

Systematic Theologies

With the market flooded by thousands of books claiming to do you spiritual good, the young believer needs some assistance in determining what is safe to read. This is especially true today since there are so many dangerous books around.

When it comes to theological works, wisdom is required in order not to be led astray. By following unbiblical, but popular, systems many have become entrenched in error that affects every aspect of their life. In some cases this has led to some making a shipwreck of their faith. Just because something claims to be Biblical truth, it doesn't mean that it is. There is a whole system of theology that is extremely popular in church circles, but which was founded only 178 years ago and emerged from a totally heretical and scandalised church.¹ None of its basic foundational doctrines have any pedigree in church history and the fruit of some proponents has led to widespread deceptions.²

Another widespread system emerged from ancient Semi-Pelagianism, opposed by the Church Fathers, and was condemned by a council of international, well-respected theologians when it began to appear in the early 1600s. It was later foisted upon England by deceitful means through the work of Jesuits in collusion with a heretical, persecuting Archbishop but was eventually adopted by Methodists, and gradually became the common position of most evangelicals.³

Since works emanating from these two spurious positions are commonplace, Biblical students need some advice regarding what to read.

What follows is some information regarding systematic theologians and their works. Now we may not agree with everything that a particular theologian says, but the following men can be trusted on all essential matters. There are some very significant disagreements amongst those that follow; Baptists do not hold to (Presbyterian) Covenant Theology, which naturally results in the doctrine of paedobaptism (infant baptism). There are big questions over the basis of Covenant Theology (Federal Theology), a system that developed 100 years after Calvin, but we cannot delve into that here. Covenant is an important doctrine but this system has some value and some weaknesses.

There is also disagreement as to the manner of baptism. Presbyterians will use pouring and/or sprinkling while most Baptists insist upon immersion only. In fact there is good scriptural evidence for both forms and no one can definitively deny one or the other. In fact the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo* has less to do with the application of the water and more to do with why the ritual is being performed.

There are many other more minor disagreements, such as church government and structure or how sanctification occurs. However, all of these are Reformed as regards salvation. This means that they are Calvinistic concerning the doctrines of grace: the Fall of man, sin, depravity, election, predestination, atonement, grace, regeneration, perseverance. They are also pretty united regarding the doctrine of God and his work: the

¹ Dispensationalism, which started its life in Edward Irving's heretical church in London. Early influences upon Irving's system came from two Jesuits: Manuel Lacunza and Cardinal Ribera. It's central teaching of a secret rapture arose from a sick teenage girl given to occult visions in 1830. These origins were covered up and the credit for Dispensationalism given to the more acceptable Brethren leader JN Darby.

² For instance the Lordship controversy in America or the Jewish Root Mvt.

³ Arminianism. The Wesleyan form is called Evangelical Arminianism since it slightly moderated the continental version.

Trinity, the attributes of God, the Father, The Son, the Spirit, providence, creation, judgment, heaven, hell etc.

The usual loci (treatments of a particular subject) of systematic theologies are:

1. Revelation – The authority of scripture. ['Bibliology']
2. God – Theology.
3. Man - Anthropology. [Plus the doctrine of sin – Hamartiology.]
4. Christ - Christology.
5. The Holy Spirit - Pneumatology.
6. Salvation - Soteriology.
7. Church - Ecclesiology.
8. The Last Things - Eschatology.

Sometimes there are variations on this scheme. Often a separate section on the Holy Spirit is omitted, his work being discussed in other sections (e.g. The Trinity and the application of the work of Christ in regeneration, sanctification, etc.).

Some works are established on a completely different format. An example of this is Turretin's dogmatics, which he calls an '*Elenctic Theology*' meaning that it is based on questions and answers. Hodge's *Outlines* is also based on this form under many chapter headings. Calvin's *Institutes* follows his own system based upon God's sovereignty and decrees. Other works take the form of lecture notes under multiple chapter headings, such as Dabney's *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Some useful theological works are collections of articles on various subjects, examples being Dabney's *Discussions* or Warfield's *Works*. There are also very helpful treatments that are commentaries on historic creeds, confessions and catechisms, such as Hoeksema on The Heidelberg Catechism, or Williamson on the Westminster Standards.

It is very useful, indeed necessary if one is doing serious studies, to compare several systematic theologies on various issues. Often one writer will expose a flaw in another or add a significant point that was missed. Only by comparing various viewpoints will the serious student get to the truth.

Now the ordinary Bible student does not need to get involved in this depth. However, anyone who is tempted to purchase a systematic theology to use as an encyclopaedic help in Bible reading needs to know what is safe and what is not. Though my views here are my own, and may well be criticised by some, I believe them to be a sound help to preserve God's people from error. To avoid offence, many offer no guidance on this issue, and so the Lord's people end up reading works that then lead them astray – and they may not even know why. I would rather risk offending men than put an obstacle in the way of God's people.

Finally, why bother with all this if we have the Bible and good background information? Most people's approach to Biblical teaching is like a jig-saw; that is, all Biblical doctrines are like hundreds of pieces of a jig-saw spread on the floor. They spend much time with a few of the pieces so that they can describe every colour and form of their favourite pieces, yet they have no clue what the overall picture represents. What they should do is collate and assemble all the pieces together, not only to see what the picture is but also to learn what it teaches about the jig-saw maker. A systematic theology does this for us; it collates all Biblical doctrines and assembles them to fit with each other in certain groupings. By studying these we can have a sane framework to aid our understanding of scripture and avoid error. Such study is extremely valuable.

