If this first instalment is any indication, Douglas Kelly’s three-volume Systematic Theology is sure to set a new standard. Harvesting decades of steady scholarship and equally steady engagement in all facets of the church’s life and ministry, Kelly displays the richness of the Christian faith, particularly in its Reformed expression. Christians of all traditions will benefit greatly from the catholic breadth, appropriate but not bewildering depth, and exegetical insight of this remarkable work.

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Douglas F. Kelly is one of the English-speaking world’s leading Reformed theologians. A brilliant Patristics scholar and a gifted linguist, with a grace-wrought passion for the Triune God, a love for truth, and a commitment to godliness, Dr. Kelly is a hearty advocate for supernaturalism in its fullest Christian sense (and you will not read far before you see his polemic against rationalism in every form). I know of no one who is better at making the unseen world of spirituality reality vivid and tangible. Here we begin to enjoy the fruits of his labors of more than three decades as a doctor of the church and servant of the Word in the teaching of systematic theology. What a feast it is. Few Protestant theologians in our day know the terrain of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Person of Christ, as well as Professor Kelly. Consequently, he is at his best when opening up to us the unrealized importance and glory of these foundational truths about our Savior God. For those who yearn for an orthodox Reformed catholicity, Kelly shows the way forward.

Ligon Duncan,
Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi
President, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals
Adjunct Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary

Professor Douglas Kelly’s eagerly awaited Systematic Theology exceeds all expectation. With the same exacting diligence and attention to detail that have always characterised his work, Doug Kelly presents a theology that is at once grounded in Scripture and appreciated within the church. His contention is that these are the hallmarks of all true theological reflection, and this volume fulfils its intention to distil the teaching of the Bible for the benefit of the believing community. Professor Kelly weaves together a rich tapestry of biblical exegesis, historical reflection, critical engagement and contemporary application; while standing in mainstream Reformed theology, he is not afraid to engage other traditions.

This first volume is a comprehensive introduction to discussion of God’s self-disclosure, Triune being, transcendent majesty, and covenant relationships. It is a magnificent gift both to the Church and the Academy.

Iain D. Campbell,
Back Free Church of Scotland, Isle of Lewis
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
VOLUME ONE

Grounded in Holy Scripture and understood in the light of the Church

DOUGLAS F. KELLY

THE GOD WHO IS: THE HOLY TRINITY

MENTOR
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Hoc volumen filio quarto meo
Patrick Blue McMillan Campbell Kelly
diligatione aestimationeque dedicatum est

Haec est autem vita aeterna,
ut cognoscant te solum Deum verum,
et quem misisti, Iesum Christum.

Ioannes XVII:iii
I was born and brought up in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (the old ‘Southern Presbyterian Church’). At the age of twenty-four, I was ordained into the ministry of this church, and have always believed its basic teachings as I learned them at the feet of my believing family and local church. Particularly, I grew up trusting in Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, God as my heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit as my sanctifier. From family and church, I learned, and still believe in the Holy Scriptures as the written Word of God, ‘the only infallible rule for faith and practice.’ I cannot claim to have lived up to all I believe, but such has been my sincere and lifelong desire.

While every Christian denomination has its own limitations, the Reformed churches do have the considerable advantage of seeing themselves as true branches of a much larger, ancient and worldwide body: the body of Christ; the bride of Christ, as part of the Holy Catholic Church (and not the whole of it). The Church of Scotland, which is the mother church of American Presbyterians, saw itself, not as a new denomination, but simply as the Catholic Church Reformed in Scotland.

A Manual of Church Doctrine according to the Church of Scotland explains how the Reforming Catholics in sixteenth-century Scotland (and much of Europe) understood themselves:

While retaining in common the Divine Ordinances and the Catholic Creeds, they [the sixteenth century European Reformers] adopted, each for itself as it was reformed, ‘Confessions’ or statements of doctrine, for the guidance of teaching and for testimony: and they regulated their internal policy on different models. They have not thereby changed their identity or broken their continuity. They are the same national churches now reformed, and members of the one visible and Catholic Church which our Standards [i.e. the Westminster Standards of the 1640s] define.

