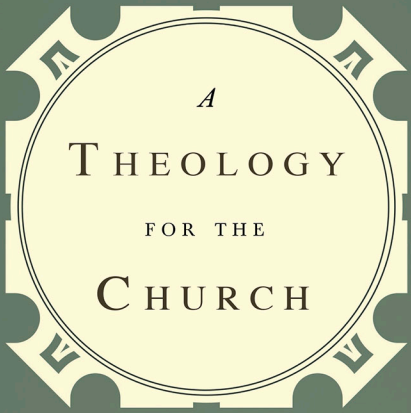


REVISED EDITION

Daniel L. Akin
*Editor*

# *A* THEOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH

REVISED EDITION


Daniel L. Akin
*Editor*

Bruce Riley Ashford and Kenneth Keathley
*Associate Editors*



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# Contents

# Preface to the Revised Edition

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is given the mandate "to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all" (Jude 3)[1] and "make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe everything I [Jesus] have commanded you" (Matt 28:19–20). It is to that end that *A Theology for the Church* is written. "The church of God, which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28) should be able to define and defend that body of truth committed to its care by God. The people of God must be equipped to distinguish truth from error, good theology from bad theology. Each contributor to this volume has a passion for a revival of theological knowledge and understanding in the church. We pray that the church, as a whole, would regain a love for the great doctrinal truths of God's infallible and inerrant Word and then take those truths to the ends of the earth for the glory of God and the good of the nations.

We believe it is crucial to wed doctrine and life—to recognize the unity of faith and practice. The apostle Paul was exemplary in this manner. He was a great theologian as well as a great missionary. He saw no dichotomy between the theology of the church and the mission of the church. In Romans 12:1–2, Paul affirmed the importance of the mind in the life of the believer, calling for a daily renewing which results in a transformed life.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., one of the contributors of this volume, states well:

> There is no room for anti-intellectualism in the Christian life, nor intellectual egotism and pride. The frame of God's glory reminds us that all we know of God and his ways is given us by grace. We are absolutely dependent upon revelation, for God's ways are unfathomable and his judgments are unsearchable. Theological education exists, at least in part, to equip believers with the ability to think, to reason, to analyze, to learn, and to synthesize biblical truth, so that this truth may be imparted to others through preaching and teaching and ministry. We dare not lose sight of this great purpose. Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ must be thinkers whose minds are captive to the Word of God, and whose entire intellectual structure is shaped and determined by biblical truth. Our captivity to the Word of God is a scandal in the secular culture, and among the Christians enamored with that culture. The secular intellectuals are blind to their own intellectual captivity to the spirit of the age. We, on the other hand, must wear our captivity to the Word of God as a badge of intellectual honor and integrity.

*A Theology for the Church* follows a distinctive pattern and a definite strategy. Each chapter is organized around four main questions, the order of which is significant: (1) What does the Bible say? (2) What has the church believed? (3) How does it all fit together? and (4) How does this doctrine impact the church today?

First, *What does the Bible say?* Primacy is given, as it should be, to biblical revelation. Scripture is foundational for the development of Christian theology. Biblical illiteracy is a great enemy of the church. Many who revere the Bible do not read or study it. As a result,

[1] All Scripture passages in this section are from the HCSB.

they are ignorant of its wonderful truths, and they do not see how the great doctrines of the Bible are defined and developed. Our prayer is that through this book God's people will grow to know more of the Bible and to know it better. We have this goal for the whole of the body of Christ. If we can teach our children and teens science, math, history, and a number of other disciplines, we are convinced we can teach them the Bible and theology as well.

Second, *What has the church believed?* If knowledge of the Scriptures is anemic in our day, a familiarity with church history and the history of doctrine is almost nonexistent. *A Theology for the Church* intentionally highlights the importance of doctrinal development in the various periods of church history. The great events and major participants are examined and critiqued to help God's people see how we arrived where we are today.

Third, *How does it all fit together?* Here we demonstrate the unity and coherence of biblical teaching as we consider each doctrine in light of the whole canon. The greatness of God will necessitate that we live with varying degrees of tension and mystery in the formulation of doctrine. Because of our finitude and sinfulness, we readily admit the limitations of our knowledge of God. Although we cannot know him exhaustively, we can know him truly. We are his image bearers, created to receive divine revelation. We can know propositional truth about our God, and we can know personally and intimately the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, *How does this doctrine impact the church today?* God's truth is eternal and unchanging. Yet it is the task of every theologian to demonstrate the relevance of the Bible for the contemporary audience in its particular historical and cultural context. Each generation asks particular questions that are often characterized by unique concerns. Here we attempt to address the more significant questions and concerns of our day.

This is a unique approach to a systematic theology text with multiple participants, so a special word of gratitude is extended to each of the contributors. I am appreciative of their theological convictions and competencies. Each participant in this project is a confessional theologian and churchman. They are evangelical and baptistic in their commitments, and they believe, as do I, that the task of theology must be recovered in the church if it is to have vitality and health in the twenty-first century.

Four chapters are significant changes from the first edition. Bruce Ashford and Keith Whitfield present a new chapter on theological method from a missional perspective that understands Scripture to provide the grand narrative for doing theology. Chad Brand gives a new chapter on theology of creation, providence, and Sabbath that upholds the essential revealed truths in these areas while engaging with the current research in science and philosophy. David Dockery and John Hammett deliver revised chapters on special revelation and human nature, respectively.

A number of people helped this project become a reality. Debbie Shugart, the administrative assistant to the president, was invaluable to the process, collecting, typing, and correcting various manuscripts. Brian Sandifer, Lance Johnson, and Chris Cowan were also instrumental in their assistance. Drs. Keathley and Ashford, the associate editors, joined me to see the project of a revised edition brought to completion. We also want to thank Jimmy Draper and Thom Rainer who gave us their full support in pursuing this project. Jim Baird and his staff at B&H are to be commended for their excellent assistance every step of the way.

Like any work done by finite and fallible humans, this project will have shortcomings, oversights, and mistakes. However, we believe it is the intention of every person involved that *A Theology for the Church* would glorify our great God, edify his church, and exalt the

name of Jesus among the nations. If that indeed comes to pass, then we rejoice that God in his grace has chosen to use our feeble and inadequate efforts to accomplish his sovereign purposes to the praise of his name.

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim 1:17).

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| *ANF* | *Ante-Nicene Fathers* |
| *BEB* | *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* |
| BEC | Baker Exegetical Commentary |
| *BDB* | Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907 |
| *BDT* | *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* |
| BECNT | Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament |
| *BHH* | *Baptist History and Heritage* |
| BSC | Bible Student's Commentary |
| *CHB* | *Cambridge History of the Bible*. Cambridge, 1970 |
| *CT* | *Christianity Today* |
| *CTJ* | *Calvin Theological Journal* |
| *CTR* | *Criswell Theological Review* |
| *DJG* | *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by J. B. Green and S. McKnight. Downers Grove, 1992 |
| *DPL* | *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin. Downers Grove, 1993 |
| EBC | Expositor's Bible Commentary |
| *EDNT* | *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by H. Balz and G. Schneider. ET. Grand Rapids, 1990–1992 |
| *EDT* | *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by W. A. Elwell. Grand Rapids, 1984 |
| *GTJ* | *Grace Theological Journal* |
| *HTR* | *Harvard Theological Review* |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| *IDB* | *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962 |
| *Int* | *Interpretation* |
| *ISBE* | *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, 1979 |
| *JETS* | *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* |
| *JGES* | *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* |
| *JNTS* | *Journal of New Testament Studies* |
| *JTS* | *Journal of Theological Studies* |
| LCC | Library of Christian Classics |
| LW | Luther's Works. Edited by J. Pelikan, H. T. Lehmann et al. 56 vols. Philadelphia, 1955–1975 |
| NAC | New American Commentary |
| NCBC | New Century Bible Commentary |

| | |
|---|---|
| *NCE* | *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. Edited by B. L. Marthaler. Washington, 2003 |
| *NIBD* | *The New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*. Edited by K. Doob Sakenfeld, S. E. Balentine, and B. K. Blount. 5 vols. Nashville, 2006 |
| NICNT | New International Commentary on the New Testament |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| *NIDNTT* | *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by C. Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1975–1985 |
| NIGTC | New International Greek Testament Commentary |
| *NPNF* [1] | *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series |
| *NPNF* [2] | *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series |
| NTC | New Testament Commentary |
| *NTS* | *New Testament Studies* |
| OTL | Old Testament Library |
| PNTC | Pillar New Testament Commentary |
| *RevExp* | *Review and Expositor* |
| *RR* | *Research Review* |
| *SBJT* | *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* |
| *SE* | *Studia evangelica* |
| *SJT* | *Scottish Journal of Theology* |
| SP | Sacra Pagina |
| *TDNT* | *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976 |
| *TJ* | *Trinity Journal* |
| TNTC | Tyndale New Testament Commentaries |
| TOTC | Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries |
| *TRE* | *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* |
| *TWOT* | *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980 |
| WA | Weimar edition of Luther's Works |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |
| *WDTT* | *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* |
| WML | Works of Martin Luther. 6 vols. Philadelphia, 1915–1932 |
| *WTJ* | *Westminster Theological Journal* |

# Section 1

# The Doctrine of Revelation

## Chapter 1

# Theological Method: An Introduction to the Task of Theology

*Bruce Riley Ashford and Keith Whitfield*

Christian theology is disciplined reflection on God's *self-revelation*. The purpose of this reflection is *to equip the people of God to know and love God and to participate in his mission in the world*.[1] The task of Christian theology is cognitive, affective, and dispositional. It aims at the head, the heart, and the hands. Toward that end it addresses questions such as: Who is God? What is his character and what are his purposes? What does it mean that God is a Trinity? Does God speak to humanity, and if so, how does he speak? In light of human sin and rebellion, how can our relationship to him be restored? What is the nature and mission of the church? How are we to live on this earth in light of God's commands and promises? These and many other questions are addressed within the pages of this volume. But first we must determine our theological method, the approach we will use in answering these questions. We will answer the following four questions: What does the Bible say? What has the church said? How do we put it all together? Why does it matter?

## *What Does the Bible Say?*

### *Scripture Anticipates the Task of Theology*

*A Theology for the Church* is written with a central methodological conviction: *our theology should be shaped by the truths and function of Christian Scripture*. Scripture makes clear that God's ultimate purpose is to be known as Lord by his creation, and we take this as the starting place for the task of theology. We find this purpose expressed in demonstrative

[1] Our reflections on how to define theology have been enriched by a number of conversation partners. We offer our definition not as a replacement to other definitions. Rather, we offer ours simply to emphasize the Christian calling to sustain reflection on God's revelation, to integrate what we learn and to express our beliefs within our circles of influence. We also want to underscore the purpose for engaging in the theological task: to know and love God and to join in his mission. Some of the theologians that have helped us think about the task of theology are Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1956), 31; Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 19, 22, 26; David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), xxiii–xxiv; J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1990), 13; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 23; James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 10; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 21; Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 41; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 141; idem, *Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 11; Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 3–18; Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), xii, 1–33.

statements such as "I am the LORD" (cf. Gen 15:7; Exod 6:2, 6; 12:12). We also discern it in the indicative statements that no one compares to him (cf. 2 Sam 7:22; Jer 10:6–7; Ps 89:6–8). This purpose is perhaps most clearly revealed when God tells us that he speaks and acts in order to be known (cf. Exod 5:22–6:8). Because God's intention is to make himself known, we affirm that our theology should be shaped by the entire biblical canon, and in particular by paying close attention to the overarching narrative that arises from the pages of the Bible. This narrative itself anticipates the task of theology as it offers the true story of God and the world and draws humanity into the drama through calling us to know and love God.

*First, Scripture anticipates theology because it reveals truth about God and furthermore provides the true story of the whole world.* From the beginning God purposed to make himself known. This purpose, however, was challenged early in the biblical narrative. The serpent tempts Adam and Eve to deny God's self-revelation. He raises a question about the nature, purposes, and character of God by asking, "Did God actually say . . . ?" (Gen 3:1). Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this the first pious conversation, the first recorded attempt to do theology. He writes, "It is not common worship, a common calling upon God, but a speaking about God, about God in a way that passes over, and reaches beyond," for the serpent speaks about God "with an attitude of having a deep knowledge of the secrets of God."[2] Over and against this temptation to doubt God's word, we recognize Scripture as God's true and trustworthy testimony of his own nature, purpose, and will. Scripture bears witness to the fact that the serpent was lying and does not know something about God's character or motives beyond what he has revealed. The serpent has his own purpose—the formation of the kingdom of darkness. But God subverts and overthrows the serpent's intentions by graciously revealing himself in order to accomplish his own purpose—the formation of the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col 1:13–14; cf. Eph 1:9–10).

God's self-revelation, therefore, provides the foundation, the trajectory, and the parameters for approaching the task of theology. A theologian would be remiss to ignore this point. In fact, Miroslav Volf underscores it in a vignette about German theologian Jürgen Moltmann: Reflecting on his career as a theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, one of the most imaginative and influential theologians of the second part of the twentieth century, told me a decade or so ago that if he were to start over again, he would interpret the Scriptures in a much more sustained way. Why? Scripture is the ultimate source of theology's vigor, he said.[3]

Indeed, Scripture is theology's vigor precisely because it is the Word of God and, furthermore, because it is God's interpretation of the whole world. Scripture paints the true story of the whole world.

In order for Scripture to be the true story of the whole world, however, it must be grounded in history and must provide a universal vision for all of humanity. Lesslie Newbigin explains the significance of this point by telling two stories. To begin with, Newbigin argues, if a religion is true, *it must be grounded in history*. He illustrates this with a story of a Hindu friend who argues that the historicity of the gospel is not important. For this friend, the historical "happenedness" of the gospel story is unknown and therefore the only thing that "matters is your living relationship with God now."[4] Newbigin's response to his Hindu friend is that one's relationship with God is necessarily bound up in following God's determined purpose for one's life and the world. In other words, it is

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Vol. 3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 111–12.

[3] Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 12.

[4] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 67.

historical by its nature. For this reason, then, the historical "happenedness" of the biblical story is indispensable to one's faith. Devotion to God is based on God's historical acts and furthermore must be expressed in and through one's involvement with history.[5] The object of faith is, therefore, not a suprahistorical reality but a historical reality and even a transhistorical reality. Newbigin concludes that the object of one's faith (God) must be one who reigns *over* and *in* the world in which they live.

Also, Newbigin argues, if a religion is true, *it must offer a universal vision for all humanity* throughout history. He tells the story of his conversation with another learned Hindu man who complained that Christians misread the Bible. The Hindu man spoke reprovingly of certain Christian missionaries who referred to the Bible as simply another book of religion. Newbigin reports that the Hindu argued that the Bible differs significantly from all the religious books in India in that it offers a "unique interpretation of universal history." So the Bible is distinct because it sets forth a cosmic vision of the world and history. This vision stretches from creation to eventual consummation. It includes God's choice to work through a particular nation for the good of the whole world and his choice to complete that work through a particular man, Jesus Christ. Newbigin writes, "What is unique about the Bible is the story which it tells, with its climax in the story of the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Son of God," and its "claim to be actual history." The conclusion drawn from this is "if that story is true, then it is unique and also universal in its implications for all human history."[6] The Bible becomes the basis for constructing the true story of the whole world.

Indeed, Christian Scripture reveals the truth about God and his world. It is the primary and privileged source for Christian theology, providing a true and trustworthy word about God and his world, an infallible interpretation for all times and all places. It is grounded in human history and provides a universal vision of God and his purposes, a vision that is for all peoples of all times and in all places. In this manner Scripture anticipates theology.

*Second, Scripture anticipates theology because it invites humanity into the drama of redemption by provoking change in the people of God and calling them to know and love him.* In other words Scripture engages humanity, demanding that they be theologians. This observation is based first on the fact that Scripture provides us with a *dramatic* narrative. The biblical drama begins at creation, continues through the fall and God's provision of redemption, and signifies that the drama will continue throughout eternity. In other words the drama does not come to an end at the close of the first century. This drama extends throughout history, and Scripture calls God's people to join his drama of redemption. Scripture is not an end in itself, a collection of facts to be observed for its own sake. Rather, it is a revelation, a guide to true and personal knowledge of God. Divine revelation entails human apprehension, right knowledge of and response to that which is revealed. This human apprehension, and its conceptual articulation, is "theology." The existence of this dramatic divine revelation anticipates the human task of theology.

This second observation is seen in the function of Scripture to *provoke change* in the people of God. Scripture corrects our thinking and the direction of our lives (Pss 17:4; 19:1–7). It offers assurance, encouragement, and hope (Ps 119:49; Rom 15:4; 1 John 5:13). It strengthens and equips (Ps 119:28; John 17:17; Acts 20:32; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 2:2). Through the Scriptures we can come to know and love God, and this right knowledge results

[5] Ibid., 68. Also, at this point, Newbigin responds to the apologetic questions regarding God's providential action in history which has been greatly questioned in Enlightenment historiography. See ibid., 69–79.

[6] Ibid., 97.

in life change. God initiates this change through biblical revelation, aids it through illumination, and further enhances it through our obedient reflection. The practice of sustained and disciplined reflection on the narrative and truths of Scripture for knowledge of and love for God is what we are calling "theology."

Finally, this observation can be seen in Scripture's call for us to both *know* and *love* God. Doing theology is the cultivating means of knowing and loving God. Through sustained reflection on Scripture we are sanctified (John 17:17) and renewed in our minds (Rom 12:1–2) that we might have hope in God (Rom 15:4).

Scripture, the Word of God, has always had an indispensable role in the formation of the people of God, regardless of covenantal context, for by it the character and works of God are revealed and explained, and through it people are called to a life of faith, devotion, and obedience. In his final words to Israel, Moses held up the commands of God as the sustenance of Israel's life (Deut 30:15). Moses, however, did not consider it enough for Israel merely to possess the Words or enough that the Words were accessible. Rather the Words had to be known with a heart of understanding and eyes to see and ears to hear and feet to walk in the way of obedience (Deut 30:11–20).

John Calvin, in the opening book of *The Institutes on the Christian Religion*, reflects on the function of Scripture as it relates to the task and function of theology. In particular, he connects the doctrine of God and the purpose of theology to the purpose of Scripture. He writes:

> Indeed, in certain passages clearer descriptions are set forth for us, wherein his true appearance is exhibited, to be seen as in an image. For when Moses described the image, he obviously meant to tell briefly whatever was right for men to know about him. "Jehovah," he says, "Jehovah, a merciful and gracious God, patient and of much compassion, and true, who keepest mercy for thousands, who takes away iniquity and transgression, . . . in whose presence the innocent will not be innocent, who visitest the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children." (Exod 34:6–7)[7]

From these verses, Calvin draws two crucial methodological conclusions. First, "[God's] eternity and his self-existence are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated. Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us." Calvin points to the fact that while divine revelation is verbal, it is a relational act of communication. He says when God reveals himself and his name, he does so to show who he is towards us.[8] Second, from this observation, he directs us toward proper theological aspirations. He reasons that God reveals himself in such a way that we can know him, so that we might love him.[9] Therefore, Calvin concludes, the task of theology is to reflect on the knowledge of God revealed in Scripture and the purpose of theology is that "we can learn to worship him both with perfect innocence of life and with unfeigned obedience, then to depend wholly upon his goodness."[10]

In other words the point of theology is not the mere acquisition of facts about God; the point of theology is to know and love God and to be transformed by his Word so that we

[7] John Calvin, *Institutes on the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1.10.2.

[8] Ibid. Calvin writes, "[God's] eternity and his self-existence are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated. Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us."

[9] Ibid. Calvin writes, "Nothing is set down there that cannot be beheld in his creatures. Indeed, with experience as our teacher we find God declares in what character he would have us know him, he puts forward a less full description but one plainly amounting to the same thing."

[10] Ibid.

can take our part in the ongoing drama of redemption. When theology is viewed as the mere acquisition of facts, it becomes what we look at rather than the process by which God forms a people who know him and love him. When we approach theology as facts to look at, it is easy to allow certain theological debates to replace Scripture as our primary theological subject matter. These debates—such as the categorization of God's attributes, the nature of predestination, the age of the earth, and the continuation of certain spiritual gifts—are not unimportant issues, and sometimes the church must return to them for extended theological reflection. However, the church's mission is derailed when theology becomes little more than a discipline helping people know what to believe about these particular issues. These debates are necessary to the task of theology, but they are not primary. The primary role of theology is to cultivate in us a love for and knowledge of God.

### *Scripture Provides the Narrative Framework for Theology*

The Bible's grand narrative provides the framework for Christian theology. This narrative unfolds in four plot movements—creation, fall, redemption, and new creation—and taken together these four movements frame Christian theology and do so in at least two ways. *First, the narrative frames the core doctrines of the Christian faith.* The narrative demonstrates that there is a progress to the history of redemption that is paralleled and often driven by the progressive nature of divine revelation recorded and found on the pages of Holy Scripture. Any given doctrine of the Christian faith must be treated in relation to each of the four plot movements because each of the plot movements teaches important truths that are necessary for understanding the core doctrines. For example, one cannot understand the doctrine of man unless one understands God's creational design for humanity, the effects of human rebellion on that design, the redemption provided by Christ, and the glorified life that will be experienced in the eternal state. *Second, the narrative orders and connects those core doctrines.* Systematic and integrative theologies must provide an order in which they teach Christian doctrine, and the narrative provides a basic order. The narrative begins with God and his Word, moves to humanity and human rebellion, then to Christ's great gift of salvation and his redeemed community, and finally to the eternal state. The reader will notice that this present book, *A Theology for the Church*, follows just such an ordering.

#### *Creation*

Scripture teaches that the task of theology stems from God's original creative work (and not solely from his redemptive work). God created freely and for the purpose of being known by his creation. His creative work reveals his character. God could have created a world very different from the one in which we live. But whatever world he creates must have two qualities: (1) The world must have the capacity to reflect and would reflect the glory of its Creator. The way creation reflects God's glory is through its beauty, its orderly design, and its righteous purposes (cf. Ps 19:1–6); for creation is, in Augustine's words, "the stamp of the triune God."[11] As the psalmist tells us, it does not bear the stamp of its Creator quietly. It proclaims the glory of God (Ps 19:1; cf. Rom 1:19–20). (2) The world must have creatures with the capacity to know, love, and respond to their Creator. This capacity is possessed by humanity and is what the Bible calls being created in the image of God. God's purpose in creation necessitates these two qualities. If God's purpose in creation is to be known, then the created

[11] See St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XI, 10, *NPNF*[1].

order must exhibit his glory, and his created imagers must have the capacity to recognize it. The created order is, in Calvin's words, a "spectator" of the awesome works of God.[12]

By creating the world, God established a kingdom that displays his glory and structures it in such a way as to accomplish this purpose. When we look at Eden, we find that God not only placed Adam and Eve in the garden but provided for them perfectly so that they could relate to him intimately. He was their God and they were his people. God had established his plan and promised his provision. Further, he created humanity to play a unique role in his kingdom. They are to participate in the fulfillment of God's creation by taking the Eden-kingdom God had provided and extending it to the end of the earth by being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the whole earth (cf. Gen 1:28). G. K. Beale writes, "[Adam and Eve] were to extend the geographical boundaries of the garden until Eden covered the whole earth. They were on the primeval hillock of hospitable Eden, outside of which lay the inhospitable land. They were to extend the smaller livable area of the garden by transforming the outer chaotic region into a habitable territory."[13] God's purpose is to fill the earth with his imagers who know him, trust him, depend on him, and enjoy him. In other words God created his imagers to be theologians and to fill the earth with more like themselves.

### *The Fall*

As we noted earlier, Adam and Eve's rebellion stemmed from a theological conversation with the serpent. The serpent implied that God's word could not be trusted and that his character was deficient. Adam and Eve's response was likewise theological, as they responded positively to the serpent's doctrine and sought to live independently of God's life-giving word. Their rebellious quest for independence from God led to their being banned from the garden of Eden and God's good creation being cursed (Gen 3:1–24). More importantly, however, it fundamentally altered the task of theology. From this point forward God's imagers would be born with a disposition toward rebellion, and their rebellious hearts would produce theologies subversive of the purpose for which God created them. These theologies set up idols leading them away from God. Ever since the fall, therefore, theology engages in the recovery of right knowledge of God and in the critique of ideas and beliefs that oppose God's plan for his creation. But this task is not mediated by human reasoning. For in the fall clear and pure thinking are corrupted, and they are recovered only through the supernatural works of regeneration and sanctification, the renewing of both the heart and the mind.

