

# BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD: A RENAISSANCE THEOLOGIAN

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I should seek to clarify the subtitle of this essay. I am not suggesting that B. B. Warfield lived during the renaissance era (that intellectually and culturally fertile period that came between the Middle Ages and the modern age). That would be a patently foolish, not to say quixotic, notion. My intent in referring to Warfield as a renaissance theologian is to point to the wealth of his breadth and depth of learning and piety. We typically call someone who is adept in many areas of learning a renaissance man.<sup>1</sup> Other such theologians would include Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Warfield's faculty colleague at Princeton Theological Seminary, Geerhardus Vos.<sup>2</sup> No doubt there are many others of equally high caliber. My concern here is with defending my observation that Warfield was a renaissance theologian. I will give first attention to a brief biographical sketch of Warfield's life. I will then offer a panoramic view of his theological oeuvre. Finally, I will consider several areas in which Warfield constructively contributed to the scholarly and ecclesiastical worlds of his day. In the end I hope to have convinced you that Warfield was indeed a renaissance theologian.

## Warfield's Life

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851–1921) was the scion of a significant American political and ecclesiastical family from the bluegrass region of Kentucky.<sup>3</sup> Early he was

1. See the helpful biographical material in Fred Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 1–32.  
2. Danny E. Olinger, *Geerhardus Vos: Reformed Biblical Theologian, Confessional Presbyterian* (Philadelphia, PA: Reformed Forum, 2018).  
3. He was related to southern Presbyterian theologian Robert Breckenridge and former vice president of the US and later confederate general and secretary of war John C. Breckenridge as well as to Wallis Warfield Simpson, the lover of and later wife of the abdicated British monarch, Edward VII.

introduced to the family agricultural work and animal husbandry. Warfield even edited the *Farmer's Home Journal* prior to entering seminary. Warfield came of age during the era of confidence in the Baconian experimental method in science and he came under the influence of Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution. From the distance of 150 years, this commitment to the scientific methodology of Francis Bacon, the musings of Darwin, and the belief that the truths of theology and natural science were automatically congruent, seem a tad bit naïve. One wonders what others will think of us at the same chronological distance.<sup>4</sup>

In 1868 Warfield entered Princeton College (later to become a university), under the watch of Woodrow Wilson, that is before he went on to serve as governor of New Jersey and then US president. At the same time Scottish philosophical theologian James McCosh arrived at Princeton to serve as president of the college.<sup>5</sup> McCosh would become known as an evangelist for Scottish Common-Sense

4. See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

5. For background on Princeton College, see Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). For histories of the seminary, see Lefferts A. Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Piety: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary*. Contributions in American Studies series. (Westport, CT: Praeger 1983), Gary Steward, *Princeton Seminary (1812–1929): Its Leaders' Lives and Works* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), James M. Moorehead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2012), and the magisterial two-volume set by David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Faith and Learning 1812–1868* and *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony 1869–1929* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).

Realism (a philosophical point of view about metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics). Among other tenets this philosophy sought a reconciliation of Christianity and evolution.<sup>6</sup> No doubt McCosh had an influence on Warfield as we might expect. How deeply this teaching permeated Warfield's thinking depends on what period in Warfield's life we are looking at. While quite interesting in its own right, this question is beyond the purview of this essay.<sup>7</sup>

Following his undergraduate studies, Warfield studied abroad at Edinburgh and Heidelberg before he wrote his family informing them of his intention to eventually enter the Presbyterian ordained ministry. Therefore, he entered upon study at the Theological Seminary (which was distinct from the college with its own faculty and administration).<sup>8</sup>

6. See J. David Hoeveler, *James McCosh and the Scottish Intellectual Tradition: From Glasgow to Princeton*. Princeton Legacy Library series. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

7. For consideration of the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism and varieties of evolutionary theory on the faculty of Old Princeton, see Mark A. Noll, ed. *The Princeton Theology 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone, eds., *B. B. Warfield: Evolution, Scripture, and Science: Selected Writings* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), Bradley Gundlach, *Process and Providence: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1848–1929* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), Paul Kjoss Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), and the appropriate sections of Zaspel, *Theology of B. B. Warfield*.

8. Although the two institutions—for a time, at least—cross-fertilized each other where the great Charles Hodge and his sons A. A. and Casper Wister as well as the sons of Archibald Alexander (the very first professor of Old Princeton) and other great-hearts taught and modeled the Christian faith and life and sought to inculcate solid scholar-

After his seminary studies, Warfield pursued ordination in the Presbyterian Church USA continuing his studies abroad. It was during this time period that he married Annie Kinkade.<sup>1</sup> Warfield also served as stated supply for a few churches and as an assistant pastor prior to moving to the Pittsburgh area to take up his duties as professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, PA. While Warfield initially showed interest and promise in Old Testament studies, he eventually settled on the study of the NT. As a confessional school, Warfield had to subscribe to the Westminster Standards to teach at Western. He noted that he subscribed to the Westminster Standards not just

It was while at Western that Warfield co-authored with A. A. Hodge his influential two-part article on inspiration. This still remains must-reading today. Warfield taught NT at Western for five years before being invited to teach dogmatic and polemical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, the position once held by Warfield's theological hero, Charles Hodge.

In 1887 Warfield entered upon his duties as professor of dogmatic and polemical theology, a position he would maintain for the next 34 years. During his tenure at Princeton, it is sometimes thought that he never traveled far from his home on the campus of the seminary because he cared for his invalid wife Annie.

terian confessional integrity and consistency.<sup>4</sup> Warfield also contended against the theological revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith that eventually yielded chapters thirty-four and thirty-five on the Holy Spirit and the love of God and world missions respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The year 1921 was monumental for Reformed and Presbyterian Christians around the world. Three theological giants were called home to be with the Lord around that time. Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper (d. 1920) and Herman Bavinck were taken from the church as was Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield. Warfield had suffered heart problems (he collapsed in the front yard of



Princeton Theological Seminary. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

because he had to but that he delighted to do so since he embraced them wholeheartedly.<sup>2</sup>

ship and deep piety and the ministerial calling into their students. The dual concerns for learning and piety were written into the founding documents of the seminary. See Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Faith and Learning 1812–1868*, 415–430, and W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1981).

1. Zaspel, *Theology of B. B. Warfield*, 27.

2. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, “The Significance of the Westminster Standards as a Creed,” 1:93–102.

There is evidence that Annie was not an invalid for the whole time that Warfield taught at Princeton, but became ill at some point after Warfield's tenure began.<sup>3</sup> During Warfield's time at Princeton, the school was known as a bastion of conservative, Bible-based confessional Calvinism. But the denomination was facing doctrinal challenges within her walls and without as well. Warfield had a public dispute with Charles Briggs, Old Testament professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Briggs challenged the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as well Westmin-

3. Zaspel, *Theology of B. B. Warfield*, 27–28.

the Vos home) but had rallied enough to return to teaching in the classroom. Alas, after his first day back at teaching he suffered a fatal heart attack on the evening of February

4. See Gary L. W. Johnson, ed., *B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), and Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lion of Princeton: B. B. Warfield as Apologist and Theologian*. Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology series. (Oak Harbor, Washington: Lexham Press, 2015).

5. These additional chapters were excised from the Confession by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and other conservative Bible-believing Presbyterian denominations.



16, 1921. Warfield, the lion of Princeton, embodied Calvinism at its finest and many saw his death as the end of an era at old Princeton. J. Gresham Machen, Warfield's younger colleague on the faculty at the seminary, wrote his mother, after having attended Warfield's funeral, that when the body of Warfield had been carried from chapel he carried the spirit of old Princeton with him. Sadly, Machen was prescient in his observation. Machen himself would be at the heart of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy a few years later and would eventually leave Princeton to establish Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929 and would be deposed from his ministry in the PCUSA and would lead a remnant to establish the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>1</sup> Warfield has maintained an influence on conservative Bible-believing Presbyterians as well as conservative Evangelicals in general since his own day. Oddly enough, for a renaissance theologian of such renown, Warfield has not yet been the subject of a full-fledged biography, although I have it on good authority that one is in the works.<sup>2</sup>

### Warfield's Constructive Theological Contributions

The proof is in the pudding, and this is no less true with theological genius than in other areas of learning or practical arts such as cooking. In this third and final section, I will consider some of Warfield's major constructive contributions to the theological science and practical ecclesiology of his day. I am only able to skate on the surface of the pond, as it were, but I hope to whet the appetites of newcomers to Warfield and remind others of why Warfield ought to be recognized as a renaissance theologian and read regularly and carefully in our own day. Warfield repays careful study and he helps through the clarity of his prose. Like his junior colleague J. Gresham Machen, Warfield was a gifted writer who typically wrote with a crystal-clear style. We will see that Warfield published on biblical

studies, church history & historical theology, apologetics, as well as systematic theology and practical Christian living or church life.

