

**THE RIGHT OF  
SYSTEMATIC  
THEOLOGY**

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The Right of Systematic Theology by Benjamin B. Warfield & J. Orr

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THE RIGHT  
OF  
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
PROFESSOR J. ORR, D.D., EDINBURGH

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## NOTE OF COMMENDATION



PROFESSOR WARFIELD of Princeton is well known on both sides of the Atlantic. He has rendered special service in the interest of Systematic Theology; and his defence of the "Right" of that science in a recent number of *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, which he edits, has appeared to us well worthy of a wider circulation in this country than it can hope to have in a journal published in America.

This explains the issue of the present book, which we commend to the attention of all who have in any degree realized the importance of the subject.

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## INTRODUCTION

BY THE

REV. PROFESSOR JAMES ORR, D.D.  
EDINBURGH

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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY has fallen on evil days. To her may be applied, with scarcely a change of a word, what Kant in the Preface to his famous *Critique* says of metaphysics: "Time was when she was the queen of all the sciences, and if we take the will for the deed, she certainly deserves, so far as regards the high importance of her object-matter, this title of honour. Now it is the fashion of the time to heap contempt and scorn upon her, and the matron mourns, forlorn and forsaken, like Hecuba—

' Modo maxima rerum,  
Tot generis, natisque potens . . .  
Nunc trahor exul, inopa.'<sup>1</sup>

But a subsequent sentence also of this great thinker may be applied to theology: "For it is in

<sup>1</sup> "So lately the greatest woman in the world, powerful in so many sons-in-law and children . . . now I am dragged away an exile, destitute."

reality vain," he says, "to profess indifference in regard to such inquiries, the object of which cannot be indifferent to humanity. Besides, these pretended indifferents, however much they may try to disguise themselves by the assumption of a popular style and by changes on the language of the schools, undoubtedly fall into [theological] declarations and propositions, which they profess to regard with so much contempt."

The grounds on which a denial of the right of Systematic Theology to exist is based are various, but they may at bottom all be reduced to one—the denial of the existence of an adequate foundation on which such a structure can be reared. Whether it be that the human faculties are held to be constitutionally incompetent to such a true knowledge of God and His ways as is presupposed in theology; or that the nature of religion, as lying in sentiment or emotion, is thought to preclude the element of knowledge—otherwise, indeed, than as the poetic vesture in which religious emotions transiently clothe themselves; or that there is lacking in reason or revelation a reliable source from which the desiderated knowledge may be obtained; or that the *data* in Scripture or religious facts on which theology has hitherto been supposed to rest have been rendered insecure or swept away by modern doubt and criticism—the result is the same, that theology has not a trustworthy foundation on which to build, and that, in consequence, it is an illegitimate pretender to the name of science. For it

will be conceded that this last and highest branch of theological discipline proposes nothing less to itself than the systematic exhibition and scientific grounding of what true knowledge we possess of God and His character and His ways of dealing with the world and men; and if no such knowledge really exists,—if what men have is at best vague yearnings, intuitions, aspirations, guesses, imaginings, hypotheses, about God, assuming this name to be itself anything more than a symbol of the dim feeling of the mystery at the root of the universe,—if these emotional states and the conceptions to which they give rise are ever changing with men's changeful fancies and the varying stages of culture,—then it is as vain to attempt to construct a science of theology out of such materials as it would be to weave a solid tissue out of sunbeams, or erect a temple out of the changing shapes and hues of cloudland. A "Science of Religions" might still exist to investigate the psychological laws involved in religious phenomena and their mocking illusions, and "dogmatics" might remain as a study and criticism of the Church's historical creeds; but an independent "Science of Theology," as a body of natural and revealed truth about God, and His purposes and dealings, would no more have any place.

We shall not anticipate Dr. Warfield's able discussion of the objections to Systematic Theology in the succeeding pages by going at any length into the subject here, but would only observe that, divested of irrelevancies, the issue resolves itself ultimately into