### *Redemption*

Although the task, sources, and focus of theology shifted with the fall, the good news is that God does not abandon his people or his plan. Essential to the theological task this side of the fall, as well as this side of paradise, is the fact that God still speaks. Even though the serpent challenged God's authority, and even though Adam and Eve sought independence from God, God's plan continued. In this plan to redeem humanity from their sins, God effectively said, "The serpent does not know me. He does not speak truth about me. Let me tell you who I am." God's self-revelation is always a corrective to aberrant theology and demonstrates

[12] Keith Whitfield, "The Triune God: The God of Mission," in Bruce Riley Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 29. John Calvin makes a similar point while explaining what Paul meant by "what can be known about God is plain to them" in Romans 1:19. He writes, "By saying, that *God has made it manifest*, he means, that man was created to be a spectator of this formed world, and that eyes were given him, that he might, by looking on so beautiful a picture, be led to the Author himself." John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, vol. 19 of Calvin's Commentaries, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 70. Emphasis original.

[13] G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 82.

God's ultimate purpose to be known and worshipped by his creation. After the fall, the task, sources, and focus of theology shift; and the good news is that God does not abandon his people or his plan, and he does not cease speaking.

Following Adam and Eve's sin and God's curse and punishment, sin's deteriorating effects become evident (Genesis 4–5). Humanity is condemned, and the whole of creation was placed in bondage to futility (Rom 8:20). Sin, death, and corruption permeate all things. Yet, in the midst of this, God revealed his gracious and redemptive nature. In Genesis 3:15, he promised Adam and Eve that he would rescue humanity by means of the seed of a woman (the promise fulfilled in Christ Jesus). In Genesis 12–15 he called Abraham, promising to give Abraham a son through whom God would make a great nation, and promising to bless all nations through it (through this one nation, God sent Christ Jesus, who is the ultimate blessing to all). Indeed, through Israel, God made preparations to reestablish his kingdom on the earth (a kingdom which was disordered by Adam and Eve's attempts to be kings to themselves). He did so by making a kingly covenant with Israel in which he promised to be their God and in return they would be his people who would broadcast his glory to the nations. In other words, God's calling was a privilege that came with a responsibility (a mission). Even when Israel failed in her mission, God reaffirmed his promise (that his kingdom would come) by sending prophets to remind his people of his plan. At every step they were instructed to trust him and follow the plan he had given. Note that Israel's obedience required theology. Obedience is predicated on the answer to questions such as: Who is this God who is calling us? Can he be trusted? How do we worship and obey him in our present context? Answering these involves doing theology.

This redemptive story is the basis of the task of theology. God redeems the task of theology by providing and preserving the main source of theology, his Word; through his Word, God reminds fallen people of the goal of theology—the fulfillment of his creational plan through his promise to redeem a people who know, love, and obey him. God's Word is preserved for us in the pages of Scripture, and through it God has chosen to reveal his nature and purpose to people throughout history. Theology is, therefore, an act of faith because in our disciplined reflection on Scripture, we are trusting that God is at work to redeem this world through his Word. This is the story that Scripture tells and continues to be used as an instrument in the fulfillment of it.

When all seemed lost, God spoke to Noah, revealing his plan of salvation (Genesis 6–9). When Noah, his family, and the creatures on the ark finally came to rest safely, God spoke, reminding Noah of God's plan to continue that which he set out to do in creation—fill the earth with his imagers who live in faithful obedience to his word. Again the world spiraled out of control, but this time upward, as the people sought to make a name for themselves. God's judgment came in the form of scattering a faithless people across the globe (Genesis 10–11). Again, when all seemed lost, God spoke. This time he spoke to Abram, calling him out to make his name great and bless all nations, and to continue God's plan for creation (Genesis 12). As the story focuses on this one man and his family, God continues to show up and speak even when his plan and promises are threatened. For example, God gave his promise in Genesis 15; Abram went astray in Genesis 16, but God spoke again in Genesis 17. This pattern continues throughout the life of God's chosen people, the children of Abraham, Israel.

What God began in Israel, he accomplished by sending his Son into the world. God decisively challenged the serpent's heretical word by sending the Son to reveal himself to the world (John 1:14, 18). Through Jesus, God the Father accomplished his original purpose to

be known universally. In fact, God accomplished creation and redemption through his Son. Scripture makes clear that the Son was present and active in the act of creation (John 1:1; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:2). Further, he was present and active in the redemptive ministry of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Jesus announced that in his life and ministry, God's promised and long-awaited kingdom came. He would overthrow the serpent, and we would share in his victory (Rom 16:20). He proclaimed the power and the presence of the kingdom with his words and actions. He declared that if people know him, they also know the Father (John 14:7). If people trust in him, they are delivered from the kingdom of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of God (cf. Col 1:13–14).

After the Father accomplished redemption through the Son's life, death, and resurrection, God decisively reclaimed his original and abiding purpose to be known throughout creation. Jesus commissioned the apostles to continue this mission by making disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:18–20). He sent them out under his authority, in the power of the Holy Spirit, with regenerate hearts, and with the promise of transformed lives. Drawing upon God's authoritative and trustworthy Word, they were to make disciples who would know and love God and participate in his mission. In other words, he sent them out as missionary theologians.

This is no mere recitation of redemptive history but the grounding of the task of theology. God redeems the task of theology by continually providing the main source of theology—his Word—and reminding his fallen people of his creational and redemptive purposes. Indeed, Scripture exists because God has chosen to reveal his nature and purpose to people throughout history. This communication, now stored in Christian Scripture, is the primary source and the hermeneutical lens through which we do our theology.

#### *New Creation*

The new creation was inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by the sending of the Holy Spirit to seal the work of salvation upon those who believe in Jesus and to empower them for their missions. It will not be realized fully until Jesus returns for his church and God establishes the new heaven and new earth for his people. God's mission is to gather to himself a people for his praise and glory, and God's people will live for God, worshipping him and enjoying him and his blessings. There will be a gathered people, and the painful effects of sin will not be present in the new creation. There will be no mourning, death, or pain (Rev 21:4). The new creation is designed to be a place where God dwells with his people (Rev 21:3). But worshipping him and enjoying him and his blessings will continue for eternity. The new city has no need for a temple or the sun, for God is the temple and the glory of God is the light that illuminates the city (Rev 21:22–25). In light of this end vision, there is a real sense in which the work of theology will never end. As we dwell forever with our God in a new heaven and earth, we remain created in God's image, uniquely equipped to know and respond to our Creator. Therefore our theological task—to know and love God by means of disciplined reflection on God's self-revelation—will never expire. Even glorified humanity will grow in its knowledge, love, and understanding of God.

### *Scripture Provides the Trajectory for the Theological Task*

In part 3 of this chapter, we will provide a concise constructive summary of the task of theology and of a faithful theological method. With that in mind, the present section seeks to locate certain core biblical passages that underlie that constructive summary. For any given question we ask of Scripture (e.g., "Who is God?" and "How can I be saved?"), certain passages of Scripture speak in a robust or particularly insightful manner to that particular issue.

These passages can be called "core passages." It is important that we pay attention to these passages but do so in a manner not isolated from the broader narrative framework.

The question we are now considering—What is the task of theology?—is best answered by drawing from certain central passages. We interact with several of those core passages but do so with two caveats. First, because of the limitations of this chapter, we have chosen not to treat certain core passages, particularly ones that are treated in other chapters. For example, in the chapter on natural revelation, Russell Moore treats Psalm 19 and Romans 1, which are important passages addressing the question of what humans can know about God by means of his general revelation to all people. And, while we treat 2 Timothy 3:16–17 below, we do not rehearse what David Dockery has to say about this passage in his chapter on special revelation, which asserts the primacy of Christian Scripture as a source for Christian theology. Second, locating core texts for the topic at hand, the task of theology or theological method, is challenging because the Bible does not directly address every component of theological method. However, we are able to treat a number of texts that direct us to the sources, aim, and framework of theology.

### *Theology's Task Issues Forth from the Act of Creation (Genesis 1–2)*

In the first two chapters of Christian Scripture, we discover foundational truths concerning individual doctrines as well as fundamental connections between these truths, connections that offer us a grid for doing theology. These truths are critical for our interpretation of the world in which we live and how we interpret the remainder of the Bible. Indeed, in the creation account we encounter three key truths that shape how we interpret our world and God's actions in the world.

*First, we encounter the truth that God created.* The basic point is that *God* created. From this we learn that the world in which we live was called into existence and shaped by his word, is a gift from him, and possesses a God-ordained purpose. The fact that creation is a gift from God and is endowed with purpose by God drives God's imagers to think about God and speak about God. These truths lead to deep and extensive theological reflection, the like of which is illustrated in Revelation 4: "Our Lord and God, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because You have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created" (Rev 4:11 HCSB). The existence of a Creator sets the stage for theology.

*Second, we encounter the truth that God's creation is good.* God's goodness is put on display by means of the splendid goodness of his creation. In the creation account, God calls his handiwork "good" seven times (Gen 1:4–1:31), referring both to the rightness of its design and the moral excellence of its purpose. The splendid goodness of creation leads one to reflect on the goodness of God himself. "[It] is religiously and theologically of utmost importance," Gordon Spykman writes, "to allow our thinking to be normatively shaped by the biblical witness to a good creation. . . . Otherwise we will be hard-pressed to honor the biblical witness to the absolute goodness of the Creator."[14] It is a reflection of the glory of his goodness, a place where his imagers can live in his presence, reflecting on his Word in order to know him and love him.

*Third, we learn that God created humanity in his own image.* The biblical account of creation gives special attention to the creation of humanity. God created man and woman in the "image and likeness" of the Creator, rather than creating them "according to their kind," as he did the animals (Gen 1:26–27). Although the precise meaning of "image and likeness"

[14] Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 143.

is not fully revealed in any one Scripture passage, the creation narrative does appear to connect this image and likeness to the unique commands God gives to his imagers, commands to "be fruitful and multiply," "till the soil," and especially to have "dominion" over God's good creation (Gen 1:26–28; 2:15).[15] Further, the biblical narrative as a whole does lead us to believe that the image of God shines forth in man and woman as they use their spiritual, moral, rational, creative, and relational capacities to his glory.[16] Finally, God makes "male and female" together in his image and likeness (Gen 1:27). From these insights we can infer two things about the task of theology. First, our ability to know and love God stems from our creation in the image and likeness of God. Second, our creation in God's image allows us to employ our spiritual, moral, rational, creative, and relational faculties in a Godward direction as we seek to theologize.

### *Theology's Task Is Complicated by the Fall (Genesis 3)*

Everything God created was "very good" (Gen 1:31). His creation was marked by a certain harmony and universal flourishing, just as God intended. Humanity lived in God's presence and enjoyed all his blessings. The task of theology was set. God's imagers were called to live under God's authority and by his design, and they were sent to manifest God's presence throughout the whole world. But the story takes a dark turn when Adam and Eve rebel against their Creator. They were persuaded by the serpent's heretical word rather than by God's trustworthy word. Being deceived and seduced by the serpent's lie, they chose autonomy and independence from God rather than worship and dependence on God. The consequences of this were deep and pervasive. From this point on, every aspect of life in this world has been altered by human sin.

Indeed, the *task* of theology is altered. In the aftermath of the fall, theologians must recover a right understanding of God's plan for creation and then seek to articulate and implement it. Also, with this plot movement, the *sources* of theology are altered. After the fall, God withdrew his immediate presence from humanity and spoke to them through his mediating word because of their idolatry and rebellion. Finally, the *focus* of theology is altered. Immediately after the fall God promises to rescue humanity by means of the seed (Gen 3:15–20). Hence, from this point forward the task of theology includes apprehending, articulating, and embracing the great salvation God provides and unifying the grand story of creation in redemption. Theologians seek to understand humanity's fallen condition, what God has done to overcome it, and how we live in a fallen world as redeemed people.

### *Theology Is a Relational Discipline (Genesis 12–15)*

Christian theology is not merely or primarily about concepts and the proper ordering of those concepts. While theology is indeed a cognitive enterprise and it does indeed deal in the ordering and relation of concepts, it is more ultimately a relational enterprise which God initiates between himself and his imagers. The name given to the agreements that govern

[15] Wayne Grudem points out the difficulty with delineating a full-orbed doctrine of the image of God. He writes, "Scripture does not need to say something like, 'The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God in the following ways. . . .' Such an explanation is unnecessary, not only because the terms had clear meanings, but also because no such list could do justice to the subject. . . . [A] full understanding of man's likeness to God would require a full understanding of who God is in his being and in his actions and a full understanding of who man is and what he does. The more we know about God and man the more similarities we will recognize, and the more fully we will understand what Scripture means when it says that man is in the image of God. The expression refers to every way in which man is like God." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 443.

[16] Ibid., 445–49. These and other capacities are precisely the instruments for carrying out the commands concerning dominion, multiplication, and tilling the soil.

this relationship is covenant (e.g., Gen 9:8–17; 15:18; 17:7; Exod 19:5, etc.).[17] Theology is a relational discipline in which God's imagers draw upon cognitive aspects of their relationship with God in order to know and love him more fully. Numerous biblical passages and stories deal with the tensions that exist as God's imagers pursue knowing him. From those texts we select Genesis 12–15 as a key passage that helps us understand the dynamic and development of this relationship throughout the Scriptures.

In Genesis 12:1–3, God promises Abraham that he will make Abraham's family into a great nation, give him land, and bless the world through him. The succeeding episodes demonstrate God's faithfulness to his promises. When Abraham's wife Sarah is kidnapped because of Abraham's lack of faith, God nonetheless blesses Abraham and his family with riches (Gen 13:2). When Lot separates from Abraham, God blesses Abraham but does not similarly bless Lot (Gen 13–14:16). When Abraham refused the king of Sodom's gifts because he would rather depend on God the King, God blesses Abraham (Gen 14:22–24). When Abraham is afraid, God reassures him (Gen 15:1). In this text we find a personal and spiritual interaction between Abraham and the Lord God. In fact, this particular passage is the heart of the Abraham story and the whole story of Scripture. This account provides a theological exposition on the promises foundational to the story of redemption and how humanity should respond to God's initiative in salvation (Gen 11:27–50:26).

After the Lord tells Abraham, "I am your shield" (Gen 15:1), Abraham responds by questioning God for not yet giving him the promised heir and suggesting that a member of his household might receive the Lord's promises instead. The Lord speaks again to Abraham to restate his promise for a son. This time Abraham responds to God's promise with faith, and because of his faith, he is counted as righteous by God (Gen 15:6). Later in the chapter the Lord again asserts his authority and character in light of the promise. He does so with the powerful proclamation, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess" (Gen 15:7 ESV). The dialogue between Abraham and the Lord continues. Abraham asks, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" (Gen 15:8 ESV). The Lord responds by providing a sacred ritual that reaffirms his covenant with Abraham. Taken as a whole, this passage provides an explicit paradigm for how God relates to fallen humanity (God's salvation is wrought by grace through faith) and a pattern that should shape the way we approach theology (our theology is wrought in the midst of temptation, fears, doubts, and real questions to God about his plan). Theology must be crafted through the covenantal/relational framework by grace through faith.

### *Theology Is a Life-Ordering Discipline (Deuteronomy 4–6)*

Christian theology is a life-ordering discipline, first and foremost, because theology is about the One true and living God (1 Thess 1:9–10). The classic text on monotheism is Deuteronomy 6:4. The fact of monotheism alone implies the task of theology. God is the One true living God. He is uniquely God. There is no other God. Earlier in the passage we find that Moses is preparing the Israelites to be obedient to God rather than to the false gods of the nations. He asks the Israelites, "Has anyone ever heard about a god speaking from fire? Has any god ever taken for himself a nation from another nation?" (Deut 4:33–34). Moses declares, "To you [Israel] it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him" (Deut 4:35 NKJV). Moses then reminds the Israelites of God's covenant with them and his provision of Ten Commandments for

[17] For an exposition of the priority of the covenant in redemptive history, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 21–37, 129–45; and John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, P&R, 2002), 11–13, 94–102.

them (Deuteronomy 5). Finally, he proclaims that their God is one (Deut 6:4). Based on this, Moses instructs the Israelites that the proper response to this truth is, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:5 ESV). The call for the Israelites to love and obey their God comes from the reasoned conclusion that God has been gracious to them and there is no other god besides him.

In the passage known as the *Shema* (Deut 6:4–9; *Shema* is the Hebrew word translated "hear" or "listen" in 6:4), Moses drives home the point that theology is a life-ordering discipline. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD your God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4). He exhorts the people to respond to this claim, and the response required is a full-scale ordering of life. The God of Israel calls for singular and full devotion. They are told to love God with all of their being, keep God's words on their hearts, and speak about God's Word throughout the day, both in private and in public (cf. Deut 6:4–9). This set of instructions from Moses is implicitly a call for them to do theology. How else is the Word of God to be "on" our hearts than through disciplined reflection upon those Words and wholehearted embrace of them? Indeed, this passage describes well the task of theology—to know and love God—by instructing God's people to meditate upon God's Word and teach it consistently, thoroughly, and situationally.

### *Theology Is a World-Interpreting Discipline (Eph 1:3–14)*

Theology is a world-interpreting discipline because Scripture reveals God's universal plan for all of history. While God's plan for all things might be expressed differently at various points in the biblical story, there is one grand, divine purpose for all of creation. In Genesis 1, the plan is expressed in these terms: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion . . . over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28 ESV). In Matthew the plan is expressed from the perspective of redemption and in slightly different terms—"make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19 HCSB). In Colossians, God's entire plan is summarized, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:16 ESV). Each of these revelations of God's ultimate purpose for history anticipates that one of the tasks of theology is to interpret the world. How can we practice loving dominion over God's good creation unless we give deep and extended consideration to God's plan for his creation and our wise implementation of that plan? How can we make disciples of all nations unless we have reflected on the biblical teaching on discipleship and the real-world, contextual challenges of making disciples cross-culturally? These types of questions are at the heart of the task of theology.

Ephesians 1:3–14 provides extended reflection on God's eschatological purposes. In this passage God reveals that he does everything "according to the good pleasure of his will" (KJV). In the first use of this phrase, we have the statement that God predestined Christians for adoption "according to the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:5 ESV). In this we see the relationship between our salvation and God's purposes. The second use of the phrase helps us discover the expansiveness of God's will, for, at this point Paul reflects on God's will for "all things" (v. 9). Here Paul says God's will has been a "mystery"—an unfolding revelation.[18] The divine "mystery" is God's "plan for the fullness of time, to unite *all things* in [Jesus Christ]" (v. 10 ESV). This mystery is the goal of all of history, for every created thing is being united under the rule and reign of one person. Andreas J. Köstenberger and

[18] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth,* New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 167. Köstenberger and O'Brien write, "The broad sweep of God's salvation-historical plan is in view when the term 'mystery' is used in [Ephesians] 3:1–13 (as read in light of 1:3–14)."

Peter O'Brien say it this way: "Christ is the one in whom God chooses to sum up the cosmos, the one in whom he restores harmony to the universe."[19] So God's plan is to bring all things together under the sovereign reign and goodness of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. These verses show clearly that, for Paul, God's purposes are universal and cosmic. When the "mystery of his will" is revealed, God's purposes are clearly fulfilled by a Christocentric redemption that embraces all of history and the whole cosmos. Indeed, God's eschatological purposes give Christian theology its unique and distinctive trajectory and call for Christian theology to be a world-interpreting discipline.

### *Theology Is a Bible-Interpreting Discipline (2 Tim 3:14–17)*

In these verses Paul says three things about Scripture. It is God breathed (v. 16), it is sufficient to accomplish its purpose (v. 16), and its purpose is to prepare believers to accomplish everything to which God calls us (v. 17). What we realize in these three points is that there is an unarticulated step that is implied and even demanded, a step that is necessary if one is to believe and act upon Paul's doctrine of Scripture. This implied step is the interpretative process needed to get us from points two and three, and it is in this step where the theological work is done. Indeed, Paul calls Timothy to engage in this process when he says, "Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed" (v. 14). This "continuing" involves returning to the Scriptures (v. 15) and requires the active work of biblical interpretation, meditation, and application (vv. 14b–17). It is this active work that we are calling theology: sustained reflection on God's revelation to know and love God.

We find the significance of what Paul says to Timothy about the Scriptures as we observe the larger context of these verses. Paul is encouraging Timothy to remain faithful to a certain lifestyle. In 2 Timothy 3:1–9, Paul warns Timothy against godless living with its love of self, money, and pleasure; heartlessness towards others; and ignorance of the truth. He directs Timothy toward a different way of life, one that is marked by theological reflection and theological moorings. It is further characterized by right doctrine, godly living, and biblical virtues (vv. 10–11). Paul offers himself as an example to follow (v. 10) but ultimately points Timothy to Scripture as the sufficient source as he continues on in the faith (vv. 14–17). In these verses Paul reminds us that theology is life shaping, but in order for it to produce this fruit, it must be a Bible-interpreting discipline.

### *Theology Is a Bible-Unifying Discipline (Luke 24)*

Jesus is at the center of the Christian faith and, as such, is at the center of the story of Scripture. This can be seen especially in the postresurrection encounter described in Luke 24. Some of the best places to encounter theological reflection in the New Testament and understand its importance are in the postresurrection encounters of Jesus with his disciples. For three years the disciples had followed Jesus as he traveled, listened to his teaching, and anticipated his coming kingdom. At his arrest all of them fled, and after his death his disciples had little hope. At the news of the resurrection, the disciples' understanding of Jesus and his mission was only beginning to be clarified, and in this there was a rebirth of hope. The importance of theological reflection becomes clear in these postresurrection encounters as we observe that the disciples' transformation does not take place merely at the sight of the resurrected Messiah. Rather, it emerges as they come to a new understanding of the person and work of Jesus through the unifying testimony of Scripture. They are changed as they begin to see how all of Scripture points to Jesus and his kingdom.

[19] Ibid., 112.

Throughout Luke 24, we see the disciples' understanding develop as they encounter the Word and reflect on it. Two disciples were walking on the road to Emmaus, talking about everything that had just happened, when Jesus appeared and started walking with them. As they talked, Jesus challenged them for their lack of understanding and explained the Scriptures to them. While they were with him, they came to a new understanding and were shocked that at first they did not recognize who was walking with them. When their eyes were opened, they went to Jerusalem to find the Eleven and the others with them. When the two arrived, they found the others marveling at Jesus' resurrection. Jesus appeared to them, and they were all at once "startled and terrified." Jesus asked them why they were troubled and still doubted. In response to their confusion, Jesus returned to the Scriptures to explain again how all of Scripture testifies to him and is fulfilled in his life, death, and resurrection. He also promised them that he would send the Spirit to empower them. The disciples could not understand fully what had happened without it being explained to them in words. Jesus could not explain fully his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming Holy Spirit without demonstrating how the whole Old Testament points to him as the fulfillment of God's promises of redemption. Sustained reflection on God's revelation of himself and his purposes leads us to see the beauty and unity of the whole story of Scripture.

### *Theology Is a Virtue-Forming Discipline (Titus 1:1–3)*

Theology is the foundation for Christian living. Our theological understanding ultimately animates and gives shape to our lives. A number of biblical texts capture this connection between knowledge of the truth and right living. For example, Paul's prayers demonstrate the connection between theology and Christian living as he prays for the growth and maturity of the church (Eph 1:15–23; 3:14–19; Phil 1:9–11). His prayer for the church in Colossae is, "We are asking that you may be filled with the *knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and *growing in the knowledge of God*" (Col 1:9–14 HCSB, italics added).

In Titus 1:1–2, the connection is made again as Paul pairs personal faith and knowledge of the truth with the pursuit of godliness. "Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to build up the *faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness*, in the hope of eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (italics added).

The spiritual fruit Paul points to here is *hope*, which he suggests is enlivened through the development of faith and knowledge of the truth. Faith and knowledge give birth to hope because they are both rooted in *theology*, which is nothing more than the practice of reflecting on and applying the reality and truth of the biblical story for the purpose of knowing and loving God and joining him on his mission. In fact, faith is the starting point of Christian theology, which ultimately moves us to seek understanding of what we believe. Knowledge of the truth is the fruit of faith that seeks to reflect and apply the reality and truth of what is believed about God, his Word, and his world. In Titus, Paul lists only hope. It is one of the main Christian virtues but not the sole virtue. Three virtues in particular are called "theological virtues": faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13).

Through faith, hope, and love the life of the kingdom is lived in this age (1 Thess 1:3). By *faith* we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us. Faith believes the redemptive promises of God with assurance and certainty (Heb 11:1). Through *hope* we pursue our deepest desires in the fulfillment of God's promises. Biblical hope waits for these desires to be fulfilled in the completion of God's promises to us. Hope holds on to the anticipation of

the eschatological promises of God. In *love* we order our lives properly by cherishing God above all things and loving our neighbor as ourselves. By this virtue all others virtues are tied together in perfect harmony (Col 3:14). Love characterizes the life built on faith and hope. Love demonstrates joy in God's redemptive promises as the community of believers fellowship with and serve one another. Love also shares with confidence and compassion God's redemption to the world—seeking to reconcile the world to God (2 Cor 5:18–21). People who live by faith, hope, and love form a new type of community, a gospel community, where the church enjoys their redemption in Christ and where the church is a sign to the world of the redemptive power of God. These virtues come from faith and knowledge of God and are invigorated through theological reflection that seeks to know and love God and join him in his mission.

## *What Has the Church Believed?*

Having set forth core Scripture passages that instruct us to do theology and guide us in how to theologize, we turn our attention to how the church has done theology throughout the ages. In so doing, one can begin to investigate two of the sources in theological method—Scripture and tradition. Tracing this history also reveals a necessary goal of theology—contextualization. Contextualization describes the effort to both obey and faithfully communicate the Word of God in cultures and contexts that are different from those of the biblical authors. Much of the diversity in theological method throughout history derives from the theologians' different contexts. Different contexts not only provide different perspectives from which to engage theology's sources but also provide a different set of questions that theologians seek to answer and different audiences for whom theology is written. Following the contours of theological method from the church fathers to the modern period will prepare us to access our own strengths and weaknesses and will allow us to forge a fresh way of knowing and loving God in our own context that is both biblically faithful and historically mindful. Our attention will be directed to select theologians (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Schleiermacher, Barth) whose work has been formative in shaping the church's view of theological method. If Christian theology is to be taken seriously as the reflection of the biblical revelation and historical expression of the "once for all" faith, we must come to terms with the historical nature and development of Christian doctrines. We cannot possibly understand the current state of theology if we ignore the doctrinal developments that have led us to our present theological state.[20] Our approach to exploring the history of theological method is to move horizontally across periods of time and to focus on key contributors to the development of our understanding of theology, its purpose, and its method.[21]

### *Patristic Theology*

Patristic theology is the theology of the church fathers during the first four centuries of the church. Theological reflection during this time arose out of the concrete and practical problems these theologians encountered while on mission. They formulated their theology *in media res* (in the middle of things), hammering out Trinitarian and Christological creeds and debating the proper relation of faith and reason, and of theology and philosophy, as they sought to articulate the faith to those inside and outside the church. Their goal was to

[20] Jan Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrine Development* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 4.
[21] Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner and Truth, 1996), 26.

carry forward the apostolic teaching as the church faced new challenges to the faith and new contexts for its teaching. Their high view of Scripture, their struggle to resist and borrow from philosophy, and their desire to integrate faith with reason would provide the point of departure for nearly all theologians that followed. In this way their thinking would form the first building block for one of the major sources of theology—tradition.

### *The Earliest Church Fathers*

During the second and third centuries, the church faced several key heresies—Gnosticism, Marcionism, and Monarchianism—which threatened the Christian faith at its core. In response to such heresies, theologians such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen honed their theological method in order to defend and articulate the faith in this new context. Irenaeus's (c. 130–200)[22] arguments against the heretics are particularly significant. Two aspects of his theological method stand out. First, he viewed theology as disciplined reflection on Christian Scripture, guided by the traditional apostolic interpretation. In referring to the "apostolic" interpretation of Scripture, the church fathers were saying that Christian Scripture is a unified and coherent body of truth, which must be read in a particular manner, and on its own terms, in order to properly recognize that truth. In fact, by the end of the second century, the church had asserted a "canon of faith" or a "right way" to read Scripture. John Behr writes, "The canon in this sense is the presupposition for reading Scripture on its own terms—it is the canon of truth, where Scripture is the body of truth."[23]

Irenaeus's primary source for doing theology was the Bible itself. In *Against the Heresies* and other writings, he argues that the heretics' interpretations go awry precisely because they do not use the apostolic interpretation of Scripture. The apostolic interpretation, unlike heretical interpretations, sets biblical passages within their home environment, which is the entire canon of Christian Scripture.[24] Second, Irenaeus refused to allow pagan philosophy to provide the overall framework for Christian theology, but he did adapt some philosophical language and categories to Christian use.[25]

Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225), known as the father of Latin theology, wrote more than thirty works of theology, many of them defending the faith against pagans or heretics. He is known for his decisive rejection of pagan philosophy, asking, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?"[26] However, like Irenaeus, Tertullian valued critical thinking (a tenet of pagan philosophy that is also central to the task of theology).[27] Further, Tertullian drew from philosophical categories within his culture in order to articulate the Trinity ("one substance, three persons") and the incarnation ("one person, two substances").

In the Eastern Church, Clement (c. 150–c. 215) and Origen (185–254) freely drew from Greek philosophy in order to defeat Gnostic heresies and show the rationality of the Christian faith articulated in Scripture. Along with other church fathers, they operated within

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[22] Unless otherwise noted, all parenthetical dates refer to AD.

[23] John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, The Formation of Christian Theology, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 15.

[24] Ibid., 32. Behr writes, "Irenaeus' basic charge against the Valentinians is that they have disregarded 'the order and connection of the Scriptures,' the body of truth, so distorting one picture into another. They have not accepted the coherence of the Scriptures, as speaking about Christ, but have preferred their own fabrication, created by adapting passages from Scripture to a different hypothesis, attempting to endow it with persuasive plausibility."

[25] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 35.

[26] Tertullian, *The Prescriptions Against the Heretics*, 7, trans. S. L. Greenslade, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 5, *Early Latin Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 35 cited in Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 35.

[27] As Richard Swinburne put it, "There are logical limits to the possibilities of human irrationality and even Tertullian cannot step outside of them." Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24.

a received Greek framework for understanding the discipline of theology. Origen, author of the first Christian systematic theology, *First Principles*, illustrates this synthesis of biblical teaching, philosophy, and the humanities by drawing from Greek philosophy and wedding it to allegorical interpretations of Scripture. Although Scripture was Origen's main source, his tools for discerning its message came from outside the canon.

***Post-Constantinian Church Fathers***

Although the context for theologians in the Roman Empire would change due to Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity (312), the goal and sources of theological method held steady. The church's newfound favor did provide a context within which theologians could work more freely. Athanasius (c. 296–373) was one of the foremost theologians of this period, best known for his theological battles with the Arians.[28] As a young man, before the Christological debate with the Arians, he wrote *On the Incarnation*, an enduring theological reflection of the entire story of Scripture built on the doctrine of the incarnation.[29] In this work we find sustained biblical reflection expressed for the spiritual and intellectual formation of Christians and the mission of the church. He demonstrates theological acuity and methodological diversity in his debate with the Arians. In this debate he made use of philosophical categories in order to argue that the Son was begotten and not made and that the Son therefore is of one substance with the Father. Peter Widdicombe writes that this is "perhaps the single most important statement made in the history of Christian thought."[30] Indeed, these distinctions are the foundation of orthodox Christology. Athanasius's theological method included biblical exegesis, tradition, reason, and the use of available philosophical terms and categories. Likewise, during the fourth century the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) fought against Arianism. They drew from philosophical categories and terms [e.g., *ousia* (essence), *hypostases* (person)] for the purpose of articulating and defending Trinitarian doctrine, "systematizing the faith of the church and expounding it with as much logical clarity as is possible."[31]

***Augustine***

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) is one of the most influential theologians in church history. His theology can be viewed as the pinnacle of theological reflection in the patristic period, embodying many of the best developments in patristic theology but also launching the church toward the next millennium of Christian theology. Although Augustine never wrote a systematic theology, he did write many theological pieces, most of which addressed a particular problem. Among his most significant and influential works are *Confessions*, *City of God*, *The Trinity*, and *On Christian Doctrine*.

While *On Christian Doctrine* offers Augustine's most thorough treatment on interpreting Scripture and teaching, *City of God* offers a particularly illuminating view of his theological method in action.[32] In this book Augustine gives a biblical theology and apologetic in

[28] See chapter 9 of this book, "The Person of Christ," for a summary of the Arians' position on the nature of the person of Christ.

[29] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1977).

[30] Peter Widdicombe, "Athanasius and the Making of the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 4 (1997): 457.

[31] Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 324.

[32] For first-time readers of Augustine, we suggest Vernon J. Bourke's abridged version. St. Augustine, *City of God*, abridged with a foreword by Vernon J. Bourke, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, Demetrius B. Zema, Grace Monahan, and Daniel J. Honan (New York: Image, 1958). Norman Cantor goes so far as to say, "Certain passages in *The City of God* equal the writings of Cicero in complexity and eloquence." Norman Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 74–75.

response to certain Roman intellectuals' attack on the Christian faith. His argument hinges on his comparison and contrast between the Roman narrative of the world (including Rome's history, her gods, and her philosophers) and the biblical narrative.[33] He relies on two sources. First, the reader will notice that Scripture was a driving force for Augustine because he firmly believed in *biblical inspiration and authority*. Augustine also believed that Scripture contains a unified and coherent story that is the true story of the whole world. Thus, his theological method took on a *narrative framework*.[34] Second, Augustine drew from *multiple fields of knowledge*, such as logic, historical philosophy, law, history, poetry, and religious studies.[35] Regarding the goal of theology, Augustine aimed for his theology to be *contextual, apologetic,* and *pastoral*. Throughout his career Augustine adapted his theological writings and arguments to where, to whom, and on what issues he was addressing.[36] Augustine set forth his arguments in order to win to the Christian faith those he engaged and to strengthen his fellow believers as their faith had come under attack.

Augustine's careful navigation of the relationships between faith and reason, philosophy and theology, and science and wisdom as sources for theology merits further discussion.

*During the course of his career, Augustine wrestled with the relationship between faith and reason.* In some passages he emphasizes the subservient role of reason, such as when he writes, "First believe, then understand."[37] In other passages he ascribes a certain primacy to reason, arguing that one cannot believe anything unless reason has led the way. He writes, "Heaven forbid, after all, that God should hate in us that by which He made us more excellent to the other animals."[38] While these passages may seem contradictory in Augustine, one must realize he was consistently critical of *autonomous* human reason, which insists on declaring itself independent of God. He spoke more positively about reason in the generic sense of knowledge-gaining and belief-forming capacities. Ultimately for Augustine faith and reason are mutually dependent. Concerning Augustine's view, Clark writes,

> In temporal sequence, faith (which is really a commitment to a Christian *way* of life) precedes full understanding, for one first accepts basic Christian truth on divine authority. At the same time, in order to exercise faith, a person must understand (by use of reason) the words that minimally explain the gospel. Further, reason can help us decide which of several competing authorities to adopt. Thus, reason tells us that it is rational to accept what reason alone cannot demonstrate.[39]

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[33] See Curtis Chang's excellent exposition of Augustine's apologetic strategy in *City of God*. Curtis Chang, *Engaging Unbelief* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000). Also see R. A. Herrera, *Reasons for our Rhymes: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 21–33, and Ronald H. Nash, *The Meaning of History* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 49–62.

[34] Unfortunately, he does not entirely escape the pagan (neo-Platonic) philosophical framework he had received as a young scholar. Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew write, "Something of the neo-Platonic spirit lives on in Augustine's synthesis, and this was to have negative consequences for the development of Western culture. *City of God*, for example, appears to combine elements of Scripture and Neoplatism. While much of his discussion sounds as if the goal of history is a restored creation, other parts betray his Neoplatism, by which the goal of the people of God is to ascend from the earthly realm to the heavenly." Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 77.

[35] Although Augustine drew from philosophy and related disciplines, he was not a philosophical system builder. R. A. Herrera, *Reasons for Our Rhymes*, 29.

[36] As we noted, Augustine struggled to contextualize faithfully, as he sometimes drew from pagan philosophy in inappropriate and unhelpful manners.

[37] Augustine, *On the Creed*, 4, in *Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers*. First Series, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989).

[38] Augustine, *On Free Will*, 5; *Letters* 120, 3 in *The Works of St. Augustine* II/2, trans. Roland Teske, S. J., ed. Boniface Ramsey (New York: New City Press, 2003), 131.

[39] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 36.

The process, therefore, is dialectical. Faith and reason reinforce one another.

*Likewise, Augustine continually explored the relationship between philosophy and theology.*[40] In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine writes, "If those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things which are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared; rather, what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use."[41] Augustine likens this "taking" to the biblical story of the Israelites plundering the Egyptians in the exodus. Not all that glitters is gold, however. For Augustine philosophy is a mixed bag, sometimes asserting truth and sometimes falsity. Theologians must make sense of which is which. Augustine provides two types of exemplars who have drawn from secular wisdom for the sake of the church. Moses illustrates the first type, a biblical author who was learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). Cyprian and other theologians illustrate the second type, consisting of church fathers who drew from their pagan education in order to serve the church. Philosophy and theology, therefore, can exist alongside each other in a mutually beneficial relationship.[42]

*Finally, Augustine explored the relationship between science and wisdom.* He argued that theology is indeed scientific, but it goes beyond scientific knowledge to gain the higher goal of wisdom.[43] David Clark summarizes Augustine's distinction between these two notions, writing that, for Augustine,

> theology is a disciplined activity by which the church reflects on the nature, will, and ways of the Creator. But *scientia* (the science of God), isolated by itself, is a truncated theology. For theology requires another dimension: *sapientia*, the wisdom of God. For the definitive purpose of theology is the knowledge of God applied as wisdom. It forms godly character in Christians as they live in community, and it governs the loves and the lives of faithful Christians who serve God and transform culture. Any theology that loses contact with this goal falls short.[44]

For Augustine, Christian theology does seek knowledge about God (*scientia*), but it goes beyond such knowledge in order to gain wisdom (*sapientia*), in order that God's people may know and love him, and thereby be conformed to his image (Rom 8:28–30).

### *Medieval Theology*

In his book *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, Jaroslav Pelikan argues that medieval theology may be seen as a series of footnotes of Augustine's thinking.[45] No doubt Augustine had a profound impact on the great churchmen in the Middle Ages—from Boethius, to Thomas Aquinas, to Bonaventure. While Augustine perhaps had the most significant impact on medieval theologians, it is also fair to recognize that medieval theology was formed in conversation and sustained interaction with all of patristic theology—depending heavily upon the great tradition for theological reflection. Medieval theology also was dominated

[40] John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–22, describes Augustine's early philosophical training, which provided the framework for his thought (and sometimes boxed him in), and Augustine's conversion through which he progressively increased his reliance on Scripture.

[41] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), II.XL.60–61.

[42] Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 93.

[43] See Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 334–37. This is one of the most helpful among the many passages in which Augustine discussed *scientia* and *sapientia*, distinguishing between them and relating them both to theology.

[44] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 37.

[45] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 16. Pelikan says, "It was principally Augustine . . . upon whom the seventh and eighth [centuries]—as well as the ninth and those that followed—drew for their understanding of church doctrine."

for a time by what we call "the scholastic method"[46] (with an emphasis on biblical exposition, rigorous logical analysis and careful linguistic distinctions) but later was influenced by mysticism (with an emphasis on one's awareness of God through direct experience, intuition, instinct, or insight). Ultimately the fruit of medieval theology may be found in a new position on authority for theological reflection in the Roman Catholic Church. Apostolic teaching and practice authorized by the church emerged as a source along with Scripture for doctrinal formulation.[47]

### *Early Medieval Theologians*

Eastern theologian John of Damascus (674–749) wrote the first great Eastern Orthodox systematic theology, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in which he follows a fourfold arrangement of prolegomena, theology proper, anthropology/soteriology, and ecclesiology/eschatology. He relies heavily on church tradition in general, and Eastern Church tradition in particular. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) drew heavily from Augustine in order to craft a theological method marked by its emphasis on rationality and beauty.[48] In *Why God Became Man* (*Cur Deus Homo*), Anselm argues that one must use reason in order to articulate and defend the faith. In *Address* (*Proslogion*), he demonstrates the use of reason by articulating his "ontological argument" for the existence of God, which is considered one of the most subtle, sophisticated, and debated arguments in the history of philosophy and theology. In addition, Anselm also sought to show the beauty of theology, as a witness to the beauty inherent in a universe created by God, who is the source of all beauty.[49] Peter Abelard (1079–1142), author of *Yes and No* (*Sic et Non*), sought to show that reason, along with revelation and tradition, must be recognized as a significant source for theology. Peter Lombard (1100–1160) wrote the *Four Books of the Sentences*, a theology text that uses a topical arrangement and in that way is a precursor to contemporary systematic theology texts. Under each heading he collected extracts from patristic and medieval theological writings. Lombard also sought to collate this material into a unified and coherent system of Christian theology.

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[46] The foundation of the scholastic method is the belief that theology and philosophy are two distinct disciplines. This belief arises from seeing the discipline of philosophy as relying on reason alone and the discipline of theology as relying on the truths derived from revelation and the mysteries of faith. While the Scholastics held to these distinctions, they also affirmed that these disciplines must ultimately agree, for God is the source of all truth. God would not reveal something in the natural order that contradicts what he reveals in the supernatural order. This characteristic marks off Scholasticism from the Patristic era. Augustine believes faith aids reason and reason aids faith. The Scholastics, however, established a method for dealing with faith and reason distinctively.

[47] Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 87. In the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Roman Catholic Church's view on the relationship between Scripture and tradition was clarified. Their statement on the Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation states, "Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence." "Documents of the Second Vatican Council," Vatican.va, n.p, n.d. August 30, 2012 (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html). Allison offers a thorough discussion on medieval development of these ideas. See *Historical Theology*, 82–87.

[48] Anselm expressed his profound debt to Augustine's *Confessions*, 4.13.20 in *NPNF*.

[49] Although Hans Urs von Balthasar and others have made this point in brief, David Hogg has provided the more comprehensive account of Anselm and the beauty of theology. David S. Hogg, *The Beauty of Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

### *Thomas Aquinas*

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) is one of the most influential and prolific theologians in church history. He is especially known for his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, which is a theology and apologetic written in response to a request to help Christian missionaries to Islam, and *Summa Theologiae*, which is a "disputed question" approach to theology. He remains highly influential today, as evidenced by the diverse streams of Thomism which have arisen since his death.[50] Aquinas called theology the "central occupation of my life."[51] He understood his calling to be a "theologian" in the broad sense of the word: he was called to teach the Bible, preach the Bible, participate in public theological debates, and write books in response to significant theological questions.[52] Yet he made few direct statements about theological method, and it is difficult to glean much about his method from his theological writings.[53]

Aquinas was both a university teacher and a churchman, and those twin roles affected his theological method. *First, Aquinas wanted to transform the medieval pedagogy by building a more integrative theology.* Medieval pedagogy was dominated by biblical exposition and face-to-face disputation.[54] Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* was an attempt to integrate these practices and set forth an orderly statement of Christian doctrine, adapted to the level of his university students. *Second, regarding the goal of theology, Aquinas wanted his theological work to be practically helpful for his students.* Aquinas said that a good teacher should "teach the ignorant, interest the bored, and attract the disinterested."[55] Therefore, although his *Summa* is dense and somewhat difficult for today's student to read (his specialized audience of students had an extensive knowledge of historical theology), Aquinas cared enough about his students to forge a new approach that would bring together biblical exposition and disputation into a seamless whole.

*Third, Scripture served as the main source of Aquinas's theology.* His commentary on the prologue to Lombard's *Sentences* is one of the two places where he deals explicitly with theological method, and his description makes clear his view of biblical authority. He does so primarily by delineating six modes of discourse used in the theological task: (1) biblical accounts of divine visions, (2) psalms and prayers, (3) narrative, (4) metaphor, symbol, and parable, (5) exhortation, and (6) argumentation. The first five modes consist of what might be called "biblical studies," but the final mode embarks upon what is now referred to as systematic theology. In Aquinas's view this mode of "argumentation" relies on Scripture as its primary source. "Thomas' primary desideratum [wish] for theology is that it be soaked in Scripture: not for nothing was a high medieval master in theology first of all a lecturer on the 'sacred page.'"[56] *Fourth, although Aquinas recognized Scripture as the primary source,*

[50] The field standard in versions of Thomism is Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). For a more concise treatment, see Thomas F. O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997), 153–200.

[51] Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Charles J. O'Neil (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1955), I.2.

[52] O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas*, 38.

[53] "It is worth noting," Aidan Nichols writes, "at the outset how comparatively little Thomas has to say about this subject. He did not get lost in methodology, or entangled by an oversophisticated and ultimately obfuscating hermeneutic. He took his Bible, a decent metaphysics, the antecedent theological tradition, and got on with the job." Aidan Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 167. We note that the "decent" metaphysics to which Nichols referred is Aristotle's metaphysics, which was deficient in certain ways because it was not based on Christian revelation and therefore negatively affected Thomas's theology.

[54] Exposition was a large part of Thomas's task as a teacher. See O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas*, 16–21; Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas*, 6–9.

[55] Thomas Aquinas, *Principium Fratris Thomae de Commendatione et Partitione Sacrae Scripturae, Opuscula theologica* 1 (Turin, 1954), 435. We owe this reference to O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas*, 18.

[56] Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas*, 169.

*he believed that the theologian must interact extensively with the antecedent theological tradition.* He writes, "We believe the prophets and apostles because the Lord has been their witness by performing miracles. . . . And we believe the successors of the apostles and prophets [church authorities] only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings."[57] Thus, tradition remains in the service of Scripture.

*Finally, Aquinas argued that faith and reason are mutually complementary.* In demonstrating their relationship, he shows three ways in which they differ. First, they differ in their sources. The source of faith is the book of Scripture, while the source of reason is the book of nature. Second, they differ in their procedures. Faith proceeds by believing the Scriptures as interpreted by the church councils and after that by using everything else at its disposal to go even deeper. Reason proceeds by collecting and synthesizing knowledge gained by experience. Third, they differ by their subject matter. Reason can ascertain many truths about being, nature, and man, and even a few truths about God. But faith alone can ascertain spiritual truths such as the incarnation and the Triune nature of God. For this reason they are mutually beneficial partners in the task of theology. Although reason can never bring us to God, it is helpful for proving that God exists, showing the inner coherence of the Christian faith, and disproving alternatives to the faith. Faith draws from reason before, during, and after faith in God, but reason cannot stand on its own without faith. Each is necessary but in its own way.[58] Both reason and faith originate in God, who is the giver of all good gifts.

Aquinas held a high view of Scripture and intended for his theology to be an accurate reflection of the biblical witness. He recognized that human reasoning capacities were a gift from God and ought to be employed rigorously and consistently when doing theology. Further, he worked to make his theology pedagogically and pastorally effective within his cultural and vocational context. While Aquinas was committed to biblical authority in principle, his appropriation of Aristotle led him to adopt too high a view of unaided reason, which in turn undercut biblical teaching and biblical authority.[59] In particular he did not sufficiently recognize the fact that human knowing is always and necessarily (postfall) adversely affected by the distorting and subverting powers of human idolatry.

