



Systematic Theology

Biblical and Historical

Robert Duncan Culver



MENTOR

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Abbreviations

No formal system of abbreviations except for the names of books of the Bible is employed. Most abbreviations are obvious in context of the chapter. The following are a few of the less obvious abbreviations employed. Full bibliographical data are in the Bibliography.

ABD – *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 volumes

ANF – *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 volumes

Barth – Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 volumes

Bauer, or Arndt and Gingrich – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translation and adaptation from the 5th edition by W. F. Arndt & F. W. Gingrich.

Bettenson – Henry S. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*

BDB – Brown, Driver and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

Calvin, *Institutes*, or *Institutes* – John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 volumes

Catholic Encyclopedia – *The Catholic Encyclopedia, An International Work of References on Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline and History of the Catholic Church*, 16 volumes

Denzinger – Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*

EDBT – *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Ed. Walter A. Elwell

EDT – *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. Walter A. Elwell

HDB – *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Ed. James Hastings, 5 volumes

Liddell and Scott – *A Greek-English Lexicon, Based on the German Work of Francis Passow*, by Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott

LW – *Luther's Works*, Ed. by J. Pelican and H. T. Lehmann, 55 volumes

McClintock and Strong – *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, prepared by John McClintock and James Strong, 12 volumes

NPNF, I – *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, 14 volumes

NPNF, II – *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, 14 volumes

OED or *Oxford English Dictionary* – *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*

Philo – *The Works of Philo*, New Updated Edition, Complete & Unabridged in One Volume

Strack & Billerbeck – *Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament Aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 volumes, Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck

TDNT – *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 volumes, Eds. G. Kittel & G. Friedrich, Trans. G. W. Bromiley

TWNT – *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 volumes, Eds. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., B. K. Waltke

ZPEB – *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 volumes, Ed. M. C. Tenney

About the Author

Robert Culver was born in rural Yakima County, Washington. It was there that he became, along with parents and family, part of a new small village congregation of believers, that has sent many of its sons and daughters into various missionary and pastoral careers. Early education was in the public schools. He is a graduate of Heidelberg College (A.B.), Grace Theological Seminary (B.D., Th.M., Th.D.) and did post-doctoral theological studies at Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary and ancient Near-East languages at the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota.

Dr Culver received formal ordination to the ministry immediately after graduation from seminary but has been a preacher, pastor and teacher all his adult life, to the present. His career as a professor has taken him to Grace Theological Seminary (Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew), Wheaton College and Graduate School (Associate Professor of Bible and Theology) Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Professor and Chairman of Theology). He was annual director of the Near-East School of Archaeology at Jerusalem (1962). He has been special or visiting lecturer at schools in Canada, several states in USA, Jordan, Hong Kong, France, the Netherlands and Argentina. Among his several publications perhaps best known are *The Life of Christ*, *Civil Government: a Biblical View*, *Daniel and the Latter Days* and the section on "Daniel" in the *Wycliffe Commentary*.

Acknowledgements

Production of this volume, by God's grace, involved the careful and persistent efforts of many competent people besides the author. Malcom Maclean, the editor of the Mentor Imprint of Christian Focus Publications, at the first, examined a portion (Part Six) of the manuscript and secured acceptance of the whole for publication. Willie MacKenzie, Editorial Manager, patiently shepherded the whole project from initial editing through indexing, printing and distribution. Colin Duriez edited the majority of the book and guided editing of the whole. He offered many helpful suggestions, notably adoption of the English Standard Version for all otherwise undesignated Bible quotations. Several typesetters and proofreaders, Jonny Sherlock, Annella MacDonald and Martin Maclean and others whose names I do not know, helped preserve the integrity of authorial intent and correct form of the final product. Susan Hart, Director of the Rushford, Minnesota Public Library has kept the author supplied with needed books and documentary information through the library search facilities and inter-library loan system over the years of the writing of this volume. Jonathan Burd prepared the lengthy Scripture Index and David Craddock, within a narrow time frame, prepared the General Index

Special acknowledgement is due Celeste Knipmeyer Culver, my loving wife of thirty years and loving step-mother, grandmother and great grandmother. She has worked steadily on this project, almost full-time since before 1990, when we decided to devote all our best energies to it. She put every word and mark into a series of computers, having already checked my handwritten 8 1/2" x 14" sheets – on through revisions, rewrites and transmission to editors and final corrections before going to press. Without her cheerful contributions and moral support this book of systematic theology would never have come to be.

Likewise my three children, Douglas, Keith and Lorraine have steadily encouraged me to complete a project begun, as they well know, long ago.


As Jesus Himself said, in another connection: "Others have labored and you have entered into their labors" (John 4:38).





Foreword

By
Walter C. Kaiser Jr.



Not every book that has seen the light of day should have been written, but this volume by the Rev Dr Robert Duncan Culver entitled Systematic Theology was one that just had to be written. Without it, we would have been deprived of one of the strongest examples of the exegetical use of the Bible in forming a Systematic Theology for our day. Parts of this line of teaching have only been known through the oral presentations of a stream of great teachers that Dr Culver represents as the highest achievement in the area of Systematic Theology of that line of godly teachers.

Even though we are seeing all of a sudden a flurry of activity in the number and size of volumes on this subject, this volume has such uniqueness about it that our generation and those that follow us, if our Lord tarries, would have been left with some major gaps in our understanding of the system of thought found in the Scriptures. I have had the privilege of hearing much of these volumes as a student, colleague and friend.

My acquaintance with Robert Culver and his teaching goes back to the latter part of the 1950s when as a graduate student I served as his teaching assistant. As I assisted him in marking the doctrinal tests of his college students and occasionally teaching a class for him, I became aware of his thought and strong Biblical approach to all of doctrine. Later I was able to take on the graduate level his course in Ecclesiology and Eschatology. But that would not be the end of our relationship or partnership in the gospel, for as a graduate student I later became an Assistant Pastor with him in a nearby Church for a year and a half until I finished my graduate work. Sometime after this we served together on two separate faculties. Therefore, I am in deep debt to him for many lines in my own thinking as I have been challenged over and over again to be more radically Biblical in my thinking while being systematic in my thought.

All too many in our day feel that Systematic Theology is a poor cousin to the newer forms of Biblical Theology with its diachronic methods as opposed to the systematic categories involving metaphysical, epistemological and logical thought. That is most unfortunate, for eventually our generation will see that, despite whatever validity may be found in the distinctive methods of Biblical theology (and there are many), nevertheless, neither discipline by itself can perform all the necessary duties laid upon it by the extraordinary issues, questions and expectations of our day. A mere perusal of this volume on Systematic Theology will demonstrate that point very readily.

