

# REDEFINING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY?

A REVIEW ARTICLE OF RICHARD C. GAMBLE'S *THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD: VOLUME 1: GOD'S MIGHTY ACTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

CHARLES HODGE ONCE wrote, "If a man adopts a false method, he is like one who takes a wrong road which will never lead him to his destination."<sup>2</sup> This projected three volume set attempts to reshape the methodology and structure of Reformed Systematic Theology by blending it with the disciplines of Biblical Theology and Historical Theology. It is customary for most major works on Systematic Theology to integrate biblical and historical theological discussions. What makes this book distinctive lies in the fact that the author redefines the methodology of Reformed Systematic Theology in light of the structure of Biblical Theology.<sup>3</sup> Its overarching sections treat the question of theological method and organization (i.e., Prolegomena), theology from Adam to Noah, theology from Noah to Moses, theology in the age of prophecy, poetry, and wisdom literature, followed by a two chapter section comprised of theological reflections drawn from the work as a whole. Because *The Whole Counsel of God* treats matters that stand at the heart of the way in which we should do Reformed Theology, it requires extensive interaction and evaluation.

This book is simple in style and it is accessible to laypeople (yet the length of the volume will likely discourage a wide lay readership). While volume one of Gamble's book contains much useful reflection upon the theology of the Old Testament, the primary contention of

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1. Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God: Volume 1: God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009). 718 pages (hardcover). \$49.99.

2. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), I, 3.

3. This statement is contrary to the review by Jeffrey Waddington, who asserts that the significance of Gamble's work lies in the fact that he attempts to integrate the entire theological encyclopedia. Jeffrey C. Waddington, "Review," in *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal*, vol. 6, 2010, 234. Integrating the disciplines has been done before. Gamble seeks to redefine the structure of Systematic Theology in light of the order of Biblical Theology. See below.

this reviewer is that it is inadequate as a work of Systematic Theology and that its relatively innovative method of organization does not mark a step in the right direction. After noting some features of the work in general, this review shall examine at length Gamble's theological method in relation to Reformed Systematic Theology.

## 2. General Observations

### Some Useful Features

Two positive features of this work are that that it is heavily steeped in Scripture and thoroughly orthodox in its conclusions. It is always refreshing for a believer to be led step by step through the unfolding of God's revelation through the Old Testament. Gamble highlights carefully the progressively unfolding nature of God's revelation in Scripture and treats the books of the Bible in their historical order. For readers who have never read anything in the area of Old Testament introduction or Old Testament Biblical Theology, this work will be a treat that has the effect of unifying and opening the entire Old Testament. While recognizing that we cannot read the Old Testament properly without the New Testament (19), the author is careful not to import too much of the content of a New Testament faith into Old Testament saints (673). This simultaneously upholds the theological unity of both Testaments while allowing the Old Testament to speak for itself.

As for noteworthy sections, Gamble's treatment of the Psalms is particularly full and useful (523-568). He has provided a lengthy and valuable exposition of the primary themes of Psalm 119 (533ff). In addition, his treatment of the eschatology of the Psalms is one of the clearest and most full treatments of the subject that this reviewer has read (548-561). While it has become cliché for reviewers to single out part of a volume as "worth the price of the book," the epithet certainly applies to Gamble's theological overview of the Psalms.

## 3. Criticism

One surprising drawback of this book is the almost universal prevalence of ambiguities, poorly worded statements, and unanswered questions that it contains. The following is a small sampling only. The work is marked consistently by poor transitions between sections (for example, 379-380). In addition, many will appreciate Gamble's effort to describe theology in biblical rather than overly "scholastic" terms. Many times when major works on theology seek to remove historically established terms, ambiguity

characterizes the finished product.<sup>4</sup> However, where Gamble includes established terminology, he commonly misuses it. For instance, on page eighty-four he refers to the “*principium essendi* of knowledge.” This confuses the historical categories of the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi*.<sup>5</sup> In traditional Prolegomena, the former involves the Triune God as the principle of being, and the latter sets forth God’s self-revelation as the principle of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> This is a relatively minor point, but the author’s lack of precision is not an isolated incident.

