

“The essence of our faith begins in the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. Systematic theologies usually arrive at this confession somewhere in the middle. Thomas (or Tom if you prefer) Noble begins exactly where faith begins. He writes with an appreciation for theological tradition, a keen eye on global shifts, and a wisdom to serve the people of God. I have looked forward to the release of this work and have already begun underlining and digesting Volume 1, Part 1: *The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. I invite you to join me. In a time when careful thinking has surrendered to sound bite, this is a needed gift to the world.”

Dan Boone, President
Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee

“This is the world-class Christian systematic theology that the Wesleyan community of faith has been eagerly awaiting. Its conception, as well as the execution of its structure, which places Christ at the beginning of this three-volume work, results in a careful and scholarly informed exposition that celebrates the very heart of the Christian faith: God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a revelation makes all the difference such that humanity, not simply Christians, can never think about God, and a host of other things, in the same way again. I give this work my very highest recommendation. Kudos to Professor Noble!”

Kenneth J. Collins, Professor of Historical Theology and Wesley Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky

“Thomas A. Noble’s Volume 1: *The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ* is the first installment of his three-volume *Christian Theology*, commissioned by the Church of the Nazarene, an international Christian community of over a half a million members. The two additional volumes, entitled *The Love of God* and *The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit*, will create the most significant and encyclopedic Wesleyan/Methodist three-volume systematic theology in at least a generation. And it will be one of the few fully Trinitarian systematic theologies composed by a theologian in Wesleyan/Methodist tradition. Noble is the most outstanding theologian the Church of the Nazarene has ever produced. There is no one today better prepared to craft this multi-volume *Christian Theology*. Volume 1 is vintage Noble—erudite, passionate, deeply aware of the Trinitarian character of the theology of the Wesley brothers, conversant in the ecumenical history of Trinitarian theology, and composed in dialogue with the current diverse and global expression of Christian faith and thought. Volume 1 is a tour de force expression of Trinitarian Wesleyan/Methodist theology.”

Elmer M. Colyer, Professor of Systematic Theology
Stanley Professor of Wesley Studies
Director of the United Methodist Studies Program
The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa

“I can’t think of a better, more widely and deeply informed, and pedagogically more suitable text for theology students than Tom Noble’s massive writing on Christology—both from a critical-historical and historical-theological perspective. Rooted in the heart of Christian tradition, guided by the Wesleyan tradition, and highlighting the Nazarene distinctives, this mature, seasoned theologian’s primer introduces not only the students but also scholars, young and old, to the details of Christology. What a treasure, what a resource. I am proud to recommend this excellent work! I am looking forward to subsequent volumes in the project.”

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Professor of Systematic Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California
Docent of Ecumenics, University of Helsinki*

“The task of the theologian is to foster the engagement of Christians with both the historic faith of the Church and the intellectual currents of their day. I can think of no one better gifted and prepared to undertake this task within the Wesleyan-Holiness community than Tom Noble. He brings a solid grounding in biblical, patristic, and Protestant sources into thoughtful conversation with contemporary trends and debates. These volumes distill his mature theological judgment as a rich resource for the community to which he has devoted his life.”

*Randy L. Maddox, William Kellon Quick Professor Emeritus of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies
Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina*

“In service to the Triune God and God’s Church, Tom Noble has marshalled and deployed extensive biblical, historical and theological resources to produce a work that not only assumes its place among major systematic theologies in the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, but also enriches the entire body of conciliar theology. By relying heavily upon historical as well as more recent sources, Noble has produced a work that creatively expounds and confirms the great tradition for today’s Church and Christian witness.”

*Al Truesdale, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Christian Ethics
Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri*



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

VOLUME I: The Grace of Our
Lord Jesus Christ

PART 1
Faith and History

T. A. Noble



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■ Preface



From one point of view, Christian Theology is the belief system of one particular faith community within human society. As citizens, Christians may legitimately respect that perspective, particularly in democratic societies, and may live as far as they can within the limits which society sets down. But that is not the Christian view. For Christians, Christian Theology is not merely an abstract or theoretical belief system of one religious group but is the articulation of our personal, interactive knowledge of the Triune God, the Creator of the ends of the earth and the universal Lord of all, within the fellowship of the Church which God has called into being. For us, therefore, it is not ‘the world’ of human society which sets the ultimate horizon within which Christian faith must be understood and regulated. Rather, it is the revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ, known only through the work of the Holy Spirit, which determines the final horizon within which we view ‘the world’. Christian Theology is the Church’s fallible attempt to articulate that knowledge given in the revelation of God, including the understanding of ourselves and of human society which arises within that perspective. For Christians, Christ, not Caesar, is Lord.

This particular work, entitled *Christian Theology*, is the attempt of one Christian theologian to articulate that knowledge. If it were merely a personal view, it could be regarded as idio-

syncretic. Therefore it is an attempt to articulate Christian Theology within a specific Christian tradition, one of many within the ‘one holy, catholic and apostolic Church’. As such, it shares the same commitment to Holy Scripture interpreted through the Nicene Creed which has characterized the historic mainstream of the Church of Christ. Within that, it shares the commitment to the Evangelical perspective of the Reformation expressed in the confessions of the major historic Protestant traditions. And within that, it is written as an expression of that tradition which arose from the life, work and writing of the brothers, John and Charles Wesley. Particularly, it stands in the tradition of those who value the teaching on Christian holiness which was part of the heritage the Wesley brothers received from the writings of the early Christian Fathers, reinterpreted through the Evangelical doctrines of the Reformation.

Specifically, this work was commissioned by the Church of the Nazarene, a denomination in the Wesleyan tradition which resulted from the union of independent churches and missions and has grown over the last century from approximately 10,000 members to a global membership of two and a half million in most of the countries of the world. The title, *Christian Theology*, is deliberately identical to that chosen by the first major Nazarene theologian, H. Orton Wiley, for his three-volume work. The title encapsulates the aim that this should not merely be a Nazarene Theology, nor even merely a Wesleyan Theology, but an articulation of *Christian Theology*. Given the ecumenical and Evangelical perspective of the Wesleys, it could not be otherwise.

Of course, Wesleyan emphases and perspectives will be articulated, particularly when we come to the Wesleys’ understanding of the doctrine of Christian sanctification. But these must be seen as arising out of the central doctrines of the Christian faith shared by all who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. The structure of the entire work therefore follows Paul’s great benediction in II Corinthians 13:14: ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.’ Beginning with the revelation of God in Christ and the salvation he has graciously secured for us, we will try to articulate our knowledge as Christians of the Triune God of Holy Love, and finally come to express our understanding of ourselves and the world in the light the Holy Spirit gives us within the fellowship of the Church.

But while this work of Christian Theology, like all others, works within one specific Christian tradition, it is also, like most others, the work of one specific theologian. It therefore inevitably expresses my specific interpretation of the tradition. It is not a conciliar document, hammered out in endless committees to express a common mind. Such creeds, confessions, and articles of faith are essential for the life of the Church, but to attempt to write a whole work of Christian Theology in that way would take eternity! Like two previous works written by Nazarene theologians, H. Ray Dunning’s *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (1988) and J. Kenneth Grider’s

A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology (1994), this is not therefore an official statement of the denomination. It is my interpretation of the tradition and there are features therefore which may present a new perspective to some. Yet it is an attempt to think creatively but loyally within the tradition. In the world of constant change and development, a Theology which stands still, only repeating old formulae without new understanding, quickly becomes obsolete. On the other hand, there is a critical difference between working creatively within the tradition and working subversively to undermine it by trying to make it conform to perspectives which are fundamentally different. That would be dishonest. But authentically creative work in Theology comes usually from conversation across the various traditions within the one Church of Jesus Christ, mining the deep riches of Christian thought through the centuries. That was the theological method, drawing on the riches of the Church catholic, which was employed by the Wesleys. In today's multicultural world, we must try to articulate that in global perspective.