It is not that Systematic Theology is indebted to Greek philosophical categories, as well as modern ones, whereas Biblical Theology is without any of these accoutrements. That is to understand badly one's own method without



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critically assessing the baggage that one may bring along with his or her study of the Scriptures. We must not be shy in our day of laying claim to the possibility of holding a 'correct' or 'objective meaning' or interpretation of the text of Scripture, for to deny that one can have a correct or objective meaning is objectively to state that there is none to be had! It is like saying, as one of my university professors said so blatantly, 'There are no absolutes!' When I asked him as casually as I could if he affirmed this absolutely, he unthinkingly replied, 'Absolutely!' He too had to be involved in precisely what he was disallowing!

Therefore, I am deeply grateful to my teacher, colleague, and long-standing friend for giving to all of us this extraordinary work that represents the fruit of a lifetime of studying God's word and teaching theology to collegians, seminarians, and the body of Christ. May our Lord use it to further the work of the gospel around the world in this new century when new believers are coming into the family of God at the phenomenal rate of two new believers every second, especially in the two-thirds world.

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Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary,
Hamilton, Massachusetts

A Prologue to the Reader

The student or scholar who holds this large book in hand or on desktop, open to this page, likely has had strong reasons for buying or borrowing it. It was not a casual decision. Nor is a decision to proceed on to read such a large tome a casual one. The opening chapter of 'An Introduction to Christian Theology,' and the next following five chapters, though in the section of *theology proper* (the Doctrine of God), are intended to prepare the reader's mind and will for the whole discipline of systematic Christian theology. Both mind and will must be prepared, for only with clean hands and a pure heart do we ascend the hill of the Lord (Ps. 24:3, 4).

Some treatments of systematic theology preface it all with a separate book or large section called *prolegomena* (Greek for 'things said beforehand') similar to *prologue*, a Greek term from dramatics for a monologue to introduce the main action in a stage play. I share the view of many others that these recondite matters (history of the subject, theories of knowledge and of hermeneutics, competing systems, sources, etc.) fit best in two other places: when the questions and topics arise – as inevitably they do – at various places over the whole of systematic theology or, the same may be taught as apologetics and philosophy of religion concurrently with or after the theology.¹

Source and Resources

A sound *evangelical* theology should make a distinction between the *source* of Christian doctrines (or church dogma) and *resources* for understanding these doctrines and how to formulate them in a system of thought. The only source of theological doctrine is the Word of God. Man, said Jesus, lives 'by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). In the present time, long after the close of the ages of revelation, our only access to those words is the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament, the source of our theology. The chief acknowledged *resources* for deriving truth from the *source* are tradition, reason and experience.

1. Since the time of Schleiermacher, 1768-1834, apologetics is sometimes called *Fundamental Theology*. A large symposium of Roman Catholic scholars about how to approach theology is entitled *Problems of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). Louis Berkhof presents a good discussion of the relation of how and when apologetics is 'introduction' or defense and at what point in *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1932, pp. 48-51. It is significant that his *Systematic Theology* is published without his *Introduction to Systematic Theology*.

Tradition – in the sense of the history of exegesis and interpretation of the words of God in the Word – is a resource all theologians depend on in one way or another. The tradition is embodied in creeds, confessions and all the commentaries and works of theology, plus the instructions of teachers, parents and pastors. No writer of theology starts from scratch. Every author of theology draws on this tradition and passes it on with his own contributions. Otherwise his book would fall as short of an adequate grasp of the Christian revelation as the faltering efforts of the first ecclesiastical writers back in the second Christian century.

I owe a debt for almost all the theology I know to all my teachers, the books of theology written by godly men of learning which I have read, and every sound lecture and sermon I ever heard – especially to my seminary professors and, of course, their teachers.

Reason is another resource for theology. Most ‘reasonable’ Christians assume that as beings made in the image of God our minds have a capacity for thought, of taking notice of cause and effect, of turning perceptions into conceptions, of organizing facts and truths in arrangements demonstrating relationships. We assume that the world we perceive with our senses is real and capable of being truly understood adequately if not perfectly. If we are both industrious and devout we may employ this capacity, or faculty to derive truths from Scripture, establish apparent relationships, place them in order and draw inferences. The Reformation creeds took special note of this. There are no metaphysical or epistemological commitments necessary except the common-sense realism which is spread over every page of the Bible. God would not make a world where all our sense impressions of the external world tell us lies.

Christian experience is not accepted by every orthodox theologian as a resource for theology. Some good Christians have claimed mystical experiences as revelatory. Yet mystical experiences are by definition impossible to report. Early neo-orthodox (*Krisis*) theology and successors make the whole Bible a fallible human report of ineffable (I-Thou) meetings with God. This the historic Christian theological consensus rejects. Yet the teaching of a ‘seasoned’ scholar or an ‘experienced’ pastor or professor is valued more than the opinion of novices. Further, would there be a world-wide church today if the first and succeeding generations of believers had not truly experienced ‘O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him’ (Ps. 34:8 KJV).

Sola Scriptura

Yet, because the Bible is the only source of theology, and judges all the proposed findings of the other resources, biblical truth should pervade every paragraph of this volume and scripturally derived norms should control as well as inform every sentence.

The Bible is perspicuous in the sense that any literate person ‘in due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding’ (*Westminster Confession of Faith* I. vii). Nevertheless, deep theological insight is served by going behind translations to the original languages. This book does not assume the reader’s acquaintance with Greek and Hebrew. Hence, when citing words from the original languages they are made approximately pronounceable by a non-technical, but traditional, transliteration. Theologians, I think, should practice scientific exegesis but report results rather than process in a book not designed for language specialists. A few passages, such as Romans 5:12-21 (in connection with sin and atonement) and the first verses of Genesis (in connection with creation), are exceptional and require furnishing some technical exegetical treatment of the original texts.

The formal scheme of systematic theology sometimes includes a section on the doctrine of Holy Scripture. The section may be entitled bibliology, inspiration, revelation or revelation and inspiration. One of the most successful orthodox evangelical volumes (*Systematic Theology* by Louis Berkhof) has no section on the Bible as such, yet throughout relies unapologetically on the veracity, integrity, inspiration and divine authority of the Canon of the sixty-six books of the Old Testament and New Testament. Regrettably, for several reasons, I have followed Berkhof’s example. J. O. Buswell (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*) tucks in a few pages after the doctrine of God. W. G. T. Shedd (*Dogmatic Theology*, three large volumes) supplies fifty or sixty pages on the subject, while Francis Pieper (*Christian Dogmatics*), deep in Lutheran controversy about the Bible, has more pages on Holy Scripture than The Doctrine of God. The first six chapters of this volume supply some features of a doctrine of Holy Scripture, though I have included no formal section on the Doctrine of Holy Scripture. I endorse plenary, verbal inspiration, i.e., the words of Scripture though in human languages and written freely by men are also fully the words of God.