#### Biblical Studies

As we have already had occasion to note, Warfield was initially attracted to biblical studies, both the Old and New Testaments. Warfield may be best remembered as a systematician, but his systematic theology was grounded in both the Scriptures and historical theology. What may not be as well known is that Warfield published one of the earliest American treatments of New Testament textual criticism. Textual criticism is the science of determining the best manuscripts of an ancient text. This is a science and an art that deals with documents that predate the advent of the printing press and mass duplication of texts that we take so much for granted today. Now long out of print, but available through the Logos software, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*<sup>3</sup> provides us with insight into Warfield's theological method. Warfield was not committed to either the King James only (for English readers), nor did he rest in the Textus Receptus or the Majority Text in the Greek. Warfield was committed to what is called the "eclectic" text which is made up of the best readings (according to the scholars involved in the process) of a given text of the NT.

Related to textual criticism is the study of canon formation. Warfield penned a brief nine-page treatment of the topic for the American Sunday School Union, *The Canon of the New Testament: How and When Formed*.<sup>4</sup> While this is a technical subject dealing with how and when the various books of the NT were penned and gathered together, it was published in an accessible format and through a more popular press aimed at intelligent laity in the pews. It is clear that Warfield was at home in what is often termed "NT Introduction." While this kind of work did not form the majority of Warfield's literary output, it demonstrates his interest in and familiarity with this theological sub-discipline.

Warfield unpacked the content of Scripture in articles eventually brought together into his ten-volume *Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*<sup>5</sup> and the two-volume *Benjamin B.*

*Warfield: Selected Shorter Writings*.<sup>6</sup> One volume in the Oxford Works set is dedicated to Scriptural exegesis and exposition of particular doctrines.<sup>7</sup> This volume covers material spanning the depth and breadth of biblical revelation: predestination, the Spirit of God in the Old Testament, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, through the prophecies of Paul, and the millennium and apocalypse. These and many other articles reveal Warfield's mastery of the subject matter. The same is evident from a view taken of biblical studies articles in his *Selected Shorter Writings*. For instance, Warfield wrote on the advancement of biblical knowledge over the previous century, characteristics of the book of Acts, the canonicity of Second Peter, the book of Revelation, Hosea 6:7 Adam or Man?, the God of Israel, the Importunate Widow and the failure of faith, the Old Testament and Immortality, and many others.

One of the most significant, if not the most significant of Warfield's articles on biblical topics is his "The Emotional Life of Our Lord," originally published in a volume of faculty articles on the occasion of Princeton Seminary's centennial celebration in 1912.<sup>8</sup> In this essay we find the hallmark of Princeton, a potent combination of learning and piety. The essay is divided into three sections dealing with different emotions attributed to Jesus in the NT: compassion and love, indignation and annoyance, and joy and sorrow. The point Warfield makes is that our Lord was truly human (as well as fully divine) and

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NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 & Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000 reprint), accessed through the Logos edition. P&R Publishing has published five volumes that largely replicate material in the Oxford Works set, although there are items in the P&R volumes that do not appear in the Oxford Works set and vice versa.

6. B. B. Warfield, *Benjamin B. Warfield: Selected Shorter Writings*. 2 vols. John Meeter, ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1976 and 2001 reprint). Unfortunately, this set is not available in electronic format as of this writing. There are several stand-alone volumes of Warfield's work currently published by Banner of Truth Trust that unfortunately we will not have occasion to reference further on in this essay.

7. This is volume two of the Oxford Works set, subtitled *Biblical Doctrines*. The P&R stand-alone volume from this set has the same title. There is appended at the end of this volume a list of several other articles on biblical doctrines by Warfield not included in the set.

8. B. B. Warfield, "The Emotional Life of Our Lord," in *Biblical and Theological Studies by Members of the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary: Published in Commemoration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the Seminary* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1912), 34–90. Accessed through the Logos edition.

