



REVISED EDITION

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PUBLISHING GROUP

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

A Theology for the Church, Revised Edition  
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978-14336-8213-1

Published by B&H Publishing Group  
Nashville, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 230  
Subject Heading: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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Printed in the United States of America

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## 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)<sup>1</sup> 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,

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<sup>1</sup> 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

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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	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
BEB	<i>Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>
BEC	Baker Exegetical Commentary
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
BDT	<i>Baker's Dictionary of Theology</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BHH	<i>Baptist History and Heritage</i>
BSC	Bible Student's Commentary
CHB	<i>Cambridge History of the Bible</i> . Cambridge, 1970
CT	<i>Christianity Today</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
DJG	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by J. B. Green and S. McKnight. Downers Grove, 1992
DPL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin. Downers Grove, 1993
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by H. Balz and G. Schneider. ET. Grand Rapids, 1990–1992
EDT	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</i> . Edited by W. A. Elwell. Grand Rapids, 1984
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> . Edited by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, 1979
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGES	<i>Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society</i>
JNTS	<i>Journal of New Testament Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
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

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NCE	<i>New Catholic Encyclopedia</i> , 2nd ed. Edited by B. L. Marthaler. Washington, 2003
NIBD	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary</i> . 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	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . Edited by C. Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1975–1985
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NPNF <sup>1</sup>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , First Series
NPNF <sup>2</sup>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Second Series
NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RR	<i>Research Review</i>
SBJT	<i>The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SE	<i>Studia evangelica</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976
TJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . 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	<i>Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms</i>
WML	Works of Martin Luther. 6 vols. Philadelphia, 1915–1932
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

SECTION 1

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THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

## CHAPTER 1

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# 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*.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.”<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> *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.

<sup>6</sup> *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)<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup>

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

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

<sup>8</sup> 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.”

<sup>9</sup> 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.”

<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup> 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

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<sup>11</sup> See St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XI, 10, *NPNF*<sup>1</sup>.