

ENDORSEMENTS

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Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.

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Teaching Fellow
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“R.C. Sproul is a consummate teacher, especially skilled at explaining difficult theological concepts in uncomplicated terms. Here, he tackles every major category of systematic theology in a succinct, lucid, even-handed fashion. This is a tremendously valuable resource for everyone from the newest believer to the most seasoned pastor. It is quite true that we are all theologians. Dr. Sproul helps us all be *better* theologians.”

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Pastor-Teacher, Grace Community Church
President, The Master’s University and Seminary
Sun Valley, Calif.

“R.C. Sproul has written a brief, comprehensive summary of systematic theology that I intend to recommend to my classes for years to come. It is biblically faithful, solidly Reformed, grounded in the two-thousand-year-old Christian tradition, and up to date on questions crucial to the minds of people in our secularized culture. He writes with his typical clarity and economy of words. As always, he holds the reader’s attention. For a long time I have recommended to students Berkhof’s *Summary of Christian Doctrine* as a reliable and succinct source of Reformed systematic theology. It is still very useful, but I suspect I shall now be recommending Sproul’s *Everyone’s a Theologian* more than anything else in this category. Trinity, predestination, creation, sin, the extent of the atonement, justification, speaking in tongues, angels and demons, heaven and hell: all of these, and many another topic, are fairly and responsibly set forth in a way that honors the Word of God written, and will edify those who are open to its truth.”

—DR. DOUGLAS F. KELLY
Professor of Theology Emeritus
Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, N.C.

R.C. SPROUL

EVERYONE'S A THEOLOGIAN

AN INTRODUCTION
to SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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To my family,
who has been so loving and supportive
through the years of my ministry

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Chapter 1



WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

Several years ago, a well-known Christian school invited me to address the faculty and administration on this question: “What is a Christian college or university?” Upon my arrival, the dean gave me a tour of the campus. During the tour, I noticed this inscription on a set of office doors: “Department of Religion.” When it came time to address the faculty that evening, I mentioned the inscription I had seen, and I asked whether the department had always been called by that name. An older faculty member replied that years ago the department had been called the “Department of Theology.” No one could tell me why the department name had been changed.

“Religion” or “theology”—what difference does it make? In the academic world, the study of religion has traditionally come under the broader context of either sociology or anthropology, because religion has to do with the worship practices of human beings in particular environments. Theology, by contrast, is the study of God. There is a big difference between studying human apprehensions of religion and studying the nature and character of God Himself. The first is purely natural in its orientation. The second is supernatural, dealing with what lies above and beyond the things of this world.

After explaining this in my lecture to the faculty, I added that a true Christian college or university is committed to the premise that the ultimate truth is the truth of God, and that He is the foundation and

INTRODUCTION

source of all other truth. Everything we learn—economics, philosophy, biology, mathematics—has to be understood in light of the overarching reality of the character of God. That is why, in the Middle Ages, theology was called “the queen of the sciences” and philosophy “her handmaiden.” Today the queen has been deposed from her throne and, in many cases, driven into exile, and a supplanter now reigns. We have replaced theology with religion.

THEOLOGY DEFINED

In this volume, we are concerned with theology, specifically with systematic theology, which is an orderly, coherent study of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith. In this chapter, I will give a brief introduction to the science of systematic theology and some basic definitions.

The word *theology* shares a suffix, *-ology*, with the names of many disciplines and sciences, such as *biology*, *physiology*, and *anthropology*. The suffix comes from the Greek word *logos*, which we find in the opening of John’s gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The Greek word *logos* means “word” or “idea,” or, as one philosopher translated it, “logic” (it is also the term from which we get the English word *logic*). So when we study biology, we are looking at the word or logic of life. Anthropology is the word or logic about humans, *anthrōpos* being the Greek word for *man*. The primary part of the word *theology* comes from the Greek *theos*, which means “god,” so theology is the word or logic of God Himself.