I was asked to write primarily for students engaged in studies leading to a second or master's degree and that has determined the level of writing. It implies a level of information and of explanation which is more detailed than that suitable for beginners, but which cannot on the other hand assume the level of knowledge and sophistication characteristic of professional academic theologians. Having read through many chapters with an adult Sunday school class, however, I am confident that the level of writing is also appropriate for thinking, reading, informed lay people who may never be free to undertake any formal studies in Theology.

I have attempted to make this an 'integrative' Theology, integrating Biblical, Historical and Philosophical Theology within the framework of Christian belief given by Systematic or Dogmatic Theology. This also has to lead to considering the implications for Practical Theology. To attempt to integrate this wide range of theological disciplines runs the risk of textbook superficiality by making wide generalizations about 'movements' or 'schools' of thought. To avoid that, I have drawn on selected major works by Christian theologians and scholars. Substantial digests of major works, ancient and modern, are incorporated into the text making this something of a *compendium*. These include, for example, works of ancient theologians such as Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen and Cyril of Alexandria; medieval theologians such as Anselm and Aquinas; modern theologians such as Schleiermacher, Forsyth, Brunner, Barth, Frei, Torrance and Pannenberg; and biblical scholars such as Brueggemann, Goldingay, Dunn, Wright, Bauckham, Marshall and Witherington. Other ancients such as Augustine or modern thinkers such as Moltmann will receive fuller treatment in subsequent volumes where their contribution is more significant. The inclusion of substantial digests of such works, plus engagement with many others, attempts to avoid the shallowness and superficiality which might otherwise accompany the wide cross-disciplinary range of discussion. But these works are not merely summarized in 'side-bars':

they are taken into account in critical discussion and woven into the main line of the theological argument.

Volume I has grown to greater length than I planned, but the length has been determined by what I decided was the appropriate depth of treatment. It has therefore been divided into three ‘Parts’, Part 1 is introductory and tackles the preliminary question of the relationship of Christian faith to history. Genuine Christian Theology begins in Part 2, which is on Christology, the doctrine of the Person of Christ. From that point onwards each chapter begins with praise, normally some verses from the ‘metrical Theology’ of Charles Wesley. Part 3 is on soteriology, particularly ‘objective’ soteriology, that is, the doctrine of the Atonement. Part 1 is therefore suitable as basic reading for an introductory class in Theology (supplemented perhaps by a book on the creed). Part 2 is suitable for a semester-length course on Christology, and Part 3 for a subsequent semester-length class on the Atonement. It is also possible for the general reader to dip into chapters which are of particular interest. But the volume has one continuous line of argument and therefore only a sequential reading from Chapter 1 through to Chapter 30 will give the reader the full benefit of that.

A few comments on language are necessary. First, I write in Standard English as regulated by the *Oxford English Dictionary* and such authorities as *Fowler’s Modern English Usage*. I believe that this is the form of English used most commonly around the world and that therefore appears appropriate for a global denomination, not to mention the global Church. Secondly, as is appropriate today, every effort has been made to employ gender neutral language. But I do not believe that that requires unnecessarily breaking the common grammatical rules which differentiate (for example) between singular and plural. Also, on the matter of language, I have deliberately included phrases and book titles in other languages (mostly Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German and French) as a reminder to the reader that Christianity is not an anglophone faith.

I doubt whether it is possible to be entirely consistent with capital letters! I have chosen to use them to indicate academic disciplines such as History and Theology, but to refer to ‘history’ when referring to the reality rather than the academic discipline. Some philosophical positions such as ‘Deism’ are given capitals and some historical movements such as ‘Liberalism’ or ‘Evangelicalism’. But the corresponding adjectives do not have capital letters if the reference is not to the historic traditions, but to ‘liberal’ thinking in politics, or where ‘evangelical’ refers to association with the Gospel. I give ‘Gospel’ a capital letter to draw attention to the Gospel’s pivotal significance as the root of Christian Theology. Some theological terms such as ‘Incarnation’ and ‘Atonement’ are conventionally given capital letters, but (perhaps inconsistently) not ‘resurrection’ or ‘ascension’. I trust that the punctilious reader will not be too distressed by any appearance of inconsistency.

I am indebted to many people who have enabled me to complete the volume. First, I must express my thanks to the Centennial Initiative Committee of the Church of the Nazarene, chaired at first by Dr Roger Hahn and then by Dr Alex Varughese, for the invitation to write this work. Dr Varughese and Dr Bonnie Perry of The Foundry have shown extraordinary patience as the years have passed by! Other necessary commitments to teaching, research supervision, and publishing have extended the writing time, and were it not for their patience, I would have had to abandon the task. I must also express my gratitude to Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, under successive presidents (Dr Ron Benefiel, Dr David Busic, Dr Carla Sunberg, and Dr Jeren Rowell) for the flexibility they have shown in allowing me to teach part-time, and eventually to be designated as a research professor. I am also indebted to Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, under successive principals (Dr David McCulloch and Dr Deirdre Brower Latz) for a study or hide-away where I can write uninterrupted.


I am also greatly indebted to an international panel of readers who have commented on sections or chapters from their own specialist knowledge or their own cultural perspective. They include the following professors, doctors and pastors: Fredi Arreola, Chris Branstetter, Rustin Brian, Kent Brower, Sandra Brower, Susan Carole, Gareth Cockerill, Joseph Coleson, Gregory Crofford, Dick Eugenio, Dean Flemming, Geordan Hammond, Jorge Julca, Svetlana Khobnya, Kim Sung Won, Diane Leclerc, Jacob Lett, David McEwan, Josh McNall, Gift Mtukwa, James Paton, Brent Peterson, David Rainey, Rodney Reed, Stanley J. Rodes, David Rollings, Jeren Rowell, Christian Sarmiento, William Selvidge, Howard Snyder, Dwight Swanson, Stéphane Tibi, Eric Vail, Jerome Van Kuiken, Robert Walker, Andrew Walls and David Wesley. I adopted ninety percent of their suggestions and amendments, which means that the reader cannot hold them responsible for any of the views or remaining errors in the volume! Others were invited but were unable to take up the chore. Josh McNall and Jerome Van Kuiken are due special thanks for reading virtually the entire volume. I recall too with gratitude the participation of the late Frank Carver of Point Loma Nazarene University, my fellow Edinburgh graduate, in the weeks before his final illness made it impossible. (He would have been particularly enthusiastic about my section on P.T. Forsyth.) I must also thank the faithful remnant of my adult Sunday school class at Kansas City First Church of the Nazarene who have engaged with my writing in stimulating conversation. The following were in regular attendance over some years: Bob and Carole Bieber, Forrest Cunningham, Nancy and Michael Hill, Arvin Oke, Tom Sandreczki, Virginia and the late Jim Vianni. Their enthusiasm has been a great encouragement.

Most of all I have to express my greatest thanks to my wife, Elaine, who has not only proofread these pages but also taken care of many domestic, family and

business matters in order to allow me to concentrate on matters theological. Without her support and encouragement these pages would never have been written.

