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Revised and Enhanced

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD

Edited by John J. Hughes


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whose lifelong love for Reformed theology faithfully
guided P&R Publishing for over four decades.

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FOREWORD TO THE REVISED EDITION

THE preponderance of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield's (1851–1921) articles and books on various biblical and theological topics are as timely today as they were when he published them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this volume, four seminal articles—"The Idea of Systematic Theology," "Christian Supernaturalism," "Predestination," and "On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects"—provide profound insights into Warfield's foundational beliefs. Additional articles on "Renewal," "Imputation," "The Foresight of Jesus," "The Divine Messiah in the Old Testament," "The Spirit of God in the Old Testament," "The Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race," "Mysticism and Christianity," "The Prophecies of St. Paul," and others make this book a veritable feast for readers who are hungry for meticulous, biblically-grounded Reformed theology. Warfield's painstaking scholarship, coupled with his academic acumen, has long been regarded as exemplifying the finest that Princeton Theological Seminary produced, before its reorganization along modernist theological lines in 1929.

During his more than thirty-three years at Princeton (1887 to 1921) as the Charles Hodge Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology, Warfield wrote the majority of the "more than forty books and booklets, nearly seven hundred periodical articles, [and] more than a thousand book reviews"¹ that were published during his lifetime. After Warfield's death, his brother, Ethelbert D. Warfield, no mean scholar in his own right, working

1. Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 27.

with William Park Armstrong and Caspar Wistar Hodge, selected eighty-nine of those articles and published them in ten volumes from 1927 to 1932 with Oxford University Press under the title *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*.² These volumes were subsequently reprinted by Baker Book House in 1981, 1991, 2000, and 2003.

From 1948 to 1958, P&R Publishing³ published a five-volume collection of Warfield's best theological articles under the titles *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, *The Person and Work of Christ*, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, *Calvin and Augustine*, and *Perfectionism*. In his informative, analytical forewords to the original volumes in this collection, Samuel Craig, P&R's first president and the series editor for the Warfield volumes, explained that with few exceptions all the articles were taken from various volumes in the out-of-print Oxford University Press edition of Warfield's works.⁴

The goal of this current project is to provide twenty-first-century readers—including scholars, students, and educated laypeople—with more accessible, readable, and useful versions of these books. To achieve these goals, I have made the following improvements.

- In the table of contents, I have listed each chapter's top-level outline, thus making it easy to see the main topics that Warfield covers.
- I have added a fulsome abstract⁵ at the beginning of each chapter and study questions and a "For Further Study" section at the end of each chapter. The abstracts are designed to provide an overview and summary of the chapters, using Warfield's own words as much as possible. The study questions reflect the key issues that Warfield addressed in the chapters and should be beneficial for classroom use. The annotated "For Further Study" sections, created by Warfield scholar Fred Zaspel, list works by Warfield and works by other authors related to each chapter's main topics. "For Further Study"

2. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, Ethelbert Dudley Warfield, and William Park Armstrong, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927–32).

3. Then known as the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

4. A physical comparison of the original P&R articles with their OUP counterparts indicates that P&R reproduced the OUP articles using a photomechanical process.

5. The abstracts for "The Idea of Systematic Theology," "Predestination," "On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects," "Faith," and "The Prophecies of St. Paul" are more fulsome than others in order to accommodate their depth and the importance of their subject matter for Warfield's theology.

selections are intended to illuminate the many topics that Warfield covers and to expand the reader's understanding of them.

- Within each chapter, I have broken excessively long paragraphs into shorter ones (assisted in this task by Scott Christensen, Karen Magnuson, and Mary Ruth Murdoch), created internal A-, B-, and C-heads to serve as road maps,⁶ modernized footnotes and bibliographies (see below), created bibliographies for all the chapters,⁷ and when possible supplied the actual information in places where Warfield used *ad loc.*, *in loc.*, *loc. cit.*, *op. cit.*, and *sub voc.* I have also conformed the use of italics and quotation marks to *The Chicago Manual of Style* (17th ed.). Additionally, except in quotations, I have followed CMS's recommendation to use shortened citations in place of "ibid." to avoid confusion, for example: "Monod, 357" instead of "ibid., 357."
- Where appropriate, I have relegated long strings of Scripture references to footnotes to make the text easier to read.
- I have provided complete bibliographical information in footnotes and bibliographies—information that should facilitate accessing the same texts that Warfield cited—including full author names when possible.⁸ As appropriate, I created proper footnotes from in-line citations, while leaving others in place for clarity of reading. By and large, I have not provided bibliographical information for the many classic commentaries that Warfield cites in this manner: "see Mayor on James 4:5, and cf. Lightfoot on 1 Cor. 2:9, Westcott on John 7:38, Godet on Luke 11:49." Most of these commentaries are well known and can easily be found in research libraries, in digital collections, and online.
- Throughout the chapters, I have conformed spelling and capitalization to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (11th ed.),

6. Of the eighteen chapters in this volume, only chapters 1 ("The Idea of Systematic Theology"), 2 ("Christian Supernaturalism"), 6 ("The Spirit of God in the Old Testament"), 9 ("Misconception of Jesus, and Blasphemy of the Son of Man"), 11 ("Imputation"), 12 ("Predestination"), 16 ("Faith"), and 18 ("The Prophecies of St. Paul") had any sort of internal outlines.

7. No chapter originally included a bibliography.

8. Many of the books listed in each chapter's bibliography can be found in full-text PDF format on the HathiTrust Digital Library site (<https://www.hathitrust.org/>). Articles in journals formerly published by Princeton can be found in full-text PDF format in "The Princeton Theological Seminary Journals" collection (<https://commons.ptsem.edu/pts-journals>).

abbreviations for biblical books to P&R's house style, abbreviations for primary sources to those in *The SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd ed.), the citation style for primary texts to the decimal style advocated by the *SBL Handbook* (§ 8.3), and the citation style in footnotes and bibliographies to *The Chicago Manual of Style* (17th ed.). A table of abbreviations provides a guide to the various primary sources Warfield cites.

- Scattered throughout the volume I have added 334 editor notes—indicated by “ED. NOTE.” These provide translations of obscure Latin words and phrases, definitions of opaque English words, where the chapters in the volume first appeared (e.g., *Princeton Theological Review*), comments on bibliographical matters, and other pertinent information designed to help the reader. The “Glossary of Defined Terms” at the end of this volume lists the 258 lexicographical editor notes.
- A comprehensive bibliography of 375 entries lists the books and journal articles cited in this volume. Three indices—Scripture, names, and subject—professionally created by John Muether, make it easy to locate various sorts of information.

Another change from the first edition of this volume is the inclusion of Warfield's seminal article “The Idea of Systematic Theology”⁹ as chapter 1. This article represents the main theological distinctives that guided the *didactic* side of Warfield's writing. Chapter 2, “Christian Supernaturalism,” provides a synopsis of the main theological distinctives that guided the *polemical* side of his work. Both articles were published in 1896. Taken together, these two chapters highlight the major outlines of Warfield's theological project at Princeton as the Charles Hodge Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology.

To help ensure the scholarly integrity of this volume, apart from conforming Warfield's spelling and use of case to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, I have not altered his words, including leaving “Holy Ghost,” rather than changing this to “Holy Spirit” (though Warfield uses both terms), and not changing “Jehovah” (= YHWH) to “LORD.”

9. Originally published as Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 7, no. 26 (1896): 243–71.

This volume brings together Warfield's best articles on the biblical and theological topics mentioned at the beginning of this foreword. Chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, and 18 are nontechnical in nature; chapters 1, 4, 5, 9, 12, 14, 15, and 16 are semitechnical. All eighteen chapters reflect Warfield's incisive scholarship.

Warfield was a watchman on the wall of orthodoxy. His temperament, training, and talent, together with his deep love for Christ and his amazing knowledge and work ethic, resulted in his being the twentieth century's greatest defender of the faith. His writings have been studied with profit for well over a hundred years—a tribute to his clear, careful, cogent, gospel-centered exposition of orthodox Christianity, which he called “the redemptive religion,” and to his fearless exposition and defense of it.

My prayer is that this revised, enhanced volume will help foster an increased interest in Warfield's writings and that his words will continue to speak to the church across the coming decades with their original power and clarity.

John J. Hughes
Whitefish, Montana

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

THIS is the third volume of the writings of Benjamin B. Warfield to be published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company. The first contained his principal writings dealing with *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, the second with his principal writings dealing with *The Person and Work of Christ*. This third volume contains a more varied assortment but they deal for the most part with the biblical doctrine of God, the biblical doctrine of predestination, and the biblical doctrine of faith and matters related to these themes. In addition it includes articles dealing with such matters as the supernaturalism of Christianity, the antiquity and unity of the human race, mysticism, and the prophecies of Paul.

All the articles included in this volume, with the exception of the one entitled, “Are They Few That Be Saved?,” have been taken from the ten volumes of the collected writings of Warfield—all of which have been out of print for some years—published under the auspices of the Oxford University Press subsequent to his death. To be more specific, three have been taken from the volume entitled *Christology and Criticism*, five from the one entitled *Studies in Theology*, and eight from the one entitled *Biblical Doctrines*.

Other biblical and theological studies, in the form of sermons, may be found in its supplement. These sermons, all of which were preached in the chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary to audiences composed almost exclusively of theological students, have been taken from his published sermons—two from the volume entitled *The Power of God unto Salvation* and two from the one entitled *The Saviour of the World*. Warfield’s sermons serve to remind us in a way that some of his more technical writings naturally

fail to do that in him a mind of rare power, extraordinary erudition, and a remarkable facility for accurate, concise and telling expression was combined with a deeply religious heart—the primary qualification of a truly Christian theologian.

A special feature of this volume is its sketch of Warfield as a man and theologian. It may seem that this sketch should have appeared in the first of the volumes of his writings published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company. However, in view of the fact that this volume contains a more varied assortment of his writings, dealing with more aspects of his teaching, it has been thought that it has an even better claim to this distinction. It is to be hoped that the day is not far distant when some scholar with the requisite knowledge and ability will give the theological world something like a full-length portrait of Warfield as a man and theologian. Believing as we do that he labored within the main stream of Christianity as it makes its way across the centuries from the Protevangelium¹ to the Consummation at a time when its progress, humanly speaking, was being seriously impeded—as is still the case—we are confident that such a volume would have more than a passing value.

Thirty years have come and gone since Warfield's death. Certain of the chapters of this volume were written as much as fifty years ago. For those who like the Athenians of Paul's day are interested only in telling or hearing some new thing this will be its sufficient condemnation. It will be found, however, we believe, that it deals with matters of perennial interest in a manner which has rarely, if ever, been surpassed. If many of the names which appear in its pages are unfamiliar to its readers it will nonetheless be found that the biblical and theological views which they defended or opposed are much under discussion today. What is more, there is every reason to think that this will continue to be the case for years and even centuries to come. If we mistake not, Warfield's contribution to their discussion is, as a whole, among the best available or that is apt to be available for a long time to come.

The three volumes of the writings of Warfield thus far published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company contain less than a

1. ED. NOTE. *Protevangelium*: a messianic interpretation of Genesis 3:15 that understands "he shall bruise your head" (ESV) as a reference to the coming Messiah and "you shall bruise his heel" (ESV) as a reference to Satan, over whom the Messiah will triumph.

third of the material included in the ten volumes published by the Oxford University Press—in terms of bulk though hardly in terms of value—not to mention his numerous writings not included in the Oxford edition. A large portion of the material included in the Oxford edition, other than that already republished, consists of studies of Calvin and Calvinism, Augustine and Augustinianism, and Christian Perfectionism. Whether interest in some or all of these writings is sufficiently widespread to warrant their republication in the near future, in view of prevailing high publication costs, is not clear. Most of the interest thus far expressed has been in his more distinctly biblical and theological writings—two or three more of which would have been included in this volume if the space had been available. It is regrettable that the sponsors of the Oxford Edition so greatly underestimated the demand that would develop for the writings of Warfield. On the other hand, the fact that the writings of Warfield are more in demand today than at the time of his death may indicate a change for the better in the religious and theological atmosphere.

S. G. C.
Princeton, New Jersey

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WISH to thank the following people for their help with this project.

Bryce Craig, my friend and P&R Publishing's president from 1982 until his death in 2025, envisioned the project, asked me to head it up, and encouraged me along the way, for which I am most grateful. Bryce's grandfather Samuel G. Craig (who along with J. Gresham Machen founded P&R) was a student of Warfield's at Princeton and later his good friend—so much so that P&R has the very desk at which Warfield studied and wrote, as well as many of his armchairs. The articles in this book may well have been written at that desk! The theology of Warfield—the twentieth century's greatest expounder and defender of the Reformed faith as embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith—has been inextricably entwined with P&R's publishing vision for over ninety-five years, since the company was founded in 1930.¹

Sinclair Ferguson, an expert on Warfield's theology, graciously lent his expertise and reputation to this project by writing the excellent "Introduction to Warfield's Works," which follows these acknowledgments and for which I am most appreciative. In his introduction, Dr. Ferguson aptly explains why Warfield's theological writings have a timeless quality that makes them as valuable today as when they were first published:

1. Samuel Craig was also on the organizing committee for Westminster Theological Seminary and a trustee (1929–36). In 1934 he delivered the commencement address to the seminary's fifth graduating class, referencing Warfield no fewer than nine times. See Samuel G. Craig, *Westminster Seminary and the Reformed Faith* (Philadelphia: Hathaway & Brothers, 1934), republished in *Christianity Today* 5, no. 5 (October 1934): 108–12. In May 1930, P&R launched the magazine *Christianity Today*, and Dr. Craig served as its editor until 1949. In 1956 the journal's name was acquired by the company now known as Christianity Today International.

Acknowledgments

Warfield's perspective was that of a biblical theologian, and there is therefore a kind of timelessness and constancy about much of his writing. In addition, he was, in the most fundamental sense, a radical theologian. He penetrated to the *radix*, to the root, of the issues with which he dealt, as he also did with the doctrinal positions of the theologians whose work he analyzed. He penetrated to, and formulated his thought based on, first principles. And it is these qualities that make so much of his work ongoingly relevant, even in a world where much has changed. So while in his writings a modern reader may occasionally encounter a name now largely forgotten, his positive exposition of Christian doctrine has a perennial quality about it. The way he thinks, the approach he adopts to theological questions, the profound biblical orientation of what he writes, the theological principles that he brings to light, coupled with his elegant writing style, all combine to give his work a lasting quality that can be appreciated just as much in the first decades of the twenty-first century as it was in the parallel decades of the twentieth century.

Fred G. Zaspel, author of the magisterial and highly acclaimed *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), graciously spent hours creating the "For Further Study" sections that appear at the end of each chapter. Dr. Zaspel also contributed the helpful annotated "Select Books on Warfield and His Theology," which is part of this volume's end matter. A hearty thanks for his invaluable contributions to this volume and for their many encouraging words.

Thanks also to these Warfield scholars who provided valuable advice and suggestions about various matters, along with welcome encouragement and enthusiasm for the project: Kim Riddlebarger, author of *The Lion of Princeton: B. B. Warfield as Apologist and Theologian*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015); Bradley J. Gundlach, author of "B. B. Warfield (1851–1921): Evolution, Human Origins, and the Development of Theology," in *Science and the Doctrine of Creation*, eds. Geoffrey Fulkerson and Joel Chopp (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 59–83; and David P. Smith, author of *B. B. Warfield's Scientifically Constructive Theological Scholarship*, Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series 10 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011). Special thanks to my good friend Vern Poythress for sharing with me his

thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of Warfield's *theological prolegomenon*—especially about Warfield's theological method.

So that we could retypeset the Warfield volumes, we had the text professionally keyboarded, and this included having the Greek keyed in Beta code.² To convert the Beta-coded Greek to proper Greek, Christopher J. Samuel at SIL kindly provided a Beta-Code-to-Unicode converter, as well as a converter that changed Roman numerals to Arabic ones in biblical citations. Jeffrey Jou carefully entered the Hebrew into the chapters, using an electronic copy of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, thus helping to ensure the highest degree of accuracy, and he proofread the Greek and Hebrew in the typeset copy. Tim Muether created three indices—Scripture and other works cited, names, and subjects—that make it easy to locate various sorts of information. Thank you, Christopher, Jeffrey, and Tim.

During this multivolume project, my P&R colleague Amanda Martin has provided valuable advice in response to various questions, and for her assistance I am most grateful.

To make Warfield's writing more inviting and easier to read, my friend and P&R author Scott Christensen,³ one of the best writers I know, assisted me in carefully dividing many of Warfield's huge paragraphs into smaller ones, as did Karen Magnuson and Mary Ruth Murdoch.⁴ For Scott's pains-taking help I am truly thankful.

Karen Magnuson assiduously applied her amazing copyediting skills to this volume and graciously answered my many editing-related questions; I am deeply indebted to Karen for her excellent work. Mary Ruth Murdoch meticulously proofread this volume with eagle-eyed precision, and for her careful work I am also grateful. Karen's and Mary Ruth's expertise has helped to ensure that this volume meets the highest standards of professionalism in academic book publishing.

Paul Woo, a WTS PhD student, labored diligently to provide correct bibliographical information for hundreds of footnotes and to format them

2. "Beta Code," last accessed April 24, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beta_Code.

