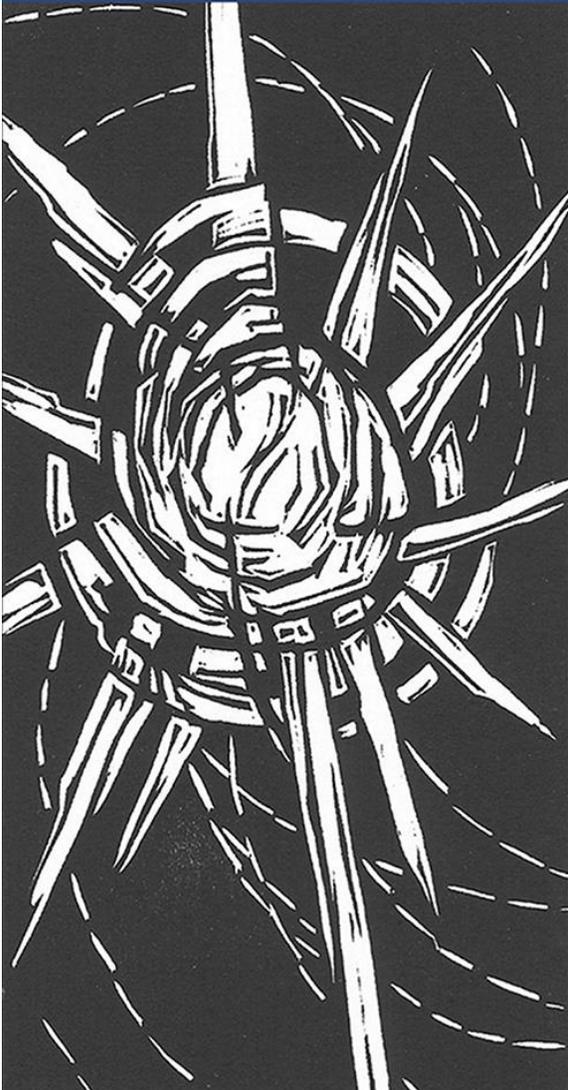


STUDY

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

VOLUME 1, THE DOCTRINE OF GOD



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Study Guide for *Systematic Theology: Volume 1, The Doctrine of God*
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Preface

Main Points:

- Who and what is God? These are two distinct questions. Whereas modern theology prefers questions of divine identity, questions of deity are equally important.
- Divine attributes are ethical, and therefore also called perfections. These attributes—*what* God is—reveal the personal—*who* God is.
- Employed here is a Theocentric method that is properly Christological—that is, it works from the deity of Christ rather than the narrative of the human Christ.
- The Divine attributes—as *what* God is—are coordinate with and reveal the personal, God as Subject.

Key Quotations:

- “One fundamental axiom of this book is that the searching and searing question about God is properly two-fold: always the Reality of God presses us to set forth and praise God’s Deity – His Nature and His Identity. Almighty God, we say, is *both* Object and Subject; *both* What and Who.” (xii)
- “Almighty God does not ‘possess’ Perfections, nor ‘have’ a Nature: His Objectivity is not under the aegis of His Subjectivity. The lord God, rather, is simply Personal, Person, in all His Nature and Substance: He is *this Living One*, this Identity altogether in His Full Reality... All the Perfections of God are properly ‘ethicized;’ yes. But even more properly, they are Personalized. God is Knowledge Itself that Knows; Humility and Dynamism that Lowers Itself; Presence and Love that Invites, Heals, Exalts. The Holy One is not a Character, an Individual, for all that!... God’s Identity does not individuate! Rather, in all His Unsearchable and Infinite Mystery, God is Person and Nature, Subject and Substance: One God.” (xiii)

Outline of attributes – perfections:

Oneness → freedom, transcendence/immanence, exclusivity



Hiddenness → Omnipresence

Humility → Omnipotence

Spiritual Nature → Eternal Omniscience

Love

Part I. The One God

§ 1. The Perfect Oneness of God

§1a. The Divine Oneness in Holy Scripture

Main Points:

- The Oneness of God is maintained by the theological and philosophical tradition, but even more it is expressed to us through Holy Scripture—indeed, God’s Oneness is the proper heart and subject matter of Scripture.
- Scripture cannot be read without a simultaneous loyalty to the text and a vision beyond it.
- God’s Oneness can be defined as:
 - God’s Name (“The Lord God is this One, and not another.”)
 - God’s Identity (God will act in only these ways)
 - God’s Solitariness (God has no consort or fellow deity)
- Divine Oneness is a metaphysical predicate.
- Divine singularity and exclusivity form the heart of Israel’s national and cultic life.