Thomas A. Noble
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28th February 2020

■ General Introduction



For Christians, the key to all human knowledge and wisdom is to know the Eternal God, the God of Abraham and the Holy One of Israel, the universal sovereign Lord who created the universe out of nothing and who became incarnate as a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. To recognize Jesus as the expected Messiah of Israel and Mediator of the new covenant and to confess him as Lord is to know him as the unique Word of God, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, and it is to know God as ‘Our Father’. It is to know that Christ Jesus, sent by the Father, came as the embodiment of the Father’s holy love, proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God, taught and healed, and lived to serve others. It is to know that, also in obedience to the Father, his life as the Servant of God culminated in giving himself willingly to be crucified in order to defeat evil, dying for our sins as our representative, and so reconciling us to God. It is to know that he crucified the old humanity in his death and rose again from the dead as our justification, sanctification and redemption, the first fruits of the new redeemed humanity. To know him is to put our faith in him as the only Way to God, to know that he is in himself Eternal Life, and to trust him as the Truth, the only definitive revelation of God. It is to believe that he will come again to establish his eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace. It is also to know that, as it was by the Holy Spirit that he became incarnate, lived, served, died, and rose again, so he

can be recognized as Lord only by the Gift of the Holy Spirit. It is to know that the Holy Spirit also is God, the Eternal Spirit, the Creator Spirit, the Spirit of Truth and so now also the Spirit of Christ, the Other Paraclete. It is to know that the Spirit is the One who now unites us to Christ in that sanctifying union signified by our baptism into his Body, the Church, and by our communion around the Lord's table. It is to know that the Holy Spirit is the One by whom we too in Christ have been born from above and by whom we each now receive the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. It is to know that the Spirit is the One who energizes us as Christ sends us out in God's mission to the world. It is to know that the Spirit is the One who fills the children of God with God's perfect love, and who, at the end, will raise us up in our resurrection bodies and bring all things to perfection in the new creation where all of life will be worship of the Triune God. Christian Theology is the articulation by the Church, through the prayerful interpretation of Holy Scripture in the light of the Gospel, of this knowledge of the One Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the God who is Holy Love.

For Christians, it is this knowledge of the living God within the relationship which God alone establishes with us which is also the key to the knowledge of ourselves and the world. This does not mean that all human knowledge is to be deduced from Christian Theology or from Holy Scripture, for the Triune Creator God has set us in his creation to explore and investigate it, and to develop and care for it. But it does mean that all human knowledge is to be understood in the light of this unique story of salvation, the Gospel, and it does mean that the Incarnate Son or Word of God is the One 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:3).

This knowledge of the Triune God is not merely an intellectual discourse or an abstract knowledge of facts, principles, doctrines, or theories, but an experiential knowledge akin to that between human persons. It is not therefore rationalistic, but it is fully rational like all experiential, interpersonal knowledge. This knowledge of God was expressed first in human language in the inspired, authoritative witness of the prophets and apostles now found in Holy Scripture, simultaneously human words and the authoritative Word of God. The exposition of their writings, interpreted according to the apostolic Gospel of Christ, gives rise to positive 'doctrine' or teaching. While this knowledge of God is to be understood as personal knowledge, it is not merely individualistic since each person who comes to know God does so as he or she is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ. This is therefore fully Trinitarian. It is as we are 'in Christ' by the Spirit that we come to know God as 'Our Father'.

But while this knowledge is relational and experiential, the corporate experience into which we enter personally by the Spirit is not the source or origin of Christian Theology. Still less is the origin common 'religious' experience. Human

‘religion’ in its numerous forms is certainly a phenomenon which may be studied by the social sciences, but it is not the starting point for Christian faith or Christian Theology. Not even Christian experiential knowledge of God within the piety and devotion of fellowship of the Church is the origin and source of Christian Theology. Rather, we must trace the starting point further back to God’s self-revelation in the Word by the Spirit. Christian Theology does not begin with human experience or with so-called ‘religious’ practice but with God’s revelation in the Word by the Spirit. In response, the Church articulates her knowledge of God in faithful response to God’s gracious initiative of self-revelation. To say, ‘The Word became flesh,’ is to say that the Word has priority. The Word is indeed contextualized in ‘flesh’, that is, in human nature and human culture and human experience. But the initiative is with the Word, not with the flesh. Christian Theology, articulated in response and in obedience to the Word, is a fully human enterprise, contextualized in varying human cultures, hence its fallibility. But its role in the providence of God is not merely to reflect on human life and human practices and human experiences, but to articulate that knowledge of God graciously given within the Church in the Word of God by the Spirit of God. The preaching of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit thus has priority in all Christian practice and mission.

The verbal articulation of this knowledge of the Triune God takes place primarily as the Church gathers to worship on the Lord’s Day, the Day of Resurrection. We listen to the Word of God proclaimed through the exposition of the Scriptures and, led by our ascended Lord, present among us in the power of his Spirit, we too respond in thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), praise and prayer. Thus, with, through and in him, we participate in the worship of heaven. The Word of God in the Gospel is also sounded out from the worshipping Church in mission to the world, in preaching the good news (*euangelizomai*), calling all who have not yet believed to come in repentance, faith and commitment. But since Word and Act are one, the verbal proclamation in the Church and to the world, along with the teaching of disciples, is inseparable from holy action in the power of the Spirit—the baptizing of all who confess Christ, the corporate participation in the Communion of the Lord’s Supper, mutual care in the Christian community, and also the feeding of the hungry, the healing of the sick in mind and body, the pursuit of justice for the oppressed, and the healing of fallen human society where many lives are ‘nasty, brutish and short’ and where all who are not ‘in Christ’ lack true transcendent hope and fulfilling purpose.

It is within this context of the common life and practices of the Christian Church that the particular study of Christian Theology as the articulation of our knowledge of the Triune God has been pursued down through two millennia. The bishops and teachers of the Church have been the main contributors, and for centuries the pursuit of Christian Theology has been a discipline requiring years of scholarly preparation and academic discipline. Inseparable from that discipline

is the role of academic Theology in the Church's self-criticism of her preaching and teaching within and to cultural contexts which always threaten to distort the truth. As a discipline, Christian Theology has always included doctrine, biblical study, and defence of the faith, all inseparable from the life of prayer, worship, witness and fellowship. True theologians live in the fellowship of the Spirit in such a way that they develop truly Christian character in the common life of holiness. In recent centuries, theologians have been tempted to give priority to their place in the academy rather than in the Church, and Theology has been divided into separate specialisms: Systematics, Church History, Biblical Studies (Old and New Testament) and Pastoral Theology. These have been divided further into yet more specialized fields. Also, within the increasingly secularized academy, Christian Theology has sometimes tried to defend its place and legitimacy by being submerged in a very different discipline known as 'Religious Studies', which is not Theology but social science. Despite these developments, Christian Theology does not find its primary place within the secular academy, but is a pursuit of the Christian Church, and we shall attempt here to recover Christian Theology as an integrated whole. Further, Christian Theology is not the preserve of Christian academic specialists and intellectuals. The theological expression of our knowledge of God in word and action is the business of the whole Christian Church, the people (*laos*) of God.

The aim of this three-volume work, *Christian Theology*, is to articulate the Theology which is common to the whole Church as it is seen at the beginning of the twenty-first century of the Christian era. But all Theology is written from within a specific tradition, and this aims to be *an Integrative Theology in the Wesleyan tradition*, that tradition of the Church which owes its character and perspective to the brothers, John and Charles Wesley. The Wesleyan tradition has certain particular notes to sound, but it is not sectarian: Wesleyan theology aims to be simply *Christian Theology*, the Theology of the Christian Church as a whole, and therefore these three volumes should also be of use to all Christian students and ministers in today's global Christian family, and, indeed, to all Christians. Since the Wesleyan tradition shares the central doctrines of the Christian faith with all orthodox Christians, the first two volumes of this work will largely examine these affirmations held in common by all who share the Trinitarian faith of the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church'. But out of these will come the particular evangelical doctrines of the Protestant Reformation affirmed by the Wesleys and also the Wesleyan affirmations about the Christian life, seen with 'the optimism of grace'. Even these however are not some sectarian peculiarities, but what Wesleyans believe to be the common heritage of the whole Christian Church.