3. *What about Free Will? Reconciling Our Choices with God's Sovereignty* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016); *What about Evil? A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020).

4. Frequently in the original P&R books, Warfield's paragraphs are over two pages long. One sentence alone was over 300 words!

Acknowledgments

correctly. This is a tedious task, and for Paul's meticulous work, I am most appreciative.

I am indebted to Warfield scholars Fred G. Zaspel, Vern S. Poythress, Kim Riddlebarger, and David P. Smith for encouraging me to include Warfield's essential article "The Idea of Systematic Theology" in this volume.

Finally, I am thankful to my wife, Claire, a former fellow Westminster Theological Seminary student who is also a Warfield reader, for her patience with me as I disappeared for many hours and many days to work on this volume and for her consistent encouragement to do so.

May the Lord of Glory be glorified by this volume, and may it serve to help build up his church throughout the world.

John J. Hughes
Whitefish, Montana

INTRODUCTION TO WARFIELD'S WORKS

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

It is a privilege to introduce this new edition of collected writings of B. B. Warfield. Behind the privilege lies a personal narrative.

While I can pinpoint the first time I heard of B. B. Warfield, it was not my first encounter with the surname. For *Warfield* was the maiden name of “that woman”—the description of choice employed by my mother’s generation for Mrs. Wallis Simpson. Her entrance into the life of Edward, the Prince of Wales and heir to the British throne (upon the death of his father, George V), precipitated a constitutional crisis and led to his abdication in December 1936.

The twice-divorced Mrs. Simpson was always known to me as Wallis *Warfield* Simpson. Little did I know in my childhood that in due season the writings of one of her distant cousins, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, would come to mean so much to me. But so it proved to be. Years later, in my very first days at university, an older student referred me to the writings of “B. B. Warfield” in such reverential tones that I realized that whoever he was, and wherever his work was to be found, he was clearly an author who merited careful attention.

In those days, however, apart from a small collection of his essays entitled *Biblical Foundations*,¹ Warfield’s works were virtually nowhere to be found

1. B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations* (London: Tyndale Press, 1958).

in Scotland. Thankfully for me, I was surrounded by older students in our Inter-Varsity Fellowship group who read serious Christian books as well as contemporary paperbacks. And these senior students had somehow discovered an organization known as The Craig Press Agency through which books published in the United States were imported into the country. Its catalogue listed a five-volume set of Warfield's works—and even better news, they were available at highly discounted prices (an irresistible combination to a young Scottish student). And so as a teenager I eagerly purchased five volumes that became familiar companions.

It is these volumes that are here republished. They have been freshly edited and formatted in a user-friendly form in this new edition and include new material. Now a new generation can enjoy this enhanced presentation of the work of a genuinely great American theologian.

B. B. Warfield died in 1921. Since then, the output of literature in theological scholarship, not least of a conservative variety, has increased exponentially. So it might be assumed that the republication of material more than a century old has only antiquarian value.

In Warfield's case, however, there are reasons why this is far from the truth. For one thing, Warfield's perspective was that of a biblical theologian, and there is therefore a kind of timelessness and constancy about much of his writing. In addition, he was, in the most fundamental sense, a radical theologian. He penetrated to the *radix*, to the root, of the issues with which he dealt, as he also did with the doctrinal positions of the theologians whose work he analyzed. He penetrated to, and formulated his thought based on, first principles. And it is these qualities that make so much of his work ongoingly relevant, even in a world where much has changed. So while in his writings a modern reader may occasionally encounter a name now largely forgotten, his positive exposition of Christian doctrine has a perennial quality about it. The way he thinks, the approach he adopts to theological questions, the profound biblical orientation of what he writes, the theological principles that he brings to light, coupled with his elegant writing style, all combine to give his work a lasting quality that can be appreciated just as much in the first decades of the twenty-first century as it was in the parallel decades of the twentieth century.

In addition, while the names change and the contexts differ, the basic theological issues with which Warfield had to deal frequently reappear

under a different name, only thinly disguised as something new and different. And one of the virtues exemplified in his work—first observed by him, he believed, in his own revered teacher Charles Hodge—is that he has the capacity to make his readers *think*.

Scripture

Warfield continues to be best known today (and most frequently quoted across the board) for his work on the doctrine of Scripture, much of which is embodied in this set in the volume titled *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Indeed, if we were looking for tributes or memorials to him, one would be found in the tendency of modern Bible translations to render *theōpneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16 as “God-breathed” or “breathed out by God” rather than (as in the older, King James tradition) by “inspired.” This reflected Warfield’s discussion of the term and his argument that Scripture is not “breathed into” (in-spired) by God but rather “breathed out” by God. It is, to echo Jeremiah 1:9, God’s words in man’s mouth, not man’s words then given the character of being “inspired.” In this way, Warfield was able to emphasize both the divinity and the humanity of Scripture.

Warfield expounded not only the nature of Scripture as “God-breathed,” but also its self-referential consciousness that what “it said” was what “God said.” Thus, what Scripture says should be heard, received, and obeyed as what “God says.” He thus shared John Calvin’s famously stated view that because of this, believers reverence the Scriptures aright only when they “regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.”²

In fact, relatively few theologians have breathed the spirit of Calvin’s combination of doctrine and devotion as did Warfield. This is in large measure the reason that so much of his work that was originally written for academically oriented journals has been read with such pleasure and profit by Christians beyond the academy. That said, contemporary seminary students who come to Warfield in this new setting of his work will doubtless breathe a sigh of relief that the editor has judiciously broken down Warfield’s

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.7.1.

extensive paragraphs into lengths digestible by us moderns. Warfield lived in a day—remembered now only by the elderly—when students were taught that a paragraph began with the introduction of a new idea or development in thought and closed when it in turn had been fully developed and exhausted. It was not unusual for Warfield to sustain a thought he wished to expound for more than three pages! But while the format is now more user-friendly, the substance remains unchanged. These pages remain genuine BBW!

What marks out Warfield's contributions to the doctrine of Scripture, but also all his other work, is that it is so biblically erudite. His own career path, providentially, imitated that of his teacher the elder Hodge. Like him, he was first a professor of New Testament. He thus was equally at home in the pages of Scripture as he was in the pages of the great works of theology.

What is more, his assessment of the writings emerging from the guild of systematic theologians was always the result of viewing their teaching through lenses crafted to a biblical prescription. Doing theology for him was never a matter of merely comparing the opinions of other theologians and choosing the best available option (with perhaps the occasional reference to Scripture). That modern form of the older scholastic methodology (which the Reformers found so stultifying) was far removed from his own approach. Even after his appointment to teach theology at Princeton Seminary, he could produce the kind of work illustrated by *The Lord of Glory*³ that demonstrated his detailed and patient attention to the text of Scripture. And although he did not follow Hodge's example of writing biblical commentaries, he was perhaps an even richer exegete than his teacher. He admired Hodge's scholarship as well as revering him as a person (he thought he had never made a major decision without asking himself, "What would Dr. Hodge think about this?"), but believed that although he had a Calvinlike instinct for getting to the meaning of a passage, he had a relative disinterest in fine exegetical distinctions.

Christology

Warfield's significance has perhaps been slightly distorted in theological circles by a somewhat monolithic interest in his work on Scripture. Important

3. B. B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory: A Study of the Designations of Our Lord in the New Testament with Especial Reference to His Deity* (New York: American Tract Society, 1907).

though that is, it represents only one element in his contribution. The availability of these five volumes should help to prevent the first of them from obscuring the others. In fact, Warfield was equally insightful, and perhaps we could say even more “at home,” when he was writing on Christology, as *The Person and Work of Christ* illustrates.

Here Warfield regularly engaged with the critical scholarship of his time. Indeed, as his many book reviews give evidence, he regarded it as part of his calling to interact with theological trends in Europe and to give guidance on them to the church in the United States. That scholarship is now over a century old, and not every reader will be immediately attracted to an essay entitled “The Two Natures and Recent Christological Speculation” or be familiar with names such as Johannes Weiss and Paul Wilhelm Schmiedel. But Warfield had an ability to penetrate to the underlying issues—surely a hallmark of all truly great theologians. This means that his discussion of what may now seem remote and doubtfully relevant views becomes a kind of heuristic tool in his hands by which we gain a deeper understanding of biblical teaching. He thus stimulates us to think reflectively and critically about similar (and sometimes the same) views when they are expressed in our own time. When we read Warfield, we can be confident that nothing, ultimately, will be wasted on us. He understood that David’s axiom “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3)⁴ is as true in contemporary theology as it was in ancient Israel.

But by no means does all of Warfield’s work on Christ engage head-on with critical scholarship. One of the glories of the first edition of this set was that it contained his magnificent essay “On the Emotional Life of Our Lord.” For reasons not immediately clear, this was omitted from the ten-volume Oxford edition of his works. It had been prepared as part of a multiauthor book that the Princeton Seminary faculty produced to commemorate the centenary of the institution in 1912.⁵

Landmark study though it was, “On the Emotional Life of Our Lord” was long a relatively unknown piece. Perhaps its existence was partly obscured by the assumption that everything of real merit from Warfield’s pen was to be

4. All Scripture quotations in this introduction are from the *esv*.

5. B. B. Warfield, “On the Emotional Life of Our Lord,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (New York: Scribner, 1912), 35–90.

found in the “definitive” Oxford edition.⁶ Thankfully, in more recent years, its appearance online and as a separate publication has helped to restore it to the prominence it merits.

Here, in dealing with the humanity of Christ, we find Warfield at his best and most sensitive as he reflects carefully and reverently on the text of Scripture and on the person and experience of the incarnate Savior. It would be no exaggeration to say that if this essay appeared nowhere else, or if a reader pondered no other essay in *The Person and Work of Christ*, it would be worth the price of the whole volume. Warfield provides Christians of all levels of intellectual ability and theological interest with much to reflect on in his exposition of the experience of the Logos made flesh. More than that, he writes with such an evident spirit of devotion that these pages should lead to both admiration for Christ and a renewed spirit of love for him. This is theology in the tradition of Augustine and Anselm, of Calvin and John Owen.

Breadth of Learning

The same spirit of reverence will be detected throughout the essays in the volume of *Biblical and Theological Studies*.

One of the interesting features of the Warfield corpus as a whole is that no *book* comes from his pen that could simply be designated a work of systematic theology. As an author, he was chiefly an essayist. And yet when his essays are surveyed en masse, it is possible to run a systematic-theology magnet over them and extract at least the building blocks for a systematic theology.⁷ It is no surprise, then, that contained in this volume we find Warfield's expositions of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and individual pieces on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as aspects of soteriology. All this is rooted in his article “Christian Supernaturalism”—which in some ways serves as a leitmotif⁸ for his theology as a whole and points

6. Further evidence that there was much more of abiding significance in the Warfield oeuvre was demonstrated by the publication of two volumes of *The Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, edited by John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970, 1973), containing over a hundred further essays.

7. As has been demonstrated in Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

8. ED. NOTE. *Leitmotif*: a dominant recurring theme.

forward to the basic antithesis that his student J. Gresham Machen would later articulate in his powerful *Christianity and Liberalism*.

Warfield was, as is well known, a cessationist.⁹ But he would have vigorously repudiated confusing his view of the noncontinuance of the spiritual gifts associated with the apostolic ministry and period with a denial of the supernatural. For him, the Christian faith is through and through supernatural from start to finish, from creation, through providence, to redemption, to final consummation. Any other view for Warfield would be tantamount to practical atheism. Not only his understanding of Christian theology in general but his exposition of soteriology in particular gives eloquent testimony to his Jonahlike conviction that “salvation belongs to the LORD!” (Jonah 2:9).¹⁰ Yet supernaturalism and the sovereignty of God are carefully set within the biblical parameters that he believed were so well expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith to which he was so devoted: in God’s sovereign providence, “all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently” (WCF 5.2).

It is impossible to survey these volumes without realizing that while Warfield’s learning extended to the great theological tradition, at the same time his interests focused on certain important individuals and moments in that history. He believed that it is true not only that we “comprehend with all the saints . . . and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:18–19), but that it is in communion with saints who have been doctors of the church that we grow in our understanding of God and the gospel. Since he viewed the Reformed faith as biblical Christianity come to its most consistent and richest expression, it is not surprising that his work reveals a special concentration on the life and thought of Augustine of Hippo among the fathers, on John Calvin among the Reformers (as the volume *Calvin and Augustine* in this set indicates), and on the Westminster divines in the later Puritan era.

9. As he indicated at length in his Thomas Smyth Lectures given at Columbia Seminary in 1917–18, published as *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Scribner, 1918).

10. On this Warfield elaborated in lectures he gave at Princeton in 1914, published as *The Plan of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915).

Nor was Warfield's breadth of learning that of a dilettante. His articles in these areas are the kind that can be produced not by a search engine but only by careful study of the original sources. Warfield understood the big trends, but he also had an eye to detail. Not all theologians who grasp the big picture and are comfortable with great ideas and movements have the necessary patience for such close attention to detail. Warfield did.

In large part due to his wife's health, but perhaps also temperamentally, in the church at large Warfield never occupied the position commanded by Charles Hodge. In the providence of God, the Warfields had no children. He was therefore more often at home—reading, reflecting, writing, and developing his rare familiarity with the fathers, the Reformers, and the Puritans. His facility in ecclesiastical history operated in smooth tandem with his learning as a systematic theologian. And these were rooted in his foundational expertise as a biblical scholar. Both the teaching of Scripture and its spirit anchored the various dimensions of his thinking in a remarkable balance and harmony.

The Scholar as Theological Pastor

One further feature of Warfield's work should be mentioned here. As a scholar, he was a minister of the gospel. He understood that the theologian who has been ordained as a doctor of the church rather than a pastor of a congregation nevertheless shares the same calling, while employing gifts suited to his different sphere of ministry. Both are called, in their distinct yet intimately related spheres, to be shepherds of the sheep. This means feeding them on the one hand and guarding them on the other. The flock needs both nourishment and protection.

Warfield's writings exhibit his belief in God's common grace, and the conviction he shared with Calvin that therefore truth is truth wherever it is to be found. He could manifest a spirit of appreciation toward other authors for what was good and noble in their writings, yet at the same time dismantle errors that he believed were on a trajectory that distorted biblical truth and therefore would ultimately harm the people of God. To some extent he had learned this disposition from his beloved Charles Hodge, who could be generous even to a theologian such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose

preaching he had heard during his sojourn in Berlin, but whose approach to theology was almost a diameter removed from his own.¹¹ Yet at the same time, many of his articles make it clear that Warfield was not slow to use the red ink of the corrector. He could, in Pauline style, express appreciation for what was good and thereafter carefully demolish everything that was not. He believed that false teaching is not only mistaken but spiritually noxious. He was therefore not slow to be critical when criticism was warranted. The intellectual scalpel he used was employed to cut away the harmful and dangerous and to make healing and sound doctrine possible.

One area in which Warfield's critique has sometimes rubbed against the evangelical grain both then and now is in his essays gathered in the volume on *Perfectionism*. Here he expresses some severe criticisms of the so-called Higher Life movement that had begun to flourish in the nineteenth century. He included in its various manifestations the teaching that had become associated with the Keswick Convention that was held annually in the English Lake District and with its various satellite conferences. While appreciative of its emphasis on devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, he was sharply critical of the way in which it separated sanctification from justification. These, for Warfield, as for Calvin, were seen as distinct aspects of salvation that must never be either confused with each other or separated, as if one could be justified by one act of faith while needing another act of faith in order to be sanctified. In Christ, and in union with him, both realities belong together.

But Warfield was nothing if not theologically prescient. He might not have been surprised to see the basic confusion at the heart of Higher Life theology morph into other forms of "higher life" in which the blessings offered to faith were abstracted from the Christ in whom they are found. This is not to say that he made the mistake of assuming that every individual who saw justification as being received by one act of faith and sanctification by another one would accept every mutation of that view. But the root of it he consistently opposed.

11. Perhaps the most striking footnote in all three volumes of Hodge's *Systematic Theology* is his reference to August Tholuck's comment that in his family Schleiermacher would say to his children, "Hush, children: let us sing a hymn of praise to Christ," to which Hodge adds: "Can we doubt that he is singing those praises now? To whomever Christ is God, St. John assures us, Christ is Savior." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1871), 2:440n1.

Warfield's concern here indicated the extent to which he thought not only in terms of first principles, but also in terms of trajectories and logical and existential implications. Beyond the essays published in this set, one of the most striking illustrations of this in his writings was the trajectory he traced in the movement in the northern Presbyterian Church to ordain women to the eldership. At the root of this movement he detected the uprooting of basic biblical principles that, he believed, contained the seeds of a trajectory that, if followed through, would ultimately undermine the biblical teaching on marriage and family life.¹² He might have been saddened, but perhaps not surprised, by the way in which both the ordination of women and the establishing of "gay marriage" have emerged in mainline churches in the Western world. In his own view, what is present in the root (in this case a distortion of the creation order) has the potential to produce disease in the fruit. Again, it should be emphasized that he did not make the mistake of assuming that people either accept or follow through to the full implications of their presuppositions. But his analysis and warnings were surely given out of his concern as a doctor of the church to fulfill his responsibility to shepherd the flock of God theologically. Perhaps in the light of that conviction, as his response to criticism of his thoroughgoing supernaturalism, his cessationism, his critique of the Keswick movement,¹³ he would simply have reminded himself that the Lord's words "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26) applied to theologians as well as all other Christians.