Trustworthy Systematic Theologies

- Bold type = particularly useful.
- Bold small caps = essential.
- As there are many editions and publishers of these works, no specific publisher is named and the date given is the original publication date. Where a work appeared as a number of volumes, the date refers to the last volume published.

à Brakel, Wilhelmus; *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2 vols.

(1635-1711) Dutch Reformed theologian of the 'Second Reformation'.

A thorough, and yet, practical examination of Reformed theology written for laymen. Many questions and answers about a particular doctrine, plus general evaluations. On some matters à Brakel is extremely valuable, however on others he is unsound, such as on eternal justification, daily justification and eternal reconciliation. He is always worth consulting and his work has been recently made available in English. There is a free CD Rom of this work available from the Ephesians Four Group. [www.e4.net]

Ames, William; *The Marrow of Theology* (3rd edition 1629)

(1576-1633) Ames is one of the giants of the early English Reformation along with Perkins, who was his teacher. He was also an observer at the Synod of Dort. Prof. of theology at Franeker, Holland, attracting students from all over Europe.

This work was quoted more often in early Puritan America than Luther or Calvin, so great was its usefulness. It was used as a textbook at Harvard and Yale. Some believed that it was the only book required other than the bible. Written for laymen, the work is concise and yet comprehensive. It is broken down into chapters and subdivided into numerous numbered points of explanation. This is the essence of Puritan theology.

Bancroft, Emery H; *Elemental Theology*, (1977).

(d. 1944) Co-founder and dean of the Baptist Bible Seminary, Johnson City, New York (now in Pennsylvania).

An attempt to give a concise and simplified analysis of Biblical doctrines, though it still occupies over 400 pages. The new edition has been revised by R B Meyers. A standard American Baptist textbook of theology.

Bavinck, Herman; **REFORMED DOGMATICS**, 4 vols. (2008).

(1854-1921) Dutch Reformed theologian. Prof. of systematic theol. at the Free Univ. of Amsterdam.

Certain books on specific subjects (Creation, God and The End) have been adapted from the larger work. *Our Reasonable Faith* is an abridged form of the larger work (1956).

Bavinck is a superb theologian and an independent thinker. *Reformed Dogmatics* is a one of the most able and thorough systematic theologies. Bavinck reveals clear and sometimes radical thinking; thoroughly intellectual and yet spiritually warm.

Berkhof, Louis; **SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY** (1939); *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (1932), *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (1933), **Summary of Christian Doctrine** (1938).

(1873-1957) President of Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

His 'Manual' is a simplified form of the systematic theology aimed at younger students. The 'Summary' is a short handbook of doctrine.

His systematic theology is probably the most well-known of all Reformed dogmatics and is constantly reprinted. It covers doctrines, counter positions and history in a well-constructed manner. Since Bavinck has been fully published in English for the first time recently, it becomes clear that Berkhof's usefulness derives from his heavy leaning on Bavinck.

Though there are areas of weakness, this is probably the most useful and easily accessed systematic theology and is constantly reprinted by Banner of Truth.

Berkouwer, Gerrit Cornelius; *Studies in Dogmatics*, 14 vols (1952-76).

(1903-) Prof. of systematic theol. at the Free Univ. of Amsterdam.

An attempt at a thorough analysis of Christian doctrines with a whole book on each main locus, or a part of a locus.

While enamoured by some, these studies often disappoint. There are good chunks, bad bits and weak portions. Furthermore, he is not sufficiently Reformed in certain areas. Not a necessary part of anyone's library but useful for comparison if available.

Boettner, Loraine; *Studies in Theology* (1953).

() American Presbyterian theologian; a student of Charles Hodge.

Boettner is always good, and able to explain theological depth in an easy manner. Though not a complete systematic theology, this collection of magazine articles comprises: inspiration, supernaturalism, the Trinity, Christ and atonement. To this we could add his book, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, which is one of the most thorough treatments of the doctrine.

Boice, James Montgomery; *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. 4 vols. abridged into 1 (1986)

(1938-) Pastor-theologian of 10th Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

An attempt at a popular and practical summary of Reformed theology from a pastor.

Boyce, James Pettigru; *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (1887).

(1827-1888) Prof. of systematic theol. at Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Baptist Reformed dogmatics with some independent thinking. Many chapters on one subject without association into main loci. Is available for download freely on the Internet.

Brown, John; *Systematic Theology*, (1782).

(1722-1787) This is John Brown of Haddington, the patriarch of several eminent descendants, three with the same name, who achieved fame as Biblical teachers.

This work is dense, but reasonably laid out into paragraphs for ease of study. Brown is always thorough, warm, spiritual, practical and drives you to search the scriptures. Heartily recommended.

Also of great use is his *Questions and Answers on the [Westminster] Shorter Catechism*.

Bullinger, Johann Heinrich; *The Decades of Bullinger*

(1504-1575) Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich, was a key Swiss Reformer and highly esteemed across Europe. He was deeply involved in the writing of the *Consensus Tigurinus* and the *Helvetic Confession*. He was slightly more moderate on predestination than Calvin and was a supporter of Erastianism (the state is involved in church affairs) against Presbyterianism.

The *Decades* are his best work, being fifty sermons on theological subjects divided into groups of ten. These were originally more popular than Calvin's institutes in England and have only recently become available in English for the first time since 1850.

Buswell, James Oliver; *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (1963). (1885-1975) President of Wheaton College & Dean of graduate faculty, Covenant College, St Louis, Missouri.
I have not got this and so I can't comment.

