

EDUARD BÖHL'S (1836–1903) CONCEPT FOR A RE-EMERGENCE OF REFORMATION THOUGHT

T.R.V. Forster

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This book is a study of a greatly understudied and undervalued nineteenth-century German Reformation scholar, Eduard Böhl, son-in-law of Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrügge, a leader in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist school which concentrated on the 'Older Testament'. Böhl's particular contribution was to use the Old Testament as a major source of his Christology within the orbit of modern Protestant thought. This and his rejection of historical criticism put him at odds with the classical school of liberal Protestantism, whose chief proponents were Schleiermacher and Ritschl as well as Abraham Kuenen and Abraham Kuyper, especially because of his faithfulness to the cause of traditionally formulated Reformed theology. His development into a systematic theologian led to his study of 'the image of God' as his main contribution to theological anthropology, especially with regard to Christology and the doctrine of salvation. Forster's work is based on substantial textual and archival research on Böhl's correspondence, writings and major dogmatic works.

In this work, Böhl is presented as a flexible theologian with regard to a strict Reformed theology. He was deeply impressed with Luther's work on justification by faith; less so with Calvin's emphasis on sanctification. His *magnum opus* was *Dogmatik*, published in 1887. It was the first attempt since the late seventeenth century to present a compendium of the Reformed faith. Forster attempts to introduce Böhl through his life, character and theological proposals. He asserts that Böhl was a late nineteenth-century Reformed scholar; that his theology was consistent with that

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of the Kohlbrüggian school; and that his most significant contribution to theology was what Forster calls 'sphere theology', which describes humanity's relationship with God in spheres rather than in substantive categories.

The first two chapters offer a historical perspective. Chapter one introduces Böhl's life, education, early academic career and an evaluation of his theological output in the dual monarchy Austria-Hungary. Chapter two considers Böhl's reception as a representative of the Kohlbrüggian school. The second part of the book is more theological in its scope. Chapter three develops Böhl's hermeneutics of the Old Testament in a Reformational perspective. Chapter four continues this Old Testament perspective by looking at anthropology and Christology, while chapter five considers justification by faith. The final section (chapter six) looks at the whole work in theological-historical perspective and traces Böhl's influence during his own and in subsequent periods.

The definitive nature of Böhl's work can be succinctly summarised in the words of the title of this book: *Eduard Böhl's (1836–1903) concept for a re-emergence of Reformation thought*. All in all, this is an interesting and engaging read. However, for an inhabitant of Africa, it does not add significantly to an understanding of the period outside of the immediate context.