Key Quotations:

- “Not innovation but ‘loyalty,’ that is, generous reading within a living tradition, marks the proper theological use of Scripture. This does not mean ‘slavish’ or ‘uncritical’! Rather, it means seeking out the pattern, the aim, and end of a scriptural book or author in the company of all who have read, and struggled, and interpreted before: it is the pattern of Scripture within the *communio sanctorum*.” (13)
- “In Holy Scripture, the Divine Nature as One pairs the Divine Invisibility with its opposition to visible divine powers and forces. Metaphysical claims about Oneness and idolatry go together. The One God is supreme in “formlessness,” in superabundant glory and hiddenness beyond all sight, imagination and figure. For God to be One is to be a nature beyond and also opposed to that spiritual force that is visible and creaturely. In biblical idiom, the Lord cannot be ranged against, placed alongside of, or ranked superior to “idols,” the formed and visible gods of the nations. It is the first commandment: I am the Lord; beside me there is no other.” (19)
- “The geopolitical life of Israel—its foreign policy, its trades and treaties, its warfare and civil revolt, its tribal and family orders—all turn on the religious question of worship to the True God or the false. The theological center of the Old Testament is not a matter of “henotheism” or of a progressively strict monotheism, however we sort out the historical order of references to the One God of Israel. The center, rather, is the conviction that the True God, the God of Torah and covenant, and thus the True God of Judaism and of the church is marked off from the false by invisibility: the nature of the One God is to have no image, form, or likeness.” (20–21)

§ 2. The Divine Oneness as Foundational Perfection

Main Points:

- God’s self-revelation, rather than rational or philosophical arguments, is the proper basis for the affirmation of Divine Oneness.
- Divine Oneness is a *foundational predicate*, meaning that all other modes, manifestations, predicates, and attributes are determined by God’s Oneness.

Key Quotation:

- “Divine Mystery is not a sign of our *failure* in knowledge, but rather our *success*. It is because we *know* truly and properly—because we obey in faith the First Commandment—that God is mystery. His metaphysical predicate of Oneness, when known, yields mystery.” (24)

§2a. The Divine Oneness in Scholastic Theology

Main Points:

- Thomas Aquinas asserts that no one can truly look at God’s radical Oneness while anchored on this earth. Three supporting arguments:
 1. We observe with our senses, and God is radically immaterial and not perceivable by the senses
 2. No finite likeness can represent God as He is *a se*
 3. Death casts an impermeable line separating finite humans and full knowledge of God

Key Quotation:

- “Not God’s ‘absence’ or ‘hiddenness’ or ‘transcendence’ makes God ineffable, unique, beyond definition. Rather, God’s sheer Reality does this. That fact that God is, that God is this very One, and known as such, overturns all thought, imagination, and concept. The Divine Freedom expresses itself principally in the self-subsistent Reality of God: God is free not so much as being over against another, not so much as being hidden against all that is manifest, not so much as being undetermined by all creaturely rules; but rather God is free simply as being One, this very One.” (35)

§2b. The Divine Oneness in the Kantian Tradition

Main Points:

- Thomas’s doctrine of God nourishes a proper doctrine of Divine Oneness more readily and distinctively than does Kant’s inner-worldly metaphysic.
- There are two uses of the term *noumena*: (1) that which we cannot see, (2) that which we cannot know through any intellectual intuition, but only through transcendent immediacy. Only a negative and regulative use of *noumena* can be trusted.

Key Quotation:

- “God’s Mystery is not marked out by a realm that lies beyond our knowing, the ‘speculative’ and excessive. Or, to express this in more Kantian terms, the Mystery of God does not lie in His noumenal Reality—positive or negative—beyond the finite limits of our intellect. Rather, God is Real *in* our encounter with Him, and in *just this way*, is exceeding Mystery, superabundant Light.” (42)

Part II. The Omnipresent One

§3. The Perfection of the One LORD’s Hiddenness: His Omnipresence

Key Quotation:

- “The Lord God can exist—even here, even now—as the Hidden, the Secret, and the Invisible. He can be a Refuge, a Shield, a Hiding Place. . . . One of the *Wesenweisen* of this sovereign and free Lord is as the hidden and secret One. As the present Lord, he can be invisible in his cosmos.” (51)

§3a. Divine Hiddenness and Atheism

Main Points:

- The public structure of thought in our era in the West is decidedly secular. This is *methodological atheism*.
- Thinkers from Aquinas to Paley affirm that we cannot speak of the direct, local, and visible presence of God in the natural world.
- God cannot be seen and is not an object encountered in the cosmos and world of creatures. God is not located or extended in space but is present everywhere.

Key Quotations: