

REFORMED DOGMATICS



*Vos during his professorship at the Theological School
of the Christian Reformed Church, circa 1888–1893.*

REFORMED DOGMATICS



GEERHARDUS VOS, PH.D., D.D.

Translated and edited by

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.



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Reformed Dogmatics

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PREFACE

The welcome decision of Lexham Press, the publisher, to make this single-volume edition available will facilitate easier access to the *Reformed Dogmatics* and further its study and usefulness as a whole. The contents of this edition, including prefaces, are unchanged.

Several points made in prefaces to the volumes previously published separately bear repeating here. The goal has been to provide a careful translation, aiming as much as possible for formal rather than functional equivalence. Nothing has been deleted, no sections elided or their content summarized in a reduced form. Vos's occasionally elliptical style in presenting material, meant primarily for the classroom rather than for published circulation to a wider audience, has been maintained. The relatively few instances of grammatical ellipsis unclear in English have been expanded, either without notation or placed within brackets.

This is not a critical translation. Only in a very few instances has an effort been made to verify the accuracy of the secondary sources cited or quoted by Vos, who usually refers to no more than the author and title and sometimes only to the author. No exact bibliographic details have been provided, and explanatory footnotes have been kept to a minimum.¹

1 Further details related to producing the translation, with some observations about its contents, are in the prefaces to the individual volumes. A fuller overview is available in Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "The *Reformed Dogmatics* of Geerhardus Vos," *Unio Cum Christo: International Journal of Reformed Theology and Life*, 4/1 (April 2018): 239–45.

As previously noted, English readers are now able to explore the relationship between the early Vos of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and his subsequent groundbreaking work in biblical theology.² I continue to be confident that whatever differences such comparisons may bring to light, the end result will confirm a deep, pervasive, and cordial continuity between his work in systematic theology and in biblical theology.

The *Reformed Dogmatics* makes a valuable contribution for anyone looking for a uniformly sound and often penetrating presentation of biblical doctrine, particularly for students and others interested in an initial in-depth treatment of systematic theology.

May God grant that the *Reformed Dogmatics* be used for the well-being of His church and its mission in and to the world in our day and beyond.

R. Gaffin, Jr.

June 2020

2 There are some observations concerning this relationship in the items mentioned in the previous footnote, including books and articles cited in them. See also the recent important, thoroughly researched biography of Danny E. Olinger, *Geerhardus Vos: Reformed Biblical Theologian, Confessional Presbyterian* (Philadelphia: Reformed Forum, 2018).

REFORMED DOGMATICS

VOLUME ONE

THEOLOGY PROPER



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PREFACE

The *Reformed Dogmatics* of Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), here appearing for the first time in English, is a welcome publication for anyone wishing to benefit from a uniformly sound and often penetrating articulation of biblical doctrine. It will be of particular interest to those who are already familiar with the work of Vos—the father of a Reformed biblical theology.¹ Few, if any, among them have not experienced a growing appreciation of his profound and singular insights into Scripture. F. F. Bruce’s characterization of *The Pauline Eschatology* is an apt description for his work as a whole: “indeed outstandingly great ... a rare exegetical feast.”²

The *Reformed Dogmatics* stems from the period 1888–1893, when among other subjects the young Vos taught systematic theology (dogmatics) at the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church, later renamed Calvin Theological Seminary. This *Dogmatiek* was first published in Dutch as a hand-written manuscript in five volumes, in 1896. It was subsequently transcribed and printed in 1910. While the 1896 version is apparently in Vos’ own hand, the transcription is almost

1 For some reflections on his work in biblical theology (or “History of Special Revelation,” the designation he much preferred), and its significance, see my “Vos, Geerhardus,” in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 1016–19, and the literature cited there, 1019, and my “Introduction” in *Geerhardus Vos, Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980/2001), ix–xxiii; see also J. T. Dennison, Jr., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 36–41, 49–59, and the editor’s “Introduction: The Writings of Geerhardus Vos,” in Danny E. Olinger, ed., *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology: Biblical and Theological Insights Alphabetically Arranged* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 1–27.

2 On the front cover of the 1953 Eerdmans reprint.

certainly by some other person or persons. But there is no good reason to question that it was done with Vos' full knowledge and approval. That transcription is the basis for this translation project.

