

“WILL WE BE FREE CHURCHES OR NOT?” A WAKE-UP CALL TO THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

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WHEN WILL THE BOMB EXPLODE?

Those who have taken the time to read and consider Malcolm Yarnell’s recent book, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, realize that he has pulled the curtain back on a theological and ecclesiological time bomb sitting in the Southern Baptist Convention’s living room. This bomb has largely been ignored by many Southern Baptists because most of us have not understood the contentions or the consequences; after all, how important can theological method be? How significant an impact can seemingly minor variations in theological method have on a local church? These are the questions that Yarnell insists the Southern Baptist Convention ask itself because he believes the stakes are in fact quite high. I, for one, agree, and that is the reason for this article. Anyone who reads *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* will immediately identify his call for a friendly but frank theological and methodological conversation between the various church traditions. Obviously such dialogue is incredibly helpful, but I do not think that is Yarnell’s primary goal for this first installment in what promises to be a substantial, on-going contribution to local Southern Baptist churches. Rather, he specifically extends this call to Southern Baptists first, and it is absolutely essential that Southern Baptists answer his call.

We are in the midst of an identity crisis. Because Southern Baptists do not seem to understand our Free Church heritage or how that should affect the way we “do” theology, we have allowed ourselves to adopt a range of conflicting and alien theological methods. Yarnell believes that we do so to our detriment, and he calls Southern Baptists not only to claim a distinctly Free Church identity ecclesologically but also to explore its ramifications theologically. In our defense, we really have not known exactly which questions to ask because we are not exactly sure what a Free Church theological method is, let alone what it is not. But no longer, for *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* proposes that very identity. In response, Southern Baptists must ask themselves two questions: Is Yarnell’s proposed theological method for the free churches right? And more importantly, does it matter enough to adopt?

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FREE CHURCH IDENTITY

Actually, a more fundamental question exists: Should Southern Baptist churches consider themselves free churches in the first place? I believe the answer is yes, but with more and more Southern Baptists freely and uncritically aligning themselves with all things “evangelical,” this question has become rather obscured. “Evangelicalism,” the modern American (and now world-wide) coalition-building strategy, has incessantly sought to tear down the barriers that supposedly divided the “evangelical” Christian traditions by reducing orthodox Christianity to two key doctrines, namely salvation by faith and biblical inerrancy. Recently, in a positive sign for the future, some evangelical Christians have realized the empty promise of such reductionism and have begun to call the evangelical churches back to the ecclesiological structures that have historically identified and distinguished them.² It is into this confused environment that Yarnell sounds a clarion call for theological integrity. In fact, he takes the discussion of this concern to the next level—not simply that the churches would acknowledge their distinctions, but also evaluate them based on their biblical and theological foundations. Yarnell believes that orthodoxy and orthopraxy applies to the church’s entire existence; consequently there is a right way—and a wrong way—to be and do church.

To that end, it matters a great deal whether or not Southern Baptist churches consider themselves free churches, for the free churches represent a distinct ecclesiological tradition—the theological tradition that birthed the Southern Baptist Convention. If we care enough about our name and heritage to defend it, then we should care enough to understand it.

Yarnell defines exactly what he means when he speaks of the free churches and their theological method in the first chapter of *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*. Because there is a certain amount of disagreement here, a brief recap may be helpful. Most importantly, for understanding the Free Church tradition, “traditional ecclesiology, divine sovereignty, missions and evangelism, religious liberty, and inerrancy”³ are necessary but *insufficient* categories. Instead, following Harold Bender, Yarnell offers discipleship (*Gelassenheit* and *Nachfolge*) as the true and sufficient theological foundation of the believers’ churches.⁴ Consequently, he summarizes their theological method as “*disciplined* response to divine

²See D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), and Yarnell “Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals? A Second Decadal Reassessment” *Ecclesiology* 2.2 (2006): 195-212.

³Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), 11.

⁴See Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1944), 20; . Related, Yarnell also uses an image from Durnbaugh, who finds the term “believers’ church” to carry less theological and social baggage than “free church,” and prefers the former, although the referents are identical. Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968).

revelation.”⁵ The importance of this simple summary cannot be overstated. Many Baptist theologians have identified theological truth as something that must be received, but few have taken this concept to its *necessary* conclusion. Christian theology *must be rooted* in a personal relationship with the Lord and Savior of the church, Jesus Christ. Why else would an academic work highlight the personal testimony of the salvation of the author? This method sets its purpose as encouraging and enabling obedience to Christ as revealed in the Word of God, the Bible. Equally important to the Free Church tradition, its context is not purely individual, but also congregational, for “discipline” is a function of the church.⁶

By means of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Yarnell explains the connection between Southern Baptists and the Free Church tradition, namely through the ideas of biblical inerrancy and sufficiency and Scripture’s resultant authority.⁷ This connection is found in the relationship between the written Word and the living Word. Baptists are not disciples of the Bible, but Jesus Christ, who gave the Bible as “a theological authority that speaks with clarity.”⁸ Such holistic discipleship to the Word manifests itself more clearly in the Free Church tradition than any other, for they believe that the three apostolic uses of Scripture are “witnessing to the lost, warning the saved, and condemning the disobedient,” and that we should continue to focus on those uses today. Their consequent insistence on connecting justification with sanctification results in a more biblical soteriology, for example, than that of the Lutherans or the Reformed.⁹

Southern Baptists’ traditional regard for biblical discipleship alone would be compelling reason for them to want to be identified with the free churches, but Yarnell also explains that Free Church theology maintains a proper perspective on the Bible that Southern Baptists would do well to consider. We are a people prone to the call of “no creed but the Bible,”¹⁰ but this call may be naïve regarding its full implications. Yarnell recounts Garrett’s own examination of the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, which quickly devolved into nothing more than *nuda scriptura* (the practical equivalent of “no creed but the Bible”). For the Reformers, this meant that they had no context by which to understand tradition, reason, or experience, making them too vulnerable to the elevation of each, which

⁵Ibid., 1. Emphasis added.