The planned three volumes of *Christian Theology* are structured according to II Corinthians 13:14. Volume I is entitled, 'The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. Volume II will be entitled, 'The Love of God' and Volume III, 'The Fellowship of

the Holy Spirit'. Volume I is divided into three parts (published in separate bindings). Part 1 is divided in turn into three sections. Section A is a general introduction to the study of Christian Theology in its historical and geographical context. Sections B and C look at the preliminary question of faith and history. Section B, Jesus of Nazareth, has two chapters on the so-called 'quest for the historical Jesus', but instead of taking the historical-critical method as a neutral method, we will examine its philosophical roots. Section C, Jesus the Christ, continues this study, but reaches historical conclusions about Jesus, seen in the context of the faith of Israel. This preliminary study of what the secular discipline of History may conclude is then confronted with the claim for the resurrection of Jesus made by the apostolic witnesses. The resulting challenge presented to the secular mind is seen as the doorway to faith.

By taking the step of faith, we are enabled to begin to engage in Christian Theology proper as *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). Part 2 of Volume I begins Christian Theology with the study of 'Christology: The Doctrine of the Person of Christ', the Church's confession of Christ as Lord in response to the apostolic Gospel. Part 3 of Volume I, entitled 'Soteriology: The Doctrine of the Work of Christ', continues our study of 'The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ' by looking at soteriology, the study of Christian salvation. Here we are concerned particularly with the objective aspect of salvation, the unique work of Atonement or Reconciliation achieved and completed by our Lord Jesus Christ. A study of 'subjective' salvation, how the believer enters into the faith of the Church, will be considered in Volume III.

PART 1

Faith and History

A ■ The Study of Theology

■ INTRODUCTION


The task of the four chapters in Part 1 (A) of this volume is to introduce Christian Theology, which is an academic discipline pursued to a greater or lesser level of study by all who share in the faith and active life of the Christian Church. The General Introduction to the whole work of three volumes attempted a preliminary, brief, but comprehensive statement of what Christian Theology is, and the four chapters in Part 1 (A) will try to set the scene with a review of the history of the discipline and a broad survey of the wide variety of schools of Christian Theology around the contemporary world. In other words, Part 1 (A) introduces the study of Christian Theology in its historical and cultural *context*. All Theology is *contextual*, and therefore we have to understand the historical and even the geographical context in which we do Theology today.

Chapter 1, 'Theology: A Brief History', is a historical introduction to help us to understand what the discipline of Theology is. Chapter 2, 'The Wesleyan Perspective', also historical, is of particular interest to those in the Wesleyan tradition. Chapter 3, 'The Contemporary Scene', is a very brief introduction not only to Theology in the West (Europe and North America) but also to the increasingly important Christian thinking in the rest of the world. Chapter 4, 'The Structure of These Three Volumes', will attempt to explain the rationale for the rather different way in which this three-volume work as a whole is organized. Once we have completed this introductory survey in Part 1 (A) of this volume, we will undertake a 'historical pro-

legomenon' in Part 1 (B) and (C). This is not yet Theology, but a study of what the secular discipline of History can establish about Jesus in the context of the life and faith of the people of Israel. It therefore addresses preliminary questions about the relationship of the Christian faith to history. But once we have been challenged by the claim that this man rose from the dead, we shall be ready to enter into the study of genuine Christian Theology, *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding), in Parts 2 and 3 of this volume.

The introduction to the discipline of Theology in the four chapters of Part 1 (A), is therefore deliberately historical and contextual rather than philosophical. To begin with 'first principles' would be rather Platonist: to begin by clarifying the method of the discipline would be Aristotelian. Both of these approaches would conform to the very Hellenistic heritage of Europe and the Americas in that they would assume that we must begin with the abstract and the universal. The same might be said of Eastern philosophies. In contrast to that, and in line with God's revelation in Christ, it is more appropriate in today's global Church, and surely more biblical and therefore more Christian, to begin with the concrete and the particular. That means beginning with the narrative of how the discipline of Christian Theology arose, how it has in fact evolved, and what it looks like today in contemporary and global context. Indeed, knowledge of the concrete always precedes knowledge of the abstract in all human knowing insofar as it is truly scientific, since, by definition, the abstract has to be 'abstracted' from the concrete. We shall come therefore to more abstract questions about the nature and methodology of the discipline of Christian Theology as we go along, for we can only do that intelligently as we engage in doing some real Theology. Meta-theology (the more abstract level of discussion of method and epistemology) must follow, not precede, actual genuine Theology. We can only think intelligently about how we do it once we have done it.

1 ■ THEOLOGY: A BRIEF HISTORY



The discipline of Christian Theology is older than any of the universities and academic institutions of the contemporary world. Indeed, although Theology now finds itself as one of many disciplines in the modern academy, in fact the modern institution of the university emerged out of Christian Theology rather than *vice versa*. But today it seems more common to think of Theology as a collection of specialist disciplines collected together in a Faculty or ‘School of Divinity’ or of ‘Religion’.

a. Theology and the Theological Disciplines

For most of the second Christian millennium, the academic work of Christian Theology has been pursued in Church colleges and universities, and that has sometimes had the harmful effect of confining Theology within the academic world till it appears abstruse and obscure and remote from ‘real life’. In the era of modernity, the increasing specialization of the academy tended to divide Christian Theology into four major disciplines—Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Church History, and Practical Theology—with increasingly numerous sub-disciplines. As these became separate disciplines, the unity and integrity of Christian Theology was increasingly under threat. Biblical Studies gave priority to literary or historical-critical methodologies, Systematic Theology could too easily conform to Philosophy, and Practical Theology to the

social sciences. It was too easy for these good servants to become dominating masters since Theology thought it needed them for intellectual respectability. Further, the secularization of the universities resulted in the dethroning of Theology, once regarded as the ‘queen of the sciences’, so that the relationship of Theology to the arts and sciences, to law and to medicine, became problematic and the very unity of the ‘university’ undermined. In today’s secular universities the ancient discipline of Christian Theology is often banned or at least side-lined and subsumed under the supposedly neutral discipline of ‘Religious Studies’.

This three-volume work will be part of the attempt to recover the unity and integrity of the discipline of Christian Theology as a whole. By no means does this imply that the author is an expert in all the many specializations of the contemporary theological disciplines. Nor does it imply that there is no place for specialist academic study. Quite the contrary, while not claiming expertise in all the specialist fields of study—the various specialist studies in Old and New Testament, or those in Ancient Near Eastern History, or in Patristics, or History of Missions, or in Pastoral Counseling, or Epistemology, or Liturgics, or whatever—this work of Christian Theology will attempt to draw on them all. It will be heavily dependent on the current state of research and on recent major publications (particularly on well-informed textbooks and overviews) in all the relevant fields. Nor is there any implication that Christian Theology should be ‘the queen of the sciences’ in the sense that it should dictate their method or content. Yet we will attempt to think to some degree about how Christian Theology should relate to the arts and sciences, including for example, History, Psychology or Cosmology. Nor does this imply that there is no place in the academy for the very different discipline of Religious Studies, taking its starting point from the observable phenomena of human religious beliefs and practices.

It should be emphasized that this ambitious project is not new: it is simply an attempt to follow those who try to recover the centuries-old integrity and unity of Christian Theology. Karl Rahner argues similarly for a ‘foundational course’ for the young Theology student, given the ‘splintered and fragmented’ nature of the theological disciplines, to present their unity and integrity at a ‘first level of reflection’.¹ As different specializations have broken away to establish their own territory in the theological curriculum of a theological college, seminary or divinity faculty, the ancient discipline of Christian Theology from which they each emerged has also come to be regarded itself as a ‘specialization’, known variously as ‘Systematic Theology’ or ‘Dogmatics’ or ‘Christian Doctrine’.

