

B. B. WARFIELD

Essays on His Life and Thought

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EDITED BY GARY L. W. JOHNSON

FOREWORD BY DAVID B. CALHOUN

INTRODUCTION BY MARK A. NOLL



P U B L I S H I N G

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FOR

RICHARD A. MULLER
DAVID E. WELLS

and in memory of

S. LEWIS JOHNSON JR.

all scholars and Christian gentlemen
after the Warfieldian model

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Foreword

DAVID B. CALHOUN

PRAYER AND WORK

*Said one, one day: "My cause is good,
The Lord will prosper it."
Said Luther: "Take it to Him, then;
That were provision fit."*

*Trust in the Lord, not in thy cause,
However good it be;
Take it forthwith in faithful hands
And lay it on His knee.*

*The best of causes go amiss;
The Lord will never fail:
Commit thy ways into his care,
And then—shake out thy sail.*

—B. B. Warfield

The year 2001 marked the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. That this milestone passed largely unnoticed merely underscores the fact that the most serious omission in the study of American Christianity and theology

is the neglect of Princeton Theological Seminary's greatest professor. It was in Italy, surprisingly enough, that the Warfield anniversary was commemorated. Meetings in Naples and Padova both dealt with "this man of God." "In the evangelical theology of the twentieth century," the Italians asserted, "Benjamin Warfield has had disciples, but he has never had equals." Francis Landey Patton, in a memorial address for Dr. Warfield given at the First Presbyterian Church in Princeton on May 2, 1921, described his departed colleague as "preeminently a scholar [who] lived among his books." "I may be pardoned perhaps for saying somewhat extravagantly," Patton continued, "that his line has gone out into all the earth and his words to the end of the world."

If scholarly attention has largely passed Warfield by (there are some able dissertations and articles), he has by no means been forgotten by serious Christians worldwide. His writings (including collections of articles, essays, and reviews of English, German, French, and Dutch books) have remained in print.

In a visit to Toronto in 1932, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones discovered in the library of Knox Seminary the recently published ten volumes of the works of B. B. Warfield. Lloyd-Jones's feelings at that moment, he was later to write, were like those of "stout Cortez," as described by Keats, when he first saw the Pacific. For many days Lloyd-Jones reveled in those ten volumes. There he found, according to Iain Murray, "theology anchored in Scripture, but with an exegetical precision more evident than in the older [Reformed] authors, and combined with a devotion which raised the whole above the level of scholarship alone." (Lloyd-Jones, introducing a collection of Warfield's writings published in 1958 as *Biblical Foundations*, wrote, "No theological writings are so intellectually satisfying and so strengthening to faith as those of Warfield.")

Dr. Warfield was above all a theologian, and the key to his theology was his unfaltering belief in the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments. He labored diligently to defend the authority and authenticity of the Bible (what he and others called the "inerrancy" of Scripture) against growing criticism and unbelief. In doing so he did not, as some have claimed, create a new doctrine of biblical inspiration. He inherited the doctrine that he so ably defended—from Charles Hodge and Archibald Alexander, from Francis Turretin and the Reformed Confes-

sions, from Calvin and Augustine. And, most important, he found in the Bible itself the claim that God's Word is truth. In a recent interview, British preacher and Christian statesman John Stott was asked: "What are the top five most influential books in your life?" Stott began with *Revelation and Inspiration* by B. B. Warfield—a collection of essays concerning biblical authority. Stott said, "This book is marked by the careful exegesis for which Warfield was renowned, and lays a solid foundation for an acceptance of biblical authority. The argument is compelling; I do not believe that it has ever been answered."

Warfield (like his mentor Charles Hodge) came to theology from biblical studies. He was a theologian, but he was a theologian who based the content of his teaching on the plain and obvious meaning of the inspired Word of God. It does not take a student of Warfield long to discover that he was a master of Scripture's meaning.