⁶Ibid., 12.

⁷Ibid., 29. The word “complementary” is the obvious key to his argument.

⁸Ibid., 24.

⁹Ibid., 89, 14; cf. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, 17.

¹⁰The 1845 Annual contains the statement, “We have constructed for our basis no new creed; acting in this matter upon a Baptist aversion to all creeds but the Bible.” Bill J. Leonard, “Southern Baptist Confessions: Dogmatic Ambiguity,” in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 171.

happened to varying extents in the different branches of the Reformation.¹¹ Against the Magisterial Reformers, the Free Church Anabaptists held to *suprema scriptura*, which protected them from the Reformation's pitfalls by giving them the framework in which they could handle extra-biblical sources for theology.

In summary, Yarnell argues that Southern Baptists should consider themselves free churchmen. He finds in the free churches the ultimate expression of Southern Baptist ideals and the safeguards necessary to prevent them from drifting into the false theological conclusions he describes throughout the book. But what is the genius of the free churches that would make Southern Baptists desire to call themselves free churchmen? First and foremost, Yarnell believes it is their theological method, and that is why this issue cannot be ignored.

THE NECESSITY OF A UNIQUE THEOLOGICAL METHOD

The title of his book, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, may not clearly identify that Yarnell pursues such a lofty purpose. Indeed, the generic title and the author's own admitted identity as a Southern Baptist free churchman will unfortunately raise some immediate concerns that this book is simply an agenda-driven Southern Baptist response to other agenda-driven works such as Paul Tillich's *A History of Christian Thought* and Roger Olson's *The Story of Christian Theology* (Yarnell himself points out the oddity of such a Southern Baptist theological enquiry at the outset of the book). But nothing could be further from the truth. Yarnell believes that Southern Baptists need a clear theological method to guide and protect their theological endeavors, and that the Free Church tradition provides that method. *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* is not about grinding some agenda-notched axe, but rather opening a dialogue. Indeed, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* calls all Christian traditions into this dialogue, challenging them to confront their own presuppositions and analyze them in the light of the New Testament with a humility that is willing to admit error and seek biblical correctives. But the first step is taken at home. Yarnell hopes the various schools of Southern Baptist thought will make the same sober self-evaluation, identify their differences, and then engage one another in the friendly but frank conversation that will help shape his ultimate literary goal, a Free Church answer to John Henry Newman's powerful *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*.¹² The process will admittedly be painful, for Yarnell wants Southern Baptists to be theologically accountable to one another; incessant decorum may keep people at the discussion table longer, but it rarely fosters any kind of resolution.

The process begins with the theologians, especially those in the seminaries who shape the mindset of the next generation of pastors and church leaders—at least, that seems to be Yarnell's point based on the heavy tone and lofty vocabulary of the book. I have elsewhere criticized Yarnell for making this book inaccessible to the average Southern Baptist, but his approach is understandable. Truly, Yarnell's love is for the people of the

¹¹Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 28; cf. J. B. Jeter, *Campbellism Examined* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, 1855), 213.

¹²Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 116.

church, and his desire is for healthy New Testament churches in the world today. In like manner, Robert Friedmann calls the Free Church tradition “existential Christianity,” by which he means it recognizes no distinction between faith and life; it is not something to be studied in the academy but lived in the church.¹³ Yarnell obviously appreciates this,¹⁴ and the ultimate success of his project will be dependent on his ability to take it to the churches, believing as he does that “constructing a biblical theology is the responsibility of every believer” and “theological judgment is best carried out by the church.” However, he wants to open this discussion first with those who are already thinking about the issue and have the ability themselves to carry the discussion into more and more localized venues.

I, for one, call upon the various theological leaders in the Southern Baptist community to accept the invitation to this table and bring a humble willingness to correct and be corrected, for the future identity of the Southern Baptist Convention is at stake. The time has come for Southern Baptist thinkers to air out their theological methods, and as fellow-workers in the gospel of Jesus Christ hold one another accountable to whatever method we conclude most appropriate to the service of Christ’s church, most faithful to the deposit of faith given in the Bible, and most glorifying to the Living God. This article has two goals: first, to justify the concern about current Southern Baptist theological methods by examining the variety of methods used by certain significant Baptist theologians; second, to summarize the main points of Yarnell’s proposal in hopes of jump-starting such a conversation between Southern Baptists. Why do I care so much about this issue? I am a music minister, and I believe our music ministries are being tossed about right now because we really do not know how our identity as free churches should affect our use of music in worship, discipleship, and evangelism. But that crisis cannot truly be solved until Southern Baptists agree what it means to think as a free churchman—until we know how disciples of Jesus Christ should approach all of these other, difficult issues. As will be demonstrated, there are a lot of different theological frameworks being taught in our seminaries making it extremely difficult for us to come together on important ecclesiological decisions. This has to change, and it needs to change soon.

WHAT IS THE URGENCY ABOUT THEOLOGICAL METHOD?

Why is Yarnell so insistent on identifying a Free Church theological method? In chapter two of his book, Yarnell helpfully illustrates the situation by offering some extremely diverse Christian methods—Roman Catholic, liberal, and Reformed Christianity—and comparing them with the Free Church method. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) represents the conservative Roman Catholic position. Ratzinger laudably emphasizes faith in Christ and a love for the church, but his method includes a willingness to base his exegesis of doctrine more on postapostolic developments than the Bible itself, resulting in an appeal to the “divinely assisted Magisterium” above the individual human consciousness.¹⁵ Maurice

¹³Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 31; cf. 45, 50.

¹⁴Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 77.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 38.