None of these is an entirely satisfactory label. ‘Systematic Theology’ may be taken to imply that Christian Theology is some kind of *logical* system, an abstract unified system of ideas to be deduced from some basic principles. While Theology

1. See Rahner (1978), 5 ff.

does have its own logic or coherence and while both deductive and inductive logic have a part to play, it is not merely the abstract deduction of doctrines from ideas or first principles. Nor is it simply (as thought by some in the nineteenth century) the inductive formulation of general laws from biblical facts. Secondly, for some it came to imply Theology understood as virtually a sub-discipline of Philosophy (particularly Metaphysics), or so married to a particular school of Philosophy that it became (as Barth joked) *mixophilosophicotheologia*.² And yet at the same time, Christian Theology does have metaphysical implications and these can only be intelligently discussed in dialogue with the discipline of Philosophy.

The term 'Dogmatics' is traditional in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions of Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland and Scandinavia.³ It is more satisfactory than 'Systematics' since it suggests that the focus of Christian Theology lies in the ancient *dogma* of the Church, that is, in the 'decrees' of the early Church Councils, particularly the Nicene Creed. That explains perhaps why it is also sometime used in the Greek Orthodox tradition, as for example by John D. Zizioulas.⁴ The early councils established that the heart of the Christian faith was the *confession* of the Triune God declared in the creed (*credo*: 'I believe'), and this is a better understanding of Christian Theology than any idea that it is a system of ideas developed from abstract first principles. Of course the orthodox Fathers used philosophical terminology, 'plundering the Egyptians' (as they said), but for them the philosophical tradition of Greece was a good servant but a bad master. And in that, John Wesley was their true heir. Strictly speaking therefore, the correct technical term for this three-volume work is 'Dogmatics', for the confession of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the most comprehensive form of the core conviction of the Christian faith. But the name 'Dogmatics' has (unfortunately) not been used in the Anglican or Wesleyan traditions and suffers perhaps (at least in the English-speaking world) from the meaning acquired from the associated adjective 'dogmatic'. Also, the aim here is to integrate into the work more material from other theological disciplines (particularly Biblical and Historical Theology) than is sometimes the case in works of pure Dogmatics.

The title 'Christian Doctrine' sometimes used in the Anglican tradition has much to commend it since 'doctrine' means 'teaching' (a 'doctor' being a recognized teacher). But it has the disadvantage that it puts the focus on abstract 'doctrine' or 'teaching', that is, on facts and ideas and principles or theories, on the abstract rather than the concrete, on the conceptual rather than the real, on teaching or beliefs *about* God rather than on the living God we actually know in Jesus Christ. Theology is necessarily cognitive, but it is not simply abstract knowledge

2. Barth (1965), see the translation of Barth's Foreword to the German edition.

3. In addition to Barth and the Dutch theologian, Hermann Bavinck, see also the Lutherans, Braaten and Jenson (1984/2011).

4. Zizioulas (2008)

of information *about* God: it is the expression of that personal knowledge *of* God which we have together within the Church of Christ. ‘Together with all the saints’ (Eph. 3:18) we have this personal knowledge of acquaintance, knowing the God who has spoken to us by the prophets and in these last days by the Son, the One to whom we speak in prayer, and in whose presence we speak and act and live.

The label ‘Integrative Theology’ has sometimes been used to express the aim of recovering the unity and integrity of Christian Theology, and that would not be inappropriate as a description of this work.⁵ The terms ‘Dogmatics’ and ‘Systematics’ have sometimes been used to imply a discipline which is one specialism within the group of theological specialist disciplines. The aim here however is to integrate Christian Theology and to include Biblical, Historical, Philosophical, and Practical Theology within the credal, Dogmatic framework. To attempt to recover this might appear not only ambitious, but while the academy rightly values the deep study of narrow areas of research, human beings require an overall perspective of understanding. The Church too requires the coherent overview in order to fulfil its mission to preach the Gospel to every creature.

b. Theology, the Church, and the Churches

The pursuit of Christian Theology is not then an individual matter: the Church is the corporate subject which articulates its knowledge of the Triune God. That of course can only mean the One Church, the Body of Christ, the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church,’ for it is an article of faith that there is only one. The unity of that Church is not something we are called upon to create or devise. It is a given reality, for it is not our creation: it is the Church of God. Strictly speaking therefore, there is no such thing as Wesleyan Theology or Lutheran Theology or Calvinist Theology, or Augustinian, or Liberal, or Black or Liberation or Feminist Theology. These are not discrete and separate ‘theologies’ in such a way that there must be a distinctive Wesleyan approach (for example) to every doctrine. Within the Church of Christ, there is only Christian Theology. Here we must beware of sectarianism. When we say, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I [am] of Apollos’ (I Cor. 1:12, KJV), or indeed, ‘I am of Calvin,’ or ‘I am of Wesley,’ we can be in danger of dividing Christ. Was Paul crucified for us, or Augustine or Luther or Calvin or Wesley?

Nevertheless, it is evident within the New Testament itself that the one Church of Christ includes traditions with different perspectives. Even in the Acts of the Apostles we become aware of conflicting perspectives within the one Church requiring a Church council to settle the differences (Acts 15:1-29). Indeed it may be said that the differing perspectives of different Christian traditions are unavoidable

5. See Demarest and Lewis (1996).

given different cultural contexts. The Greek Christian tradition of the Fathers quickly developed a character which was shaped to speak to the great metaphysical questions of Hellenistic culture, while the tradition of the Latin Fathers spoke more to moral and legal issues of law and guilt, punishment and forgiveness. All of the magisterial traditions of the Reformation (Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican) which owed their achievement of Church reform to the action of princes and city councils had to think hard about the relationship of church and state, but Methodism has little thinking in that area. American Christianity developed in a quite different context where the European traditions which became dominant, Puritanism and Pietism, were shaped into a pragmatic, activist, libertarian and democratic mould which tended to take the central doctrines of the Christian faith for granted (or even dismiss them as irrelevant) and focus on ethics and on individual piety. In the rapidly growing new churches of the global East and South today, the burgeoning newer traditions of the Christian Church will increasingly be influenced by their own specific context. In short, the issues faced by Christians in different social, political and cultural contexts are bound to lead to different theological perspectives.

This should be welcomed. Provided that within the one Church there is ‘in essentials unity’, then in ‘nonessentials’ there may be ‘liberty’ while in ‘all things’ there should be ‘charity’.⁶ The diversity within the one Church of Christ should indeed be a source of strength, provided the differences and disagreements can be seen as complementary (even in a paradoxical way) rather than fundamentally in conflict. But it also has to be borne in mind that the unity of the Church in the essentials, the core convictions of the Christian faith, necessarily requires that there are boundaries to the liberty. Some perspectives have to be judged to be incompatible with the Christian faith and these have to be labelled ‘heresies’.

To speak of ‘heresies’ is a hard thing, given the history of the Church. The appalling history not only of the banishing of heretics, but, from the eleventh century, of the horrendous practice of burning heretics at the stake, should make us as Christians hang our heads in shame for the way the name of Christ has been besmirched. It was such a blaspheming of the name of Christ in the so-called ‘wars of religion’ following the Reformation which was a major factor leading to the secularization of European culture and, the long-term, serious decline of the European churches. Nonetheless, ‘heresy’ is a category which is essential to Christian Theology since otherwise the Christian faith means anything and everything. Today, we will defend freedom of speech—the right of the heretics to speak—but we do not have to accept every idea and doctrine as compatible with the Christian faith, and therefore we do not have to give heretics a platform within the Church.

6. *In necessariis unitas: in dubiis libertas: in omnibus caritas*. This aphorism, sometimes wrongly attributed to Augustine of Hippo, was often quoted by Dr Phineas Bresee, the leading father-figure of the Church of the Nazarene.

