Introduction

On more than one occasion historian Mark Noll, among others, has lamented that no one has yet produced a comprehensive account of the theology of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield.¹ This work is intended to fill this void and re-introduce Warfield to today’s theological discussion.

A few remarks by way of clarification are in order. You will notice at some points a certain inequality of treatment of a given doctrine, but this reflects the balance of Warfield’s own work. Warfield was an “occasional” writer, addressing specific issues as the need and interest arose. Also, in digesting Warfield’s various arguments it was necessary at virtually every turn to bring together statements from various writings. Often a single sentence reflects thoughts and statements expressed by Warfield in multiple places. This, in turn, made footnote referencing impossibly cumbersome. And so the decision was made to group references together, usually at the end of the paragraph. I trust that those who wish to follow the references will find themselves only somewhat inconvenienced by this.

Of course it is to be expected that there will be areas of disagreement with Warfield — in questions of baptism and eschatology, for example. But the goal here has been to present Warfield’s arguments accurately on their own terms. There has been no attempt either to confirm or refute his views, his arguments, or even his understanding of other writers — an endeavor that would increase the length of the study exponentially. Nor have I entered discussion with others who have attempted to criticize Warfield’s views. The purpose is not to critique or evaluate but to clarify the views Warfield actually held and the arguments he advanced in their support. And with this object kept in mind I have had to leave aside the arguments of others, whether in support of or opposition to Warfield. My interaction with others, rather, is restricted to those who in my judgment have misstated Warfield’s position on a given issue. In such cases I seek to clarify Warfield against such misunderstandings or misrepresentations of him.

Many thanks to Bram van de Beek and Michael Haykin for their helpful input throughout this project. Without them the thesis would be of much less value indeed. Many thanks to Ryan Kelly for encouraging me to undertake this work in the first place. Many thanks to Ken Henke for his invaluable assistance with the Warfield Archives in the Princeton Theological Seminary library. Many thanks also to Word of Life Baptist Church of Pottsville, PA, and Reformed Baptist Church of Franconia, PA, for their patient and even enthusiastic listening to so much of Warfield. Many thanks to my wonderful family who have at least pretended much interest as I have rattled on and on of Warfield on countless occasions upon returning to them from my study. And surely no writer has ever had a more supportive wife than mine. All throughout these years of research — beset though they were with so much suffering in our home — she has been a mainstay of constant loving encouragement to see the work to its completion. Thank you, Kim.

Fred G. Zaspel
Lansdale, PA
October 2009

To James and Connie Zaspel,

loving and beloved parents

who faithfully pointed me to Christ

and

through whom God first instilled in me a love for Himself and His Word.
The State of Warfield Studies
by Fred G. Zaspel

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) is widely recognized as perhaps the leading orthodox theologian of the early twentieth century. Even in his own day he was hailed by friends and critics alike as among the weightiest of authorities in virtually all Biblical and theological domains. In a memorial address Francis Patton, Warfield’s colleague at Princeton, eulogized, “It is difficult, of course, to estimate the influence he exerted in this way, but geographically speaking it was widely extended, and I may be pardoned perhaps for saying somewhat extravagantly that his line has gone out into all the earth and his words to the end of the world.” Both the breadth and depth of his voluminous works have impressed Christian students and scholars of all theological persuasions, and among Reformed orthodox theologians few have stood taller.

It would be expected, therefore, to find widely available a wealth of scholarly studies in Warfieldian theology. Yet historians Mark Noll and David Calhoun both lament that a definitive Warfield biography has still not been produced. And surprisingly, the Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century, a book designed to review the lives and careers of the century’s most influential theologians, includes no selection on Warfield. Citations of Warfield abound in the last hundred years of theological literature, but studies of Warfield himself are still lacking. Despite his towering stature, Warfield has been sorely neglected as a subject of scholarly investigation. He is often cited for reasons of authoritative support, but other than such incidental use, Warfield study has been largely neglected.

This is not to say, however, that Warfield has been ignored altogether. Some selective scholarly attention has been directed toward Warfield, even if this attention has tended to cluster around a few select issues. A survey of this literature on Warfield studies follows.

Studies in Warfield’s Doctrine of Scripture

Warfield is perhaps best known as the defender of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, and it is not surprising to find some considerable attention given to his views. Of contemporary scholars most critical of Warfield’s doctrine of biblical inspiration, Ernest R. Sandeen, Jack B. Rogers, and Donald K. McKim are the most prominent. In The Roots of Fundamentalism, Sandeen argues vigorously that Warfield’s insistence on plenary verbal inspiration and absolute inerrancy was extreme and historically naive; indeed, it was a position that stepped far beyond that of the historic orthodoxy of the likes of John Calvin, the Westminster Confession, Warfield’s teacher, Charles Hodge, and Hodge’s teacher and colleague, Archibald Alexander. According to Sandeen, Warfield progressively “retreated” to a position that was unprecedented and self-contradictory. Furthermore, given that Warfield argued only in reference to the original autographs, and given that the original autographs are no longer extant, Sandeen contests, Warfield’s argument is both indefensible and undeniable. Following up on Balmer’s earlier Master’s thesis, John Woodbridge and Randall H. Balmer responded to Sandeen briefly but thoroughly in their chapter, “The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An

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1 PTR July, 1921
4 Attention will be devoted primarily to dissertations and monographs on Warfield. Briefer articles and other lesser treatments of significance will be noted also.
Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal.  

