

J. Method in Systematic Theology

1. The contribution of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF)

Chapter 1, section 6 of the WCF states that "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." Does this suggest that deduction, even if it cannot serve as a completely adequate method, can nevertheless play a role in theologizing? Can sound deductions be made from certain biblical truths? Can sound implications be drawn from certain biblical assertions? If a truth is affirmed by Scripture, can logical inferences be drawn to truths not affirmed in Scripture?

For example, if "all Scripture is God-breathed," can we deduce that everything recorded in Scripture is the Word of God? Can we infer that everything written in the Bible is authoritative? Can we imply that every page of Scripture is true? Can we deduce that whatever can properly be called Scripture is inerrant? Or must each of these inferences be qualified by other facts and truths?

2. The contribution of Charles Hodge

In Volume 1 of his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge reduces the methods that have been applied to the study of theology to three: the speculative, the mystical, and the inductive. Having disposed of the first two, Hodge sets forth the third, in which there are four steps:

(1) The theologian comes to the task with certain assumptions, including the trustworthiness of his sense perceptions and reasoning powers, and the certainty of those truths given in the constitution of human nature.

(2) He ascertains, collects, and combines all the facts that God has revealed in Scripture concerning Himself and our relation to Him.

(3) He is guided in his collection of facts by the same rules as govern the scientist; to wit, that the collection must be made with diligence and care, and that the collection should be comprehensive, and if possible, exhaustive.

(4) He derives principles from the facts, instead of impressing them on them. He believes that "the relation of these biblical facts to each other, the principles involved in them, and the laws that determine them, are in the facts themselves, and are to be deduced from them."

Other than the use of the word "inductive", a stress on collecting and combining scriptural facts, and an emphasis on deriving principles from the facts, Hodge does not tell us how we are to go about combining the