Calvin, John; ***INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION***, 2 vols. [Battles edition] (1559). (1509-1564) French-born, theologian, preacher, pastor, reformer at Geneva. This is the most famous work of the great reformer and systematiser of the Reformation. Many consider him to be the best teacher the world has known, combining profound theology with a heartfelt pastoral concern. This work changed the course of history and deeply affected Reformation Europe and future civilisations. There is still great value in reading this. It is also found on the Internet and several CD Rom packages.

Dabney, Robert Lewis; *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878); *Discussions*, 3 vols. (1890).

(1820-1898) Prof. at Union Seminary, Virginia. Of strong independent mind, Dabney is very helpful in discussions of a controversial nature. His systematic theology is thorough and detailed, often taking a singular line of argument. However, he can be obtuse and difficult to follow. Those who can cope with him find him invaluable. There is a free CD Rom of this work available from the Ephesians Four Group. [www.e4.net]
The Discussions are very interesting regarding issues of his time.

Dagg, John Leadley, ***Manual of Theology*** (1857) (1794-1884) President and Prof. of theology at Mercer Univ., Georgia and one of the most respected American Baptists. This was a pivotal work amongst 19th century Southern Baptists, and it was the first complete dogmatics published by a Baptist in America. Dagg is warm, clear, concise, thorough and, consequently, very useful. It was a welcome breath of fresh air when it appeared, in comparison to earlier elaborate, dense or even prolix works. It is also compact in form in the Gano Books publication (1990). Heartily recommended.

Erickson, Millard; *Christian Theology* (1985). *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (1992) a 70% abridged form of the first work.

(1932-) Dean at Bethel Theological Seminary, St Paul and Prof. at Southwestern Baptist Sem. Ft Worth. Dogmatics from a modern, Baptist, post-tribulational, premillennial, perspective. Not a first choice reference. Considered a standard Baptist work.

Gill, John; *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 2 vols. (1767) (1697-1771) Gill was a giant of learning, preaching, evangelism, and theology. He is the great champion of Reformed Baptists and often accused of Hyper-Calvinism. Gill is simply wrong on some key issues, particularly eternal justification. However, Gill does not ardently deny duty-faith as claimed by Gospel Standard Strict Baptists, as is demonstrated in many sermons. His, ***The Cause of God and Truth*** is a powerful proof of Calvinism as opposed to Arminianism. His *Body of Divinity* is not

an easy read and is, therefore, not first choice for reference. However, on certain subjects Gill is better than many others.

All Gill's works are available on CD ROM or via the Internet.

Goodwin, Thomas; *Works* (many reprints)

(1600-1680) Goodwin was a Calvinist Congregational Puritan (not to be confused with his contemporary John Goodwin who was one of the rare Arminian Puritans). He was the leader of the dissenting brethren at the Westminster Assembly a member of the Savoy Assembly (1658) and in 1649 made chaplain to the Council of State and in 1650 president of Magdalen College, Oxford. He was also an advisor to Oliver Cromwell. A friend and senior of John Owen he produced several volumes of sermons of theological, Biblical and devotional subjects that are very useful and highly thought of. However, due to the nature of Puritan exposition and the dense type with no breaks, they are typically hard to read without persistence and very difficult to dip into. Goodwin is noteworthy for his sermons on the sealing of the Spirit, which greatly influenced Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

Griffith Thomas, WH; *The Principles of Theology*, (1930)

(1861-1924) Anglican clergyman and Principal of Wycliffe Hall Oxford; Prof. of systematic theol. at Wycliffe College Toronto.

Anglican dogmatics based upon an exposition of the 39 Articles of the Church of England. Considered by JI Packer to be the fullest presentation of Evangelical truth produced by Anglicanism.

Heppe, Heinrich; *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated From the Sources*, (1861).

(1820-1879) German academic.

This work is really a collection of quotes from other theologians arranged according to systematic loci. Beloved by some, ignored by others. Many of the writers quoted are obscure. Not a first choice.

Hodge, Archibald Alexander; ***Outlines of Theology*** (1883). *The Confession of Faith* (1869). *Evangelical Theology: Lectures on Doctrine* (1890).

(1823-1886) AA Hodge was the son of Charles Hodge and Prof. of systematic theol. at Princeton Seminary.

Hodge had a deserved reputation for many complex things easy to understand in a warm style. His *Outlines* are extremely useful, being arranged in question and answer form under various chapter headings. The *Confession* is an exposition of the Westminster Confession and is also very helpful. The lectures are a more conversational style of doctrinal exposition and are very useful. There is a free CD Rom of the *Outlines & The Confession* available from the Ephesians Four Group. [www.e4.net]

Hodge, Charles; *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1873). and 1 vol. Abridged edition (1988).

(1797-1878) Prof. of systematic theology at Princeton. Hodge is a giant in American Reformed theology. His work is thorough and widely used as a text-book today. However, there are significant weaknesses, especially on creation vs. evolution. The one-volume edition would suffice most readers.

Hoeksema, Herman; ***Reformed Dogmatics*** 1 vol. (1966), *The Triple Knowledge* 3 vols. (1972).

(1886-1963) American-Dutch Reformed Pastor, theologian, preacher and leader of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Prof. of dogmatics in the theol. school of the PRC. One of the most independent and valuable theologians to come out of

America. A champion of orthodoxy who paid highly for his stance in a downgrade denomination (which he left).

He denies the idea of 'Common Grace' and the 'well-meant (or sincere) offer' in the Gospel [I agree with him].

Reformed Dogmatics is dense and could do with being edited graphically to make it more accessible to modern people. However, it is superb and deals with certain subjects more thoroughly than most works. He also wrote many helpful books, pamphlets and edited *The Standard Bearer* for many years. Many of these are free and available from the Protestant Reformed Churches in the US and N. Ireland.