Warfield also excelled in historical theology, amply demonstrated by his major studies of Tertullian, Augustine, Calvin, and the Westminster Assembly. (Warfield's student and colleague J. Gresham Machen spoke of Warfield as "one of the greatest masters in the field of the history of doctrine.") Recently, in my Ancient and Medieval Church History class at Covenant Theological Seminary, I ended my comments on the creation of the New Testament canon in the early church by quoting Warfield on the subject, and then adding, "You will find that when I don't know what else to say about something, I will quote Warfield!"

Warfield needs to be studied seriously because of the value and lasting solidity of his teaching. He also needs to be studied to correct the false impressions that have been created about him: that he was a rigid scholastic theologian who hardened the doctrine of inspiration into a new concept of inerrancy; that he was a rationalist who minimized the noetic effects of sin and the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit; that he was an evidentialist who could not appreciate the importance of Christian presuppositions; and that he was an intellectualist without spiritual fervor. (One of Warfield's students characterized him as "the most Christ-like man that I have ever known.")

If Warfield the scholar has been ignored, so has Warfield the man. His was not an exciting life. He seldom traveled beyond Princeton, staying at home to care lovingly for his invalid wife until her death.

FOREWORD

He rarely preached outside Princeton. He was not active in the courts of the church, except to attend sessions of the local presbytery. But the life of this man, who, according to Francis Patton, “bore the marks of a gentleman to his finger-tips,” is not without interest. He was called to be a teacher—and he was punctilious in the discharge of his duties as a teacher. Patton reported that “the manner of his death was in keeping with the habits of his life. He met his class on the day he died. The lecture was over, he returned to his lonely dwelling: there came a few sharp shocks of pain—and he had left the work that had been his joy, to be with the Saviour whom he loved.”

When I was a student at Princeton Seminary twenty-five years ago, Warfield’s picture hung in the student center with other Princetonians, but he was neither read nor greatly respected. One of my professors belittled him as “a sophisticated fundamentalist.” It is time that modern Christians come to know the real Warfield. Andrea Ferrari, in his preface to the book of addresses on Warfield given by Italian Protestants in 2001, stated that “more than a scholar with an amazing intellectual capacity, Warfield was a believer deeply attached to Christ and to the faith passed on to the saints once and for all . . . a man whose heart was on fire for Christ’s truth and for the triumph of God’s kingdom in the world.” This Warfield we need to know.

Acknowledgments

A number of people were instrumental in getting “the Warfield project” off the drawing board and into print. Allan Fisher, who now serves in a similar capacity at Crossway Books, sought approval for the project and oversaw its earliest stages. Marvin Padgett, who came from Crossway to P&R, oversaw the remaining stages. Associate editor Barbara Lerch proved to be both cheerful and patient. Louise Brown, Jean Johns, Autumn Frey, and Nancy Lindsay proved invaluable in preparing the manuscript for submission.

Many thanks to all of you.

Gary L. W. Johnson

Introduction

MARK A. NOLL

As one of the last great expositors of orthodox and classical Calvinism in the modern world, B. B. Warfield faced a double burden. It was obvious in nearly all his work that he was trying to present the doctrines of sovereign grace and gracious sovereignty with faithfulness to the traditions of high Calvinist theology that he had learned at Princeton Theological Seminary from Charles Hodge and, even before that, in his own household through the influence of his grandfather, Robert Breckinridge. But it was also obvious that Warfield was trying to articulate those doctrines as exactly what his contemporaries needed for both a proper foundation of Christian piety and a proper framework of Christian thinking. Despite his formidable gifts as biblical exegete, biblical theologian, and biblical apologist, it is not clear that Warfield's dual effort has been appreciated as it should have been. To modern thinkers he has seemed old-fashioned, to active revivalists overly Calvinistic, to some Calvinists too much a rationalist. Yet Warfield has never lacked readers who appreciated the clarity with which he maintained traditional Calvinist doctrines or ventured forth from his Calvinist foundations to address new problems, and the numbers of those readers seem to be growing. It is, thus, all to the good that this book is being published in order to stimulate closer attention to who Warfield was and what his theological contributions actually mean.