The words of Scripture, not merely the ideas, are God's words, without error in original documents, true and of divine authority.²

It is assumed the reader is already familiar with the entire Bible, not necessarily previous classroom courses in Bible, but the acquaintance which comes through reading the Book. With extra effort in diligently reading the Bible references furnished and use of reference works, an inadequate knowledge of Scripture may be overcome. Reading fifty pages a day in a moderately large-print Bible will take you from Genesis through Revelation in a month.

Sound doctrine will be founded on sound interpretation of the Bible. Hence many departments of systematic theology offer a course in *biblical hermeneutics*. Sadly, the contemporary field of hermeneutics is plagued with a plethora of aggressive proponents of nihilistic to weird theories of meaning and of non-meaning of documents, including the Bible.³ We have been compelled by our times to come to terms with assaults but not to surrender to them. The same common sense realism (formal or informal) which took you through fourth grade geography and college chemistry will take you through Bible and theology. A course in hermeneutics is hardly prerequisite to theology. It can wait.

Theology must also be aware of the importance of *biblical introduction* both general (text and canon) and special (date, authorship, genuineness, sources, etc.). Several kinds of destructive scholarly criticism have relentlessly attacked Christian belief from this quarter for two centuries. These subjects are almost unbelievably complicated. They should be pursued under competent guidance and good literary sources. Yet systematic theology serves as well, perhaps better, as preliminary to critical studies than the other way around. This book takes neither a pre-critical nor an uncritical approach to Scripture, but one of informed rejection of that form of biblical criticism which assumes rejection of the Christian, theistic, *weltanschauung* (world-view) as a precondition of scholarly study. We have the canon of Holy Scripture and accept it as inspired and truthful in all its parts. We gratefully adopt and promote all the positive fruits of modern study of the science of interpretation and both special and general introduction to the Bible.

The goals in this volume do not include references in text and notes to every author or teacher who over the author's life has informed or affected my thoughts about theology. I document quotations and give credit to immediate sources even if not directly quoted and supply some guidance to further reading. Readers are pointed to far more ancient, Reformation, post-Reformation, recent and contemporary evangelical authors than to the offerings of the largely university-generated, burgeoning theological marketplace of today. It does not seem wise to let the spoilers set the agenda for constructive theology for Christians – even as we try to take due note of any positive corrections or refinements their work suggests. The hot trails of ephemeral controversies and faddish 'new theology' do not lead to the deposit of acknowledged, Christian consensual truth about God and His ways.

The program of investigation and instruction is *systematic* because God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). If it is God's will that in the church all things be *done* decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40; cf. 14:2 and 34) then *thinking* about eternal truth should also be in some systematic order. The Apostle commands the interim pastor at Ephesus to 'Follow the *pattern* of sound words' which he had already heard from his systematic theology professor ('sound words... heard from me' 2 Tim. 1:13 RSV). He is to 'guard the truth that has been entrusted to you' (2 Tim. 1:14 RSV). Down through the seventy-five-plus generations of our era comes the charge:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. Avoid... godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:15, 16 RSV).

Very early in my ministry as a pastor I found I had not achieved competence to do what these and similar passages demand. My college education had been interrupted by prolonged and acute hard times. There was no money to move a pastor from the center of things to our rather remote church. So when our young pastor resigned to finish seminary education the congregation invited me and my bride to move into the parsonage, preach, teach and shepherd the flock at the tender age of twenty-one! Things went fairly well. Youthful enthusiasm and a strong voice

2. I have set forth a more comprehensive summary of the doctrine as The Doctrine of Holy Scripture in a large section of a book published jointly with Dr Lloyd M. Perry, *How to Search the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1967, 1979). I intend, God enabling, to enlarge that modest effort into a book on the subject. This is only one of several writing projects that preparation of this volume has provoked.

3. A good brief survey of the subject from a non-committal point of view is *Hermeneutics* by Bernard Lategan in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, pp. 149–154, corrected somewhat by *Interpretation of the Bible* by F. F. Bruce, EDT, pp. 565–568. A highly recommended recent textbook is *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard.




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in a community of many loyal friends old and young carried quite a distance. The congregation was even attracting a few new people.

I already had a fair grasp of the historical structure and literary content of the Bible and was thoroughly familiar with all the notes in the most popular study Bible of the time. Some college courses in Bible, church history, Christian evidences and twenty semester hours in Greek enabled the aspirant pastor-teacher to ascertain the surface meaning of the text of the Epistle to the Ephesians and some of the depths. But in the very first chapter he came up against election, the Holy Trinity, the sovereign will of God, a present reign of Christ in heaven and a seemingly complicated doctrine of the church. Nothing in his background had provided definition and a logical structure of doctrines whereby these grand truths of revelation could be defined and related to one another and to the 'whole counsel of God.' The ancient church used *katholikos* (catholic) both of the whole church through all the world and the *canon of faith*, or scheme of beliefs – in other words, systematic theology. What this aspirant pastor-teacher desperately needed, in America, is usually called systematic theology, that is, 'What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches and confesses on the basis of the word of God: this is Christian doctrine.'⁴

No theologian or denomination has a lock-hold on all the details, though each writer or lecturer necessarily places his own distinct character on structure and details. Yet, to be of interest to any beyond the author and his immediate sympathizers, systematic theology will consist mainly of historical, consensual, orthodox, biblical doctrine – in the language of Vincent of Lerins, that which has been believed 'everywhere, always, by all' – orthodox believers, that is.

The opening 'Introduction to Theology,' follows up on the questions aroused by these opening sentences and lays ground for all to follow.



4. The first line repeated often afterward in Jaroslav Pelikan's, *The Christian Tradition*, 5 vols., Vol. I, p. 1.



PART 1
THEOLOGY PROPER
Introduction and Doctrine of God

PART 2
ANTHROPOLOGY
Man as Created

PART 3
HAMARTIOLOGY
Man as Sinner

PART 4
CHRISTOLOGY
Person and Work of Christ

PART 5
SOTERIOLOGY
Salvation Applied

PART 6
ECCLESIOLOGY
Church Local and Universal

PART 7
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GENERAL INDEX





1

An Introduction to Christian Theology

I. What Theology is.

One may rightly say Christian theology is study or organized treatment of the topic, God, from the standpoint of Christianity. To leave the matter there, however, would be grossly misleading, for theology is not merely an interpretation of the meaning of God from the outside; theology is a part or aspect of Christianity itself. On a deeper level theology is of the essence of Christianity. It is so much of the essence that to dispense with theology is to dispense with Christianity.