Wiles, an Oxford theologian, represents the liberal Christian tradition, whose primary interest is “reinterpreting the Christian faith for modern culture.”¹⁶ Wiles’s focus leads him to adopt a foundation that does not regard fidelity to the past, but rather creative potential for the future, so his method (completely antithetical to the Free Church method) operates as a kind of survival of the fittest approach.¹⁷ Finally, Herman Bavinck represents the Reformed tradition.¹⁸ Bavinck begins with election and the divine decrees, and this particular emphasis on speculations about God leads to an elevation of general revelation and common grace and subsequently to a dual consideration of philosophy and Scripture, the foundation of Reformed theological method.¹⁹

The theological diversity represented by those three Christian traditions can largely be traced to the theological foundations and methods chosen. By painting such a clear picture, Yarnell makes a compelling case for the importance of a theological method. Now the question must be asked: What does this have to do with Southern Baptists?

THE FOUNDATION OF DOCTRINE: FOUR BAPTIST ALTERNATIVES

While it can be said that Southern Baptists do not cover quite as severe a spectrum as Yarnell highlights, it would be terribly foolish to believe that Southern Baptists are at all uniform in their theological methods. Taking a cue from Yarnell, perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to survey the theological methods employed by the textbooks used in Southern Baptist theology courses, some of the more popular of which include *A Theology for the Church* edited by Daniel A. Akin, *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem, *Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson, and *Systematic Theology* by James Leo Garrett.²⁰ Certainly this approach has severe flaws, for not only can it not be proved that these methods represent a given percentage of Southern Baptists, but also it cannot be proved that the students who use these books even follow their method! Of course, the implication is such, and this approach will at least illuminate the variety of methods currently considered and taught by Southern Baptists.

¹⁶Ibid., 42.

¹⁷Cf. Ibid., 46, 154.

¹⁸The choice of Bavinck may be a bit extreme; Yarnell calls him “schizophrenic” (ibid., 51) and more than a few reformed Christians would distance themselves from some of his conclusions.

¹⁹Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 59, cf. 50 and 65.

²⁰Gregory Alan Thornbury, “Prolegomena,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2000).

Gregory Thornbury

The most recent book on the list, *A Theology for the Church*, published in 2007, is problematic because it is a compilation of essays by different authors, so the method proposed by Gregory Alan Thornbury in chapter one does not necessarily apply to the entire book, but it is the method explicitly taught. To Thornbury, theology is “the attempt to explain God’s self disclosure in a consistently faithful manner.”²¹ Surrounding this awfully vague center, Thornbury’s “Prolegomena” is a perfect example of the problem identified by Yarnell, for Thornbury does not propose a specific theological method at all; rather, his chapter on prolegomena offers a philosophical and historical introduction to epistemology. Consequently his method must be deduced from the structure of his chapter, a relatively simple matter. Thornbury begins with a discussion of truth—“that which corresponds with reality”²²—and includes perspectives from individuals such as Stanley Fish, Richard Dawkins, the Milesian and Eleatic philosophers, and even Fyodor Dostoyevsky. What he does not begin with is a biblical exposition; indeed, only five of the seventy pages in the chapter are devoted to the role of the biblical witness in theology. Thornbury offers some helpful statements, including the Bible’s claim that all reality, not just theological truth, cannot be known apart from an acknowledgement of its divine origin. But he also posits that the reception of truth is radically impaired by the fall of man, so he quickly moves to his primary presupposition, that “philosophical systems and ground rules have always been deeply imbedded in the work [of theology] being done.”²³ From there he devotes the rest of his prolegomena to the various systems to thought that have shaped Christian theology.

By the very structure of his chapter, Thornbury communicates to his reader that theology cannot be done apart from philosophy; therefore, theological method begins with the right philosophy (or worldview). In response to Tertullian’s famous question, “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” Thornbury recognizes the need for “appropriate caution” in the use of philosophy, but counters that “there is no need to go to the opposite extreme and dismiss all of the teachings of the Greek philosophers.”²⁴ He holds up Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas as positive examples of the way Christianity can integrate important non-Christian philosophies (Platonism and Aristotelianism respectively), and then explains how William of Occam turned a reinterpretation of Aristotle into a major split in Christian thought, concluding, “And how do we know the will of God? By reading Aristotle? The church fathers? Thomas Aquinas? To the contrary, God reveals his will to those whom he wills, and he does so most preeminently in his Word.”²⁵

This conclusion sounds positive, but in context actually creates a number of

²¹Thornbury, “Prolegomena,” 54.

²²Ibid., 5.

²³Ibid., 21; cf. *ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁴Ibid., 23.

²⁵Ibid., 30.

problems. “Most preeminently” takes on a different meaning against the following discussion of the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Karl Barth, as well as Baptists Carl Henry, Millard Erickson, and Stanley Grenz. Thornbury lays his methodology bare when he says of Baptists John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce that they “largely avoided philosophical speculation in their work and failed to include any substantive approach to prolegomena.” The rest of Thornbury’s prolegomena communicates the clear message that the student of theology must first carefully consider his or her own worldview, because worldview forms theology. Thornbury does make the critical concession, “Mental agility without a personal relationship with the triune God will doubtless terminate in grave error, or even worse, apostasy,” but waits to do so until the second to the last sentence of the entire chapter, and that not very convincingly.²⁶

Wayne Grudem

Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* is a compendium of valuable theological statements and offers some very helpful guidance to beginning students of theology, but ultimately runs into the same conundrum as Thornbury. In his prolegomena, Grudem defines systematic theology as the answer to the question, “What does the whole Bible teach us today?” with respect to a certain topic.²⁷ He then establishes his presupposition, that the Bible is the only true and accurate revelation of God, making a clear distinction between biblical theology, which focuses on specific sections of Scripture, and systematic theology, which turns the results of biblical theology into structured formulae.²⁸ He even addresses the accusation made against Thornbury, that philosophy is a foundation in theological method, by saying, “It is Scripture alone, not ‘conservative evangelical tradition’ or any other human authority, that must function as the normative authority for the definition of what we should believe.”²⁹ This sounds like a promising beginning to a seemingly unbiased, biblical work. But herein lies the problem with Grudem’s foundation. As Garrett explains,

Systematic theology can give such attention to biblical materials that other sources for systematic theology are bypassed or deemphasized. Accordingly systematic theology is held to be the compilation of biblical doctrine devoid of other influences, even though the culture and/or the ecclesial tradition may have actually shaped the formulation. Illustrative of this type of systematic theology were Charles Hodge’s (1797-1878) *Systematic Theology*, Lewis Sperry Chafer’s (1871-1952) *Systematic Theology*, and Wayne Arden Grudem’s (1948-) *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.³⁰

²⁶Ibid., 51, 70.

²⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 21.

²⁸Ibid., 26; cf. 22-23.

²⁹Ibid., 25.

³⁰Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 26.

According to Garrett, Grudem falls into the *nuda scriptura* trap described earlier—there is no such thing as theology by *nuda scriptura*. Grudem somewhat hints at this when he uses the analogy of the jigsaw puzzle to describe systematic theology.³¹ He says that systematic theology is akin to putting together all of the edge pieces and a few of the middle sections, realizing that there are many significant gaps in the puzzle. In other words, systematic theology defines the border of all theology, which by extension includes biblical theology. So for Grudem, the theological system one uses is part of the foundation for one’s theological method. This is not to say that theology should not establish boundaries, for it most certainly should. But this is to question whether one should begin with the borders, or work from the center, namely Jesus Christ.

The identity of Grudem’s system is easy to establish, for he reveals it himself (safely in the Preface). He says that he holds a “traditional Reformed position with regard to questions of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, the extent of the atonement, and the question of predestination,” acknowledging that his understanding of theology was formed at Reformed Presbyterian Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.³² According to Yarnell, these are the very doctrines that forced the Reformers into an extra-biblical theological system through which they interpreted significant sections of Scripture;³³ as a result, Grudem’s entire system is affected by this basic presupposition. Although somewhat obscured by Grudem’s thorough presentation of various perspectives on the different theological issues, the Reformed tendencies of his system are undeniably present in his theology, and not only in the obvious issues of predestination and limited atonement. For example, Grudem also holds to the concept of the church as invisible, an idea that Yarnell accuses results in a “weak ecclesiology,”³⁴ incompatible with a free church. Indeed, Grudem’s ecclesiology is weak in the sense that he deemphasizes the unique role of the local church and the function of the members of that church; even his meaningful section on church discipline lacks the covenantal significance found in the practiced ecclesiology of the early free churches.³⁵

Millard Erickson

Erickson qualifies many statements in his *Christian Theology* making it difficult to argue that he overlooks elements of method or foundation, or that he fails to bring them to his reader’s attention. Rather, any concerns with the theological method Erickson teaches his students must arise from both a phenomenological evaluation as well as some of his conclusions. To his credit, and against the tone of the earlier works reviewed, it is critical to

³¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 29.

³²Ibid., 16; cf. *ibid.*, 21n1.

³³cf. Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 92.

³⁴Compare Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 855-63 with Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, xiv.

³⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 976.

note that Erickson's title has real meaning to him. Before he defines theology, Erickson tells his reader that "accepting Jesus as Lord means making him the authority by which we conduct our lives,"³⁶ and that Christianity is far more than holding specific beliefs. The free churches should be most pleased with this prefatory remark, and yet be somewhat concerned that Erickson does not explicitly state that being a Christian is necessary for writing Christian theology.

In this second edition of his well-known text, Erickson devotes seven chapters to a discussion of theological method, including a chapter on postmodernism written for this latest edition. He begins by describing Christian theology as first biblical, then systematic, then related to culture, then contemporary, and finally practical. Unlike Thornbury and Grudem, Erickson does not try to draw a clear line between systematic (what he means when refers to Christian theology) and biblical theology. Systematic Christian theology "is not simply based on biblical theology; it *is* biblical theology. Our goal is systematic biblical theology." Within this framework Erickson offers two very laudable presuppositions: that God exists and that he has revealed himself in the canonical Scriptures.³⁷

However, thrown into the middle of this discussion is a rather innocuous paragraph that states, "Systematic theology also utilizes philosophical theology,"³⁸ such that philosophy may be used to evaluate theology. Whereas Thornbury embraces the use of philosophy wholeheartedly, Erickson clarifies his approach to the study of philosophy, saying, "Because they may to some extent influence our thinking, even unconsciously, it is helpful to be able to recognize and evaluate their valid and invalid emphases."³⁹ It is on this basis that he launches into a rather lengthy discussion of philosophical alternatives. Erickson argues that "revelation rather than philosophy will supply the content of our theology," but also that philosophy "helps us" iron out our concepts, presuppositions, formulations, and applications.⁴⁰ The free churches should be comfortable with a certain amount of philosophical discourse, for no Christian thinks in a vacuum. Yet those same churches can also see through his discursive smokescreen and state clearly that Erickson's theological method and development is in fact *not* based on revelation but on philosophy.

Erickson's chapter entitled "The Method of Theology" is an excellent case in point, for in this significant chapter he cites only four biblical passages, and none of those for the purpose of establishing theological method. In this chapter, Erickson (like Thornbury) communicates the message that the interpretation of theology is highly philosophical in nature. This message is clarified three chapters later, but Erickson's "process" illustrates the situation. He creates the sequence, exegesis—biblical theology—systematic theology, and

³⁶Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 20-21.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 20, 23-24, 26, 35.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 29; cf. 36.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 56, 59-60.

the emphasis must be placed on his penultimate step, the development of a central interpretive motif.⁴¹ Our concern should not be with the possibility of an interpretive motif,⁴² but rather the process of its identification. Erickson tells his reader that he has developed his theology around the broad concept of “the magnificence of God.”⁴³ The free churches would never deny the magnificence of God, but they would query as to why his magnificence should be chosen as the theological foundation of the understanding of his Word. Unfortunately, Erickson never offers a convincing apologetic for his choice of motifs, so this most important of decisions is left to the assumptions of the reader.⁴⁴

In many ways, this reflects the concern expressed earlier about Grudem. Is the purpose of the Bible merely to reveal God’s glory (as does the creation), or is it to reveal the gospel—God’s plan to reconcile sinful man to himself through his Son Jesus Christ? Again, the apostles saw the purpose of Scripture to be “witnessing to the lost, warning the saved, and condemning the disobedient.”⁴⁵ This is done best through the central interpretive motif of covenant discipleship to Jesus Christ. The free churches also have one additional concern with Erickson’s choice of motif, namely its philosophical overtones. One has to go to the Bible to learn about discipleship to Jesus Christ; the magnificence of God as presented by Erickson is not so restricted. In fact, as Yarnell describes, the concepts of divine sovereignty and philosophical predestination can and have sometimes been used to subvert the biblical order.

