

What the Bible Says, God Says: B. B. Warfield's Doctrine of Scripture

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Abstract

B. B. Warfield's writings continue to provide a highly influential Reformed Evangelical doctrine of Scripture that is faithful to the historic Christian view of the Bible. Warfield seeks to present the Bible's own doctrine of Scripture. His conviction that what the Bible says, God says is grounded on the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture which guarantees its inerrancy. Particular consideration is given to the mode of inspiration and the humanity of the Bible. Following the Westminster divines, Warfield argues for the necessity, clarity, sufficiency, preservation and translation of Scripture. The Bible mediates relationship with Christ and is God speaking to the believer.

The doctrine of Scripture is in some sense, or at least ought to be, foundational to all theology, and a particular approach to Scripture is one of the enduring defining characteristics of Evangelical and Reformed theology. We do well, therefore, to re-examine this fundamental doctrine especially if we aspire to be Evangelical and Reformed in our thinking.

Why Warfield?

A strong case can be made for beginning an examination of a Reformed Evangelical doctrine of Scripture with the work of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) as he is often acknowledged as the leading defender of a conservative evangelical view of the Bible.

For John Gerstner, a champion of inerrancy, Warfield's 'may well be the greatest contribution to the theme [of the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible] ever made by any Christian scholar'.¹

Andrew T. B. McGowan discusses Warfield and A. A. Hodge's 'classic expression' of the Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture² and says:

Warfield was undoubtedly a spiritual and theological giant whose work on Scripture is very important. The published collection of his writings on the subject provides a clear indication of his views on most of the controversial areas.... His work is of such quality and detail that he has left the church in his debt.³

Timothy Ward notes that Warfield's 'writings on Scripture have set the agenda for many debates on Scripture in the last century, especially in the United States'.⁴

Warfield continues to be read today, although perhaps not as much as he deserves to be, and his writings are relatively readily available.⁵ With his prominent and extensive historical and

¹ John H. Gerstner, 'Warfield's Case For Biblical Inerrancy', in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium On The Trustworthiness Of Scripture*, ed., John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974): 115-42, at 115.

² A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiritation of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 85, referring to Hodge and Warfield's article 'Inspiration', *Presbyterian Review* 2 (1881): 225-60, reprinted with an introduction by Roger R. Nicole (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1979).

³ McGowan, *Divine Spiritation*, 86-7.

⁴ Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 20.

⁵ This essay draws on B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter, 2 vols., (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company (1970- 73); B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 10 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House reprint, 2000). See also

theological studies of, amongst others, Augustine, Calvin and the Westminster Standards, for many contemporary Reformed Evangelicals Warfield is a key mediator and defender of the tradition.

Warfield, and the Old Princeton school, of which he is perhaps the most able spokesman, have greatly influenced Reformed Evangelical doctrines of Scripture. Though critical of Warfield's understanding of inspiration, Kern Robert Trembath highlights Warfield's impact. 'The significance of the role played by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) in the development of inspiration theory among evangelicals cannot be overestimated: "There is little doubt but that Warfield did more to shape recent Evangelical thinking on inspiration than any other theologian."'⁶

In particular, the approach of The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy is unmistakably Warfieldian,⁷ Warfield's mark is evident in numerous works, not least in the writings of James I. Packer,⁸ perhaps the most important Reformed Evangelical (Anglican) theologian of our day.

Warfield's writing was usually occasional and polemical or apologetic. His work on the doctrine of Scripture concentrates on a defence of the inspiration of the Bible and its consequent inerrancy,

John E. Meeter and Roger Nicole, *A Bibliography of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield 1851-1921* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974).

⁶ Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20, quoting W. J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 15.

⁷ The ICBI was formed in 1978 by approximately 300 Evangelical scholars and produced the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy which is reproduced in an appendix to J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* 2nd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993) and is also available in various places online including <<http://www.reformed.org/documents/icbi.html>> [last accessed 11 September 2009]. See also, for example, the ICBI books: Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), and Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy & the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), which provides papers from the 1982 Chicago conference on Biblical Hermeneutics.