This study by Woodbridge and Balmer does not focus on Warfield specifically but on the historical background of his Princeton predecessors and of nineteenth century Protestantism in general, and it documents their contention, against Sandeen that the doctrine of inspiration espoused by Warfield and his Princetonian allies was not new.

In *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (1979), Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, relying somewhat on Sandeen and on Rogers’ earlier doctoral thesis, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession: A Problem of Historical Interpretation for American Presbyterianism,* and reflective of his essay “Van Til and Warfield on Scripture in the Westminster Confession,” have launched a similar assault on Warfield and the Princetonian doctrine of scripture. Although somewhat more tempered in tone than Sandeen, the charge remains that Warfield misrepresented history in defense of his innovative and unprecedented doctrine. According to Rogers and McKim Warfield was no historian, and his historical arguments were skewed by his apologetic motive; Warfield’s case was built on unsubstantiated assumptions, historical inaccuracies, and dogmatic pre-commitments. However, in his *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal,* John Woodbridge takes Rogers and McKim to task for their own historical reconstructions and selectivity. Although Woodbridge does not focus on Warfield or the Princetonians specifically, his work goes a long way toward vindicating Warfield of the charges which Rogers and McKim have leveled against him.

In their criticisms against Warfield, these critics have merely restated the charges leveled originally by Charles Augustus Briggs, Warfield’s arch-opponent at Union Seminary in New York. Briggs’ fascination with the higher criticism which he had learned in Germany had brought him into conflict, not only with the Princetonians, but with his own Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and although Warfield won the day, for Briggs — as well as for Sandeen and Rogers and McKim — the triumph was attained more by weight of political influence than by historical evidence. But if Sandeen’s work appears vitriolic, it is sheer calm in comparison to the assaults launched by Briggs in his *Biblical Study* (1883), *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times* (1889), *The Bible, the Church, and the Reason* (1892), *General Introduction to the Study of Holy

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For example, Briggs identifies the opponents of the higher criticism as “enemies of truth,” as the “hissing serpents” of Matt 23:33, and the “dogs” of Phil 3:2. And he refers specifically to Warfield and others of “the Princeton school” as perilously dangerous “blind guides.” Personally and emotionally involved in the conflict as he was, Briggs wrote passionately, vigorously impugning even the motives and the scholarship of the Princetonians’ unsubstantiated yet successful “revision” of the Reformed doctrine of scripture. Of Briggs’ *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* Warfield wrote in review, “there is hardly a page we can read without offense.” In somewhat more congenial tone, this is the cause taken up by Sandeen and by Rogers and McKim. For them, history has vilified the wrong person. Especially in Rogers and McKim but to some degree in Sandeen also, Briggs is given hero status for his work, and effort is made to vindicate him from any remaining Warfieldian injustice.

In his *Infallibility as a Theological Concept* Trevor Morrow provides a descriptive analysis of the respective approaches of Briggs and Warfield to scripture, both in their concept of the nature of scripture and their use of scripture. His thesis is that the concept of infallibility is used by both men but with obviously different understandings. The thesis itself seems an extended demonstration of the obvious, but his respective descriptions of the theological understanding of these two theologians is fair and may be generally helpful to one new to the discussion.

In his *The Principle of Authority in the Theology of B. B. Warfield, William Adams Brown, and Gerald Birney Smith*, Clyde Norman Kraus compared and contrasted Warfield’s doctrine of religious authority to that of William Adams Brown and Gerald Birney Smith. Kraus’ work amounts to another study in Warfield’s doctrine of scripture, although it treats also his teachings regarding mysticism. For Smith, religious authority was more a personal matter, arrived at empirically, pragmatically, and naturalistically. Personal religious experience was paramount in determining truth and ethics. Truth and standards rest not on externally imposed doctrine or norms but on personal and moral experience. Brown was avowedly supernaturalistic and was willing to speak in terms of the authoritative nature of the Bible, but in his mediating position (between Smith and Warfield) he still held to the importance of personal experience. For Warfield, religious authority is simply part and parcel of divine revelation; religious authority is external, objective, divine revelation, and located finally in holy scripture.

Woodrow Behannon examines Warfield’s view of scripture as the sole authority in religious matters in his *Benjamin B. Warfield’s Concept of Religious Authority*. The dissertation emphasizes Warfield’s loyalty to scripture as the Word of God and the necessary authoritative revelation in questions pertaining to human salvation, but it contributes very little to the discussion.

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15 Briggs, *The Bible, the Church, and Reason*, 278.


17 PRR 11 (1900): 359.


John J. Markarian explores Warfield’s doctrine of scripture in relation to that of John Calvin in his *The Calvinistic Concept of the Biblical Revelation in the Theology of B. B. Warfield*. According to Markarian, Warfield deviated from Calvin and misunderstood the Reformer’s differentiation between scripture as a formal oracular authority and scripture as a means of grace. Markarian argues that Warfield added the ideas of objectivity (vs. the inner witness of the Spirit) and reliance upon reason and evidence for the scripture’s truthfulness. In Markarian’s opinion, Warfield was self-defeating and entirely unsuccessful in defending the formal authority of scripture.