While this is not a critical translation, the goal has been to provide a careful translation, aiming as much as possible for formal rather than dynamic equivalence. The accuracy of the secondary sources Vos cites or quotes—usually by referring to no more than the author and title and sometimes only to the author—has not been verified nor the exact bibliographic details provided. Explanatory footnotes have been kept to a minimum. Nothing has been deleted, no sections elided or their content summarized in a reduced form. Vos' occasionally elliptical style in presenting material, meant primarily for the classroom rather than for published circulation to a wider audience, has been maintained. The relatively few instances of grammatical ellipsis unclear in English have been expanded, either without notation or, where the expansion is more extensive, placed within brackets.

Concerning the use of Scripture a couple of things are to be noted. Effort has been made to verify Scripture references, and occasional instances of typographical error, where the intended reference is clear, have been corrected without that being indicated. In Vos' original, Old Testament verse references are to the Hebrew text, which varies occasionally from the numbering used in English Bibles. These references have been changed in this translation to be consistent with English versification. Also, quotations occasionally follow the *Statenvertaling*³ but are usually Vos' own translation, whether exact or a paraphrase. Accordingly, rather than utilizing a standard English translation, they are translated as Vos quotes them.

English readers will now be able to explore the relationship between the early Vos of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and his subsequent work in biblical theology, begun in the fall of 1893 when he moved from Grand Rapids to Princeton Seminary as the first occupant of its newly created chair of biblical theology.⁴ Whatever differences that comparison may bring to light, it is safe to anticipate that the end result will substantiate

3 The state-commissioned Dutch translation first published in 1637.

4 The most extensive bibliography of Vos' writings is in Dennison, *Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, 89–110; on the *Dogmatiek*, 92. For a thorough survey of Vos' life, see 13–85; on his time teaching in Grand Rapids, 25–26.

deep, pervasive and cordial continuity between his work in systematic theology and biblical theology. An important reference point in this regard is provided by Vos himself in his comments on the thoroughly positive, complementary relationship he as a Reformed theologian saw between the two disciplines. This point was present in his Princeton inaugural address in the spring of 1894⁵ and echoed decades later, well after his retirement.⁶

Another interesting question concerns the antecedents of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, particularly those Vos may have considered its more immediate predecessors. Calvin is quoted most often, and there is occasional reference to various figures in late 16th and 17th century Reformed theology. However, there is no indication of current or more recent Reformed theologians who substantially influenced him and upon whose work he sees himself as building. There are only two passing references to Charles Hodge in Volume One (both dissenting!). There is no mention of Abraham Kuyper or B. B. Warfield, although Vos was personally acquainted with both and corresponded with them during his time in Grand Rapids, sometimes touching on matters theological. This silence may be explained by the fact that their major works were yet to appear.

The appearance of the *Reformed Dogmatics* will disclose substantial affinity with the *Reformed Dogmatics* of Herman Bavinck. This is to be expected, since the slightly younger Vos (by seven years) considered Bavinck a good friend as well as a close theological ally. The first volume of Bavinck's work (in Dutch), however, did not appear until 1895, after Vos' Grand Rapids period.⁷ Perhaps the later volumes of the *Reformed Dogmatics* will shed more light on the question of influences on Vos' work.⁸

5 "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as Theological Discipline," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 23–24.

6 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), Preface, 23.

7 Vos provided lengthy and appreciative reviews of volume 1 (1895) and volume 2 (1897) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* soon after each appeared; see *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 475–93.

8 For Vos' side of ongoing correspondence with Kuyper, Bavinck and Warfield, see Denison, *Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, 116–203, for the time prior to and during his Grand Rapids period, 116–78. None of this correspondence sheds any light on the existence of the *Dogmatiek*.

Volume One, appearing here, deals with theology proper. Subsequent volumes, scheduled to appear as the translation of each is readied, treat in order anthropology, Christology, soteriology, and in the final volume, ecclesiology and eschatology.⁹

This project represents a collaborative effort without which it would not have otherwise been possible. Particular thanks are due to the translators for their efforts in providing base translations of the various parts of Volume One and also to Kim Batteau for some translation review. I have reviewed and revised their work and given the translation its final form.

Thanks are due to Lexham Press for its commitment in initiating and supporting this project, and to its editorial staff for their work. Special thanks to the project manager, Justin Marr, for all his time and efforts, not least his ready availability to make suggestions and answer questions about procedures. Finally, it would be remiss not to acknowledge indebtedness to the unknown person or persons responsible for the careful transcription work done over a century ago. Those labors have made this translation project immeasurably more feasible.

