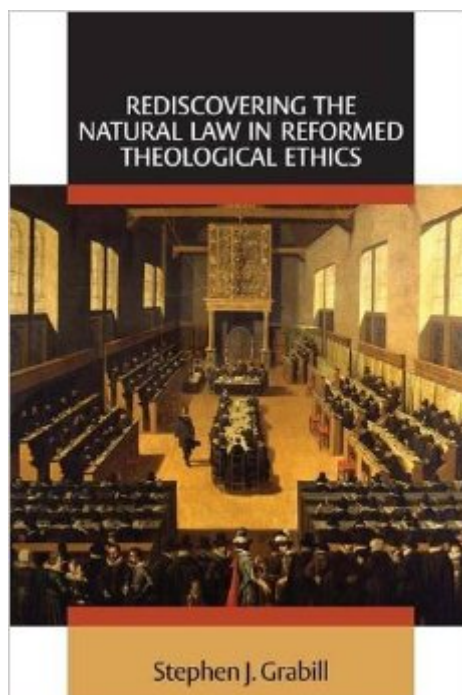


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# Rediscovering The Natural Law In Reformed Theological Ethics (Emory University Studies In Law And Religion)



## Synopsis

Is knowledge of right and wrong written on the human heart? Do people know God from the world around them? Does natural knowledge contribute to Christian doctrine? While these questions of natural theology and natural law have historically been part of theological reflection, the radical reliance of twentieth-century Protestant theologians on revelation has eclipsed this historic connection. Stephen Grabill attempts the treacherous task of reintegrating Reformed Protestant theology with natural law by appealing to Reformation-era theologians such as John Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Johannes Althusius, and Francis Turretin, who carried over and refined the traditional understanding of this key doctrine. *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* calls Christian ethicists, theologians, and laypersons to take another look at this vital element in the history of Christian ethical thought.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In his letter to Sadoleto (1539), John Calvin denied that the Reformers were innovators, expressed that the desire of the Reformers was to remain in continuity with antiquity, and alluded to the Vincentian Canon (AD 434). Grabill's *Rediscovering the Natural Law* demonstrates that the Reformed tradition, as it existed from the time of Calvin to the end of the 17th century, made good on Calvin's claim in the area of theological ethics. This book is both a historical and topical approach to the foundations of ethics in the Reformed tradition. Those already familiar with the historical methodology of Reinhold Seeburg, Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, and Richard Muller will find

this survey in the history of doctrine a comfortable read. Grabill examines in detail a limited number of interrelated doctrinal topics (natural revelation, natural theology, natural law) as they were formulated by Reformed founders (Calvin, Vermigli) and developed by later successors (Zanchi, Althusius, Turretin). Perhaps the most illuminating chapter in this volume, however, is the late-Medieval background to the development of the natural-law tradition. Here Grabill summarizes the research of medieval historians William Courtenay, Francis Oakley, and Heiko Oberman to show that the development of natural-law theory in the late-Medieval period should not be read as a monolithic tradition.

1. Introduction Stephen Grabill (research scholar at the Acton Institute, inaugurating editor of *The Journal of Markets and Morality*, PhD, Calvin College) explores in this volume the history of the natural law in the Reformation and in the Reformed tradition. The chief issue that he explores is the recent break among Reformed Christians from an ancient natural law tradition that traces its way back from the Middle Ages to the Patristic Age. Grabill argues that this tradition was a part of the early universal church, and that even the leaders of the Reformation never doubted its place in theology. Grabill therefore questions why the Reformed churches have broken from this tradition. He does this by exploring the writings of Reformed theologians from John Calvin to those of our modern day. Grabill traces the recent shift to the influence of theologians who split from the natural law tradition for epistemological reasons in the twentieth century. These theologians believed that, due to man's fall, reason has been irrecoverably tainted and therefore, the natural law, which relies predominantly on reason, is not trustworthy. They hold instead to the competing school to natural law theology--divine command theory--which teaches that Scripture alone is able to lead man to truth on matters of God and morality. This volume, which is particularly dense in some sections, reads at times like a research dissertation. The first paragraph of page 175, for example, begins with a sentence spanning eight lines and is broken up by only two commas. The non-theologian lay reader will find occasional passages difficult to digest. For the most part, however, the work is readable, and it is to my knowledge the best scholarship available on the Reformed tradition's view of the natural law.

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