In his “Warfield’s Case for Biblical Inerrancy,” John Gerstner takes up Warfield’s cause and is critical of both Sandeen and Markarian. Gerstner maintains that Sandeen wrongly manufactures a difference between Hodge and the WCF, unfairly comparing the “persuasion element” in the WCF to the “evidence” element in Hodge. Rather than demonstrating agreement, Gerstner charges, Sandeen manufactures disagreement. In a similar way, Gerstner argues, Sandeen imagines a further departure from Hodge on the part of Warfield in terms of their respective arguments as to the grounds of acceptance of the credibility of the Biblical writers. Gerstner then proceeds to analyze Warfield’s “case” for inspiration with earnest approval. His overall treatment is brief, but it is one more attempt to vindicate Warfield from his critics.

In his *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology*, John Vander Stelt argues strenuously that the Old Princeton doctrine of inerrancy was grounded in the Common Sense Philosophy which dominated the thinking of the Old Princetonian theologians. He writes,

> The meaning of infallibility is for Warfield, as for all Old Princeton theologians, determined not only by an allegiance to the basic assumptions and thought-structures of [common sense philosophy], but also by an acceptance of the traditional, scholastic, and religiously dualistic distinction between that which is natural and that which is supernatural.

Vander Stelt’s contention is that Princeton’s new doctrine of scripture was fostered not by scripture but by their previous philosophical commitments. That their doctrine was “new,” however, is a charge that goes unproven. Further, in his *Common Sense and American Presbyterianism: An Evaluation of the Impact of Scottish Realism on Princeton and the South*, J. Ligon Duncan argues that Vander Stelt’s “stock” charge of philosophical rather than scriptural motivation is unsubstantiated. Speaking of Vander Stelt, Duncan writes, “Those who do insist on a cause and effect relation between Common Sense and inerrancy have never adequately demonstrated their case. In the absence of historical demonstration of this ‘link,’ only vague allegations are substituted.” For Duncan, the fact that Common Sense Philosophy has become the alleged

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influence of so many differing and contradictory ideas, demonstrates the need of saner evaluations. Warfield held to Common Sense Philosophy, and Vander Stelt demonstrates better the evidence of it in Warfield’s apologetic method than in his doctrine of inerrancy. The degree to which this philosophical commitment shaped the content and the method of Warfield’s apologetic, however, still deserves fuller treatment.

The dissertation by Man Chee Kwok is the only attempt to date to reconcile Warfield’s objective doctrine of inspiration (and Christian evidences) with his doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. In his *Benjamin B. Warfield’s Doctrine of Illumination in Light of Conservative Calvinistic Tradition*, Kwok argues that Warfield follows squarely in the tradition of Calvin and that his differences are only in terms of the rationalistic opponents of his own day. Unlike Kuyper who emphasized the mystical element in illumination almost exclusively, and unlike others who fail altogether in addressing the question of the relation of evidence to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, Warfield followed Calvin in stressing the indispensability of the Spirit’s work; but he also argued that the illuminating faith which the Spirit gives is not an empty one. It is a faith grounded in evidence — evidence which by itself is ineffective. Kwok’s is a helpful contribution to the much-debated subject of Warfield’s doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*.

Two doctoral dissertations have been presented which contrast Warfield’s doctrine of inspiration with that of differing theologians — *The Doctrine of Inspiration in the Writings of James Orr and B. B. Warfield: A Study in Contrasting Approaches to Scripture*, by Robert James Hoefel, and *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield*, by Peter Maarten van Bemmelen. The Scottish theologian James Orr held that absolute inerrancy was “suicidal,” while Warfield argued it was essential; yet Hoeffel claims that these two theologians were in substantial agreement, that the differences between them were primarily in matters of approach and purpose — Orr’s concerns lay in answering the critics while Warfield’s concerns lay in the Biblical teaching regarding inspiration. In the end, the differences between Orr and Warfield can be explained in terms of agendas and emphases and not fundamental disagreement. Van Bemmelen’s study is more contrastive, examining as it does the liberal/critical views of Sanday and the conservative views of Warfield. He attempts by his contrast to clarify the various issues involved in formulating a Biblical doctrine of inspiration. He notes that the seemingly striking similarities between the two are more superficial than real and demonstrates by the contrast the necessary issues and steps which must be taken to arrive at a consistent position on the doctrine. Van Bemmelen’s treatment of Sanday is fair and comprehensive, although his sympathies remain clearly with Warfield: Warfield’s method and conclusions reflect a consistent and accurate procedure and handling of the necessary data.