Among the following chapters, several attempt to resuscitate one aspect or another of Warfield's theology. Readers who follow in Warfield's train will read these chapters carefully, critically, and charitably, but they will also be making up their own minds about the success of those efforts. At the very least, all who follow the authors as they

track Warfield through thickets of theological complexity will be amply rewarded for their efforts.

Other chapters in what follows are more strictly biographical, and from these all readers will benefit. Warfield's reputation as a thinker is well deserved, but that reputation has also obscured how interesting the life of this thinker actually was. As that life is brought alive by the biographical studies in this book, new dimensions will open into the significance of this theological champion as well as the character of what he championed.

But first, as an introduction to both theological and biographical considerations, it may help to present a brief overview of the man and his main concerns. Such a sketch, if only an aperitif, should help prepare the way for the solid and nutritious fare found in the chapters themselves.



Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield was the most widely known advocate of confessional Calvinism in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.¹ Warfield continues to exert an influence today mostly through his defense of biblical inerrancy, although, as chapters below by Paul Helseth indicate, his convictions about the role of reason in apologetics also stimulate ongoing discussion. Now nearing a century after his death, many of his works remain in print. And his opinions continue to count, not only among conservative Presbyterians and modern advocates of biblical inerrancy, where such attention could be expected, but also with Southern Baptists, Wesleyans, some neoorthodox theologians, and still others whose interest in Warfield's views might be regarded as a surprise.

Warfield was born on November 5, 1851, at Grasmere, his family's estate in the vicinity of Lexington, Kentucky. His father, William

1. This introduction adapts and abridges material on Warfield by Mark A. Noll in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 26–39; and by Noll and David N. Livingstone in “Introduction: B. B. Warfield as Conservative Evolutionist,” in B. B. Warfield, *Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 13–44.

Warfield, a prosperous gentleman farmer, served as a Union officer in the Civil War. It was pertinent for Warfield's later writings on scientific questions that his father bred livestock and was the author of *The Theory and Practice of Cattle Breeding* (1888). It is also significant for his later epistemological and ethical views that Warfield's entrance into the sophomore class at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) in 1868 coincided with the installation of James McCosh as president. McCosh had been called to Princeton from his post as professor of moral philosophy at the Queen's University of Belfast in Ireland, where he was one of the last great exponents of the Scottish philosophy of common sense. Even more significantly, McCosh also advocated full and frank dialogue between traditional Christian faith and the best modern science, philosophy, and ethics.

After graduating from college in 1871, traveling in Europe for a year, and serving briefly as an editor for the *Farmer's Home Journal* in Lexington, Warfield entered Princeton Seminary to prepare for the ministry. During his time at the seminary, he was particularly impressed with the piety and theological comprehension of the elderly Charles Hodge. After graduating from the seminary, Warfield married, once again visited Europe, served for a short time as an assistant minister in Baltimore, and then in 1876 accepted a call to teach New Testament at Western Theological Seminary near Pittsburgh. In 1887, upon the death of Archibald Alexander Hodge, son of his own teacher, Warfield returned to Princeton Seminary as professor of didactic and polemic theology. During thirty-four years in that position, he instructed more than 2,700 students. Warfield died at Princeton late in the evening of February 16, 1921, after meeting his classes earlier that day.