This concern reaches a critical pinnacle in Erickson’s chapter, “Theology and Its Language.” In this chapter, which explains how theology is communicated, Erickson not only does not cite the Bible as a source for his ideas, but fails even to refer to it in any of his explanations. Instead, he offers a very complicated philosophical approach to language through high-level categories such as eschatological verification, metaphysical synthesis, and speech-act theory. While his presentation is interesting, Erickson unfortunately communicates to his students that only well-trained philosophers can correctly or effectively read or express theology. Consequently, despite all of the ideas Erickson offers for consideration in the name of Christian theology, his work raises significant questions as to appropriate theological method.

⁴¹Ibid., 70-82.

⁴²Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 5, 78.

⁴³Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 82.

⁴⁴From Erickson’s interaction with Stanley Grenz, it appears that Erickson’s choice of divine magnificence as an integrative motif may have been an afterthought. Ibid., 82 and 82n.

⁴⁵Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 89.

James Leo Garrett, Jr.

Next to these three Baptist alternatives stands the theology of James Leo Garrett, who begins with some strikingly different theological foundations in his *Systematic Theology*. First, “good systematic theology ought to be based on the fruitage of biblical theology and the history of Christian doctrine.” Second, Christian theology “is a sympathetic, not an alien, interpretation of the Christian gospel. Christian experience is thus a *sine qua non* of Christian theology.” Third, “it is the *church*, and not merely individual Christians, that is involved in the theological task.” Fourth, theology does not deny scientific observation, but rather “claims another and transcendent source of knowledge, namely, God’s self-disclosure, or divine revelation.” These presuppositions paint a very different image of theology, especially with respect to its sources of the Bible, tradition, experience, and culture, and its understanding of the church, the local and visible congregation of believers. For Garrett, there is a wedge driven between philosophy, man’s quest for truth, and theology, man’s understanding of divine revelation, which is finally and ultimately made in Jesus Christ. It is only after clearly establishing his foundations that Garrett begins to explain the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy.⁴⁶

Summary Evaluation

Further discussion of Garrett’s system and method is unwarranted because many of his conclusions will be adopted by Yarnell, Garrett’s student and admirer. For example, countering the three alternative systems of Catholicism, Liberalism, and the Reformed tradition, Yarnell calls upon Southern Baptist J. L. Dagg, who rejected building metaphors for biological metaphors with respect to the church, returning the emphasis to “a free church holism arising from a living faith in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ Importantly, this simple counter-perspective corrects not only those non-Baptist Christian alternatives described in *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, but also the Baptist alternatives described above. Thornbury’s foundation ultimately crumbles because it starts with philosophical methodology, Grudem’s because it starts with a theological system, and Erickson’s because it starts with an arbitrary philosophical center. None of these systems consider the role of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ in the formation of sound Christian theology, and none of these systems acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit or the local, visible church in its development. These three simple concepts are the very foundation of the free church tradition! How can they not even be considered in the formation—the method—of Free Church theology? The Free Church commitment must be to a theology based on a living and personal faith in Jesus Christ and guided by the ongoing illumination of the Holy Spirit. Such a theology is protected from such deficiencies for the reasons Yarnell describes in chapter three of his book and it reflects the very basis of our identity.

⁴⁶Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, ix, 3, 4, emphasis added, 5, 81ff.

⁴⁷Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 70.

WHAT IS THE FREE CHURCH THEOLOGICAL METHOD?

We really cannot allow any ambiguity on this issue, so let me summarize the answer before launching into Yarnell’s detailed argument. For the free churches, the foundation of theology is Jesus Christ; its source is the Bible as illuminated by the Holy Spirit; its participants are born again believers working together in the context of the local church; its purpose is to help believers live in covenantal discipleship to Jesus Christ. These simple points guide Free Church theological method, and this is why Yarnell defines it as “disciplined response to divine revelation” where “discipline” has a very specific meaning: “the church’s commitment to follow Christ.”⁴⁸

For his primary Free Church theologian, Yarnell significantly chooses Pilgram Marpeck. Most importantly, Marpeck was a layman, engaging in churchwide theological method, and living out the Free Church ideal. Furthermore, recent manuscript discoveries have brought Marpeck into the forefront of German Anabaptist studies. But in my opinion, the most intriguing fact about Marpeck is that he lived in both worlds—as a Free Church theologian and as a public servant (city engineer). Marpeck worked with his persecutors, he was genuinely sympathetic to their beliefs, and he remained ever-compassionate about the needs of church members. He also poses a challenge to the contemporary theologian because “Marpeck was not so much concerned with precise theological definitions as he was with sincere and entire obedience to God, whose will was revealed in Scripture.” Yarnell wants to see a return to this motivation for theology, and he rises to this challenge by discussing Marpeck’s thought in inductive categories generated from Marpeck’s own thought.⁴⁹

Yarnell summarizes, “The free churches begin their theology of discipleship with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, seek to understand His ordinances through His Word illuminated by the Spirit, and institute those ordinances within the church, according to the biblical order.” Jesus Christ, and discipleship to Him, is the essence of Christianity. By the Spirit of God, the Bible is the Word of God. So by emphasizing both Word and Spirit, Christians can properly understand the Bible without going beyond it (spiritualism) or forcing it into a man-made system (evangelicalism). This is possibly the most important claim Yarnell makes—critical, even, to the Free Church perspective—that both inspiration *and* illumination are works of the Spirit, and thus Christian theology is driven by the *coinherence* of the Word and Spirit. No more exclusive and inhospitable claim can be made, nor one more consistent with free churches’ convictions. Unless one is a born-again Christian, he cannot properly understand the Bible (and by implication has no place at the theological discussion table). Furthermore, one cannot properly understand the letter of the Word apart from the Spirit of the Word; consequently the Bible can neither be purely spiritualized nor systematized. According to Marpeck, this fine balance is inherent to proper Free Church theological method.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., 1, 12.