In “Benjamin B. Warfield’s View of Faith and History: A Critique in the Light of the New Testament” Daniel Fuller affirms Warfield’s understanding of faith in Scripture as grounded in the *indicia*. Fuller then uses this understanding of faith as grounded in history in order to depart from Warfield’s

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26 Duncan gives examples of the widely differing and contradictory ideas supposedly influenced by Common Sense Philosophy: “the Jeffersonian concept of human rights and justifying slavery, maintaining the societal status quo and providing the basis for a radical critique of society, engendering the New School Presbyterian movement and dominating the thought of the Old School Presbyterians; as well as giving birth to the states’ right movement, Princeton’s view of Scripture, Hodge’s view of biblical interpretation Warfield’s apologetical technique, the Southern view of Church and State, Dabney’s Zwinglian view of the sacraments, and Thornwell’s ecclesiology.” *Common Sense*: 104.


30 JETS 11:1 (Spring, 1968): 75-83.
understanding of inerrancy in the details — the “non-revelational” aspects — of Scripture. No one who has read Warfield will be find Fuller’s use of Warfield to justify an errantist position persuasive. See also the later correspondence on this between Fuller and Clark Pinnock in JETS 16:2 (1973):67-72.

In his *The Protestant Dogmaticians and the Late Princeton School on the Status of the Sacred Apographa*, Theodore Letis argues that Warfield’s position in regard to textual criticism marked a distinct departure from the Lutheran and Reformed positions and that of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Before Warfield the *apographa* (copies) in possession and dominant use were considered authoritative and infallible. Warfield’s shift to the “infallible *autographa*” constituted a demythologizing of the WCF.

Hendrik Van den Belt provides an excellent investigation of the doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* and the self-authenticating character of Scripture in Reformed thought. Van den Belt analyzes and evaluates the relevant teachings of Calvin, Reformed Orthodoxy, Warfield, and Bavinck and demonstrates areas of agreement and divergence. Just fifty-three pages are devoted to Warfield, but it is an exhaustive study of the doctrine overall, very well written, and helpful. Van den Belt’s concern is an evangelistic one — how to bring the scriptures to the postmodern world — and in his final chapters he offers suggestions along these lines.

Warfield, from his own day until our own, is best known as the champion of Biblical inerrancy. It is to be expected, therefore, that this has been the most studied aspect of his theological work. However, although the historical allegations brought against him by Briggs, Sandeen, and Rogers and McKim, have been challenged, little evaluation has been given to the charge that his “rationalistic” and objective doctrine of inerrancy placed Warfield out of step with his Reformed (especially Puritan) heritage vis-a-vis the inner witness of the Spirit. Nor has there yet been offered a comprehensive analysis of his doctrine of scripture and its relation to his theological schema as a whole.

**Studies in Warfield and Evolution**

Contemporary evangelical creationism has created and sustained a high interest in the subject of human origins which no doubt has contributed somewhat to the renewed interest in the study of Warfield’s views on evolution. The first such study was that of Deryl Freeman Johnson in his *The Attitudes of the Princeton Theologians Toward Darwinism and Evolution from 1859-1929*. The study covered the period from the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859) to the reorganization of Princeton Theological Seminary (1929) and examined, in turn, the views and writings of Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, Warfield, and C. W. Hodge, Jr., in regard to science, creation, evolution, theological method, and related questions. As the title implies, the study is on the Princetonians as whole, of whom Charles Hodge and then Warfield wrote most extensively of the question of human origins. Approximately sixty of the two hundred and ninety-two pages focus on Warfield. Johnson finds Warfield’s opinion regarding evolution itself evolved during his tenure at Princeton, from that of “a Darwinian of the purest water” to one who denied that evolution had ever been proved. Johnson argues that Warfield, unlike Charles Hodge, remained open to the question and affirmed that some form of evolution could be compatible with the Biblical creation narratives, that God in providence

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33 Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1968.
could well have used this method to bring about the human race. However, it was difficult for Warfield to reconcile the theory with the Genesis record of the immediate creation of the body of both Eve and Adam. Perhaps evolution could explain the eventual arrival of plant and animal life and other world material. But it could only with difficulty explain the origin of the human body, and it could never explain the origin of the human soul. In the end, Warfield was willing to allow science to interpret the Genesis account, but he had questions as to how it could be done. The question remained open for him, and he left it open for his students also. Bradley John Gundlach, in his The Evolution Question at Princeton: 1845-1929, offers a similar sympathetic reading of the Princetonians and their “evolving” position regarding the question of human origins. His examination of the views of the Princetonians is more thorough and precise. In the broader study, Presbyterian Attitudes Toward Science and the Coming of Darwinism in America, 1859-1929, Dennis Royal Davis presents the larger theological and ecclesiastical context in which the question was considered and devotes but a few pages to a survey of Warfield’s contribution to the debate. And Brian Aucker provides a brief investigation of the thinking of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield in regard to evolution within the space of twelve pages. Acker provides a helpful summary of the views of both Princetonians and takes particular issue with Livingstone’s interpretation of Warfield (see on Livingstone below).