The Triple Knowledge is an exposition, in three large volumes, of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Lewis, GR & Demarest, B; *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (1994).

Professors of systematic theology at a Baptist college (Denver Seminary).

It seeks to combine systematic theology with Biblical theology, historical analysis, apologetics and pastoral teaching.

Litton, Edward Arthur; *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, (1892).

(1813-1897) British theologian.

An Anglican approach to systematics.

Milne, Bruce; *Know the Truth*, (1982)

Minister at First Baptist Church, Vancouver. Former lecturer at Spurgeon's College, South London.

Intended by IVP to replace and update Hammond's *In Understanding Be Men*. Fairly standard explanation of doctrine in a concise manner. Not concise enough to be the handbook it claims to be, and not thorough enough to be a satisfying systematic theology. However, it is popular with students, which was its intended market.

Mullins, Edgar Young; *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*, (1917).

(1860-1928) President of the Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Standard Baptist dogmatics.

Murray, John; *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (1982).

(1898-1975) Prof. of systematic theol. at Westminster Seminary.

Murray can be extremely good and clear at times, and then extremely poor. Of an independent frame of mind he was right to question certain matters, however, he was very bad on the offer of the Gospel. His collected writings, as well as his other books, are a useful resource but they are not strictly a systematic theology.

Owen, John; *Works* (many reprints).

(1616-1683) Owen is perhaps the most intellectual Puritan Congregational divine and a thorough theologian; of great influence in modern conservative theology. A pastor and between 1649-51 was the chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. Later, the dean and then vice-chancellor of Christ Church, Oxford. He helped to compose the Savoy Declaration (1658). After being expelled from Christ Church, he again formed a church in his home and for 23 years was the undisputed leader of English nonconformity. Ministered in various churches, two that he planted himself.

His works are very detailed treatments of doctrinal and controversial issues that contain scholarly and helpful material. His 'Display of Arminianism' and his work on the 'Death of Death' (atonement) are classics. However, he is extremely dense and even prolix; sometimes his sentences last more than a page of small type.

Consequently these are only for the serious and most persevering students; yet on occasion Owen is better than anyone else.

Pink, AW; **VARIOUS BOOKS.**

(1886-1952) Independent writer for many years; formerly pastor of various churches in Australia and America and an itinerant teacher. His many books are collated from his monthly magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*.

Pink is an exceptional writer, able to clarify complex doctrinal matters in simple terms. He is also eminently practical, writing for laymen and not scholars. Though he never wrote a systematic theology, his many books cover most areas of dogmatic and practical theology. His full works are now available on a CD Rom quite cheaply. Though enamoured of the Puritans, he was not afraid to identify their weaknesses (as in *The Doctrine of Sanctification*). His clarity and independence of thought arises partly from his wide Christian background, from the Brethren to consistent Calvinism. One word of warning; some of his earlier works betray some heterodox ideas from the time of his earlier experiences before he achieved balance and maturity in theology. He openly admitted this. For instance, some Dispensational ideas emerge in early works like *The Antichrist*. Despite this weakness, Pink is heartily recommended.

Reymond, Robert L; **A NEW SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**, (1998).

() Prof. of systematic theol. at Knox Theol. Seminary, Fort Lauderdale.

This work arose from lectures to students at Covenant Theol. Seminary, St Louis and Knox Theol. Sem. Many consider it to be a modern replacement for Berkhof, however the two are quite different. Reymond is more thorough, especially in certain areas, more up to date on modern controversies, but is harder to access. Reymond is warm, often practical and always worth consulting. Probably if someone could only have one systematic theology, this would be it.

Shedd, WGT; **Dogmatic Theology**, 3 vols. (1889).

(1820-1894) Prof. at Union Theological Seminary, New York. Shedd is one of the few independent thinkers in Reformed theology and has very valuable things to say. He wrote a number of other works on useful subjects.

The work is unusual in that theological subjects are treated in volumes one and two, but are supplemented by additional studies in volume three. Unfortunately, these volumes are not laid out well and not easy to consult. However, Shedd is often brilliant in expounding key subjects and always worth consulting. These volumes cry out for someone to thoroughly edit them and present a comprehensive survey.

Strong, Augustus H; **Systematic Theology**, (1907).

(1836-1921) President of Rochester Theol. Seminary. Strong was a Baptist theologian and the first president of the Northern Baptist Convention.

This was a standard textbook for many Baptists in the past until it was superseded by Erickson's, *Christian Theology*. While useful for comparison, Strong is not always trustworthy, especially on the atonement where he takes a universal view.

Thornwell, James Henley; **Collected Writings**, 4 vols. (1873).

(1812-1862) Prof. of theology in the Presbyterian Theol. Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina.

Though occasionally a little dated and verbose, Thornwell can be extremely useful. Always worth consulting and sometimes brilliant.

Turretin, Francis; **Institutes of Elenctic Theology**, 3 vols. (1997).

(1623-1687) Prof. of theology at the Geneva Academy.

This is often stated to be one of the most thorough presentations of Reformed theology ever written and the Latin publication was a textbook in many colleges. Charles Hodge made much use of it. It was only made available in English in the 1990s and published by Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing. Though very extensive, the layout enables students to easily find what they are looking for. 'Elenctic' refers to the format of questions and answers.

Ussher, James; *A Body of Divinity. Being the Sum and Substance of the Christian Religion* (reprint 2007).