⁸ See for example James I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1958), 77, 83, n.1, 86-88, 179. Ward comments that Packer's 'writings on Scripture since the 1950s have made one of the most significant contributions to the maintenance and defence of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture' (*Words of Life*, 138).

naturally in response to the challenges and issues that he perceived in his own day. A more broadly articulated doctrine of Scripture is to be found in Warfield's exposition of the Westminster Standards, to which he was a strict adherent. Study of what Warfield thought about the Bible therefore yields a standard, mainstream, and influential Evangelical doctrine of Scripture, although, of course, it is not exhaustive or unchallenged.

As Warfield did not produce a single standard systematic treatment of the doctrine of Scripture, most of this essay is given to exposition of his view and provides a fairly thorough original synthesis not otherwise readily available.

Warfield's basic thesis: what the Bible says, God says

Warfield's doctrine of Scripture may be summarised as 'what Scripture says, God says'⁹. The canon of Scripture is 'the Word of God written.'¹⁰ The following is a typical summary:

What this church-doctrine [of inspiration] is, it is scarcely necessary minutely to describe. It will suffice to remind ourselves that it looks upon the Bible as an oracular book, — as the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says, — not a book, then, in which one may, by searching, find some word of God, but a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God.¹¹

This simple statement ('what the Bible says, God says') is a profound one with far-reaching implications. Warfield's doctrine of Scripture and the Evangelical doctrine of Scripture more generally may legitimately be seen as the necessary out-working of this basic conviction. A proper doctrine of Scripture is therefore profoundly theological: it is grounded on the character and nature of the God who speaks the Scriptures and the relationship between God and his words.¹²

⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:92.

¹⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 1:33.

¹¹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:52.

¹² Discussed further below. It is also one of the chief concerns of Ward's *Words of Life* is to develop this point.

The traditional doctrine

Pace Ernest Sandeen, whose case is discussed further below, Warfield explicitly and accurately casts himself as a defender of the traditional 'church-doctrine of inspiration',¹³ rather than as a theological innovator. Warfield argues that 'this attitude of entire trust in every word of the Scriptures has been characteristic of the people of God from the very foundation of the church'¹⁴ and gives instances of such teaching from Origen, Irenaeus, Polycarp, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Rutherford, Baxter, Charles Hodge, Henry B. Smith, as well as various confessions.¹⁵ For Warfield, his doctrine of Scripture is not merely that of the Evangelical or Reformed party but is an expression of the basic and historically dominant Christian conviction that the Bible is God's word. McGowan makes a similar point of Warfield and quotes Mark Noll's conclusion that

Most Christians in most churches since the founding of Christianity have believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. Or at least they have believed that the Scriptures are inspired by God, and so are the words of eternal life. The term *inerrancy* was not common until the nineteenth century. But the conviction that God communicates in Scripture a revelation of himself and of his deeds, and that this revelation is entirely truthful, has always been the common belief of most Catholics, most Protestants, most Orthodox, and even most of the sects of the fringe of Christianity.¹⁶

Inspiration: the Bible is God-breathed words of God

For Warfield the written Word of God is the product of inspiration. Warfield defines the Reformed doctrine of inspiration thus: 'Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence (or, passively, the result of it,) exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the

¹³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:52.

¹⁴ Warfield, *Works*, 1: 53.

¹⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 1:54-55.

¹⁶ Mark Noll, 'A Brief History of Inerrancy, Mostly in America', in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 9-10, quoted in McGowan, *Divine Spiration*, 85.

words of God, and, therefore, perfectly infallible.¹⁷

Henry Krabbendam points out that 'Warfield does not construe a difference between infallibility and inerrancy.'¹⁸ As well as calling the Bible infallible, Warfield equally says that the influence of the Spirit and the divine co-authorship of the Bible preserves it 'from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship – thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy).'¹⁹

Fundamental to this understanding of inspiration is 2 Timothy 3:16. Warfield clarifies:

[T]he Greek word in this passage — θεόπνευστος — very distinctly does not mean 'inspired of God.'... The Greek term has... nothing to say of *inspiring* or *inspiration*: it speaks only of 'spiring' or 'spiration.' What it says of Scripture is, not that it is 'breathed into by God' or is the product of the Divine 'inbreathing' into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, 'God-breathed,' the product of the creative breath of God. In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them. No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted the Divine production of Scripture than that which is here employed.²⁰

The Scriptures, then, are inspired in the sense that they are breathed

¹⁷ Warfield, *Works*, 1:396. Warfield is willing to speak of inspiration more broadly as taking in the whole process of inscripturation or in a stricter more specialized sense as applying to the supernatural influence of the Spirit in guaranteeing that the human words of the Bible are also fully the errorless words of God.