Finally, David N. Livingstone and Mark A. Noll are the most sympathetic exponents of Warfield’s openness to evolutionary thought. In his fourteen-page article, “B. B. Warfield, the Theory of Evolution and Early Fundamentalism,” Livingstone pointed to George Frederick Wright and B. B. Warfield in order to demonstrate that early (pre-1920) fundamentalism was much more open to evolutionary theories than the later fundamentalism would allow and thereby challenged modern fundamentalists who use Warfield’s defense of inerrancy in support of their more strict creationist position. Livingstone together with Noll continued in this vein in their joint twenty-page article published by the History of Science Society entitled, “B. B. Warfield 1851-1921: A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist.” Here Livingstone and Noll present Warfield as becoming less and then again more open to some form(s) of evolution throughout his theological career; and although there is no sustained analysis of Warfield’s teaching as such, they do commend his as a balanced mediating view between the two extremes of the overly strict inerrantist on the one hand and the atheistic Darwinian on the other. Their assertion that Warfield actually held and taught a form of evolutionism, however, is certainly open to objection. Finally, in Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings [of B. B. Warfield], editors Noll and Livingstone provide in one volume the most significant of Warfield’s writings on the issues of the Bible and science, evolution, Darwin, and Darwinianism, with brief introductions to each.

In short, the little that has been written to date specifically of Warfield’s thinking on evolution is primarily from a sympathetic yet broadly Evangelical viewpoint. Warfield’s theories themselves have yet to receive extended examination, and the compatibility of his evolutionary and inerrantist views has yet to be evaluated.

35 Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1980.
37 EQ 58:1 (January 1986).
38 Isis 91 (2000).
Studies in Warfield’s Apologetics

Warfield held Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck in highest esteem but expressed pointed disagreement with their presuppositionalist apologetic method and their understanding of the relation of faith and reason. For all the theological agreement between them their approach to apologetics differed fundamentally. For Warfield the Dutch theologians made too little of the value and role of evidence in displaying the truth of Christianity to the unbeliever. He agreed with them that only the Holy Spirit could open the heart, but he disagreed with them as to the role of evidence in that work.

Stephen Spencer’s *A Comparison and Evaluation of the Old Princeton and Amsterdam Apologetic* fairly represents and examines the respective views of each side in this discussion, but his treatment of Warfield specifically is only slight. Cornelius Van Til, more the follower and developer of Kuyper’s apologetic ideals, was successful in revolutionizing Reformed apologetics. His departure from the more evidentialist apologetics of old Princeton, influential though it has been, has stirred relatively little interest by way of Warfield’s apologetics and the “Scottish Common Sense Realism” which is said to underlie his apologetic method. Van Til, in other respects an heir of old Princeton, rejected Warfield’s apologetic method in favor of a development of that of Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, and as a result most Reformed apologists today prefer Van Til’s presuppositionalism over Warfield’s evidentialism. Scattered throughout Van Til’s works are various criticisms of Warfield, but his only sustained criticism of Warfield’s apologetic method is in his chapter “Kuyper and Warfield on Apologetics” in *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* where he highlights both the points of similarity and difference between the Dutch and Old Princeton schools respectively.

Although the treatment of Warfield specifically is slight, in their “Reformed Theology at Princeton and Amsterdam in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Reappraisal” Donald Fuller and Richard Gardiner provide a very helpful investigation of the underlying philosophical presuppositions of the two respective schools. They argue pointedly that the growing consensus “that Old Princeton was influenced heavily by the Enlightenment while Amsterdam held to traditional Calvinism shall, in the end, prove to be exactly backwards.” Another briefer work is provided by Hendrik Van den Belt’s “An Apology for the Lack of Apologetics: The Influence of the Discussion with B. B. Warfield on H. Bavinck’s Stone Lectures” — a brief summary of the differing epistemologies and approaches to apologetics of Bavinck and Warfield and an exploration of the possible influence of Warfield’s “friendly and instructive” critique of Bavinck’s earlier work on Bavinck’s Stone Lectures.

William Livingstone’s dissertation, *The Princeton Apologetic as Exemplified by the Work of Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen: A Study in American Theology, 1880-1930* treats not so much Warfield’s philosophical apologetic as his theological polemic within the context of the rising controversies of the Protestantism of his day. Livingstone is very critical of the old Princeton theology and alleges that it

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43 P.105.
44 A paper delivered at the Annual Conference (2009) of the Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology in celebration of Herman Bavinck’s Stone Lectures *Philosophy and Revelation*, April 17, 2009; unpublished.
45 Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1948.
departed from its Reformed heritage and at the same time fought needlessly to demonstrate the truthfulness of old doctrine. Moreover, in Livingstone’s view, Warfield failed to accomplish his own apologetic purpose and by it hurt his own cause. Old Princeton’s attempt to “prove truth” is misguided and dangerous, according to Livingstone, who appears to have been motivated by a desire to vindicate the “progressive orthodoxy” of the newer Protestantism (of the 1940s) over against the dogmatic positions of old Princeton, particularly in regards to its doctrine of scripture and of the nature of Christ’s death. Livingstone’s work, which amounts to a theological critique of old Princeton, concludes that in these two areas (the doctrines of scripture and the nature of Christ’s death), Warfield did more damage to his own cause than to that of his opponents. Livingstone accuses Warfield of treating his opponents unfairly and “credits” Warfield for a scholarly defense of a position which is impossible to prove.