⁴⁹Ibid., 76.

⁵⁰Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 79, 87, 82.

Not surprisingly, Marpeck denies any conclusion drawn from a system as opposed to the Bible. He decries the Reformers for invoking a vague “divine sovereignty” with respect to infant baptism, or practical considerations with respect to religious liberty, as opposed to the biblical witness. In a very significant section, Yarnell relates a trial/debate between the Strasbourg Reformer Martin Bucer, the prosecutor, and Marpeck, the defendant. Reviewing this trial, Yarnell concludes, “As the argument concluded, Bucer resorted to worldly concerns and historical precedent, while Marpeck continued to look to Christ.”⁵¹ Now the urgency of theological method should be apparent, for this assessment should be considered a slap in the face to all Reformed churchmen, especially those who align themselves with the Southern Baptist Convention. By virtue of the disparate starting points of the two theological methods, a legitimate doubt as to the place of Calvinism within the Free Church tradition is raised. In addition, the elevation of systematic theology over biblical theology in the Convention’s seminaries and decision-making is questioned. These issues cannot be ignored by our Convention. If Yarnell’s assessment is accurate, and if those foundations carry over to the present day, we are faced with a fundamental disagreement not only in theological method, but also theological purpose and theological conclusion. The only way this assessment can be pursued is if the theological leaders of our Convention choose to engage in a friendly but frank conversation, honestly, openly, and humbly.

Yarnell points out three additional consequences of Marpeck’s foundation of biblical discipleship to Christ. First, Marpeck did not divide justification and sanctification as the Reformers did. Instead, he expected all believers to continue their growth in Christlikeness. Second, Marpeck found the biblical referent for baptism to be “witness,” not “symbol.”⁵² Consequently, it must be reserved for believers, for it is a witness to their regeneration, and it highlights the role of the church in which it takes place. Third, the Lord’s Supper is also a witness, meaning it is more than mere memorial, though less than sacramental. In summary, Yarnell places the foundation of Free Church doctrine on Christocentrism and a Word-Spirit understanding of divine revelation interpreted within the church community over and against human systems. As simple as this may sound, it truly isolates the free churches from most other traditions. In practice, free churches may stray from this foundation, and other traditions may appeal to it, which is why this conversation should be engaged and will be extremely helpful over time. In theory, at least, this chapter of Yarnell’s book can serve as the starting point for much fruitful discussion within (and without) the Southern Baptist Convention.

UNDERSTANDING DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

Yarnell does not leave his proposal with theological foundation, but pursues it through its historical dimension, namely, the proper form of doctrinal development. Yarnell may lose a number of readers in this section of his argument because it requires a strong awareness of Christian history, but it should not for that reason be ignored. After all, what good does it do you to take exceptional care in pouring your house’s slab and then pay little

⁵¹Ibid., 95.

⁵²Ibid., 99.

attention to its actual construction? Both aspects are equally important to the final product. Yarnell begins this section by describing alternative theories of doctrinal development. Vincent of Lerins speaks for the “classical thesis” that “there is no real development in doctrine,” but that orthodox doctrine has been believed everywhere, always, by all. The key to this thesis is that it was assimilated into the Roman Catholic church, which considered itself the guardian of doctrine. Heresy became identified with novelty or antisacerdotalism. Importantly, because church and state had been intertwined in this period of history, heresy was seen as a criminal danger to society, and heretics were subject to civil punishment, even the death penalty. The Reformation set the Roman church on the defensive for a time, and some Romans recognized some doctrinal development within their history. But rather than admit error, the Roman church “concretized” the classical thesis, deciding that all doctrinal development was protected by an infallible Church (Vatican I). The Enlightenment and German liberalism opened new criticisms, even threatening the validity of the Bible, and Harnack was specifically able to demonstrate the full extent of extrabiblical developments within the Roman church. Then John Henry Newman, “the most important theological thinker of modern times,” an Anglican-turned-Roman Catholic, proposed a new theory of development. Following Anglican obsessions with fourth and fifth century patristics, Newman proposed that the Bible cannot be understood on its own, but only through the church (especially the patristic church). He maintained the necessity of Scripture, but added tradition as a “necessary supplement;” the Holy Spirit guides men towards truth, but does so through the Church. Thus, Newman integrated Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the church into the development of doctrine, a seemingly brilliant compromise between three competing positions.⁵³

It should go without saying that the free churches found Newman’s compromise unacceptable. On the one hand, Yarnell recapitulates Oscar Cullman’s argument for the priority of Scripture. Cullmann contends that Christ spoke through the apostles via the Holy Spirit, and the church recognized that their tradition alone could be authoritative and must be preserved in its written form. On the other hand, Yarnell also exegetes the Paraclete sayings of John 14-16 driving towards a most important conclusion about the development of doctrine. Against D. A. Carson and other Reformed thinkers, Yarnell believes that the paraclete sayings promise a continuing ministry of the Spirit upon all believers for all time to guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Essentially offering a basic doctrine of “illumination,” Yarnell explains the critically practical consequence of a church that believes and lives by this doctrine: such a church does not need to rely on rationalism (or by implication, tradition) to understand *or* develop its doctrine. Furthermore, Yarnell puts this in the context of Marpeck’s congregational hermeneutics, itself the context of John 16—illumination is not an individual but a corporate event.⁵⁴

There is a second consequence to this theory: all church doctrine must follow the “simple patterns of Scripture itself,”⁵⁵ avoiding the human tendency to augment and

⁵³Ibid., 107, 111, 113, 116, 117.