### *Late Medieval Theology*

While contemporary with that of Aquinas, Bonaventure's (1221–1274) approach to theological knowledge takes a different course. He wrote weighty theological treatises, drawing from Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy in combination with Scripture and patristic theology, in order to formulate his arguments. He, however, stressed God's initiative in theology and argued that theology requires virtue as well as intellect.[60] Although some moral truths can be apprehended through reason, many others can be received only through divine illumination. In order to be illumined, one must be virtuous and prayerful. Like Bonaventure, William of Ockham (1290–1349) emphasized the spiritual nature of the theological task, stressing simple faith and disciplined reflection on Christian Scripture. He rejected scholastic attempts to wed Aristotelian philosophy with Scripture and argued that theology should be aimed for the heart. He rejected all proofs for the existence of God. Ockham's work

[57] Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, trans. James V. McGlynn, S. J. (Chicago: Henry Regency Company, 1953), XIV, 10, ad 11.

[58] For a more expansive treatment of Aquinas's view of faith and reason, see Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 57–70.

[59] For an accessible and concise exposition of this synthesis, see Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 78–81.

[60] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 39.

provided an alternative to Aquinas and an environment in which the Reformation could soon develop.[61]

### *Reformational Theology*

The Reformation era (c. 1517–1650) decisively altered the field of theology and, in some ways forged new paths in theological method. Although Martin Luther (1483–1546) never wrote a systematic theology, he wrote many theological works including commentaries on Romans and Galatians and many occasional treatises. John Calvin (1509–1564) published the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, emphasizing God's sovereignty as Creator and Redeemer. Luther and Calvin both rely principally on Scripture as their primary source, and both also appeal to the church fathers in their theological reflection. While they express it differently, they share the same theological goal: knowledge of God and knowledge of self. However, they differ with respect to the third source of theology. Luther emphasizes experience and downplays reason, while Calvin has a more welcoming posture toward reason and does not engage much theologically from the perspective of experience. Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), a collaborator with Luther in the German Reformation, wrote the first systematic theology of the Reformation, *Loci Communes* (*Leading Conceptions in Theology*), which focused on Scripture, law and gospel, and justification by faith. The Radical Reformers published an array of commentaries, sermons, and treatises that were deeply theological. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation made medieval theology into authoritative dogma, arguing that Scripture and tradition are coauthorities so that the Roman Catholic Church determines the canon and rightly interprets Scripture.

#### *Martin Luther*

Like Augustine and Aquinas before him, Martin Luther is an enduringly influential theologian in the history of Christian theology. Unlike Aquinas before him and others after him, however, Luther was not a systematic theologian. Timothy Lull writes, "Luther is an occasional theologian, not a systematic theologian! He wrote no single summary of his own teaching that can stand next to the greatest compendiums of Christian doctrine. The person who wants to listen to Luther has to follow him through the concrete struggles for the gospel in the context of the sixteenth century church and society."[62] In order to listen to Luther, therefore, we begin with his personal and historical context. Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, in 1483. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, so he entered the university with this vocation in mind. However, according to Luther's account, his intentions changed when he was almost killed by lightning one afternoon and soon thereafter promised God that he would become a monk. As a novice monk Luther often experienced anxiety attacks as he worried about the genuineness of his own belief and repentance. He completed his education at the University of Erfurt and went on to earn the doctorate of theology at the University of Wittenberg. At Wittenberg he continued to experience spiritual anxiety. However, while preparing lectures on Romans, he encountered a progression of spiritual and intellectual breakthroughs, through which he came to understand the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. From this experience and his later efforts as a reformer, all of Luther's theology flows.

Luther considered Scripture, the church fathers, and experience as sources for theology, while renouncing reason and philosophy. Paul Althaus writes, "We shall begin at this point:

[61] Ibid., 39.

[62] Timothy Lull, "Introduction," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 1.

All Luther's theological thinking presupposes the authority of Scripture. His theology is nothing more than an attempt to interpret Scripture. Its form is basically exegesis. He is no 'systematician' in the scholastic sense, and he is no dogmatician—either in the sense of the great medieval systems or in the sense of modern theology."[63] Most of his writings consist of Bible commentary, and his theological system and method were set forth most ably in his commentaries on Romans and Galatians. Luther was not a systematic theologian *per se*, but he was a theologian whose powerful mind enabled him to think theologically with a depth and coherence unrivaled by most.

*In terms of the relationship between theology and philosophy, Luther renounced philosophy, metaphysics, and the abstract knowledge of God.* He argued that such things stem from an anthropocentric worldview, from a "theology of glory." This renunciation arose from his view of faith and reason, which centered on the conviction that although God gave his imagers the capacity to reason (which separates them from the animals), humans have wrongly sought autonomy. They have relied on reason in order to reject the gospel, which in turn further incapacitates the right use of reason. For Luther philosophy knows almost nothing about man and even less about God. Philosophy can know something of God, his sovereignty, and his providence, but it can know nothing about God as a person and about God's relation to man. In his view even Plato's ability to see God is "like a cow staring at a new gate."[64] With these denunciations of reason and philosophy, however, it should be noted that Luther's contention was with autonomous human reason rather than with human reasoning faculties that he used vigorously in theological debate, that he did not deny natural revelation, and that he himself was more influenced by philosophical developments than he was able or willing to recognize.[65]

*Luther also interacted often with the church fathers.* He assumes that in all historical periods God raises up witnesses to defend his Word against errors and restores the purity of his teachings. So he writes:

> Saint Hilary lived at a time when righteousness was deeply humiliated and the truth was thoroughly damned, when hardly two sound bishops maintained their churches and the madness of Arius had seized all the other churches. Then truth and righteousness lay completely prostrate, and yet Christ came and drove off the Arians with their heresy, and the truth remained unshaken. So it was in the case of the Pelagians. . . . Therefore arm yourselves with these promises that Christ will be a successful fighter in us, and you will witness miracles performed by the right hand of Christ, which now seems to be weak. Thus our cause has passed through a number of definite threats, and if we look back, we see only miracles that would have been simply incredible before they took place. Christ has directed all these things so marvelously.[66]

Luther thus honors God's providential goodness in preserving right doctrine through the ages of the church. This appreciative esteem of the church fathers, however, should not lead one to conclude that he uncritically appropriated the fathers. Rather, in one section of *Table Talk*, Luther critiques some of the church fathers for misinterpreting Scripture and overlooking the doctrine of faith and justification.[67]

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[63] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 3.

[64] Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 44, 591 cited in Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 10n9.

[65] On this last point, see Heiko Oberman's treatment of Luther and philosophical nominalism. Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Scharzbart (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 120.

[66] Martin Luther, "Psalm 45 (1532)," vol. 12 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. E. B. Koenker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 222–23.

[67] Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, trans. William Hazlitt (London: Fount, 1995), 257–61.

*Luther believed that the goal of theology was the knowledge of God and man.* To be more precise, theology deals with the knowledge of man as a guilty sinner and God as the Justifier and Savior of guilty man. "Whatever one seeks apart from this is error and idle gossip in theology."[68] In other words, Luther is the theologian exemplar of "justification by grace through faith," and just as salvation is God's work through and through, theology is a reflection on the Bible's redemptive narrative through and through. "All Luther's theological thinking presupposes the authority of Scripture."[69]

*From this overarching goal of theology, Luther deduced that both the goal and source of theology are more than merely informational; they are personal.* "Theological knowledge is necessary: A man should know himself, should know, feel, and experience that he is guilty of sin and subject to death; but he should also know the opposite, that God is the Justifier and Redeemer of a man who knows himself in this way."[70] In other words, God's Word establishes itself in us through experience. Althaus writes:

> When it comes to the heart and the center of the gospel, the message of sin and grace, Luther appeals not only to Scripture and the consensus of the church, but also to his own experience in spiritual matters. There can be no doubt that experience is one of the principles of his theology. It is, of course, not a source of knowledge in and by itself, but it definitely is a medium through which knowledge is received. Theological knowledge is won by experiencing it.[71]

Luther used reason, tradition, and experience as he theologized; thus, his theological method is best described as disciplined reflection on Christian Scripture.

### *John Calvin*

John Calvin is one of a handful of enduringly and toweringly influential theologians before the modern era of church history. He was not a systematic theologian in the modern sense of the word. John McNeill writes, "One who takes up Calvin's masterpiece with the preconception that its author's mind is a kind of efficient factory turning out and assembling parts of a neatly jointed structure of dogmatic logic will quickly find this assumption challenged and shattered."[72] Perhaps it is best to say that although Calvin did not set forth to be a system builder, in either the scholastic or the modern vein, he did seek to present his Scripture-based theology in a topical, unified, and coherent manner, and therefore can be considered a systematic theologian in that qualified sense of the term.

If one is to understand Calvin as theologian, one must grapple with a wide variety of sources. Timothy George notes six: Calvin's commentaries, sermons, tracts, letters, catechetical writings, and, most importantly for this chapter, his masterpiece, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.[73] From these writings one can deduce that Calvin's sources for theology included Scripture, reason, and church tradition, but Scripture held pride of place. The other sources must be in conformity with Scripture and serve to interpret Scripture itself rightly.[74] In order to demonstrate this, Calvin *argues that independent human reason cannot ascend*

[68] Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883), 40:2, 327 cited in Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 9.

[69] Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 3.

[70] Martin Luther, "Selected Psalms," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 12:311–12, cited in Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 40.

[71] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 8.

[72] John T. McNeill, "Introduction," in John Calvin, *Institutes on the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), li.

[73] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 185–89.

[74] Randall C. Zachman, "John Calvin," in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction,* ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 117–24.

*to the knowledge of God*. In Calvin's view God has implanted knowledge of himself (a sense of divinity) *in all humans*, and its purpose is to lead us to salvation. However, our ignorance and sin combine to distort and blunt our knowledge of God. If this corruption is to be overcome, one must develop a love for God. Further, God has provided knowledge of himself *in the created order*. He has displayed "innumerable evidences" of himself in the universe, which is itself "a sort of mirror" by which we can see God.[75] However, we also distort and blunt that knowledge. Sin has so blinded us that we cannot see what is in front of our eyes.[76]

*In light of man's inability to know God through independent reason, God must descend to man by means of his Word.* Scripture is sufficient to know God, and to deny such sufficiency is to deny the Holy Spirit. Calvin writes, "Whoever imagines that anything must be added to their doctrine, as if it were imperfect and but half-finished, not only accuses the apostles of dishonesty, but blasphemes against the Spirit."[77] Timothy George points out two dominant images Calvin uses to describe the Bible. The first is *baby talk*. When God speaks, he accommodates himself to man's fallenness and finitude. Calvin writes:

> For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity.[78]

The second image is that of *spectacles*. Calvin writes:

> Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.[79]

For Calvin, therefore, Christian Scripture is the sole means by which we can see what is to be seen of God.[80]

*Calvin also asserted that Scripture has primacy over church tradition.* Although he sometimes drew from the church fathers as he made his arguments, he refuted the Catholic two-source theory, which viewed church tradition as a coauthority alongside Scripture. In regards to the two-source view, Calvin writes:

> But what effrontery is this? . . . But when [the disciples] committed their doctrine to writing, were they even then beset with such dullness that they afterward needed to supply with a living voice what they had omitted from their writings through the fault of ignorance? . . . For every

[75] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.1.

[76] Calvin writes, "It is therefore in vain that so many burning lamps shine for us in the workmanship of the universe to show forth the glory of its author. Although they bathe us wholly in their radiance, yet they can of themselves in no way lead us into the right path. They do not go farther than to render us inexcusable." Ibid., 1.5.14.

[77] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 143, cited in Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 153.

[78] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.1. Timothy George notes that this baby talk image leads directly to a foundational principle in Calvin's method, which is his "doctrine of Holy Scripture, the essential elements of which we can summarize in one sentence: The Bible is the inspired Word of God revealed in human language and confirmed to the believer by the inner witness of the Spirit." George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 194.

[79] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

[80] Calvin writes, "Let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. . . . Indeed, how can the mind by its own leading come to search out God's essence when it cannot even get to its own? Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself." Ibid., 1.13.21.

> schoolboy knows that in the writings of the apostles, which these fellows, as it were, maim and halve, there abides the fruit of that revelation which the Lord then promised to the apostles.[81]

For Calvin, therefore, theology may draw from sanctified human reason and church tradition but only to the extent that they are in submission to Christian Scripture. Theology is, for Calvin, disciplined reflection on Christian Scripture.

***The Radical Reformers***

The mainline Protestant Reformers referred to the Radical Reformers with such pejorative terms as "swarming bees," "asses," and "mad dogs," and did so because the Radical Reformation was a critique not only of Catholicism but also of the mainline Protestant Reformation. A substantial portion of their critique concerned theological method. George H. Williams divides the Radical Reformers into three subgroupings: Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Evangelical Rationalists.[82] For the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on three Anabaptists: Balthasar Hübmaier, Menno Simons, and Pilgram Marpeck as representatives of the larger Radical Reformation. The goal of Anabaptist theology was to establish a church on the pattern of the New Testament church—emphasizing following Jesus Christ as the living head of the church and defining the church as a voluntary fellowship of believers. They were driven more by restoration than by reformation.

Balthasar Hübmaier (1480–1528) is known as the first Anabaptist theologian to earn a doctoral degree in theology and the only one to do so in the earliest days of the development of Anabaptism.[83] One central conviction stood out among his doctrinal distinctives: *Christian Scripture is the source and norm for Christian theology*. For him Scripture is the only standard for adjudicating when there is a question on a matter of faith.[84] Yet again, in *A Christian Catechism* he makes clear that the Bible, rather than the church fathers and councils, is the source for Christian theology. (He did, however, occasionally quote and draw from the creeds and even wrote his *Twelve Articles of Christian Belief* using the Apostles' Creed to structure the articles.[85]) Perhaps the most powerful episode in his life relating to his convictions about the Bible was his second Zürich imprisonment, at which time, under torture, he recanted certain portions of his beliefs. After being released, Hübmaier repented and confessed his sin of recanting and wrote a *Short Apology* in which he pointed out that he was human and that he had erred but that he would never be a heretic because he lashed his theology to the Word of God. In 1528, he and his wife Elizabeth were arrested by Roman Catholic authorities, tortured, and tried for heresy. He was burned at the stake, and she was drowned in the Danube River.

Menno Simons (1496–1561) was a former Catholic priest who was a guiding light for the Anabaptists in Netherlands and Germany. Concerning his theological method, he claimed *Christian Scripture is the sole source and norm for Christian theology*. He writes, "Put your trust in Christ alone and in His Word, and in the sure ministration and practice of His holy apostles, and by the grace of God you will be safe from all false doctrine and the power of

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[81] Ibid., 4.18.14. We owe this reference to Allison, *Historical Theology*, 154.

[82] George H. Williams and Angel Mergal, eds., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 19–38. Also, see George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962; Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000).

[83] For a contemporary Anabaptist theology, see Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Bible, Historical, and Constructive* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

[84] Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 90.

[85] William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 180.

the devil, and will walk with a free and pious mind before God."[86] Timothy George notes that Simons rebuked the mainline Reformers for drawing from human traditions and vain learning in addition to Scripture.[87] Accordingly, in his *Confession of the Triune God* (1550), he built the doctrine of the Trinity without explicitly appealing to any sources other than Scripture. *Simons gave the New Testament clear priority over the Old*, stressing the progressive nature of revelation and the discontinuity between the two testaments. *Perhaps more shocking is that Simons viewed the Apocrypha as canonical.* He referred repeatedly to all of the apocryphal books, never distinguishing their authority from the sixty-six undisputed writings.[88]

Pilgram Marpeck (d. 1556) was not a systematic theologian. But, as Malcolm Yarnell argues, the unsystematic nature of his literary corpus is a clue to Marpeck's theological method: "This is not so much a failure as a continual rebuke to the aridity to which academic theology is too commonly subject."[89] Concerning his theological method, Scripture is the only source for theology. *Thus, theology must be formulated in light of the explicit teaching of Christian Scripture.* Jan Kiwiet writes, "Theology is, for Marpeck, a systematic hermeneutic of Scripture."[90] *In order to properly understand the Scriptures, he believed, the Holy Spirit must open the theologian's eyes.* True understanding and true faith come by Word and Spirit.[91] He practiced a congregational hermeneutic, in which multiple members read, discussed, and preached Scripture.[92] Despite his emphasis on Scripture, like Simons, he argued that the New Testament was more authoritative than the Old,[93] *and sometimes referenced the Apocrypha without distinguishing its authority from the undisputed writings*.[94]

### *Neo-Reformational Theologians*

The Reformation was a time of fruitful theological reflection and formulation, and during this period many new theologians emerged. These new theological voices did not always agree with one another. Many wrote their theology in direct response to both first- and second-generation Reformers. Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) stands at the head of the *Arminian* response to the Calvinist wing of the Reformation, calling for every doctrine to be reexamined in light of the biblical testimony. His primary contention with Calvinists is that they had misinterpreted Scripture and in some cases had held Reformed confessional statements on par with Scripture. Moises Amyraut (1596–1664) stands at the head of the *Amyraldian* response to the Calvinist wing of the Reformation. His primary contention with Calvinists is that their doctrine of limited atonement or "particular redemption" was a misinterpretation of the biblical teaching caused by their theological system. *Pietism* was a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century German movement seeking to renew Lutheran theology. Pietists such as Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) criticized the Lutherans for building rationalist theological systems and emphasizing a polemical approach to teaching and preaching.[95] *Puritan* theology emphasized biblical authority, exe-

[86] Menno Simons, *Foundation* in John Christian Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956), 138. We were alerted to this quote by Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 181.

[87] George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 274–78.

[88] Ibid., 277.

[89] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 76.

[90] Jan J. Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marbeck: Ein Fuhrer in der Tauferbewegung der Reformationszeit* (Kassel: J. G. Oncken, 1958), 16 cited in Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 85.

[91] Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 87.

[92] Ibid., 101.

[93] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 126.

[94] Ibid., 125.

[95] Dale Brown writes, "Their position was summarized in the popular Latin saying: *in necessarii veritas (unitas), in non necessarii libertas, in omnibus caritas* (in necessary things, truth [or unity], in things not necessary, liberty, in all things,

gesis, theology, and piety. Arguably, the greatest and most influential Puritan theologian was Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Concerning his theological method, Scripture as the inspired Word of God serves as the authoritative source.[96] Although Scripture served as the primary source, he affirmed that human rational faculties are necessary and useful in the task of theology. He denied, however, that independent human reason can make the knowledge of God real to unregenerate man. Along with Scripture and reason, Edwards evidenced a deep and sustained interaction with developments in philosophy and the sciences (especially with the works of John Locke and Isaac Newton). At least part of the goal of Edwards's theology was beauty, and at the center of his pursuit of beauty was explication of God's glory as the right and ultimate end of all things.[97] "God is God," wrote Edwards, "and distinguished from all other beings, and exalted above 'em, chiefly by his divine beauty."[98]

### *Post-Reformational Theologians*

The Post-Reformation era (1640–1725) is known as the period of "high orthodoxy" for Protestant theology and the development of theological method. The Reformers and their immediate successors laid the groundwork for a Protestant theological method but were unable to examine carefully their own theological presuppositions and to propose a finely tuned methodology for the task of theology.[99] The century following the Reformers, however, was a time of intense reflection on the task of theology by both Roman Catholic theologians and Protestant theologians. Two main factors contribute to the attention given to such careful and nuanced developments to the task of theology in the century following the Reformation: the concentration of polemics for reformational theology and the continuation of medieval definitions of theology.[100] The principal difference between the Reformers and the Post-Reformers is seen in the discussions on definitions of theology in their prolegomena and the notable shift in the basis of theological knowledge from Scripture alone with the Reformers, to Scripture and God himself for the Post-Reformers. The Post-Reformers made a distinction between these two forms of knowledge. Scripture is the cognitive foundation, and the Triune God is the necessary foundation for knowledge. While the Post-Reformers affirmed the thoughts and fundamental assumptions of the Reformers, their theological terminology,

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love"). . . . Spener, Francke, and their colleagues desired to walk the middle ground between dogmatic inflexibility and dogmatic indifference." Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 43.

[96] Richard Lints writes, "[Edwards] was fascinated by the new learning of his day, and, although it may seem incompatible to most moderns, he was also bound by an unparalleled commitment of fidelity to the Scriptures." Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 172.

[97] Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University, 1968); Stephen R. Holmes. *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Belden C. Lane, "Jonathan Edwards on Beauty, Desire, and the Sensory World," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 44–72; Owen Strachan and Douglas Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards on Beauty* (Chicago: Moody, 2010).

[98] Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University, 1959), 298.

[99] Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 108. Muller says, "The reason for this omission is simple: the first two generations of Protestant thinkers were fully occupied in establishing exegetically and discursively the basic theological positions of Protestantism."

[100] Ibid., 60–73. Muller helpfully summarizes the Post-Reformation reflection on theological method. He says, "In the case of the Protestant theologians, however, the construction of prolegomena was a twofold or even threefold endeavor involving the statement of views of the theological task grounded in the experience of the Reformation, the appropriation and modification of the earlier tradition of prolegomena, and the polemical and apologetic defense of Protestant theological presuppositions over against Roman Catholic attack. The resulting prolegomena manifest a mastery of the issues and debates underlying the theological enterprise that has seldom been achieved in the history of theology either before or since" (109).

expressions, and structural arguments were different from those of the Reformers.[101] Their theological expressions sound more like the Medieval Scholastics than the Reformers.

### *Modern and Contemporary Theology*

The modern period is marked by a dizzying diversity of theological paradigms, each with their attendant theological methods.[102] At the headwaters of contemporary theology stand two toweringly influential theologians, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth. A substantial portion of contemporary theologians do their work consciously in the wake of, and in response to, the agendas set forth by these two men. Schleiermacher influenced a shift in both the source and aim of theology. To Schleiermacher, the purpose or goal of theology is to make sense of personal religious experience, which was also his privileged theological source. Thus for the German theologian, theological source and theological aim are in fact two sides of the same coin. Barth, on the other hand, sought to recover the centrality of the free and sovereign personal revelation of God. Theology, for him, was the study of God's revelation through the proclamation of the Word to the church. For this reason he titles his thirteen-volume work *Church Dogmatics*. So we can speak of his source for theology and aim of theology as related to one another as well. They are not identical as in Schleiermacher but work together in a confluence. His source is the threefold manifestation of the Word to the church, and his aim is to test and enrich how the Word is proclaimed for the church. This section begins with an overview of theological method in Schleiermacher and Barth, followed by brief treatments of other selected theologians.

#### *Friedrich Schleiermacher*

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was born into a devout Pietist family in Prussia. He was the pastor of Trinity Church in Berlin, helped found the University of Berlin, and produced the authoritative German translation of Plato's works. Throughout these years he became known as a great preacher, an internationally renowned theologian, and prominent cultural leader in Germany. He is considered the father of liberal theology and modern hermeneutics and generally is listed as one of the most influential theologians in church history.[103] Karl Barth called him the "great Niagara falls" to which 200 years of theology was drawn.[104] In 1834, when Schleiermacher died of pneumonia, thousands of Berlin's citizens swarmed the streets in an outpouring of affection for their beloved theologian and preacher.

In terms of his theological method, Schleiermacher was experiential, expressive, communal, pastoral, systematic, and reductionist. *First and foremost, Schleiermacher's method was experiential.* In *On Religion* he wrote to persuade his cultured friends that religion does not smother people and alienate them from their true selves. Instead, he argued that it is both credible and compelling precisely because religion is something that arises from universal human experience.[105] In *The Christian Faith* he argues that the Bible is a record of the

[101] Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume 4: The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 397–403.

[102] For a helpful survey of these theologians and their theological method vis-à-vis the doctrines of divine transcendence and immanence, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

[103] Ibid., 40.

[104] We owe this citation to Brian Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 20.

[105] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers,* ed. Richard Couter (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1996).

religious experiences of ancient people.[106] It is not revelational or authoritative, but it does help the Christian community to reflect on its own religious experience. Christian theology is disciplined reflection on our religious experience, on our sense of absolute dependence, of which God is the object.[107] *Second, Schleiermacher's method was expressive.* After having reflected on the religious experience of the Christian community, the theologian attempts to present the Christian religious affections in human language. *Third, his method was communal.* Theology arises primarily from the church and only secondarily from the pen of the solitary theologian.[108] *Fourth, his method was pastoral.* Because theology is disciplined reflection on the church's piety, it should not be driven by one's desire to gain scientific truth or to defend oneself at the bar of the academy but rather is driven by one's desire to serve the church.[109] *Fifth, his method was systematic.* While Schleiermacher did not try to systematize divinely revealed propositional truth, he did seek to reflect systematically upon religious experience. *Sixth, his method was reductionist.* By locating religion and theology in the realm of experience, he gave up religion's claims to scientific and moral truth.