In his *Benjamin B. Warfield: Historian of Doctrine in Defense of Orthodoxy*,46 James McClanahan examines Warfield’s use of historical theology in his defense of the Reformed faith. This, again, is not so much an analysis of Warfield’s philosophical apologetic or his apologetic method. Nor is it a holistic presentation of the Warfield theology. It is a thorough and helpful examination of Warfield’s historical-theological method and an attempt to establish the Princeton theology as firmly within the stream of historic (ancient and Reformed) Christianity. It is the liberal/modernist, Warfield argued, who bears the burden of proof that traditional dogmatic/doctrinal Christianity is not authentic Christianity. To be sure, McClanahan argues in agreement with Warfield, Christianity, in order to be relevant and clear has always reshaped and restated its teaching in terms of its own age, but Christianity has never permitted the ideas of its age to state its teaching. Biblical Christianity has “developed” in the sense of restatement and increasingly careful articulation of its beliefs, and this is the duty of each successive generation of Christians. But Christianity does not give way its ground to the influences current in any given age. Development there has been, but only a development that is continuous with its heritage and apostolic moorings. Warfield argued strenuously that the dogmatic Reformed tradition is in keeping with this line of continuity stretching back through the WCF, John Calvin, Augustine, and Tertullian, to the NT itself; contemporary liberalism, on the other hand, constitutes an unprecedented departure. In brief, Warfield’s burden is to show that the faith for which he contended was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Thomas Allen Schultz gives brief attention to Warfield’s apologetic in his *The Noetic Effects of Sin in John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, With its Implications for the Apologetic Methodology of B. B. Warfield and Cornelius van Til*.47 The analysis, however, is not in-depth and does not provide a significant contribution to the discussion.

Paul Kjoss Helseth’s “B.B. Warfield on The Apologetic Nature of Christian Scholarship: An Analysis of His Solution to the Problem of the Relationship Between Christianity and Culture”48 makes an excellent contribution to the study of Warfield’s epistemology and apologetic method in relation to the findings of unbelieving scholarship. He argues briefly that Warfield did not mark a departure from the traditional Reformed understanding and presents Warfield as a model for apologetic method today.

In his chapter “Benjamin B. Warfield,”49 Andrew Hoffecker surveys Warfield’s sustained reaction to

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nineteenth-century scholarship and his commitment to the Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Hoffecker illustrates well Warfield’s vast yet firm grasp of new ideas from all sides as well as his ability to give answer and defend the Reformed faith. He further offers a brief but compelling challenge to the presuppositional apologists of the Kuyper-Van Til school to consider the ground for interaction with their evidentialist counterparts which Warfield provides.

Riddlebarger comes the closest to giving an overall analysis of Warfield’s apologetic. However, it still remains to be demonstrated just how much Warfield was dependent upon the Scottish Common Sense Realism to which he adhered. Whether his arguments were grounded in Realist thought to whatever degree, or whether his arguments merely resembled the Scottish philosophy by reason of the common ideas involved, is yet to be established. Also, the question of the Biblical legitimacy — the exegetical justification — of Warfield’s approach has yet to be addressed at length, as also the question of the compatibility of his apologetic method and his Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity.

In his *Benjamin B. Warfield and Right Reason: The Clarity of General Revelation and Function of Apologetics* and the revised version, *Reason and Worldviews: Warfield, Kuyper, Van Til and Plantinga on the Clarity of General Revelation and Function of Apologetics* Owen Anderson provides a helpful historical survey and brief analysis of the diverging philosophical issues between Warfield, Kuyper, and Warfield’s Reformed legacy, focusing on the question of the knowledge of God and man’s inexcusability.

In his *B. B. Warfield’s Scientifically Constructive Theological Scholarship* David P. Smith argues that the Scottish Common Sense philosophy was not a heavy influence in the shaping of Warfield’s apologetic, and it does not provide adequate accounting for the breadth and depth of his scholarship. Similarly, Kim Riddlebarger’s *The Lion of Princeton: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on Apologetics, Theological Method and Polemics* rather exhaustively examines Warfield’s apologetic in light of his (Warfield’s) critics and concludes that they have not evaluated him thoroughly or fairly and that his supposed reliance on Scottish Common Sense Realism is overstated. Riddlebarger demonstrates that Warfield’s apologetic is consistent with the Calvinism he so vigorously espoused and that the charge of incipient Arminianism is ill-founded.

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Other Subjects and Lesser Contributions

In *B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought*[^4] editor Gary Johnson has brought together an excellent collection of essays, several of which were published previously in various theological journals, and provides a most helpful introduction to Warfield. This work includes various analyses of Warfield’s apologetic method and his doctrine of scripture, and most helpful are the contributions by Bradley Gundlach — his two biographical entries, each extensively researched, are a particularly helpful contribution to Warfield studies.

Robert W. Cousar provides a summary of Warfield’s christology and soteriology in his *Benjamin Warfield: His Christology and Soteriology.*[^5] Although Cousar is generally sympathetic to Warfield he tends to see Warfield as a bit rationalistic, and his work does not reflect the warmth and richness of Warfield’s work in these areas that were so central to his theological outlook. The work is atomistic in its approach and does not seem to have a holistic grasp of Warfield. On the whole the work is not particularly useful and has never been published.