(1581-1656) Irish archbishop and scholar. Declined membership of the Westminster Assembly. Prime author of the Irish Articles (1615) based on the Lambeth Articles (1595). Though originally a high Calvinist, in later years Ussher drifted towards Hypothetical Universalism (like Davenant and Preston). [Hypothetical Universalism is the English form of continental Amyraldism, which it is very close to.]

His *Body of Divinity* has recently been published for the first time in many years and is considered by many to be very valuable.

Warfield, BB; **Works** in 10 vols. plus a number of other theological books.

(1851-1921) Prof. at Princeton Theol. Seminary. Probably one of the best American Reformed theologians.

Several volumes in his published works have been issued as single volumes by publishers. Other useful books include, *The Plan of Salvation*, *The Lord of Glory* and various sermons. Warfield is always worth consulting. He is usually easy to read and very thorough in his treatments.

Watson, Thomas; *Body of Practical Divinity*, ().

(d. 1689) Rector of St Stephen's, Walbrook; ejected by the Act of Uniformity.

These are sermons on the Westminster Catechism, considered by Spurgeon to be one of the most precious Puritan works. He showed a lively style combining sound doctrine with practical wisdom and has long been a favourite of Reformed students.

Recommendations

Baptist: Bancroft for easy reading, Boice for detailed study, but Dagg for all-round usefulness.

Presbyterian Reformed: Berkhof and AA Hodge for general usefulness; Hoeksema for detailed study; Reymond as the best for all-round usefulness.

Historic: Calvin's *Institutes* and John Brown for thorough but warm classic treatments.

Puritan: Watson for thorough studies but Ames for well-laid out usefulness of topics.

For detailed, serious study: Turretin, Shedd, Gill, Pink, Hoeksema, Bavinck, Calvin.

Untrustworthy Systematic Theologies

It is possible to gain great benefit from certain parts of these works, but the student must be on his guard against some unbiblical positions underlying them. Some of them are to be avoided as seriously unbiblical.

Reformed but questionable

Berkhof, Hendrikus; *Christian Faith*, (1979 - Eng. translation).

Dutch theologian from the modern, compromised, Netherlands Reformed church; not to be confused with Louis Berkhof.

Traces of liberalism. Densely laid out. Not to be trusted.

Bloesch, Donald G: *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2 vols. (1979); also a series of books on systematic theology.

Modern Reformed theologian.

Bloesch is essentially Reformed and well loved by certain leaders (such as his student RC Sproul), but is very weak on some crucial doctrines, such as election and the authority of the Bible.

Grenz, Stanley J; *Theology for the Community of God*, 1 paperback vol. (1994).

Modern Baptist theologian. Prof. of theology and ethics at Carey Theol. College and at Regent College at Vancouver (British Columbia).

Well designed and easy to read; somewhat novel in some descriptions. Anything recommended by Clark Pinnock raises doubts; indeed Grenz is very superficial on some key doctrines, especially those regarding redemption. He is, however, strong on giving concise historical descriptions of doctrinal progress.

Oden, Thomas; *The Living God, Systematic Theology Vol 1*. (1987)

Oden was previously a liberal Methodist theologian who became a conservative evangelical. He specialises in early church theologians.

Schilder, Klaas; various theological works.

Prof. of Theology in the Dutch Reformed Church. Very influential in the US.

Weak on limited atonement and the Gospel presentation; teaches a conditional decree.

Dispensational

Chafer, Lewis Sperry; *Systematic Theology*, 7 vols (1948) or 2 vol. abridged edition (1988).

(1871-1952) First President of Dallas Theol. Sem.

This is the most complete Dispensational systematic theology.

Ryrie, Charles; *Basic Theology*. (1986)

Prof. of Systematic Theol. at Dallas Theol. Sem.

A simple introduction to theology from a Dispensational viewpoint.

Thiessen, Henry Clarence; *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. (1949)

Chairman of the graduate school at Wheaton College. Baptist, but Dispensational.

Arminian

Arminius, James; *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols. (1956)

(1560-1609) Prof. of theology at Leyden.

Not as extreme as his followers.

Carter, Charles W (ed.); *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*, 2 vols. (1983).

A collection of 24 doctrinal essays by various Arminian scholars.

Finney, Charles Grandison; *Lectures on Systematic Theology*. (1878)

(1792-1875) Revivalist and later president of Oberlin College.

This is extreme Arminianism, becoming Pelagianism in places. This is not a real systematic theology as it focuses on Finney's key interests and is not complete. It centres on perfectionist and even Pelagian ideas.

Miley, John; *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (1989)

Prof. at Drew Theological Seminary, New Jersey.

The best extensive academic Arminian dogmatic theology.

Pope, William Burt; *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (1876).

A significant Wesleyan dogmatic theology.

Purkiser, WT, ed.; *Exploring our Christian Faith*. (1960)

A simple summary of Arminian tenets.

Torrey, RA; *What the Bible Teaches*. (1957)

(1856-1928) American campaign evangelist, pastor and seminary teacher. Associated with DL Moody. A product of the Holiness tradition but originally Congregationalist.

Written in popular style, driving through doctrines by using scriptures followed by propositions, questions and answers. No long discourses or argumentation. Reverent but sometimes unsound.

Watson, Richard; *Theological Institutes*. 2 vols (1823).

(1781-1833)

The earliest Methodist systematic theology.

Wiley, H Orton; *Christian Theology*. 3 vols. (1943)

Theologian of the 'Church of the Nazarene'.

A strong modern Arminian systematic theology.

Lutheran

Mueller, John Theodore; *Christian Dogmatics*. (1934)

Prof. at Concordia Seminary in St Louis (Missouri Synod – the more evangelical form of American Lutheranism).

A condensation and translation of Francis Pieper's work.