Schleiermacher's method led him to revise or discard many orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith. Regarding the doctrine of God, he minimized the Trinity and included it only in a brief manner in the conclusion to *The Christian Faith*, denied that the "attributes of God" actually describe God, denied the reality of miracles, and rejected the efficacy of prayer. Regarding Christology, he rejected traditional teaching on the incarnation and the two natures of Christ, positing that Jesus Christ was entirely human except for his potent God-consciousness. Regarding soteriology, he argues that Christ "saves" us by attracting us to himself with his powerful personality, thereby developing in us a more potent God-consciousness. In summary, Schleiermacher's anthropocentric turn cast the aim of theology as understanding religious experiences and thus produced a heterodox theological method, which resulted in heterodox conceptions of nearly every major Christian doctrine.

### *Karl Barth*

Karl Barth (1886–1968) was born in Basel, the son of a moderately conservative Reformed pastor.[110] From an early age Barth knew he wanted to be a theologian. In his university studies at Bern, Berlin, Tübingen, and Marburg, he became enamored with liberal theology. However, upon graduating and becoming a pastor, he soon rejected the liberal paradigm. Barth writes, "An entire world of theological exegesis, ethics, dogmatics, and preaching, which up to that point I had accepted as basically credible, was thereby shaken to the foundations."[111] In the summer of 1916, while writing his commentary on Romans, *Der Romerbrief* (1919), he made a decisive break with liberalism.[112] In the following years, through the publication of *Church Dogmatics* (*CD*) and other writings, he continued to forge

[106] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: T&T Clark, 1999).

[107] Brian Gerrish summarizes Schleiermacher's view nicely: "Theological reflection . . . makes sense only if it is framed within a life of spontaneous piety, since, when all is said and done, theology is nothing other than honest, persistent, critical reflection upon piety." Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church*, 31.

[108] Describing this aspect of Schleiermacher's work, C. W. Christian writes, "Theology must, in the last analysis, be the creation of the worshiping fellowship, not primarily the work of the religious genius. Theology is always *church* theology, and the theologian is ever the servant of the church." C. W. Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), 30.

[109] Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 30–31.

[110] For concise introductions to Barth's life and work, see John Webster, *Barth,* Outstanding Christian Thinkers (New York: Continuum, 2000), 2; Joseph L. Magnina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 24–25.

[111] Karl Barth, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher" in *The Theology of Schleiermacher* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 264 cited in Webster, *Barth*, 4.

[112] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. Edwyn Hoskyns; New York: Oxford, 1968).

an alternative to theological liberalism. His influence on the field of theology is massive. "More than perhaps any other theologian in the twentieth century," writes Eberhard Busch, "Karl Barth has dominated the subject-matter of theology and posed the questions with which the theologians of the different churches have been, and are, occupied, although they may want to 'go beyond' him, go back behind him, or even protest against his answers."[113]

The debate about how best to identify Barth's "method" is lively and is noteworthy for the emergence of several markedly different schools of interpretation.[114] *The foundation of Barth's theological method is that he understood God's Word to be the only source for theology.* For Barth, God's Word consists of three modes. "God's Word" is first and foremost Jesus Christ. This mode is divine revelation itself. Further, "God's Word" is the Bible, which is a witness to that divine revelation. In other words, Scripture is not divine revelation in and of itself. Instead, it is a vehicle by which we can encounter God's revelation if God independently chooses to reveal himself in any particular reading of Scripture. The Bible mediates Christ's authority to the church.[115] Finally, "God's word" is the church's proclamation of the gospel.[116] Because Barth understood "God's Word" as the lone source of theology, *Barth rejected any attempt to know God based upon natural theology (human reason and philosophy).*[117] He writes, "The logic of the matter demands that, even if we only lend our little finger to natural theology, there necessarily follows the denial of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ."[118] One can only know God through his Word, Jesus Christ.

*The theologian's goal is to write Christian theology primarily for God and his church and only secondarily for other publics.* In other words, theology is biblical, confessional, ecclesial, and spiritual. It is *biblical*,[119] in that it adopts the posture of the biblical witnesses and renounces autonomous human reason; it is *confessional*,[120] in that it takes seriously its confessional allegiances; it is *ecclesial*,[121] in that it is done with the church in mind; and it is *spiritual*, in that it is done by the power of the Spirit.[122] *For these reasons theology*

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[113] Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), xiii.

[114] In order to understand the debate surrounding Barth's theological method, see George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); and Webster, *Barth*. The Hunsinger and McCormack texts are not the most recent, but they are two of the most significant texts in the history of Barth interpretation and provide an instructive and contrasting set of interpretations. The Webster text is more recent, less polemical, and takes a minimalist approach to interpreting Barth's theological method.

[115] Barth writes, "Theology stands and falls with the Word of God, for the Word of God precedes all theological words by creating, arousing, and challenging them. Should theology wish to be more or less or anything other than action in response to that Word, its thinking and speaking would be empty, meaningless, and futile." Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 17.

[116] Webster writes: "Barth recommends a particular attitude for readers to adapt to the event of God's Word in the Scriptural text. . . . What is required of readers is that they be shaped at the most fundamental level by the miracle of divine speech which encounters us through the text." Webster, *Barth*, 67. For this reason Barth backed away from historical criticism as the primary hermeneutic for biblical exegesis, although he was not able to fully move from some of its assumptions (which affected his view on the nature of Scripture) and interpretative conclusions.

[117] This is not to say that Barth was against "reason." His view is a type of "Christo-reason" which recognizes that human speech and thoughts are broken and need to be taken up and given their "position" as a witness to God's revelation. This "taking up" and "positioning" is done predominantly in God's self-revelation in Christ but also in God's interaction with humanity through Scripture and the church. We owe this point to e-mail correspondence with Barth scholar N. Keith Errickson.

[118] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, *The Doctrine of God*, Part 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 173 cited in Grenz and Olson, *20th-Century Theology*, 70.

[119] Barth, *CD* I/2, 816.

[120] Ibid., 822.

[121] Ibid., 840.

[122] Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 55.

*is best written by a theologian who has been profoundly affected by God's grace.* Indeed, the theologian should be marked by wonder, concern, commitment, and faith.[123] The life of a Christian theologian should be marked by *wonder* because the biblical narrative is a wondrous story about a wondrous God who graciously grants him the vocation of theologian.[124] Further, the theologian should be characterized by *concern* for the human race, for the church, and especially for himself.[125] Further still, he is marked by *commitment* to God, the gospel, and the task of theology.[126] Finally, the theologian is marked by *faith*, which occurs when God frees him to trust his Word.[127] Faith is new every morning, is continually directed toward God, and must continually hope for further faith.

Evangelical responses to Barth are numerous and diverse.[128] The most common positive response to Barth involves his rejection of the liberal tradition. Barth demonstrated a higher view of Scripture than the liberals, and his attendant methodology was more biblical and evangelical than theirs. The most common negative response to Barth involves his abstention from affirming the doctrine of verbal plenary biblical inspiration and its corollary doctrines of infallibility and inerrancy. In addition, evangelicals criticize his doctrinal innovations, such as his functional universalism, which were able to develop because of his deficient doctrine of Scripture.[129]

### *Dutch Neo-Calvinism*

Dutch Neo-Calvinism arose in the aftermath of Schleiermacher's theology and was a conservative alternative to liberal theology. Two theologians are worth mentioning because of their influence on later theology, especially Reformed theology. Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was a Dutch theologian whose most distinctive contribution to theological method is his doctrine of "antithesis." Kuyper argued that there is a great war between light and darkness, between error and truth, and that this is illustrated in the conflict between Christianity and modernism. Modernism creates its own worldview, which is in conflict with the Christian worldview and which demands that Christians should fall into conformity with its own unchristian ideals. One of the implications of this is that Christian theologians should not trust autonomous human reason and should not build their theologies on the scaffolding of philosophical systems that are beholden to modernism. Instead, Christian theologians should remain in conversation with Christian philosophers, as both are guided by Christian Scripture and arise from its attendant worldview.[130] Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) was an ally of Kuyper's who agreed with Kuyper's doctrine of the antithesis but who emphasized

[123] Ibid., 63–105.

[124] Barth writes: "The astonishment of the individual carries with it the fact that no one can become and remain a theologian unless he is compelled again and again to be astonished at himself. . . . After all, who am I to be a theologian?" Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 71.

[125] Ibid., 74–84.

[126] Barth writes: "It is splendid and beautiful to be assigned a duty by the God of the Gospel who is the object of evangelical theology, but it is also demanding, exalting, and finally terrifying. A *nobile officium*, a noble charge, is confided and entrusted to man; but this charge implies that he is expected to fulfill his ministry. He is privileged to do what is expected of him. But he also must do what he is chosen to do." Ibid., 85.

[127] Ibid, 100.

[128] For further reading on evangelical responses to Barth, see Albert Mohler, "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models of Response" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Gregory G. Bolich, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1980); and Sung Wook Chung, ed., *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

[129] Barth's functional universalism is more directly a result of his doctrine of election (which is his doctrine of God), but both doctrines of course arose from his theological method, which was flawed in its view of Scripture.

[130] For an introduction to Kuyper's thought, see Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931). For further reading see Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

the power of God's "common graces" that curb the destructive powers of sin and enable humans to operate in realms such as art, science, and philosophy.[131]

***Miscellaneous Theologies in the Modern Era***

The modern era is marked by a nearly endless proliferation of "schools of theology," each with unique theological methods. One common factor among all of these theologians is their refusal to recognize Scripture as the words of God. The first school is composed of several of Barth's near contemporaries who bore some theological similarity to him and to one another. They are often placed together with Barth in the category of "Neo-Orthodoxy." These theologians, such as Emil Brunner (1889–1966),[132] Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976),[133] and Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971),[134] are known for rejecting liberal theologies for their anthropocentric theological method and conservative theologies for their high view of Scripture. Neoorthodoxy sought to recover the revelation of God as the privileged source for theology but emphasized the personal nature of this revelation over an objective/propositional understanding of revelation. Revelation is therefore viewed as a free and sovereign act of God in the person of Jesus Christ but mediated through the written and proclaimed Word.

The twentieth century also saw many variations of Schleiermacher's liberal-revisionist agenda. Paul Tillich (1886–1965) proposed that theological method should take the form of "correlation," whereby modern philosophy poses the questions, which the theologian answers, and then helps to shape the answers the theologian gives. In the 1960s, a time of great confusion and searching, a new theological school emerged around the theme of hope and the doctrine of eschatology. The principal theologians who represent the development are Jürgen Moltmann[135] (b. 1926) and Wolfhart Pannenberg[136] (b. 1928). Their theological vision is built on the notion that the quest for knowledge of God should be oriented by the reality of the eschatological future breaking into our world.[137]

Liberation theology comes in several forms, but Gustavo Gutierrez's Latin American version is the most significant. The most notable distinctive of liberation theology is its goal: to create a unique theology for each social context. In *The Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez (b. 1928) argues that all theology is done in the midst of, and for, specific social and cultural contexts.[138] European theologies are not done in the midst of, or for, Latin Americans, and therefore Latinos must forge their own theology. For him this means forging a theology that liberates the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. Sin is primarily found in sinful societal structures, and salvation is primarily liberation from those oppressive structures.

Karl Rahner (1904–1984) stands at the head of modern Catholic theology, notable for his attempts to strike the right balance between traditionalism and modernism. In order to do so, he drew heavily from philosophy (especially Kant and Heidegger) in order to build his "transcendental" theological method. According to this method, the theologian tries to

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[131] For an introduction to Bavinck's thought, see Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*.

[132] Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, vol. I: *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2003).

[133] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1934). Bultmann's demythologizing approach places him toward the "far left" of neoorthodoxy.

[134] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2002), and idem, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1943).

[135] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1967).

[136] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1994–2010).

[137] Grenz and Olson, *20th-Century Theology*, 170–74, 194, 198. For a contemporary evangelical reprisal of the theology of hope, see Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2001).

[138] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988 revised).

show the necessary metaphysical conditions (e.g., existence of God) for certain facts (e.g., a human's experience of his restless heart). He sought to prove Augustine's claim that humans are created to find their rest and purpose in God through transcendental inquiry into the a priori human condition for knowledge. In other words, Rahner sought to bring the two sources of philosophy and theology together in order to show that theism is credible and knowledge of God is both subjective and dependent upon revelation.[139]

Postliberal theology, heavily influenced by Barth, arose in the context of Yale Divinity School and includes such theologians as Paul Holmer (1916–2004), Hans Frei (1922–1988), George Lindbeck (b. 1923), and Stanley Hauerwas (b. 1940).[140] As Placher notes, postliberalism is first marked by a rejection of liberal cultural accommodation and a refusal to wed Christian theology to alien philosophical frameworks. They push back against philosophical frameworks, and many of them do so by drawing on Barth and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.[141] A further distinctive is its goal: an insistence upon paying attention to the particularities of the Christian faith and doing so by emphasizing the ability of the Christian narrative to help Christians understand God and themselves (rather than drawing out some moral lesson or propositional statement, after which the narrative can then be discarded).[142] Doing this, however, leads to an insufficient view of Scripture, and it often grounds authority in the Christian community rather than in Christian Scripture itself.[143] Nevertheless, Scripture remains the principal text for theological reflection.

### *Evangelical and Baptist Theologies in the Modern Era*

Conservative theologians made their mark on theological method by continuing to hold Reformation suppositions about the authority of Scripture and not falling under Schleiermacher or Barth's sway. Understanding these theologians will help the reader understand the next section of the present chapter, which will provide a paradigm for a faithful evangelical and Baptist theological method.

Southern Baptist theologian John L. Dagg (1794–1884) viewed Christian theology as disciplined reflection on inspired and inerrant Scripture.[144] In his *Manual of Theology* and *Manual of Church Order*, he relies exclusively on interaction with Christian Scripture, refraining from citing historical theology or philosophy.[145] Further, his work emphasizes that the goal of theology is not only to know but also to *love* God. In an oft-cited quote, Dagg writes, "The study of religious truth ought to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the heart."[146] As Yarnell notes, Dagg "repeatedly

[139] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978). For an introduction to Rahner's thought, see Grenz and Olson, *20th-Century Theology*, 238–54.

[140] Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978); Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001).

[141] For further reading on Wittgenstein's influence on the postliberal movement, see Bruce Riley Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians? A Survey of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Influence on Theology," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (June 2007), 357–75; Bruce Riley Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Impact on Anglo-American Theology: Representative Models of Response to Ludwig Wittgenstein's Later Writings" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

[142] William C. Placher, "Postliberal Theology," in David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 344–45.

[143] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 47.

[144] See Mark E. Dever, "John L. Dagg," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 165–87.

[145] Dagg, *Manual of Theology*; and J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1990).

[146] Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 13.

used words such as duty, obligation, and call, to imply that all Christians are obliged to theologize."[147] A. H. Strong (1836–1921), probably the most significant Baptist theologian of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, bore a strong resemblance to Dagg in that he was an inerrantist who viewed theology as an inductive science. Unlike Dagg, however, Strong interacted with, and was influenced by, contemporary philosophies.[148]

The Presbyterian Charles Hodge (1797–1878) viewed Christian theology as disciplined reflection on inspired and inerrant Christian Scripture. He also argued that theology is an inductive science in which theologians are passive knowers who readily receive the theological conclusions that arise naturally from the facts.[149] Scripture is an inspired and inerrant anthology of facts. Fellow Presbyterian and Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) held that Scripture is inspired and inerrant and therefore is the source and norm for theology. He believed the theologian could come to the biblical text objectively (not tainted by philosophical or cultural contexts) and build his theology as an inductive science (a neutral arrangement of objective facts). Warfield pushed back against deductive systems seeking to integrate biblical data into some preconceived system.[150] Instead, he wanted to coordinate the Bible's facts rightly in relation to the rest of the Bible's facts.

Baptist theologian Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003), whose publications include *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) and *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1983), is the foremost conservative evangelical theologian of the twentieth century. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson note several significant aspects of Henry's method.[151] *With regard to the goal of theology, Henry urged theologians to set forth constructive and relevant theologies.* He repeatedly challenged conservatives to stop neglecting "the frontiers of formative discussion in contemporary theology" and stop writing theology that lacked "an air of exciting relevance."[152] *Henry maintained that the source for attaining this goal must be Christian Scripture.* He rebuked mainline Christians and theologians for eschewing their commitment to divine revelation. *This normative status lay in Scripture's divine inspiration and inerrancy.* For Henry, inspiration is "a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of their oral and written proclamation. Historic evangelical Christianity considers the Bible as the essential textbook because, in view of this quality, it inscripturates divinely revealed truth in verbal form."[153] *For Henry, God's revelation in Scripture is rational and propositional, being conveyed in rational ideas and meaningful verbal form.* Indeed, revelation's rationality directly affects the theological task. Henry writes: "Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is the verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole."[154] Henry viewed rationality as the foundational dimension of human existence. Henry, therefore, drew from two main sources for doing Christian theology: Scripture

[147] Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 69.

[148] Kurt A. Richardson, "Augustus Hopkins Strong," in George and Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians*, 289–306. The best primary source is Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1907).

[149] "The true method of theology is, therefore, the inductive, which assumes that the Bible contains all the facts or truths which form the contents of theology, just as the facts of human nature are the contents of the natural sciences." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008 [originally 1871–1873]), 1:17.

[150] B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988 [first published 1932]), 49–108.

[151] Grenz and Olson, *20th-Century Theology*, 288–97.

[152] Carl F. H. Henry, *Frontiers in Modern Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1964), 140–41. We owe Grenz and Olson for pointing out this source. Grenz and Olson, *20th-Century Theology*, 291.

[153] Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1983; repr., Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 4:129.

[154] Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:215.

and reason. Toward the end of the twentieth century, numerous evangelical and Baptist theologians have emerged whose work deserves attention; although we have not interacted with all of them in part 2, we will interact with many of them as we lay out our own methodology in part 3.[155]

## *How Do We Put It All Together?*

In the first part of this chapter, we suggested that Scripture "anticipates" the task of theology. The biblical narrative not only implies the task of theology, but it frames the way that we do theology. In the biblical text, core passages provide the starting point, parameters, and trajectory for theological method. In the second part of the chapter, we surveyed church history and historical theology in order to learn about the ways in which theologians have approached their trade. This history provides the reader with an idea of the tools one could use for the theological trade and gives the reader some idea of the decisions that must be made, including the sources from which one draws, the interpretive weight each source is given, and the ways in which the theologian synthesizes these sources. In part 3, we make the leap from description to prescription, synthesizing what we have gleaned from Scripture and tradition into a theological methodology that is biblically faithful, yet culturally relevant. In this attempt to "put it all together," we offer ten guiding methodological thoughts for theological reflection.

### *1. Christian theology is disciplined reflection on God's self-revelation for the purposes of knowing and loving God and participating in his mission in this world.*[156]

#### *The Task of Theology*

Theology is *disciplined reflection on God's self-revelation* because the God we know, love, and obey has revealed himself in times past through his mighty acts, through his prophets and apostles, and through the incarnation of his Son. He now reveals himself through his written Word. This written Word is the primary source from which a theologian draws and is the norm by which we measure any other theological source (e.g., church tradition). Further, theology *is done for the purpose of knowing and loving God and participating in his mission in this world*. The task of theology is cognitive, affective, and dispositional. It aims at the head, the heart, and the hands. J. L. Dagg writes, "The study of religious truth ought

[155] Some of these theologians have written systematic and integrative theologies, such as Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word & Spirit: Authority & Method in Theology*, Christian Foundations, vol. 1 (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992); Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987); Erickson, *Christian Theology*; John Frame, *A Theology of Lordship*, 4 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987–2010); Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002–2005); Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006); Spykman, *Reformational Theology*; J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988–1992). Other theologians have written thoughtful and detailed treatments of theological method but have not themselves written systematic theologies which work out their respective methods. Those theologians include, but are not limited to Clark, *To Know and Love God*; Winfried Corduan, *Handmaid to Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), and *The Drama of Doctrine*; Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*.

[156] This definition can be further nuanced by distinguishing between more specific approaches to theology, such as biblical theology, systematic theology, and integrative theology. These nuances are briefly treated later in this chapter.

to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the heart. When learned, it ought not to be laid on the shelf, as an object of speculation; but it should be deposited deep in the heart, where its sanctifying power ought to be felt."[157] Theology entails more than merely acquiring information about God; it confers affection for God and submission to God. When the theologian properly attends to the cognitive, affective, and dispositional dimensions of the task, he glorifies God's name. Herman Bavinck writes, "A theologian, a true theologian, is one who speaks out of God, through God, about God, and does this always to the glorification of His name."[158] The task of theology, therefore, is to glorify God by knowing, loving, and serving him.

### *Theology's Relation to Four Concepts*

Because theology is "disciplined reflection on God's self-revelation for the purposes of knowing and loving God, and participating in his mission in this world," it must be defined in relation to four concepts: narrative, worship, obedience, and mission.[159] First, theology arises out of the Bible and its *narrative*. The Bible is composed of sixty-six books with multiple genres and is written by numerous authors from diverse historical and cultural contexts. However, this diversity is part of a beautiful unity that can be seen in the Bible's overarching story. This story begins with God's creation and humanity's rebellion and then proceeds with God's unfolding plan of redemption. The biblical narrative is the true story of the whole world. Furthermore, it is dramatic in nature, inviting us into the story so that the story will shape our lives. Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen write, "[The biblical narrative] functions as the authoritative Word of God for us when it becomes the one basic story through which we understand our own experience and thought, and the foundation upon which we base our decisions and our actions."[160] Finally, this narrative is unsubstitutable: it should not be discarded in favor of abstractions (scholastic theology), symbols (liberal theology), or any other stand-in.

Second, theology arises from and issues forth in *worship* and *obedience*. On the one hand, worship issues forth from theology as we seek to understand, conceptualize, and articulate the God whom we cherish. Likewise, obedience issues forth from theology; if we want to know and love God more truly, we must be conformed to the image of Christ in order that we might be able to see him and hear him more clearly. On the other hand, theology *issues forth* in worship and obedience. Michael Horton writes: "When the doctrine is understood in the context of its dramatic narrative, we find ourselves dumbfounded by God's grace in Jesus Christ, surrendering to *doxology* (praise). Far from masters, we are mastered; instead of seizing the truth, we are seized by it, captivated by God's gift, to which we can only say, 'Amen!' and 'Praise the Lord.'"[161] Without close attention to the biblical narrative and its attendant evangelical doctrine, our worship and obedience are at best unfocused and at worst idolatrous. However, when we consciously submit to the biblical narrative and its teaching, the flame of our worship and obedience is fueled by the oxygen of Word and Spirit.

Third, theology arises from and issues forth in *mission*. The early church is a prime example. On the one hand, their theology arose in the midst of their God-given mission. Paul's epistles, for example, were written as he proclaimed the gospel, planted churches, and

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[157] Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 13.

[158] Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 31.

[159] This is similar to Michael Horton's "drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship," in Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 13–34.

[160] Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 21.

[161] Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 22.

suffered for the sake of his faith. But on the other hand, their robust and powerful theology caused their mission to flourish.[162] This mutually beneficial relationship arises from the fact that God's triune nature is the foundation of mission, and his triune life provides the pattern for mission.[163] Timothy C. Tennent argues perceptively that theology has an essential missional quality because at the center of divine revelation and God's purpose in the world is the triune God. He says, "The Trinity enlivens all theological discussions, demanding that they be seen from a missional perspective."[164] Just as we affirm, "God is missional, therefore theology is missional," we also affirm that the message of Scripture is missional.[165] The biblical narrative, from which Christian theology arises, is nothing if not a missional narrative.[166] Any theology that purports to be Christian but does not arise from mission and issue forth in mission is not a truly *Christian* theology at all.

***2. Christian theology is undergirded by God's revelation of the nature of reality.***

The theologian's task is made possible by a revealed ontology (metaphysics or the study of being, existence, and reality) that can be contrasted to the ontologies provided by atheism, pantheism, and Islam. Only within the framework of a Christian ontology can theology be pursued. This becomes clear when we recognize four aspects of a Christian ontology.

