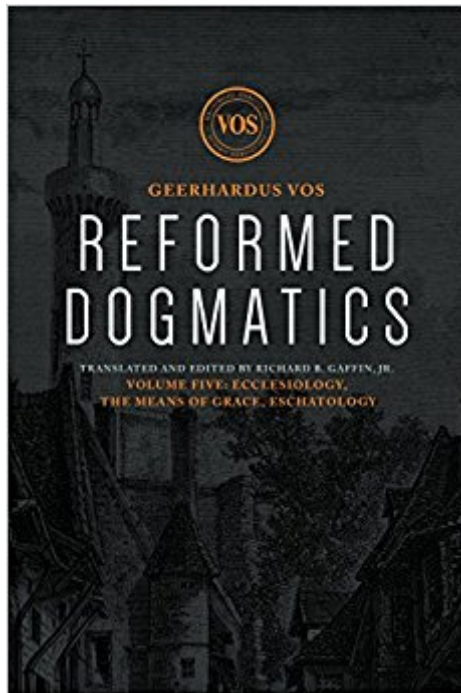


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# Reformed Dogmatics: Ecclesiology, The Means Of Grace, Eschatology



## Synopsis

"Like books, people can become 'classics.' Great in their day, but richer and more fulfilling with time. Not yet a classic, Vos's never-before-published Reformed Dogmatics is more like a lost Shakespeare play recently discovered."--Michael Horton

Until recently, Reformed Dogmatics was only available in its original Dutch. But now you too can access Geerhardus Vos' monumental work of systematic theology. This brand-new English translation was edited by biblical theologian and Vos expert, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

In Volume Five: Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology, Vos discusses:--The essence and organization of the church--The Word of God, baptism, and the Lord's Supper as means of grace--The doctrine of last things in both individual and general terms

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like books, people can become 'classics.' Great in their day, but richer and more fulfilling with time. Not yet a classic, Vos's never-before-published Reformed Dogmatics is more like a lost Shakespeare play recently discovered. There seems to have been a flurry in recent years of systematic theologians writing with an eye for biblical theology. With this series we now have a biblical theologian writing a systematic theology. Thanks to Lexham Press for giving us such long-awaited but impressive access to this much-discussed gem."--Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California

The state of access to deep, historic, orthodox Reformed theology has progressed exponentially in the

last decade or so. Resources previously inaccessible to many have now become available to a vastly wider audience. In my view, the capstone of this accessibility is in this masterful work of Geerhardus Vos. Vos has the singularly unique acumen and ability to summarize and state concisely some of the deepest truths of Reformed theology. This volume will now be my first recommendation to anyone who wants to understand the riches of the Bible's teaching in a compressed and clear way. Thanks to Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., to the translators, and to Lexham Press for putting this work into our hands.--K. Scott Oliphint, professor of apologetics and systematic theology, Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia)

This translation of Vos' *Dogmatiek* is the last link in access to his magnificent oeuvre. English readers will now be able to match the Princetonian's commitment to historic Reformed doctrinal orthodoxy with his pioneering work in redemptive-historical biblical theology. The interaction is refreshing as well as pace-setting. Kudos to publisher and translator alike for undertaking this project.--James T. Dennison, Jr., academic dean and professor of church history and biblical theology, Northwest Theological Seminary

Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), a Dutch American theologian, is considered by many to be the father of modern Reformed biblical theology. He studied at the University of Berlin, the University of Strasburg, and finally Calvin College (then the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church), where he delivered the lectures that would become the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Vos held Princeton's new Chair of Biblical Theology from 1893 until his retirement in 1932. His thinking and scholarship deeply influenced the biblical and theological work of Cornelius Van Til, John Murray, Herman Ridderbos, and Richard B. Gaffin Jr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. is Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus, at Westminster Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 1965. An ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, he has authored and edited a number of biblical and theological works, including *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*.

Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) was an American Calvinist theologian who taught Biblical Theology at Princeton Theology from 1893-1932. He wrote other books, such as *Biblical Theology*, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God*, and *the Church*, *Pauline Eschatology*, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, etc. The other volumes in this series are *Reformed Dogmatics: Theology Proper*, *Reformed Dogmatics: Anthropology*, *Reformed Dogmatics: Christology*, and *Reformed Dogmatics:*