R. Gaffin, Jr.

January 2013

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9 Interestingly, and no doubt of some disappointment to some readers today, there is no introduction (prolegomena) to systematic theology. It is unclear if—and if so, where—this area was covered in the curriculum of the Theological School at this time and whether Vos or someone else taught it. My thanks to Dr. Mark A. Garcia for verifying this state of affairs from the resources available in the Heritage Hall Archive at the Calvin College and Seminary Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



CHAPTER ONE

The Knowability of God

1. *Is God knowable?*

Yes, Scripture teaches this: “that we may know the One who is true” (1 John 5:20), although it also reminds us of the limited character of our knowledge (Matt 11:25).

2. *In what sense do Reformed theologians maintain that God cannot be known?*

- a) Insofar as we can have only an incomplete understanding of an infinite being.
- b) Insofar as we cannot give a definition of God but only a *description*.

3. *On what ground do others deny God’s knowability?*

On the ground that God is All-Being. They have a pantheistic view of God. Now, *knowing* presumes that the object known is not all there is, since it always remains distinct from the subject doing the knowing. Making God the object of knowledge, one reasons, is equivalent to saying that He is not all there is, that He is limited.

4. *What response is to be made against this view?*

- a) The objection that this view presents stems entirely from a philosophical view of God, as if He were All-Being. This view is wrong.

God is certainly infinite, but God is not the All. There are things that exist, whose existence is not identical with God.

- b) It is certainly true that we cannot make a visible representation of God because He is a purely spiritual being. But we also cannot do that of our own soul. Yet we believe that we know it.
- c) It is also true that we do not have an in-depth and comprehensive knowledge of God. All our knowledge, even with regard to created things, is in part. This is even truer of God. We only know Him insofar as He reveals Himself, that is, has turned His being outwardly for us. God alone possesses ideal knowledge of Himself and of the whole world, since He pervades everything with His omniscience.
- d) That we are able to know God truly rests on the fact that God has made us in His own image, thus an impression of Himself, albeit from the greatest distance. Because we ourselves are spirit, possess a mind, will, etc., we know what it means when in His Word God ascribes these things to Himself.



CHAPTER TWO

Names, Being, and Attributes of God

1. *In what does the importance of the names of God lie?*

In this, that God through them draws our attention to the most important attributes of His being. This being is so rich and comprehensive that we need to have some benchmarks in order to understand the rest. God's names are not empty sounds (like the names of people), but they have meaning and contribute to our knowledge of God.

2. *What is the meaning of the name Elohim?*¹

“He who is to be feared,” “the One who is full of majesty.” The ending *im*² is a plural ending. The singular is *Eloah* and appears first in the later books of the Bible as a poetical form. The plural ending does not point to an earlier polytheistic conception, but signifies the plenitude of power and majesty there is in God.

3. *What are the meanings of the names El and Adonai?*

El means “the Strong One,” “the Mighty One.” *Adonai* means “Ruler,” “Lord”; originally, “my Ruler,” “my Lord.”

1 Throughout Vos' transliterations of Hebrew and Greek words are preserved—they have not been updated to conform to current transliteration systems.

2 In this version, italics represent emphasis, per underlining in the original manuscript—not transliteration, although italics often occur on transliterated words. This style is included for each time a word is underlined in the original manuscript.

4. *Give the meaning of the name Eljon.*

It means “the Exalted One,” namely “above all other so-called gods”; cf. Genesis 14:18.

5. *What is the meaning of the name El Shaddai?*

“The Mighty One,” “the Sovereign One.”

6. *What is the derivation and what is the meaning of the name Jehovah?*

Very early the Jews thought that Leviticus 24:11, 16 forbade them to pronounce the holy name of God. They always replaced it with Adonai. Later, when vowels were added to the Hebrew text, the vowels of Adonai were used. Thus, the pronunciation “Jehovah” came into existence. We cannot ascertain with certainty what the original pronunciation was, but most probably the pronunciation was *Jahweh*. However, we are already so used to the sound of Jehovah that it would almost be irreverent to change it at this stage. According to Exodus 3:14, Jehovah is a covenant name and signifies: (a) self-existence; and (b) God’s immutability and faithfulness.

Elohej³

7. *What does the name Jehovah Zebaoth affirm?*

It means “the God [or the Lord] of Hosts.” This name was first used in the time of Samuel. In that connection, one has thought that it indicates Jehovah as *Captain of Israel’s battle array* (Psa 44:9). However, in Scripture, two other things are also called “hosts,” namely the stars and the angels (Deut 4:19; Job 38:7). Thus along with the meaning mentioned above, included also in the name is *this*: God all-powerfully rules over angels and stars, and Israel should not fear them as the heathen do.