His treatment of the Ten Commandments (chapter 20) illustrates the effects of poor wording in theological formulation. Reformed theology has ordinarily argued for the priority of the first table of the law regarding the worship of God over the second table of the law, yet Gamble denies this distinction (396). Later he states, “[The Decalogue] was not binding upon those Gentiles who never heard it; yet, it was in a sense written upon their consciences” (399). Yet if the Decalogue is written upon the consciences of the Gentiles, then how can it not be binding upon them? Perhaps the citation of Witsius in the footnote indicates the author’s intended meaning: “The Gentiles, who had heard nothing of the giving of the law in the wilderness, were not bound to the observance of that law, *as it was published to the Israelites*, but only as inscribed on their own consciences” (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup> This statement is much more precise in that Witsius argues that the same law was binding upon Jew and Gentile alike, but not in the same manner (reflecting Romans 2-3). Under the fifth commandment, Gamble writes that we must not “strike” children “without cause” (415). However, we must never “strike” children. Instead, we must discipline and train them. “Strike” connotes attack or abuse, both in biblical times and in contemporary culture, whereas “discipline,” “training,” or “the rod” reflect biblical concepts. On pages 417-419, he raises a host of thorny ethical questions with regard to the sixth commandment and leaves them unanswered and unsatisfying (this occurs often). One of the most perilous examples of poor wording occurs when the author asserts that when God commanded Israel to kill the adulterers in Numbers 25, he did so “in actual violation of his command not to murder” (421). This gives the impression that God sometimes commands his people to violate his own law, which law is a reflection of himself.

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4. For more instances of this problem in contemporary theology, see my review of *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 73/1 (Spring 2011): 175-179.

5. Surprisingly, Waddington bypasses this observation, even though he criticizes Gamble for failing to note the scholastic roots of this terminology. Waddington, 236.

6. Although some, such as Bavinck, split the principle of knowledge into two parts in order to emphasize the external revelation of God in Scripture as well as the internal illumination of the Holy Spirit.

7. Authors cited in the footnotes of *The Whole Counsel of God* are frequently much clearer in stating their positions than the main body of the text.

This assertion threatens to overthrow the foundation of all justice and order.

These features limit the use of this volume as a major text on Systematic Theology. For a work of this size, the lack of precision and depth of discussion is somewhat surprising. There are many gems along the way and the author's orthodoxy and piety is refreshing, but the text requires significant refinement.

### Theological Method and Organization

The primary question that looms in the background in relation to *The Whole Counsel of God* is the value of its methodology. This section will set forth and evaluate Gamble's method and then close with some general observations concerning the nature and purpose of Systematic Theology.

#### *Interaction with Gamble's Text*

Gamble's revision of the methods of Reformed Systematic theology does not so much entail an attempt to weave together exegesis, church history, and systematic formulation,<sup>8</sup> as it does an effort to set forth a new model for the structure of Systematic Theology. Bavinck's magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics* exemplifies his view of the relationship between these theological disciplines, yet Gamble cites Geerhardus Vos's critique of the methods upon which Bavinck based his Systematic Theology (64ff).<sup>9</sup> He calls the traditional loci method arbitrary and ascribes its origins to Aristotle (46-47). His proposal is that our system of theology must follow the historical order of the Bible rather than from a logical order. There are several difficulties with his proposal.

First, rejecting the traditional loci method because of possible connections to Aristotle (46) comes close to committing the "root fallacy." Even if the so-called loci method resembles Aristotelian categories in some manner, this is not the same thing as selecting an arbitrary system of organization for theology.<sup>10</sup> Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) wrote the first Protestant Systematic Theology. Yet far from imposing an arbitrary scheme upon Scripture, he developed a

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8. Contra Waddington's assertions. Waddington, 234.

9. Gamble took this material predominantly from Vos's unpublished course lectures on Systematic Theology. Curiously, Waddington presents Gamble as pursuing the methodological ideals of "a Bavinck, Vos, or Warfield." Waddington, 234. Yet Gamble explicitly pits Vos and Bavinck against one another. We shall see below that he included Old Princeton in this contrast as well.

10. We must remember as well that adopting Aristotelian categories in the sixteenth and seventeenth century did not automatically entail accepting Aristotelian content. See Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998), esp. 29-44.

loci method based upon the structure of the book of Romans.<sup>11</sup> By connecting the traditional loci method to Aristotle, Gamble has created a bias against the structure of Reformed Systematic Theology. However, can the apostle Paul not serve as a method for our theological methodology? If Paul could select topics from Scripture and present them in a logically progressive manner in order to defend the gospel, then why cannot the church imitate his methods?

