A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, by Robert L. Reymond. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998. 1210 pp. $44.99.

Robert L. Reymond, professor of systematic theology at Knox Theological Seminary for the past eight years and at Covenant Theological Seminary for the previous twenty-two, has provided us an eminently worthy systematic theology destined to carve out for itself a niche on the most accessible shelf in many a biblical scholar's library. In an era where "suggestive theology" is becoming more and more the rule, Reymond sets forth a theology that is undeniably and refreshingly dogmatic. More importantly he amasses a formidable array of Scripture to justify his dogmatism—any critic will necessarily wade through a great amount of Scripture before positing disagreement with his conclusions. Reymond has also interacted with a large corpus of historical and contemporary theological literature, and especially with the Westminster Confession and stalwarts of the reformed tradition, most notably B. B. Warfield and John Murray.

The distinguishing feature of Reymond's work is its embrasure and command of a presuppositionalist apologetic methodology. Permeating the work and especially evidenced in the lengthy discussions of God and Scripture, presuppositionalism is convincingly and rightly set forth (in sharp contrast, at times, with the traditional reformed tradition) as the only reasonable approach to the existence and revelation of God. Further, as in his *Justification of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), Reymond displays an uncommon ability to render presuppositionalist apologetics, a field that has historically suffered considerable obfuscation at the hands of some of its most qualified proponents, both understandable and exceptionally readable.

In keeping with his presuppositionalism, Reymond indulges in no discussion of ontological or empirical proofs for the existence and nature of God except for a masterful refutation of them (pp. 132–52). Likewise, Reymond exposes the "quest for the historical Jesus" for what it is—a rationalist subjection of the truth of Scripture to the "higher authority" of history for authentication; the subjection of infallible to fallible (p. 17; pp. 545–81). In his third chapter, "The Attributes of Holy Scripture," one of the volume's best, Reymond's uses his presuppositionalism as a solid defense for Scriptural authority and inspiration (pp. 71–73), and as the basis for his doctrines of canonization (p. 66) and cessationism (pp. 57–59). This last section, expanded in his earlier work, *What About Continuing Revelations and Miracles in the Presbyterian Church Today*? (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977) is quite helpful, succinctly rebuffing all arguments for continuing revelation.

Reymond also displays a keen grasp of the difference between the epistemologies of Gordon Clark and Cornelius Van Til, a topic that has

been regularly misunderstood and misrepresented in recent discussion. Reymond's is a mixture of Clarkian and Van Tilian epistemology (pp. 95–126). In contrast to Van Til he views human knowledge as "univocal (though of course not exhaustive)" (p. 102) rather than analogical to God's, thus reducing the difference between God's and man's knowledge to primarily a quantitative one (pp. 95–110).[2] On the other hand he takes issue with Clarkian epistemology by maintaining that knowledge is not acquired exclusively through the truth claims of Scripture (p. 147), at the same time maintaining that all genuine knowledge finds its systematization, legitimization, and justification *as truth* in the truth system of Scripture (pp. 111–126).

Reymond's unmitigated covenant theology is naturally a concern for dispensationalists. Indeed, this concern is the chief disclaimer this reviewer places on Reymond's *Theology*. The covenants are intertwined heavily throughout many of Reymond's discussions, so that the reader is obliged to use caution when extracting theological truth (which exists in great abundance) from the volume. A review is not an adequate forum for a thorough treatment of the shortcomings of covenant theology (e.g., amillennialism, paedobaptism, Presbyterianism, the replacement of the nation of Israel by the church, the continuing validity of the Law, etc.) nor for an answer to Reymond's lengthy critique of dispensationalism (pp. 507–44). However, it is adequate for the demonstration of two central flaws of the covenant system that find considerable discussion in Reymond, namely, its hermeneutic and its theological center.

After his discussion of the laws of human language and of a literal hermeneutic (pp. 17–23), an incautious dispensationalist might be tempted to applaud what appears to be, at first glance, a hermeneutic with which dispensationalists might find agreement. With scholarly grace he recognizes that a "literal" hermeneutic does not preclude figures and symbols, rejecting the straw-man argument to the contrary with which covenant theologians have perpetually plagued dispensationalism. Nonetheless, Reymond's appeal to the "great 'analogy of faith'" (p. 23)

[2]Reymond essentially excludes the possibility of an analogical relationship between God's and man's knowledge, contending that, if the relationship between the two sets of knowledge is analogous *with* univocal correspondence, then it is actually univocal; if it is analogous *without* univocal correspondence then it is not an analogy at all, but equivocation. He thus equates Van Til's "analogy" with Aquinas's. Reymond's flaw is that he assumes any genuine analogy must have univocal (i.e., identical) elements. Van Til stressed analogy based not upon *identity*, but upon *similarity* (a category that Reymond seems unwilling to accept). For Van Til, man's knowledge is no more identical to God's knowledge than man's power is identical to God's power. There is a similarity, yes, but identity? Certainly not. Van Til's analogy, to this reviewer, seems to be the only way to account for a body of true knowledge that is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from God's.