8. *Has God made Himself known to us only through His names?*

No, also through His attributes. God’s attributes are the revealed being of God Himself insofar as it is made known to us under certain circumstances.

3 Elohej occurs in the original manuscript, but it’s not certain why.

9. *What two questions arise for us in connection with God's attributes?*

- a) In what relation do they stand to His being?
- b) In what relation do they stand to each other?

10. *What do the ancients teach concerning God's being?*

- a) As has been noted above, we cannot give a definition of God's being. After all, every definition presupposes a higher concept of genus and a distinction between a concept of genus and a concept of species, as well as a composition of the two. Now there is nothing higher than God, and God is simple, without composition.
- b) There is no distinction in God between essence and existing, between essence and being, between essence and substance, between substance and its attributes. God is *most pure* and *most simple* act.

11. *May we make a distinction in God between His being and His attributes?*

No, because even with us, being and attributes are most closely connected. Even more so in God. If His attributes were something other than His revealed being, it would follow that also essential deity must be ascribed to His being, and thus a distinction would be established in God between what is essentially divine and what is derivatively divine. That cannot be.

12. *May we also say that God's attributes are not distinguished from one another?*

This is extremely risky. We may be content to say that all God's attributes are related most closely to each other and penetrate each other in the most intimate unity. However, this is in no way to say that they are to be identified with each other. Also in God, for example, love and righteousness are not the same, although they function together perfectly in complete harmony. We may not let everything intermingle in a pantheistic way because that would be the end of our objective knowledge of God.

13. *From what other matters in God must we clearly distinguish His attributes?*

- a) From God's names, derived from the relation in which He stands to what is created. Thus, He is called Creator, Sustainer, Ruler (we call these predicates or descriptions).
- b) From the personal qualities that are unique to each person of the Holy Trinity and whereby they are distinguished from one another, e.g., begetting, being begotten, and being breathed (these are called properties, "particularities").

14. *In how many ways have theologians attempted to make a classification of God's attributes?*

- a) They have been classified in three ways according to which, it is thought, one must arrive at knowledge of the attributes:
 - 1. The way of causality
 - 2. The way of negation
 - 3. The way of eminence

However, this is not so much a classification of attributes as of ways in which *natural theology* has attempted to establish God's attributes.

- b) Another classification is *affirming* and *negating* attributes. Pure negations only tell us what God is *not* and are therefore not attributes in the fullest sense of the word. When we consider this more closely, these so-called negative attributes mostly include something affirming, so the distinction disappears. For example, God's eternity says more than that He has no beginning and no end. It also says that for Him everything is an indivisible present, etc.
- c) A third classification divides into *absolute* and *relative* attributes, or what comes down to the same thing, *inherent* and *transitive* attributes. However, strictly speaking, all God's attributes are absolute. In other words, the ground for them resides in His being, apart from the existence of the world, although we must admit that we could not conceive of some of them in action (e.g., grace

and mercy) if the world did not exist. On the other hand, there is no attribute in God that is not in a certain sense transitive, that is, which He has not revealed. We cannot claim that we know everything in God, but what we know, we only know because God has revealed it to us, because He has communicated and disclosed it to us.

- d) In the fourth place, there are some who want to differentiate between *natural* and *moral* attributes. Moral attributes are, e.g., goodness, righteousness. The remaining attributes that lack this quality are called natural. Against this distinction, there are two objections.
1. The word natural is ambiguous. It could give occasion here for thinking that God's moral attributes do not belong to His nature, His being.
 2. In addition, the error could arise as if in God the moral is separated from the natural and the latter is a principle of lower order in God.
- e) Fifth, we have Schleiermacher's classification along the same lines as his system. He divides according to the different ways in which our feeling of dependence expresses itself in response to God's attributes. This feeling does not arouse resistance within us against God's eternity, omnipotence, etc. Such attributes form one class. But against God's holiness, righteousness, etc., this feeling arouses resistance. These form a second group. This resistance has been removed by Christ, and the attributes with which we come into contact through Christ are summed up in a third group.
- f) The most common classification, which we also follow, distinguishes between *incommunicable* and *communicable* attributes.
1. To the incommunicable attributes belong:
 - a. Self-existence
 - b. Simplicity
 - c. Infinity
 - d. Immutability

2. To the communicable attributes belong:
 - a. Spirituality and personality
 - b. Understanding
 - c. Will
 - d. Power
 - e. God's Blessedness

15. *What must be noted regarding an objection raised against this ancient division into communicable and incommunicable attributes?*

It has been said that the differentiation is relative, that is, that the incommunicable attributes when viewed from another perspective are communicable and vice versa. For example, God's eternity is infinite in relation to time; in man there is a finite relation to time. Thus, there is an analogy between God and man. Conversely, there is only limited goodness and righteousness in us; in God both are perfect. Thus, there is an infinite distance. Each attribute, one says, is at the same time incommunicable and communicable according to one's perspective.