If one were to ask what drove Warfield on to produce such a significant body of work, perhaps the answer lies in a conviction that had developed as he moved from his late teenage years into his twenties. As he sat with his close college and seminary classmate Charles Barrett on the first Sunday evening of their seminary careers, Barrett asked his friend what had made him, in 1872, at the age of twenty, decide to enter the ministry. Warfield

12. It is worth noting, however, that in 1889–90 Warfield chaired the church committee that explored the question of women deacons in the church and recommended their appointment (but not their "ordination").

13. It should be said here that at least in its original location in the English Lake District, the teaching given at the Keswick Convention has decisively, if in an unheralded way, moved away from the earlier "higher life" emphasis.

replied quietly, "Because I think that in the work of the ministry I can do the most to repay the Lord for what he has done for me."¹⁴

But perhaps this introduction is best closed not by comments on Warfield's theology viewed from a century's distance, but with the testimony of two men who knew him. At his memorial service in the First Presbyterian Church, Princeton, on May 2, 1921, Francis L. Patton reflected on the man himself. His words give us a glimpse of what it must have been like to be his student:

In his young manhood of those days Dr. Warfield was a most imposing figure. Tall, erect, with finely moulded features and singular grace and courtesy of demeanor, he bore the marks of a gentleman to his finger-tips. There was something remarkable in his voice. It had the liquid softness of the South rather than the metallic resonance which we look for in those who breathe the crisp air of a northern climate. His public utterances took the form of a conversational tone, and his sentences often closed with the suggestion of a rising inflation, as if inviting a hospitable reception from his hearers. He lacked the clarion tones of impassioned oratory, but oratory of this kind was not natural to him. He kept the calm level of deliberate speech, and his words proceeded out of his mouth as if they walked on velvet.¹⁵

The five-volume collection of Warfield's works was the original brainchild of Dr. Samuel Craig, who with Dr. J. Gresham Machen founded the present publishers—and under whose auspices these volumes first reached Scottish shores. Perhaps, therefore, it is fitting that the closing words of this introduction should be left to Machen, once Warfield's student and later his colleague. In a letter to his mother the day following Warfield's funeral, the thirty-nine-year-old Machen wrote:

Dr. Warfield's funeral took place yesterday afternoon at the First Church of Princeton. . . .

I am thankful for one last conversation I had with Dr. Warfield some

14. Quoted from the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 15, no. 1 (1921): 10–11, in David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 2:117.

15. Francis L. Patton, "Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D.: A Memorial Address," *PTR* 19, no. 3 (July 1921): 370.

weeks ago. He was quite himself that afternoon. And somehow I cannot believe that the faith which he represented will ever really die. . . .

Nearly everything that I have done has been done with the inspiring hope that Dr. Warfield would think well of it. . . . He was the greatest man I have known.¹⁶

The republication of these five volumes of Warfield's works in this splendid new edition is surely a further confirmation of Machen's conviction that the faith Warfield represented will be nourished for yet another generation of his readers, and indeed can never really die.

16. Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 310.

ABBREVIATIONS

General

	parallel symbol
§	section sign; refers to individually numbered sections of a document
A.D.	<i>anno Domini</i> (“in the year of our Lord”)
ad loc.	<i>ad locum</i> (“at the place”)
app.	appendix
ASV	American Standard Version / American Revised Version
AV	Authorized Version / King James Version
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BBW	Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield
B.C.	before Christ
BTS	Benjamin B. Warfield, <i>Biblical and Theological Studies</i> , ed. John J. Hughes, rev. and enhanced ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2026)
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BU	Emil Seckel and Wilhelm Schubart, eds., <i>Ägyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen</i> (later: <i>Staatlichen</i>) <i>Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden</i> , Berlin, vol. I (1895)–vol. XX (2014)
ca.	<i>circa</i> (“about”)
cf.	<i>confer</i> (“compare”)
ch. / chap.	chapter
chs. / chaps.	chapters
col.	column

Abbreviations

cols.	columns
CR	<i>Contemporary Review</i>
ed.	edited by; edition
eds.	edited by; editors
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> (“for example”)
enl.	enlarged
esp.	especially
ESV	English Standard Version
ET	English translation
et al.	<i>et alii</i> (or <i>et alia</i> , “and others”)
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
f.	and following (singular)
<i>Faith and Life</i>	Benjamin B. Warfield, <i>Faith and Life</i> (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1916)
ff.	and following (plural)
GH	Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, <i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898–)
Gk.	Greek
IAB	Benjamin B. Warfield, <i>The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible</i> , ed. John J. Hughes, rev. and enhanced ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> (“in the same place”)
i.e.	<i>id est</i> (“that is”)
in loc.	<i>in loco</i> (“in the place”)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
KJV	King James Version
loc. cit.	<i>loco citato</i> (“in the place cited”)
LXX	Septuagint
m.	Mishnah
marg.	margin
mg.	margin
no.	number
NT	New Testament
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025)

Abbreviations

op. cit.	<i>opere citato</i> (“in the work cited”)
OT	Old Testament
OUP	Oxford University Press
p.	page
Par. P.	Paris Papyri. W. Brunet de Presle, ed., <i>Notices et textes des papyrus grecs du Musée du Louvre et de la Bibliothèque Impériale et sur leur publication préparée par [A.] Letronne; extrait d’un rapport lu à l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres en 1850</i> (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1865)
pp.	pages
pt.	part
PRR	<i>Presbyterian and Reformed Review</i>
PTR	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
PTS	Princeton Theological Seminary
PWC	Benjamin B. Warfield, <i>The Person and Work of Christ</i> , ed. John J. Hughes, rev. and enhanced ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023)
rev.	revised
rv	Revised Version / English Revised Version
sec.	section
seq.	sequence
ser.	series
sq.	sequence
SSW 1	John E. Meeter, ed., <i>Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield</i> , vol. 1 (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970)
SSW 2	John E. Meeter, ed., <i>Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield</i> , vol. 2 (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976)
s.v.	<i>sub verbo, sub voce</i> (“under the word”)
trans.	translated by
TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
usw	<i>und so weiter</i> (German “and so forth; and so on”)
v.	verse

Abbreviations

ver.	verse
viz.	<i>videlicet</i> (“namely”)
v.r.	variant reading
vol.	volume
vols.	volumes
vv.	verses
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
Works	Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, Ethelbert Dudley Warfield, and William Park Armstrong, <i>The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield</i> , 10 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927–32)

Classical Authors

Arist.	Aristotle
<i>de Superst.</i>	Plutarch, <i>de superstitione</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Historiae</i>
<i>Mor.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i>
<i>Nat. d.</i>	Cicero, <i>De natura deorum</i>
<i>Oed. Rex.</i>	Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Rex</i>
Plut.	Plutarch
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetoric</i>
Soph.	Sophocles
<i>Vesp.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Vespasianus</i>

Deuterocanonical Works and Septuagint

2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
4 Macc.	4 Maccabees
Sir.	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

Josephus

<i>A.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
<i>B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i>

Mishnah, Talmud, and Related Literature

Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
Mak.	Makkot
Meg.	Megillah
Midr. Rabbah	Midrash Rabbah
Yalkut	Yalkut Shimoni
y. Hal.	Jerusalem Talmud, tractate Hallah

Philo

<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i>
<i>Leg. 1, 2, 3</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae I, II, III</i>

THE IDEA OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

ABSTRACT

This semitechnical chapter¹ provides an overview of Warfield's understanding of systematic theology, including its nature, source, method, structure, and "holy purpose"; what it is and what it is not; how it relates to the other four theological disciplines; and how it relates to the other sciences. In other words, this chapter is Warfield's *theological prolegomenon*.

Warfield was professor of "didactic and polemic theology." This chapter provides a synopsis of the main theological distinctives that guided the *didactic* side of Warfield's writing, while the next chapter, "Christian Supernaturalism," provides a synopsis of the main theological distinctives that guided the *polemical* side of his work. Taken together, these two chapters, both originally published in 1896, define the major outlines of Warfield's theological project during his thirty-four-year tenure at Princeton Theological Seminary (1887–1921).

In this chapter, Warfield is describing the *logical relationships* among the various theological disciplines and the *idealized flow* of information

1. Originally published as Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," *PRR* 7, no. 26 (1896): 243–71. Reprinted in Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, ed. Ethelbert D. Warfield, William Park Armstrong, and Caspar Wistar Hodge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 49–87. An earlier version of this article appeared in 1888 as "The Idea of Systematic Theology Considered as a Science," in *Discourses Occasioned by the Inauguration of Benj. B. Warfield, D.D. to the Chair of New Testament Exegesis and Literature*, In *Western Theological Seminary: Delivered on the Evening of Tuesday, April 20th, 1880, In the North Presbyterian Church, Allegheny, PA*, edited by Western Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, Elliot Elisha Swift, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, and Alumni Collection (Princeton Theological Seminary) (Pittsburgh: Nevin Brothers, 1880), 5–40. Because of the importance of this chapter for understanding Warfield's theological project, extra space has been allocated to this abstract.

among them, when considered as parts of a scientific system, rather than describing how a systematician actually sits down and “does theology.”² Warfield’s understanding of *theology* as a science was shaped by a broad understanding of *science* as any endeavor whose goal was to comprehend all the facts in a given field of study and to explain them in their proper relationships to one another. When reading this chapter, it is important to keep in mind the historical context in which Warfield wrote and the accompanying concerns that he addressed. Warfield defined the nature of systematic theology and explained its relation to neighboring fields of study in the context of addressing two popular subjectivist theories: Schleiermacher’s account of theology as the study of religious feelings and the “science of religion’s” definition of theology as the study of the social phenomena of religion.

This chapter is divided into eight main parts: (1) Systematic Theology Is a Science, (2) The Three Presuppositions of Systematic Theology, (3) What Systematic Theology Is and Is Not, (4) Scripture Is the Only Sufficient Source for Systematic Theology, (5) The Place of Systematic Theology Among the Four Theological Disciplines, (6) The Place of Systematic Theology Among the Other Sciences, (7) Systematic Theology Is a Progressive Science, and (8) Systematic Theology Is a Practical Science.

In “Systematic Theology Is a Science,” Warfield states:

2. ED. NOTE. Richard Lints, in an article that discusses the differences between Warfield’s topically structured theological methodology and the historically structured theological methodology of his colleague and close friend Geerhardus Vos, notes that Warfield, having argued that systematic theology rests on and is constructed from the results of biblical theology, ignores this ideal structural relationship in actual practice. Lints says:

It must be admitted that Warfield, in his actual practice, believed that systematic theology (in its defense and clarification of doctrine) can actually begin to accomplish its task without the aid of biblical theology. He had earlier denied this view in formal remarks, but in his actual practice he gave little manifestation of the outworkings of these strictly formal observations. The *historicity* of the Scriptures was so significant for Warfield that he may well have been unable to see the *historical flow* of the text. It is as if he is standing on the edge of the promised land convinced that it must be entered and yet not sure of how to embark on the journey.

Richard Lints, “Two Theologies or One? Warfield and Vos on the Nature of Theology,” *WTJ* 54, no. 2 (1992): 250. In a private note to me, Fred Zaspel suggested another possibility—that Warfield’s view of biblical theology may have differed from Vos’s view. Warfield did not believe, Zaspel suggested, “that systematic theology (in its defense and clarification of doctrine) can actually begin to accomplish its task without the aid of biblical theology.” Instead, Warfield understood biblical theology to consist of the exegesis of passages in their immediate and larger and growing contexts—something that is found throughout his writings. There is little to no evidence in his published writings that Warfield ever understood Vos’s redemptive-historical approach. In support of Zaspel’s suggestion is the fact that in his many writings, Warfield never cites or alludes to Vos, although they were colleagues for twenty-nine years at Princeton Seminary, took daily walks together, and were close friends.

In asserting that theology is a science, then, we assert that, in its subject-matter, it includes all the facts belonging to that sphere of truth which we call theological; and we deny that it needs or will admit of limitation by a discriminating adjectival definition. We may speak of it as Christian theology just as we may speak of it as true theology, if we mean thereby only more fully to describe what, as a matter of fact, theology is found to be; but not, if we mean thereby to discriminate³ it from some other assumed theology thus erected to a coordinate position with it.

Today, *science* designates *only* natural sciences. But for Warfield, theology was just as much a “science” as were geology and biology. Just as those sciences have various subcomponents or subdisciplines that form parts of the whole, so, too, does theology, Warfield argues.

In “The Three Presuppositions of Systematic Theology,” Warfield says: “There is much more than this included, however, in calling theology a science. For the very existence of any science, three things are presupposed: (1) the reality of its subject-matter; (2) the capacity of the human mind to apprehend, receive into itself, and rationalize this subject-matter; and (3) some medium of communication by which the subject-matter is brought before the mind and presented to it for apprehension.”

Warfield elaborates:

That is to say: (1) The affirmation that theology is a science presupposes the affirmation that God is, and that he has relation to his creatures. Were there no God, there could be no theology; nor could there be a theology if, though he existed, he existed out of relation with his creatures. The whole body of philosophical apologetics is, therefore, presupposed in and underlies the structure of scientific theology. (2) The affirmation that theology is a science presupposes the affirmation that man has a religious nature, i.e., a nature capable of understanding not only that God is, but also, to some extent, what he is; not only that he stands in relations with his creatures, but also what those relations are. Had man no religious nature he might, indeed, apprehend certain facts concerning

3. ED. NOTE. *Discriminate*: distinguish, differentiate.

God, but he could not so understand him in his relations to man as to be able to respond to those facts in a true and sympathetic embrace. The total product of the great science of religion, which investigates the nature and workings of this element in man's mental constitution, is therefore presupposed in and underlies the structure of scientific theology. (3) The affirmation that theology is a science presupposes the affirmation that there are media of communication by which God and Divine things are brought before the minds of men, that they may perceive them and, in perceiving, understand them.

Warfield concludes:

In other words, when we affirm that theology is a science, we affirm not only the reality of God's existence and our capacity so far to understand him, but we affirm that he has made himself known to us—we affirm the objective reality of a revelation. Were there no revelation of God to man, our capacity to understand him would lie dormant and unawakened; and though he really existed it would be to us as if he were not. There would be a God to be known and a mind to know him; but theology would be as impossible as if there were neither the one nor the other. Not only, then, philosophical, but also the whole mass of historical apologetics by which the reality of revelation and its embodiment in the Scriptures are vindicated, is presupposed in and underlies the structure of scientific theology.

In "What Systematic Theology Is and Is Not," Warfield says: "In thus developing the implications of calling theology a science, we have already gone far towards determining our exact conception of what theology is. We have in effect, for example, settled our definition of theology. A science is defined from its subject-matter; and the subject-matter of theology is God in his nature and in his relations with his creatures. Theology is therefore that science which treats of God and of the relations between God and the universe." Warfield then warns against confusing the science of theology with (1) "the science of faith" (following Schleiermacher⁴) or with (2) "the

4. ED. NOTE. *Schleiermacher*: see note 3, chapter 17, "Mysticism and Christianity," in this volume.

science of religion” or “the science of the Christian religion.” The first confuses belief, which is subjective, with the subject matter of theology, which is objective (God’s revelation). The second

confounds the product of the facts concerning God and his relations with his creatures working through the hearts and lives of men, with those facts themselves; and consequently, whenever strictly understood, bases theology not on the facts of the divine revelation, but on the facts of the religious life.

This leads ultimately to a confusion of the two distinct disciplines of theology, the subject matter of which is objective, and the science of religion, the subject matter of which is subjective; with the effect of lowering the data of theology to the level of the aspirations and imaginings of man’s own heart.”

Warfield continues: “Wherever this definition is found, either a subjective conception of theology, which reduces it to a branch of psychology, may be suspected; or else a historical conception of it.” Warfield then issues this warning about confusing theology with “a historical conception of it”:

When so conceived, it is natural to take a step further and permit the methodology of the science, as well as its idea, to be determined by its distinguishing element: thus theology, in contradiction to its very name, becomes Christo-centric.⁵

No doubt, “Christian theology,” as a historical discipline, is Christo-centric; it is by its doctrine of redemption that it is differentiated from all the other theologies that the world has known. But theology as a science is and must be Theo-centric.⁶ . . . There can be but one center about which so comprehensive a subject-matter can be organized—the conception of God. He that hath seen Christ, has beyond doubt seen the Father; but it is one thing to make Christ the center of theology so far as he is one with God, and another thing to organize

5. ED. NOTE. *Christo-centric*: Christ-centered.

6. ED. NOTE. *Theo-centric*: God-centered.

all theology around him as the theanthropos⁷ and in his specifically theanthropic⁸ work.

In “Scripture Is the Only Sufficient Source for Systematic Theology,” Warfield states:

Not only, however, is our definition of theology thus set for us: we have also determined in advance our conception of its sources. We have already made use of the term “revelation,” to designate the medium by which the facts concerning God and his relations to his creatures are brought before men’s minds, and so made the subject-matter of a possible science. The word accurately describes the condition of all knowledge of God. If God be a person, it follows by stringent necessity, that he can be known only so far as he reveals or expresses himself. . . . Our reaching up to him in thought and inference is possible only because he condescends to make himself intelligible to us, to speak to us through work or word, to reveal himself. We hazard nothing, therefore, in saying that, as the condition of all theology is a revealed God, so, without limitation, the sole source of theology is revelation.