Christianity is not merely a mixture of ceremonies, beliefs, adherents, history and the like. The Christian religion is all of these, perhaps, but that also is a misleading statement, for it is not an aggregate or mixture of things like baptism (ceremony), the Apostles' Creed (beliefs), a congregation of Baptists (adherents) and a book of church history.

Authentic Christianity is a single thing. We may compare it to a chemical compound such as sulphuric acid (H_2SO_4). H_2SO_4 is not two parts hydrogen, one of sulphur and four of oxygen, somehow mixed together in a glass beaker. It is a single thing in which there are three elements so integrally united as to form a substance different from any one of the three alone, and from anything else. The distinctive features of Christianity are really of little importance singly. They are always together in authentic Christian religion. They are each explicit in Scripture. There are four: (1) certain acts of God in history, or *redemption*; (2) the meaning of those acts of God as set forth in Holy Scripture, or *doctrines*; (3) the *lives of countless believers*, the Christians themselves through the ages but particularly those alive today; and (4) the *congregations of believers* throughout the world, the churches, or, considered in their spiritual oneness, *the church*.

Redemption – History of what God has done.

First, in historical and logical order, Christianity has been rendered what it is by what God did a long time ago. The Second Person of the Godhead became a man. He lived, suffered and died for us and for our salvation. He arose, ascended to the right hand of God where presently He reigns till His enemies are made the footstool of His feet and where He exercises certain ministries for us in the presence of the Father. Essentially, however, redemption is finished: 'After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Heb. 1:3). His sitting down signified, in part, that His redemptive work had been completed.



What God did in the redemptive career of Jesus of Nazareth was a consummation of events of God's doing from eternity past, through all of the preparatory history of the Old Testament and up to the point when in 'the fullness of time... God sent forth his Son' (Gal. 4:4).

Christianity, one may justly say, is a history, in the sense of a finished work of redemption performed in a certain period of linear time. The events of redemption may be precisely located in time and place. The first four books of the New Testament are the only extensive authentic sources of information about those acts of God.

The four Gospels are not precisely of the genre history, but they contain a very special species of history, truthful reports of events in time. Though not very specific about the timeframe, the nature of the events themselves is clear if the records are permitted to speak for themselves.

The first Christian generation heard the story of redemption from eyewitnesses – at least the earliest ones did. We, however, depend upon the written testimony of the eyewitnesses. There is no alternate dependable source at this late date.

The element Christianity calls history (events which happened, not mere reports of them) in our religion accounts in large part for the preponderance of narrative in most of the Bible up to the Epistles in the New Testament. It also is the reason why the 'Gospels' are Gospels – more about this later.

Doctrines – The Biblical Meaning of the Redemptive History.

There is an essential second element in our religion. The events of biblical salvation history – God's acts of redemption – have meaning. They must be interpreted, and are seminally interpreted, in the same Scriptures which report God's acts. This interpretation is known as doctrine.

The late J. Gresham Machen explained this matter well:

From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name 'gospel' or 'good news' implies, consisted of an account of something that had happened. And when from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth there was Christian doctrine. 'Christ died' – that is history. 'Christ died for our sins' – that is doctrine. Without these two elements joined in an absolutely indissoluble union there is no Christianity.¹

The death of Christ taken as a naked fact is not a doctrine, not even a very significant fact. Julius Caesar died. So did my dear father over forty years ago and my dear mother over fifteen years ago. 'It is appointed for man to die once.' There is no special meaning for the human race in the fact that a man, even a sinless man, died unless someone in a position to have the facts tells us why and what for. The death of Christ, as we sometimes hear it correctly said, had a cosmic meaning. Statement of the fact with the meaning it has for the world of sinful people is a statement of Christian doctrine. We call it the doctrine of atonement.

There is a modern approach to Christianity which holds all doctrines to be assertions of and interpretations of religious experience. My liberal-Niebuhr college professor of religion, for example, claimed that Luther's doctrine of Justification by Faith was the Reformer's interpretation of his religious experience of forgiveness and acceptance by God. Of course, Luther himself, who found the doctrine in evangelical Psalms, Galatians and Romans as he prepared his sermons for the congregation of one of the churches of Wittenberg, said it was the other way around. First he learned the doctrine of Justification of David and Paul on the ground of Jesus' shed blood, appropriated by faith alone. After he believably appropriated the righteousness of God he had wonderful Christian religious experiences.

The distinction between redemptive facts of Christianity and doctrine must not be pressed too far, for it does not apply to all doctrines or facts. Some teachings, which must be called doctrines, are revealed truths. Among these are the present ministry for us by Christ in heaven, His Second Advent and the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is part Christian interpretation of events of history (e.g. events at Jesus' baptism) and part revealed truth.

Furthermore, there are some doctrines uniformly believed by Christians everywhere, confessed and proclaimed, that are not spelled out in any verse of the Bible, but are quite as certain as if they were. Some doctrines have comprehensive exact statement in a single text of the Bible. Some do not. Why that is true and what theologians have done about it must be reserved for later.

1. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), p. 27.

Insistence on proclamation of these two elements, the interpretation of facts, and history and its meaning, is found repeatedly in the New Testament. Yet, in spite of that, about every generation or so, another emphasis, 'another gospel', 'which is not another', is proposed. When I began to learn about such things in college the prevalent notion in Protestant centres of ministerial training in America was that the apostles' superior grasp of eternal, moral principles taught by Jesus and exemplified by Him was the gospel that conquered the empire of Rome. Another world depression, Hitler, a Second World War and general dissolution of liberalism scotched that fable. Then in America the gospel of existential experience (neo-orthodoxy) came and went. After that 'the image of God in man' theology, promoting self-fulfilment as the essential Christian gospel came along. There have been and are other theologies. A whole series of books about these and other ephemeral theologies sits on the back shelves of many a preacher's private library today. Like the rest of the world (1 John. 2:17) they are all 'passing away'.

The Lives of Countless Believers.

It probably seems obvious to anyone who thinks about it that in some manner Christianity is properly to be equated with all the Christian people one knows. This is at least partially correct. Christianity is life, human life of a very special kind. Here we must briefly consider some more biblical history and apostolic testimony.

Notice how Paul ties redemptive history and the meaning of it within his own life as essential, true religion: 'Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Phil. 1:20,21). 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20 NIV).

This is what Christianity has been from its beginning. The beginnings of Christianity, as reported in Acts and Epistles and Revelation, are now again acknowledged even by many critical scholars as definite historical phenomena, not mythical or imaginary. This is in spite of two centuries of every conceivable attack on the genuineness of the accounts. Christianity began a few days after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. It was not an absolute beginning for it existed in preliminary form as soon as Jesus gathered that original group of five or six who accompanied Him the first year of His public ministry. They did not even have a collective name until years later, at Antioch of Syria, their neighbours named them, 'Christians' (Acts 11:26).