Pieper, Francis; *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (1924)

(1852-1931) Missouri Synod theologian & Prof. of Concordia Sem.

The standard systematic theology for conservative Lutherans (Missouri Synod).

Charismatic

Grudem, Wayne; *Systematic Theology, An introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (1994).

Prof. of Biblical & systematic theol. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity school.

Associated with the Charismatic 'Third Wave' of John Wimber.

A much more thorough dogmatics than most Charismatic works. It is also laid out in a very well-designed manner. Better on the baptism in the Spirit than most Charismatic apologetics. Influenced by many Reformed theologians, but still weak in certain areas. Grudem is not very exegetical in his analysis and does not really interact with historical theology. This leads his work to be more weak and elementary than most books claiming to be a thorough systematic analysis. In a work comprising over 1200 pages this is odd. He has enough space to be thorough but is not when he needs to be on some issues. There is overemphasis on Charismatic issues, occupying many more pages than certain cardinal doctrines; the baptism in the Spirit gets its own separate chapter in 24 pages, while the spiritual gifts also receive a chapter covering 72 pages. Eternal punishment receives barely two pages in one section while hell gets roughly four pages in another and yet these are utterly crucial and contested issues today. This is an example of Grudem's imbalance.

Williams, J Rodman; *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*. 3 vols. (1992)

Prof. at Regent Univ.

Misc

McGrath, Alister E; *Christian Theology*; (1994).

(1953-) Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford & Prof. of theol. at Regent College Vancouver.

This is really an academic work and not very useful for the layman – yet it is well-laid out and easy to read. McGrath is not 100% evangelical and certainly not Reformed; indeed he lists towards liberalism. His 'further reading' lists many non-evangelicals and few that we would recognise. However, on some matters McGrath can be superb.

Trustworthy Summaries of Systematic Theology

Alexander, Archibald; *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*.

(1772-1851) American Presbyterian theologian; professor and the first Principal at Princeton Theol. Seminary. Well known for some excellent Bible commentaries.

This is an esteemed summary of the main doctrines of theology.

Calvin, John; *TRUTH FOR ALL TIME, A brief outline of the Christian faith*. Banner of Truth (1998) paperback, 77 pages.

This is Calvin's first presentation of doctrine in a concise format, which he published in French in 1537 when only 29 years-old. It amounts to a summary of his first edition of the *Institutes*, which appeared in 1536. It was ignored for 300 years as it was replaced by a catechism in 1542, but has now been made available and is very useful.

Calvin, John; *Biblical Christianity*, Grace Pub. (1982) paperback, 125 pages.

This is a précis of Calvin's final edition of the *Institutes* made by BR Wood, taken from another summary made by JP Wiles in 1920. Very helpful for someone unlikely to ever read the full version.

Berkhof, Louis; ***A Summary of Christian Doctrine***, (many impressions) paperback 184 pages.

Well laid out with many sub-headings, questions for review and for further study. Probably the most useful concise doctrinal summary.

Gerstner, John; *Theology for Everyman* ()

A simple compendium of studies on cardinal doctrines in eleven chapters. Though concise, Gerstner is always excellent and thorough.

Hammond, TC; ***In Understanding Be Men***, IVP (many impressions), paperback 198 pages.

Really this is a thorough systematic theology but presented in a concise way. It was once very popular with students. Though too dense for some, it is a very useful work. It is now out-of-print but can be found easily second-hand and is better than the work that was supposed to replace it.

Jeffery, Peter; *Bitesize Theology* ()

A simple approach to key doctrinal issues for those new to theology. Jeffrey is always clear and approachable.

Jeffery, Peter; ***CHRISTIAN HANDBOOK*** (1988), 192 pages.

An extremely useful little work which covers theology, church history and Biblical studies. There are many helpful diagrams, tables and pictures. While there is not great depth, it is intended to be a comprehensive review and introduction to these matters, and it achieves this admirably. Every young convert ought to be given a copy.

Kevan, EF; ***What the Scriptures Teach***, Evangelical Press, (1966), paperback, 79 pages. (d. 1965) Kevan was a Baptist pastor and Principal of London Bible College.

Only eight chapters with a set of questions for each one. While not covering all loci of theology this deals with: God, sin, the Lord Jesus Christ, atonement, redemption, salvation, the Holy Spirit and Christian behaviour. Kevan is excellent at summarising truth in succinct but instructive form. This book is most helpful and very simple.

Kuiper, RB; ***The Bible Tells Us So***, Banner of Truth (1968), paperback, 132 pages.

(1886-1966) Reformed professor of practical theology at Westminster Theol. Seminary.

This is a collection of Kuiper's doctrinal studies, which he died before completing. They are simple and straightforward but very effective and illuminating. Though incomplete, it is well worth reading.

Packer, JI; ***Concise Theology***, Tyndale (1993), paperback, 267 pages.

(1926-) Many academic positions, latterly Prof. of historical & systematic theol. at Regent College, Vancouver. Anglican theologian who has written many fine studies that have great value. His work *Knowing God* is a Christian classic. Has marred his testimony by his recent ecumenical stance with Rome.

A series of doctrinal studies of between 2-4 pages each. There are ample Biblical references and many practical implications. Even Presbyterian Reformed writers have called this, 'a splendid, largely uncontroversial exposition of the Christian faith.' (Review in *British Reformed Journal*, 49).

Sproul, RC; *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, Tyndale (1992), paperback, 302 pages.

Short expositions of 102 doctrines grouped in the normal way. Though larger than other works mentioned here, this is well laid out with summaries and Bible references. Would be very helpful as a first time introduction to doctrine or as a sort of dictionary for reference.