This view is entirely wrong. God's eternity says much more than that He stands in an infinite relation to time. It says that He is wholly exalted above it. Clearly, there is not a shadow or trace of this in man. God's eternity is indeed incommunicable, not only in degree but also in principle.

16. *What else do we observe about incommunicable and communicable attributes in relation to each another?*

That the former determine the latter. For example, God is infinite and possesses understanding. Now, we are able to connect infinity with understanding and say God possesses infinite understanding. We could do this as well with all the other attributes. The two sets are at no point separated from each other; they penetrate each other.

17. *What is God's self-existence?*

That attribute of God by which He is the self-sufficient ground of His own existence and being. Negatively expressed, *independence* says only what God is *not*. Self-existence is precisely the adequate affirmation here. Proof texts: Acts 17:25; John 5:26.

18. *What is God's simplicity?*

That attribute of God whereby He is free of all composition and distinction. God is free:

- a) Of logical composition; in Him there is no distinction between genus and species.
- b) Of natural composition; in Him there is no distinction between substance and form.
- c) Of supernatural composition; in Him there is no distinction between slumbering capacity and action. Proof texts: 1 John 1:5; 4:8; Amos 4:2; 6:8.

The Socinians and Vossius⁴ deny this attribute in order better to escape the Trinity, that is, the oneness in being of the three Persons.

19. *What is God's infinity?*

That attribute whereby God possesses within Himself all perfection without any limitation or restriction.

It is further distinguished into:

- a) Infinite perfection
- b) Eternity
- c) Immensity

20. *Is the concept of infinity negating or affirming?*

It has been claimed that it is purely negating and therefore has no content. This is not correct. Certainly it is true:

- a) That we cannot form a graphic image of the infinite or of an infinite thing. Beholding is always limited, and what is limited does not comprehend the infinite.
- b) That we cannot make a concept of the infinite with our thinking. Thinking also is always limited; thus it is inadequate for comprehending the infinite.

4 Vorstius is possibly meant here (see the answer to question 32 below).

Nevertheless, it remains true that we must hold with conviction that:

- a) Behind the finite we comprehend, the infinite exists. It is with the infinite God as it is with space. However far we proceed in our imagination, we know that we have not yet arrived at the end, that we could still take one more step.
- b) This infinity for God Himself is not something indeterminate as it is for us, but He Himself perfectly encompasses and governs it. However inconceivable this may be for us, in God it is a reality.

21. *Is God's infinity limited by the existence of other things that are not God?*

No, for to be infinite does not mean to be everything, although the pantheists claim the latter.

22. *Where does Scripture teach us God's infinite perfection?*

In Job 11:7-9 and Psalm 145:3.

23. *What is God's eternity?*

That attribute of God whereby He is exalted above all limitations of time and all succession of time, and in a single indivisible present possesses the content of His life perfectly (and as such is the cause of time).

24. *How many concepts of eternity are there?*

Two:

- a) A more popular concept: Eternity as time without beginning and without end.
- b) The more abstract and more precisely defined concept: Eternity is something that lies above time and differs entirely from time.
- c) Both belong together and serve to supplement each other. According to the first, time in itself would be the original, and eternity only an extension of time. The latter taken to an extreme brings us to the pantheistic error that time is only an alteration of eternity. But both exist, eternity in God, time in the world. Scripture has both descriptions of eternity: Psalm 102:12; 90:2, 4; 2 Peter 3:8.

25. *What question presents itself to us here?*

How God can have knowledge of temporal things, without, with this knowledge, time, as it were, penetrating God's thinking and thereby His entire being? In other words: How does God relate to time?

26. *What must the answer to this be?*

- a) That we may not follow those who deny a real existence to time and space and think that they are merely subjective forms in which man represents things. So Kant and many others. Time and space are objective and real.
- b) That it is difficult to decide whether time and space are independent entities or modes of existence, or are relations of things to each other, or an entirely different kind of reality, or something about which we can say nothing further. These questions belong to the realm of metaphysics. God's Word does not give a further explanation.
- c) That time and space as realities are also realities for God, the existence of which He knows.
- d) That, however, a great difference remains between the relationship in which we stand to these realities and in which God stands to the same realities. We have time and space not only as real outside us, but they are also created in our mind as forms for representation, so that our inner life is governed by them and we cannot be rid of them. We can only see in space and think in time. For God it is entirely different. His divine life does not unfold or exist in those forms. He is exalted above them and just that fact makes His eternity His omnipresence. He knows the finite as existing in time and space, but He does not know and see it in a temporal or spatial manner.

