

Matthew S. Miller

Reforming Good Works in Geneva

Bénédict Pictet's Doctrine of Good Works and
His Place in Late Reformed Orthodoxy



Reformed Historical Theology

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Preface

Bénédict Pictet (1655–1724), Genevan theologian and heir to Francis Turretin’s chair of theology, has long been regarded as a major Reformed theologian. Originally characterized as a faithful steward of the Reformed high orthodox theology he inherited, the most recent generation of scholarship has advanced an interpretation of him as a “theologian of transition” – one whose emphases and methodology indicate a turning away from the high orthodoxy of Francis Turretin and toward the more positive and practical Enlightened Orthodoxy of Jean-Alphonse Turretini. This new interpretation of Pictet has become the overwhelming scholarly consensus.

Our study calls into question this contemporary interpretation by investigating Pictet’s handling of the nature and necessity of good works – a perennially challenging and often controversial doctrine in which myriad theoretical and practical concerns converge. In the course of analyzing Pictet’s treatment of good works across a wide range of his texts, we show that the contemporary interpretation of Pictet as a “theologian of transition” between the two Turretins rests upon a significant methodological misstep: the assumption that his 1696 *Theologia Christiana* (the work that has been available in English for almost two centuries as Pictet’s *Christian Theology*) was his “major theological text.” Our study demonstrates that the actual cornerstone of Pictet’s theological writing was his 1721 *La théologie chrétienne* (translated into Dutch, but never into English), a work more than seven times the length of its Latin predecessor. Crucially for our thesis, the 1721 *La théologie chrétienne* also features hallmarks of the very kind of high orthodoxy that advocates of the “theologian of transition” thesis – relying on the 1696 *Theologia christiana* – claim Pictet rejected.

We also expand the research question beyond Pictet’s position “between the two Turretins,” considering his doctrine of good works in light of his broader intellectual-historical context. This intellectual-historical context includes Pictet’s early exposure to, and remarkable programmatic affinities with, a movement known as the Dutch “Further Reformation” (*Nadere Reformatie*). In the end, we find that Pictet was not a “theologian of transition” between the Reformed high orthodoxy of Francis Turretin and the Enlightened Orthodoxy of Jean-Alphonse Turretini, so much as a theologian of integration who aimed to forge a compelling link between the theoretical and practical dimensions of theology, as exhibited in his doctrine of good works.

A special word of thanks is due to family, friends, and helpers who provided encouragement and invaluable support in the course of researching and writing

this work, which began as my doctoral thesis at the University of Bristol under the wonderful supervision of Jon Balsarak.

Several friends served as key interlocutors for thinking through this topic: Mark McDowell and Blair Smith of Reformed Theological Seminary, Seth Nelson of Erskine Theological Seminary, and Peter Yoder of Montreat College. It was Peter Yoder who first suggested that I look into possible thematic connections between Pictet's emphases and those of the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie*. Additionally, Rev. Pieter Wouters volunteered his time to review several translators' introductions to eighteenth-century Dutch translations of Pictet's works, finding passages that proved to be immensely valuable to my research.

I wish also to acknowledge my deep appreciation for Martin I. Klauber, for it is thanks to him that a body of scholarship on Pictet existed for me to engage. Though I critique some of his interpretations of Pictet (and lean on others), I ultimately approach the subject of my thesis in a very similar way to how he approached Jean-Alphonse Turretini, the subject of his.

I could not have conducted my research without the Junius Institute for Digital Reformation Research and my almost daily use of their website, the Post-Reformation Digital Library (prdl.org). In Geneva, Paula Dunand provided me invaluable assistance during my time in the Salle Senebier of the Bibliothèque de Genève, as did the staff of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris at both its Richelieu and François-Mitterrand sites during my visits there. Laurent Christeller of the Fondation des archives de la famille Pictet in Geneva answered my inquiries and provided me the copy of Pictet's 1706 sermon on Jeremiah 17:9–10.

All future researchers of Pictet owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to M. Pierre Benoit of Geneva, Switzerland, who has labored with great skill over the past decade to bring over 3,000 pages of Pictet's works to light in modern typographic French. These titles – and many others by French and Genevan post-Reformation figures – are available at www.biblioref.net/editions-pierre-thierry-benoit/

Finally, I wish to thank my wife and children. Lindsay, you have been my closest companion and greatest encourager, not only in this endeavor, but in all of life. Elise, Davis, and Owen, you have been very patient with me in the final months of this work, especially during the many evenings I was hidden behind my computer and a pile of books. I dedicate this book to you.