Warfield's incredibly prolific output of books, learned essays, and reviews (which were frequently sophisticated monographs in their own right) was a product of his devotion to the confessional standards of Presbyterianism and, behind those standards, to his conception of classic Christian faith. Even in the long line of outstanding conservative theologians from "old Princeton" that stretched from Archibald Alexander (the founding professor in 1812) to J. Gresham Machen (who left Princeton Seminary in 1929), Warfield stands out. In that distinguished company, he was the most widely read, had the greatest skill in European languages, displayed the most patience in

unpacking arguments, and wrote more clearly on a wider range of subjects. Some of Warfield's convictions—especially his conception of the inerrancy of Scripture in its original autographs—have generated a great quantity of polemical attack and defense. Yet despite helpful work by John E. Meeter, Roger Nicole, and now the authors who contribute to this volume, there exists no comprehensive account of Warfield's theology.² Bradley Gundlach's contributions to this book are the first real steps to an adequate biography.

One reason for the absence of such work may be directly related to Warfield's conception of his task. He was, in the strictest sense of the terms, a polemical and a conserving theologian. Despite comprehensive learning, he never attempted a full theological statement, primarily because he found Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* generally satisfactory for himself and his students. Because he was content with the positions of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, he devoted an enormous amount of patient writing to explicating traditional Calvinism, fending off misreadings, and defending it against the modernizing, enthusiastic, or naturalistic tendencies of his day.

Warfield was also content with what had been handed down to him by his Princeton predecessors on questions concerning the larger framework of thought. He did not delight in speculation (and so would mildly criticize Jonathan Edwards for his "individualisms," while praising Edwards for being "a convinced defender of Calvinism").³ Rather, he gave himself wholeheartedly to Princeton's deeply ingrained commitment to theology as a scientific task (with "science" defined in conventional terms). In so doing, he thus shared fully in Princeton's equally long-standing confidence in a philosophy of common-sense realism. That philosophy owed something to its formal statement by the cautious savants of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart. But it owed even more to a concrete, anti-speculative turn of mind that the "old Princeton" theologians liked to describe as a simple inductivist Anglo-Saxon inheritance. From the

2. See especially John E. Meeter and Roger Nicole, *A Bibliography of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, 1851–1921* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974).

3. B. B. Warfield, "Edwards and the New England Theology" (1912), in *Studies in Theology*, vol. 9 of *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (1932; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 530–31.

perspective of the late twentieth century, the philosophy of common sense at Princeton looks mostly like a gentlemanly, Victorian, and dignified Presbyterian adaptation of the practical bent so common at all levels in nineteenth-century American culture. Again, chapters below represent some of the best work on how Warfield approached such basic philosophical questions.

Warfield's stance as an ardent defender of confessional Calvinism, combined with his positions on the issues that engaged Presbyterians around the turn of the century, have led to a curiosity. Warfield seems to have regarded his work as a coherent effort to maintain the theology of Calvin and the Westminster divines. Later attention, however, has focused more on his exposition of individual topics, like the inerrancy of Scripture, counterfeit miracles, or the place of apologetics in theology more generally. The result has been that, although several of Warfield's positions continue to exert considerable influence among theological conservatives, the defense of Calvinism that loomed large in his own work receives far less attention today.

By the early 1880s, American Presbyterians were being drawn more directly into European debates over the Bible.⁴ Presbyterian leaders realized that new higher critical proposals touched the heart of their faith as it had developed in Britain and America. They also knew that the controversies raging over modern criticism in Scotland during the 1870s, especially concerning the work of William Robertson Smith of the Free Church, would soon arrive in America. Smith's acceptance of Old Testament higher criticism was especially significant for Princeton Seminary because Princetonians had championed the Free Church since its founding in 1843. So it came about that A. A. Hodge of Princeton and Charles Briggs of Union Seminary in New York agreed that the journal they jointly edited, the *Presbyterian Review*, should consider these matters. Briggs, who was predisposed toward the newer opinions, enlisted several colleagues to write in favor of adjusting traditional views. Hodge too sought assistance in supporting his conviction that the new views were mostly a threat to the church. For this purpose

4. See Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 27–31.

his first recruit was B. B. Warfield, then still a young New Testament professor at Western Theological Seminary.