27. *Is it right to say that all "occurring" takes place in time and that thus there must also be passage of time in God?*

No, for we know that there is causing and being caused, thus a real occurring, outside of time, namely, in the generation of the Son and the spirating of the Holy Spirit.

28. *What do you understand about God's immensity?*

That perfection of God whereby He is exalted above all distinction of space, yet at every point in space is present with all His being and as such is the cause of space.

29. *Wherein lies the distinction between immensity and omnipresence?*

Both express the same thing but from two different perspectives. The first teaches how God is exalted above space and the second how He nevertheless fills space at every point with His whole being.

30. *How should we not think of this omnipresence of God?*

Not as extension over space; "God is entirely within all and entirely outside all," as one theologian has stated.

31. *In how many ways can existing beings be considered in relation to space?*

In a three-fold way:

- a) Material bodies exist in space in a delimited way. They are completely delimited and encompassed by space.
- b) Pure spirits, which are created, exist in space in a determinate way, that is, although they themselves have no extension unlike material bodies, they are still determined by space and its laws. Our soul cannot function everywhere.
- c) God, lastly, is in space in an effecting way, that is, space is sustained by the upholding power of His providence, as He has created it in the beginning and He wholly fills it.

32. *Is God omnipresent with only His power and knowledge or also with His being?*

The older Socinians, Vorstius, and some Anabaptists claimed the first. The latter is the case, as demanded by the infinity of God's being.

33. *Is God present everywhere in the same way?*

No, He reveals His presence in a different way in heaven than in the place of the lost, and differently on earth than above.

34. *How do you prove God's immensity from Scripture?*

From the following: Ephesians 1:23; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Psalm 139:7-12; Acts 17:24-28.

35. *What is the answer to the objection that the infinity of space limits God's infinity?*

- a) That we have no ground for claiming space is infinite. It is true that we cannot imagine an end to space, but that is due to our own limitation.
- b) Admitting that space were infinite, even then it need not limit God's infinity. That God is infinite does not mean that He is *all*. Since they fall into different spheres, the two infinities need not limit each other.
- c) If space were infinite, it would not be independent of God. God alone is self-existent; also note His immensity.

36. *What is God's immutability?*

That perfection in God whereby He is exalted above all becoming and development, as well as above all diminution, and remains the same eternally.

37. *Why is it necessary to emphasize this attribute?*

Because pantheism teaches that within God there is development, indeed, that the development of the world is nothing other than the process whereby God comes to self-consciousness. Martensen, a Christian theologian tainted by pantheism, says, for example, "God's immutability is not the immutability of the lifeless, for he is only as in eternal fruitfulness *he becomes of himself*. His eternity is therefore not a stagnant eternity like the eternal mountains, or a kind of crystalline eternity like the eternal stars, but a living eternity, continuously blossoming in unfading youthfulness." Beautiful language, but a God-dishonoring thought!

38. *How are the creation of the world and God's actions in time to be brought into agreement with His immutability?*

We must believe that all these deeds do not effect any change in God, since they do not require time in Him, although naturally their realization falls within time.

39. *How can we further distinguish God's immutability?*

One can speak of:

- a) An immutability of being.
- b) An immutability of essential attributes.
- c) An immutability of decrees and promises.

40. *Prove this from Scripture.*

See James 1:17; 1 Timothy 1:17; Malachi 3:6.

41. *What is the first of the communicable attributes?*

God's spirituality.

42. *What does Scripture mean when it calls God Spirit?*

The Hebrew and Greek words that mean "spirit" are both *wind*. From this starting point we discover the following:

- a) Wind is that power among material powers that seems to be the most immaterial and invisible. We feel it but we do not see it (John 3:8). When God is called Spirit, it therefore means His immateriality (John 4:24).
- b) Wind or breath is the mark of life and thus stands for life or in place of enlivening power. Thus it is the case that God's spirituality also means His *living activity*. As Spirit God is distinguished from man, indeed all that is created, that is flesh, that is powerless and inert in itself. Spirit is thus what lives and moves *of itself*. Jeremiah 17:5; Isaiah 31:3.
- c) Wind as the spirit of life or the breath of life belongs with something else enlivened or activated by it. God can also in this sense be called Spirit insofar as He is the enliver and source of life for the creature. That is so both in a natural sense as well as in a

spiritual sense. That agrees with the fact that man can be called flesh in a twofold sense, both insofar as he naturally has no power of life in himself and insofar as he is spiritually dead and cut off from God. In the latter sense, the word takes on its bad meaning, which it has throughout the entire Scripture. Psalm 104:30; 2 Corinthians 5:16.