Warfield then affirms that God has revealed himself “in divers manners”⁹ (Heb. 1:1 KJV; “many ways,” ESV), that “he has never left man without witness of his eternal power and Godhead,” and that he has never left man without “the manifestations of himself in nature and providence and grace.” “Every generation,” Warfield says, “has had abiding and unmistakable evidence that he is, that he is the good God, and that he is a God who marketh iniquity.” Warfield then turns to discussing the meaning of *revelation*. He says:

Under the broad skirts of the term “revelation,” every method of manifesting himself which God uses in communicating knowledge of his being and attributes, may find shelter for itself—whether it be through those

7. ED. NOTE. *Theanthropos*: “a title given to Jesus Christ as being both God and man”; God-man. *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Theanthropos (n.),” December 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9526428697>.

8. ED. NOTE. *Theanthropic*: being both divine and human; having a divine nature and a human nature.

9. ED. NOTE. *Divers manners*: different or various kinds or ways.

visible things of nature whereby his invisible things are clearly seen [Rom. 1:20], or through the constitution of the human mind with its causal judgment indelibly stamped upon it, or through that voice of God that we call conscience, which proclaims his moral law within us, or through his providence in which he makes bare his arm for the government of the nations, or through the exercises of his grace, our experience under the tutelage of the Holy Ghost—or whether it be through the open visions of his prophets, the divinely breathed pages of his written Word, the divine life of the Word himself.

Thus Warfield lists eight methods—“divers manners”—by means of which God reveals himself: (1) nature, (2) the human mind, (3) conscience, (4) providence, (5) grace, (6) prophetic visions, (7) Scripture, and (8) the incarnate Word.

Next, Warfield discusses more fully the meaning of “in divers manners.” This phrase, Warfield says, means that

we distribute the one source of theology, revelation, into the various methods of revelation, each of which brings us true knowledge of God, and all of which must be taken account of in building our knowledge into one all-comprehending system. . . . It is with no reserve that we accept all these sources of knowledge of God—nature, providence, Christian experience—as true and valid sources, the well-authenticated data yielded by which are to be received by us as revelations of God, and as such to be placed alongside of the revelations in the written Word and wrought with them into one system.

Warfield then points out that these various methods of revelation differ in terms of “the amount of revelation they give, the clearness of their message, the ease and certainty with which they may be interpreted, [and] the importance of the special truths which they are fitted to convey.” These “divers manners,” Warfield states, “correspond also to divers messages of divers degrees of importance, delivered with divers degrees of clearness.” The revelation in the written Word of God, Warfield says, contains “within itself the formulation of his truth, the proclamation of his law, the discovery of his

plan of salvation: this mere fact, I say, would itself and prior to all comparison, raise an overwhelming presumption that all the others of ‘the divers manners’ of God’s revelation were insufficient for the purposes for which revelation is given, whether on account of defect in the amount of their communication or insufficiency of attestation or uncertainty of interpretation or fatal one-sidedness in the character of the revelation they are adapted to give.”

Warfield presses home the fact that the written Word and the written Word alone is normative over all other forms of God’s revelation:

Thus the revelation of God in his written Word—in which are included the only authentic records of the revelation of him through the incarnate Word—is easily shown not only to be incomparably superior to all other manifestations of him in the fullness, richness, and clearness of its communications, but also to contain the sole discovery of much that it is most important for the soul to know as to its state and destiny, and of much that is most precious in our whole body of theological knowledge. The superior lucidity of this revelation makes it the norm of interpretation for what is revealed so much more darkly through the other methods of manifestation. The glorious character of the discoveries made in it throws all other manifestations into comparative shadow.

Warfield then warns of the dangers that lurk and the disasters that await the theologians who try to reason their way to God through nature. “The natural result of resting on the revelations of nature is despair,” he notes, “while the inevitable end of making our appeal to even the Christian heart is to make for ourselves refuges of lies in which there is neither truth nor safety.” Warfield then warns against trying to construct a “theology of the feelings” from “the nature of the Christian life.” He continues: “The interpretation of the data included in what we have learned to call ‘the Christian consciousness,’ whether of the individual or of the church at large, is a process so delicate, so liable to error, so inevitably swayed to this side or that by the currents that flow up and down in the soul, that probably few satisfactory inferences could be drawn from it, had we not the norm of Christian experience and its dogmatic implications recorded for us in the perspicuous¹⁰ pages of the written Word.”

10. ED. NOTE. *Perspicuous*: “easily understood; clearly expressed; lucid.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, “perspicuous (adj.), sense 1.a,” March 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5891710704>.

In “The Place of Systematic Theology Among the Four Theological Disciplines,” Warfield begins by stating:

Under such a conception of its nature and sources, we are led to consider the place of Systematic Theology among the other theological disciplines as well as among the other sciences in general. Without encroaching upon the details of Theological Encyclopaedia, we may adopt here the usual fourfold distribution of the theological disciplines into the Exegetical, the Historical, the Systematic and the Practical, with only the correction of prefixing to them a fifth department of Apologetical Theology. The place of Systematic Theology in this distribution is determined by its relation to the preceding disciplines, of which it is the crown and head.

Warfield then explains the various roles of these four theological disciplines. Apologetical theology “prepares the way for all theology by establishing its necessary presuppositions without which no theology is possible,” and it “places the Scriptures in our hands for investigation and study.” Exegetical theology “receives these inspired writings from the hands of Apologetics, and investigates their meaning; presenting us with a body of detailed and substantiated results, culminating in a series of organized systems of Biblical History, Biblical Ethics, Biblical Theology, and the like.” Historical theology “investigates the progressive realization of Christianity in the lives, hearts, worship and thought of men, issuing not only in a full account of the history of Christianity, but also in a body of facts which come into use in the more advanced disciplines.” Although systematic theology “gladly utilizes all the material that Historical Theology brings it,” Warfield says, “it certainly does not find in it its chief or primary source, and its relation to Historical Theology is, in consequence, far less close than that in which it stands to Exegetical Theology which is its true and especial¹¹ handmaid.”

Warfield then explains the nature of exegetical theology and its special relationship to systematic theology. “The independence of Exegetical Theology is seen in the fact that it does its work wholly without thought or anxiety as to the use that is to be made of its results,” and “so far as its

11. ED. NOTE. *Especial*: extraordinary; highly distinctive.

theological facts are concerned, it provides them chiefly that they may be used by Systematic Theology as material out of which to build its system.”

Warfield then shifts his focus to biblical theology and its relationship to exegetical theology on the one side and to systematic theology on the other.¹² “Biblical Theology is not a section of Historical Theology,” Warfield says,

although it must be studied in a historical spirit, and has a historical face; it is rather the ripest fruit of Exegetics, and Exegetics has not performed its full task until its scattered results in the way of theological data are gathered up into a full and articulated system of Biblical Theology. . . .

The task of Biblical Theology, in a word, is the task of coordinating the scattered results of continuous exegesis into a concatenated¹³ whole, whether with reference to a single book of Scripture or to a body of related books or to the whole Scriptural fabric. . . . It is to reproduce the theological thought of each writer or group of writers in the form in which it lay in their own minds, so that we may be enabled to look at all their theological statements at their angle, and to understand all their deliverances as modified and conditioned by their own point of view.

12. ED. NOTE. Warfield’s understanding of the relationships among exegetical theology, biblical theology, and systematic theology is foundational to his thought and extremely relevant to the current interest in “theological retrieval” and “classical Christian theism,” both of which are strongly grounded in historical theology. In contradistinction to this modern trend, Warfield argues in this chapter that although systematic theology “gladly utilizes all the material that Historical Theology brings it,” systematic theology should be grounded in biblical theology, which is grounded in exegetical theology. Historical theology is not the “chief or primary source” for systematic theology, Warfield says, rather, “Exegetical Theology . . . is its true and especial handmaid.” Thus Warfield draws a bright line between historical theology serving as the basis for systematic theology and exegetical theology (mediated through biblical theology) doing so. Fred G. Zaspel states: “It is in exegetical theology, itself culminating in biblical theology, that systematic theology finds the material out of which its system is built.” *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 81. According to Zaspel, Warfield did not understand systematic theology to be a historical discipline. “It does not seek to discover or to elucidate what Christians have held or do hold to be true. It seeks to discover and elucidate what is true” (82). Zaspel points out that Warfield “was first and foremost an exegetical theologian” (554), that “all of Warfield’s work was undergirded by a careful handling of the biblical text,” and that Warfield “was an exegete who did theology,” rather than “a theologian who did exegesis” (555). Also see Zaspel’s article “Historical Theology and B. B. Warfield,” *Christ over All*, <https://christoverall.com/article/concise/historical-theology-and-b-b-warfield/> (accessed November 1, 2025). Warfield’s understanding that systematic theology should be based on exegetical theology characterizes the work of theologians like John Murray, John Frame, Richard Gaffin, and Vern Poythress.

13. ED. NOTE. *Concatenate*: to link together in a series or chain.

Warfield states that “it is only when we have thus concatenated an author’s theological statements into a whole, that we can be sure that we understand them as he understood them in detail” and thus “guard against perverting them when we adapt them to our use.”

“The relation of Biblical Theology to Systematic Theology,” Warfield declares,

is based on a true view of its function. Systematic Theology is not founded on the direct and primary results of the exegetical process; it is founded on the final and complete results of exegesis as exhibited in Biblical Theology. Not exegesis itself, then, but Biblical Theology, provides the material for Systematics. Biblical Theology is not, then, a rival of Systematics; it is not even a parallel product of the same body of facts, provided by exegesis; it is the basis and source of Systematics. Systematic Theology is not a concatenation of the scattered theological data furnished by the exegetical process; it is the combination of the already concatenated data given to it by Biblical Theology.

Warfield notes: “We gain our truest Systematics not by at once working together the separate dogmatic statements in the Scriptures, but by combining them in their due order and proportion as they stand in the various theologies of the Scriptures.”

In “The Place of Systematic Theology Among the Other Sciences,” Warfield begins by stating: “The place that theology, as the scientific presentation of all the facts that are known concerning God and his relations, claims for itself, within the circle of the sciences, is an equally high one with that which it claims among the theological disciplines. . . . It is as far out of all comparison above all other sciences as the eternal health and destiny of the soul are of more value than this fleeting life in this world.” In other words, theology is the most important of all the sciences. Warfield continues: “As all nature, whether mental or material, may be conceived of as only the mode in which God manifests himself, every science which investigates nature and ascertains its laws, is occupied with the discovery of the modes of the divine action, and as such might be considered a branch of theology.” And “theology is the science which deals with the facts concerning God and his relations with the universe. Such facts include all the facts of nature and history.” In this section, Warfield advances seven reasons to justify his

main point that theology is the queen of the sciences. (1) Every science is “in some measure included in” theology and therefore (2) “might be considered a branch of theology,” as explained by the preceding quotations. (3) Every science “depends for its foundation” on theology, and so (4) theology “enters into the structure of every other science.” Therefore, (5) “the science of him [God] and his relations is the necessary ground of all science”—theology “lies at the root of all sciences.” (6) “It is only in theology, therefore, that the other sciences find their completion.” And finally: (7) “Scientific theology thus stands at the head of the sciences as well as at the head of the theological disciplines.” To sum up, (1) theology is the foundation (the root, the ground) of all the sciences; (2) all sciences are branches of theology (“included in” it); (3) only in theology do all the other sciences find completion; and (4) theology is therefore the head, or authority, over all sciences, including all the theological disciplines.

Warfield concludes this section by stating: “Scientific Theology is related to the natural and historical sciences, not immediately and independently for itself, but only indirectly, that is, through the mediation of the preliminary theological discipline of Apologetics. . . . Scientific Theology rests . . . most directly on the results of Biblical exegesis as provided in Biblical Theology; but avails itself likewise of all the material furnished by all the preceding disciplines. . . . But it does not make its direct appeal crudely and independently to these sciences, any more than to exegesis and Christian history, but as it receives the one set of results from the hands of Exegetics and Histories, so it receives the others from the hand of Apologetics. Systematic Theology is fundamentally one of the theological disciplines, and bears immediate relation only to its sister disciplines; it is only through them that it reaches further out and sets its roots in more remote sources of information.” Footnote 36 in this chapter includes Warfield’s famous “rough graphic representation of the relations of Systematic Theology as thus far outlined.”

In “Systematic Theology Is a Progressive Science,” Warfield writes: “Since the close of the canon of Scripture, the intellectual realization and definition of the doctrines revealed in it, in relation to one another, have been, as a mere matter of fact, a slow but ever-advancing process. The affirmation that theology has been a progressive science is no more, then, than to assert that it is a science that has had a history—and a history which can be and should be genetically traced and presented.” Warfield then briefly summarizes the development of “the objective side of Christian truth” and

the “subjective side of its faith.” Together these “built up the system which we all inherit. Thus the body of Christian truth has come down to us in the form of an organic growth; and we can conceive of the completed structure as the ripened fruit of the ages, as truly as we can think of it as the perfected result of the exegetical discipline. As it has come into our possession by this historic process, there is no reason that we can assign why it should not continue to make for itself a history.” Warfield spends the remainder of this section explaining how and why theology as a science continues to make progress.

In “Systematic Theology Is a Practical Science,” Warfield says: “In calling theology a progressive science we unavoidably raise the inquiry, what the end and purpose is towards an ever-increasing fitness to secure which it is continually growing. Its own completeness and perfecting as a science—as a department of knowledge—is naturally the proximate goal towards which every science tends.” Warfield continues: “Yet we must vindicate a further goal for the advance of theology and thus contend for it that it is an eminently¹⁴ practical science. The contemplation and exhibition of Christianity as truth, is far from the end of the matter. This truth is specially communicated by God for a purpose, for which it is admirably adapted. That purpose is to save and sanctify the soul. And the discovery, study and systematization of the truth is in order that, firmly grasping it and thoroughly comprehending it in all its reciprocal relations, we may be able to make the most efficient use of it for its holy purpose.” In other words, the “holy purpose” of doing theology is not refined system building per se but the proper application (“the most efficient use”) of biblical truth to the twin needs of sinful man: salvation and sanctification—in short, theology is unto application.¹⁵ Theology is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end, and that end is holiness—conformity to the image of Christ.

For Warfield, refined system building precedes and is unto “the most efficient use” of the truths in the system “to save and sanctify the soul.” Warfield says: “The task of thoroughly exploring the pages of revelation, soundly gathering from them their treasures of theological teaching, and carefully fitting these into their due places in a system whereby they may be preserved from misunderstanding, perversion and misuse, and given a

14. ED. NOTE. *Eminently*: to a high or special degree.

15. ED. NOTE. This is similar to but not the same as John Frame’s well-known definition of *theology* as “the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life.” John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 8. For Warfield, theological system precedes application. For Frame, theology is application.

new power to convince the understanding, move the heart, and quicken the will, becomes thus a holy duty to our own and our brothers' souls as well as our eager pleasure of our intellectual nature." He then explains that the "systematizing" in systematic theology must be done carefully and precisely. "It is not a matter of indifference, then," Warfield writes, "how we apprehend and systematize this truth. On the contrary, if we misconceive it in its parts or in its relations, not only do our views of truth become confused and erroneous, but also our religious life becomes dwarfed or contorted. The character of our religion is, in a word, determined by the character of our theology: and thus the task of the systematic theologian is to see that the relations in which the separate truths actually stand are rightly conceived, in order that they may exert their rightful influence on the development of the religious life." Warfield continues:

These theoretical considerations are greatly strengthened by the historical fact, that throughout all the ages every advance in the scientific statement of theological truth has been made in response to a practical demand, and has been made in a distinctly practical interest. We wholly misconceive the facts if we imagine that the development of systematic theology has been the work of cold, scholastic recluses, intent only upon intellectual subtleties. It has been the work of the best heart of the whole Church driving on and utilizing in its practical interests, the best brain.

That statement is followed by the recitation of examples from church history and by backing quotations from various theologians.

As was common in Warfield's day, he believed that every science and its subdisciplines have a nature (an "essence") and that failure to correctly discern that nature results in a deformed and therefore misleading system:¹⁶

16. ED. NOTE. The corollary of this is that there is only one correct system for every science and that successive generations of scientists (e.g., theologians) work to refine their system so that it becomes increasingly correct. Regarding this common nineteenth-century understanding that scientific progress is linear and accretional, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Regarding the application of Kuhn's theories to the development of Christian theology, see: Edwin El-Mahassni, "Kuhn's Structural Revolutions and the Development of Christian Doctrine: A Systematic Discussion," *Heythrop Journal* 59, no. 3 (May 2018): 509–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12488>, and Dirk-Martin Grube, "Christian Theology Emerged by Way of a Kuhnian Paradigm Shift," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 79, nos. 1–2 (2018): 178–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1422988>.

“When we do not know a body of doctrine systematically, we are sure to misconceive the nature of more or fewer of its separate elements; and to fancy ‘that that is true which a more systematic knowledge would show us to be false,’ so that ‘our religious belief and therefore our religious life would become deformed and misshapen.’”¹⁷ That statement is followed by a litany of quotations from various sources that lament on the one hand “the lack of precision in our Christian conceptions,” that commend on the other the need for “a strongly concatenated body of doctrine,” and that illustrate the weakening effects of the former and the strengthening effects of the latter on the Christian life. “If such be the value and use of doctrine,” Warfield says,

the systematic theologian is preeminently a preacher of the Gospel; and the end of his work is obviously not merely the logical arrangement of the truths which come under his hand, but the moving of men, through their power, to love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves; to choose their portion with the Saviour of their souls; to find and hold him precious; and to recognize and yield to the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit whom he has sent. . . .