Soteriology. He observes about Jesus' church — "on the one hand, the church is something future. On the other hand, there is present in the word itself, pointing back clearly enough to the church of Israel, that it is not something absolutely new. It has existed earlier but will now come in a new form; it will now be His church par excellence — the church in the form that He Himself has given it. In essence, the church under the old and new covenant is the same; in form and manifestation there is a difference — The church under the old dispensation was more than church, it was equally state church — The church of the old covenant was not only a state church; it was essentially a national church — The outpouring of the Holy Spirit likewise distinguishes the Old and New Testament church — in the particular form in which this now happens, it forms a distinction between the Old and the New." (Pg. 7-8) He points out, "deacons and deaconesses should be spoken of — It can be said of all office-bearers in the church that they are servants. Paul calls himself a deacon — (Col 1:25). The government is God's minister (Rom 13:4) — But deacon also appears in a narrower sense along with the office of elder, — with the overseers and deacons — (Phil 1:1) — Mention is made of a woman as a deaconess, — Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae — (Rom 16:1) — (Pg. 61) He suggests of the word "sacraments" — that it is not to be rejected, just because it is not scriptural: — "for it shares this character with many other terms that we nevertheless cannot do without. Time and time again there have been those who have expressed objection to its use, but in spite of all criticism the word has remained." (Pg. 93) He says of Confirmation, — "Protestants have replaced the Roman Catholic confirmation with a confirmation of their own. However, they make no claim that it is a divine institution; it is something purely human that may not be elevated at the expense of baptism. Baptism and the Lord's Supper belong to each other as sacraments; the so-called profession [of faith] or confirmation indicates only the time when the right to the Lord's Supper, constantly held forth, becomes actual, is in force." (Pg. 106) He acknowledges, — "Thus the issue between us and Baptists is not at all whether baptize-in — means to immerse or to sprinkle. One can grant, and probably will have to grant, that nowhere in the New Testament has it completely lost its original

meaning of ἵνα ἐκβαπτίσῃ αὐτὸν ὁ νεοφύτουτος or  
ἐκδιψήσῃ αὐτόν. The issue is simply whether immersion was the main point or something incidental. And then we say the latter. It was immersion with the purpose of washing, and in order to portray purification. We rely on this when we claim that baptism by sprinkling is just as much the ordinance of Christ as baptism by immersion.<sup>7</sup>

(Pg. 123) He looks at the “baptism for the dead”<sup>8</sup>: Linked permanently to 1 Corinthians 15:29 is the difficult question whether dead persons may also be baptized, at least representatively—that is, whether someone can be baptized on behalf of the dead.

The most natural and only tenable explanation seems to be as follows: In the Corinthian congregation a misuse must have existed whereby Christians let themselves be baptized vicariously for unbaptized deceased persons, probably in the superstitious belief that from this baptism the latter would gain an advantage on the day of resurrection. Thus this misuse included belief in the resurrection from the death. And to the extent that the practice included this faith, Paul could make use of it as an ad hominem argument. By this, however, it is not being maintained that Paul approved of this superstitious use. Under other circumstances Paul could have remonstrated with the Corinthians about this practice and taught them better. In any case the apostles opposed it, for it did not continue in the church.

No one will be able to claim, however, that [Voss’s explanation] removes all difficulties. It remains abidingly strange that Paul could make such a dreadful misuse of baptism the basis for his argument without a single word of disapproval.

(Pg. 139-140)

Of the “profession of faith” needed prior to adult baptism, he observes,  
“Knowledge of the fundamental truths of Christianity is required. The baptism of an adult takes place on the supposition that there is grace present in the heart. But the presence of that grace can only be revealed by words. Where every expression of knowledge is lacking, the basis for the supposition just mentioned would be lacking. God has so ordained that the inward life of a Christian can only emerge by a conscious profession. But a difference of opinion can exist regarding the extent of the knowledge required. That extent can vary according to the person.”

(PG. 143) He asserts,

“The fact that under the Old Testament dispensation of the covenant of grace, young children of the covenant people were circumcised. If it can be shown that circumcision was a sign and seal of the covenant of grace in entirely the same sense as baptism is that now, then infant baptism follows from circumcision. One easily sees that this argument can only be advanced by maintaining the spiritual character of the Old

Testament dispensation. Adults were not circumcised in Israel. The Baptist must then also maintain that circumcision did not possess any signifying and sealing power for the covenant of grace. But if not circumcision, then what? Passover, perhaps? Its administration was just as general as circumcision. So we see how the Baptist must come to completely despiritualize the Old Testament dispensation of the covenant of grace. Nothing of it remains other than the form of a national covenant. (Pg. 161-162) He argues, “we do not maintain that the children of believers are already regenerated at an early age, but leave that completely undecided. And nevertheless, we assume on the basis of the promise of God that the young children of the covenant who die before the use of their understanding, receive eternal salvation. On what basis do we make this assumption?... We should note that Scripture does not offer us any grounds to entertain this expectation for ALL children wherever they are born among pagans, Muslims, of Christians. It is clear that one can only reason here from the covenant. Where no covenant relationship exists, every basis for such a verdict is lacking. One need not for that reason to preach with emphasis that all such children are lost. But there is no basis for their salvation. All the reasons that are produced for their salvation proceed from a weakening of the concept of original sin. It is believed that original sin in itself is not sufficient to consign a child as damnable before God, or at least cause it to be lost. If the child dies before it commits actual sin, then it is saved. Our answer to this is that original sin is certainly sufficient for damnation, and one may not make this difference in degree between it and actual sin. (Pg. 183) He continues, “one cannot go further than to say that on the basis of the promise it is expected and required of all the children of the covenant that they will fulfill the covenant. That expectation includes that, if the parents honor their promise, God, in His own time, wills to work in their children through His Spirit, and from those who grow up will build the church and further His covenant. And at the same time, that expectation includes those children who die before the use of their understanding are saved. Both expectations are sealed in baptism. And so there is in that sealing of baptism more than a conditional offer of the covenant; there are positive promises of God. These are the two highly comforting facts. And with an eye to this, no one will be able to say that infant baptism is meaningless. (Pg. 185) He also suggests, “So we can only hold to this rule: the children of believing parents have the right to baptism. It is very difficult to make a further determination and establish how many generations may be skipped. The church has not always remained the same on this matter. It wishes to baptize even the children of those who are excommunicated members by baptism only are certainly covenant members, but members who do not honor their covenant obligations. And those