- d) The spirituality of God implies that He is a rational being, with understanding, will, and power.

43. *Whereby does the doctrine of God's spirituality acquire a practical significance?*

Through the use of images in Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches (cf. Rom 1:23).

44. *What else does God's spirituality involve?*

That God's being also exists as personal. However, we should consider that God's being may not be called personal in the abstract but only in His threefold existence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In God personality is not one but three. There are not four but only three persons in the Godhead.

45. *Do not infinity and personal existence exclude each other?*

Almost the whole of modern philosophy claims that they do and therefore will not acknowledge any communicable attributes or personality in God. This claim is based on the idea that an "I" cannot exist without a "not-I" and that the nature of infinity excludes such an opposite.

The answer to this:

- a) That God is not all that exists and that therefore in His thinking He can most certainly place other things vis-à-vis Himself without canceling out His infinity.
- b) That personal consciousness is not caused by the consciousness of another outside us, but completely the reverse; the former makes the latter possible. Only where there is personal consciousness can one distinguish something else from one's self.
- c) That in us, human beings, consciousness of personality is certainly awakened and developed by contact with the world outside

us, but that we may not make this a rule for God. He is wholly independent from all that is outside Him.

- d) That within God's being itself there is a distinction that should explain completely how there can be consciousness of personal existence in God apart from other things. The Father is indeed conscious not to be the Son, and the Son not to be the Father, and the Holy Spirit not to be the Father and not to be the Son. And these three do not limit each other but together are the one, infinite God.

46. *What do we consider concerning God's understanding?*

His knowledge and His wisdom.

47. *What is God's knowledge?*

That perfection by which, in an entirely unique manner, through His being and with a most simple act, He comprehends Himself and in Himself all that is or could be outside Him.

48. *What distinguishes divine knowledge from that of human beings?*

- a) It occurs by a most simple act. Human knowledge is partial and obtained by contradistinction. God arrives immediately at the essence of things and knows them in their core by an immediate comprehension.
- b) It occurs from God's being outwardly. With us the concept of things must first enter our cognitive capacity from outside us. God knows things from within Himself outwardly, since things, both possible and real, are determined by His nature and have their origin in His eternal decree.
- c) In God's knowledge, there is no cognition that slumbers outside His consciousness and only occasionally surfaces, as is the case for the most part with our knowledge. Everything is eternally present before His divine view, and in the full light of His consciousness everything lies exposed.
- d) God's knowledge is not determined through the usual logical forms, by which we, as by so many aids, seek to master the objects

of our knowledge. He sees everything *immediately*, both in itself and in its relation to all other things.

49. *Is God's knowledge the same as His power?*

Some have claimed this. Augustine said, "We see the things that you have made because they exist; they exist, on the other hand, because you see them." In the same sense, Thomas Aquinas speaks of God's knowledge as the "cause of things." Likewise, many Reformed and Lutheran theologians. Against this idea we note:

- a) That it is certainly true that every act of will in God and every expression of His omnipotence is accompanied by knowledge, and thus one may speak of an effectual knowledge.
- b) That this, however, will always be a figurative way of speaking that may not lead us to identify the knowledge and power of God.
- c) That God's knowledge and power must be distinguished is clear-est from the fact that they have different objects. God *knows* all that is *possible*. His power is active only with respect to all that is real, and in a very different sense.

50. *How does one distinguish God's knowledge with reference to its objects?*

- a) Into *necessary* knowledge and a *free* knowledge.
- b) Into a knowledge of *simple comprehension* and a knowledge of *vision*.

51. *What is meant by the distinction between necessary and free knowledge?*

The objects of necessary knowledge are God Himself and all that is possible. It is called necessary, because it is not dependent on an expression of will in God. God is as He is, an eternal necessity reposing in Himself; also what is or is not possible is determined with equal necessity by God's perfect nature. One should note, however, that this necessity does not lie in a compulsion above God but in God's being itself.

The objects of *free* knowledge are all actual things outside God, that is, that actually have been, still are, or will be. It is called free because the knowledge of these things as existing depends on God's omnipotent decree and was by no means an eternal necessity.