*First, God is Creator.* Whereas pantheists believe everything is one (because both spirit and matter are one), and atheists also believe everything is one (because nothing exists except for matter), Christians confess that everything is not "one." In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and everything therein (Gen 1:1; cf. Ps 24:1). God the Creator, therefore, is qualitatively and quantitatively different from his creation. This Creator-creature distinction is basic for theology.[167] Gordon Spykman writes:

> God is absolutely sovereign, 'the Other,' not simply 'Another.' Even the biblical teaching on man as imager of God may not be allowed to eclipse the radical otherness of God. There is indeed a *relatio* between these *relata*—a two way relationship, a covenant partnership, anchored in the mediating function of God's Word. But that Word stands as the boundary line as well as the bridge between the Creator and his creatures. . . . Let God be God, and let man be man.[168]

In other words, because of the radical otherness of God, if humans are to know God, they must come to know him by means of his mediating Word.

*Second, God is personal.* This truth sets God apart from certain philosophical theisms (e.g., Aristotle's impersonal gods), from atheism (God does not exist), and from pantheism

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[162] See I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 34–37, 717–26. Marshall argues that mission is the core of the New Testament.

[163] For further reading on the triune God as the foundation and pattern of mission, see Whitfield, "The Triune God: The God of Mission," in *Theology and Practice of Mission*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011).

[164] Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 74.

[165] This is a central thread in Christopher Wright's grand treatment of mission as a hermeneutical key for the biblical narrative. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006).

[166] For a brief exposition of the biblical narrative in relation to the concept of mission, see Bruce Riley Ashford, "The Story of Mission: The Grand Biblical Narrative," in *Theology and Practice of Mission*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 6–16.

[167] For a fascinating discussion of the Creator/creature distinction, see Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1995), 21–40.

[168] Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 65.

(God is the world and the world is God). God's personal nature allows us to know and love him in a way we could not if he were impersonal.

*Third, God is purposive.* Unlike atheism and pantheism, the Christian faith recognizes that God acted purposefully, with design, when he created the world to be the theater of his glory.[169] Creation in God's grand design is the stage for the dramatic creational and redemptive narrative, and he calls us to play a purposeful role. God's purpose is revealed in Scripture, for there God's creative and redemptive intentions and deeds are interpreted for us. As we reflect on the doctrines of creation, providence, salvation, ecclesiology, and eschatology, we most directly reflect on God's sovereign purposes for all things. But, generally, we recognize that because God is purposeful and has revealed his purposes we can meaningfully engage in the task of theology.

*Fourth, God is triune.* Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not normally a part of a discussion of ontology, we draw from it in this section because God's triune nature is central to an understanding of reality. God's triune nature sets him apart from the god of Islam (God's unity is monochrome), from pantheism (God is not a person), and from atheism (God does not exist). Based on the Triune God's unity in diversity, we approach Scripture seeking to show the unity expressed in all its diversity.

***3. Christian theology is informed by God's revelation of the nature of human knowledge.***

In light of this revealed ontology, the next question is one of knowledge. In a world in which God is both qualitatively and quantitatively different from us and in which we are adversely affected by our sin against God, is it possible for one to know and speak the truth about him? Any response to this question must recognize that our ontology (study of reality) affects our epistemology (study of human knowing). If God is radically different from his creation, then there must be a bridge between God and humans in order for us to know him. This chapter, and indeed the entire book, is built on the conviction that God's Word is the bridge between God and man, teaching truth about God and man, and providing the authoritative norm for human knowledge.

A core element of this type of revelational epistemology is the recognition that *God is a God who speaks, a God who offers his Word as a bridge to his world*. No other worldview, religion, or philosophy can properly offer such a bridge between the Creator and his creatures. Atheism offers a closed universe in which there is Nobody to speak from without. Deism can only offer a mute God unwilling or incapable of speaking to his creatures. Pantheism is a modern version of Neoplatism in which the world purportedly evolves upward into God. Islamic monotheism offers a God who is entirely inscrutable. Christian theism, however, offers God as the qualitatively and quantitatively different One who nonetheless initiates personal communication with his creatures. In fact, God's triune nature is a model of accomplished communication. The triune God is God the Father (the One who speaks), God the Son (the Word), and God the Spirit (the One who inspired, illumines, guides, and teaches); God the Father speaks through his Son, and we as humans are enabled to hear and understand that communication by means of the Spirit.[170]

Another core element of a revelational epistemology is that *God's Word can/does bring trustworthy knowledge to his creatures*. But how can this be? If God is infinite and we are finite, then how can we speak meaningfully about God? How can finite words describe

[169] See Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.8; 1.6.2; 1.14.20; 2.6.1; 3.9.2.

[170] For further reading, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 455–68.

the majesty of an infinite God? There have been three basic approaches to answering this question.[171] Some theologians such as Plotinus, Martin Buber, and Emil Brunner say that our language about God is *equivocal*, that the human words we speak about God apply to him in an entirely and utterly different way than they apply to us. Other theologians, such as Augustine, Paul Tillich, and Carl Henry say that our language about God is *univocal*, that the human words we employ for God apply to him in an entirely consistent manner. However, neither of these options is preferable.[172] Human language about God cannot be equivocal because God is the triune God who is personal, purposive, and communicative and because he created us to live in fellowship with him. But neither is our knowledge and language about God univocal because God is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from his creation.[173]

Therefore, we take the view that our language about God and our cognitive knowledge of God is *analogical*.[174] Under this view, held by Thomas Aquinas, the Reformers, and others, our language about God and our knowledge of God is *similar to* our language about and knowledge of created reality. It is not exact (univocal), but neither is it arbitrary (equivocal). To put it another way, when we speak a word in two different linguistic contexts (e.g., a God context and a human context), a term communicates different senses, and yet those two senses are meaningfully related to one another. For example, when God reveals himself to us as Father, there is enough similarity between divine fatherhood and human fatherhood that the comparison is justified and fruitful for our understanding of God.[175] Just as Solomon recognized that God cannot be contained in a temple made by human hands (1 Kgs 8:27), we recognize that the knowledge of God cannot be fully contained in words uttered by human mouths. This doctrine of analogy is the linchpin that holds together God's otherness and his knowability. A univocal view threatens God's otherness, while an equivocal view threatens his knowability.[176] What humans can know and say about God is not comprehensive, but it is true, trustworthy, and sufficient for faithful living.[177]

***4. Christian theology recognizes Christian Scripture as its norm.***

If, therefore, we can speak about God in a true, trustworthy, and sufficient manner (albeit not comprehensively or univocally), where do we look for such knowledge and how do we speak in such a manner? From what sources does a theologian draw when looking for raw material about God? And if there is more than one source for such material, how

[171] For a concise exposition of these three views, see Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 305–19.

[172] While we will argue for an analogical understanding of theological language in the next paragraph, we wish to note at this point that this merely is our best understanding of how theological language works. That said, we realize that some contributors to this volume are comfortable speaking of theological language in univocal terms. This is an important point of discussion related to theological method but does not affect our understanding of the nature of truth and Scripture and does not affect one's position on any of the core Christian doctrines.

[173] This rejection of univocal language is the central insight of apophatic theology (sometimes called the "via negativa"). Apophatic theologians have long insisted that we cannot strictly apply any human concepts to God. Although some forms of apophatic theology lead to skepticism, other forms of it (such as Thomas Aquinas's) properly recognize the uniqueness of God and the necessity of analogical predication.

[174] Because knowledge of God is not merely cognitive but relational, the question arises as to whether relational knowledge is analogical. Our response is that relational knowledge is not in and of itself analogical, but it becomes analogical when we reflect on it conceptually.

[175] Exodus 4:22 provides an example of God revealing himself in this way early in the biblical narrative.

[176] Michael Horton writes: "This doctrine of analogy is the hinge on which a Christian affirmation of God's transcendence and immanence turns. A univocal view threatens God's transcendence, while an equivocal view threatens God's immanence. The former leads to rationalism, while the latter engenders skepticism." Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 55.

[177] This way of putting it is a slight modification of Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 74.

do we order the sources in priority? John Webster offers a sound answer to this question. "Judgements about sources," he writes, "go hand-in-hand with acceptance of *norms*, that is, criteria by which decisions may be reached about which sources furnish the most authentic, reliable, and persuasive Christian teaching."[178] We believe faithful Christian theology is built on Christian Scripture as the primary source for theology and the norm above all norms (2 Tim 3:16–17). We reject any view that explicitly or implicitly allows tradition (Roman Catholicism), experience (liberalism), reason (modernism), or culture (postmodernism) to subvert the authority and primacy of Scripture. However, this conception of theology does not deny the significance of tradition, experience, reason, or culture—each of which is essential to the task of theology.

*Reason.* Most theologians agree that reason plays a significant role in the task of theology. However, exactly what type of role is up for debate. David Clark clarifies three senses in which we employ a concept of "reason."[179] First, one can speak of reason in the sense of *autonomous reason*, reason which insists on living independently of God. Gerhard von Rad describes this type of reason: "Man has taken leave of the relation of dependence. He has refused to obey and has willed to make himself independent. No longer is obedience the guiding principle of his life, but his autonomous knowledge and will."[180] Second, one can speak of reason as *the totality of our epistemic capacities*. In this use reason denotes the ability to think about anything at all. Third, one can speak of reason in order to denote *one facet of our epistemic capacities*, the aspect we use to make valid arguments. Of the three senses of reason, we reject only the first, autonomous reason, because this type of reason subverts sound theology in its attempts to be independent of God (thus subverting God). The second two senses, however, we affirm, as theologians certainly must rely on their God-given rational faculties in order to reflect on God's self-revelation in a disciplined manner.

*Culture.* Theology is necessarily conceived in a cultural context and articulated in cultural forms. Indeed, one's culture provides the language, conceptual categories, media, artifacts, and environment in which theology is done.[181] In fact, God's act of creation explains the God-givenness of culture. God created his imagers to interact with his good creation, tilling the soil, naming the animals, and otherwise practicing loving dominion over his good creation. The result of such interaction is human culture.[182] The theologian cannot escape his cultural context, nor should he want to. Instead, the theologian works hard to properly leverage his cultural context for the task of theology. Proper leverage flows from lashing one's theology to the Scriptures, conceptualizing and expressing it in appropriate cultural forms (language, conceptual categories, etc.), and continually bringing the results back to Scripture for correction in light of its transcultural authority.[183] Further, culture directly affects the theologian's use of other sources of theology, in that it affects one's manner of

[178] John Webster, "Introduction: Systematic Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook for Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

[179] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 299–301.

[180] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1973), 78.

[181] Kevin Vanhoozer, in line with his conception of doctrine as drama, puts it this way: "Culture sets the stage, arranges the scenery, and provides the props that supply the setting for theology's work." Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 129.

[182] Culture has been variously defined. One of the more helpful definitions is provided by Paul Hiebert, who writes that culture is "the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do." Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 30.

[183] For further reading on this process of contextualization, see Bruce Riley Ashford, "Gospel and Culture," in Bruce Riley Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 109–27.

*reasoning* and it provides the linguistic categories within which one conceives and articulates one's *experience*.[184]

*Experience.* Discussing the role of experience in theological reflection is often approached with caution. This unease is for good reason. We can impute our experience, emotions, and perspective to the message of Scripture—affecting how we listen to the biblical text. But an overreaction, leading to ignoring the role of experience, will produce stunted theological reflection on the biblical text and overlooks the fact that we cannot escape our situatedness as we seek to know and love God. In a broad sense one's "experience" is anything that arises in one's life journey. In a more focused and theological sense, "experience" refers to our subjective feelings and emotions. In both senses experience plays an inescapable role for the Christian theologian.[185] In the broader sense mentioned above, our journey in life is what prepares us to understand the words of Scripture. Scripture teaches us about God and does so analogically. It draws from our experience of fatherhood to teach us about God the Father; it draws from our experience of love to teach us that God is love; and so forth. In order to understand God, one must be situated in experiential reality. Likewise, in the more focused sense mentioned above, our feelings and emotions can be helpful. They can be an *impetus for* the theological task in that our feelings and emotions lead us to ask questions of the Scriptures, to vigorously pursue the mind of God (for example: Lament Psalms, e.g., Psalms 42, 69). They also can be a *result of* the theological task in that Scripture, and its attendant evangelical doctrine, calls forth wonder, delight, fear, and other emotions.[186] In fact, as Alister McGrath and others have noted, "Christian doctrine provides the framework within which we interpret our own experience, thereby nuancing, enriching, and deepening our experience."[187]

*Tradition.* Christian theology is always and necessarily written in historical context. In particular it is written in the context of church history and the historical development of Christian theology. Christian tradition provides the context for, and is a source of, theology. But how so? Three theories vie for acceptance. First, the Catholic Church has recognized a *dual-source theory of tradition*, in which, "'tradition' was understood to be a separate and distinct source of revelation, in addition to Scripture. Scripture, it was argued, was silent on a number of points, but God had providentially arranged for a second source of revelation to supplement this deficiency: a stream of unwritten tradition."[188] Second, many Anabaptists evidenced a *rejection of tradition*, arguing that we have the right to interpret Scripture however we please under the guidance of the Spirit. For example, Sebastian Franck rejected the Trinity and the divinity of Christ because he thought (through his private interpretation) they rested on inadequate biblical foundations.[189] Third, this chapter recognizes a *single-source*

[184] Regarding the relation of culture and *reason*, we note that one must distinguish between substantive and formal rationality. Formal rationality is built upon basic laws of logic which are transcultural, but substantive rationality is always rooted in a tradition. Substantive reason always operates within a worldview, and worldviews are always religiously oriented. Regarding culture and *experience*, we note that culture provides categories by which we experience our "experience." At the heart of culture is language, and one's linguistic apparatus directly and pervasively affects one's ability to conceptualize and articulate one's experience.

[185] An example of how experience can properly influence theological reflection is Russell D. Moore's book *Adopted for Life* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2009). In this book Moore tells the story of his and his wife's adoption of two Russian orphans, and throughout, he demonstrates how their experience of adopting their boys shapes his reflection on soteriology, ecclesiology, and mission.

[186] This is Karl Barth's point in his treatment of the theologian's feelings of wonder, concern, commitment, and faith in relation to the task of theology. Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 63–105.

[187] Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 71.

[188] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 139.

[189] Ibid., 140.

*theory of tradition*. Along with many patristic and Reformation era theologians, we suggest that "theology is based on Scripture, and 'tradition' refers to a 'traditional way of interpreting Scripture.'"[190] The early church fathers referred to the "rule of faith," in which they recognized that there is a proper order and connection to the biblical narrative; and if this order and connection are ignored, one will misread texts of Scripture and misconstrue Christian doctrine. The rule of faith, therefore, is a safeguard against misinterpretation and self-serving construals of the text.[191]

*Conclusion.* Christian Scripture is the primary source and supreme norm for Christian theology. Scripture, and Scripture alone, is inspired by God and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). As the theologian interprets Scripture, he seeks illumination from the Christian tradition and uses his God-given rational faculties and experience in order to appropriately conceptualize and articulate an evangelical theology within a particular cultural context.

***5. Christian theology is a multifaceted and integrated unity.***

The task of theology is complex and multifaceted, bringing together several disciplines and subdisciplines. Included in this interface are church history, historical theology, biblical studies, biblical theology, systematic theology, philosophical theology, apologetics, and practical theology. The present volume is born out of the conviction that a theology for the church should integrate the historical, biblical, philosophical, systematic, and practical aspects of theology as it seeks to achieve a unified, coherent, contextual, and compelling account of the Christian message. In other words, it is an *integrative theology*. In this section we will discuss the unique contribution each of these disciplines makes to Christian theology and demonstrate the enriching relationship among these disciplines for Christian theology. At the end of this section, we attempt to show that practical theology is the fruit of multifaceted theological studies and development of integrated unity. We accomplish this by positioning our approach to theological application in the forming and renewing work of grounding our identity in the dramatic narrative of Scripture.

***Church History and Historical Theology***

Church history and historical theology help the theologian understand the historical development of Christianity, its creeds, confessions, doctrines, and theologies. *Church history* deals with the historical development of Christianity in general. "To deal with the history of the church," McGrath writes, "is to study cultural, social, political, and institutional factors which have shaped the development of the church down the ages."[192] Building upon church history, *historical theology* deals with the historical development of Christian doctrine in particular because, as John Behr notes, "the theological reflection of the writers of antiquity cannot be divorced, as pure dogmatic speculation, from the ecclesial, social, and political situations and struggles in which they were immersed."[193] Historical theology therefore lays bare the factors that have been significant in shaping both the questions and the answers of Christian theology. The historical disciplines help theologians in at least three ways. First, the historical disciplines help us recognize the ways inherited theological traditions have shaped the questions we ask and the answers we give. We recognize why certain issues tend

[190] Ibid., 138.

[191] See Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 17–48, for a helpful discussion of the rule of faith and its use by Irenaeus in arguing against the Gnostics.

[192] McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 9.

[193] Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 4.

to occupy a central place in our structure of thought, and other issues tend to occupy only a peripheral place. We notice how certain conceptual categories and forms of thought have been bequeathed to us by theologians of a different era. Second, the historical disciplines help us preserve the integrity of tradition, while at the same time not allowing tradition to control us. Third, the historical disciplines allow us, in humility, to transcend our own era and location by learning from the great theologians and church traditions of the past.

***Biblical Studies and Biblical Theology***

As we have argued, Christian Scripture is the primary source and supreme norm for Christian theology. For this reason Christian theologians treat biblical studies and biblical theology as the *sine qua non* for faithful theology. Scripture provides the basic categories, themes, and framework within which evangelical theologians work. The Bible has priority. But what does it mean to make the Bible a priority in the task of theology? We mention four imperatives about biblical interpretation followed by a discussion of the nature of biblical theology.

*A Proper Hermeneutic.* Hermeneutics is the theory and philosophy of interpretation. Theologians must approach the biblical text with a proper hermeneutic, which will include at least these four imperatives. *First, when reading Scripture, we seek to understand what the biblical author was trying to communicate.* Although we cannot "step inside" the biblical author's mind in order to access his mental state, we can access his communicative purposes through the text.[194] *Second, we read the text with a hermeneutic of love.* To do so means that we value it for its inherent worth and beauty rather than using it toward some other means (such as proving our theological systems). We approach it patiently, attentively, like a lover rather than impatiently and inattentively, like, perhaps, a fast-food customer. N. T. Wright says: "Love does not seek to collapse the beloved into terms of itself. . . . In the fact of love, in short, both parties are simultaneously affirmed."[195] The process of interpretation is a conversation with the text, one in which the reader can gain real understanding of the text and, in so doing, gain real understanding of the world outside of the text (external reality). *Third, we read the text with a hermeneutic of trust.* We trust Scripture and are suspicious of ourselves, rather than vice versa.[196] *Fourth, we read the text humbly.* We recognize that we read the text with historical, cultural, and existential biases that threaten to distort its meaning. For this reason we seek continually to bring our exegetical conclusions back to the text for "cleaning." David Clark writes: "In light of cultural and life issues and concerns, a theologian listens to Scripture, then develops tentative hypotheses, and then goes back to the Bible in a dialogical movement. . . . He seeks to flesh out his hypotheses and to test them for adequacy to Scripture, internal coherence, and explanatory power for life."[197] Furthermore, we seek the help of the Christian community in reading Scripture. When we read the Scriptures in this manner, we are more likely to avoid the interpretive distortion that can be brought about by our biases and limitations.

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[194] See Kevin Vanhoozer's *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 43–97. Also, see Anthony Thiselton's "adverbial" understanding of authorial intent. Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 558–62.

[195] Nicholas Thomas Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 64. On practicing a hermeneutic of charity and love, see also Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 38–41; idem, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 367–441.

[196] This point is worked out in detail in Craig Bartholomew's "Philosophy, Theology and Biblical Interpretation: Watson, Dooyeweerd and Vanhoozer," an unpublished paper delivered in 1995 at the *Bible and Theology Conference* at King's College (London).

[197] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 51.

*A Biblical Theology.* Biblical theology is a discipline that studies the various biblical texts as a whole, seeking to apprehend and express their unity, and to do so by means of categories taken from the texts themselves. As such, it lays the basis for systematic and integrative theology, whose theologians also seek to apprehend and express the unity of the Bible, but often in relation to questions that arise outside of the text and with categories that are not explicitly found in the text. Biblical theology is a rather diverse field of studies.[198] Amid all of this diversity, evangelical biblical theologians are unified in their belief that the Bible exhibits unity amid its diversity.[199] For this reason we think systematic and integrative theologies (such as the one set forth in this book) benefit particularly from narrative-shaped biblical theologies.

> Over the past few decades, one of the most exciting developments in biblical studies has been the growing recognition among scholars that the Bible has the shape of a *story*. . . . It functions as the authoritative Word of God for us when it becomes the one *basic* story through which we understand our own experience and thought, and the foundation upon which we base our decisions and actions.[200]

Indeed, the narrative approach is helpful because of the narrative quality of Scripture. Not only does the majority of the canon consist of narrative, but even the nonnarrative books (e.g., the epistles) are in constant conversation with the Old Testament narrative(s) and the life of Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 10:1–13). Further, it is helpful for apologists who seek to show the explanatory power of the biblical narratives in contrast to other narratives, for pastoral theologians seeking to employ the narrative for shaping Christians' worldview, and, most importantly for our purposes, for systematic and integrative theologians who want to locate the major heads of doctrine within the Bible's home environment, which is its overarching narrative framework. Finally, it is helpful because it helps us read the text within its totality (*tota Scriptura*).

### *Philosophical Theology*

In addition to the historical and biblical disciplines, the Christian theologian must also interact with philosophical theology. There are various ways of conceiving the task of philosophical theology, but it will suffice here to say that philosophical theology is the appropriation of philosophical tools for the task of theology. Such appropriation has been evident since the earliest days of church history, in which the church found itself needing to interact with a language and a Greco-Roman framework of thought that were not designed with the needs of Christian theology in mind. McGrath writes, "On the one hand, it was necessary to go beyond the insights of scripture in order to meet the new intellectual challenges faced by the Christian communities; on the other, it was necessary to ensure that these extensions of the scriptural vocabulary and conceptual framework were consonant with its central insights."[201] Indeed theologians in the present era wrestle with the same challenge, acknowledge that

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[198] New Testament scholar Donald A. Carson has listed six different conceptions of biblical theology; Old Testament scholar Gerhard Hasel lists no fewer than ten major methodologies in the field of Old Testament theology. Donald A. Carson, "Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995), 17–41; Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed., rev. and exp. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 38–114.

[199] For an evangelical response to objections that some scholars have leveled against the unity of Scripture, see Craig Bartholomew, "Story and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 144–71.

[200] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 21.

[201] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 6.

some level of philosophical theology is unavoidable, and find ways appropriately to draw from their context's conceptual languages and frameworks.

### *Systematic Theology*

*The Nature and Legitimacy of Systematic Theology.* As with biblical and philosophical theology, there are more than a few ways to conceive of systematic theology. For our purposes we define systematic theology as a discipline that draws from the Bible and its narrative in order to conceptualize and articulate the biblical faith in a comprehensive, well-proportioned, and unified manner for a particular cultural context.[202] Because it is shaped in and for a particular context, it often conceptualizes and articulates the biblical faith in relation to questions that arise outside of the text and with categories that are not explicitly found in the text. It is "systematic" by nature of the fact that it is organized based on a set of presuppositions and also on the basis of pedagogical and presentational concerns. A faithfully biblical systematic theology will be "systematic" without flouting the biblical ordering, lopping off awkward biblical data, or otherwise relegating Scripture to a secondary status. It will seek to construct systematic conceptions of the biblical material that arise comfortably from the biblical narrative, resonate with its core teachings, take into account all of the biblical data, and recognize its own secondary status in relation to Scripture. Further, we note that faithful theologians will not read the Bible in order to construct "great systematic theologies." Rather, we construct systematic theologies that help us read the Bible better, systems that lead us to deeper and richer exegesis. Scripture is primary, while systematic renderings of it are secondary.