Moreover, his assertion that the loci method is “subjective” and directed by the “presuppositions” of the theologian gives the false impression that a biblical theological structure prevents this danger (47). Everyone who reads the Bible comes to the text with a presupposed system of theology that they have gained from prior study. The question is not whether we come to Scripture with a system of doctrine, but whether we come to the Scriptures with the correct system of doctrine.<sup>12</sup> For instance, in his *Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, the reason why Herman Witsius (1636-1708) combined the systematic loci method with a biblical theological method is that the logical order of biblical doctrines naturally overlaps with the historical order of the same doctrines.<sup>13</sup> The systematic and logic order of theology fills in the gaps and the presuppositions that stand behind the historical order of the biblical books. Interestingly, Gamble admits that Biblical Theology has the potential to undermine the *analogia fidei*, the creeds of the church, and Historical Theology (50), though he does not desire to do any of these things.

*Second*, he argues that the traditional loci method is contrary to the Bible’s model for interpreting itself. Gamble argues that the fact that Bible provides the model for its own exegesis and theology requires a radical revision of theological method (53, 95). While it is true that the Bible provides the standard for exegetical method, we should ask whether the Bible legitimizes a loci method as well as a biblical theological method. Gamble argues that “a theological model for systematic theology” (54) should be rooted radically in Scripture in the sense that the structure of Systematic Theology should be grounded in Scripture (56). He adds that being wholeheartedly committed to Scripture does not permit multiple models for theology (67). Instead, there is one model that Scripture prescribes and we must discover and follow this model. He tacitly accuses older Reformed theologians of inadequately intertwining the loci of theology

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11. See Lowell C. Green, “Melancthon’s Relation to Scholasticism,” in Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Bletchney, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 273-288.

12. See Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002).

13. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

(69). In his view this means that tracing the unfolding revelation of God in historical order from Genesis to Revelation should take precedence.<sup>14</sup>

As much as this position appears to honor the sufficiency of Scripture, could not these assertions equally justify Melancthon's loci method drawn from the book of Romans? Imitating Paul's theological method will involve duplicating the method as need requires. This means that a Pauline system of theology will not necessarily be limited to the topics addressed in Romans. Paul moved logically and progressively from human depravity, to Christ, to faith and justification, to sanctification, to indwelling sin, to final redemption, to the Church, and to Christian ethics. A biblical system of theology may unpack more of what Paul has in view, for instance, by adding the doctrine of God first. This is logical and progressive as well. In addition to Paul's model in Romans, the sermons of the New Testament and the New Testament use of the Old Testament, with few exceptions, employ the traditional approach of Systematic Theology as much as Biblical Theology. Most of the time, the New Testament authors drew theological inferences or applications from Old Testament texts. Thus, in Acts 2 Peter contended for the resurrection of Christ by inference from Psalm 16. Paul argued that "you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain" taught the church more about supporting ministers than it did about oxen (1 Cor. 9). Paul's exegesis of Psalm 69 in Ephesians 4:11ff lifts the reader from the context of God's victorious procession to Mount Sinai after leading His people to battle, to the ascension of Christ as King and the distribution of gifts to His church. The meaning of these particular examples is beside the point here.<sup>15</sup> What is important is that the New Testament model of biblical exegesis singles out doctrines and practices from various places of Scripture in order to draw general theological and practical conclusions. While not undervaluing Biblical Theology as a discipline, the New Testament model of theological formulation demonstrates that the traditional methods of Systematic Theology harmonize with the sufficiency of Scripture. If they did not, then the apostles would have relegated their use of the Old Testament to a continual retelling of redemptive

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14. See pg. 60. Gamble assumes the priority of Biblical Theology more than he argues for it. Waddington's review gives the impression that Gamble simply allows the theological disciplines to "converge" as they will. Waddington, 234. However, it is more correct to state that he allows them to converge where they will in conformity to the order and structure of Biblical Theology rather than traditional Systematic Theology. Instead of integrating Biblical and Historical Theology into Systematic Theology, Gamble integrates Systematic and Historical Theology into Biblical Theology. This is a significant methodological shift.