Somehow the fact got abroad into public knowledge that not only was Christ their teacher, example and Savior, but that He lived in them and with them. Paul did not invent the theology of Christian life we read of in these statements quoted above from Philippians 1:20, 21 and Galatians 2:20.

Development of the idea of Christian life, individual and as a group, will come later in these studies. The dynamics of it, however, are on display beginning with the first chapter of Acts through the end of Revelation. In a nutshell, the elements were constant attention (*proskarterountes*) to apostolic doctrine (*didachē*), to the fellowship (*koinōnia*), to the special central fact of worship, i.e. 'the breaking of the bread', to their prayers together (Acts 2:41, 42 and 4:23-41) and to their public testimony (Acts 2:43-47 and 5:12-42). These were irresistible to outsiders, purifying to insiders and enviable to competitors for the hearts of mankind.

There has been much interest among historians and philosophers about what caused the Christian movement to succeed. What forces were at work in overwhelming the Roman Empire by Christianity in the three centuries from about AD 30 to about AD 315? Industrious readers will find the matter discussed learnedly in Edward Gibbon's multi-volumed *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Adolph Harnack's *The History of Dogma*, Ernst Troeltsch's *The Social Teachings of the Churches*, Kenneth Scott Latourette's *The History of Christianity* and even Arnold J. Toynbee's multi-volumed *Study of History*. There are many differences and agreements in part among these five writers. All agree, however, that moral quality of the lives of these early Christian people, in concert with their love one for another, and care for the welfare of all mankind, set them apart. These qualities came gradually to be grudgingly admired in spite of harassment by a succession of emperors, in vain hope of saving the corrupt society of ancient Roman paganism from ruin, without deigning to acknowledge any of the claims of Christianity.

The same quality of life is of the essence of biblical Christianity. Professed religion anywhere without it is less than the religion of which Jesus is the heart, life and centre.

An Institution-Church, Churches, and Organization

There is a fourth element – the public association of believers together in congregations. They have a corporate life together, partially observable to all men. In John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is introduced, rather early in his journey from the City of Destruction to Mount Zion, to the great house 'built by the LORD of

the hill, for the relief and security of pilgrims'. There he became acquainted with Prudence, Piety and Charity, was furnished companionship and nourishment and sent on his way toward the celestial destination panoplied with the full armour of God. This he found useful at every future stage of the journey.

The people in these visible local associations also think of themselves as members of a world-wide spiritual commonwealth of believers. These living believers, together with all deceased believers now in heaven, are all together 'the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven' (Heb. 12:23) and constitute 'the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph. 1:22, 23).

This unity of the believers both locally and universally is so central in the New Testament portrayal of Christianity that our religion can neither be discussed nor possessed without reference to it. There is no such thing as having Christ, or loving, admiring or confessing Him without similar participation in 'the church'. This is the way Christ Himself, determined the matter to be. For reasons of space and good order an adequate exposition of the church as a doctrine will await its proper place in this treatment of doctrines. The features of the church which distinguish it from other social groups will then be examined. The church of today is inseparable, in reality and thought about it, from the church of yesterday and the church of tomorrow. It is both a heavenly reality and an earthly entity. The history of Christianity and the history of the church may be distinguished but not separated.

Christianity, to summarize, exists under four inseparable aspects: (1) *redemptive acts of God in history*; (2) *doctrines*, which are apostolic interpretation of the meaning of that history; (3) the *lives* of those who have embraced the redemptive acts of God in history and the apostolic interpretation of them; and (4) the *Church* (Heb. 12:23) 'of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven'.

II. What Systematic Theology is.

It is apparent that a book of 'theology', even though we have not fully defined theology as yet, is connected closely with the 'doctrine' aspect of Christianity. 'What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches and confesses on the basis of the Word of God: this is Christian doctrine... The Christian church would not be the church as we know it without Christian doctrine.'²

When what the church teaches is announced as it emerges portion by portion from the Bible the discourse is properly called *exposition*. The process of exploring the texts and bringing out the meaning in preparation for exposition is *exegesis*. Particular teachings are *doctrines*. These doctrines are believed and confessed regularly by Christians in their gatherings for worship, in classes and groups as well as privately to their neighbours. When these doctrines are organized into some logically coherent arrangement there is systematic theology. As shall become evident, *systematic theology* is more than logical arrangement of biblical doctrines, but it must not ever be less if it is rightly to claim the title, Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion.³ There are other adjectives used with 'theology' – biblical, historical, practical, dogmatic, symbolic – but for now we will attend only to systematic theology.

Sustained study of doctrines of the Word of God cannot avoid organized, coherent arrangement of the doctrines, nor should it. Meaningful study of botany, zoology, law, history, medicine, agriculture or any other topic cannot proceed without organized, coherent arrangement of the data.

If new believers are to be instructed, false doctrines exposed, described and corrected, and if the teachings of the Bible are to be seen in their wholeness, then something not in the written book called the Bible but written in human nature must be brought to it. We call it orderly arrangement or system.

To illustrate, nature has put a hundred species of plants all together in one acre of hillside forest on my small farm. But to know and use what is there – even though I was reared on a farm and my ancestors for at least ten generations have been 'yankee farmers' – I have bought several books on botany: one on flowers, others on shrubs, deciduous trees, coniferous trees and so on. I even bought several on lumber and another on firewood. Similarly the *topics* of theology loci, (Latin for 'places', in English *lo-see*, singular, *lo-kus*) were born of rational necessity for thinking people. These loci usually begin with God, then move on to revelation (Holy Scripture), mankind, sin, redemption (Christ's person and work), salvation (application of redemption), church and last things. These loci can no more be avoided than hooks in a closet, shelves in a pantry or library, or drawers in a filing cabinet.

2. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 1.

3. J. O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962, 1971).

Persuading Objectors to Theology.

The moods of recent decades, even in theological schools, have not always been favourable to the study of systematic theology – not even to the study of doctrines of church, denomination or even of Christianity itself. This may be the fruit of commonly low opinions of authority of all kinds among the young – though that may be passing. Yet, even among those hardly to be regarded as lawless in spirit, there has been widespread genuine suspicion of systematic approaches to Christian doctrines. The ‘pietist’ flavour of popular, evangelical theology certainly has had something to do with this distrust. ‘How can you say anybody’s beliefs are right and another’s wrong’ was one new student’s response to my third lecture and twenty-five pages into the textbook for the course, not long ago. I wondered who had admitted this sophomore (‘wise fool’) to a graduate course in theology. ‘Post-modern’ was not yet a respectable category.

Whatever it is that causes suspicion of systematic theology, it frequently comes out as a preference for something called ‘biblical theology’ even when the objector may not know what biblical theology is. It seems very intellectual and pious to assume prejudice or hoary-headed sectarian controversies control ‘systematics’ while to derive doctrines from fresh, inductive study of Scripture gives the Holy Spirit a chance to teach us. John 16:12 may be cited out of context to support this outlook. It is not an entirely unworthy attitude, however erroneous. If one has not yet thought through the implications of what the Bible has to say about the gift of ‘teacher’ and ‘teachers’, Christ’s Lordship over truth and warnings against theological independence, an atmosphere of doctrinal non-commitment seems quite admirable. The subtlety of Satan has taken quick advantage of many who looked at revealed truth in this way.

A true story about a theological student will convey the matter neatly. He was a bright young man in a course leading to the M.A. degree in church history at the seminary. There was a required ‘minor comprehensive’ examination in systematic theology which, to his dismay and disgust, he failed utterly. As department chairman in charge of a second try, and with some lenity, I allowed the student to read the college level *Manual of Christian Doctrine* by Louis Berkhof, and to document and to make a satisfactory written report in lieu of a second try at the examination. Reading this standard work was his very first experience with theology and it completely changed his mind about the value of systematic theology in education for a Christian ministry of any kind. In his report I was pleased to read the following conversion – uncoerced by me, for he did not need to respond personally. ‘I came to Trinity with a strong anti-theological bias and I wanted to study church history without studying theology. The fact that I imagined such a thing to be possible... indicates the extent of my ignorance of both disciplines. As one might expect, I spent an extremely foggy first year.’

He goes on to say he did poorly on his papers in church history, the area of his major, because he did not understand the theological issues involved. He acknowledged that the theology book I required him to read had not only fascinated him but compelled him to change what he now called ‘unsupported dogmas’ of his own. The report closed as follows:

The greatest value of the book was in setting boundaries for discussion. When one studies church history, the field looks infinite... there is no end to the topics and this is extremely frustrating. There is something reassuring about being able to examine a book from cover to cover [Berkhof’s *Manual*] and know that one has at least an introduction to all the subject area within a given discipline. I have never had a course in introduction to theology: the reading of Berkhof could not actually replace such a course, but it did provide the general overview of the field which I needed but did not want [desire]. I am not yet a theologian, but I know what I will need to become one.

It is good to know that this young man settled down to complete a standard course of education for the Christian ministry, including, of course, all the required systematic theology studies.

Biblical Mandate for Formal Theological Training.

Is there a specific biblical mandate for setting up schools of training for pastors, missionaries and evangelists and, if so, must systematic doctrinal study be a part of it? Do we really need teachers? Is it not true that if serious Christians would only gather together with Bibles on their laps, read together, and share their insights and experiences, this is all they need to understand the Word of God? Is something less explicit than formal, guided study under authorized

teachers possible and, if so, is it desirable? Is there intellectual depth to Christianity which justly challenges the best minds? If so, does that require the same sorts of intellectual rigour which is the case in many other areas of human culture? The answer to all these questions is not far to seek.

Let us start with Jesus. He lived out His days as a biblical Jew, according to the requirements and instructions of the Law and the Prophets. They spoke to Jesus with authority. The synagogue, its school and rabbis were part of His youthful training. He asserted that to search the Old Testament is a part of the true way of eternal life.

This attitude of Jesus He passed on to the apostles, all of whom were already committed to the same outlook. They followed Jesus everywhere, being schooled thereby in one of the accepted pedagogical methods of the ancient world, i.e. they were true 'Peripatetics' though not quite after the Aristotelian model.

Many times He promised they would understand fully what He had been saying only after His resurrection. So, at one of His first post-resurrection meetings with the apostles He 'opened their minds that they might understand the Scriptures' (Luke 24:45). From then forward the Hebrew Scriptures became for Jesus' followers a Christian book. All the vast resources of that treasury of religious literature instantly became part of the Christian tradition with distinctly Christian meaning. All truth of Old Testament biblical religion, all that was true even in first century Judaism, became sources of Christian doctrines. This great body of truths answers the deepest questions ever to occupy human minds – about the origin of the world, the nature of humanity, about the Godhead, sin, evil, salvation, the future life and many other things.

The apostles were custodians of their Master's teachings, truths to be transmitted to those who would believe through their word. From the first the Christian congregations gathered regularly to give attention to the apostles' 'doctrine'. There is merit, if not pressed too far, in distinguishing their preaching of the good news (gospel, evangel) from their instruction in doctrine. Doctrine in the Acts and Epistles often translates *didachē*, from the Greek word to teach. *Didachē* is not usually 'proclaimed as by a herald' whereas gospel or evangel was proclaimed as by a herald; hence its preaching was *kerygma*, from *kērusso*, to proclaim. The gospel, when considered narrowly, is only a segment of the proclamation of Christianity, as Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 15. The teaching (*didachē*) contains the gospel, but the gospel does not contain all the teaching. After a lesson or two anyone can tell someone else the good news with its simple corollaries. Hence there are useful tracts like 'Four things God wants You to Know' – in use as long as most of us have been alive.

Doctrine is something else. It is like the *halakoth*, or moral precepts of rabbinical Judaism. Minimally the many passages in the New Testament, employing *didachē* and the several other words for doctrines, require that we distinguish a more complete statement of Christianity alongside the proclamation of salvation. The *didachē* may be characterized as a statement, with full explanation, chiefly to believers, of the entire Christian revelation. Most of these doctrines were already contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, what Christians call the Old Testament. Christ had opened their minds that they might understand these Scriptures in a Christian way (see Luke 24:25, 26, 44-49).⁴ This was and is the basis of Christian theology along with the New Testament revelation.

This task of instruction was of sufficient magnitude and importance that the first congregation 'devoted themselves [*proskaterountes*] to the apostles' teaching' (Acts 2:42). It was also boldly stated to unbelievers of the Jewish nation (Acts 5:28). It sometimes accompanied, even preceded, announcement of the gospel in missionary evangelism (see Acts 13:12; 17:19).

This body of doctrine was a treasure committed by the apostles to the next generation of believers. Paul, though he did not derive his message directly from any of the Twelve, nevertheless preserved the same methods and emphasis in regard to the instruction of Pauline churches. Therefore, typically a Pauline Epistle will devote the major first part to Christian doctrines and in the second turn to ethics and practices of Christian living.

In the Pastoral Epistles Paul instructs leaders of the churches to devote prior attention to this deposit of truth. These three letters (1 and 2 Tim. and Titus) are among the most conservative in tone of any literature. The last thing Paul or his corps of pastors wished to be was 'innovative' in their doctrines. They may have pioneered new methods of evangelism (though always through 'the foolishness of preaching' [1 Cor. 1:21 *kjv*]) but they thought of themselves as conservators of known truths not inventors of new ones.

4. I explain further the relevance of all the Old Testament to Christology in my book *The Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976, 1991), pp. 1–36. This book is now *The Earthly Career of Jesus, the Christ* (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publ., 2002).

There is considerable evidence that the gist of doctrinal affirmation took on a fixed verbal form for liturgical recitation. Researches of C. H. Dodd a couple of generations ago promoted this understanding among many scholars. Whether the words were the same everywhere or not, in this early period of apostolic and Catholic Christianity, it was important to all the Fathers whose writings comment on the matter, that doctrines (what was believed, taught and confessed) be the same in every congregation. The Fathers inherited this outlook from the apostles, especially Paul whose speeches in Acts and exhortations in his Epistles show how great was his concern for uniformity of doctrines everywhere.

Paul besought the Corinthians all to 'speak the same thing... perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment'. There is but 'one faith', he said. The pastor's sermon was to contain only 'sound words', 'the trustworthy word... sound doctrine' and 'sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God' (1 Cor. 1:10 KJV; Eph. 4:5; 2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 1:10-11). These are some of the expressions demonstrating Paul's insistence on a uniform orthodoxy, perhaps even a standard verbal form or creed-like outline of doctrines, in the apostolic churches.

Such mandates for giving 'constant attention to the apostles' doctrine', that is, doctrines announced in the Old Testament, refined by Jesus, illuminated by the Spirit, enlarged by apostles, uniform in all the churches, would have been impossible to effect without a staff of exponents – teachers, elders – call them clergy if you like, educated for their vocation. The churches everywhere were in immediate need for the services of teachers who had mastered the body of doctrine received from the founders.

The notion that Christianity ever was for any extended period capable of maintaining itself as a 'wholly spiritual' movement bound together on spiritual, ethical and social principles only – without organization, having no recognized trained leadership and committed to no official teachings (only the word *dogma* seems to fit) – is impossible to maintain in light of the evidence. It certainly was not true of the early church. Even some Plymouth Brethren have conceded that not every new 'assembly' comes to birth with all the spiritual gifts and those gifted to be 'pastors and teachers'. Very late they have 'discovered' that their founding Fathers were all thoroughly educated and theologically trained Anglican clergymen.

If there were to be teachers who had mastered what Scripture, Jesus and the apostles taught, there had to be some programme of instruction. If so, then there were likely also recognized schools of theology. We know of several located in metropolitan churches, for example, in Caesarea, Antioch and Alexandria in the subapostolic age. How about schools for the training of pastors and teachers in Paul's time among the churches he founded? All the twelve apostles were graduates of the 'peripatetic' school of Jesus. Paul was a learned man already and mentions his private studies after conversion over several years (Gal. 1:18; see Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:4-6) before setting off on apostolic mission. He, himself, schooled his own missionary corps.

It should be expected that he would establish means of perpetuating a trained ministry to serve on after he was gone from earth – schools of theology – in any centre where Christians became numerous. Ephesus was such a place. It is close to certain Paul established such a school there. This is the significance some theologians and exegetes have found in 2 Timothy 2:1, 2: 'You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others' (NIV).

I quote only two of several theologians who could be cited. Francis Pieper, a leading theologian for the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, wrote this summary statement, 'Timothy performed the work of a theological professor when he committed the things he had learned from the Apostle Paul "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).' He quotes the Lutheran scholar Quenstedt on oral teaching by professors of theology to student ministers in theological schools. This text, he goes on to say, 'teaches and establishes the mysteries of the faith and refutes the errors contrary to sound doctrine more accurately and copiously, and is the province of bishops and preachers in the church'.⁵

A most convincing argument that this verse mandates a theological seminary in the ancient city of Ephesus was proposed by Alfred Plummer as now follows. I quote only certain leading statements from Plummer's comments on 2 Timothy 2:2 in *The Expositor's Bible, The Pastoral Epistles*:

5. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics vol. i* (St. Louis: Concordia Publ., 1950), p. 43.

In this tenderly affectionate address we have a very early indication of the beginnings of Christian *tradition* and Christian *schools*, two subjects intimately connected with one another... He [Paul]... exhorts him [Timothy] to make proper provision for continuity of sound teaching in the church [Ephesus] committed to his care. In other words, before leaving his flock in order to visit his spiritual father and friend, he is to establish a school, – a school of picked scholars, intelligent enough to appreciate, and trustworthy enough to preserve, all that has been handed down from Christ and His Apostles respecting the essentials of the Christian faith... [the authentic and only gospel and *didache*, Gal. 1:6-9].⁶

Plummer goes on to say that Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 ‘from the outset’ commanded such provision for ‘the tradition’ and for ‘Christian schools’. He further showed how ‘experience has proved how entirely necessary such [schools] are’ (p. 466). The doctrine and order of the churches tend to be only as sound as the sources (schools or otherwise) where their pastors receive their training.

Plummer wrote as a thoroughly informed orthodox Anglican. He was fully aware of the school of thought embodied in the Modernism of Adolph Harnack, which contended Paul had overthrown original Christianity, that continuity between Jesus’ teachings and the doctrine of the second century church had been almost totally lost. This gives both importance and poignancy to Plummer’s still fully relevant closing remarks on 2 Timothy 2:1-2, as follows:

But what is certain respecting the earliest ages of the church is this, that in every Church regular instruction in the faith was given by persons in authority specially selected for this work, and frequent intercourse between Churches showed that the substance of the instruction given was in all cases the same, whether the form of the words was identical or not. These facts, which do not by any means stand alone, are conclusive against the hypothesis [Harnack’s] that between the Crucifixion and the middle of the second century a complete revolution in the creed was effected; and the traditional belief of Christians is not that which Jesus of Nazareth taught, but a perversion of it which owes its origin mainly to the overwhelming influence of His professed follower, but virtual supplanter, Saul of Tarsus.⁷

In view then of the obvious importance of this text (2 Tim. 2:2), let us enlarge upon it.

Theological education for ministers is a very large undertaking. It is utterly reasonable that every seminary or department which intends to prepare pastors and missionaries will have some distinct features since its mandate, is distinct from all others. Let us therefore seek to understand in detail and as fully as possible what this, the only such text in the New Testament, has to say to the people who found or manage such schools and to tell students what they have a right to expect.