The essay, titled simply “Inspiration,” which Hodge and Warfield published in the April 1881 issue of the *Presbyterian Review*, both recapitulated many of the themes that had been prominent in previous Princeton writing and anticipated most of the points about the Bible that Warfield would make over the next forty years in a wealth of publications. What was new about the doctrine of Scripture in this essay was its precision of statement and its detailed response to modern theories. The essay’s burden was to show that proper scholarship on Scripture and its background supported, rather than undercut, a high view of verbal inspiration. The doctrine this essay defended was the belief that “God’s continued work of superintendence, by which, his providential, gracious and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, he presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters he designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the word of God to us.”⁵

Throughout the essay, as indeed throughout his entire career, Warfield took great care to qualify the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration. Hodge and Warfield stated, almost at the outset, that this doctrine was not “a principle fundamental to the truth of the Christian religion” as such, nor was it the case “that the truth of Christianity depends upon any doctrine of inspiration whatever.”⁶ They also maintained at length that such a view of inspiration did not rule out a full, active participation of Scripture’s human authors in its production. They held that these biblical authors “were in large measure dependent for their knowledge upon sources and methods in themselves fallible, and that their personal knowledge and judgments were in many matters hesitating and defective, or even wrong.”⁷ They insisted that the Bible must be interpreted after the intent of its authors, an intent that often required careful study to discover. They held that supposed errors in Scripture

5. Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration*, ed. Roger R. Nicole (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 17–18.

6. *Ibid.*, 8.

7. *Ibid.*, 28.

must be located in “some part of the original autograph,”⁸ rather than haphazardly drawn from what might be corrupted transmissions of the text. And they acknowledged that this doctrine, which they held to be the plain teaching of many scriptural passages themselves, needed to be confirmed by full attention to all possible objections arising from the study of the Bible itself (e.g., questions concerning mistaken history or geography, inaccurate quotations from the Old Testament in the New, internal lack of harmony, and the like). Yet once having made these qualifications, Hodge and Warfield insisted that the Bible was fully inspired, absolutely without error, and legitimately to be regarded not just as a bearer of the Word of God but as that Word itself.

As critics responded to this position paper, and as the Princeton theologians themselves fleshed out their conception of biblical inerrancy in scores of works, Warfield made crucial statements about Scripture that would also shape his response to questions of science. Of particular importance was his response to the charge that his view of inspiration amounted to a mechanical view of divine dictation. In response, Warfield repeatedly argued that he was advocating not dictation, but what he called “concursum.” For example, in an 1894 article on “The Divine and Human in the Bible,” Warfield was at pains to defend the fully human character of the Bible *in addition to* its fully divine character. As he phrased it in this discussion of the Bible, “concursum” meant that “the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word and every particular.”⁹ The importance of this way of thinking for Warfield’s scientific views was great. In simple terms, the products of natural history could be the consequence—at the same time—of both natural forces and divine action.

The main points of Warfield’s defense of an inerrant Bible, if not necessarily the details of his position, eventually became major

8. *Ibid.*, 36.

9. B. B. Warfield, “The Divine and Human in the Bible” (1894), in Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 2 vols., ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970, 1973), 2:547.

guideposts for the American fundamentalist movement.¹⁰ The rise of fundamentalism, however, placed Warfield and other confessional conservatives in an ambiguous situation. While they applauded the fundamentalists' adherence to biblical infallibility and their defense of a supernatural faith, they found fundamentalism theologically eccentric and methodologically suspect. Many later fundamentalists would employ Warfield's formulation of biblical inerrancy as a definition of their own beliefs about Scripture, but Warfield himself maintained several important positions that set him apart from fundamentalism. In the first instance, Warfield held that fundamentalist proof-texting represented a retrograde step in studying the Bible.¹¹ In addition, Warfield was unimpressed by the dispensationalism that became so important in American fundamentalism. Modern theologies associated with John Nelson Darby, C. I. Scofield, or other promoters of dispensationalism were suspect to Warfield for faulty exegesis, questionable theological construction, and errors on the work of the Holy Spirit.¹² Finally, like his college teacher James McCosh and his senior colleague, A. A. Hodge, Warfield found little difficulty in thinking that, if scientific facts called for such a move, it would be a straightforward theological task to align historic confessional Calvinism with non-naturalistic forms of evolution.¹³ This, of course, was a move that fundamentalists were unwilling to make.