*The Relationship of Systematic Theology to Philosophical Theology and Biblical Theology.* Evangelical systematic theologians generally sustain conversation, at some level, with both biblical theologians and philosophical theologians. Systematic theologians are sometimes dependent on philosophical theology for certain concepts with which to articulate the Christian message. Rational representation of the Christian message requires concepts, which are abstractions of the more concrete and historical biblical narrative(s). Philosophical theology provides those concepts and has done so throughout church history. For example, the early church fathers spoke of Christ as being *homoousios* with (or, "of the same essence as") the Father. They did so in order to speak clearly and in a common language within their cultural context. Philosophical concepts can function as a sort of intellectual shorthand, which allows for more direct apprehension than can be had from the sprawling canon of Scripture, composed as it is of narrative, poetry, prose, and other genres.

However, these concepts can undermine the Bible unless the theologian defines those concepts biblically, filling them with Christian meaning drawn from the biblical narrative. In his seminal article on this topic, Michael Williams writes:

> I want to argue this precise point: the biblical narrative structure, the story of God's relationship with his creation—from Adam to Christ crucified and resurrected to Christ triumphant in the restoration of all things in the kingdom of God—forms the regulative principle and interpretive key for systematic theology no less than it does for biblical theology. This suggests that a systematic theology that is oriented to the biblical narrative and scriptural ways

[202] This definition draws from, but modifies and expands, the definition given by John Webster, in which "systematic theology aims at a comprehensive, well-proportioned, and unified conceptual representation of Christian teaching." Webster, "Introduction: Systematic Theology," 12.

> of knowing ought to be redemptively-historically grounded rather than ordered to a cultural convention of rationality or an extra-biblical conception of system.[203]

If the concepts drawn from philosophical theology are ever "cut free" from the narrative and allowed to "float" on their own, the result will be a distortion or subversion of the biblical teaching. For example, Christian theologians have drawn from Aristotelian philosophy in order to conceive of and articulate God's attributes in terms of God's "pure actuality," "simplicity," "aseity," "necessity," and so forth. But if God is described merely in those terms, without those terms being defined by the biblical witness about God and his mighty acts in history, we have not understood who God is. We have contemplated some abstractions about a purported deity, but we have not understood or embraced the God of Israel who alone can save. For this reason *we affirm that biblical theology, rather than any culturally conditioned philosophical framework, is the home environment of systematic theology*.

Theology's often inappropriate relationship with philosophy began in the patristic period but gained steam in the medieval period, as the scholastic method fostered an impulse toward abstraction. Theology became an exercise in abstract, metaphysical knowledge of God divorced from the concrete particularity of the historical narrative. In fact, the Reformers sought to reform theology on this exact point. Luther's "theology of the cross" was an attempt to assert the priority of the Bible and its narrative over philosophical metaphysics. "Luther's fundamental point . . . is that the narrative of the crucified Christ must be interpreted on the basis of a framework established by that narrative itself, rather than upon the basis of an imposed alien framework."[204] The theologian of the cross is the one who allows his conceptual framework to arise naturally from the biblical narrative rather than vice versa, interpreting the biblical narrative on the basis of a preconceived system.

#### *Practical Theology*

In Christianity theology and practice are not bifurcated. The God who speaks is the God who acts, and we who listen are those who worship and obey in gratitude and joy. The Bible's story is one in which God speaks and acts in our midst, narrating our lives and casting us in an unfolding drama. We grow into our identity by means of this dramatic narrative. Our theology arises from within the dramatic narrative, and the narrative sends us forth anew to participate in the drama. Another way of putting this same point is that theology *arises from* and *issues forth* in *mission*. Theology arises in the midst of active ministry and in turn issues forth in renewed and vigorous ministry and mission. This deep and rich interplay between theology and mission ensures that Christian theology is not an ivory tower exercise isolated from the church's broader mission, and it confirms that our missional endeavors are shaped and formed by sound theology.

### *6. Christian theology is inescapably contextual.*

An integrative theology is always conceived and articulated in cultural context, whether that context is Boston, Beirut, or Beijing.[205] For biblical illustration of this inescapable fact,

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[203] Michael Williams, "Systematic Theology as a Biblical Discipline," in *All for Jesus: A Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Covenant Theological Seminary*, ed. Robert A. Peterson and Sean Michael Lucas (Fearn, Tain, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 199.

[204] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 65.

[205] "From age to age, the church lives under the authority of the story that the Bible tells, interpreted ever anew to new generations and new cultures by the continued leading of the Holy Spirit who alone makes possible the confession that Jesus is Savior and Lord." Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 78.

one notes how Paul shaped his sermons and speeches for specific contexts. An examination of his sermons in Acts 13 (to Jewish Diaspora), Acts 14 (to rural animists), Acts 17 (to the cultural elite of the Areopagus), and his testimonies in Acts 22 (Jewish patriots) and Acts 26 (to the cultural elite of Syria-Palestine) reveal Paul's conscious and consistent determination to communicate the gospel in a contextually appropriate manner.[206] Further, cultural context is not an evil the theologian seeks to escape. God himself established culture when he created his imagers with culture-making capacities and told them to be fruitful, till the soil, and practice dominion (Gen 1:26–31). These inherently social and cultural commands, combined with the social and cultural nature of the eternal state (Revelation 21–22), assure us that the deeply cultural nature of human existence is something to be embraced rather than avoided.[207]

The biblical testimony leads us to believe theologians must affirm that God has woven "culture" into the fabric of human life, that theology is done in the midst of human culture and by means of cultural realities such as human language, and that the theologian must critically recognize the human rebellion and idolatry that has marred his cultural context precisely because his theology is crafted in the midst of, and for the sake of, that context. If one's theology is to be appropriately contextual, it must be crafted faithfully, meaningfully, and dialogically. *First, theology must be done faithfully*, by recognizing Scripture as our primary source and supreme norm. *Second, theology must be done meaningfully*, by being conceived and articulated in ways that are appropriate for its particular social and cultural context. We want the hearer to apprehend our words and actions in the way we intend and to respond in a way that is meaningful for that context. *Third, theology must be done dialogically*, being crafted in such a way that God's Word speaks prophetically to that context, unmasking its idolatrous underpinnings and its insufficiency on its own to understand the truth about God and the world. God's Word calls every human culture into question, calling it to conform to the image of Christ. The gospel does not condemn all of a culture, but it is always and at the same time both affirming and rejecting. If the gospel we preach does not have a prophetic edge, then it is not truly or fully the gospel.

David Clark and other theologians have elaborated on the dialogical process for contextual theology.[208] Clark provides a particularly helpful explanation of the dialogical process and does so by means of seven steps that a contextual theology might include.[209] *First, Christians raise questions from within their particular cultural context.* Those questions are shaped by that context's cultural matrix, including its distinctive set of beliefs, feelings, values, practices, products, and so forth. *Second, Christians offer initial responses based on their understanding of the biblical testimony.* Because the questions are raised from within a particular culture, which is not the culture in which the Bible was written, the questions asked may not find an easily packaged answer from the pages of the Bible. *Third, Christians seek to embrace and obey the conclusions they have provisionally drawn*; they prayerfully allow God to keep their hearts open to further light from the Scriptures. *Fourth, they allow Scripture to judge the cultural context from within which the questions were asked.* No human culture asks all of the right questions or has all of the right conceptual categories for

[206] For a detailed exposition of the contextual nature of Paul's preaching and teaching, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 155–208, 334–53.

[207] For a more extended theology of culture, see Bruce Riley Ashford, "Gospel and Culture," in *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 109–27.

[208] See Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985); William A. Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 99–131.

[209] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 114.

conceiving and articulating the gospel. In fact, all human cultures are underlain by idolatry, which distorts both their questions and their categories.[210] *Fifth, through prayer and hard work, Christians form a contextual theology*, a theological framework. *Sixth, if possible, they discuss their findings with theologians from other cultures*, whether those theologians are the church fathers from eras past or contemporary thinkers from other global or cultural locations. *Seventh, Christians return to the Bible once again, evaluating the emerging theology and continuing the cycle.* Clark explains, "Using a dialogical method implies we notice the danger in simply asking Scripture to answer the culture's concerns. A dialogical approach requires that the Bible not only answer our concerns but also transform those concerns."[211] In this way the theologian does contextual theology that allows Scripture its place as the primary source and supreme norm of the task.

***7. Christian theology converses with philosophy and the sciences.***

Our Western cultural context has placed great emphasis on philosophy and science. As theologians reflect on the Scriptures in order to conceive and articulate Christian teaching, they often find themselves in conversation with philosophers, scientists, and those who work in other fields of learning. In such encounters, how should theologians view the fruits of philosophy, science, or some other discipline—especially if the practitioners with whom they interact are not believers and do not take into account the teaching of Christian Scripture?

***Levels of Reflection***

Before tackling the notions of philosophy and science separately, first we must provide a conceptual map relating those disciplines to Scripture, biblical theology, worldview, and systematic theology. Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen provide such a map.[212] In their view *Scripture* is the inspired Word of God. *Biblical theology* is the study of Scripture that conceives of and articulates Scripture as a unified and coherent narrative that is the true story of the whole world. *Worldview* consists of the basic beliefs drawn from the biblical narrative, in interaction with a particular culture's basic beliefs.[213] *Systematic theology* and *Christian philosophy* both arise from Scripture, biblical theology, and worldview. They (like worldview) are abstractions from the biblical story. *Other disciplines* (e.g., the arts, the sciences, business, economics) arise from Christian philosophy and systematic theology, drawing from them as they study the particulars of their own creational reality.

The larger model, therefore, has five tiers:

1. Scripture (God's Word written)
2. Biblical Theology (the story of the Bible)
3. Christian Worldview
4. Christian Philosophy and Systematic Theology
5. Other Disciplines

[210] Kevin Vanhoozer writes, "Prophetic theology treats contemporary culture with the utmost seriousness, though not as having final authority. Faith seeks contextualization, but we have argued that this does not mean bowing the knee to prevailing plausibility (and popularity) structures. Though theology employs the linguistic and conceptual resources that are at hand, it does not leave them unchanged." Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 356.

[211] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 115.

[212] Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 26–28.

[213] Ibid., 27.

Bartholomew and Goheen further explain this model by means of an analogy, comparing knowledge with a tree.[214] In this analogy the roots of the tree are "faith" or the direction of the heart. All humans practice faith, either in God or in idols. The base of the trunk is biblical theology, providing the foundation and trajectory for the growth of the tree. The main body of the trunk is a Christian worldview, which in turn has two main branches, namely, systematic theology and Christian philosophy. Growing from those two main branches are further branches, which represent the special sciences, the various disciplines each of which has its own creational integrity. In this view of things, Christian theology and Christian philosophy stand side by side in the search for truth. Neither discipline seeks to build its knowledge independent of God's revelation. Both disciplines arise from the biblical narrative and its attendant Christian worldview and, therefore, find themselves in a healthy and fruitful dialogue and partnership with one another.

### *Theology and Philosophy*

In discussions of theological method, one contested issue is the enigmatic relation between philosophy and theology. An account of the theological task must provide an account of the relation of these two disciplines. Before doing so, however, one must define this notion of "philosophy," which can be used in different manners. David Clark points out that theologians use the word *philosophy* in at least four different ways.[215] First, philosophy can refer to a person's philosophy of life, his worldview, his most basic conceptual grid. Under this view philosophy is a macro perspective that interprets the whole of life. Second, philosophy can refer to an academic discipline that consists of a cluster of subdisciplines such as logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. Third, philosophy can refer to second-order areas of study that have become academic disciplines with their own integrity. Examples include philosophy of science, philosophy of history, and philosophy of religion. Fourth, philosophy can refer to one's commitment to critical thinking and argumentation.

When unfolding the relation of theology to philosophy, this chapter has in mind a combination of the latter three uses of the word *philosophy*. In our view *Christian* philosophy is the attempt to describe systematically the structure of creation (the nature of being, of knowledge, of beauty, etc.), drawing from God's self-revelation found in the created order and in the Bible, using the tools of critical thinking and argumentation, that informs and guides the Christian in how he or she ought to behave in order to live faithfully before the Lord. It seeks a comprehensive view of the created order *as creation* (not merely as "nature") and draws from Scripture. Although Scripture does not give a comprehensive or detailed analysis of creational realities, it does provide the framework and many clues for understanding them. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen write:

> In our experience, sometimes people get so excited about philosophy—believe it or not—that they forget that it is Scripture that is God's infallible word. Indeed, in our opinion a healthy Christian philosophy, like a healthy Christian theology, will take us back again and again and deeper and deeper into the Bible. We also believe that because the Bible is God's Word for all of life that philosophy too must bow to its authority.[216]

How, therefore, is Christian philosophy related to the task of systematic and integrative theology (such as this present book)? First, philosophy is helpful for conceiving one's

[214] Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), chaps. 1–2.

[215] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 296–99.

[216] Bartholomew and Goheen, *Liberating Christian Philosophy*, chap. 1.

theological method. For example, Christian philosophers can help the theologian articulate the ontology and epistemology that undergird the theological enterprise, giving the theologian a specific vocabulary by which to clearly set forth the doctrines of the faith in unambiguous distinction from those that are unfaithful, sub-Christian, or even heretical. Second, the philosophical subdiscipline of logic helps the theologian conceive and articulate each doctrine in a unified and coherent manner and further to relate the doctrines to one another in a likewise rational way. Third, the philosophical subdiscipline of "history of philosophy" can help the theologian understand both the positive and negative developments in intellectual history. Fourth, philosophical tools can help the theologian make a deep-level exegesis of his cultural context. Fifth, philosophical tools can help clear the ground for a person's conversion by answering various objections to belief. Sixth, philosophy can assist the theologian in analyzing various aspects of the creational order and of human life, an aspect of the philosophical task to which we now turn.

### *Theology and the Sciences*

A third contested issue is the relation of theology and the sciences. This issue has proven to be divisive, as was made clear when the scientist Galileo was persecuted at the hands of the pope as well as many Catholic and Protestant theologians, or when Christian theologians today are ridiculed by the scientific establishment. In response to the conflict between theologians and scientists, various views have developed about the relation of theology and science.[217] One view holds that theology and science are *overlapping research programs which conflict* with one another. Under this view the two disciplines are inherently opposed to one another, and in most cases one discipline is believed to be inherently superior to the other. Another view holds that theology and science are *nonoverlapping research programs which do not conflict*. A third view holds that theology and science are *overlapping research programs which should remain in conversation and partnership* with one another and which are not inherently conflictive or competitive. The understanding of theology that we have proposed in this chapter leads us to hold the third view above. The Bible, as God's Word written, is the foundation of our knowledge. From the biblical narrative arises a Christian worldview, which consists of basic beliefs embedded in that narrative. From the Bible and Christian worldview arise two disciplines, systematic theology and Christian philosophy, which give rise to other disciplines such as the natural and social sciences.

This understanding supports the view that theologians and scientists should dialogue with one another and partner together in seeking to understand reality. "Reality is complex," David Clark writes, "And human knowers access different dimensions of reality using different methods. This is precisely why dialogue among disciplines is important. Dialogue permits us to adopt multiple frames of reference on reality. Still, if *truth* is unified as we hold, we must seek connections between and integration of these multiple frames of reference."[218] As Clark goes on to note, theology speaks to science and science speaks to theology. *Theology speaks to the sciences* by (1) explaining the origin and destiny of the universe, (2) explaining why it is orderly and can be interpreted, (3) explaining why sciences matter, (4) helping to guide future scientific research, and (5) helping provide warrant for one scientific theory over another.[219] *Moreover, science speaks to theology* by (1) offering conceptual

[217] The three views presented here are best viewed on a continuum. Often the three views we have presented are divided further until there are four or more models of the relation between theology and science. See, for example, Richard F. Carlson, ed., *Science and Christianity: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

[218] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 284.

[219] This list is a slight modification of Clark's five points. Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 287–94.

frameworks and analogies helpful for elucidating theological concepts, (2) helping provide warrant for one theological interpretation over another, and (3) illustrating and providing further explanation of biblical teaching on aspects of created reality.

But if theologians and scientists enter into a mutually beneficial dialogue and partnership, how do we adjudicate in the case of conflict? Under the model proposed in this chapter, theology and science are overlapping areas of study that are not inherently conflictive. A proper interpretation of the Scriptures will not be found in conflict with a proper interpretation of the created order. While we affirm this truth in theory, in practice, it remains challenging to arrive at the "proper" interpretation at every point. In light of this truth, we offer three principles for reconciliation in the occasion of disagreement between theologians and scientists.[220] *First, either group (theologians or scientists) is subject to error, and therefore either group is subject to correction.* Both theologians and scientists are finite and fallible human knowers, and both are subject to making interpretive mistakes. For example, the Catholic and Protestant church leaders were wrong to condemn Galileo based on their misinterpretation of Bible passages. Likewise, scientists have been wrong to criticize theologians for their refusal to believe that the cosmos (or matter) is not eternal and that it evidences design.[221] *Second, science is in a constant state of flux.* Scientific hypotheses and conclusions are always changing. For this reason theologians should be careful not to hastily revise their interpretation of Scripture based on a purportedly "proven" scientific fact.[222] *Third, Scripture is not intended to be a science textbook.* Scripture does not err in what it asserts scientifically, but Scripture does not usually communicate with scientific precision. Based on these three principles, both scientists and theologians are well served to hold their exegetical conclusions with appropriate humility.

***8. Christian theology aims for truth.***

This chapter has been written under the belief that Scripture is revelation from God that provides the true story of the whole world. Christian theologians recognize Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, and culture as sources from which they draw. They integrate the insights given by historical, biblical, philosophical, systematic, and practical theology in order to build an integrative theology that remains in conversation with philosophy, science, and other fields of knowledge. All of this is done in order to provide a unified and coherent account of the truth about God and the world.

> The church's affirmation," writes Lesslie Newbigin, "is that the story it tells is the true interpretation of all human and cosmic history and that to understand history otherwise is to misunderstand it, therefore misunderstanding the human situation here and now. . . . From age to age, the church lives under the authority of the story that the Bible tells, interpreted ever anew to new generations and new cultures by the continued leading of the Holy Spirit who alone makes possible the confession that Jesus is Savior and Lord.[223]

But what does it mean to say that Christian teaching is "true"?

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[220] These three principles are adapted from Norman Geisler's treatment in Norman L. Geisler, "Science and the Bible," in Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 691–92.

[221] An article by theoretical particle physicist Stephen Barr (University of Delaware) provides five examples where scientists have wrongly criticized theologians. Stephen Barr, "Retelling the Story of Science," in *First Things* 131 (March 2003): 16–25.

[222] Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), has made clear that science does not always progress rationally and that it indeed often reverses tracks or finds itself in the midst of irrational and radical paradigm shifts.

[223] Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 77–78.

Some philosophers set forth a *coherence theory of truth*.[224] Under this theory any coherent system of belief counts as a "true" system of belief. Any belief that coheres with the rest of one's belief counts as "true." The problem with this theory is that one can construct a coherent set of beliefs that has no connection with reality. While the logical coherence of a belief system is a factor one takes into account when judging whether such a belief system is true, coherence is not itself constitutive of truth. Other philosophers set forth a *pragmatist theory of truth*.[225] Under this theory, whichever beliefs prove to be invaluable instruments of action can be counted as true. However, not all true propositions are immediately useful and not all useful propositions are true. Adolf Hitler's belief system proved to be a valuable instrument of action for him and for Germany's economy, but his belief system was built upon deeply inhumane falsehoods. While the pragmatic value of a belief system is a factor one takes into account when judging whether such a belief system is true, pragmatism is not itself constitutive of truth. In contrast to these theories, Christian theologians traditionally have espoused a *correspondence theory of truth*. In this view truth is what corresponds with reality. Truth is independent of the human mind. Even if the human mind cannot recognize a particular truth, the truth of a matter still stands. This view of truth is pretheoretic and intuitive, rooted in the human experience. We believe this view tallies with the biblical testimony which teaches that God is truth and that God speaks truth (e.g., John 14:6).

Related to the question of truth is the question of knowledge (epistemology). Can human knowers access objective reality? Some philosophers have espoused *naïve realism*. In this view it is assumed that the human knower can directly access objective reality. Naïve realism is called such because it naïvely overlooks the obstacles to knowing truth, obstacles such as human idolatry, and the historical and cultural location of the human knower. Other philosophers have held to epistemological *nonrealism*. In this view it is assumed that the human knower does not have access to objective reality. In contrast to these two views, we believe that Christian theology best fits with a view known as *critical realism*.[226] In this view human knowers are constrained by the limitations of our rational and empirical faculties and by the historical and cultural locatedness of our attempts to gain knowledge. But Christian theologians recognize a further reason that human knowers are limited and fallible: the distortive, corrosive, and ultimately subversive effect of human sin on the mind's ability to know. In other words sin has epistemological consequences. While God's knowledge of reality is comprehensive, our human knowledge of reality is partial, inadequate, and dependent on God. N. T. Wright puts it well when he writes that critical realism "acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence, 'realism'), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower or the thing known (hence, 'critical')."[227] We believe a critically realist theological method is necessary in order to take full account of the biblical testimony concerning truth and knowledge. What humans can know and say about God is not comprehensive, but it is true, trustworthy, and sufficient for faithful living.[228]

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[224] Brand Blanshard, "Coherence as the Nature of Truth," in *The Nature of Thought*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), 2:264–69.

[225] William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1975).

[226] Some of the foremost theological proponents of critical realism are David K. Clark, Lesslie Newbigin, and N. T. Wright. See Clark, *To Know and Love God*; Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 47–64.

[227] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 35.

[228] This way of putting it is a slight modification of Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 74.

***9. Christian theology serves multiple audiences.***

As theologians proceed with the task of theology, they do so for multiple audiences. David Tracy has argued that theology must be public and must find ways to interact compellingly with three distinct audiences: academy, church, and society.[229] This chapter expands Tracy's list in order to address five audiences: God, family, church, academy, and society at large.

***Theology for God***

First and foremost, theology is done for God. Just as God seeks to bring glory to his name and increase his own renown, so we do all we do to glorify him and make his name great.[230] The biblical testimony could not be clearer on this count. God created humanity for his glory (Isa 43:7), sent his Son to vindicate his glory (Rom 3:23–26; 15:8–9), will one day fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory (Hab 2:14), so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10–11 NKJV). In the present age we are to do all things for his glory (1 Cor 10:31). "All things" includes the task of theology. For this reason, Barth writes, "Evangelical theology is concerned with Immanuel, God with us! Having this God for its object, it can be nothing else but the most thankful and *happy* science!"[231] As theologians, we have the great privilege of studying God's Word and, in so doing, tasting and seeing that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8), delighting ourselves in the Lord (Ps 37:4), seeking him early in the morning (Ps 63:1), and savoring his words (Ps 119:103). There is nothing more wonderful than attending closely to what our most loved One is saying to us and then speaking it back to him and telling others what he has told us. Theology is done, first and foremost, for God.

***Theology for the Church***

Second, theology is done for the church, universal and local (Eph 4:11–13). Just as the apostle Paul wrote theological epistles that benefitted particular local congregations as well as the church as a whole down through the centuries, so we should do theology consciously with God's church in mind. "Theology for the church" can be done in many ways, but we will mention three. First, the pastors of local congregations are the lead theologians for their churches. They should preach theologically, orchestrate their services theologically, and counsel theologically. Well-crafted sermons, services, or counseling sessions are examples of theology for the church. Second, a group of university and seminary professors could collaborate to write an integrative theology (such as the present volume) that takes as its primary audience the pastors, missionaries, counselors, and other ministers whom they teach. Third, a pastor, university, or seminary professor might set forth to write or teach in a manner which is technical and academic in nature. Even when this is the goal, Christian theology should be done with an eye toward knowing and loving God and building up his (universal) church.

***Theology for the Family***

Third, theology is done in the presence of, and for the sake of, our families. Family is the most basically human of all our vocations, the one in which God's gracious love and his providential care are most tangibly conveyed through human beings. Moreover, God

[229] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3–46.