1. The OPC was initially named the Presbyterian Church of America, but when it was taken to court by the PCUSA the denomination changed its name. The sister denomination the Presbyterian Church in America came out of the southern PCUS in 1973 with an almost identical name (albeit the outcome of a voting process) which it has retained.

2. I look forward to the publication of the Warfield biography someday, I have had correspondence with the author working on the biography and can say he is more than competent to write on Warfield's life. There are other biographical treatments in books of broader interest (Zaspel, for instance).

3. B. B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1886), accessed through the Logos edition.

4. B. B. Warfield, *The Canon of the New Testament: How and When Formed* (Philadelphia, PA & New York, NY: American Sunday School Union, 1892), accessed through the Logos edition.

5. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York,

he exhibited real human emotion that didn't involve necessary sin. These examples are concrete and real to life. Warfield concludes this essay with the exhortation that Jesus is our model but most importantly he is our model because he is our savior.

### Church History & Historical Theology

Warfield was also adept at constructively contributing to the field of church history and historical theology (the distinction is one of events and persons on the one hand and theologies on the other). As with his biblical studies, we find Warfield working with historical matters throughout his career as a systematician. The fourth volume of his *Oxford Works* is dedicated to one study of Tertullian and the early development of trinitarian theology and four studies on Augustine's biography, his doctrine of knowledge and authority, the *Confessions*, and Augustine's involvement in the Pelagian controversy.<sup>1</sup>

The fifth volume of the *Works* is given over to studies of John Calvin and the resulting Calvinist tradition. This volume is comprised of seven studies including Calvin's biography, his doctrine of the knowledge of God, his doctrine of God, Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity, his doctrine of creation, a chapter on Calvinism, and the literary history of Calvin's *Institutes*.<sup>2</sup> His essays on the doctrine of the knowledge of God and the doctrine of the Trinity particularly stand out. Warfield's treatment of Calvin's doctrine of our knowledge of God looks at Calvin's twofold knowledge of God which could be either our knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer or the knowledge we have of God and of ourselves that are inextricably linked. His examination of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity highlighted Calvin's insight (not always valued in the history of the Reformed tradition) that the Son of God (and the Spirit as well by implication) is *autotheos*. That is, the Son is in himself divine and does not derive his divinity from the Father. In other words, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal in divinity. However, the Son does derive his personhood from the Father. Calvin contributed himself to the further development of an orthodox under-

standing of the doctrine of the Trinity with this insight and Warfield has aided us in our understanding with his historical scholarship.

Warfield also delved into the world of the Westminster Assembly and the documents that arose out of that unique and chaotic time of the English Civil Wars. The sixth volume of the *Oxford Works* is dedicated to six essays on the historical context of the Assembly, the formulation of the *Confession* and its doctrine of the divine decree, the Westminster doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of the divine inspiration of Scripture found in the *Confession*, the printing of the *Confession*, and finally, he concludes with a study of the first question of the *Shorter Catechism*.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most significant of Warfield's essays is his examination of "Edwards and the New England Theology," found in volume nine of the Oxford edition of Warfield's *Works*.<sup>4</sup> Warfield begins his essay noting that Edwards was not just a brilliant philosopher but was a theologian. The essay has four parts: the period of Edwards's preparation, his role as a pastor, then his role as a theologian, and finally Warfield addresses the so-called "New England theology." New England theology (sometimes also called the "New Divinity") was an errant spawn of the theology of Edwards. There were emphases that the ostensible disciples shared with their master like a central focus on the faculties of the human soul. But the departures from Edwards were more significant in the opinion of this writer. For instance, the theology of Nathaniel Taylor, professor at the Yale University divinity school in New Haven, CT (this school of theology was also referred to as the "New Haven theology") on the nature and reality of sin was the 180-degree opposite of Edwards as was Taylor's take on the freedom of the will. Warfield trains his scope on the question of whether Edwards held to the mediate or immediate imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity. Mediate imputation holds that the guilt of Adam's sin is mediated to his posterity through the corruption of our fallen natures. Immediate imputation holds that the guilt of Adam's first transgression precedes the corruption of our fallen natures.<sup>5</sup>



Warfield thinks that Edwards held to mediate imputation because Edwards puts so much emphasis on what went through the mind of Eve before she picked the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I think Warfield is wrong at this point and so I agree with the assessments of John Murray in his *Imputation of Adam's Sin*<sup>6</sup> and John Gerstner<sup>7</sup> that Edwards held in fact to the most immediate form of immediate imputation.