The student of systematic theology needs a very sensitive religious nature, a most thoroughly consecrated heart, and an outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon him, such as will fill him with that spiritual discernment, without which all native intellect is in vain. He needs to be not merely a student, not merely a thinker, not merely a systematizer, not merely a teacher—he needs to be like the beloved disciple himself in the highest, truest and holiest sense, a divine.

THE term *Systematic Theology* has long been in somewhat general use, especially in America, to designate one of the theological disciplines. And, on the whole, it appears to be a sufficiently exact designation of this discipline. It has not, of course, escaped criticism. The main faults that have

17. Quoting Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1871), 2:314.

been found with it are succinctly summed up by a recent writer in the following compact phrases:

The expression "Systematic Theology" is really an impertinent tautology. It is a tautology in so far as a theology that is not systematic or methodical would be no theology. The idea of rational method lies in the word *logos*, which forms part of the term *theology*. And it is an impertinence in so far as it suggests that there are other theological disciplines, or departments of theology, which are not methodical.¹⁸

Is not this, however, just a shade hypercritical? What is meant by calling this discipline "Systematic Theology" is not that it deals with its material in a systematic or methodical way, and the other disciplines do not; but that it presents its material in the form of a system. Other disciplines may use a chronological, a historical, or some other method: this discipline must needs employ a systematic, that is to say, a philosophical or scientific method. It might be equally well designated, therefore, "Philosophical Theology," or "Scientific Theology." But we should not by the adoption of one of these terms escape the ambiguities which are charged against the term "Systematic Theology." Other theological disciplines may also claim to be philosophical or scientific. If exegesis should be systematic, it should also be scientific. If history should be methodical, it should also be philosophical.

An additional ambiguity would also be brought to these terms from their popular usage. There would be danger that "Philosophical Theology" should be misapprehended as theology dominated by some philosophical system. There would be a similar danger that "Scientific Theology" should be misunderstood as theology reduced to an empirical science, or dependent upon an "experimental method." Nevertheless these terms also would fairly describe what we mean by "Systematic Theology." They too would discriminate it from its sister disciplines, as the philosophical discipline, which investigates from the philosophical standpoint the matter with which all the disciplines deal. And they would keep clearly before our minds the main fact in the case, namely that Systematic Theology, as distinguished from its sister disciplines, is a science, and is to be conceived as a science and treated as a science.

18. David Worthington Simon, "The Nature and Scope of Systematic Theology," *BSac* 51, no. 204 (October 1894): 587.

The two designations, “Philosophical Theology” and “Scientific Theology,” are practically synonyms. But they differ in their connotation as the terms “philosophy” and “science” differ. The distinction between these terms in a reference like the present would seem to be that between the whole and one of its parts. Philosophy is the *scientia scientiarum*.¹⁹ What a science does for a division of knowledge, that philosophy essays²⁰ to do for the mass of knowledge. A science reduces a section of our knowledge to order and harmony: philosophy reduces the sciences to order and harmony. Accordingly there are many sciences, and but one philosophy. We, therefore, so far agree with Prof. D. W. Simon (whom we have quoted above in order to disagree with him), when he says:

What a science properly understood does for a subsystem, that philosophy aims to do for the system which the subsystems constitute. . . . Its function is so to grasp the whole, that every part shall find its proper place therein, and the parts, that they shall form an orderly organic whole: . . . so to correlate the reals, which with their activities make up the world or the universe, that the whole shall be seen in its harmony and unity; and that to every individual real shall be assigned the place in which it shall be seen to be discharging its proper function.²¹

This, as will be at once perceived, is the function of each science in its own sphere. To call “Systematic Theology” “Philosophical Theology” or “Scientific Theology” would therefore be all one in essential meaning. Only, when we call it “Philosophical Theology,” we should be conceiving it as a science among the sciences and should have our eye upon its place in the universal sum of knowledge: while, when we call it “Scientific Theology” our mind should be occupied with it in itself, as it were in isolation, and with the proper mode of dealing with its material. In either case we are affirming that it deals with its material as an organizable system of knowledge; that it deals with it from the philosophical point of view; that it is, in other words, in its essential nature a science.

19. ED. NOTE. *Scientia scientiarum*: science of the sciences.

20. ED. NOTE. *Essay*: to attempt; to endeavor.

21. Simon, “Nature and Scope of Systematic Theology,” 592.

It is possible that the implications of this determination are not always fully realized. When we have made the simple assertion of "Systematic Theology" that it is in its essential nature a science, we have already determined most of the vexing questions which arise concerning it in a formal point of view. In this single predicate is implicitly included a series of affirmations, which, when taken together, will give us a rather clear conception not only of what Systematic Theology is, but also of what it deals with, whence it obtains its material, and for what purpose it exists.

Systematic Theology Is a Science

First of all, then, let us observe that to say that Systematic Theology is a science is to deny that it is a historical discipline, and to affirm that it seeks to discover, not what has been or is held to be true, but what is ideally true; in other words, it is to declare that it deals with absolute truth and aims at organizing into a concatenated system all the truth in its sphere. Geology is a science, and on that very account there cannot be two geologies; its matter is all the well-authenticated facts in its sphere, and its aim is to digest all these facts into one all-comprehending system. There may be rival psychologies, which fill the world with vain jangling; but they do not strive together in order that they may obtain the right to exist side by side in equal validity, but in strenuous effort to supplant and supersede one another: there can be but one true science of mind.

In like manner, just because theology is a science there can be but one theology. This all-embracing system will brook no rival in its sphere, and there can be two theologies only at the cost of one or both of them being imperfect, incomplete, false. It is because theology, in accordance with a somewhat prevalent point of view, is often looked upon as a historical rather than a scientific discipline, that it is so frequently spoken of and defined as if it were but one of many similar schemes of thought.

There is no doubt such a thing as Christian theology, as distinguished from Buddhist theology or Mohammedan theology; and men may study it as the theological implication of Christianity considered as one of the world's religions. But when studied from this point of view, it forms a section of a historical discipline and furnishes its share of facts for a history of religions; on the data supplied by which a science or philosophy of religion may in turn be based.

We may also, no doubt, speak of the Pelagian and Augustinian theologies, or of the Calvinistic and Arminian theologies; but, again, we are speaking as historians and from a historical point of view. The Pelagian and Augustinian theologies are not two coordinate sciences of theology; they are rival theologies. If one is true, just so far the other is false, and there is but one theology. This we may identify, as an empirical fact, with either or neither; but it is at all events one, inclusive of all theological truth and exclusive of all else as false or not germane to the subject.

In asserting that theology is a science, then, we assert that, in its subject-matter, it includes all the facts belonging to that sphere of truth which we call theological; and we deny that it needs or will admit of limitation by a discriminating adjectival definition. We may speak of it as Christian theology just as we may speak of it as true theology, if we mean thereby only more fully to describe what, as a matter of fact, theology is found to be; but not, if we mean thereby to discriminate it from some other assumed theology thus erected to a coordinate position with it.

We may describe our method of procedure in attempting to ascertain and organize the truths that come before us for building into the system, and so speak of logical or inductive, of speculative or organic theology; or we may separate the one body of theology into its members, and, just as we speak of surface and organic geology or of physiological and direct psychology, so speak of the theology of grace and of sin, or of natural and revealed theology. But all these are but designations of methods of procedure in dealing with the one whole, or of the various sections that together constitute the one whole, which in its completeness is the science of theology, and which, as a science, is inclusive of all the truth in its sphere, however ascertained, however presented, however defended.

The Three Presuppositions of Systematic Theology

There is much more than this included, however, in calling theology a science. For the very existence of any science, three things are presupposed: (1) the reality of its subject-matter; (2) the capacity of the human mind to apprehend, receive into itself, and rationalize this subject-matter; and (3) some medium of communication by which the subject-matter is brought

before the mind and presented to it for apprehension. There could be no astronomy, for example, if there were no heavenly bodies. And though the heavenly bodies existed, there could still be no science of them were there no mind to apprehend them.

Facts do not make a science; even facts as apprehended do not make a science; they must be not only apprehended, but also so far comprehended as to be rationalized and thus combined into a correlated system. The mind brings to every science somewhat which, though included in the facts, is not derived from the facts considered in themselves alone, as isolated data, or even as data perceived in some sort of relation to one another. Though they be thus known, science is not yet; and is not born save through the efforts of the mind in subsuming the facts under its own intuitions and forms of thought. No mind is satisfied with a bare cognition of facts: its very constitution forces it on to a restless energy until it succeeds in working these facts not only into a network of correlated relations among themselves, but also into a rational body of thought correlated to itself and its necessary modes of thinking.

The condition of science, then, is that the facts which fall within its scope shall be such as stand in relation not only to our faculties, so that they may be apprehended, but also to our mental constitution so that they may be so far understood as to be rationalized and wrought into a system relative to our thinking. Thus a science of aesthetics presupposes an aesthetic faculty, and a science of morals a moral nature, as truly as a science of logic presupposes a logical apprehension, and a science of mathematics a capacity to comprehend the relations of numbers. But still again, though the facts had real existence, and the mind were furnished with a capacity for their reception and for a sympathetic estimate and embracing of them in their relations, no science could exist were there no media by which the facts should be brought before and communicated to the mind. The transmitter and intermediating wire are as essential for telegraphing as the message and the receiving instrument.

Subjectively speaking, sense perception is the essential basis of all science of external things; self-consciousness, of internal things. But objective media are also necessary. For example, there could be no astronomy, were there no trembling ether²² through whose delicate

22. ED. NOTE. *Trembling ether*: In nineteenth-century scientific thinking, ether (or *aether*) was a theorized (hypothetical) "omnipresent, perfectly elastic medium having zero density" through which

telegraphy²³ the facts of light and heat are transmitted to us from the suns and systems of the heavens. Subjective and objective conditions of communication must unite, before the facts that constitute the material of a science can be placed before the mind that gives it its form. The sense of sight is essential to astronomy: yet the sense of sight would be useless for forming an astronomy were there no objective ethereal messengers to bring us news from the stars. With these an astronomy becomes possible; but how meager an astronomy compared with the new possibilities which have opened out with the discovery of a new medium of communication in the telescope, followed by still newer media in the subtle instruments by which our modern investigators not only weigh the spheres in their courses, but analyze them into their chemical elements, map out the heavens in a chart, and separate the suns into their primary constituents.

Like all other sciences, therefore, theology, for its very existence as a science, presupposes the objective reality of the subject-matter with which it deals; the subjective capacity of the human mind so far to understand this subject-matter as to be able to subsume it under the forms of its thinking and to rationalize it into not only a comprehensive, but also a comprehensible whole; and the existence of trustworthy media of communication by which the subject-matter is brought to the mind and presented before it for perception and understanding. That is to say: (1) The affirmation that theology is a science presupposes the affirmation that God is, and that he has relation to his creatures. Were there no God, there could be no theology; nor could there be a theology if, though he existed, he existed out of relation with his creatures. The whole body of philosophical apologetics is, therefore, presupposed in and underlies the structure of scientific theology. (2) The affirmation that theology is a science presupposes the affirmation

light was thought to travel [Albert A. Michelson, "The Relative Motion of the Earth and the Luminiferous Ether," *American Journal of Science* 22, no. 128 (1881): 120–29]. The then-prevailing wave theory of light postulated that for light to travel through the vacuum of space, a medium—*luminiferous aether* (light-bearing ether)—was necessary, just as sound waves require the medium of air to propagate. According to the theory, because ether was said to be *perfectly elastic*, light caused it to tremble or vibrate as it passed through it (just as a sound causes air to vibrate at it passes through it), thus creating waves. Thus light waves were thought to be "trembling ether." The Michelson-Morley experiment (1887) and Albert Einstein's theory of relativity (1905) signaled the end of scientific belief in ether.

23. Ed. NOTE. *Telegraphy*: "the action or practice of conveying messages over a distance using visible or audible signs or signals; a method of doing this." *Oxford English Dictionary*, "telegraphy (n.), sense 1.a," September 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5332279919>.

that man has a religious nature, i.e., a nature capable of understanding not only that God is, but also, to some extent, what he is; not only that he stands in relations with his creatures, but also what those relations are. Had man no religious nature he might, indeed, apprehend certain facts concerning God, but he could not so understand him in his relations to man as to be able to respond to those facts in a true and sympathetic embrace. The total product of the great science of religion, which investigates the nature and workings of this element in man's mental constitution, is therefore presupposed in and underlies the structure of scientific theology. (3) The affirmation that theology is a science presupposes the affirmation that there are media of communication by which God and Divine things are brought before the minds of men, that they may perceive them and, in perceiving, understand them.

In other words, when we affirm that theology is a science, we affirm not only the reality of God's existence and our capacity so far to understand him, but we affirm that he has made himself known to us—we affirm the objective reality of a revelation. Were there no revelation of God to man, our capacity to understand him would lie dormant and unawakened; and though he really existed it would be to us as if he were not. There would be a God to be known and a mind to know him; but theology would be as impossible as if there were neither the one nor the other. Not only, then, philosophical, but also the whole mass of historical apologetics by which the reality of revelation and its embodiment in the Scriptures are vindicated, is presupposed in and underlies the structure of scientific theology.

What Systematic Theology Is and Is Not

In thus developing the implications of calling theology a science, we have already gone far towards determining our exact conception of what theology is. We have in effect, for example, settled our definition of theology. A science is defined from its subject-matter; and the subject-matter of theology is God in his nature and in his relations with his creatures. Theology is therefore that science which treats of God and of the relations between God and the universe. To this definition most theologians have actually come. And those who define theology as "the science of God," mean the term God

in a broad sense as inclusive also of his relations; while others exhibit their sense of the need of this inclusiveness by calling it “the science of God and of Divine things” while still others speak of it, more loosely, as “the science of the supernatural.” These definitions fail rather in precision of language than in correctness of conception.

Others, however, go astray in the conception itself. Thus theologians of the school of Schleiermacher usually derive their definition from the sources rather than the subject-matter of the science—and so speak of theology as “the science of faith” or the like; a thoroughly unscientific procedure, even though our view of the sources be complete and unexceptionable, which is certainly not the case with this school. Quite as confusing is it to define theology, as is very currently done and often as an outgrowth of this same subjective tendency, as “the science of religion,” or even—pressing to its greatest extreme the historical conception, which as often underlies this type of definition—as “the science of the Christian religion.” Theology and religion are parallel products of the same body of facts in diverse spheres; the one in the sphere of thought and the other in the sphere of life. And the definition of theology as “the science of religion” thus confounds the product of the facts concerning God and his relations with his creatures working through the hearts and lives of men, with those facts themselves; and consequently, whenever strictly understood, bases theology not on the facts of the divine revelation, but on the facts of the religious life.

This leads ultimately to a confusion of the two distinct disciplines of theology, the subject matter of which is objective, and the science of religion, the subject matter of which is subjective; with the effect of lowering the data of theology to the level of the aspirations and imaginings of man’s own heart. Wherever this definition is found, either a subjective conception of theology, which reduces it to a branch of psychology, may be suspected; or else a historical conception of it, a conception of “Christian theology” as one of the many theologies of the world, parallel with, even if unspeakably truer than, the others with which it is classed and in conjunction with which it furnishes us with a full account of religion. When so conceived, it is natural to take a step further and permit the methodology of the science, as well as its idea, to be determined by its distinguishing element: thus theology, in contradiction to its very name, becomes Christo-centric.

No doubt, “Christian theology,” as a historical discipline, is Christocentric; it is by its doctrine of redemption that it is differentiated from all the other theologies that the world has known. But theology as a science is and must be Theo-centric. So soon as we firmly grasp it from the scientific point of view, we see that there can be but one science of God and of his relations to his universe, and we no longer seek a point of discrimination, but rather a center of development; and we quickly see that there can be but one center about which so comprehensive a subject-matter can be organized—the conception of God. He that hath seen Christ, has beyond doubt seen the Father; but it is one thing to make Christ the center of theology so far as he is one with God, and another thing to organize all theology around him as the theanthropos and in his specifically theanthropic work.

Scripture Is the Only Sufficient Source for Systematic Theology

Not only, however, is our definition of theology thus set for us: we have also determined in advance our conception of its sources. We have already made use of the term “revelation,” to designate the medium by which the facts concerning God and his relations to his creatures are brought before men’s minds, and so made the subject-matter of a possible science. The word accurately describes the condition of all knowledge of God. If God be a person, it follows by stringent necessity, that he can be known only so far as he reveals or expresses himself. And it is but the converse of this, that if there be no revelation, there can be no knowledge, and, of course, no systematized knowledge or science of God. Our reaching up to him in thought and inference is possible only because he condescends to make himself intelligible to us, to speak to us through work or word, to reveal himself. We hazard nothing, therefore, in saying that, as the condition of all theology is a revealed God, so, without limitation, the sole source of theology is revelation.