⁵⁴Ibid., 130-33, 134-36, 139.

⁵⁵Ibid., 141.

complicate ideas. To do this, a church tradition must identify the hermeneutical center of the Bible and establish its circumference. Unfortunately, this is apparently an “impossible” task, for every word in the Bible is important,⁵⁶ but Marpeck captured the essence of the task in his focus on radical discipleship, leading to believers’ baptism, a christocentric kerygma, and a Trinitarian identification. At this point Yarnell makes a key assertion, for it has begun to sound as if Marpeck is simply creating his own rival theological system. But unlike J. N. Darby, Frances Turretin or George Lindbeck (or Thornbury, Grudem, or Erickson, for that matter!), Marpeck began with Scripture, not Aristotelian categorization or Protestant scholasticism.⁵⁷ Marpeck’s “system” is biblical, not systematic; by beginning with the Great Commission, he has created a holistic understanding of the Bible that is not simplistic, but elegant. From all of this, on the authority of the book of Acts, Yarnell concludes that proper dogma actually unites, not divides, and a healthy awareness of the human tendency to drift into error must drive the church to continue to reevaluate itself by the only truly trustworthy theological source, the written Word of God.⁵⁸

This important chapter should provoke a great deal of discussion in Southern Baptist circles. If it does not, then Southern Baptists are not paying attention. Yarnell’s application of John 13 and Matthew 28 to a history of doctrine should provide a very important basis for his desired dialogue, assuming his peers are not too put off to join him at the table—implying that the *Institutes* is extrabiblical will be a bit of a stumbling block for some! At a first glance, it may seem that Marpeck tends to systematize in much the same way as his opponents, only from a different perspective, and that Yarnell overlooks that out of his bias towards the Free Church tradition.⁵⁹ On the contrary, Marpeck’s thought is that elegant. He cannot be charged with forcing the Bible through a system because the Bible itself is the system. Reformed and dispensational theologians (and all others) will fight this conclusion, and should offer some heavy retaliation, but as long as it is offered in honest, biblical tones, Yarnell may and should welcome the dialogue.

THE FREE CHURCH PROPOSAL

In the last two chapters of his book, Yarnell explains the Free Church model for proper doctrinal development, one that recognizes both rational and spiritual discernment, in its ecclesiological and personal dimensions.⁶⁰ He first points out two important steps in the development of the Free Church identity: first, early English separatists appealed to the “further light” or illumination by the Spirit as the Word of God “became better known;” second, Andrew Fuller proposed an entire theology based on the cross of Christ, resulting in a strong sense of the mission of evangelism. But in a welcome twist, rather than interpreting

⁵⁶Ibid., 139.

⁵⁷Ibid., 141; cf. *ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁸Ibid., 148.

⁵⁹cf. *ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁰Ibid., 150.

the history of theology or the development of doctrine, Yarnell explains how the Free Church perspective should impact the historian of theology and the theologian of history.⁶¹

To do so, Yarnell invokes Herbert Butterfield, who proposed three levels of thinking and reporting: facts, causes, and providence. Butterfield asserted that a good historian must offer an analysis of the facts of history—though never a Whig interpretation!—but a better historian will acknowledge his personal commitment to certain metaphysical assumptions that color his interpretation of those facts, and the best historian will approach history out of his personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Butterfield’s perspective is greatly—even solely—enhanced by Free Church values that are explained in the next section of the book. But at this point, Yarnell makes clear that every historian functions both as a scientist and an artist. Butterfield did so exceptionally well because of his commitment to Jesus Christ.⁶²

FREE CHURCH HISTORIOGRAPHY

Yarnell believes that the values within the Free Church theological method, when appropriately understood, will drive a superior interpretation of history. First, the Lord of eternity is the Lord of history. In other words, human history only makes coherent sense when understood within the metanarrative of creation to corruption to redemption.⁶³ Second, the Lord is Lord of all human beings equally. This perspective helps to mitigate cultural bias, and more importantly restrain judgment. Third, the Lord acts through divine providence. Consequently, history must be *linear* (though patterned). Fourth, the Lord is Lord of the fallible. Here, Yarnell draws the conclusion that the historian should treat all dogmatic development with much suspicion. Fifth, the Lord is Lord of both covenants, recognizing a progression from the old to the new. Such a progression is welcome and valuable to a historian, but full caution must be employed when applying this section to anything other than history. Finally, the Lord is Lord of all the churches. This perspective takes root in the Free Church prioritization of the local, visible church; in other words, “the history of the church is best conceived as the history of local churches.”⁶⁴ A historian with this viewpoint in mind will take seriously the voices from all cultures in all times.

This is a very promising proposal for the writing of history. Any theist will immediately recognize the value and importance of acknowledging the hand of God at work in human history; in fact, denying or ignoring that hand leaves a bad taste in a reader’s mouth. Unfortunately, it is much easier said than done. This is why I earnestly hope that

⁶¹One complaint may be issued to Yarnell in this context (which is the reason this article has been written in the first place), that he may have left too much to the reader to conclude.

⁶²See Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 154, 162, 165.

⁶³Ibid., 166. “Metanarrative” is my word, not Yarnell’s.

⁶⁴Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 178; cf. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, 59.