Recommendations

- Berkhof, Sproul or Packer for general reference.
- Calvin's *Truth for All Time* as a 'must read', as is Kevan and Kuiper; all are simple.
- Jeffrey's *Handbook* as an essential introduction for young converts.
- Hammond for more detailed study.

Variable and untrustworthy Summaries of Systematic Theology

Fitch, William; *Enter into Life*, Eerdmans (1961), paperback, 110 pages.

A very short series of six studies: Sin, salvation, repentance and faith, regeneration, the means of grace and the Second Advent. There is useful material here but he is Arminian and erroneous on the order of salvation, putting repentance & faith, justification & reconciliation before regeneration. This ruins the usefulness for young converts.

Lightner, Robert P; *Handbook of Evangelical Theology, A historical, Biblical and Contemporary Survey and Review*, Kregel, (1995), paperback, 303 pages.

A survey of doctrines under the normal headings written by a Dispensational author. However, he tries to represent all views on the subjects covered and as a survey this can be useful. Not suitable for beginners.

Little, Paul, *Know What You Believe*, Victor (many impressions), paperback, 144 pages
Also found bound with *Know Why You Believe*, World Wide Pub. paperback, 256 pages

Not a first choice, though there are many useful summaries of doctrinal subjects. Marred by Dispensationalism.

Marshall, I Howard; *Christian Beliefs*, IVF (now IVP, 1963), paperback, 94 pages.

A treatment of several key theological loci but not all. Marshall is an esteemed scholar and author of many useful books. However, he strayed from some foundational truths (such as hell, which is not mentioned here) and cannot be fully trusted. This short work is useful as a brief introduction (which to be fair is what it sets out to be) but is not thorough or comprehensive enough.

Pawson, David; *Truth to Tell*, Hodder & Stoughton (1977), paperback, 159 pages.

A collection of essays on doctrine written in a tabloid style, some aspects of which are irreverent in my view. Pawson is an apologist and elder statesman of UK Charismatic ministry as well as teaching a form of Christian Zionism. This work is not to be trusted, although some parts are worthwhile if you can stomach the superficial style.

Pentecost, J Dwight; *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, Zondervan (1965), paperback, 159 pages.

Fourteen short essays on key doctrinal points. Pentecost was a professor of Bible exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary and also a pastor of Grace Bible Church in Dallas. While there is some benefit in these studies, the Dispensational edge reduces its usefulness.

Wilson, John; *Pity My Simplicity*, Evangelical Press (1980), paperback, 164 pages.

The usual short studies on doctrinal subjects treated simply and celebrating being written by a Reformed layman. However, this is pursued with superficiality and conversational style that is demeaning (even the cover is trite to the point of unpleasant) in order to sound attractive and modern. It is just off-putting and does not effectively get at the truth.

Trustworthy Treatments of the Doctrines of Grace (the ‘Five Points’)

Boettner, Loraine; *THE REFORMED FAITH*, paperback, P&R, 28 pages.

An extremely simple and useful booklet. It explains the Reformed position on the basis of God’s sovereignty, followed by why this is more Biblical than the Arminian position.

Dabney & Dickinson; *The Five Points of Calvinism*, hardback, Sprinkle.

Contains an essay of the five points by RL Dabney covering 80 pages; followed by five studies on the five points by Jonathan Dickinson, covering 252 pages. A useful standard work.

Booth, Abraham; *The Reign of Grace*, hardback, Evangelical Press, 254 pages (1768).

A classic work by an English Particular (Reformed) Baptist (1734-1806). Though this is not strictly a treatise on the five points, it covers the application of grace in salvation in 13 chapters, which deals with the same ground. Grace Publications has an abridged paperback of this work called, *By God’s Grace Alone* (73 pages).

Engelsma, David & Hanks, Herman; *The Five Points of Calvinism*, RFP, paperback, 103 pages, (2008).

Transcript of spoken messages given at the 2006 British Reformed Fellowship 91st annual conference. Absolutely brilliant. While being a summary of the arguments of the five points, it also manages to be a devotional exhortation with warm application. There is also an introductory chapter on the history of Calvinism. Very highly recommended.

Girod, Gordon; *The Deeper Faith*; paperback (1978), 135 pages.

Deals with the issues on the basis of an exposition of the Canons of the Synod of Dort. [This was the conference of international theologians that evaluated, debated and then condemned the arguments of the Remonstrants – the followers of Arminius – that were troubling the Dutch churches. The five points of Calvinism under the mnemonic TULIP arose from this synod, since it condemned the five central arguments of the Arminians.]

Lewis, Clements & Haslam; *Chosen For Good*, paperback, Kingsway, 159 pages.

A popular-style collection of essays, based on a series of lectures given to a local Sussex church by Peter Lewis (Total Depravity / Unconditional Election); Roy Clements (Limited Atonement / Irresistible Grace); Greg Haslam (Final Perseverance). This book is now marred by the serious apostasy of Clements.

Molland, WH; *Salvation The gift of God or the choice of man?* Paperback, private publication, 86 pages.

A concise presentation of the doctrines of grace by the pastor of North Rd Chapel, Bideford. Contains a diagram of salvation drawn by John Bunyan.

Ness, Christopher; *An Antidote Against Arminianism*; (various publishers), paperback, 58 pages.

This is a famous Puritan summary of the arguments. Not as easy to read as modern books.

Parks, William; *The Five Points of Calvinism*, Berith Pub. (n.d.) paperback, 111 pages; various other editions available second-hand.