Theology is a very broad term. It refers not only to God but to all that God has revealed to us in sacred Scripture. Included in the discipline of theology is the study of Christ, which we call “Christology.” It also includes the study of the Holy Spirit, which we call “pneumatology,” the study of sin, which is called “hamartiology,” and the study of future things, which we call “eschatology.” These are subdivisions of theology. Theologians also speak of “theology proper,” which has specific reference to the study of God Himself.

Many are comfortable with the word *theology* but cringe when they

hear the qualifying term *systematic*. This is because we live in a time of widespread aversion to certain kinds of systems. We respect inanimate systems—computer systems, fire alarm systems, and electrical circuitry systems—because we understand their importance for society. However, when it comes to systems of thought or to understanding life and the world in a coherent manner, people are uncomfortable. Part of the reason for that has to do with one of the most influential philosophies to emerge in Western history—existentialism.

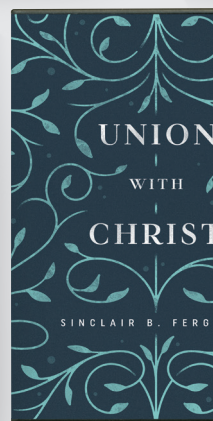
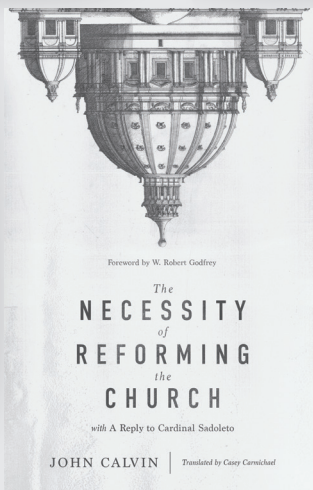
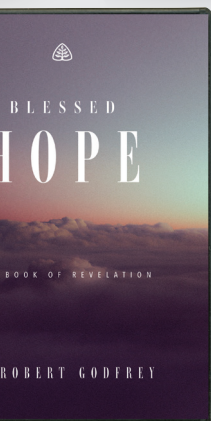
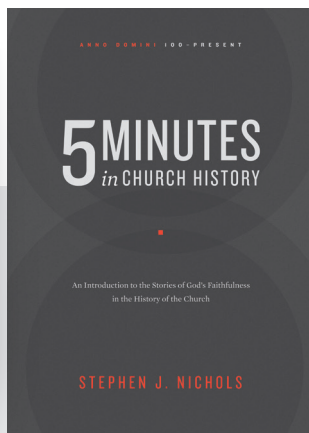
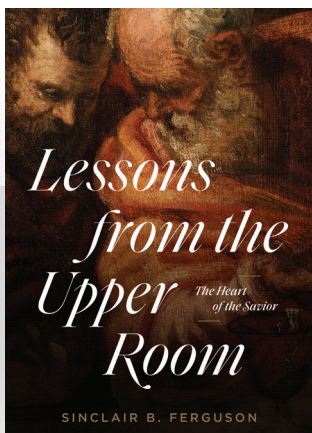
THE INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHY

Existentialism is a philosophy of existence. It presupposes that there is no such thing as essential truth; rather, there is distinctive existence—not essence, but existence. By definition, existentialism abhors a generic system of reality. It is an anti-system that holds to truths but not to *truth* and to purposes but not to *purpose*. Existentialists do not believe that reality can be understood in an orderly fashion because they see the world as ultimately chaotic and without meaning or purpose. One simply confronts life as it happens; there is no overarching viewpoint to make sense of it all, because ultimately life does not make sense.

Existentialism has had a tremendous impact in Western culture along with its offspring, relativism and pluralism. The relativist says, “There is no absolute truth except the absolute truth that there is absolutely no absolute truth. All truth is relative. What is true for one may be false for another.” There is no effort to bring opposing views into harmony (something a system would seek to do) because, according to relativists, there is no possibility of a systematic understanding of truth.

Such philosophy has also had a strong impact on theology, even in the seminaries. Systematic theology is rapidly becoming a forgotten discipline, not only because of the impact of existential thought and of relativism and pluralism, but also because some people misunderstand systematic theology as an attempt to force the Bible into a philosophical system. Some *have* attempted to force the Bible into a philosophical system, as was the case with René Descartes and his rationalism and with

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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