15. For more detail on the manner in which the New Testament authors employed inferences in their theological use of the Old Testament, see my work, *By Good and Necessary Consequence*, in, *Explorations in Reformed Confessional Theology Series* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming).

history. This is precisely what they did not do, with the exceptions of Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 and Paul's sermon in Acts 13.<sup>16</sup>

*Third*, using Biblical Theology for the structure of Systematic Theology, rather than to support its conclusions, demolishes the nature and purpose of Systematic Theology. Gamble notes humbly that, of necessity, his methodological conclusions must be provisional (60). He adds that no single theologian will be able to propose a final theological method (63).<sup>17</sup> He argues for the necessity of three primary skills for theological formulation: 1. Biblical theology. 2. Historical theology. 3. Philosophical analysis of culture. The glaring omissions in this list are the very skills that are necessary for Systematic Theology and which distinguish it as a discipline. Theology does not simply demand skills in redemptive history and in church history. It requires the ability to logically synthesize the contents of the Bible as a whole into a coherent system of doctrine. Ironically, Gamble argues that the traditional loci method has prevented theologians from demonstrating how the doctrines of Scripture interrelate. The examples he provides to support his claim are the alleged detachment of the sacraments from the doctrine of sanctification as well as a failure to connect the doctrine of sanctification to the resurrection of Christ (69). He adds that the loci method inherently obscures the interrelationship between "anthropology, creation, Christology, and eschatology" (71). The irony of this charge lies in the fact that Reformed systems have ordinarily been accused of forcing the Bible to fit into a logically airtight system of doctrine in order to maintain their interrelation. A proper system of doctrine should be rooted in exegesis, developed in light of Biblical Theology, read in light of the historical reflections of the church, and integrated in its conclusions. His objection applies to poorly executed Systematic Theology. In a biblically rooted system, each individual locus naturally builds upon the others as well as informs the others.

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16. The insinuation that the traditional loci method violates the sufficiency of Scripture has not held true historically either. It is difficult to comprehend this accusation when we read Junius, Polanus, Hoornbeeck, Brakel, Mastricht, or Leigh.

17. John Owen (1616-1683) argued that because so much progress had been made already in the truth and in the *methods* of divinity, anyone who could make "singular improvement" to the Reformed system or method must possess great diligence "and an insight into all kinds of learning." *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Johnstone and Hunter, 1852), XII, 49. Owen himself tried to propose some revisions to theological methodology, yet Gamble's book seeks either to reject or to modify radically the entire course of the Reformed tradition. This is not to say that he is not a very capable theologian, but in his first chapter, he alludes to that many believe that the methods of Reformed Theology await substantial revision. Perhaps it is alarming that so many have simply assumed that this need exists. For instance, contrast the introduction to Owen's work cited here with Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "The Vitality of Reformed Systematic Theology," in Anthony T. Selvagio, ed., *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spear* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007), 1-31.

*Fourth*, Gamble relies upon too narrow of a spectrum of Reformed theologians in order to describe and to reject the historical methodology of the Reformed system of doctrine. In particular, he has a predilection for citing Charles Hodge and the Old Princeton theologians as the primary representatives of the older method of Reformed theology. While he cites other authors as well, he often has the two Hodges and Warfield as his primary targets for methodological problems (72).<sup>18</sup> The Old Princeton men were great men (and Warfield was a more accomplished biblical theologian than many seem to give him credit for), yet when we compare Hodge's system of theology with his Reformed orthodox predecessors, we must realize immediately that Richard Muller correctly notes the effects of post-Enlightenment rationalism upon Reformed theology.<sup>19</sup> In particular, Apologetics became a part of Prolegomena and the role of reason was elevated to a foundational level in theology. In Hodge's case, he regarded Scripture as the raw data from which we should draw theology, treating each topic in its turn much like any other science.<sup>20</sup> To select one arbitrary example by way of contrast, Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666) began his *Theologiae Practicae* with the self-attesting nature of Scripture and the idea that theology considered as a bare scientific system without the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit is not worthy of the name theology.<sup>21</sup> Whether the reader believes that the Enlightenment improved or denigrated Reformed theology and Apologetics, he or she cannot deny that the Enlightenment changed theological method. This is particularly evident in the area of Prolegomena, which includes the organization and methodology of a theological system. While Gamble rejects the Princeton method of theology in favor of a new model, this reviewer contends that discussions regarding theological method must begin prior to Princeton. No one in the history of the church has given more attention to theological method than the Reformed theologians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In addition, there is a small, but growing body of literature in historical theology that is demonstrating the manner in which earlier Reformed Orthodox theologians sought to develop their methodology from the exegesis of Scripture.<sup>22</sup> This does not mean that the Reformed Orthodox

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18. Such references fill the book.

19. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), I,

20 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I, 15-16.

21. Johannes Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae* (Utrecht, 1663), 8. Gamble would agree with this view. See pg. 24. On page 17, Hodge acknowledged the need for the work of the Holy Spirit as well and the importance of religious experience. The difference is that many older Reformed orthodox theologians refused treat theology as though it could be defined as an objective scientific system apart from the regeneration of the theologian.

22. For examples of this trend, see Brian J. Lee, *Johannes Cocceius and the Exegetical Roots of Federal Theology: Reformation Developments in the Interpretation of*

tradition is monolithic in its treatment of theological methodology. However, Gamble's new proposal departs too dramatically from the range of accepted methodology to justify drawing from such a narrow range of authors.

#### 4. Some General Observations on the Methods of Systematic Theology

Gamble's biblical-theological proposal for restructuring Systematic Theology calls for a few remarks regarding the proper interaction between Systematic and Biblical Theology, as well as the value of keeping them distinct.

(1) While Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology inform one another, their methods must remain distinct. If the methods of each are confused, then neither discipline will be able to answer the purposes that are peculiar to it. We can illustrate the problem of blending methodology in light of Witsius on the *Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*. Gamble expresses his own dependence upon this work. It is rightly a classic text of Reformed Theology. However, readers will be hard pressed to find an adequately elaborated doctrine of the Trinity here, even though the translator or English publisher of Witsius's big work inserts the erroneous notion that his book is a complete body of divinity (that claim is missing in the Latin title). To be sure, statements about the Trinity are woven into the narrative, but in order to find a full treatment of the doctrine, the reader must consult his work on *The Apostle's Creed*.<sup>23</sup> Gamble suffers from the same problem. From the standpoint of Biblical Theology, the Old Testament foreshadows the doctrine of the Trinity (663-664). The New Testament presents the doctrine as the capstone of the unfolding biblical revelation of God. The Trinity then becomes both the foundation of our theology as well as the conclusion to the doctrine of God. From the standpoint of Systematic Theology, the Triune God is one of the two great *principia*, or first principles, of the entire system of doctrine.<sup>24</sup> The knowledge of God is Trinitarian and the God whom believers know is Triune. This is why in Reformed Systematic Theology, the doctrines of Scripture, God, and the Persons of the Godhead come first in the system. These doctrines come first by virtue of theological priority rather than

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*Hebrews 7-10* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706: Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation & the Directory for Worship* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007).

23. Herman Witsius, *The Apostle's Creed* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). This observation is not designed to denigrate Witsius. His work on the covenants is on this reviewer's list of top ten most important books.

24. See Muller, *PRRD*, vol. 4.

historical priority. We often reflect this theological priority even in our personal evangelism. We begin by telling people who God is, who they are as sinners, who Christ is and what He did, and why they to trust in Him alone for salvation.<sup>25</sup> Any method for Systematic Theology that is overly dependent upon the structure of Biblical Theology will lack precisely the kind of organizational principles necessary to fulfill the purposes of Systematic Theology as a discipline.

(2) Both Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology have their strengths and limitations. The strength of Biblical Theology is that it enables us to look at the entire Bible and to stand in awe of its gradually unfolding unified message. The strength of Systematic Theology is to stand back and look at the big picture and tell people what the Bible says. Moreover, the order of these two approaches to the Scriptures overlap significantly. Biblical theology traces creation, the covenants of God, his revelation of himself in human history, his unfolding plan of redemption, how Christ accomplished this redemption, how the Spirit applies it to believers in the church, and how the entire Bible marches on towards an eschatological reality. Systematic Theology begins by making explicit what Genesis 1:1 presupposes: God and his self-revelation in Scripture. This is followed by creation and the fall, Christology and Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and finally Eschatology. Both disciplines, if done properly, recognize that all of these themes are present from Genesis to Revelation.<sup>26</sup> Both disciplines must address the continuities and discontinuities between the Old and New Testaments. Moreover, the most thorough Systematic Theologies, such as Bavinck, include the historical development of doctrine in Scripture within their broader treatments of particular doctrines. The different goals of these two disciplines mean that while they overlap, they must remain two distinct disciplines. Systematic Theology should often be more biblical than it is, and Biblical Theology should often be more systematic in its conclusions than it is. Yet Gamble has largely collapsed the two disciplines into one. The result is both an inadequate Systematic Theology and an underdeveloped Biblical Theology.