Southern Baptist historians will choose to join this conversation and add their unique perspectives. Yarnell lifts up Butterfield and Robert A. Baker as positive representatives of proper school of historical evaluation, but who else can be added?⁶⁵ How can anyone learn the art of walking the line between a Christian interpretation of historical facts (which is not quite Butterfield's third level) and a misapplied appeal to divine providence? Yarnell's suggested themes, while reasonable and a helpful start, do not provide the answer to this question, and thus this issue must be addressed by Southern Baptists at large.⁶⁶

A FREE CHURCH HISTORY OF THEOLOGY

The free churches, following the New Testament, view history through the cross of Jesus Christ—which brings the reader to consider the life, death, resurrection, commission, and return of Christ—and the history of Christian theology must be viewed as a response to those events.⁶⁷ To illustrate a “New Testament pattern of history,” Yarnell traces the development of the doctrines of the Trinity, salvation, and covenant from this perspective. For example, with respect to the Trinity, the Free Church perspective leads to an interesting interpretation of the battle between the Arians and the Nicene Christians. Nicene theology “won” because of its biblical basis, especially with respect to the Great Commission. In this, the hand of God is seen through causality, for the appeals to human factors such as politics or philosophy ultimately cannot explain the matter. Yarnell sees the same factor at work in the understanding of salvation, seeing the anti-sacerdotalism of the Reformation (even the opinion of Erasmus) through a Great Commission-driven view of “living faith.” He further notes how the Anabaptists rediscovered the biblical concept of a church covenant, realizing that personal commitment operated within mutual accountability.⁶⁸ Importantly, Yarnell concludes with a lament that free churches have not always “been true to their principles,” commenting specifically about the Southern Baptist approval of human slavery.⁶⁹

This is an incredibly helpful exercise in the study of the formation of Christian doctrine because Yarnell shows his reader the primary Free Church themes at work in specific test cases. The doctrine of the Trinity comes about through the coinherence of Word and Spirit, driven by a doctrinal and practical focus on the Great Commission.

⁶⁵For example, Historian David Bebbington comes to similar conclusions about historiography in *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979) but avoids any meaningful reference to providence in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

⁶⁶Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 187.

⁶⁷Ibid., 182; cf. 186.

⁶⁸cf. ibid., 190, 193; and Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁹Ibid., 199; cf. Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: UNC, 2006).

Soteriology evolves around a commitment to discipleship and “living faith.” The church covenant, and its tension between freedom and accountability, takes all of these factors into account. In the process, Yarnell again intimates that only Christians can have a seat at this discussion table, for only Christians can properly operate at all three of Butterfield’s levels of a New Testament pattern of history.

This exercise also reveals the clear need for further dialogue in this area, and not entirely to Yarnell’s credit. Frankly, some of Yarnell’s explanations are unsatisfying, especially with respect to the egregious offenses committed in Free Church history (the primary example given is slavery, but countless lesser examples could be offered). To say that the nature of the Southern Baptist free churches was “compromised” but not lost during this period,⁷⁰ thought true, sounds very much like historical reinterpretation. How should a Free Church historian handle those periods of history where the proffered themes are clearly non-existent (such as the antebellum South)? How should Christians respond to histories written from a non-Free Church perspective (or even a non-Christian perspective—Philip Benedict’s *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed* comes to mind)? What would a “school of historians” look like, considering that a history of churches is still written by individuals, not churches? Answers to these and other questions must be addressed in the hoped-for conversation, and I believe very strongly that Southern Baptists will benefit greatly from its engagement.

SUMMARY

By the end of Yarnell’s book it should be evident that the free churches should care not only about their theological foundation, but also their theological method. What is the purpose of theology? Is it to create a structure for making complex statements about God? Or is it to help Christians walk worthy of their calling, take up their crosses, and follow Jesus to the glory of God? By their method, the free churches do not separate theology from life, the academy from the church. We do not do theology in order to do evangelism, or in order to create ethical systems, as some of the methods discussed earlier seem to imply, for there is no separation between these things. If we think theology can be done independent from the call to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus, then I would question if we truly understand God’s purpose in self-revelation. The free churches should not have such ambiguity. And I believe very strongly that we should be very concerned that all of the theological methods taught in our colleges and seminaries may not take our theologies to this vital, singular purpose.

How Should We Respond?

How should Southern Baptists respond to Yarnell’s wake-up call? Do we ignore the bomb? Do we try to set it off in a “controlled” fashion, hoping to minimize the damage? Or do we work together to defuse it? While there will be a great deal of disagreement as to the particulars of his proposal, one conclusion is unavoidable: a Free Church theological method exists, and it is powerful—powerful through the Word and Spirit of God. Yarnell provides a taste of the grandeur of the Free Church tradition and the elegantly simple means

⁷⁰Ibid., 200.

by which it describes the foundation and formation of doctrine, keeping it true to the Bible and the pattern of Christianity set by Jesus Christ, and predicting and guarding against the abuses inherent in man's interpretation, abuses even within its own tradition. Yarnell's perspective is sound, and his accusations must be answered by all the traditions questioned in this book.

But the "success" of the book must be measured by response. Yarnell has two ultimate goals in mind with this book. One is to make a place for the Free Church tradition at the wider theological table. This he has done well, so it is not left to representatives of other traditions to open the dialogue. But the other is to clarify the Free Church position to his own Southern Baptist Convention. Members of the Convention (including those of a more Reformed, dispensational, or even possibly Landmarkist leaning) may discover that they fall outside of certain bounds described in this book. Yarnell clearly wants his peers to come to grips with their identity as free churchmen and together identify those foundations that determine what can and cannot fall under the large theological umbrella held by the Convention.⁷¹ This goal will be much harder to reach than he may realize. Both goals require theologians to come—of their own free will—to the table with a genuine desire to dialogue and learn. But will anyone come to the table? Certainly Southern Baptists, but will Anglicans or Catholics or Presbyterians come? Most importantly, at this time, will those who are entrusted with the task of teaching Southern Baptists come? Furthermore, can Yarnell guide the dialogue to a meaningful conclusion, and can he then help take the results to the churches? The first step can only be judged by the second. A modern restoration is called for on many fronts in *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*. Who will hear this call?

⁷¹cf. Ibid., 118.

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