In his views on dispensationalism, evolution, and the use of the Bible, therefore, Warfield was not a fundamentalist as the label came to be used. A carefully qualified view of biblical inerrancy, like the one Warfield developed, did not necessarily entail the particulars of fundamentalist theology, but could in fact ground judgments on nature, the

10. See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1973).

11. See, for example, his review of *What the Bible Teaches* (1899), by R. A. Torrey, *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 39 (July 1899): 562–64.

12. See, for example, B. B. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse" (1904), in *Biblical Doctrines*, vol. 2 of *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (1929; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 643–64.

13. See, for example, A. A. Hodge, review of *Natural Science and Religion*, by Asa Gray, *Presbyterian Review* 1 (July 1880): 586–89; or his "Introduction" to Joseph S. van Dyke, in *Theism and Evolution* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1886), xv–xxiii.

character of biblical theology, and approaches to biblical scholarship very different in tone, and significantly different in substance, from what was found among fundamentalists.

Important as Warfield felt it was to contend for the truthfulness of the Bible, he exerted even more energy throughout his long career expounding the truths of the Bible. Warfield, in other words, was concerned to secure the Bible as the ground of theology and to protect reason as a prime theological tool, but he was characteristically more interested in the theology he felt the Bible taught and reason supported.

Warfield was not embarrassed to say what that theology was and where he felt it had been best represented in the history of the church. Time and again throughout his historical, exegetical, and polemical works (and it was never easy to disengage these categories from each other), Warfield defined true Christianity as the pure religion of the Reformation; or, in phrases that to him meant the same thing, as the Augustinian grasp of human sin and divine grace recovered by Luther and especially Calvin; or, even more fully, as the Pauline summation of the biblical gospel passed on especially to Augustine and then renewed by the magisterial Reformers. “Calvinism,” he wrote in 1904, “is just religion in its purity. We have only, therefore, to conceive of religion in its purity, and that is Calvinism.”¹⁴

Five years later Warfield spelled out explicitly what he meant by Calvinism—“a profound apprehension of God in His majesty, with the inevitably accompanying poignant realization of the exact nature of the relation sustained to Him by the creatures as such, and particularly by the sinful creature.” In the same place, Warfield suggested that he was not using “Calvinism” as a narrow label for those holding a certain theological position. Rather, “Calvinism” meant a way of life before God that, in the course of history, had been most satisfactorily described by the Protestant Reformers, who recovered an Augustinian understanding of the biblical message. If Warfield’s theological labeling was narrow, his conception of the thing for which the label spoke was broadly catholic.

14. B. B. Warfield, “What Is Calvinism?” (1904), in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:389.

He who believes in God without reserve, and is determined that God shall be God to him in all his thinking, feeling, willing—in the entire compass of his life-activities, intellectual, moral, spiritual, throughout all his individual, social, religious relations—is, by the force of that strictest of all logic which presides over the outworking of principles into thought and life, by the very necessity of the case, a Calvinist.¹⁵

The comprehensiveness of this kind of Calvinism—its picture of a God who pervaded all aspects of existence—was critical for Warfield’s stance in general.

Although Warfield is today better known for his views on the Bible, a solid case can be constructed on the basis of his own works that his commitment to classic Protestantism was deeper and more comprehensive than even his commitment to biblical inerrancy as such. By this classic Protestantism, Warfield meant commitment to an Augustinian view of God, the sinful human condition, and salvation in Christ, but also a broadly open acceptance of the world as the arena of God’s creative activity. For Warfield, the heart of both theology and active religion was the glory of God, who rescued sinful humans from self-imposed destruction and who enabled them to share his work of the kingdom in every sphere of life, including the natural world.