1. Mandate.

The mandate for a special theological school for the ministry is provided in Paul’s ‘Therefore’ (κϰν). He had been expressing concern for ‘the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me’ throughout chapter 1 (see 2 Tim. 1:13) and was aware of a particular doctrinal peril from heresies originating in the very province (Asia) in which Ephesus was located. So this very practical Apostle has in mind two reasons for founding a school of theology. The primary one was *catechetical*, the necessity of thoroughly grounding the preachers in the doctrines of Christianity; the secondary one was *apologetical*, preparing the teacher to repel the perversions of aggressive promoters of error and heresy. There are therefore sound reasons to assume schools of Christian theology have existed from the very beginning and will of necessity always exist in some form or other for these same two reasons.

2. Subject Matter.

Nor are we without guidance as to the subject matter of a sound theological education. Timothy knew exactly what it was: the things that he had heard Paul say. As 2 Timothy 1:13 puts it, he was to ‘Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me’. The content of teaching was to be a body of truth, elsewhere designated as ‘teachings’ (*didaskalia*), truths ‘committed to... trust’ imperiled by ‘godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge’ (1 Tim. 6:20 NIV). No doubt Timothy knew something about inductive study and the methods of historical research, as anyone in a learned profession, but neither was particularly relevant to the heart of the Christian Theological Academy of Ephesus where Timothy served as dean. His assignment was faithful transmission

6. Alfred Plummer, *The Pastoral Epistles. The Expositor’s Bible* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1908), p. 466.

7. *ibid.*, p. 469.

of truth already defined and made available to him through the Apostle Paul's oral instructions. He was not therefore directed to head up a research project – valuable as research in the present age of the world may be. Paul's *Ekousas* (aorist) 'what you have heard' sounds for all the world like listening to sermons and lectures and not at all like doing research and writing papers (again, valuable in a certain context). The origin and authority of these teachings in the Apostles, and ultimately from Christ, Himself, has been mentioned earlier and will demand extended attention again in connection with the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

3. Public Quality.

The public quality of these teachings is plain. Timothy had heard it *dia pollōn marturiōn*, 'among many witnesses' (KJV and ASV), 'before' (RSV), 'in the presence of' (NASB, NIV). The Greek preposition *dia* with the genitive, as here, ordinarily means 'through', though the translations give the necessary sense that what Paul had transmitted to a group, of which Timothy was a part, and has now become common property, is to be transmitted in similar public manner (church, classrooms, etc.) to another generation. Here is a sort of freedom of information statute for Christian doctrine. Though we do not ordinarily conduct our doctrine classes in the street (even a university setting is generally inappropriate), our lectures are open. Only the interested will come, but the information is not a *gnosticism* which only the initiated may hear. Observers of all sorts may be admitted, though membership may be restricted to believers. Strictly to the point, tenets of the Christian religion have nothing in common with rituals and formulae of secret societies and mystery religions which only initiates and lodge members may know. Christ tells us not to cast our pearls before swine or give holy things to dogs, as it were, but truly interested people are neither intellectual nor spiritual swine and dogs. They are welcome to learn. This being true, no special jargon is strictly necessary to theology, however useful specific, technical terms may be. A good term, say 'Providence', may save a lot of time in discussion if everyone understands it. Such words – and there are many useful ones – are of value as they serve to conserve time, summarize or elucidate ideas, and promote clear communication of ideas. As mere marks of erudition they are useless and should be avoided. On the other hand, beginners must be both patient and industrious enough to learn the special terms as they come along. Anyone can master the ideas which they represent, given industry, a little time and spiritual inclination.

4. Pedagogical Method.

The pedagogical method is specified in 'entrust', or more exactly, *these things* (Gr. *tauta*) 'entrust to faithful men'.

The usefulness of scientific experiments, of data-gathering and inductive reasoning, in many areas of knowledge may not be questioned. There is a widely diffused notion that skills, techniques and special information basic to professions such as law, medicine, engineering and the like need not be mastered by those aspiring to be pastors and Christian teachers in the office of the ministry. Such thinking is contradictory to common sense, and here, contradictory to Scripture also. From the beginning there was a body of Christian doctrine to be learned. It was not going to be codified and organized for a long time into the future, but in seminal form it was all there, not to be researched, but mastered. The truths were to be *set before* or *put before* as food on a table. The Greek word is *paraitihēmi*, also used of Jesus' setting His parables before the disciples (Matt. 13:24, 31).

5. Recipients.

The subjects, that is the ones instructed in the theological school, are 'faithful men' ('reliable men' NIV).

An important matter is present here. The word is not 'believing men' but 'faithful men'. The former would be *pisteuouisi*; the latter (in the text before us) is *pistoi*s, dative plural of *pistos*, faithful.

Christian truths belong to all Christians, but not everyone is equipped by nature and the special gifts of the Holy Spirit to be a teacher. So the church needs to make provision that some be trained in order to be 'able to teach others also'. Paul's rhetorical question 'Are all teachers?' (1 Cor. 12:29) implies that *not* all are teachers. This is true in the home. Parents teach the children, not the other way around. Not every Christian is required to be a teacher of the Word. Only a small group *must* be 'able to teach' (1 Tim. 3:2, *didaktikon*, related to *didaskō* to teach), i.e. the bishop (=elder or pastor). It is therefore both lawful and wise that those admitted to this kind of education at church expense be approved ahead of time. Or if that is impractical, then at least, as Francis Pieper wrote: 'Therefore men must not be elected to the teaching office by lot or in any other haphazard way; only such may be chosen as possess the qualifications set down in 1 Tim. 3:1 ff; Titus 1:5-11, one of which is a special aptitude to teach [others].'⁸

6. Goal.

The goal of special theological education is that those so instructed be 'able to teach others also'. This is not, specifically, evangelism. Only by a very loose employment of language is it 'discipling'. If one wishes to speak exactly, disciples are not made by theological education, though certainly it is not irrelevant. Disciples of Christ are His confessed followers – i.e. *public* Christians. Ordinarily they become so by public baptism. Of course, the ones who are instructed and who are obedient are better disciples than those who are uninstructed and disobedient. The preparation of these men is in order to teach all the believers: 'able to teach others [other Christians] also'. There is a large body of Scripture information on the ministry of pastoral teaching. Let it await the proper locus in the doctrine of the church.

Every experienced preacher and teacher knows that there are several levels of theological teaching. The one appropriate for everyone at the same time is the sermon. Yet, as we should know, preaching good sermons takes extraordinary skill, especially when they must be delivered by the same minister one to three or four times a week to the same band of listeners, week after week, year in and year out.

The study of theology is therefore particularly important for ministers of the Word throughout their years of preaching and teaching. Since all believers are admonished by Scripture to deepen their understanding of divine things, the study of theology in a structured manner is appropriate for everyone. 'In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil' (Heb. 5:12-14 NIV).

8. Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 40.