(3) Systematic Theology of necessity stands above Biblical Theology among the theological disciplines. This does not mean that the discipline of Biblical Theology is unimportant or unnecessary. However, Biblical Theology relies most immediately upon exegesis and it can allow incomplete conclusions drawn from earlier books of the Bible to await the clearer conclusions provided by later books.

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25. This order is remarkably close to Paul's in Romans.

26. For an excellent example of this, see J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Genies House, Fearn Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2007).

Systematic Theology cannot afford this luxury. Of necessity, Systematic Theology draws together the materials gathered from exegesis, Biblical Theology, Historical Theology, and Practical Theology into inter-related formulations and conclusions. As Warfield noted, if theology is the queen of the sciences, then Systematic Theology is the queen of the theological disciplines. He added, "But these are not days in which lofty claims are readily allowed; and we need not be surprised to discover that those which Systematic Theology advances are not permitted to pass unchallenged.... Systematic Theology may look on with an amused tolerance and a certain older-sister's pleased recognition of powers just now perhaps a little too conscious of themselves, when the new discipline of Biblical Theology, for example, tosses her fine young head and announces of her more settled sister that her day is over."<sup>27</sup> Both disciplines desire to set forth the teaching of Scripture, but from different perspectives. Systematic Theology, by definition, draws more comprehensively from the data of all other theological studies. It rightly stands at the head of the theological encyclopedia.

(4) It is valuable to distinguish between Biblical and Systematic Theology on a practical level. If a church member asks his or her minister a question about an attribute of God, that minister will instinctively avoid Gamble's method. He will not likely say, "Read Gamble volume one, pages 145-667 and then we will talk." He will probably not begin in Genesis and then work his way carefully through all of the canonical books in historical order and then tell this parishioner what he has found in retrospect. The pastor's answer will more likely draw from the Westminster Shorter Catechism definition of God, or some similar tool. He will unpack what the Scripture say about God in a systematic and concise fashion. If he needs a more detailed answer on some particular point and he wants to look up more information, then he will likely reach for Turretin, Berkhof, or Bavinck because these works address directly the questions in view. When church members ask about the attribute of God, predestination, adoption, or free will, they are asking questions that require the precision and narrow focus that Systematic Theology alone can provide. Of course, the pastor will answer these questions by selecting the clearest passages of Scripture that answer them, regardless of where these texts fall into redemptive history. He will use redemptive history briefly in order to establish the context so that he roots his doctrinal explanation firmly in Scripture. On the other hand, if a church member comes with a question related to a particular passage of Scripture, then this is where Biblical Theology becomes more important. However, even here

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27. B. B. Warfield, "The Right of Systematic Theology," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2001), II, 220.

the minister will often find more help on a question such as what it means that God “repented” in Gen. 6:6 from Bavinck than he will from a standard work on Biblical Theology or from Gamble.

## 5. Conclusion

Volume one of *The Whole Counsel of God* is like Gamble’s description of Old Testament theology in general. Just as the Old Testament is not complete without the New, so volume one of this set is not really complete without volumes two and three. By contrast, when one reads Bavinck on the being and attributes of God, he or she leaves his text with a sense of what the entire Bible says about God in both Testaments. Systematic Theology inherently addresses the “big picture” of Scripture. This volume is useful and interesting as an Old Testament theology or Old Testament introduction, but its content and method are insufficient for a Systematic Theology. It marks an admirable attempt to combine disciplines that are too often segregated to separate discussions. However, this writer is convinced that a writer like Bavinck is a better model of how to incorporate biblical theological discussions into theology in a way that is subordinate to the overarching task of Reformed Systematic Theology.