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0. Introduction

0.1 Bénédict Pictet “Put Asunder”

David Sytsma opens his recent study of English Puritan Richard Baxter by declaring that his subject “deserves to be better known as a philosophical theologian.”¹ Baxter has long been appreciated “as a practical theologian,” but Sytsma convincingly shows that Baxter was equally regarded in his own day as a highly capable scholastic theologian, one whose legacy has suffered from a scholarly “neglect of Baxter’s theological works [that] obscures the quality of his intellect.”² Sytsma draws special attention to Baxter’s nine-hundred-page *Methodus theologiae*, which Sytsma maintains “rivals contemporary theological systems such as Francis Turretin’s *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (1679–1685) in scholastic subtlety and erudition.”³ Sytsma makes a strong claim, given that Francis Turretin’s *Institutio* is regarded as the highwater mark of an era of post-Reformation theology now dubbed “high orthodoxy.” But Sytsma makes his case convincingly, exposing what he calls “a scholarly neglect [that] puts asunder what Baxter himself joined together” – namely, the theoretical and practical dimensions of theology.⁴

Our study focuses on another major figure of the post-Reformation era whose legacy has suffered from a similar scholarly disjoining of the theoretical and practical elements of his thought. Heir to Francis Turretin’s chair of theology, Moderator of Geneva’s Venerable Company of Pastors, and twice Rector of the Academy of Geneva (1690–1694 and 1712–1718), Bénédict Pictet (1655–1724) was recognized as one of the preeminent theologians of his day. Earlier assessments of Pictet regarded his theology as “orthodox with full Calvinistic rigor” joined with a practical element that “brought doctrine down to the ground of life.”⁵

More contemporary scholarship, however, has questioned the character of Pictet’s theology relative to his Genevan predecessors – especially relative to the

1 David Sytsma, *Richard Baxter and the Mechanical Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

2 Ibid., 2.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Jacob Elisée Celliér, *L’Académie de Genève, esquisse d’une histoire abrégée de cette académie pendant les trois premières périodes de son existence (1559–1798)* (Paris: Imprimerie de Ch. Meyrueis et Cie., 1855), 18; repeated verbatim and without citation by Eugene de Budé, *Vie de Bénédict Pictet: théologien genevois, 1655–1724* (Lausanne: Bridel, 1874), 105.

high orthodox theology of his immediate predecessor, Francis Turretin (1623–1687) – and reinterpreted him as a theologian who was, on the eve of the Enlightenment, more interested in pressing the practical dimension of the Christian faith than in defending the intricacies of Reformed theology. Representative of this contemporary evaluation of Pictet is Philip Benedict (2002) when writes that Pictet’s “chief pastoral calling was to promote the reform of life rather than the comprehension of doctrine.”⁶ We aim to show that this reassessment of Pictet puts asunder what he himself joined together – namely, the interlocking of Reformed high orthodoxy with an intensified moral imperative, forged in response to contextual pressures in Geneva at the turn of the eighteenth century.

0.2 Approaching Pictet’s Theology from His Doctrine of Good Works

Since it would far exceed the scope of this thesis to examine Pictet’s theoretical and practical theology comprehensively, we have selected one major doctrine that affords a suitable vantage point from which to see how his theoretical and practical theology interlock: Pictet’s doctrine of good works, and especially the perennially complex matter of the necessity of good works for salvation. We have chosen to focus on this doctrine for three reasons. First, as we will see, the doctrine of good works occupies a place of great prominence in Pictet’s corpus. It not only reaches into nearly all of his works, thus leading our investigation naturally into several of Pictet’s previously unexplored writings; it also teems with surprising force in unexpected places. One such place is Pictet’s catechism for children, in which the child is asked, “What must I do to be saved?” and the Genevan theologian pens what is, at first glance, a most startling answer: “To put all my trust in Jesus Christ our Savior, *and to do good works.*”⁷ Such a statement would have likely made Calvin wince, but carries the freight of one of Pictet’s priorities.

Second, a focus on Pictet’s doctrine of good works situates our study in a stream of scholarship examining how key figures during the Reformation handled the “intense dispute [that] broke out over the religious basis and value of good works” and how that dispute persisted into the post-Reformation era.⁸ As Lutheran and Reformed theologians prosecuted the Catholic teaching on the

6 Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 351.