¹⁸ Henry Krabbendam, 'B. B. Warfield Versus G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture', in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 413-446. Packer comments that the terms infallible and inerrant 'both have been so variously employed in theological discussion that they now bear no precise meaning at all!' *Fundamentalism*, 95. Some recent writers have advocated infallibility as a narrower notion than inerrancy, meaning that the Bible achieves God's purposes infallibly. This can be an attempt to sidestep the question of whether or not God means to affirm scientific and historical truth in speaking the Scriptures and whether or not he does so infallibly and inerrantly.

¹⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:173.

²⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 1:78-9.

out by God, God-Spirited,²¹ not in the sense that, say, Shakespeare may be said to be 'inspired' with some weaker meaning and not just because they can be 'inspiring'.²²

Warfield thus holds that the Bible is the word, or more exactly, the words of God, put into writing to be permanently authoritative for the Church. The Bible does not merely contain a general message or word of God nor are only some of its words to be identified with God's words. Rather, Warfield's defense of inspiration is both extensive and intensive. First, it extends to all parts of Scripture. Second, inspiration applies not only to the general message or thoughts of Scripture but to the actual words. He says, 'the Spirit's superintendence extends to the choice of the words of the human authors (verbal inspiration)'.²³

According to Warfield, 'the church-doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Bible' is 'the doctrine that the Bible is inspired not in part but fully, in all its elements alike...matters of history and science as well as of faith and practice, words as well as thoughts.'²⁴

The logic of inspiration

Inspiration is thus central to Warfield's doctrine of Scripture because it secures his basic thesis that the Bible is God's words written in such a way that what the Bible says, God says authoritatively for his church forever. Warfield's doctrine of God is therefore the underlying presumption of his doctrine of the words of God. For Warfield the attributes of God include 'unchangeableness...infinite knowledge and wisdom, infinite...power, infinite truth, righteousness, holiness and

²¹ This view of inspiration is emphasised in McGowan, *Divine Spiration* see esp. 38-43. Recall that πνεῦμα and רִיחַ may be translated breath, wind, or spirit.

²² Cf. Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): 'I shall propose that "the inspiration of the Bible" should be taken to refer not to empirical characteristics of the Bible itself but rather to the fact that the church confesses the Bible as God's primary means of inspiring salvation within itself' (5).

²³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:173.

²⁴ Warfield, *Works*, 1:59.

goodness'.²⁵ The words of God reflect (in part) the character of their speaker. It is because God is the sovereign, all-powerful, omniscient truth-telling God that his word is effective, authoritative and infallible. This logic may be seen at work in the passages already quoted above. Inspiration constitutes the Bible the words of God '*and, therefore, perfectly infallible.*'²⁶ It is implicit that, because God does not err nor lie, his words are inerrant. Similarly, God's words lack 'everything inconsistent with divine authorship', being entirely trustworthy and inerrant.²⁷

The mode of inspiration

Warfield is more concerned with the results of inspiration than with describing the process. He says: 'The Reformed Churches admit that this [the mode of inspiration] is inscrutable. They content themselves with defining carefully and holding fast the effects of the divine influence, leaving the mode of divine action by which it is brought about draped in mystery.'²⁸

Warfield's dominant understanding of the authorship of Scripture is by 'concurative operation'.²⁹ He understands the Bible to be a completely human and completely divine work.

According to this mode of conception [*concurus*] the whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities, which enter it, however, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluent with them; so 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.³⁰

In general, the human writers of Scripture and the Holy Spirit are co-authors.

²⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 9:111.

²⁶ Warfield, *Works*, 1:396, emphasis added.

²⁷ Warfield, *Works*, 1:173.

²⁸ Warfield, *Works*, 1:397.

²⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:15.

³⁰ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 2:629.