Andrew Hoffecker’s dissertation, entitled *The Relation Between the Objective and Subjective Aspects in Christian Religious Experience: A Study in the Systematic and Devotional Writings of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield,*[^6] later published under the title, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians,*[^7] provides the only examination of Warfield as a theologian of Christian experience. The work treats three leading Princetonian theologians, and about sixty pages are devoted to Warfield. Of these, about twenty pages examine Warfield’s interpretation of Calvin in regard to the work of the Spirit and the Word. Hoffecker also looks briefly at Warfield’s doctrines of dependence upon God, faith, the inner witness of the Spirit, and his analyses of the religious experiences of Augustine, Edwards, Finney, and Darwin. Following this is a quick survey of Warfield’s devotional writings (sermons). He concludes that Warfield follows in the Princetonian tradition of faith and life, but the treatment is only cursory. Hoffecker picks up on this theme in his chapter “Benjamin B. Warfield” mentioned above and briefly highlights Warfield’s concern both for private, personal piety and for cultural transformation. Still, virtually no analysis is given of Warfield’s studies in perfectionism and sanctification, and any survey of the “affectionate” qualities of his systematic and polemic writings is completely lacking. Hoffecker has made an important first step, but particularly in relation to Warfield, there is much more to be done here. Warfield’s doctrine of the Christian life deserves more attention.

Among Warfield’s most extensive writings are his polemics against the perfectionist and higher life movements. This has received little attention, but in his dissertation *The Old Princeton Presbyterian Response to the Holiness Movement in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in America* David Cho devotes about forty pages to Warfield’s extensive studies in perfectionism. The bulk of this discussion concerns the broad theological teachings of the various perfectionists, while only a few pages are given to an extracting from it of Warfield’s doctrine of sanctification.[^8] Warfield’s criticism of Lewis Sperry Chafer’s views of Sanctification has caught the notice of Randall Gleason, who in his “B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer On

briefly surveys the backgrounds of both Warfield and Chafer in order to place their respective emphases in personal and theological context. The article highlights the views of each theologian in summary fashion only, but it is a helpful introduction to the study. When Warfield published his articles critiquing the victorious life teachings, W. H. Griffith Thomas offered a respectful rejoinder in his “The Victorious Christian Life.” Thomas contends that Warfield misrepresents the victorious life teachings and spends much time denying various allegations made by Warfield. He offers little Biblical argument but concludes with an appeal to Warfield to consider the vital Christian experience that characterizes the Keswick movement.

Although Warfield produced a vigorous work on the subject of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, only Jon Mark Ruthven has given these writings any sustained critical analysis. Writing from a Pentecostal perspective in his *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic of Benjamin B. Warfield,* Ruthven takes strong exception to Warfield on all counts and concludes that Warfield’s arguments fail on all scores — theological, exegetical, and presuppositional. Overall, however, Ruthven represents Warfield accurately and interacts with him fairly. The validity and force of his argument against Warfield, of course, is a matter of opinion. On the one hand, anyone seeking to vindicate Warfield’s view will have to take Ruthven into consideration. But on the other hand, Warfield deserves further hearing in this regard from someone more open to considering his arguments seriously. In a 1997 *JETS* article entitled “Christian Prophecy And Canon In the Second Century: A Response to B. B. Warfield,” Gary Shogren seeks to answer Warfield’s historical argument that the gift of prophecy ended with the apostles and completion of the NT canon. He culls references to the prophetic gift from the postapostolic literature and concludes, contrary to Warfield, that the gift did, in fact, endure beyond the first century. Shogren does not, however, test the claims which he finds, but simply takes them at face value as evidence for the continuance of the gift. He has thus provided groundwork for further discussion, but he has certainly not disproved Warfield’s thesis.

Warfield was somewhat a scholarly recluse who was involved in very little outside the seminary. It is no doubt in large measure due to this that no official biography of him has yet been produced: apart from his writings, there just is relatively little about Warfield to know! Bradley Gundlach of Trinity International University, however, is hoping to produce a Warfield biography in a few years. In his carefully-researched two volume history of Princeton Seminary, entitled *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony,* David Calhoun does not devote the space to Warfield that he does to the earlier Princetonians and to Machen, but he does offer a nice overview of Warfield’s life and career. Stanley Bamberg offers a brief overview of Warfield’s life and career in his “Our Image of Warfield Must Go.” Bamberg notes Warfield’s major accomplishments and highlights his contributions for Evangelicals today. Hugh Thomson Kerr, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield Professor of Theology Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary, offered the Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures for 1982. In the first of these lectures Kerr summarizes Warfield’s academic and professional accomplishments, bemoans his “panic fear” of critical scholarship, and presents some pleasant vignettes of his life. Valuable and enjoyable though these contributions are, they illustrate the lament above.

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65 Lecture one was transcribed by Princeton archivist, William Harris. Not published.
that no definitive Warfield biography has yet been produced. Bradley Gundlach has provided a very good start in the two articles mentioned above, and his projected comprehensive Warfield biography will be a welcome contribution to Warfield studies indeed.