Even Warfield’s defense of biblical inerrancy, which often seems to be undertaken on behalf of a bare notion of biblical veracity, was also a product of his overarching Calvinism. The point of defending traditional views of the Bible was not so much the Bible itself as what the Bible taught. When Warfield in 1910 reviewed the autobiography of William Newton Clarke, a Northern Baptist who over the course of a long career moved from believing in the Bible as inerrant revelation from God to considering it a refined record of religious encounter with God, Warfield rehearsed the arguments he had made many times before concerning Jesus’ own testimony to the infallibility of Scripture. But in the end the critical matter was not just Scripture: “He who no longer holds to the Bible of Jesus—the word of which cannot be broken—will be found on examination no longer to hold

15. B. B. Warfield, “Calvinism” (1908), in *Calvin and Calvinism*, vol. 5 of *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 354–56.

to the Jesus of the Bible.” This Jesus, who communicates forgiveness to needy sinners, is the one “to whom it [Scripture] bears consentient witness.”¹⁶ Historian L. Russ Bush has made the important observation that Warfield’s understanding of the Bible follows his more general conception of theology as a whole.¹⁷

It is that theology, and the man who held it, that are opened up in an unusually helpful way by the chapters that follow.

16. B. B. Warfield, review of *Sixty Years with the Bible*, by William Newton Clarke, *Princeton Theological Review* 8 (Jan. 1910): 167.

17. L. Russ Bush, “The Roots of Conservative Perspectives on Inerrancy (Warfield),” in *Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy, 1987* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 280–81.



“B” Is for Breckinridge: Benjamin B. Warfield, His Maternal Kin, and Princeton Seminary

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When the news spread of B. B. Warfield’s call to the most venerable professorship in the Presbyterian church in early 1887, letters of congratulation arrived from all over the country, as well as from Great Britain. Princeton and the Hodge family were delighted. “My sister says who should succeed A. A. but B. B.!” quipped Caspar Wistar Hodge, Warfield’s mentor in New Testament. From San Francisco, Warfield’s uncle Josie, a beefy officer in the U.S. Army, exulted, “I could chirp like the bird upon the bough except that I am too old & large and the bough would be sure to break.” Some British correspondents seemed less enthralled with the name of Princeton and the task of dogmatic theology. W. R. Nicoll, editor of the London *Expositor*, tempered his well-wishes with an expression of regret that the church would lose an important New Testament exegete when Warfield changed departments, and William Sanday of Oxford wrote tactfully of the appointment, “I presume it is in accordance with your tastes & wishes.” David Brown, aged principal of the Free Church College in Aberdeen, with whom Warfield enjoyed a long and rich collegial correspondence on topics of New Testament interpretation,

said, “Well, you’ll do real good, I believe, by bringing your woof across their warp (if that is a right figure of your relation to them) at Princeton,” where till now “the Dogmatics of two Hodges has probably over-Hodged it.”¹

Some of the British reserve over Warfield’s call to Princeton derived from a methodological preference for exegesis and criticism over systematics, and some from doctrinal differences with the Princeton theology. But as Brown’s remarks suggest, it arose also from a sense that Warfield was not just another specimen from the Princetonian hot-house—that his advent in Princeton in the chair of the Hodges would bring something qualitatively new. Some of Warfield’s own relatives concurred. Uncle George Morrison declared, “Nothing can be grander for Princeton than that the Breckinridge Warfield Blood shall be infused into Princeton.”²

Warfield was not in fact the first man from the Breckinridge line to teach at Princeton, nor were the Breckinridges unknown there—far from it. This family had a long and tangled history with Princeton already; their relationship was intimate yet often oppositional. For that very reason Uncle George was right: in view of the past record of unstable relations, the call of a Breckinridge to the hallowed chair at Princeton was worth remarking.