In so speaking, however, we have no thought of doubting that God’s revelation of himself is “in divers manners.” We have no desire to deny that he has never left man without witness of his eternal power and Godhead, or that he has the manifestations of himself in nature and providence and grace,

so that every generation has had abiding and unmistakable evidence that he is, that he is the good God, and that he is a God who marketh iniquity. Under the broad skirts of the term “revelation,” every method of manifesting himself which God uses in communicating knowledge of his being and attributes, may find shelter for itself—whether it be through those visible things of nature whereby his invisible things are clearly seen, or through the constitution of the human mind with its causal judgment indelibly stamped upon it, or through that voice of God that we call conscience, which proclaims his moral law within us, or through his providence in which he makes bare his arm for the government of the nations, or through the exercises of his grace, our experience under the tutelage of the Holy Ghost—or whether it be through the open visions of his prophets, the divinely breathed pages of his written Word, the divine life of the Word himself.

How God reveals himself—in what divers manners he makes himself known to his creatures, is thus the subsequent question, by raising which we distribute the one source of theology, revelation, into the various methods of revelation, each of which brings us true knowledge of God, and all of which must be taken account of in building our knowledge into one all-comprehending system. It is the accepted method of theology to infer that the God that made the eye must himself see; that the God who sovereignly distributes his favors in the secular world may be sovereign in grace too; that the heart that condemns itself but repeats the condemnation of the greater God; that the songs of joy in which the Christian’s happy soul voices its sense of God’s gratuitous mercy, are valid evidence that God has really dealt graciously with it. It is with no reserve that we accept all these sources of knowledge of God—nature, providence, Christian experience—as true and valid sources, the well-authenticated data yielded by which are to be received by us as revelations of God, and as such to be placed alongside of the revelations in the written Word and wrought with them into one system. As a matter of fact, theologians have always so dealt with them; and doubtless they always will so deal with them.

But to perceive, as all must perceive, that every method by which God manifests himself, is, so far as this manifestation can be clearly interpreted, a source of knowledge of him, and must, therefore, be taken account of in framing all our knowledge of him into one organic whole, is far from

allowing that there are no differences among these various manifestations—in the amount of revelation they give, the clearness of their message, the ease and certainty with which they may be interpreted, or the importance of the special truths which they are fitted to convey. Far rather is it *a priori*²⁴ likely that if there are “divers manners” in which God has revealed himself, he has not revealed precisely the same message through each; that these “divers manners” correspond also to divers messages of divers degrees of importance, delivered with divers degrees of clearness.

And the mere fact that he has included in these “divers manners” a copious revelation in a written Word, delivered with an authenticating accompaniment of signs and miracles, proved by recorded prophecies with their recorded fulfillments, and pressed, with the greatest solemnity, upon the attention and consciences of men as the very Word of the Living God, who has by it made all the wisdom of men foolishness; nay, proclaimed as containing within itself the formulation of his truth, the proclamation of his law, the discovery of his plan of salvation:—this mere fact, I say, would itself and prior to all comparison, raise an overwhelming presumption that all the others of “the divers manners” of God’s revelation were insufficient for the purposes for which revelation is given, whether on account of defect in the amount of their communication or insufficiency of attestation or uncertainty of interpretation or fatal one-sidedness in the character of the revelation they are adapted to give.

We need not be surprised, therefore, that on actual examination, such imperfections are found undeniably to attach to all forms of what we may, for the sake of discrimination, speak of as mere manifestations of God; and that thus the revelation of God in his written Word—in which are included the only authentic records of the revelation of him through the incarnate Word—is easily shown not only to be incomparably superior to all other manifestations of him in the fullness, richness, and clearness of its communications, but also to contain the sole discovery of much that it is most important for the soul to know as to its state and destiny, and of much that is most precious in our whole body of theological knowledge.

24. ED. NOTE. *A priori*: relating to or derived by reasoning from self-evident propositions or principles; deductive. Contrasts with *a posteriori*: relating to or derived by reasoning from observed facts; inductive.

The superior lucidity of this revelation makes it the norm of interpretation for what is revealed so much more darkly through the other methods of manifestation. The glorious character of the discoveries made in it throws all other manifestations into comparative shadow. The amazing fullness of its disclosures renders what they can tell us of little relative value. And its absolute completeness for the needs of man, taking up and reiteratingly repeating in the clearest of language all that can be wrung from their sometimes enigmatic indications, and then adding to this a vast body of still more momentous truth undiscoverable through them, all but supersedes their necessity.

With the fullest recognition of the validity of all the knowledge of God and his ways with men, which can be obtained through the manifestations of his power and divinity in nature and history and grace; and the frankest allowance that the written Word is given, not to destroy the manifestations of God, but to fulfill them; the theologian must yet refuse to give these sources of knowledge a place alongside of the written Word, in any other sense than that he gladly admits that they, alike with it, but in unspeakably lower measure, do tell us of God. And nothing can be a clearer indication of a decadent theology or of a decaying faith, than a tendency to neglect the Word in favor of some one or of all of the lesser sources of theological truth, as fountains from which to draw our knowledge of divine things. This were to prefer the flickering rays of a taper to the blazing light of the sun; to elect to draw our water from a muddy run rather than to dip it from the broad bosom of the pure fountain itself.

Nevertheless, men have often sought to still the cravings of their souls with a purely natural theology; and there are men today who prefer to derive their knowledge of what God is and what he will do for man from an analysis of the implications of their own religious feelings: not staying to consider that nature, “red in tooth and claw with ravin,” can but direct our eyes to the God of law, whose deadly letter kills; or that our feelings must needs point us to the God of our imperfect apprehensions or of our unsanctified desires—not to the God that is, so much as to the God that we would fain²⁵ should be. The natural result of resting on the revelations of nature is despair; while the inevitable end of making our appeal to even

25. ED. NOTE. *That we would fain should be:* that we would gladly have; that we wish to be.

the Christian heart is to make for ourselves refuges of lies in which there is neither truth nor safety.

We may, indeed, admit that it is valid reasoning to infer from the nature of the Christian life what are the modes of God's activities towards his children: to see, for instance, in conviction of sin and the sudden peace of the new-born soul, God's hand in slaying that he may make alive, his almighty power in raising the spiritually dead. But how easy to overstep the limits of valid inference; and, forgetting that it is the body of Christian truth known and assimilated that determines the type of Christian experience, confuse in our inferences what is from man with what is from God, and condition and limit our theology by the undeveloped Christian thought of the man or his times. The interpretation of the data included in what we have learned to call "the Christian consciousness," whether of the individual or of the church at large, is a process so delicate, so liable to error, so inevitably swayed to this side or that by the currents that flow up and down in the soul, that probably few satisfactory inferences could be drawn from it, had we not the norm of Christian experience and its dogmatic implications recorded for us in the perspicuous pages of the written Word.

But even were we to suppose that the interpretation was easy and secure, and that we had before us, in an infallible formulation, all the implications of the religious experience of all the men who have ever known Christ, we have no reason to believe that the whole body of facts thus obtained, would suffice to give us a complete theology. After all, we know in part and we feel in part; it is only when that which is perfect shall appear that we shall know or experience all that Christ has in store for us. With the fullest acceptance, therefore, of the data of the theology of the feelings, no less than of natural theology, when their results are validly obtained and sufficiently authenticated as trustworthy, as divinely revealed facts which must be wrought into our system, it remains nevertheless true that we should be confined to a meagre and doubtful theology were these data not confirmed, reinforced, and supplemented by the surer and fuller revelations of Scripture; and that the Holy Scriptures are the source of theology in not only a degree, but also a sense in which nothing else is.

There may be a theology without the Scriptures—a theology of nature, gathered by painful, and slow, and sometimes doubtful processes from what

man sees around him in external nature and the course of history, and what he sees within him of nature and of grace. In like manner there may be and has been an astronomy of nature, gathered by man in his natural state without help from aught but his naked eyes, as he watched in the fields by night. But what is this astronomy of nature to the astronomy that has become possible through the wonderful appliances of our observatories?

The Word of God is to theology as, but vastly more than, these instruments are to astronomy. It is the instrument which so far increases the possibilities of the science as to revolutionize it and to place it upon a height from which it can nevermore descend. What would be thought of the deluded man, who, discarding the new methods of research, should insist on acquiring all the astronomy which he would admit, from the unaided observation of his own myopic and astigmatic eyes? Much more deluded is he who, neglecting the instrument of God's Word written, would confine his admissions of theological truth to what he could discover from the broken lights that play upon external nature, and the faint gleams of a dying or even a slowly reviving light, which arise in his own sinful soul. Ah, no! The telescope first made a real science of astronomy possible: and the Scriptures form the only sufficing source of theology.

The Place of Systematic Theology Among the Four Theological Disciplines

Under such a conception of its nature and sources, we are led to consider the place of Systematic Theology among the other theological disciplines as well as among the other sciences in general. Without encroaching upon the details of Theological Encyclopaedia, we may adopt here the usual fourfold distribution of the theological disciplines into the Exegetical, the Historical, the Systematic and the Practical, with only the correction of prefixing to them a fifth department of Apologetical Theology. The place of Systematic Theology in this distribution is determined by its relation to the preceding disciplines, of which it is the crown and head.

Apologetical Theology prepares the way for all theology by establishing its necessary presuppositions without which no theology is possible—the existence and essential nature of God, the religious nature of man which enables him to receive a revelation from God, the possibility of a revelation

and its actual realization in the Scriptures. It thus places the Scriptures in our hands for investigation and study.

Exegetical Theology receives these inspired writings from the hands of Apologetics, and investigates their meaning; presenting us with a body of detailed and substantiated results, culminating in a series of organized systems of Biblical History, Biblical Ethics, Biblical Theology, and the like, which provide material for further use in the more advanced disciplines.

Historical Theology investigates the progressive realization of Christianity in the lives, hearts, worship and thought of men, issuing not only in a full account of the history of Christianity, but also in a body of facts which come into use in the more advanced disciplines, especially in the way of the manifold experiments that have been made during the ages in Christian organization, worship, living, and creed-building, as well as of the sifted results of the reasoned thinking and deep experience of Christian truth during the whole past.

Systematic Theology does not fail to strike its roots deeply into this matter furnished by Historical Theology; it knows how to profit by the experience of all past generations in their efforts to understand and define, to systematize and defend revealed truth; and it thinks of nothing so little as lightly to discard the conquests of so many hard-fought fields. It therefore gladly utilizes all the material that Historical Theology brings it, accounting it, indeed, the very precipitate²⁶ of the Christian consciousness of the past; but it does not use it crudely, or at firsthand for itself, but accepts it as investigated, explained, and made available by the sister discipline of Historical Theology which alone can understand it or draw from it its true lessons. It certainly does not find in it its chief or primary source, and its relation to Historical Theology is, in consequence, far less close than that in which it stands to Exegetical Theology which is its true and especial handmaid.

The independence of Exegetical Theology is seen in the fact that it does its work wholly without thought or anxiety as to the use that is to be made of its results; and that it furnishes a vastly larger body of data than can be utilized by any one discipline. It provides a body of historical, ethical, liturgic, ecclesiastical facts, as well as a body of theological facts. But so far as

26. ED. NOTE. *Precipitate*: the product or result of a process or action.

its theological facts are concerned, it provides them chiefly that they may be used by Systematic Theology as material out of which to build its system.

This is not to forget the claims of Biblical Theology. It is rather to emphasize its value, and to afford occasion for explaining its true place in the encyclopedia, and its true relations on the one side to Exegetical Theology, and on the other to Systematics—a matter which appears to be even yet imperfectly understood in some quarters. Biblical Theology is not a section of Historical Theology, although it must be studied in a historical spirit, and has a historical face; it is rather the ripest fruit of Exegetics, and Exegetics has not performed its full task until its scattered results in the way of theological data are gathered up into a full and articulated system of Biblical Theology. It is to be hoped that the time will come when no commentary will be considered complete until the capstone is placed upon its fabric by closing chapters gathering up into systematized exhibits, the unsystematized results of the continuous exegesis of the text, in the spheres of history, ethics, theology, and the like.

The task of Biblical Theology, in a word, is the task of coordinating the scattered results of continuous exegesis into a concatenated whole, whether with reference to a single book of Scripture or to a body of related books or to the whole Scriptural fabric. Its chief object is not to find differences of conception between the various writers, though some recent students of the subject seem to think this is so much their duty, that when they cannot find differences they make them. It is to reproduce the theological thought of each writer or group of writers in the form in which it lay in their own minds, so that we may be enabled to look at all their theological statements at their angle, and to understand all their deliverances as modified and conditioned by their own point of view.

Its exegetical value lies just in this circumstance, that it is only when we have thus concatenated an author's theological statements into a whole, that we can be sure that we understand them as he understood them in detail. A light is inevitably thrown back from Biblical Theology upon the separate theological deliverances as they occur in the text, such as subtly colors them, and often, for the first time, gives them to us in their true setting, and thus enables us to guard against perverting them when we adapt them to our use.

This is a noble function, and could students of Biblical Theology only firmly grasp it, once for all, as their task, it would prevent this important science from being brought into contempt through a tendency to exaggerate differences in form of statement into divergences of view, and so to force the deliverances of each book into a strange and unnatural combination, in the effort to vindicate a function for this discipline.

The relation of Biblical Theology to Systematic Theology is based on a true view of its function. Systematic Theology is not founded on the direct and primary results of the exegetical process; it is founded on the final and complete results of exegesis as exhibited in Biblical Theology. Not exegesis itself, then, but Biblical Theology, provides the material for Systematics. Biblical Theology is not, then, a rival of Systematics; it is not even a parallel product of the same body of facts, provided by exegesis; it is the basis and source of Systematics. Systematic Theology is not a concatenation of the scattered theological data furnished by the exegetic process; it is the combination of the already concatenated data given to it by Biblical Theology. It uses the individual data furnished by exegesis, in a word, not crudely, not independently for itself, but only after these data have been worked up into Biblical Theology and have received from it their final coloring and subtlest shades of meaning—in other words, only in their true sense, and after exegetics has said its last word upon them.

Just as we shall attain our finest and truest conception of the person and work of Christ, not by crudely trying to combine the scattered details of his life and teaching as given in our four gospels into one patchwork life and account of his teaching; but far more rationally and far more successfully by first catching Matthew's full conception of Jesus, and then Mark's, and then Luke's, and then John's, and combining these four conceptions into one rounded whole—so we gain our truest Systematics not by at once working together the separate dogmatic statements in the Scriptures, but by combining them in their due order and proportion as they stand in the various theologies of the Scriptures.

Thus we are enabled to view the future whole not only in its parts, but in the several combinations of the parts; and, looking at it from every side, to obtain a true conception of its solidity and strength, and to avoid all exaggeration or falsification of the details in giving them place in the completed

structure. And thus we do not make our theology, according to our own pattern, as a mosaic, out of the fragments of the Biblical teaching; but rather look out from ourselves upon it as a great prospect, framed out of the mountains and plains of the theologies of the Scriptures, and strive to attain a point of view from which we can bring the whole landscape into our field of sight.

From this point of view, we find no difficulty in understanding the relation in which the several disciplines stand to one another, with respect to their contents. The material that Systematics draws from other than Biblical sources may be here left momentarily out of account. The actual contents of the theological results of the exegetic process, of Biblical Theology, and of Systematics, with this limitation, may be said to be the same. The immediate work of exegesis may be compared to the work of a recruiting officer: it draws out from the mass of mankind the men who are to constitute the army. Biblical Theology organizes these men into companies and regiments and corps, arranged in marching order and accoutred²⁷ for service. Systematic Theology combines these companies and regiments and corps into an army—a single and unitary whole, determined by its own all-pervasive principle. It, too, is composed of men—the same men which were recruited by Exegetics; but it is composed of these men, not as individuals merely, but in their due relations to the other men of their companies and regiments and corps.

The simile is far from a perfect one; but it may illustrate the mutual relations of the disciplines, and also, perhaps, suggest the historical element that attaches to Biblical Theology, and the element of all-inclusive systematization which is inseparable from Systematic Theology. It is just this element, determining the spirit and therefore the methods of Systematic Theology, which, along with its greater inclusiveness, discriminates it from all forms of Biblical Theology the spirit of which is purely historical.

The Place of Systematic Theology Among the Other Sciences

The place that theology, as the scientific presentation of all the facts that are known concerning God and his relations, claims for itself, within the circle of the sciences, is an equally high one with that which it claims

27. ED. NOTE. *Accoutre*: to outfit, equip.

among the theological disciplines. Whether we consider the topics which it treats, in their dignity, their excellence, their grandeur; or the certainty with which its data can be determined; or the completeness with which its principles have been ascertained and its details classified; or the usefulness and importance of its discoveries: it is as far out of all comparison above all other sciences as the eternal health and destiny of the soul are of more value than this fleeting life in this world.

It is not so above them, however, as not to be also a constituent member of the closely interrelated and mutually interacting organism of the sciences. There is no one of them all which is not, in some measure, touched and affected by it, or which is not in some measure included in it. As all nature, whether mental or material, may be conceived of as only the mode in which God manifests himself, every science which investigates nature and ascertains its laws, is occupied with the discovery of the modes of the divine action, and as such might be considered a branch of theology. And, on the other hand, as all nature, whether mental or material, owes its existence to God, every science which investigates nature and ascertains its laws, depends for its foundation upon that science which would make known what God is and what the relations are in which he stands to the work of his hands and in which they stand to him; and must borrow from it those conceptions through which alone the material with which it deals can find its explanation or receive its proper significance.