Excellent presentations on these doctrines by an old Anglican clergyman, originally preached to his church in 1856 and then published. Simple to read, easy to follow and deals with objections. Highly recommended.

Seaton, WJ; *The Five Points of Calvinism*, booklet, Banner of Truth, 24 pages.

A very helpful short summary of the arguments.

Steele & Thomas; *THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM*, paperback, P&R, 95 pages.

David N Steele and Curtis C Thomas present a concise and yet very thorough treatment that stands out as the best introduction to the subject. It presents the historical positions, the arguments of both sides, the scriptures involved and a discussion of various writings. Extremely useful.

There are very many other books on this matter of varying usefulness, but these are sufficient for our purposes here. All are easily available, with the exception of Parks, which may be found second-hand. Look out for reprints.

Historical Theology

It may be helpful to include a few works in this department. It is extremely helpful to be able to understand the flow of doctrinal development in history; sometimes this enables us to understand certain dogmatics far better. For instance, by following the debates on atonement through history one can better understand the final composition of dogmatic statements on penal substitution or the Trinity. Another value is that by studying the heresies that arose in church history, and observing the battles fought by our godly forbears, we are better able to discern heretical teachings and movements as they arise today.

I will only mention a few key works.

Berkhof, Louis; ***THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES*** (1937).

More compact than other works and easily accessible. Sub-headings on the side of pages enable readers to quickly identify key topics under review. This book forms a companion to his *Systematic Theology*. This is the simplest introduction available for the keen student.

Cunningham, William; ***Historical Theology***, 2 vols. (1862)

Subtitled, *A review of the principal doctrinal discussions in the Christian Church since the Apostolic Age*. This is a classic work on the subject. Cunningham was a great Scottish theologian with deep insight into the issues he covers. By reading him on this matter, one gets a thorough grounding in systematic theology as well as history.

Cunningham, William; *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, (1862)

Another standard work from Cunningham but centring on the Reformation.

Kelly, JND; *Early Christian Doctrines*, (1958).

This is a standard textbook on the period from the early church to the 5th century (Augustine). Though not a Reformed writer, there is considerable benefit to be gained from Kelly's work.

Shedd, WGT; ***A History of Christian Doctrine*** 2 vols. (1872).

Shedd is always thorough and interesting. Even his introduction on methodology is invaluable. At the end is a useful examination and evaluation of Christian symbols (confessions).

While good systematic theologies will evaluate historical doctrinal developments in the course of their study, this can only be cursory. A thorough examination of this history in a separate work is desirable and helpful.

Some Suppliers On-Line

While there are many useful independent retail and second-hand bookshops what is of most use to folk today are stores with large supplies that are internet-based. Surprisingly, some secular outlets can sometimes be more helpful and cheap than Christian ones. Here are some; (due to space constraints, I will review only a few that can normally supply everything required):

Metropolitan Tabernacle Bookshop: www.tabernaclebookshop.org

Bookshop attached to rear of what was once Spurgeon's church in Elephant & Castle (there is customer parking). Whilst there is a good selection of Reformed books, there are some glaring missing items.

ICM (Independent Christian Ministries): www.icmbooks.co.uk

Irish Christian bookstore, often the prices are discounted more than anyone else. Large selection and good service.

Amazon: www.amazon.co.uk

Well-known secular bookstore. Always check the 'new and used' offers where you will normally find your desired book much cheaper and in good or even new condition. These bargains are usually outsourced to other dealers, such as 'Book Depository'. This is probably your best first stop.

Book Depository: www.bookdepository.co.uk

Secular bookshop; usually excellent service and supply. Often one can find important but obscure Christian books here that are not supplied by Christian bookshops.

James Dickson Books: www.jamesdicksombooks.com

Mixture of Christian books: some excellent, some not so good. Many titles that are hard to locate elsewhere. Emphasis on Scottish authors.

Super book deals: www.superbookdeals.com

Secular bookshop. Good service. American company (hence .com) but with a base in 77 Beak Street, Soho, London, W1F 9DB.

Example of comparison:

Volumes of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* four volumes £34.99 each recommended retail price. [Correct at August 2008.]

Amazon	All volumes available. Prices from £13.50 to £26.99. Full set £80.
Book Depository	All volumes available. Prices from £17.63; amazingly they offer the full set for £59.96.
ICM	Three of three four volumes currently available, price around £19.97 each.
James Dickson Books	Not available
Metropolitan Tabernacle Bookshop	Not available.
Super Book Deals	All volumes available, but prices in dollars on website – cheap prices.

Thus can be seen an odd situation. Bavinck is a standard and classic work of Reformed theology, vital to serious students, yet two Reformed Christian bookshops do not stock it, while secular bookshops do!!!

Also one must also note the availability of free supplies; I will mention two.

E-sword

This is the best computer Bible study program available and it is free. As well as various Bibles and commentaries, there are a number of theological works and dictionaries that can be attached to the program. Download from www.e-sword.net

Ephesians Four Group

This ministry supplies a free CD Rom containing many Biblical, devotional and theological classics. The theological books include: à Brakel, Hodge's *Outlines* and Dabney's *Systematic Theology*. The Ephesians Four Group; P.O. Box 1505, Escondido, Ca 92033; Voice: 1.800.942.3766; Fax: 760.839.9309; Email: info@e4.net; Web: www.e4.net

For purchase

One can also consider purchasing CD Roms of large theological works very cheaply. All Calvin's works are available for £12, as are Gill's, Owen's, Pink's and others. *Ages* software also do a collection of Christian reference works that contain many theological books very cheaply. It is possible to amass large libraries of works at a fraction of the printed cost.