leaves him an escape from normal hermeneutics—an escape which he develops on pages 50–53. While on these pages Reymond, citing Kaiser, denies *sensus plenior,* that is, that there are multiple meanings to a text to which the human author may or may not be privy, he nevertheless affirms that "it is just a fact that there are passages where there is no way the exegete can discern what the author or speaker intended without the benefit of subsequent revelational insight" (p. 51). That is, while the human and divine authors spoke univocally, with full comprehension of the meaning of their words (as demanded by normal laws of human language), readers and exegetes cannot understand what was said apart from later revelation (as much as 1500 years later). Thus the equation of Israel and the church, the continuation of the Mosaic Law, the presence of the kingdom, and the denial of a future, literal Millennium are sustained, all while allegedly following a normal, even literal, hermeneutic. One wonders whether normal laws of language can allow for revelation so adumbrative, yea, so deliberately deceptive as this within the framework of propositional divine self-disclosure and normative instruction.

Reymond's covenant theology also demands a dual unifying center for his theological system. While there is no doubt that Reymond holds in some sense to a doxological purpose for the existence of the created universe (pp. 396–97), he nonetheless asserts for God a "more primary redemptive plan which he accomplished in Christ" (p. 397). Indeed, to consistently view "God's kingdom and the unity of the biblical covenants as the hermeneutical key to the understanding of Holy Scripture" (p. xxxv), Reymond is obliged to assert "that the creation itself has never had any other than a redemptive *raison d'être*" (p. xx, cf. p. 398). Thus, while man's central purpose is doxological, God's central purpose (that which is "more primary") is soteriological. However, Reymond's *raison d'être* fails to explain the reason for non-redemptive revelation (e.g., angels [a topic which is strangely given no systematic treatment], the animal kingdom, hell, the eternal state, etc.). To his credit, Reymond does take on the accusation, that the original creation and pre–lapsarian Adam are non-redemptive, by viewing these phenomena as *chronologically* prior to the necessity of redemption, but *logically* subsequent (a view consistent with his supralapsarianism—pp. 397–98 cf. esp. point 1, pp. 494–95). Nonetheless, Reymond's unifying center remains too narrow and man-centered to accommodate all God's activity in his universe.

Despite this ultimately soteriological focus, Reymond reverts to a strongly theocentric focus in the discussion of God's decree (Chapter 10). In it he administers a sound thrashing of Pinnock's Arminian heresies (pp. 346–56 cf. also pp. 184–91; 378–80) in a discussion which serves as a shining fulfillment of Reymond's promise to deliver a systematic theology that is "a corrective to these other 'gospels,' [namely]

Pelagian, semi-Pelagian, semi-semi-Pelagian, Arminian, apostate...which abound on every hand" (pp. xx–xxi). While many will take issue with his supralapsarianism and double predestinationism, Reymond's discussion of the decree of God and his defense of God as the decretal cause, yet not the chargeable cause of sin, nonetheless combine to constitute one of the finest chapters in the volume. His explanation of why sin necessarily entered the world (p. 377), however, should probably have been stated a bit more tentatively—the hypothesis, while logical and intriguing, is not biblically derived.

Conservatives will also be pleased with Reymond's assertion of a six-day literal creation (pp. 392–96) and his denunciation of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (p. 734) and all forms of inclusivist pluralism (pp. 1085–92). He ably defends the biblical veritude of hell as a place of eternal, conscious torment (pp. 1068–85). He has a firmly complementarian view on the feminist issue (pp. 900–901). His Warfieldian view of preservation and dispersion of Scripture is also refreshing (pp. 90–93). Readers should, in this author's opinion, also approve of his *ordo salutis*, in which regeneration properly precedes repentance and faith (pp. 704–11)—it is unfortunate only that he fails to give an explanation why repentance may be called "repentance *to life*" if regeneration (the impartation of spiritual life) precedes it. Reymond rightly expresses incredulity with Zane Hodges' dangerous non-repentance "easy-decisionism" (p. 722). He further includes an excellent defense of the use of the pulpit and the unadulterated Word of God (as opposed to social means) for the spread of the gospel, exposing Arminianism (not Calvinism) as the virulent foe of biblical evangelism (pp. 882–85)

A point of some concern is Reymond's view of eternal sonship (p. 324–330), by which he, overreacting to the historical misuse of monogenhv denies all subordinationism within the Trinity. On a practical note, the main subject index is inadequate, making the usage of the volume's full potential as a reference tool a bit limited. Perhaps future printings and editions, of which there should be many, will remedy this unfortunate deficiency.

These flaws aside, however, the *New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* emerges to vie for a place at the very top of a long list of modern systematic theologies. Theology is, or should be, the mainstay of our institutions. Thus, until dispensationalism can produce a systematic theology of comparable depth and scholarship, we will continue to rely upon works like Reymond's to buttress our own distinctive system of theology.

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