Theology, thus, enters into the structure of every other science. Its closest relations are, no doubt, with the highest of the other sciences, ethics. Any discussion of our duty to God must rest on a knowledge of our relation to him; and much of our duty to man is undiscoverable, save through knowledge of our common relation to the one God and Father of all, and one Lord the Redeemer of all, and one Spirit the Sanctifier of all—all of which it is the function of theology to supply. This fact is, of course, not fatal to the existence of a natural ethics; but an ethics independent of theological conceptions would be a meagre thing indeed, while the theology of the Scriptural revelation for the first time affords a basis for ethical investigation at once broad enough and sure enough to raise that science to its true dignity. Accordingly, a purely natural ethics has always been an incomplete ethics even relatively to the less developed forms of

ethics resting on a revealed basis. A careful student has recently told us, for example, that:

Between the ethics of pagan antiquity and that of the Old Testament there is a difference of the widest and most radical kind. There is no trace of gradual transition from the one to the other. That difference is first seen in the pagan conception of God and of man's ethical relation to Him. . . . It was essentially a morality between man and man. For where man's relation to a personal God is not apprehended, anything approaching an universal ethics is impossible, and only individual virtues can be manifested. Ethics was thus deprived of its unity. . . . Morality became but a catalogue of separate virtues, and was deprived of that penetrating bond of union which it receives when the realm of human personalities is bound by innumerable links to the great central personality, God.²⁸

We must not, however, on the ground of this intimacy of relation, confound the two sciences of theology and ethics. Something like it in kind and approaching it in degree exists between theology and every other science, no one of which is so independent of it as not to touch and be touched by it. Something of theology is implicated²⁹ in all metaphysics and physics alike. It alone can determine the origin of either matter or mind, or of the mystic powers that have been granted to them.³⁰ It alone can explain the nature of second causes and set the boundaries to their efficiency. It alone is competent to declare the meaning of the ineradicable³¹ persuasion of the human mind that its reason is right reason, its processes trustworthy, its intuitions true. All science without God is mutilated science, and no account of a single branch of knowledge can ever be complete until it is pushed back to find its completion and ground in him. In the eloquent words of Dr. Pusey:

God alone is in Himself, and is the Cause and Upholder of everything to which He has given being. Every faculty of the mind is some reflection of

28. William Stanton Bruce, *The Ethics of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 12–14.

29. ED. NOTE. *Implicate*: a thing implied.

30. Cf. the ground-texts which Prof. John Laidlaw has placed at the head of the first division of his *The Bible Doctrine of Man: or, The Anthropology and Psychology of Scripture*, rev ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895): "The truth concerning the soul can only be established by the word of God"—Plato, *Timaeus*, 72 D. "How can the knowledge of the substance of the rational soul be sought or had from which the substance of the soul first emanated."—Bacon, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, 4.3.3.

31. ED. NOTE. *Ineradicable*: incapable of being eradicated, completely done away with; indissoluble.

His; every truth has its being from Him; every law of nature has the impress of His hand; everything beautiful has caught its light from His eternal beauty; every principle of goodness has its foundation in His attributes. . . . Without Him in the region of thought, everything is dead; as without Him, everything which is, would at once cease to be. All things must speak of God, refer to God, or they are atheistic. History without God is a chaos without design, or end, or aim. Political Economy, without God, would be a selfish teaching about the acquisition of wealth, making the larger portion of mankind animate machines for its production; Physics, without God, would be but a dull inquiry into certain meaningless phenomena; Ethics, without God, would be a varying rule, without principle, or substance, or center, or regulating hand; Metaphysics, without God, would make man his own temporary God, to be resolved, after his brief hour here, into the nothingness out of which he proceeded.³²

It is thus as true of sciences as it is of creatures, that in him they all live and move and have their being. The science of him and his relations is the necessary ground of all science. All speculation takes us back to him; all inquiry presupposes him; and every phase of science consciously or unconsciously rests at every step on the science that makes him known. Theology, thus, as the science which treats of God, lies at the root of all sciences. It is true enough that each could exist without it, in a sense and in some degree; but through it alone can any one of them reach its true dignity. Herein we see not only the proof of its greatness, but also the assurance of its permanence. "What so permeates all sections and subjects of human thought, has a deep root in human nature and an immense hold on it. What so possesses man's mind that he cannot think at all without thinking of it, is so bound up with the very being of intelligence that ere it can perish, intellect must cease to be."³³

It is only in theology, therefore, that the other sciences find their completion. Theology, formally speaking, is accordingly the apex of the pyramid of the sciences, by which the structure is perfected. Its relation to the other sciences is, thus, in this broader sphere quite analogous to its relation to the

32. Edward Bouverie Pusey, *Collegiate and Professorial Teaching and Discipline* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1854), 215–16.

33. A. M. Fairbairn, "Theology as an Academic Discipline," *CR* 51 (February 1887): 202.

other branches of the theological encyclopedia in that narrower sphere. All other sciences are subsidiary to it, and it builds its fabric out of material supplied by them. Theology is the science which deals with the facts concerning God and his relations with the universe. Such facts include all the facts of nature and history: and it is the very function of the several sciences to supply these facts in scientific, that is, thoroughly comprehended form. Scientific theology thus stands at the head of the sciences as well as at the head of the theological disciplines. The several sciences deal each with its own material in an independent spirit and supply a multitude of results not immediately useful to theology. But so far as their results stand related to questions with which theology deals, they exist only to serve her. Dr. Flint well says:

The relevant facts of natural theology are all the works of God in nature and providence, all the phenomena and laws of matter, mind and history, and these can only be ascertained by the special sciences. The surest and most adequate knowledge of them is knowledge in the form called scientific, and therefore in this form the theologian must seek to know them. The sciences which deal with nature, mind and history, hold the same position towards natural theology which the disciplines which treat of the composition, genuineness, authenticity, text, development, etc., of the Scriptures do towards Biblical theology. They inform us, as it were, what is the true text and literal interpretation of the book of creation. Their conclusions are the premises, or at least the data, of the scientific natural theologian. All reasonings of his which disregard these data are *ipso facto* condemned.³⁴ A conflict between the results of these sciences and the findings of natural theology is inconceivable. It would be a conflict between the data and conclusions of natural theology, and so equivalent for natural theology to self-contradiction. . . . The religion of the Bible is but one of a multitude of religions which have left traces of themselves in documents, monuments, rites, creeds, customs, institutions, individual lives, social changes, etc.; and there is a theological discipline—comparative theology—which undertakes to disclose the spirit, delineate the character, trace the development and exhibit the relations of all religions with the utmost attainable exactitude. Obviously the mass of data which the science has to collect, sift and interpret is enormous. They can only be brought to light, and set in their natural relationships, by the labors of hosts of

34. ED. NOTE. *Comdemn*: variant spelling of *condemn*; to declare morally wrong or evil.

specialists of all kinds. . . . Christian dogmatics has to make use of the results of natural theology, Biblical theology and comparative theology, and to raise them to a higher stage by a comprehensive synthesis, which connects them with the person and work of Christ, as of him in whom all spiritual truth is comprehended and all spiritual wants supplied.³⁵

The essence of the matter is here admirably set forth, though as connected with some points of view which may require modification. It would seem to be a mistake, for example, to conceive of scientific theology as the immediate and direct Synthesis of the three sources—Natural Theology, Biblical Theology and Comparative Theology—so that it would be considered the product in like degree or even in similar manner of the three. All three furnish data for the completed structure; but if what has been said in an earlier connection has any validity, Natural and Comparative Theology should stand in a somewhat different relation to Scientific Theology from that which Biblical Theology occupies—a relation not less organic indeed, but certainly less direct.

The true representation seems to be that Scientific Theology is related to the natural and historical sciences, not immediately and independently for itself, but only indirectly, that is, through the mediation of the preliminary theological discipline of Apologetics. The work of Apologetics in its three branches of Philosophical, Psychological and Historical, results not only in presenting the Bible to the theological student, but also in presenting to him God, Religion and Christianity. And in so doing, it supplies him with the total material of Natural and Comparative Theology as well as with the foundation on which exegesis is to raise the structure of Biblical Theology. The materials thus provided Scientific Theology utilizes, just as it utilizes the results of exegesis through Biblical Theology, and the results of the age-long life of men under Christianity through Historical Theology.

Scientific Theology rests, therefore, most directly on the results of Biblical exegesis as provided in Biblical Theology; but avails itself likewise of all the material furnished by all the preceding disciplines, and, in the results of Apologetics as found in Natural Theology and Comparative Theology, of all the data bearing on its problems, supplied by all the sciences. But it does

35. "Theology," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed., 25 vols. (New York: Henry G. Allen, 1875–89).

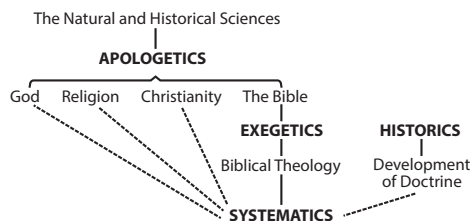
not make its direct appeal crudely and independently to these sciences, any more than to exegesis and Christian history, but as it receives the one set of results from the hands of Exegetics and Histories, so it receives the others from the hand of Apologetics.³⁶ Systematic Theology is fundamentally one of the theological disciplines, and bears immediate relation only to its sister disciplines; it is only through them that it reaches further out and sets its roots in more remote sources of information.

Systematic Theology Is a Progressive Science

The interpretation of a written document, intended to convey a plain message, is infinitely easier than the interpretation of the teaching embodied in facts themselves. It is therefore that systematic treatises on the several sciences are written. Theology has, therefore, an immense advantage over all other sciences, inasmuch as it is more an inductive study of facts conveyed in a written revelation, than an inductive study of facts as conveyed in life. It was, consequently, the first-born of the sciences. It was the first to reach relative completeness. And it is today in a state far nearer perfection than any other science. This is not, however, to deny that it is a progressive science. In exactly the same sense in which any other science is progressive, this is progressive.

It is not meant that new revelations are to be expected of truth which has not been before within the reach of man. There is a vast difference between the progress of a science and increase in its material. All the facts of psychology, for instance, have been in existence so long as mind itself has existed; and the progress of this science has been dependent on the progressive discovery, understanding and systematization of these facts. All the facts of theology have, in like manner, been within the reach of man for nearly two

36. It may be useful to seek to give a rough graphic representation of the relations of Systematic Theology as thus far outlined:



millenniums; and the progress of theology is dependent on men's progress in gathering, defining, mentally assimilating, and organizing these facts into a correlated system. So long as revelation was not completed, the progressive character of theology was secured by the progress in revelation itself. And since the close of the canon of Scripture, the intellectual realization and definition of the doctrines revealed in it, in relation to one another, have been, as a mere matter of fact, a slow but ever-advancing process.

The affirmation that theology has been a progressive science is no more, then, than to assert that it is a science that has had a history—and a history which can be and should be genetically traced and presented. First, the objective side of Christian truth was developed: pressed on the one side by the crass monotheism of the Jews and on the other by the coarse polytheism of the heathen, and urged on by its own internal need of comprehending the sources of its life, Christian theology first searched the Scriptures that it might understand the nature and modes of existence of its God and the person of its divine Redeemer. Then, more and more conscious of itself, it more and more fully wrought out from those same Scriptures a guarded expression of the subjective side of its faith; until through throes and conflicts it has built up the system which we all inherit. Thus the body of Christian truth has come down to us in the form of an organic growth; and we can conceive of the completed structure as the ripened fruit of the ages, as truly as we can think of it as the perfected result of the exegetical discipline.

As it has come into our possession by this historic process, there is no reason that we can assign why it should not continue to make for itself a history. We do not expect the history of theology to close in our own day. However nearly completed our realization of the body of truth may seem to us to be; however certain it is that the great outlines are already securely laid and most of the details soundly discovered and arranged; no one will assert that every detail is as yet perfected, and we are all living in the confidence so admirably expressed by old John Robinson, "that God hath more truth yet to break forth from his holy Word." Just because God gives us the truth in single threads which we must weave into the reticulated³⁷ texture, all the threads are always within our reach, but the finished texture is ever and

37. ED. NOTE. *Reticulate*: resembling a netlike or network pattern.

will ever continue to be before us until we dare affirm that there is no truth in the Word which we have not perfectly apprehended, and no relation of these truths as revealed which we have not perfectly understood, and no possibility in clearness of presentation which we have not attained.

The conditions of progress in theology are clearly discernible from its nature as a science. The progressive men in any science are the men who stand firmly on the basis of the already ascertained truth. The condition of progress in building the structures of those great cathedrals whose splendid piles glorify the history of art in the Middle Ages, was that each succeeding generation should build upon the foundations laid by its predecessor. If each architect had begun by destroying what had been accomplished by his forerunners, no cathedral would ever have been raised.³⁸ The railroad is pushed across the continent by the simple process of laying each rail at the end of the line already laid.

The prerequisite of all progress is a clear discrimination which as frankly accepts the limitations set by the truth already discovered, as it rejects the false and bad. Construction is not destruction; neither is it the outcome of destruction. There are abuses no doubt to be reformed; errors to correct; falsehoods to cut away. But the history of progress in every science and no less in theology, is a story of impulses given, corrected and assimilated. And when they have been once corrected and assimilated, these truths are to remain accepted. It is then time for another impulse, and the condition of all further progress is to place ourselves in this well-marked line of growth. Astronomy, for example, has had such a history; and there are now some indisputable truths in astronomy, as, for instance, the rotundity of the earth and the central place of the sun in our system. I do not say that these truths are undisputed; probably nothing is any more undisputed in astronomy, or any other science, than in theology. At all events he who wishes, may read the elaborate arguments of the “Zetetic” philosophers, as they love to call themselves, who in this year of grace are striving to prove that the earth is flat and occupies the center of our system. Quite in the same spirit, there are “Zetetic” theologians

38. “Commend me,” says Coleridge, “to the Irish architect who took out the foundation stone to repair the roof.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Anima Poetae: From the Unpublished Note-books of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: W. Heinemann, 1895), 139. Such architects seem to be rather numerous in the sphere of theology.

who strive with similar zeal and acuteness to overturn the established basal³⁹ truths of theology—which, however, can nevermore be shaken; and we should give about as much ear to them in the one science as in the other.

It is utter folly to suppose that progress can be made otherwise than by placing ourselves in the line of progress; and if the temple of God's truth is ever to be completely built, we must not spend our efforts in digging at the foundations which have been securely laid in the distant past, but must rather give our best efforts to rounding the arches, carving the capitals, and fitting in the fretted roof. What if it is not ours to lay foundations? Let us rejoice that that work has been done! Happy are we if our God will permit us to bring a single capstone into place. This fabric is not a house of cards to be built and blown down again a hundred times a day, as the amusement of our idle hours: it is a miracle of art to which all ages and lands bring their varied tribute. The subtle Greek laid the foundations; the law-loving Roman raised high the walls; and all the perspicuity of France and ideality of Germany and systematization of Holland and deep sobriety of Britain have been expended in perfecting the structure; and so it grows.

We have heard much in these last days of the phrase “progressive orthodoxy,” and in somewhat strange connections. Nevertheless, the phrase itself is not an inapt description of the building of this theological house. Let us assert that the history of theology has been and ever must be a progressive orthodoxy. But let us equally loudly assert that progressive orthodoxy and retrogressive heterodoxy can scarcely be convertible terms. Progressive orthodoxy implies that first of all we are orthodox, and secondly that we are progressively orthodox, i.e., that we are ever growing more and more orthodox as more and more truth is being established. This has been and must be the history of the advance of every science, and not less, among them, of the science of theology. Justin Martyr, champion of the orthodoxy of his day, held a theory of the intertrinitarian relationship which became heterodoxy after the Council of Nice;⁴⁰ the ever-struggling Christologies of the earlier ages were forever set aside by the Chalcedon fathers; Augustine

39. ED. NOTE. *Basal*: related to or forming the base of something.

40. ED. NOTE. *Council of Nice*: the First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine I, to address Arianism (which denied the deity of Christ) and the relationships among the three members of the Trinity.

determined for all time the doctrine of grace, Anselm the doctrine of the atonement, Luther the doctrine of forensic justification.

In any progressive science, the amount of departure from accepted truth which is possible to the sound thinker becomes thus ever less and less, in proportion as investigation and study result in the progressive establishment of an ever-increasing number of facts. The physician who would bring back today the medicine of Galen would be no more mad than the theologian who would revive the theology of Clement of Alexandria. Both were men of light and leading in their time; but their time is past, and it is the privilege of the child of today to know a sounder physic and a sounder theology than the giants of that far past yesterday could attain.

It is of the very essence of our position at the end of the ages that we are ever more and more hedged around with ascertained facts, the discovery and establishment of which constitute the very essence of progress. Progress brings increasing limitation, just because it brings increasing knowledge. And as the orthodox man is he that teaches no other doctrine than that which has been established as true; the progressively orthodox man is he who is quick to perceive, admit and condition all his reasoning by all the truth down to the latest, which has been established as true.

Systematic Theology Is a Practical Science

When we speak of progress our eyes are set upon a goal. And in calling theology a progressive science we unavoidably raise the inquiry, what the end and purpose is towards an ever-increasing fitness to secure which it is continually growing. Its own completeness and perfecting as a science—as a department of knowledge—is naturally the proximate goal towards which every science tends. And when we consider the surpassing glory of the subject-matter with which theology deals, it would appear that if ever science existed for its own sake, this might surely be true of this science. The truths concerning God and his relations are, above all comparison, in themselves the most worthy of all truths of study and examination.

