Milbank, while firmly disagreeing with Reformed theology, helpfully outlines RO's vision: a vision of an alternative Protestantism. Milbank insists we need an alternative Protestantism because the 16thC Reformation, necessary as it was, was the birth-child of modernity and couldn't escape modernity's embryonic secular presuppositions. Fortunately, RO maintains a way for the church to truly be the Church, being obedient to Scripture, while avoiding the necessary secularism of modernity. Milbank did a wonderful job, building upon the work of Jean Luc Marion in describing "enfolded layers of being." Milbank's essay is interesting, but he fires from the hip the whole time. Michael Horton has since seriously challenged all of Milbank's conclusions (though Milbank's use of Aquinas and Augustine at the end of the essay still stands, I think). Michael Horton has the best essay in the book, "Covenant and Participation." Horton appreciatively follows the RO critique of Enlightenment epistemology. He then uses Kant and the postmodernists to set the stage for a failure of all non-biblical epistemologies. Horton shows that God meets us as a stranger. He meets us in Word and in Sacrament (e.g., the Emmaus Road). Kant and the Postmodernists are absolutely correct in that we cannot reason our way to God (e.g., the death of all natural theologies), but they never considered that God would condescend to meet us by means of Revelation, Incarnation, and Sacrament. Horton's essay was a true tour de force.

What Can We Learn from RO? Many RTs will balk at RO's Anglo-Catholicism. Some will cringe at the overt Platonism. Others will criticize the socialism. So what do ROs offer us? They force us to interact with the best of postmodern literature. They have made theology and Christology exciting again. They have shown how Christology can solve many of the problems of philosophy. ROs, while never entirely successful, seek to free the church from dualisms and anything that might downgrade creation.

A more critical conclusion: I am not so sure RO is as "participatory" as it claims to be. If it accepts creation as a continuum of being

between creation and God, then how do they avoid the critique they label at Scotus, that they are on the same level of being? Milbank's essay was originally the most interesting, but he rarely developed his points and some of his conclusions were just downright silly.

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