### Apologetics

Warfield is a well-known exemplar of the classical method of apologetics. This is the method that seeks to follow a two-step process to defending the Christian faith. The first step is to argue for the existence of God on more or less neutral philosophical grounds. The second step is to defend the veracity of the Bible based upon the fulfillment of prophecy, performance of miracles, and the consideration of other kinds of evidence. Kim Riddlebarger provides a fine exposition and defense of Warfield's apologetic method in his book *The Lion of Princeton*.<sup>8</sup> Warfield's method of defending the faith is on display in his article on apologetics in the Oxford edition of his *Works*.<sup>9</sup> Here Warfield gives a history and description of apologetics, argues for its place in the theological encyclopedia, stresses its value, and looks at its development. Warfield's commitment to the classical apologetic method is evidenced through his literary corpus in various articles and reviews whether these are obviously apologetically oriented or not. For instance, in his *Selected Shorter*

of Adam's sin is what is taught in Scripture and the Reformed confessions in general and the Westminster Confession in particular. This view is, I believe, the majority view within the Reformed tradition and rightly so.

6. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1977).

7. John Gerstner mentions Warfield and Murray on this question in his taped series on the life and theology of Edwards.

8. Riddlebarger, *Lion of Princeton*.

9. Warfield, "Apologetics" in *Works*, 10:1–21.

1. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 Vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 and Baker reprint, 2000), vol. 4. Accessed through the Logos edition.

2. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 Vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 and Baker reprint, 2000), vol. 5. Accessed through the Logos edition. The final essay on the literary history of Calvin's *Institutes* has also appeared with some English translations of the *Institutes*.

3. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 Vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 and Baker reprint, 2000), vol. 6. Accessed through the Logos edition.

4. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 Vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 and Baker reprint, 2000), vol. 9. Accessed through the Logos edition. 9:511–538. Clearly the fact that I am a student of Edwards clouds my objectivity.

5. I am of the opinion that immediate imputation

*Writings*, Warfield addresses apologetic issues in the first four essays in the second part of volume two.<sup>1</sup> Here Warfield provides an introduction to Francis Beattie's *Apologetics*, a puzzled review of Herman Bavinck's *The Certainty of Faith*, an essay on whether recent criticisms undermined Christian evidences, and then an essay on Darwin's arguments against Christianity and religion in general.

While Cornelius Van Til, erstwhile professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, was correct in critiquing Warfield's embrace of the classical method of apologetics, it is not the case that he rejected Warfield on apologetics wholesale. Quite the opposite is true. The late Greg Bahnsen has argued in his massive *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* that Van Til neither rejected Warfield out of hand nor did he embrace Abraham Kuyper uncritically.<sup>2</sup> Van Til sought in his apologetic method to embrace the strengths of Warfield and Kuyper and to eschew the weaknesses of both. Van Til, says Bahnsen, held that both Warfield and Kuyper had (1) a central insight or conviction about our knowledge of God, (2) a second notion inconsistent with the first, and finally (3) an erroneous view of apologetics as a result. Van Til saw Warfield's strength as his conviction about the objectivity, clarity, and intelligibility of God's revelation for all men in nature and history. However, the second inconsistent premise was his belief that the evidence for Christianity was only probable. Finally, these inconsistent premises produced a faulty conclusion: the natural man can correctly interpret God's natural revelation. We do not have the space to unpack this Van Tilian assessment of Warfield's apologetic more fully and adequately. Suffice it to say that Bahnsen himself provides a thorough exposition. Notice, however, that Van Til believes Warfield gets it right about the reality and clarity of God's revelation in nature and history. Where Warfield goes astray is at the subjective epistemological level. Whatever we may think of Warfield's foray into apologetics, it is clear he is at home and in his element when he engages in polemics. Even we Van Tilians can appreciate the strong stance on divine revelation to which we add the proper understanding about the rock-solid and certified subjective authority of divine

revelation.