Warfield’s great-uncle John Breckinridge served as professor of pastoral theology at Princeton Seminary in the 1830s, and was a close friend of Professors Charles Hodge (at the seminary) and James Waddell Alexander (then at the college). Hodge and Breckinridge had been classmates at Nassau Hall. Both men experienced conversion in the college revival of 1815. After John’s untimely death the Princetonians revered him as “the personification of all that is noble and gentle in his humanity, and all that is fearless and self-sacrificing in the work of his Master”—so much so that the index volume of the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* devoted five pages to a fulsome biographical

1. Caspar Wistar Hodge to B. B. Warfield (hereafter BBW for correspondence), February 6, 1887 (Warfield Papers, Princeton Theological Seminary [hereafter PTS], box 17); Joseph Cabell Breckinridge to BBW, undated (early 1887) (Warfield Papers, PTS, box 6); W. R. Nicoll to BBW, February 5, 1887 (Warfield Papers, PTS, box 17); William Sanday to BBW, March 20, 1887 (Warfield Papers, PTS, box 17); David Brown to BBW, February 15, 1887 (Warfield Papers, PTS, box 17).

2. George Morrison to BBW, January 29, 1887 (Warfield Papers, PTS, box 6).

sketch of this man who contributed only two articles to the journal. Perhaps in explanation of this disproportionate honor, the author acknowledged that “a romantic interest is now associated with his name.”³

John was just one of four Breckinridge brothers whose lives were tied to Princeton. He, older brother Cabell, and younger brother Robert all attended college there.⁴ John and Robert went on to study at the seminary as well. In those early days the college faculty numbered a mere handful, and the seminary faculty only three.⁵ In that cozy environment three of the four brothers married wives from the leading families of both Princeton institutions. Cabell and the fourth brother, William, married into the already interconnected families of Princeton College presidents John Witherspoon and Samuel Stanhope Smith. John married Margaret Miller, the eldest daughter of seminary professor Samuel Miller. Thus the mingling of Princeton and Breckinridge blood had occurred in actual fact, well in advance of Uncle George’s metaphor.⁶

The joining of families thus far had brought an infusion of Princeton blood into the Breckinridge line. Uncle George now triumphantly looked forward to an infusion in the other direction, and this time in metaphorical—that is, theological and churchly—form. Hitherto the theological meeting of the two lineages had taken place in the eccle-

3. “Breckinridge, John,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, index volume, 111. On John’s relationship with Charles Hodge, see Hodge’s letters to him, 1819–41 (Hodge Family Papers, Princeton University, box 14).

4. The father, John Breckinridge Sr.—attorney general for Thomas Jefferson—sent his sons to Princeton on the recommendation of James Madison. Ethelbert Dudley Warfield, “The Breckinridges of Kentucky: A Chronicle of Loyalty,” *Independent*, May 22, 1890 (clipping among the Warfield Papers at the University of Kentucky).

5. Cabell graduated from Princeton College in 1810. John was one of twenty-five students in the Princeton Seminary class of 1822. Among them were Charles Clinton Beatty, who, as a director of Western Seminary, would offer Warfield his first academic job; and John Maclean, president of Princeton College at the time of Warfield’s admittance. Robert technically belonged to the class of 1834, but pursued his theological studies under an independent-study arrangement with Samuel Miller. *Biographical Catalogue of the Princeton Theological Seminary, 1815–1932*, comp. Edward Howell Roberts (Princeton, 1933).

6. On Joseph Cabell Breckinridge, see James C. Klotter, *The Breckinridges of Kentucky, 1760–1981* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 95–96. Cabell was the father of U.S. vice president, presidential candidate, and Confederate General John C. Breckinridge. Cabell’s wife was Mary Clay Smith, daughter of Samuel Stanhope Smith and granddaughter of John Witherspoon. William’s wife was her niece, Frances Caroline Prevost, Smith’s granddaughter and Witherspoon’s great-granddaughter.