who are excommunicated and censured for other sins do that much less. This, too, is a consideration: suppose that one admits such baptized members to the sacrament of baptism for their children, what means are there left to exercise discipline over them? Keeping them from the Lord's Supper is of no avail, since they do not desire the Lord's Supper for themselves. Denying them baptism for their children appears to be the only means. But that is a means that at the same time affects the children along with the parents. (Pg. 195) Of the bread in the Lord's Supper, he asserts, "The Reformed view is exegetically the only tenable one: This thing (the bread) SIGNIFIES my body. That the apostles could understand. By that understanding one is not in the least forced into the Zwinglian view. Nowhere is it determined that we must derive everything that we know regarding the sacrament of the Lord's Supper from that. It is. If that were so, then the explanation 'signifies' would in fact carry us into the arms of Zwinglianism. But there are other data that teach us that more is connected with this 'signifies,' about which further presently. (Pg. 213-214) He explains, "This intermediate state [after death] is passed by believers in heaven, by the lost in hell. Thus it is not a state without locality. That believers at their death enter heaven follows from the fact that they do to be with the Lord. We may not be able to say where heaven is, and yet that heaven is where Christ is, namely, according to His human nature. That the lost are in hell follows from Luke 16:23, 'being in torment.' Nor are the souls of those who have died elevated above time; they are and remain in time (Rev 6:11); they serve God day and night (Rev 7:15). (Pg. 256-257) He admits, "One must acknowledge that Revelation 20:1-6 seems to speak of a millennium. We are not able here to provide an explanation of this passage. It would first be necessary to decide which interpretation of the book of Revelation must be employed, the so-called church-historical theory or the so-called groupings theory. In any case, it is certain that the numbers in Revelation do not have a literal but a symbolic meaning. The number of the beast is 666. Even the chiliast cannot take that number literally. Why then does he insist on the literal interpretation of these 1,000 years?... However, we would not want to go as far as some who say that if it is proven that Revelation 20:1-6 in fact teaches a millennium, then that for me is a reason to declare Revelation to be spurious. We do not have the right to reject prophecy because it appears to us to be in conflict with other portions of Scripture. (Pg. 299) As regards the punishment of hell, he states that it consists

“In absolute separation from the gracious presence of God  
In endless destruction, an endless disruption of existence  
In actual pains of the soul and of the body  
Along with these objective punishments, there will also be subjective ones---pangs of conscience, anguish, despair  
The question arises how the fire of hell is to be understood  
It seems to us that this question is not capable of being resolved  
Even if material fire is not meant, then the repeated mention of fire still cannot be a mere metaphor in the superficial sense in which it is usually taken  
In the punishments of hell there will be a difference of degree  
(Pg. 302-304) This series will be of great interest to those seriously studying Reformed theology.

Excellent resource! Vos is pivotal 20th century theologian.

I completed the set with this purchase. The last time I saw this set, it was hand written in Dutch in a bound Three volume set in the Westminster Seminary library. Thank you, Dr. Gaffin and the publishers.

Vos doesn't really get into the kinds of foundational issues you would expect from a good systematic/dogmatic theology; although, you will get elements of a prolegomena from his "Biblical Theology". Overall, I enjoy the flow of Vos' Dogmatics, but still consider Bavinck and Reymond as my go-to systematics.

The 5th Volume of Vos' Dogmatics offers a fantastic view of systematic theology done in a straightforward and helpful manner. The catechetical format is a great tool, and blended together with Vos' deep biblical theological instincts, offers a rich resource to students of doctrine. Vos offers a helpful perspectives on the life of the church, in particular with his comments on church government and the Lord's Supper. At my request, Lexham Press offered me a pre-publication copy in order to see Vos' treatment of John 6 and the Lord's Supper, and Vos did not disappoint. In an extended discussion, Vos engages faithfully with the text, church history, and the unified message of scripture in order to provide a robust and incisive perspective on the Eucharist. That segment is indicative of his entire methodology of employing biblical theology in the service of dogmatics, and building his systematics solidly on the contextual flow of scripture. It was an



absolute delight to read, and source to which I will quickly return in my own ministry and study.

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