Yet we must vindicate a further goal for the advance of theology and thus contend for it that it is an eminently practical science. The contemplation and exhibition of Christianity as truth, is far from the end of the matter.

This truth is specially communicated by God for a purpose, for which it is admirably adapted. That purpose is to save and sanctify the soul. And the discovery, study and systematization of the truth is in order that, firmly grasping it and thoroughly comprehending it in all its reciprocal relations, we may be able to make the most efficient use of it for its holy purpose.

Well worth our most laborious study, then, as it is, for its own sake as mere truth; it becomes not only absorbingly interesting, but inexpressibly precious to us when we bear in mind that the truth with which we thus deal constitutes, as a whole, the engrafted Word that is able to save our souls. The task of thoroughly exploring the pages of revelation, soundly gathering from them their treasures of theological teaching, and carefully fitting these into their due places in a system whereby they may be preserved from misunderstanding, perversion and misuse, and given a new power to convince the understanding, move the heart, and quicken the will, becomes thus a holy duty to our own and our brothers' souls as well as our eager pleasure of our intellectual nature.

That the knowledge of the truth is an essential prerequisite to the production of those graces and the building up of those elements of a sanctified character for the production of which each truth is especially adapted, probably few will deny: but surely it is equally true that the clearer, fuller, and more discriminating this knowledge is, the more certainly and richly will it produce its appropriate effect; and in this is found a most complete vindication of the duty of systematizing the separate elements of truth into a single soundly concatenated whole, by which the essential nature of each is made as clear as it can be made to human apprehension.

It is not a matter of indifference, then, how we apprehend and systematize this truth. On the contrary, if we misconceive it in its parts or in its relations, not only do our views of truth become confused and erroneous, but also our religious life becomes dwarfed or contorted. The character of our religion is, in a word, determined by the character of our theology: and thus the task of the systematic theologian is to see that the relations in which the separate truths actually stand are rightly conceived, in order that they may exert their rightful influence on the development of the religious life.

As no truth is so insignificant as to have no place in the development of our religious life, so no truth is so unimportant that we dare neglect it or

deal deceitfully with it in adjusting it into our system. We are smitten with a deadly fear on the one side, lest by fitting them into a system of our own devising, we cut from them just the angles by which they were intended to lay hold of the hearts of men: but on the other side, we are filled with a holy confidence that, by allowing them to frame themselves into their own system as indicated by their own natures—as the stones in Solomon’s temple were cut each for its place—we shall make each available for all men, for just the place in the saving process for which it was divinely framed and divinely given.

These theoretical considerations are greatly strengthened by the historical fact, that throughout all the ages every advance in the scientific statement of theological truth has been made in response to a practical demand, and has been made in a distinctly practical interest. We wholly misconceive the facts if we imagine that the development of systematic theology has been the work of cold, scholastic recluses, intent only upon intellectual subtleties. It has been the work of the best heart of the whole Church driving on and utilizing in its practical interests, the best brain.

The true state of the case could not be better expressed than it is by Prof. Auguste Sabatier, when he tells us that:

The promulgation of each dogma has been imposed on the Church by some practical necessity. It has always been to bring to an end some theological controversy which was in danger of provoking a schism, to respond to attacks or accusations which it would have been dangerous to permit to acquire credit, that the Church has moved in a dogmatic way. . . . Nothing is more mistaken than to represent the Fathers of the Councils, or the members of the Synods as theoreticians,⁴¹ or even as professional theologians, brought together in conference by speculative zeal alone, in order to resolve metaphysical enigmas. They were men of action, not of speculation; courageous priests and pastors who understood their mission, like soldiers in open battle, and whose first care was to save their Church, its life, its unity, its honor—ready to die for it as one dies for his country.⁴²

41. ED. NOTE. *Theorician*: “a person who holds or advances a theory or theories; an expert in the theoretical aspects of a subject.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, “theorician (n.),” July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2442459924>.

42. Auguste Sabatier, *Esquisse d’une philosophie de la religion d’après la psychologie et l’histoire* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1897), 306. Cf. Auguste Sabatier, *The Vitality of Christian Dogmas and Their Power of Evolution: A Study in Religious Philosophy*, trans. Emmanuel Christen (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1898), 31–33.

In quite similar manner one of the latest critics of Calvin's doctrinal work feels moved to bear his testimony to the practical purpose which ruled over the development of his system. "In the midst, as at the outset of his work," says M. Pannier,

it was the practical preoccupations of living faith which guided him and never a vain desire for pure speculation. If this practical need led—in the successive editions of the *Institutes*—to some new theories, to many fuller expositions of principles, this was not only because he now desired his book to help students of theology to interpret Scripture better—it was because, with his systematic genius, Calvin understood all that which, from the point of view of their application, ideas gain severally in force by forming a complete whole around one master thought.⁴³

Wrought out thus in response to practical needs, the ever-growing body of scientific theology has worked its way among men chiefly by virtue of its ever-increasing power of meeting their spiritual requirements. The story of the victory of Augustinianism in Southern Gaul, as brought out by Prof. Arnold, of Breslau, is only a typical instance of what each age has experienced in its own way, and with its own theological advances. He warns us that the victory of Augustinianism is not to be accounted for by the learning or dialectic gifts of Augustine, nor by the vigorous propaganda kept up in Gaul by the African refugees, nor by the influence of Caesarius, deservedly great as that was, nor by the pressure brought to bear from Rome: but rather by the fullness of its provision for the needs of the soul. "These were better met," he says,

by Christianity than by heathenism; by Catholicism than by Arianism; by the enthusiasm of asceticism than by the lukewarm worldliness of the old opponents of monachism: and they found more strength and consolation in the fundamental Augustinian conception of divine grace, than in the paltry mechanism of the synergistic moralism.⁴⁴

Here is the philosophy, *sub specie temporis*, of the advance of doctrinal

43. Jacques Pannier, *Le témoignage du Saint-Esprit essai sur l'histoire du dogme dans la théologie réformée* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1893), 79.

44. C. Franklin Arnold, *Caesarius von Arelate und die gallische Kirche seiner Zeit* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1894), 345.

development; and it all turns on the progressively growing fitness of the system of doctrine to produce its practical fruits.⁴⁵

It may possibly be thought, however, that these lessons are ill-applied to systematic theology properly so called: that it may be allowed indeed that the separate truths of religion make themselves felt in the life of men, but scarcely that the systematic knowledge of them is of any value for the religious life. Surely, however, we may very easily fall into error here. We do not possess the separate truths of religion in the abstract: we possess them only in their relations, and we do not properly know any one of them—nor can it have its full effect on our life—except as we know it in its relations to other truths, i.e., as systematized. What we do not know, in this sense, systematically, we rob of half its power on our conduct; unless, indeed, we are prepared to argue that a truth has effect on us in proportion as it is unknown, rather than in proportion as it is known. To which may be added that when we do not know a body of doctrine systematically, we are sure to misconceive the nature of more or fewer of its separate elements; and to fancy “that that is true which a more systematic knowledge would show us to be false,” so that “our religious belief and therefore our religious life would become deformed and misshapen.”⁴⁶

Let us once more, however, strengthen our theoretical opinion by testimony: and for this let us appeal to the witness of a recent French writer who supports his own judgment by that of several of the best informed students of current French Protestantism.⁴⁷ Amid much external activity of Christian work, M. Arnaud tells us, no one would dare say that the life lived with Christ in God is flourishing in equal measure: and his conclusion is that, in order to be a strong and living Christian, “it does not suffice to submit our heart and will to the Gospel: we must submit also our mind and our reason.” “The doctrines of Christianity,” he adds,

45. It is only another way of saying this to say with Prof. W. M. Ramsay, when speaking of another of the great controversies: “Difficult, however, as it is to appreciate the real character of the Arian controversy as a question of social life, on the whole we gather, I think, that the progressive tendencies were on the side of Basil, and acquiescence in the existing standard of morality characterized the Arian point of view. The ‘Orthodox’ Church was still the champion of the higher aspirations, and Basil, however harsh he was to all who differed from him, was an ennobling and upward struggling force in the life of his time.” William M. Ramsay, “Basil of Caesarea,” *Expositor*, 5th ser., 3, no. 1 (January 1896): 52–53.

46. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols (New York: Scribner, 1871), 2:314.

47. Eugène Arnaud, *Manuel de dogmatique* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1890), ix.

have just as much right to be believed as its duties have to be practiced, and it is not permissible to accept these and reject those. In neglecting to inquire with care into the Biblical writers, and to assimilate them by reflection, the Christian loses part of his virtue, the preacher part of his force; both build their house on the sand or begin at the top; they deprive themselves of the precious lights which can illuminate and strengthen their faith, and fortify them against the frivolous or learned unbelief as well as against the aberrations of false individualism, that are so diffused in our day.

In support of this judgment he quotes striking passages, among others, from Mr. F. Bonifas and Prof. Ch. Bois. The former says:⁴⁸

What strikes me to day is the incomplete and fragmentary character of our faith: the lack of precision in our Christian conceptions; a certain ignorance of the wonderful things which God has done for us and which he has revealed to us for the salvation and nourishment of our souls. I discover the traces of this ignorance in our preaching as well as in our daily life. And here is one of the causes of the feebleness of spiritual life in the bosom of our flocks and among ourselves. To these fluid Christian convictions, there necessarily corresponds a lowered Christian life.

Mr. Bois similarly says:⁴⁹

There does not at present exist among us a strongly concatenated body of doctrine, possessing the conscience and determining the will. We have convictions, no doubt, and even strong and active convictions, but they are, if I may so speak, isolated and merely juxtaposed in the mind, without any deep bond uniting them into an organism. . . . Upon several fundamental points, even among believers, there is a vagueness, an indetermination, which leave access open to every fluctuation and to the most unexpected mixtures of belief. Contradictory elements often live together and struggle with one another, even in the most positively convinced, without their suspecting the enmity of the guests they have received into their thought. It is astonishing to observe the strange amalgams which spring up and acclimate themselves in the minds of the young theological generations, which have been long deprived of the strong discipline of the past. This incoherence of ideas produces weakness and danger elsewhere also, besides

48. François Bonifas, *De la valeur religieuse des doctrines chrétiennes* (Paris: Ch. Meyrueis, 1869), 14.

49. *Revue Théologique de Montauban*, 13^e Année, 14.

in the sphere of doctrine. It is impossible but that spiritual life and practical activity should sustain also serious damage from this intellectual anarchy.

Cannot we see in the state of French Protestantism as depicted in these extracts, a warning to ourselves, among whom we may observe the beginnings of the same doctrinal anarchy? And shall we not, at least, learn this much: that doctrine is in order to life, and that the study of doctrine must be prosecuted in a spirit which would see its end in the correction and edification of life? Shall we not, as students of doctrine, listen devoutly to the words of one of the richest writers on experimental religion of our generation,⁵⁰ when he tells us,

that Living knowledge of our loving Lord, and of our need of Him, and of our relations to Him for peace, life, testimony, service, consistency, is given by the Holy Comforter alone. But it is given by Him in the great rule of his dealings with men, only through the channels of doctrine, of revealed, recorded and authenticated truth concerning the Lord of life.

And shall we not catch the meaning of the illustrations which he adds:

Does the happy soul, happy because brought to the “confidence of self-despair,” and to a sight of the foundation of all peace, find itself saying, “O Lamb of God, I come,” and know that it falls, never to be cast out, into the embraces of ever-living love? Every element in that profound experience of restful joy has to do with doctrine applied by the Spirit. “O Lamb of God” would be a meaningless incantation, were it not for the precious and most definite doctrine of the sacrifice of propitiation⁵¹ and peace. That I *may* “come just as I am,” is a matter of pure divine information. My emotions, my deepest and most awful convictions, without such information, say the opposite; my instinct is to cry “Depart, for I am a sinful man.” The blessed doctrine, not my reveries,⁵² says, “Nay. He was wounded for thy transgressions; come unto Him.” And when [one] draws

50. Principal H. C. G. Moule, “The Relations Between Doctrine and Life,” in *The Church and Her Doctrine*, ed. W. Saumarez Smith (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1892), 186.

51. ED. NOTE. *Propitiation*: the act of turning away God’s wrath by means of a sacrifice.

52. ED. NOTE. *Reverie*: daydream; musing; fantasy.

towards the journey's end, and exchanges the trials of the pilgrimage for the last trial, "the river that hath no bridge," why does he address himself in peace to die, this man who has been taught the evil of his own heart, and the holiness of the Judge of all? It is because of doctrine. He knows the covenant of peace and the Mediator of it. He knows, and he knows it through revealed doctrine only, that to depart is to be with Christ and is far better. He knows that the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But he knows, with the same certainty, that God giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; and that His sheep shall never perish; and that He will raise up again at the last day him that has come to God through Him. All this is doctrine. It is made to live in the man by the Holy Ghost given to him. But it is in itself creed, not life. It is revealed information.

If such be the value and use of doctrine, the systematic theologian is preeminently a preacher of the Gospel; and the end of his work is obviously not merely the logical arrangement of the truths which come under his hand, but the moving of men, through their power, to love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves; to choose their portion with the Saviour of their souls; to find and hold him precious; and to recognize and yield to the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit whom he has sent.

With such truth as this he will not dare to deal in a cold and merely scientific spirit, but will justly and necessarily permit its preciousness and its practical destination to determine the spirit in which he handles it, and to awaken the reverential love with which alone he should investigate its reciprocal relations. For this he needs to be suffused at all times with a sense of the unspeakable worth of the revelation which lies before him as the source of his material, and with the personal bearings of its separate truths on his own heart and life; he needs to have had and to be having a full, rich and deep religious experience of the great doctrines with which he deals; he needs to be living close to his God, to be resting always on the bosom of his Redeemer, to be filled at all times with the manifest influences of the Holy Spirit.

The student of systematic theology needs a very sensitive religious nature, a most thoroughly consecrated heart, and an outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon him, such as will fill him with that spiritual discernment,

without which all native intellect is in vain. He needs to be not merely a student, not merely a thinker, not merely a systematizer, not merely a teacher—he needs to be like the beloved disciple himself in the highest, truest and holiest sense, a divine.

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Study Questions

1. What were the two sides of Warfield's writings?
2. Explain what Warfield means by his statement that "Systematic Theology is a science."
3. What are the three presuppositions of systematic theology, according to Warfield?
4. What does Warfield say is the subject matter of theology?
5. What is Warfield's definition of *theology*?

6. How does Warfield explain the differences between “the science of theology,” “the science of faith,” and “the science of religion” (or “the science of the Christian religion”)?
7. Critique this proposition: “theology is the science of faith.”
8. Why does Warfield believe that theology should be defined not as “Christo-centric” but as “Theo-centric”?
9. What is the only sufficient source—the sole source—for systematic theology, and why is it the only sufficient source?
10. Warfield discusses eight methods—“divers manners”—by means of which God reveals himself. What are they?
11. How do these eight various methods of revelation differ among themselves? One hint: they differ in terms of “the clearness of their message.”
12. In what three important ways does the revelation in the written Word of God differ from the other seven methods of revelation?
13. Warfield declares: “The natural result of resting on the revelations of nature is despair; while the inevitable end of making our appeal to even the Christian heart is to make for ourselves refuges of lies in which there is neither truth nor safety.” Which of the eight forms of revelation should we rest on to avoid those dead ends? Which mode of revelation should be normative? Hint: the correct answer is the same for both questions.
14. Briefly restate Warfield’s explanation of the place of systematic theology among the disciplines of exegetical theology, historical theology, and practical theology.
15. Explain how Warfield understands the relationship between systematic theology and biblical theology.
16. What seven reasons does Warfield advance to justify his claim that theology is the queen of the sciences?
17. In what senses is systematic theology a progressive science, according to Warfield?
18. In discussing “Systematic Theology Is a Practical Science,” Warfield says: “The contemplation and exhibition of Christianity as truth, is far from the end of the matter. This truth is specially communicated by God for a purpose, for which it is admirably adapted.” Warfield

also refers to this as a “holy purpose.” Identify this “holy purpose” and discuss it.

19. Discuss this summary statement (from this chapter’s Abstract) of the practicality of systematic theology: “Theology is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end, and that end is holiness—conformity to the image of Christ.”
20. Discuss and critique this statement: “The task of the systematic theologian is to see that the relations in which the separate truths actually stand are rightly conceived, in order that they may exert their rightful influence on the development of the religious life.”
21. Evaluate this statement: “The systematic theologian is preeminently a preacher of the Gospel; and the end of his work is obviously not merely the logical arrangement of the truths which come under his hand, but the moving of men, through their power, to love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves; to choose their portion with the Saviour of their souls; to find and hold him precious; and to recognize and yield to the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit whom he has sent.”

For Further Study

Related Warfield Works

As professor of didactic and polemic theology, and in a day when theology itself was increasingly decried, Warfield was zealous to clarify the nature of the theological enterprise and to vindicate its place as the queen of the sciences. Accordingly, in addition to his voluminous writings on many specific areas of doctrine, he published several articles devoted to this broader theme of the theological task itself.

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Charles Hodge was Warfield's teacher, and A. A. Hodge was his predecessor at Princeton Seminary.

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