[230] John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998); James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

[231] Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 12.

instructs all believers to talk about him and his Word consciously and continually within the home.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4–9 NKJV)

We are called to know and love God in the midst of our families, teaching God's Word to them diligently throughout the day, in such a way that it functions as blinders on a horse, keeping our feet on the path of righteousness.[232]

***Theology for the Academy***

Fourth, theology can be done within the academy and for the sake of others in the academy. Unfortunately, in the past century Western universities have increasingly shied away from recognizing theology as a legitimate academic discipline. George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* and Stanley Hauerwas's *The State of the University* speak to the situation in which Christian theology is removed from the domain of true scholarship and Christian theologians struggle to be granted tenure.[233] We believe this modern Western conception of theology is false. Christian theology is an eminently legitimate discipline. Theologians should do their scholarly work with excellence, constructively and critically engaging other scholars in theological studies, religious studies, comparative religions, and so forth. This task is not easy. "The dilemma for evangelical theology," writes Clark, "is whether it can maintain intellectual integrity, as judged by the academic world, and still serve the needs of Christian believers. . . . This means that evangelical theologians want to do what many believe is impossible: *both* think critically *and also* recognize biblical authority."[234] In fact, we would argue that the recognition of biblical authority should itself foster critical thinking. The rational, creative, and moral capacities necessary for intellectually rigorous theology are the capacities through which the image of God shines. In other words, intellectual rigor is a part of spirituality (1 Pet 3:15).

***Theology for Society***

Fifth, theology can be done for society at large. Theologians can do their work with an eye toward various publics, taking into account their questions and concerns, and communicating in a way that will be meaningful and compelling. C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer are examples of public theologians. Lewis was known for mediating Christian truth by means of radio talks, fictional literature, apologetics, and debates. Schaeffer did theology in public by means of speeches, videography, and popular level books; he addressed existential and ethical issues that were immediately relevant to society as a whole and used those issues to invite people to consider Christian truth. The point here is that the Christian faith is not something to sit back and stare at but something to lean forward and look through. The Scriptures are like a pair of spectacles through which we view the world. The Christian

[232] For a fine example of a theological text written to help parents teach biblical truth to their children, see Bruce Ware, *Big Truths for Young Hearts: Teaching and Learning the Greatness of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

[233] George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University, 1998); Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

[234] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 200.

theologian is uniquely positioned to speak truth about issues of interest to any person in any walk of life.

***Theology with Faithfulness and Excellence***

For whichever audience a theologian intends to teach, preach, or write, it is incumbent upon him to do his work *faithfully* in the hope that he might be able to do his work with *excellence*. Excellence cannot always be achieved, though faithfulness can. A theologian can always do his work faithfully by lashing his theology to Scripture and doing so in order to know and love God and participate in his mission in this world. To the extent he is able, he will also draw from theology's various sources, integrate its various subdisciplines, and remain in conversation with philosophy and other fields of learning. Most importantly, he will work hard to evoke from his students a curiosity and excitement about the things of God. To be a lazy teacher, preacher, or writer is a sin. Although George Steiner was not writing about theologians, his words are instructive:

> To teach seriously is to lay hands on what is most vital in a human being. . . . Poor teaching, pedagogic routine, a style of instruction that is, unconsciously or not, cynical in its mere utilitarian aims, are ruinous. They tear up hope by its roots. Bad teaching is, almost literally, murderous and metaphorically, a sin. It diminishes the student, it reduces to gray inanity the subject being presented.[235]

Theology is done for the purpose of knowing and loving God and equipping his people to join his mission; therefore, theologians work hard to teach, write, and preach with excellence so their words will be maximally meaningful and compelling.[236]

***10. Christian theology is both science oriented and wisdom oriented.***

Theologians have debated the type of intellectual activity that ought to characterize the task of theology. In other words, what is the character of theology as a discipline? Since the early church, theologians have argued whether theology should be construed upon a scientific model (Latin, *scientia*) or upon a wisdom model (Latin, *sapientia*). Augustine preferred *sapientia* to *scientia*, but later medieval theologians preferred *scientia* to *sapientia*. We contend that theology is indeed science, but more ultimately it is wisdom. We agree with Vanhoozer that "doctrine has a cognitive component . . . but the thrust of Christian doctrine is not mere knowledge, but rather wisdom."[237] In our opinion wisdom is the ultimate goal of theology because it includes not only the scientific aspect of knowing but also the prudential aspect of living wisely in light of what we know. In order to flesh out this view of theology as science and wisdom, we address both aspects of theological knowledge.

On the one hand, theology is scientific if by scientific we mean that it is a *bona fide* discipline oriented to a legitimate object and possessing appropriate methods of investigating.[238] Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that theology is a science because it has a defined sphere of investigation, an internal coherence, a purposive attempt to describe external reality, and a public sphere of justification.[239] Likewise, Millard Erickson writes:

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[235] George Steiner, *Lessons of the Masters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 18.

[236] For further explanation and analysis of the call for excellence in Christian theology, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

[237] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 88.

[238] This sense of the word *scientific* stems from the earliest medieval universities. We have adapted the definition from David Clark's definition. Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 213.

[239] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 326–45.

> (1) Theology has a definite subject matter to investigate, primarily that which God has revealed about himself. (2) Theology deals with objective matters. It does not merely give expression to the subjective feelings of the theologian or of the Christian. (3) It has a definite methodology for investigating its subject matter. (4) It has a method for verifying its propositions. (5) There is coherence among the propositions of its subject matter.[240]

Pannenberg and Erickson both argue that theology must be subject to verification and, in Pannenberg's criteria, public justification. We agree with Pannenberg and Erickson that theology is a *bona fide* discipline oriented to a legitimate object and possessing appropriate methods of investigating, and in that manner science oriented.

On the other hand, theology is wisdom oriented. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10 HCSB). As Craig Bartholomew and Ryan O'Dowd have argued, the wisdom theme pervades the biblical witness.[241] Although theology is science oriented, it is more ultimately wisdom oriented for two reasons. *First, theology is more than science because it involves a personal relationship between the knower and the known.*[242] True knowledge is rooted in commitment to God. Gerhard von Rad writes:

> The thesis that all human knowledge comes back to the question about commitment to God is a statement of penetrating perspicacity. . . . Israel attributes to the fear of God, to belief in God, a highly important function in respect of human knowledge. She was, in all her seriousness, of the opinion that effective knowledge about God is the only thing that puts a man into a right relationship with the objects of his perception.[243]

Indeed, theology goes beyond correct information, extending ultimately to right relationship with God. *Second, theology is more than science because it seeks to equip the church to live wisely in light of its knowledge.* Theology is wisdom in that it involves both true theory and right practice. David Ford writes, "[Theology] asks not only about meaning, interpretation and truth but also, inextricably, about living life before God now and about how lives and communities are shaped in line with who God is and with God's purposes for the future. In short, it is about lived meaning directed toward the kingdom of God."[244] If one focuses on theology's science orientation to the exclusion of its wisdom orientation, one warps and distorts the task of theology and hinders the mission of the church.[245]

In summary, theology is more than science because theology is missional by its nature. Theology is centered on knowing and loving God, on being transformed by him, and by being a light to the nations so they also can know and love God. David Bosch writes, "Just as the church ceases to be church if it is not missionary, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character."[246] God's biblical self-revelation is the true story of the whole world, but he does not reveal this account merely for us to step back and be wowed by its

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[240] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 36.

[241] Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 231–60.

[242] Ellen Charry writes, "Sapience [English, "wisdom"] includes correct information about God, but emphasizes attachment to that knowledge. Sapience is engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower to the known." Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

[243] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM, 1970), 67–68.

[244] David Ford, "Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God (1)," in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM, 2003), 4–5.

[245] David Clark notes that overly cognitive approaches to theology (1) obscure the transformational aspect of theology, which is its true purpose; (2) give the false impression that one must have a seminary degree in order to read the Bible; and therefore (3) intimidate Christians who have not formally studied theology. Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 240–41.

[246] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 494.

elegance and power. He has given us the Bible so we can live within its pages, allowing its missional story to shape our identities so we can in turn take this story to the nations.

## *Putting It All Together*

After having reflected on these ten crucial dimensions of theological method, the question remains: how can one draw from the lessons learned in these ten discussions in order to forge a basic workable theological method, even for one who is a "beginner" in systematic and integrative theology? In other words, can several "steps" be delineated by which a theology student can proceed? The short answer is yes. *A Theology for the Church* structures each chapter around four questions: What does the Bible say? What has the church said? How do we put it all together? Why does it matter? These questions form a basic four-step method for the Christian theologian.

The first question is, What does the Bible say? The faithful Christian theologian will build his theology upon Christian Scripture. After all, Christian theology is disciplined reflection on God's self-revelation. A theologian, therefore, will not only draw from the entire canon of Scripture to answer a theological question, but he will focus special attention on certain key passages that speak in a particularly expansive, profound, or clear manner on the question at stake. In studying these passages, he will draw from the work of trusted biblical commentaries, as well as Greek or Hebrew grammars and dictionaries. He will view the text in light of its literary and historical context. He will approach each passage patiently, lovingly, and humbly, seeking to understand the biblical author's communicative purposes so he can understand and obey God's Word.

The second question is, What has the church said? The faithful Christian theologian will ascertain, to the best of his ability, what the church has said through the ages and across the globe. In so doing, he begins to understand the way in which he, the theologian, has already been shaped by a certain theological tradition, for better or for worse. He can submit himself and his tradition to the authoritative Word of God and in humility can seek to learn from the great theologians and church traditions of times past and from other parts of the globe.

The third question is, How do we put it all together? As the theologian is studying Scripture and attending to what the church has said concerning a particular question, he may also draw from his reasoning abilities, life experience, and cultural context in order to craft an answer to his question, an answer that is faithful to Scripture and meaningful to his cultural context. If he has access to libraries, he may draw from historical theologies, biblical studies and biblical theologies, systematic theologies, philosophical theologies, and practical theologies. He may bring his own theological thoughts into conversation with philosophers and scientists, all toward the end of gaining the fullest possible knowledge of truth. In this task of theology, he may write, speak, or think for any number of audiences: God, his family, the church, the academy, and society at large. He seeks to do his theology with faithfulness and excellence, toward the end of living wisely under God's reign and equipping others to do the same.

The fourth question is, Why does it matter? The Christian faith does not allow a bifurcation between theology and practice. The theologian does theology in order to know and love God and participate in his mission in this world. The wise theologian does theology in the midst of active ministry, and his theology in turn fosters renewed ministry and mission. If a theologian's "thinking" does not arise in the midst of a life of ministry and if it does not issue forth in ministry, it is not a truly Christian theology.

To return to the question above: Can several "steps" be delineated by which a theology student can proceed? The short answer we have given is yes. The longer answer is yes, but. Yes, these four questions form a helpful framework that reminds the theologian how to do theology faithfully under God's kingship. However, the truth of the matter is that the theologian's work is a bit messier than this neatly articulated series of steps. A theologian might find himself discovering truths about God in a way that is "out of order." As he is approaching a theological question or problem, he might find himself going back and forth between several of the steps. He might even find that his mind is performing several of these steps at once! Nevertheless, as this third section has given a broad overview of ten crucial dimensions of the theological task, these four steps provide a helpful framework for doing the work of faithful theology.

## *Why Does It Matter?*

In the fourth part of this chapter, we provide a few examples of why theological method matters. Indeed, a healthy theological method will lead to a robust Christian orthodoxy, which fosters a vibrant orthopraxy, which in turn reinforces healthy theological method and robust orthodoxy. A deficient theological method will lead to heterodox and heretical doctrine, which warps and stunts Christian life and practice, which in turn negatively reinforces deficient theological method and heterodox doctrine. In order to illustrate this cycle, we now turn to two historical case studies, the first arising from the patristic period and the second within the modern period.

### *Historical Case Studies*

#### *Irenaeus and the Heretics*

During the patristic period the church and its theologians wrestled mightily to properly interpret, conceptualize, and articulate the Bible's Trinitarian and Christological teaching. The backstory of these controversies, however, was the conflict between rival methodologies. Irenaeus's conflict with the heretics illustrates the point. Against the heretics Irenaeus (c. 130–200) argued for the unity of the Godhead, redemption by the incarnate Son, and the future resurrection of the body. In retrospect we affirm that Irenaeus clearly came out on the right side of the debate and was able to do so, in large part, because of his theological method. Two points stand out. First, in *Against the Heresies* and other writings, he argues that the heretics' interpretations go awry precisely because they do not use the apostolic interpretation of Scripture. In other words, the heretics rejected the traditional interpretation of selected biblical passages, an interpretation that set those passages within their proper textual and canonical context. John Behr writes,

> Irenaeus' basic charge against the Valentinians is that they have disregarded 'the order and connection of the Scriptures,' the body of truth, so distorting one picture into another. They have not accepted the coherence of the Scriptures, as speaking about Christ, but have preferred their own fabrication, created by adapting passages from Scripture to a different hypothesis, attempting to endow it with persuasive plausibility.[247]

Second, Irenaeus was appropriately critical of pagan philosophy, vigorously refuting many of its conclusions and many aspects of its method while nonetheless adapting some of its

[247] Behr, *The Way to Nicea*, 32.

language and categories to use as he defended the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, redemption, and the resurrection of the body.[248] Irenaeus, therefore, stands as a positive example of how healthy theological method fosters orthodoxy.

***Friedrich Schleiermacher***

The modern period has been no less fraught with controversy, and, like the patristic period, its controversies are rooted in divergent theological methods. Friedrich Schleiermacher is often called the father of modern theology and the fountainhead of liberal and revisionist brands of theology and theological method.[249] As we noted in the historical section of this chapter, Schleiermacher's method is experiential and expressivist. The *experiential* aspect of his method is underlain by Schleiermacher's belief that religion arises from universal human "feeling." For this reason theology is disciplined and critical reflection on Christian religious experience, feeling, and piety. Schleiermacher removes Scripture from its place as the primary source of theology and places experience in its stead. Second, theology is also *expressive* in that the theologian draws from his analysis of the Christian experience in order to express the Christian experience in human language.

Although we find ourselves in limited agreement with other aspects of Schleiermacher's method (e.g., his belief that theology should be communal and pastoral), we reject the experiential-expressivism that lies at the heart of his theological method. His decision to rest the task of theology on the subjective foundation of religious feeling and experience paved the way for his (and his followers') rejection and revision of orthodox Christian doctrines. Schleiermacher discarded the historic Christian belief that Christian Scripture is divine revelation. He minimized the doctrine of the Trinity, asserted that the "attributes" of God do not actually describe God, denied the reality of miracles, and rejected the efficacy of prayer. He rejected traditional teaching on the incarnation and the two natures of Christ, positing that Jesus Christ was entirely human except for his potent God-consciousness. He distorted the biblical witness about salvation, arguing that Christ "saves" us by attracting us to himself with his powerful personality, thereby developing in us a more potent God-consciousness. In summary, Schleiermacher's anthropocentric theological method reduces theology to anthropology. His view of Christian theology was underlain by a heterodox view of Christian Scripture, which left him unable to build a truly Christian theology.

But it remains to be shown that his faulty theological method not only leads to errant doctrine but also adversely affects the church's mission and ministries. Christians who follow his method will likely jettison historical and biblical ministry practices that conflict with the Christian community's current "experience" of God. In our twenty-first-century Western context, they will likely minimize or reject biblical teaching on man's wickedness and God's wrath and craft mission paradigms that focus on social ministry to the exclusion of verbal proclamation of the whole counsel of God. Likewise, they will be less likely to embark on missions to unreached and unengaged people groups around the world who have no access to Bibles, churches, or Christians, and who therefore have no access to the gospel. They likely will depart from biblical teaching on gender and sexuality. In sum, the liberal-revisionist methodological paradigm is detrimental for the church's belief and practice.

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[248] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 35.

[249] Grenz and Olson write, "What is significant in Schleiermacher is not the particular reconstructions of Christian doctrines, but the method and approach he took in trying to disentangle Christian beliefs from conflicts with modern thought, which set the trend for theological liberals for the next two hundred years." Grenz and Olson, *20th-Century Theology*, 40.

### *Contemporary Case Studies*

In the historical case studies above, we organized the material chronologically and on the basis of particular persons. In the contemporary case study we will now investigate, we will arrange the material topically, focusing on some tangible "practical" situations in which theological method affects mission and ministry. One of the most significant challenges facing the church today is the imperative to craft a sound theological method that will foster sound doctrine and healthy ministry practices.[250] The first case study deals with pastoral counseling, while the second case study arises in the context of international missions.

#### *Pastoral Counseling*

Earlier in the chapter we discussed the relationship of theology and the sciences, concluding that they are mutually beneficial dialogue partners. This aspect of theological method is significant for the life of the church, and its significance can be illustrated in the practical ministry of pastoral counseling. With this case study we are not trying to address all the questions related to the integration of theology and psychology, nor are we trying to provide a model for pastoral counseling.[251] The point of this case study is merely to demonstrate how mutually enriching a dialogue between theology and science is for theological reflection and application.

Suppose a pastor encounters a believer who is experiencing an extended period of depression. Should he rule out psychology or psychiatry as helpful conversation partners, insisting that no source but the Bible should be consulted? Or, alternatively, should he look past the Scriptures to psychology and psychiatry for the master plan for treatment? Under the method espoused in this book, neither option is preferable. In counseling a person in an extended period of depression, he will draw from both sources in order to build a framework for understanding depression.

On the one hand, the pastor knows that theology provides the presuppositional framework for understanding the origin, existence, and destiny of the human being. His counselee is created in the image and likeness of God. She lives, however, in a fallen world and therefore must deal with both the cosmic and personal effects of sin. She could be experiencing *the cosmic effects of sin* that include physical sickness in general and brain-based sickness in particular. She could be experiencing the consequences of a particular person's sin, such as her own sins or her husband's sins against her. Further, the pastor knows that God has redeemed this counselee. Although this redemption does not (until the eternal state) mitigate the effects of cosmic sin on the counselee, it does provide for reconciliation with her husband in light of his sin and reconciliation with God in light of her own sin.

On the other hand, the pastor knows that the psychological and psychiatric disciplines can be helpful in cases of extended depression. For example, this person's depression might

[250] Elsewhere, I (Bruce) have written, "If we are not careful . . . fissures between belief and practice will derail our mission and render our evangelical theology impotent. A faulty doctrine of God, for example, will lead us to a wrong definition of success. A poor hermeneutic will lead to an aberrant definition of God's mission and of our mission. A misguided soteriology neuters our attempts at evangelism and discipleship. A reductionist ecclesiology will result in anemic churches that fail to disciple their members or reach their communities. In order to foster a healthy mission, therefore, we must seek carefully, consciously, and consistently to rivet missiological practice to Christian Scripture and its attendant evangelical doctrine." Bruce Riley Ashford, "A Theologically-Driven Missiology," in Bruce Riley Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 294–95.

[251] For a thorough engagement on these questions, see Mark McMinn, *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1996); Eric Johnson, *Foundation for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007); Stanton Jones and Richard Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991); and Mark Yarhouse, Richard Butman, and Barrett McRay, *Modern Psychopathologies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005).

stem from a brain-based illness. If this sickness is accurately diagnosed and appropriately medicated, a psychologist (in consultation with a psychiatrist) will prove to be a helpful partner for the pastor. Or, for a further example, the counselee's depression might stem from her husband's adulterous relationships with several other women rather than from a brain-based illness. Even though this woman ultimately needs the pastor's counseling for the spiritual, moral, and relational aspects of her life, she may also benefit from short-term medication in order to stabilize her and discourage thoughts of suicide. Still again, the pastor could benefit from empirical studies published by psychologists, studies that explain the symptoms of depressed people.

Finally, the pastor knows that either he or a psychologist could err in counseling. The psychologist's paradigm will be errant to the extent that he does not allow Scripture to frame his thoughts. Without consulting Scripture, he will never fully understand "normal" and "abnormal." He will never understand the relationship of body and soul. He probably will tend to misdiagnose and overmedicate because he cannot understand that many or most counselees are manifesting symptoms that stem directly from spiritual issues. Likewise, the pastor knows he could err in the counseling process. He could overlook physiological and brain-based factors that should be taken into account. He might correctly understand that a person's sin has deep effects on his own psyche or another person's psyche but at the same time not fully understand *how* it affects the brain and the rest of the body. He might misinterpret the Bible's teaching or even apply the Bible's teaching inappropriately to this counselee's case of depression. In summary, the relationship of the theological and psychological disciplines should be one of mutual benefit and dialogue, with practitioners of both disciplines taking into account biblical teaching and creational reality, in order to arrive at a full-orbed understanding of reality.

***International Church Planting***

During this chapter's discussion of the multifaceted and integrative nature of Christian theology, it was noted that theologians should situate their work in light of the entire biblical narrative. This narrative, which stretches from creation and the fall through to redemption and new creation, provides the starting point, the trajectory, and the framework for a theologian's work. If one neglects any of the plot movements in the narrative, one's theology will be skewed. This aspect of theological method is significant for the church's ministry, and its significance can be illustrated in the case of an international church planter. Suppose a would-be church planter arrives in Southeast Asia. His charge is to evangelize a Muslim people group and to plant contextually appropriate churches among them that would give robust and powerful witness to Christ's lordship. Is the full scope of the biblical narrative important for his ministry? Or could he easily overlook segments of the narrative without negative consequences? We will argue that the church planter's ministry will be adversely affected if he does not take fully into account the biblical teaching on creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.

From creation the church planter learns that God's creation is ontologically good and that God's imagers are commanded to be fruitful, to till the soil, and to practice loving dominion. These commands affirm that God initiated the social and cultural natures of human existence and that the social and cultural dimensions of human existence are part of his good design. From the fall the church planter learns that human rebellion has broken the shalom that existed at the time of creation. Man and woman experience the brokenness of their relationship with God, each other, the created order, and self. Their sin has negatively affected their social and cultural pursuits, redirecting those creaturely aspects of their lives

toward idolatrous ends. From redemption the church planter learns that Jesus of Nazareth is God in flesh, the promised Savior-King who will redeem God's imagers from their slavery to sin and will redeem God's creation from the bondage it experiences because of human sin. Because of Jesus Christ, God's imagers may be saved from judgment and brought back into relationship with him. From new creation the church planter learns that God's redeemed imagers, complete with glorified bodies, will one day dwell with him on a restored universe. Their existence will be a fully human existence, replete with society and culture, and devoid of the possibility of sin.

Let's suppose the church planter ignores the full counsel of God from creation through new creation. How will this oversight negatively affect his charge to plant contextually appropriate churches that acknowledge the full lordship of Christ? We see two negative consequences. First, if the church planter does not understand the biblical emphasis on the goodness of God's creation and on the goodness of the social and cultural dimensions of human existence, he will struggle to contextualize appropriately. He might try to avoid the task of contextualization as if cultural context were an obstacle to be overcome. Second, his minimalization of the creaturely and cultural nature of human existence will probably lead him to ignore the ways in which his new churches should bring every area of their existence under submission to Christ. He would focus on the nonmaterial aspects of human life (e.g., contemplation or prayer) to the exclusion of the physical and material aspects (e.g., one's work in the arts, the sciences, business, or education). In so doing, he would relegate Christ's lordship to one dimension of human existence. In summary, the church planter would likely plant churches that were poorly contextualized and ineffective in bringing all aspects of their existence under submission to Christ.

## *Conclusion: Learning to Do Theology*

This chapter provides an overview of theological method by answering the four questions that structure each chapter in *A Theology for the Church*: What does the Bible say? What has the church said? How do we put it all together? Why does it matter? In reply to the first question, we suggested that Scripture anticipates the task of theology. The Bible implies the task of theology, and it also frames the way we theologize. We addressed the second question by tracing the contours of church history and historical theology. Here we surveyed the various ways in which theologians have approached their task. This history guides us to discover and evaluate the tools we might use for the task and provides us with an idea of the crucial decisions we must make when doing theology. Then, as we set out to put it all together, we offered ten guiding methodological principles with a framework of four basic steps that theologians can take in order to put those principles into practice. In response to the final question, we highlighted four case studies to demonstrate the relationship between healthy theology and healthy practice.

In the remaining chapters of *A Theology for the Church*, you will engage a number of different authors who reflect on biblical doctrines using these same four questions. These authors, and the chapters they have written, provide the reader with a recurrent exercise in *disciplined reflection on God's self-revelation for the purposes of knowing and loving God and participating in his mission in this world*. As you read the remaining chapters, you too are invited to engage in the process of doing theology. This chapter matters primarily because it offers a guide for reading and reflecting on the remaining chapters in such a way that you develop knowledge of, and love for, God and commit to participate in his mission.