7 Bénédict Pictet, *Cinq catéchismes pour instruire les jeunes gens dans la Religion Reformée* (Lausanne: Jean Zimmerli, 1729), 113. Emphasis mine.

8 “GOOD WORKS,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 2, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 182.

merit of good works, Catholic theologians countered that the Protestant doctrine of justification severed the need for good works altogether.⁹ Lutheran and Reformed theologians took somewhat different tacks in their response. The Lutherans were, by and large, content to affirm justification apart from works without affirming the absolute necessity of good works in the Christian life. The Reformed, on the other hand, were determined to affirm both, which made for a challenging theological project, one that has attracted no small amount of attention from contemporary scholars of the Genevan theologians John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Francis Turretin. Thus, an examination of Pictet's doctrine of good works brings our study into conversation with a sizeable body of scholarship on a topic of abiding interest to Reformation and post-Reformation studies and stands to contribute to that body of scholarship.

Third, a focus on Pictet's doctrine of good works – which brings into view a constellation of texts, doctrines, and contexts – positions us to expand the constrictive research question that has dominated the modest body of scholarship on Pictet over the past three decades. That question concerns whether the general character of Pictet's theology – and particularly his theological prolegomena – bears a stronger resemblance to the Reformed high orthodoxy of his uncle, the aforementioned Francis Turretin, or to the Enlightened Orthodoxy of his nephew, Jean-Alphonse Turretini, who devoted his labors – quite successfully – to disparaging the usefulness of much of post-Reformation theology (and who, to make matters more complicated, was Francis Turretin's son).¹⁰ By Reformed “high orthodoxy,” we mean the era of post-Reformation Reformed theology that aims to formulate its body of doctrine as comprehensively and precisely as possible – availing itself of the tools and methods of scholasticism¹¹ – and marks “the final codification of orthodoxy.”¹² By “Enlightened Orthodoxy,” we mean a

9 “Catholics repeatedly accused the Protestants of teaching a doctrine of justification that neglected works, something that Jacobo Sadoletto had done in his three-volume *Romans Commentary*.” Brian Lugioyo, *Martin Bucer's Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology and Early Modern Irenicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 195.

10 Contemporary scholarly literature refers to the older Turretin (François Turretini) by his Anglicized name, Francis Turretin, but continues to refer to the younger Turretin by his French-Italian name, Jean-Alphonse Turretini. Except when referring to “the two Turretins” or “the older and younger Turretins,” we will maintain the current practice by referring to the older as Turretin and the younger as Turretini.

11 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520-ca. 1725*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 34–37. See also Theodore G. Van Raalte, *Antoine de Chandieu: The Silver Horn of Geneva's Reformed Triumvirate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 106–114.

12 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520-ca. 1725*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 81.

movement away from high orthodoxy that embraces elements of Cartesianism, prefers a more irenic posture to that exhibited by the disputative method, shows far less interest in the doctrines of election and predestination,¹³ and aspires for a more “practical form of theology that the average parishioner could understand.”¹⁴ If Francis Turretin was (and remains) the representative figure of the Reformed high orthodoxy, his son, Jean-Alphonse Turretini, became (in something of an irony) the same for Enlightened Orthodoxy, achieving such success in his aims that he has been remembered as the “gravedigger” of Reformed high orthodoxy.¹⁵ With rare exceptions, contemporary scholarship on Pictet evaluates him vis-à-vis the two Turretins, describing him in this respect as a “theologian of transition” – or, in the words of McNutt (2013), “the seemingly lone figure seeking to mediate between the Reformed Scholasticism of one Turretini and the Enlightened Orthodoxy of the other.”¹⁶

Insofar as tensions between the older and younger Turretins are most conspicuous in the areas of theological method and prolegomena (the relationship of faith and reason, the role of natural revelation, proofs for the existence of God, etc.), contemporary scholars have focused on those aspects of Pictet’s theology as well, generally confining themselves to the opening portions of his 1696 *Theologia christiana* – and, in many cases, relying on the (sometimes unexpectedly) abridged English translation of that text. This narrow focus on Pictet’s theological method and prolegomena may also owe to what Martin Wisse has identified as a current shortcoming in post-Reformation studies as a whole:

13 Martin I. Klauber, “Reformed Orthodox or Philosophe? Eighteenth-Century Genevan Views of the Reformation,” in *Fides et Historia*, 35, vol. 2 (Summer/Fall 2003): 131. Rouwendal examines Jean-Alphonse Turretini’s odd treatment of Romans 9 in his commentary on Romans: “Romans 9 has always been the classic text for proving the doctrine of predestination and of election as a source of grace. That J.-A. Turretin does not mention this doctrine at all but only mentions the condition of faith instead as part of the content of this chapter – even though it is not mentioned by Paul – indicates that he deviated from both the traditional exegesis of this chapter as well as from the Reformed doctrine of predestination ... He neither defended nor attacked the doctrine of predestination as such. He apparently simply declared it irrelevant.” See Pieter L. Rouwendal, *Predestination and Preaching in Genevan Theology from Calvin to Pictet* (Kampen: Summum Academic Publications, 2017), 248–249.

14 Martin Klauber, “Reformed Orthodoxy in Transition: Bénédict Pictet (1655–1724) and Enlightened Orthodoxy in Post-Reformation Geneva,” in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 96.

15 Maria-Cristina Pitassi, *De l’orthodoxie aux Lumières, Genève 1670–1737* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1992), 7.

16 François Laplanche, *L’écriture, le sacré et l’histoire: érudits et politiques protestants devant la Bible en France au XVIIe siècle* (Amsterdam: Holland University Press, 1986), 621; and Jennifer Powell McNutt, *Calvin Meets Voltaire: The Clergy of Geneva in the Age of Enlightenment, 1685–1798* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 6.

namely, “an exaggerated attention to method and prolegomena [that] is basically a post-Enlightenment interest,” with the result that contemporary scholarship is “to some extent stuck at what is the beginning of most dogmatic handbooks of the period.”¹⁷ (He adds, “This implies much uncovered ground for new research projects.”¹⁸) The result is that most of the activity of Pictet’s pen over the four decades of his prodigious writing career – including those themes that make him distinct from either of the Turretins – has remained unexamined.

We will show that by locating Pictet’s theology primarily in relation to the two Turretins, scholars have not only limited themselves thus far to a small portion of Pictet’s corpus; they have also chosen to assess Pictet in terms of continuities and discontinuities with figures before and after – a method of approach that Muller convincingly laments as a “rather narrow world of reductionistic argumentation.”¹⁹ In an effort to break out of that narrow world, our study of Pictet’s doctrine of good works – the first full-length monograph on Pictet since Eugene de Budé’s biography in 1874 – will follow an admittedly wide arc, one that involves orienting ourselves to the plan of his writings, identifying key aspects of his intellectual–historical context, and tracking the development of the doctrine of good works through the line of his Genevan predecessors. This approach will enable us to identify nuances in Pictet’s doctrine of good works relative to his Genevan predecessors, trace those nuances back to sources that lie outside of his Genevan predecessors, and venture reasonably informed interpretations of how those nuances reflect and respond to contextual pressures.

0.3 Plan for This Study

Our study will begin with a survey of the scholarly literature on Pictet, tracking the rise and development of the contemporary interpretation of Pictet as a “transitional figure” between Reformed high orthodoxy and Enlightened Orthodoxy. From there we will survey the state of research on the Reformation and post-Reformation handling of the doctrine of good works, considering especially the more recent scholarship concerning how Calvin, Beza, and Turretin handle this doctrine. We also briefly consider the small field of post-Reformation Reformed

17 Maarten Wisse, “Reformed Theology in Scholastic Development,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, eds. Michael Allen and Scott Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 64.

18 Ibid.

19 Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 34.

ethics, to which our examination of Pictet's *La morale chrétienne* stands to make a modest contribution.

Following our review of the scholarly literature in chapter one, in chapter two we will orient ourselves to Pictet's own literary output, focusing especially on the correct identification of his two major texts. Since it is undisputed that Pictet's *La morale chrétienne* is his first major text, we will begin with it, offering the first substantial survey of its nature, plan, notable features, and reception history. We will then confront a mistake that looms large in contemporary scholarship – that of taking Pictet's 1696 *Theologia christiana* for his “major theological work,” when in fact that title belongs to his 1721 *La théologie chrétienne* (which scholars, probably on account of following de Budé, have mistaken for a mere translation of the earlier Latin text). As we will see, the 1721 *La théologie chrétienne* (which Pictet first published in 1702 and then guided through subsequent editions) is an original project that not only exceeds the length of its Latin forerunner by at least sevenfold; it also features a different theological method, with massive consequences for how Pictet's theology should be characterized. We conclude this chapter by showing how from these two major texts flow four subsequent works that combine (six in all) to form the backbone of Pictet's theological and ethical writings.