One should note that the objects of free knowledge are simultaneously objects of necessary knowledge, but then not as actual but as purely possible.

52. *What is meant by the distinction between a knowledge of simple comprehension and a knowledge of vision?*

It is the same as the previous distinction. The knowledge of simple comprehension extends to all that is possible; the knowledge of vision, to all that is actual in the sense described above.

53. *In which two respects, however, is the knowledge of simple comprehension distinguished from necessary knowledge?*

- a) God is clearly the object of necessary knowledge but not of the knowledge of simple comprehension. Yet, the latter, as the name indicates, comprises only that which is *purely possible*.
- b) Actual things are also objects of necessary knowledge insofar as they are likewise possible. It seems that they must be excluded from the knowledge of simple comprehension because we are dealing here with a simple comprehension, that is, a comprehension that excludes all that is actual.

54. *Why are these classifications of the objects of God's knowledge important?*

Because they include a protest against the pantheistic identification of God and the world. By these distinctions, we confess that for God more is possible than exists in reality, that His power and thoughts extend beyond the world, that the latter is the product of His free will.

55. *What is so-called middle knowledge?*

It is something that Jesuits, Lutherans, and Remonstrants introduce between necessary and free knowledge.

By this is meant the knowledge that God possesses of certain things that would occur independently of God by the free determination of human will, provided that certain conditions would be fulfilled beforehand. For example, God gives to some His Word and the Holy Spirit, but not to others. We conclude from this His omnipotence in granting the means of grace. No, the proponent of middle knowledge responds, God

knew which persons would convert themselves by a free determination of will when these means are presented to them, and therefore He brings these means only to them.

56. *What must be said against this conception?*

- a) That knowledge, indifferent to whatever kind or origin, presupposes absolute certainty. Only what is certain and sure can be known.
- b) That, therefore, whatever is free and uncertain in itself cannot be the object of knowledge, nor can it be a particular kind of knowledge.
- c) That the opponents have only invented this knowledge in order to unite God's foreknowledge with their free will. And that they seek to unite two things here that logically exclude each other. Freedom of action in a Remonstrant sense and advance knowledge of that action are not compatible.
- d) Some have appealed to God's eternity in order to defend the knowledge of absolutely free actions. They say that God stands wholly above time, that the future is always present for Him, and therefore that He can know it despite its absolute freedom.

This is certainly true, but God's eternity, to which they appeal here for help, is simply overthrown by this doctrine of absolutely free will, withdrawn from God's decree. If in this way God must expect an increase in His knowledge of things outside Himself, if He must, as it were, wait if He thus must take up within Himself the influence of the temporal, then this destroys His eternity. The doctrine of middle knowledge denies precisely what could make it comprehensible.

57. *Is not such middle knowledge taught in 1 Samuel 23:9-12 and in Matthew 11:22-23?*

No, in the first case David is simply told what the consequence would be given the present attitude of the people among whom he found himself if he remained in the town. In Matthew 11:22-23, we have a hyperbolic mode of speech used by Jesus to indicate the hardening of His contemporaries.

58. *How far does the knowledge of God extend?*

It comprises all things great and small, free and necessary, past, present, and future. Therefore, it is called *omniscience*.

59. *What is the relation between God's decree, His free knowledge, and the free actions of men?*

God's decree grounds the certainty of His free knowledge and likewise the occurring of free actions. Not foreknowledge as such but the decree on which it rests makes free actions certain.

60. *How do you describe the wisdom of God?*

That perfection of God by which He uses His knowledge for the attainment of His ends in the way that glorifies Him most.

61. *How can one demonstrate God's knowledge and wisdom from Scripture?*

From Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 139:16; Proverbs 15:11; 1 Timothy 1:17.

62. *In how many different senses can the word "will" be understood?*

It can have three meanings:

- a) All morally determined attributes, insofar as these are active powers that can operate in a twofold direction. In this sense, holiness, righteousness, etc. belong to the will.
- b) The *capacity* to make a decree or a plan, and such a decree or plan *itself*. In this sense, the will (never the understanding) is the capacity by which God decrees or is the decree of God itself.
- c) The capacity by which God executes a decree of His will by a manifestation of power outwardly. In this sense, God's will is most closely connected with His active might.

63. *Is there a particular reason for classifying the following attributes of God under His will?*

Yes, for while in us rational attributes lie for the most part below our consciousness and thus hardly resemble a conscious volition, in God they are entirely different. All His rational perfections, such as His holiness, righteousness, etc., lie in the full light of His consciousness, that is, they are a conscious inclination of His nature. Clearly, conscious inclination