### Systematic Theology

We finally come now to the discipline of systematic theology, often referred to as the queen of the sciences as it is the culmination of the theological project. As we might expect, Warfield, like any other sound and orthodox systematician, wrote with an eye on Scripture, the history of theology, apologetic concern, and practical application.<sup>3</sup> That is, each of the sub-disciplines of the theological encyclopedia contribute to the constructive systematic theological effort. However, Scripture is paramount.<sup>4</sup> I believe that we would conclude that Warfield was a renaissance theologian simply by examining his systematic theological work. Such was the scope of his literary output that it beggars the imagination. For instance, Warfield addresses the problem of perfectionism in two volumes of his Oxford edition of his *Works*.<sup>5</sup> He shows the German development of perfectionism prior to its transportation to America. The first volume dedicated to perfectionism looks at the role of Albrecht Ritschl in the unfolding of perfectionism in the German academy. Warfield recognizes that the chief source of Christian perfectionism is John Wesley and the Methodist tradition. But Ritschl contributes a heightened mysticism which carries far into the bloodstream of perfectionism. Perfectionism is manifest not only in the Wesleyan tradition, but also amongst the Keswick higher life movement, and in Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement.

In the second volume dedicated to the "sanctification life" of perfectionism, Warfield examines its appearance in the Oberlin movement, named after the college in Ohio that is often associated with one of its faculty, Charles Grandison Finney. Oberlin College would play a large role in the abolitionist

and women's suffrage movements.<sup>6</sup> Warfield devotes chapters to other movements that spring from perfectionism: the Upham sect and the Oneida Community of John Humphrey Noyes.<sup>7</sup> Warfield also looks at the higher life movement (Keswick) which is in many ways a Baptist appropriation of the perfectionism of the Wesleyan holiness tradition. Related to this is the "victorious life" movement. Consider these as ripples that waft out from the perfectionist center. Among the problems with perfectionism would be its weak view of sin (Wesley's famous definition of sin was the conscious breaking of a known law of God) and its too sanguine view of human nature and potential. Warfield noted these concerns and many more.

There are many of Warfield's essays on systematic theological topics that we could consider (such as his Oxford *Works* volume dedicated to Christology<sup>8</sup>), but I would like now to turn Warfield's work on divine inspiration and the methods used in systematic theology. Warfield co-authored a two-part essay on inspiration while he was still a professor of NT at Western Theological Seminary near Pittsburgh.<sup>9</sup> Writing with A. A. Hodge, Warfield and Hodge defended biblical inerrancy. With the likes of OT scholar Charles Briggs of Union Theological Seminary in view, the authors offer a sophisticated explanation of an orthodox doctrine of biblical inspiration. Warfield and Hodge are so successful in their argument that some contemporary scholars have confused a clear-eyed defense of inerrancy with its invention.<sup>10</sup> As John Wood-

6. While Warfield was rightly critical of the perfectionist movement and its manifestation at Oberlin College, there is every reason to support the freedom and citizenship of African Americans and the right of female citizens to vote in American elections.

7. For purposes of full disclosure, I was born in Oneida, NY and love the silverware that is the town's best-known product. The silver company is in reality the residue of the free love and hyper in-grown community.

8. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 Vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 and Baker reprint, 2000), vol. 3.

9. A helpful and thorough treatment of the development of Warfield's thinking on inspiration can be found in Jeffrey Stivason's *From Inscrutibility to Concursus: Benjamin B. Warfield's Theological Construction of Revelation's Mode from 1888 to 1915*. Reformed Academic Dissertations series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017). Warfield and Hodge's essay was later published as a book.

10. I have in mind *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach by Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999 reprint). This volume was

1. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 2:93–141.

2. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 596–612. For a more detailed exposition and evaluation of this section of Bahnsen, see my "On the Shoulders of Giants: Van Til's Appropriation of Warfield and Kuyper" in *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal* 7 (2011): 139–146.

3. I should note that practical application would be determined by the subject and not by the theologian or reader. In other words, what counts as practical is determined by Scripture, not cultural expectations—not even church cultural-expectations.

4. One area of weakness in the work of Warfield is the apparent lack of biblical theological emphasis. This is doubly odd as he was a close friend of the father of Reformed redemptive historical theology, Geerhardus Vos. Warfield and Vos had the habit of daily walking together with their dogs along the streets of Princeton and around the campus of the seminary.

5. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 Vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 and Baker reprint, 2000), vols. 7 & 8.



bridge has exhaustively shown, inerrancy was not the product of the Old Princeton theology but was rather superbly put forward by Warfield and Hodge. Warfield devoted many essays to divine revelation as seen in the first volume of his *Oxford Works*.<sup>1</sup> If Warfield is known for anything among the broader Evangelical community it is his work on revelation. But as we know by now, Warfield was not a one-trick pony.

Warfield was very much concerned with the value of systematic theology, a fact made clear by the presence of two essays in his *Oxford Works*.<sup>2</sup> Here we find his essays “The Idea of Systematic Theology” and the “The Task and Method of Systematic Theology.” In his *Selected Shorter Writings*, Warfield has an additional essay entitled “The Right of Systematic Theology.”<sup>3</sup> These essays, along with several others involved Warfield’s defense of systematic theology in an era of anti-metaphysical theology as seen, for instance, in the writings of German scholar Albrecht Ritschl. Not only does Warfield address the legitimacy of systematics as a discipline, but he outlines a proper way to be constructive. That is, everything has not already been discovered in Scripture, although the church over two millennia have come to firm conclusions on many doctrinal points. But the Holy Spirit is a teacher of truth not only in the past, but presumably in the present and will be until Jesus returns. The right understanding is to hold to what has been firmly hammered out and allow for perfection of insight and formulation. A survey of Warfield’s published writings reveals his ability to maintain a familiarity with the breadth and depth of the various systematic theological loci.

### *Practical Christian Living/Church Life*

As already noted earlier in this essay, Warfield was a clear writer and so he was able to

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successfully answered by John D. Woodbridge’s *Biblical Authority: Infallibility and Inerrancy in the Christian tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015 reprint). Unfortunately, the erroneous views of Rogers and McKim were virtually replicated by Peter Enns in his *Inspiration and Incarnation*.

1. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 10 Vols. Ethelbert Warfield, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932 and Baker reprint, 2000), vol.1. This volume is subtitled “Revelation and Inspiration.” The P&R edition of this volume has a well-known introduction by Cornelius Van Til.

2. Warfield, *Works*, 9:47–105.

3. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 2:219–279. Note that this essay is followed by an article on the “indispensableness” of systematic theology for the preacher.

write for an academic audience but also for laypeople as well. In fact, it is quite astonishing, by today’s standards to see what kind of periodicals published his articles. Not only denominational or religious magazines, but also secular publications, some still in existence today. No doubt these magazines wouldn’t come within a ten-foot pole of Warfield in our day, but it is instructive-not to say somewhat amusing-to see how far and wide Warfield’s exposure was in his day. He was even published in ladies’ magazines. But write for church publications he did. Two interesting articles deal with race relations.<sup>4</sup> “A Calm View of the Freedman’s Case” and “Drawing the Color Line.” In these articles Warfield manifests a refreshingly solid view of the relation between blacks and whites in the church. Perhaps surprisingly, given Warfield’s southern roots, he is opposed to treating African-Americans as inhuman or even as second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. These two brief essays repay serious consideration, especially when so many simply assume that previous generations were racist. No doubt Warfield would come up short when stacked against contemporary expectations. But it is interesting to see where he stood on such a perennially troubling issue.

### **Conclusion**

Readers may be forgiven for finding it hard to believe me when I tell you that I have skated on the surface of the frozen pond here. Hopefully I have shared enough of my own perusal of Warfield’s oeuvre to agree with me that he was definitely a renaissance theologian. With our hyper-specialization in the learned disciplines, it is hard for someone to obtain, let alone retain such a grasp of both theological and general learning as B. B. Warfield did. What’s more, Warfield sought to bring all his learning into his service to his Lord and the church. I would encourage readers to start slow as you enter into the literary world of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. But start you must. Warfield is a giant and we see as far as we do, as someone once said, because we stand on his and others’ shoulders. We have surveyed a wide swathe of Warfield’s contribution to theology and I pray that God would send along others of similar capabilities and commitments. I thank our great and glorious Triune God for gifting the church with the likes of this particular renaissance theologian.<sup>5</sup>

4. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:735ff.

5. Rather than creating a separate recommended reading list, peruse the notes to find references to many, but by no means all, of Warfield’s voluminous literary output. I am aware of at least two an-



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