Even if it is relatively brief, Richard Lints makes an important first step in the analysis of Warfield’s theological method in his “Two Theologies Or One? Warfield and Vos on the Nature of Theology.” He points out the newness of the Biblical-theological perspective and that although Warfield emphasized the importance of it, it did not seem to affect his theological method greatly. There is much more to be done here, but Lints has made a helpful start. From a broader perspective Wilber B. Wallis’s “Benjamin B. Warfield: Didactic and Polemical Theologian” provides a survey of the “life” of Warfield as viewed through his literary output. Wallis reflects an impressive level of acquaintance with Warfield’s writings and highlights the successive stages of Warfield’s literary career. The overview is helpful, even if very general.

In his book *The Princeton Theology* historian Mark Noll, well known for his interest in old Princeton, provides a sampling of the writings of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield on scripture, science, and theological method. He provides eleven (some incomplete) samples from Warfield’s articles and reviews, with a brief introduction to each. As intended, this is only an introduction to Warfield’s thinking on these themes.

Little effort has been spent in analyzing Warfield simply as a theologian and Biblical scholar. The breadth of his scholarship is widely appreciated, but there are almost no studies of his skills as a Biblical exegete and of his theological method. His polemical theology has been examined, but his exegetical precision and his method of “doing theology” — particularly in relation, say, to his mentor Charles Hodge — has not been addressed. Nor has there yet been presented an exploration of Warfield’s “theological center,” his controlling theological ideal. Virtually no work at all has been done on Warfield as a Trinitarian theologian. Warfield’s studies on the Trinity itself as well as on the Persons and works of the Father, Son, and Spirit are as of yet relatively unappreciated — likewise his work in soteriology. His contributions here deserve attention. However, Warfield’s Christology does receive attention in Harold F. Carl’s *Found in Human Form: The Maintenance and Defense of Orthodox Christology by Nineteenth Century American Reformed Theologians*. This comparative study of the Christologies of Charles Hodge, Robert Dabney, W. G. T. Shedd, and Warfield has not been published but provides a helpful summary of Warfield’s christological position and approach.

**This Present Work in Perspective**

More to our point, a complete theological portrait of this famous Princetonian has never been attempted. Towering figure though he was — and is — what still has not been produced is a global presentation, overall synthesis, distillation, and assessment of his theological career.

Warfield himself never produced a systematic theology. Indeed, he wrote few books of systematic analysis of Biblical themes. He was an “occasional” writer whose attention was given primarily to addressing

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67 This was published in two parts, *Covenant Seminary Review* 3 (Spring 1977):3-20, 73-94.
issues of current concern. His essays appeared by the score in various journals and periodicals and covered a broad range of Biblical and theological themes. And while these writings have been consulted in varying degree throughout the years since, they have yet to be analyzed in a holistic way\textsuperscript{70} in order to present a comprehensive portrait of Warfield’s theological career. As historian Mark Noll complains, “there exists no comprehensive account of Warfield’s theology.”\textsuperscript{71} This is the work undertaken here. The purpose will be to provide an accurate theological portrait of Warfield within the context of his own day. Analysis will be given also of his influence from his own day until our own. In the end, we should have an accurate theological summary of this outstanding Princeton theologian.

That this work has not yet been attempted may be due in part to the sheer number and difficulty of access to all of Warfield’s works. Warfield’s literary output was staggering, constituting many thousands of pages spread over many books and literally hundreds of journal and periodical articles and book reviews, and touching virtually every corner of biblical and theological studies. Several of his books have recently become more readily available, and many of his articles and book reviews have been collected and republished in the ten volumes of his \textit{Works} and the two volumes of his \textit{Selected Shorter Writings}. However, many scores of articles remain unavailable generally, found only in few libraries that hold century-old journals and such.\textsuperscript{72} By means of research in Princeton Seminary’s archives and the searching out of Warfield material at other places such as Princeton University and the Presbyterian Historical Society, I have obtained and studied all that Warfield published, as well as his extant classroom lecture notes and class notes taken by students. I have also taken into account all of significance that has been written to date in analysis of him. This present work provides a holistic reconstruction of Warfield’s global theological perspective based on a universal analysis of these works — a complete, systematic reconstruction of his theology, taking into consideration both his most academic and his more devotional writings. This work is a necessary step as foundational to more critical investigations of Warfield in the future. I have begun further work toward a comprehensive annotated bibliography of his works which, it is hoped, will facilitate this study further.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{70} A search of the \textit{Theological Journal CD Rom}, vol. 1-10 shows about 3,500 references to Warfield. Yet of these only thirteen articles focus on Warfield or some aspect of his theology specifically, and only one of these seeks to give a broader (although very brief) perspective of his work and accomplishments.

\textsuperscript{71} Mark Noll, “B. B. Warfield,” 28.

\textsuperscript{72} Note that the bibliography lists some four pages of un-republished Warfield titles, yet even this is not nearly an exhaustive list of his un-republished works.

\textsuperscript{73} In 1974 Roger Nicole and John E. Meeter published the comprehensive \textit{A Bibliography of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield} (Philipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing). This work, with only a very few titles overlooked, and though providing only a listing of each title, has proved very helpful in this present study. Roger Nicole has given me the rights to republish and amend their work as needed for use in my annotated bibliography.