We have to differentiate between the range of theological perspectives possible within the Church and those teachings and doctrines which conflict with the apostolic faith of the New Testament and so are ‘another gospel’ (Gal. 1:6–8, KJV).⁷

Yet the rejection of that which is ‘heterodox’ (*hetera doxa*, another opinion) and a faithfulness to that which is ‘orthodox’ (*orthē doxa*, straight or right opinion) does not lead to a uniformity. Within the Church catholic, agreed on the central *dogma* of the faith, there is wide room for difference of perspective on many issues. And it is therefore right and healthy that the one great Church should include different theological perspectives—Orthodox and Lutheran, Calvinist and Arminian, Anglican and Mennonite, and many, many more.

c. The Great Doctors

While all orthodox Christian traditions are united in the central affirmations of the faith and adhere to ‘the faith...once...entrusted to the saints’ (Jude 3), Christian Theology is not static. Over the centuries as the Church has engaged in mission, Christian Theology has developed in the range and depth of its understanding of the Truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Both our understanding of the central affirmations of the faith and the diversity within the Church are constantly changing and developing as the Church thinks through the implications of the Gospel and engages with constantly changing human cultures. Within the one Church which is the corporate subject articulating its knowledge of God, certain great doctors stand out as those who have most shaped the development of Christian Theology and whose Theology is the common heritage of all Christians. Although their opinions on many subsidiary matters differ and we may disagree with some things each of them wrote, their common adherence to the central doctrines of the faith allow us to plot the trajectory which the ‘Great Tradition’ of Christian Theology has taken in its development through the centuries.

The Greek Fathers

In the second Christian century when the creeds were being first devised in the context of the church’s worship (particularly the rite of baptism), Irenaeus expounded the *regula fidei* (the ‘Rule of Faith’), essentially the triadic confession which was even then taking shape in the various local creeds, as the hermeneutical key to the understanding of the emerging canon of Holy Scripture. He insisted against the widespread heresies we call ‘Gnosticism’, which were the popular ‘spiritual’ religiosity of the day, that the Christian Scriptures must be interpreted according to this triadic key which summarized their story. In the third century,

7. See Olson (2002/2016), which reviews the variety of views within Christian orthodoxy and tries to distinguish those which must be regarded as stepping over the line into heresy.

Origen's *Peri Archōn* (*On First Principles*, often referred to by its Latin title, *De Principiis*), was perhaps the first attempt at a Systematic Theology. But unlike Irenaeus, who produced an essentially biblical theology, interpreting Scripture by the *regula fidei*, Origen, in his well-intentioned attempt to commend the faith to the high Hellenistic culture of his day, mixed in with the recognized doctrine of the Church his own metaphysical opinions, drawn from Platonism.

In the fourth century, Athanasius and the Cappadocians (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa) fought to establish the doctrine of the Person of Christ as the God-man and in so doing established the Christian doctrine of God, the Holy Trinity. They used concepts from their own Hellenistic culture and yet at the same time fought against heresies which arose from the metaphysical assumptions of that same culture. In this way they formulated Christian 'Theology' in the strict sense, the 'doctrine' (*logos*) 'of God' (*Theou*) and their theology lies behind the Nicene Creed, the one form of the creed officially approved by a council of the whole Church. In the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria was the major theologian behind the Church's fuller official doctrine of the Person of Christ, formulated in the Symbol of Chalcedon in AD 451. In the eighth century, John of Damascus summed up the Nicene Trinitarian Theology of the Greek Fathers in his work of Systematic Theology, *De Fide Orthodoxa* (*On the Orthodox Faith*).

Latin Theology

A different perspective on the doctrine of God the Holy Trinity and on Christian doctrine as a whole was developed by the Latin Fathers, particularly Tertullian (c. AD 155–c. AD 240) and Augustine (AD 354–430). Although neither composed one single comprehensive work of Systematic Theology, Augustine's *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*) possibly comes closest, while his other great work, *De Civitate Dei* (*On the City of God*) gives his influential Christian philosophy of history. As with Origen, Augustine, who was a rhetorician rather than a philosopher, nonetheless presented a powerful integration of Nicene Christian Theology and Platonist philosophy, and his intellectual dominance shaped the whole Christian culture of Western Europe. The great minds of the so-called 'Middle Ages', such as Anselm, stood in his shadow.

It was in the Christianized culture of medieval Europe, and particularly in the context of that newly invented Christian institution, the university, that the 'systematic' presentation of Christian Theology as the 'queen of the sciences' was pursued. The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (c. 1096–1160), used for generations by the 'scholastics' or 'schoolmen', organized Christian doctrine under numerous *loci* ('places' or topics) giving a comprehensive overview. Of the many *summa* ('summations' or 'summaries') of Theology, the greatest was undoubtedly the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Still influenced by the marriage of

Christian Theology and Platonism, Aquinas also brought into the alliance the thought of Aristotle, only recently available to Western Europe through contact with the great Arab philosophers. As with Origenist and Augustinian thought therefore, Thomist Theology became inseparable from the Greek philosophical tradition, though not based on it.

The Reformers

To a large degree, the Reformation was a revolt against the cultural assimilation of Christian Theology into the philosophy of a supposedly Christian culture. Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a professor of Biblical Studies, and it was his careful study of the text of Romans, struggling to rid himself of the assumptions he brought to the text from the Aristotelian assumption of his culture, which led to his doctrine of justification by faith *alone*. He also prophetically called the Church to realize afresh that true Christian Theology must always be a *theologia crucis*, a Theology where everything, even the doctrine of God, was shaped by the cross. It was John Calvin (1509–1564), however, who wrote the great Systematic Theology of the Reformation, the *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (*Institute of the Christian Religion*), undoubtedly one of the greatest works of Christian Theology ever written. Although like Luther he saw himself as standing in the Augustinian tradition, and appealed to Augustine and the Greek Fathers against the distorting innovations of the late medieval tradition, he stood in the Trinitarian tradition of the Nicene Fathers and attempted to write (like Irenaeus) a genuinely *biblical* theology. The *Institutio* should be read along with his commentaries on almost every book of the Bible and was intended to be a compendium, a systematic presentation of the teaching of the Bible organized in the shape of the creed.

All the Reformers therefore agreed that the material principles of the Reformation, *sola fide* (by faith alone), understood in the light of *sola gratia* (by grace alone), and really finding its heart in *solus Christus* (Christ alone), had to be supplemented by the formal principle, *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). Luther's new focus on the Gospel (the 'evangel') thus initiated those many Christian traditions usually gathered under the political term, 'Protestant', but more correctly denominated (as in Germany) by the term 'Evangelical' (*Evangelische*). They loyally embraced the orthodox Trinitarian, Nicene theology of the Fathers as the true interpretation of Holy Scripture, but they insisted that *all* theological tradition was subordinate to Scripture, and that Scripture was centred in the Evangel or Gospel. It is misleading therefore to use the words 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' as two mutually exclusive categories. All Protestant (or, more correctly, 'Evangelical') Christians are 'Catholics' in the sense that they accept the authority of the Scriptures as interpreted through the Church's one ecumenical creed, the Nicene Creed, which is focussed on the Incarnation and therefore the doctrine of the Trinity. Those who do not accept those 'Catholic' beliefs (including some who regard themselves as 'Liberal'

Protestants) are rejecting the heart of the Christian faith. Those who remained in communion with Rome after the Reformation are correctly designated not simply as ‘Catholics’ but as ‘*Roman Catholics*’.

