

Forum on Elizabeth A. Clark's *The Fathers Refounded: Protestant Liberalism, Roman Catholic Modernism, and the Teaching of Ancient Christianity in Early Twentieth-Century America*

Introductory Remarks

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The turn of the twentieth century represents an incisive moment in religious thought and theological education. Scholars across Europe and North America were wrestling with the twin influences of Protestant Liberalism and Roman Catholic Modernism, the questions they raised for how to conceive of the origins of Christianity, and how to make them palatable to a rapidly changing world. In her most recent monograph, *The Fathers Refounded: Protestant Liberalism, Roman Catholic Modernism, and the Teaching of Ancient Christianity in Early Twentieth-Century America*, Elizabeth A. Clark explores these questions in the lives and work of three of the era's most influential figures. Her work stands at the center of this forum, with four distinguished scholars considering its implications.¹

The Fathers Refounded follows the trajectory of Clark's previous monograph, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America*.² The latter traces the origins of the study and teaching of early Christianity in American seminaries and divinity schools during the second half of the nineteenth century. In *The Fathers Refounded*, Clark continues to investigate the landscape of early Christian education in the United States. Trends in pedagogy, scholarship, and broader religious discourse at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century emerge from the lives and work of three individuals: Arthur Cushman McGiffert, professor and eventually president at Union Theological Seminary; George LaPiana, an Italian immigrant who became the first Roman Catholic-trained historian to teach at Harvard Divinity School; and Shirley Jackson Case, professor of New Testament and, later, early Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

¹Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Fathers Refounded: Protestant Liberalism, Roman Catholic Modernism, and the Teaching of Ancient Christianity in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

²Elizabeth A. Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

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For each, Clark's monograph provides a thoroughgoing biography; an assessment of assumptions, influences, and developments; and an account of their approach to teaching early Christianity. The profiles of scholarship and pedagogy that emerge from this study show a number of points of convergence: a decisive break between theological commitments and critical historical scholarship; a critical stance toward tradition and its relevance for Christianity in the twentieth century; and an emphasis on the patristic period as an era of development, growth, change, and even loss. Their individual emphases—shaped by divergent religious confessions, philosophical currents, and theological visions—nevertheless differ considerably, revealing a promising yet embattled era of Christian graduate education in America.

In their comments, the respondents here praise the “rich,” “learned,” and “sumptuously detailed” work, while further contextualizing both its central characters and its author in their social and intellectual worlds. To this end, Gary Dorrien considers the impact of philosophical currents on Case and McGiffert and their lasting impact on Protestant Christianity. Robert Orsi explores the consciously constructed distance between the scholarly worlds of early Christianity constructed by the book's protagonists and “working-class Catholics, African Americans, and evangelicals.” Robin Darling Young, in turn, examines the work as the magisterial climax of Clark's trajectory of scholarship, while Margaret M. Mitchell offers an incisive study of *The Fathers Refounded* in light of Hayden White's fourfold typology of historiographic narrative. In her response, Clark both raises a gentle defense of the work's protagonists and invites readers more deeply into the project, its challenges, and the pathways it opens for future research.