The Reformers believed that it was the Roman Church that had departed from the Apostolic faith. It was by the Church itself that the Reformation had been effected. The Reformers sought not to destroy the Church as a united and visible body, but to strengthen it and cleanse it by restoring its Apostolic and primitive form. In the eyes of the Reformers there was no real disruption at the Reformation – baptism and ordination were held as valid and the Reformed presbyter emerged from the Roman priesthood;
the Catholic Church Reformed was no national sect, but The Universal Kirk [according to the Scots Confession of 1560, art. xvi] …

The word ‘Catholic’ has also a canonical and juristic sense which is decided by the Edict of Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius (A.D. 380): that those are to be called Catholics who believe in ‘the one Godhead and equal majesty and holy tri-unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost’. The Scottish Reformers in 1558 had this definition in view when they required that ‘the Church be reformed in accordance with the precepts of the New Testament, the writings of the Ancient Fathers, and the Godly and approved laws of the Emperor Justinian’ (in whose code the Theodosian Edict had been incorporated) … As a branch of the Reformed Church the Church of Scotland has consistently followed the example of Calvin who sought to restore the face of the Apostolic and Catholic Church by reforming it in accordance with its apostolic foundation and in agreement with the Catholic doctrine of the Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church …1

Therefore, I have written this first volume of Systematic Theology, thinking of my heritage as both Reformed and Catholic; gladly appropriating crucial insights, as best I could understand them, of the whole people of God over the last two thousand years – Eastern Orthodox, Western Catholic, and Reformation Protestant – as they sought to explicate and live out the foundational truths of the inspired Word of God.

I like what Dr. (often called ‘Rabbi’) John Duncan (Free Church of Scotland minister, former missionary to the Jews, and erudite professor of Old Testament in nineteenth-century New College in Edinburgh) once said: ‘I’m first a Christian, next a Catholic, then a Calvinist, fourth a Paedobaptist and fifth a Presbyterian. I cannot reverse this order.’2

For all of these reasons, I entitle this work: Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church. Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would be with the Church to the end of time, so as to guide her into all truth (John 16:13-15). The Apostle Paul makes it clear that all parts of the universal Church need one another in order to see the fullness of this truth (Eph. 1). It takes the whole Church to understand the whole truth. God reveals His life and truth within the covenant community (of Israel and of the Church). Dissociated individuals, cut off from the covenant community of faith and the covenant Word in the Scriptures, are in no position accurately to grasp and articulate God’s saving truth. They need the Church in order to see and experience the Word of God in God’s own light (cf. Ps. 36:9), and this volume seeks to call them into this believing fellowship of grace. This believing fellowship of grace has been divinely called out from all ages, cultures, tribes and tongues. That is why I have not hesitated to draw from its rich resources from a wide array of denominational traditions, who have often vehemently disagreed among themselves on important issues, but nonetheless, have ultimately agreed on


far more than divided them, since it is a God-ordained characteristic that ‘the sheep hear Christ’s voice and follow Him’ (John 10:27). It is my humble prayer that the bread of heaven and the living waters may be multiplied to many of God’s people (and to some outside the fold who may thereby find their true spiritual home), as they read this volume.

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It remains my happy task to thank many who have helped me in so many different ways while this first volume has been in preparation. I started on it during a sabbatical leave from Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, to the University of Edinburgh (1998–99), and largely finished it during a second sabbatical leave (from and to the same places) in 2005–06. Of necessity, I have done plenty of other things during these years, so that I had to lay aside this book for long stretches of time, but it has remained my major project. Since it has stretched over seven or eight years, I fear that I shall forget some who have been of significant assistance. If I did not keep a personal daily diary, this task of acknowledgments would indeed be hopeless. And even with the diary, I am likely to neglect important servants of God, who have done much for me. If so, I apologize to them ahead of time. But no doubt they did it primarily for Christ, ‘who is not unfaithful to forget their labour of love.’

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My prayer for all of these good people, and for all who will ever read this volume, is that of the Psalmist:

Lord, bless and pity us,
Shine on us with thy face:
That th’ earth thy way, and nations all
May know thy saving grace.
Let people praise thee, Lord;
Let people all thee praise.
O let the nations be glad,
In songs their voices raise.

(Ps. 67:1-4; Scottish metrical version).