Despite their clear emphasis on *sola scriptura*, it is not clear that Luther and Calvin totally escaped the philosophical assumptions of their culture (assuming that is ever possible). The theologians of post-Reformation Protestant ‘orthodoxy’ were even more shaped by philosophical tradition. They revived the thought patterns of Aristotelian scholasticism (particularly Aristotelian logic) in order to defend their doctrine against the reinvigorated Roman theology of the Catholic Reformation.⁸ So-called Protestant ‘orthodoxy’ was not only split into warring factions, each narrowly identifying Christian truth with its own formulations, but was also found sadly inadequate to deal with the newly emerging secular thought of the so-called ‘Enlightenment’. For the first time in a millennium and a half, the Christian Church lost its intellectual dominance in European culture. The essentially secular philosophy of rationalism emerged, followed by its somewhat less ambitious sibling, empiricism, both attempting to ground individual human knowledge in a certainty achieved by unaided human reason. The Deism which accompanied this was gradually to sink (despite Kant, or perhaps because of him) into atheism.

d. Theology in the Modern Era

The ‘Liberal’ Theology of ‘Modernity’

It was in this context that F.D.E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) emerged as the next great formative thinker (if not a ‘great doctor’) of the Church. He was immensely influential for good or ill in the Christian Theology of the next two centuries, sometimes now designated the era of ‘modernity’. Brought up among the Pietists with their emphasis in *Herzensreligion* (the religion of the heart), Schleiermacher’s answer was to commend ‘religion’ to the ‘cultured despisers’ of the so-called Enlightenment by making a strategic retreat. Theology should renounce all claims to ‘knowledge’ or to be a ‘science’, and ground itself in the universal human religious experience, that *Gefühl* (feeling), that awareness or consciousness of dependence on the divine, of the Infinite in the finite, the Eternal in the temporal, which was shared by all humankind. Christianity was the greatest and most advanced ‘religion’ or ‘piety’ among the ‘religions’ of the world.

‘The father of Liberal Theology’ and the ‘Liberal’ tradition which followed him, notably in the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and the Ritschlian school, must be given the credit for an apologetic motive, to commend the Christian faith. But the radical reformulation of Christian Theology to meet the

8. This is now the standard way of referring to what used to be called ‘the Counter-Reformation’.

thinking of European culture in fact issued in many cases, notably that of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), in heresy, effectively denying the central Christian belief in the Incarnation and therefore in Nicene faith in the Holy Trinity. For a time the new philosophical rationalism of Hegel challenged the growing intellectual supremacy of secular and materialistic atheism and offered intellectual support to a new form of philosophical Theology usually known as Idealism. The attack of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) on the inflated claims of Hegelianism was long ignored. New forms of the so-called ‘Liberal’ tradition continued in the twentieth century in the work of notable theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) and Paul Tillich (1886–1965) and the existentialism of the New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). All of them reacted against the old ‘Liberalism’ of the nineteenth century, but were still ‘Liberal’ in that their thought was shaped to speak to the ‘modern’ world at a time when, with hindsight, it now appears that the ‘modernity’ of the Enlightenment era was already being ‘outmoded’.

The Recovery of Biblical, Nicene Theology

It has become increasingly apparent in historical perspective that the theologian who played the pivotal role in the twentieth-century recovery of Nicene, biblical theology and who therefore has the greatest claim in the modern era to be called a ‘doctor of the Church’ was Karl Barth (1886–1968). Some of those engaged in the struggle against so-called ‘Liberal’ or ‘modernist’ Theology (particularly the conservative Calvinist wing of his own Reformed tradition) dismissed him as not sufficiently ‘conservative’. He was labelled with the somewhat dismissive and superficial term, ‘neo-orthodox’, and charged with propagating a ‘new modernism’.⁹ But without agreeing with all Barth’s theology (any more than with all of the theology of Augustine, Luther or Calvin), we can see that he not only stands in the authentic tradition of the Fathers and Reformers, but repristinated the central Nicene doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity. Although hesitations about Barth remain among some conservative Evangelicals, his great concern to be biblical and his massive contribution to the recovery of Nicene, Trinitarian Theology in the tradition of the Reformation is increasingly acknowledged. His commentary on the Epistle to the Romans was a turning point, and his clear emphasis on the transcendence of God re-asserted an appropriate balance over against the ‘Liberal’ tradition which characteristically stressed God’s immanence.

Despite Barth’s rejection of Roman Catholic Theology, significant theologians in that tradition found him an enlightening conversation partner, particularly Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) and Hans Küng (1928–2021), who saw Barth’s doctrine of justification as compatible with Roman Catholic doctrine. The

9. See Van Til (1973). The term ‘neo-orthodox’ implies that the seventeenth-century Lutheran and Calvinist theologians are the measure of ‘orthodoxy’!

passing of the dominance of rigidly conservative Tridentine and Thomist Theology in the Roman Catholic Church, which may be dated from the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), opened the way to closer interchange with the heirs of the Reformation. Behind these developments was the work of the *ressourcement* theologians, such as Yves Congar (1904–1995), Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), and Joseph Ratzinger (b. 1927), who furthered biblical and patristic studies. The work of Karl Rahner (1904–1984) on the doctrine of the Trinity also helped Protestants to see that despite the continuing differences dating from the Reformation, the central Christian convictions of Christology and Trinity were shared. Barth was invited as an observer to the Council, and later discussions on the doctrine of justification have led to something of a rapprochement.

In the world of Liberal Protestant academic Theology, by contrast, Barth was dismissed as *too* conservative. His refusal to adapt the faith to the rationalism of ‘modernity’ and his revival of the doctrines of the Trinity and Chalcedonian Christology (even the Virgin Birth) meant that he was often dismissed as reverting to the ‘pre-modern’. For some decades after his death, Barth’s influence was thought to be eclipsed by the existentialism of Bultmann and Tillich, and many in the continuing tradition of ‘Liberal’ or ‘modern’ Theology will continue to dismiss him today. But the emerging consensus, at a time when ‘postmodern’ thought is proclaiming the death of ‘modernity’ or ‘the Enlightenment project’, sees Barth as speaking prophetically precisely by his leadership in the recovery of the credal, Nicene, Trinitarian, Christian Theology of the Fathers and the Reformers. His significance is not just that he recovered old doctrines in a fourth-century or sixteenth-century form, but that he re-expressed them and re-formulated them in a way which speaks to today’s emerging postmodern culture.¹⁰ His Christocentric Theology stimulated a new era characterized by the most profound and practical engagement with the doctrine of the Trinity since the patristic era in the writings of Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, T.F. Torrance, John Zizioulas, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and a dozen other leading theologians. However we may disagree with him therefore in particulars and refuse to be ‘Barthians’, and however much his successors may now have gone beyond his views on many matters, his voice has emerged as the major influence for the future of Christian Theology. However varied may be the schools of thought in the international Church of today, Christian Theology for the foreseeable future will be shaped by his influence and the new ‘postliberal’ era he inaugurated. Despite our hesitations and our disagreements with his Theology therefore, if anyone deserves to be called a ‘doctor of the church’ in the modern era, it is Barth.

The great doctors of the Church, among whom we single out particularly Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and to

10. But see McCormack (2008).

whom we must add Barth, represent the central trajectory of Christian Theology over two millennia. They differ from each other at many points and all of them have their short-comings. All of them are influenced by the philosophical outlook of their culture, some too much so. But in order to be true to the central trajectory of Christian Theology, we must learn to appreciate Barth without being Barthians, Calvin without being Calvinists, Luther without being Lutherans, Thomas Aquinas without being Thomists, and (what is infinitely more difficult for those in the tradition of Western Christianity) Augustine without being blindly Augustinian. The last is the most difficult of all, for both Roman Catholics and Protestants, the heirs of ancient Latin Christianity, often read the text of Holy Scripture through Augustinian spectacles without being aware of it. Many who proclaim their loyalty to ‘biblical Christianity’ are in fact deeply influenced in ways they do not realize by assumptions Augustine drew from his cultural context.

As for the Greek Fathers, even here there are features in their thought which we will not want to embrace. But Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians and Cyril shared the same Hellenistic culture and Greek language of the early New Testament churches of the gentile mission. Their doctrines of Trinity and Christology are enshrined in the Nicene Creed and Chalcedonian Symbol as the definitive expression of Christian orthodoxy. While the heirs of the Reformation (including Wesley) regard them as subordinate to Holy Scripture, the substance of their Theology constitutes the official interpretation of Scripture by the Church catholic. These ancient Greek doctors of the Church who formulated the creeds therefore carry greater weight than Augustine or Aquinas. Calvin and Luther may carry similar weight for Protestants, although there are aspects particularly of Calvin’s theology which most Evangelical Protestants (including Wesleyans) will reject. Barth qualifies for this list because of the unparalleled influence he has had over the last century in bringing the Protestant churches at large back to a focus on Christ and on the Holy Trinity, but many Christians will disagree with aspects of his thought.

e. Christian Theology and the Worldwide Church

Is This Merely European Theology?