Having identified and surveyed the major texts of Pictet's writings, in chapter three we will turn to the major contexts of Pictet's life. This chapter will not take the form of a “womb to tomb” biography but will rather highlight four major aspects of Pictet's intellectual–historical context that possess significant heuristic value for interpreting his writings. Accordingly, we will consider his exposure to a movement in the Dutch Reformed churches known as the *Nadere Reformatie* (or “Further Reformation”), his support of the French Huguenots before and after Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, his polemic with “Religious Indifferentism,” and his response to epochal changes in Geneva – theological, economic, and moral – at the turn of the eighteenth century. These aspects of his context cast light not only on Pictet's doctrine of good works but also on his theological program more generally.

In chapter four, we trace the journey of the doctrine of good works across the generations of Genevan theologians prior to Pictet. Our longest chapter, it will provide essential material for making informed judgments in the chapters that follow about the extent to which Pictet's doctrine of good works stayed in line with, or departed from, his direct theological forbears. Accordingly, we survey the doctrine of good works in John Calvin (1509–1564), Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Giovanni Diodati (1576–1649), and Francis Turretin (1623–1687), taking stock of the extent to which the doctrine of good works remains stable as it travels along this line, and to what extent it manifests changes or adaptations.

Rightly oriented toward Pictet's major writings, attentive to his intellectual-historical context, and suitably knowledgeable of the doctrine of good works he inherits as a Genevan theologian, we are then prepared, in chapters five through seven, to take up Pictet's own doctrine of good works. This begins in chapter five with an examination of the nature of good works as he describes it, taking stock of his six "conditions" for an action to be a "good work." As we will see, three of these conditions are "standard fare" in the Reformed tradition he inherits, but three are not. We will dedicate most of our attention to expounding and interpreting the latter.

In chapter six, we will pivot to Pictet's arguments for the necessity of good works for salvation. We set forth nine of his arguments, which we group under four headings: arguments for the necessity of good works from authority, arguments from "the nature of the thing," arguments from the evidentiary value of good works in this life, and Pictet's argument that good works are "the way (*via*) to glory." In the course of this chapter, we will encounter strong evidence for our claim that Pictet was not a "theologian of transition" between the older and younger Turretins, insofar as he puts a premium on theological argumentation for the necessity of good works (contrary to Jean-Alphonse Turretini) and frequently resorts to scholastic analysis (of the kind epitomized by Francis Turretin) in doing so.

In chapter seven, we consider four additional supports for Pictet's claim that good works are necessary for salvation that are more unusual than the nine arguments covered in the previous chapter. We will focus on how he establishes the necessity of good works from the doctrine of union with Christ in a manner that none of his Genevan forebears, to the best of our knowledge, had done. We will then examine in great detail the striking ending to his otherwise standard definition of the doctrine of justification – an ending that corresponds closely with the peculiar catechism question and answer we referenced above. From there we will consider how he classifies the necessity of good works vis-à-vis an important theological development known as "the fundamental articles," and we will close with how he presses the necessity of good works through his original (by his own admission) interpretation of Jesus's cursing of the barren fig tree. The material covered in this chapter will highlight some of the risks Pictet takes in the service of making it impossible for his readers to miss the inescapable obligation on those who are saved by grace to do good works.

In the end, we hope our study accomplishes three things. First, insofar as our study is the first contemporary monograph on Pictet, and one that proposes significant corrections to the existing scholarship, we hope it leads future researchers of Pictet's theology to base their investigations on those texts that form the main column of his corpus, with particular attention to the interrelationship Pictet established between his *La morale chrétienne* and his *La théologie chréti-*

enne. Second, we hope to deepen the historical and theological appreciation for the complexities involved in the Reformed affirmation of the necessity of good works for salvation – an affirmation that remains a point of vigorous debate to the present day. Third and finally, we hope that this study will model the kind of synthetic analysis that we find so appealingly described by Muller when, advocating for the direction that the field of post-Reformation theological studies needs to go, he writes:

Thus, the issue is not a simple matter of identifying or claiming continuity or discontinuity between the views of one thinker and the views of another – rather, it is a matter of identifying both the place of a particular thinker in his own context and in relation to various trajectories or traditions of thought. These trajectories or traditions, moreover, embody complex patterns of reception and use involving exegesis, formulae, and arguments drawn out of patristic and medieval backgrounds, as well as arguments and formulations either mediated through or derived from the Reformation-era debates.²⁰

The benefit of this approach is that it encourages researchers to conduct their investigations with the assumption that each figure they study is more complex than has been previously thought, as well as more worthy of study in their own right. We have done our best to bring that assumption to this study of Bénédict Pictet.

20 Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 40. See also Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:44–45; Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, “Introduction,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1999), xi–xix; and Wisse, “Reformed Theology in Scholastic Development,” 69.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Investigations of Pictet's life and theology have been few and succinct in nature. No book-length studies of Pictet have been published since 1874, when the prodigious biographer of Swiss Reformation figures Eugene de Budé (1836–1910) brought to light what remains the only biography of Pictet, *Vie de Bénédicte Pictet: théologien genevois, 1655–1724*.¹ Berthoud (2020) writes: “No other biography (of Pictet) exists. Neither his theology nor his (broader) work has ever been, to our knowledge, the subject of any in-depth study. It's an astonishing gap to say the least.”²

In the eighteenth century, Pictet was mentioned in the same breath as Francis Turretin, and often as Calvin himself. Pictet was especially highly regarded in the Netherlands (as we will see in chapter three). In a lengthy biographical introduction to the 1728 edition of his Dutch translation of Pictet's *La théologie chrétienne*, Johannes Wesselius,³ writing four years after Pictet's death, describes him in these words: “The church has not had a more zealous advocate of the truth after the great Calvin, both in Geneva, where he was held to be the head of the orthodox, and abroad, where, through his letters and published books, he helped preserve intact the precept of sound doctrine when it was tainted or corrupted.”⁴ Wesselius later esteems Pictet as “a second Calvin” and concludes his introduction on this note of praise: “And if Geneva formerly had the good fortune of having bestowed upon the church a reformer, namely, John Calvin, with no less right may she at this time glory upon the learned Mr. BENEDICTUS

1 Eugene de Budé, *Vie de Bénédicte Pictet: théologien genevois, 1655–1724* (Lausanne: Bridel, 1874).

2 Jean-Marc Berthoud, “Introduction: Bénédicte Pictet (1655–1724): Le dernier héraut de l'Orthodoxie genevoise,” in Bénédicte Pictet, *La morale chrétienne ou l'art de bien vivre (1710)*, tome premier (Genève: Pierre Thierry Benoit, 2020), 31. Translation mine.

3 Johannes Wesselius (1671–1745) was a Dutch professor of theology at the University of Leiden, remembered for his *Dissertationibus academicis*.

4 Johannes Wesselius, “De Vertaaler Aan Den Lezer,” 1.3, in Benedictus Pictet, *De christelyke Godgeleertheid en kennis der zaligheid, of Verklaring der waarheden, die God aan de menschen de Heilige Schrift heeft geopenbaart, nevens de wederlegging der tegengestelde dwaalingen ... Vermeedert met een kort vertoog van't allermerkwaardigste in de ... geschiedenissen* (Pieter van Thol, 1728). I am immeasurably grateful to Rev. Wouter Pieters for providing me a transcription of this lengthy text, “The Translator to the Reader,” into modernized Dutch, along with an English translation.

PICTET, of whom we see more and more testimonies every day come forth.”⁵ A century and a half later, Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) quotes the Dutch translation of Pictet’s *La morale chrétienne* copiously in his own lectures on Reformed ethics.⁶

Pictet enjoyed the admiration of notable churchmen and theologians in Scotland and America in the nineteenth century. His reputation in Scotland owes to the use of his 1696 *Theologia christiana* as a theological textbook in courses of divinity at the University of Edinburgh (more on this in the next chapter). Scottish minister and mathematician Robert Wallace⁷ was said to have referenced “St. Augustine, Calvin, Turretine, and Pictet” to Lord Kames⁸ as “the greatest and soundest divines of the church.”⁹ John Witherspoon (1723–1794), born and educated in Scotland before emigrating to America, held Pictet’s theology in especially high esteem. “For Witherspoon,” writes DeYoung, “Turretin and especially Pictet ... provided the basic theology that should be shared by all Scottish ministers, because it was the basic theology they almost all received.”¹⁰ Downstream of Witherspoon, American Reformed theologian James Henley Thornwell (1812–1862), writing home to his wife in 1860 during his visit to Geneva, would reflect: “Here I am in Geneva, the city of Calvin, of Beza, of Farel, of Viret, of Turretin, and of Pictet.”¹¹ Thornwell’s admiration for Pictet echoes that of Frederick Reyroux, who in his introduction to his abridged 1834 English translation of Pictet’s *Theologia christiana*, relays:

5 Ibid.

6 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 2 vols., ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019–2021).

7 Robert Wallace (1697–1771) pastored several churches and served as moderator of the Church of Scotland in 1743. He also wrote texts on mathematics and critiques of David Hume that were translated into French. “Turretine” was a common older English spelling of Turretin.

8 Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782) was a Scottish writer, philosopher, and judge who became one of the leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment.

9 See Kevin DeYoung, “John Witherspoon and ‘The Fundamental Doctrines of the Gospel’: The Scottish Career of an American Founding Father” (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2019), 40–41. Pictet’s theology so dominated the Scottish theological landscape that when Scottish churchman Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) envisioned writing a new system of theology, he juxtaposed an order of topics that he envisioned against the more established order, describing the latter as “that in which Calvin and Turretin, Pictetus and Vitringa, have delivered them.” Thomas Chalmers, *Posthumous Works of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D.B., LL.D.*, ed. William Honns, vol. 7 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1849), xix. The statement comes from a lecture by Chalmers entitled “On the Right Order of a Theological Course.” Chalmers refers to Pictet by his Latin name, Pictetus.

10 DeYoung, “John Witherspoon and ‘The Fundamental Doctrines of the Gospel,’” 40.

11 Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1875), 458.

In addition to the intrinsic excellence of this work, it will perhaps be an interesting recommendation of it to many readers, that its author may in some measure be regarded as the last of those illustrious and orthodox divines who presided over the church of Geneva, and who contributed, by their indefatigable labours and excellent writings, to render it the bulwark of the Reformation in those parts.¹²

In the early part of the twentieth century, American Reformed churchman James Good (1850–1924), in his *A History of the Reformed Churches in Switzerland Since the Reformation* (1913), calls Pictet “a genuine Calvinist, but of an irenic liberal spirit.”¹³

Several histories of the Academy of Geneva give varying assessments of Pictet. Eugene de Budé’s memorably description of Pictet in 1874 as “orthodox with full Calvinistic rigor, who through his piety brough doctrine down to the ground of life,” actually comes verbatim (and without citation) from Jacob-Elisée Cellérier (1785–1872).¹⁴ A professor at the Academy of Geneva, Cellérier published in 1855 a history of the school, *L’Académie de Genève: Esquisse d’une histoire abrégée de cette académie pendant les trois premières périodes de son existence (1559–1798)*, in which he briefly contrasts the unwaveringly orthodox Francis Turretin with his more liberal son. From there he describes Pictet as one who, “already more than forty years old when Turretin’s son joined him as a colleague, remained, in spirit, a man of the seventeenth century – closing it out in a manner that brought particular honor to the Faculty.”¹⁵

Half-a-century after Cellérier, Swiss historian and jurist Charles Borgeaud authored the first volume of his *Histoire de l’Université de Genève* (1900), in which he acknowledges Cellérier’s appraisal of Pictet in order to dispute it. “Pictet should be classed,” he asserts, “with the men of the eighteenth century and not, as has been typical following Cellérier, among those of the seventeenth.”¹⁶ The evidence on which Borgeaud bases this reassessment is paltry. In sum, he observes, from his reading of de Bude’s *Vie de Bénédicte Pictet*, that Pictet sent a copy of his *La théologie chrétienne* to the Catholic bishop of Annecy along with a “complimentary letter”; that Pierre Bayle acknowledged receiving a copy of

12 In Bénédicte Pictet, *Christian Theology*, trans. Frederick Reyroux (London: L. B. Seeley and Sons, 1834), iv.

13 James Good, *A History of the Swiss Reformed Churches Since the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1913), 178.

14 Eugene de Budé, *Vie de Bénédicte Pictet: théologien genevois, 1655–1724* (Lausanne: Bridel, 1874), 105; repeating Jacob-Elisée Cellérier, *L’Académie de Genève: Esquisse d’une histoire abrégée de cette académie pendant les trois premières périodes de son existence (1559–1798)* (Paris: Imprimerie de Ch. Meyrueis et C., 1855), 18.

15 Ibid.

16 Charles Borgeaud, *Histoire de l’Université Genève*, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1900), 531.