It also has to be noted in an age when, just within the last century, the Church has become truly global, that all of these great doctors of the Church were culturally European, and while that may not be seen as a major problem in Europe or in the essentially European cultures of the Americas, it may raise serious questions in Africa and certainly does so in Asia. The question of the relationship of the Gospel to culture will have to be considered at each point of doctrine, but here a general

point must be made. The fact that the rise of Islam restricted the Church in the Middle East and largely cut off the Church in the European continent for centuries is part of the 'scandal of particularity'. We cannot change what has happened.

God's revelation and covenant came to one Asian nation, Israel, and God the Son became incarnate as Yeshua within that Israelite culture, formed and shaped for centuries like clay on the potter's wheel. From a Christian perspective, that was the essential preparation for the coming of Christ and gave us the words and concepts in which to express the Gospel. But as Christians see it, God's purpose was that the Gospel should spread from that one culture to others and it is part of the particularity of temporal, historical existence that it took root strongly in the Hellenistic culture of the Eastern Roman Empire. That meant that pagan Greeks and Romans had to reject their own religion, Zeus or Jupiter and all the gods of Mount Olympus, deeply intertwined though all of that was with their cultural heritage. It meant that, as Christians, they had to contextualize the Gospel using language from their pagan philosophical heritage without letting that philosophical tradition distort their Christian faith and Theology. Indeed, it was primarily within that culture that the doctrines of God and Christ, the heart of Christian Theology, were articulated. These Hellenistic formulations of the early creeds do not have the same authority for Christians as the word of God which was given expression within the Hebrew culture of Israel, and in principle it may be possible to re-formulate the creeds in terminology drawn from any other world cultures. But since the Greek Fathers were closest in history, in language and culture to the earliest Christian communities by, to and for whom the New Testament Scriptures were written, and were the first to wrestle with the theological questions raised, they retain a *de facto* authority which is irreplaceable. Any re-formulation of the creeds in other cultural language would have to be demonstrably true to Nicea, Constantinople and Chalcedon. Only in this way can the integrity of Christian Theology as the articulation of that knowledge of the God revealed in Jesus Christ be safeguarded.

At the next stage of the advance of the Christian mission, after the demise of the Western Roman Empire, Greek, Roman and Celtic missionaries took the Gospel to the barbarian, pagan tribes of Teutons, Franks, Anglo-Saxons, Slavs, Norsemen and all the others. They too, the ancestors of most of modern Europe, had to reject Thor and Woden and all their pagan heritage and religion in order to embrace Christ. Further, since the ancient churches of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch (that is, the great centres of Christianity in Asia and Africa) lived under the rule of advancing Islam, which bottled up the remaining Christian churches in Europe for a thousand years, and since much of global Christianity is the consequence of the belated awakening of European Christians in the eighteenth century to the Great Commission, the Christian churches around the world today, except the ancient churches of the Middle East, have in fact grown almost entirely from

European missions. A major task of global Christian Theology today therefore is to differentiate between those European cultural formulations of Christianity which are true, authentic and necessary expressions of the Gospel and those which are culture-bound and distorting. The Gospel is *not* a European Gospel. The pagan Europeans, first the Greeks and Romans and later the barbarian tribes, were ‘aliens [to] the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world’ (Eph. 2:12). Yet the Gospel they received from Paul and Barnabas and the other apostolic missionaries has now been historically mediated to us today through two millennia when European culture was shaped by the Gospel but reciprocally shaped the Church’s Theology.

It is in this concrete and realistic historical context that we have to view the fact that these ‘great doctors’ of the Church (even those who lived in Africa) were all European in language and culture. Despite that, because they represent the central tradition of the development of Christian Theology up to this point as it has tried to articulate the Church’s knowledge of the Triune God, they remain the major voices in Christian Theology today. But significant new voices are arising in today’s global Church to add to Christian diversity and to contextualize the Gospel in all world cultures. Rather than adding those to this chapter on the past historical development of Christian Theology, we shall attempt a similarly brief but comprehensive overview of those when we look at the contemporary scene in Chapter 3. It is also to be hoped and expected that women will play an increasing role as leaders of Christian thought, a possibility till recently denied to them. But while these new formulations of Christian Theology will have new accents and new models of thought, they will have to be in substantial continuity with the tradition of the one universal Church and the unity of Christian Theology represented by the ‘great doctors’ in their united confession of the Triune God.

Diversity within Unity

Even within the European context, given the multiple languages and cultures of that continent, the Christian Church developed considerable diversity. The diversity of perspectives within the unity of the ‘Great Church’ clearly includes the ‘magisterial’ Protestant traditions of the Reformation, namely, the Lutheran tradition, the Reformed tradition which looks primarily to Calvin, and the Anglican tradition. It includes all the ancient churches of the Middle East, so-called Monophysite, and even those thought to be ‘Nestorian’. It includes those who are the heirs of the Anabaptists of the Reformation and the Baptist and the Pentecostalist traditions, all of which are widely influential in the independent new churches around the world now outpacing the old churches of Europe and America. It also includes a renewed Eastern Orthodox tradition.

More controversially, it must even include the *Roman Catholic* tradition which has been so virulently opposed and denounced in the past by the heirs of

the Reformation, who even at times rejected the claim of the Roman Church to be Christian at all. Today it has to be recognized that the Roman Catholic Church not only went through painful reform and purification in the Catholic Reformation, but that the tradition today has emerged out of the theological straightjacket of the Tridentine era with its outright condemnation of all things Protestant. A ferment of thought stimulated by the yeast introduced into Roman Theology by John Henry Newman and the *ressourcement*, led to a return to biblical and patristic Theology. Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Hans Küng are among the great names of twentieth century Theology, all of them in conversation with the theology of Barth and major Protestant theologians. The Second Vatican Council marked the end of the Tridentine era and it now even appears that there are moves toward a common mind with the Reformation traditions on justification by faith.

But while many of the heirs of the Reformation now see the Roman Catholic tradition as an ally against secularism, others are not sure that it has yet advanced sufficiently to complete the Reformation of the whole Church begun but aborted in the sixteenth century. Papal infallibility, Mariolatry, purgatory and prayers to the 'saints', even still relics and indulgences (!), the sacramentalism which appears to run against genuine evangelical conversion, the belief in the apostolic succession of monarchical bishops (shared by the Orthodox and some Anglicans), the forcible 'baptism' of the peoples of South America by the conquistadores, and the oppression of Protestants in some parts of the world still today, offend many Protestants and constitute huge barriers. To those in the pietistic Evangelical tradition, the popular culture of the Roman Catholic Church often seems to be characterized either by nominal Christianity or by pious superstition or by both. And underlying all that is the question whether Rome fully and genuinely recognizes that all Church tradition and dogma must be subject to the scriptural account of God's definitive revelation in Jesus Christ. But Rome's adherence to the central Christian dogmas of the faith, the Trinity and the Incarnation, its recent apparent movement on justification by faith and its firm stand on issues of Christian Ethics (all in contrast to some in the 'Liberal' Protestant tradition) give hope that the Spirit is at work in the continuing Reformation of the whole Church. Whatever may be true in some quarters, the theologians of the Roman Catholic tradition, in dialogue with Protestant and Orthodox theologians, show a commitment to the core conviction of the Christian faith, that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ and died on the cross for our sins, and make such a contribution to biblical scholarship, that their participation in the work of Christian Theology is invaluable.¹¹

11. See Noll and Nystrom (2005).