Warfield's account of inspiration is not simplistic or naive. He recognises that 'of course, these books were not produced suddenly by some miraculous act – handed down complete out of heaven, as the phrase goes; but, like all other products of time, are the ultimate effect of many processes cooperating through long periods.'³¹ These include God's sovereign providential preparation of the human authors so that, 'If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.'³²

Warfield repeatedly distances himself from mechanical dictation theories.³³ For example, he says,

At one time there arose in the Church, under the impulse of zeal to assert and safeguard the divinity of Scripture, a tendency toward so emphasizing the divine element as to exclude the human. The human writers of Scripture were conceived as mere implements in the hands of the Holy Ghost, by which (rather than through whom) he wrote the Scriptures. Men were not content to call the human authors of Scripture merely the penmen, the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit, but represented them as simply his pens. Inspiration, in this view, was conceived as a simple act of dictation; and it was denied that the human writers contributed any quality to the product, unless, indeed, it might be their hand-writing. This properly so-called, mechanical theory of inspiration was taught by a number of seventeenth century divines, in all Protestant communions alike – by Quenstedt, Calov, Hollaz, among the Lutherans; by Heidegger and Buxtorf, among the Reformed; by Richard Hooker, among the Anglicans; and by John White among the Puritans.³⁴

³¹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:100-101.

³² Warfield, *Works*, 1:101.

³³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:98-99; 6:262.

³⁴ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 1:543. Anthony N. S. Lane, 'B. B. Warfield on the Humanity of Scripture', *Vox Evangelica* 16 (1986) : 77-94, at 79, seeks to chart the development of Warfield's thinking about dictation theories of the Bible. Warfield cites Charles Hodge in support of the contention that 'the Reformed churches have never held such a [mechanical] theory [of inspiration].' (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* [Philadelphia, 1948], 421), whereas A. A. Hodge in *Inspiration* says that many former advocates of verbal inspiration had maintained 'extremely mechanical conceptions of Inspiration' (Hodge and Warfield, 'Inspiration', 233). Thereafter Warfield acknowledges that some seventeenth century theologians

Although James Barr, William Abraham and Clark Pinnock cannot see it, Lane is right to suggest that Warfield's account of *concursum* shows that a conservative view of inerrancy does not require a mechanical dictation theory of inspiration.³⁵ The following section gives further support to this claim.

The humanity of the Bible

In contrast to dictation theories of inspiration, Warfield repeatedly insists on the humanity of the Bible. After all, in the immediately preceding quotation above, Warfield is insisting that the human authors of Scripture are pen-men not pens! Nevertheless, it is unsurprising that in his polemical context Warfield is primarily concerned to defend the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy as the written words of God, since the divinity rather than the humanity of the Bible was the principal focus of conflict.³⁶

Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim's contention that with its doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration 'the Princeton position as

had taught a mechanical view, as the passage cited above shows. See also Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 2:628-630. Lane ('Warfield', 80) concludes that 'while Warfield seems to have changed his mind to some extent about the existence or otherwise of such theories in the past, he was consistent in rejecting them himself.'

³⁵ Lane, 'Warfield', 81 cites James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London, 1981), 290-293. Barr sees divine and human elements in conflict so that he would see allowing total divine authorship of the Bible as smuggling in dictation and for inerrantists to allow human elements as inconsistent. Abraham, *Divine*, 34, similarly argues that it is inconsistent of conservatives to hold inerrancy while rejecting dictation. For Pinnock: 'Materially they [conservatives] believe in it [dictation], but not formally.... It is quibbling over words to deny it so vigorously.' (Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* [San Francisco, 1984; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985], 101). Lane ('Warfield', 91-92) points out that Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1880-1930* (London and Chicago, 1970; reprint edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 124-125, clears Warfield of the dictation charge but 'inconsistently proceeds to claim that God's control of the words used by the writers [i.e. verbal inspiration] implies dictation' ('Warfield', 91-92).

³⁶ Warfield responds for example to Henry Preserved Smith's and Charles Briggs' arguments for limited inerrancy. See McGowan, *Divine Inspiration*, 86 for a little further detail.

brought to its most refined form by Warfield, allowed no practical manifestation of the human element in the Scripture³⁷ is demonstrably false.

It is true that Warfield would have disliked the talk of 'a human element in Scripture' if it is thought to suggest a paradigm in which the Bible is seen as partly human and partly divine, such that it might be divided up, or with the two elements in competition. Rather, Warfield insisted on 'a human side or aspect' to all Scripture.³⁸

It can be shown that Warfield recognised this human aspect of Scripture, even if he did not always develop in detail what it meant. He says that the case for verbal inspiration of the Bible insists that 'The book is throughout the work of human writers and is filled with the signs of their handiwork.'³⁹ As has been shown, these signs are more than their handwriting! Warfield explains further that 'No finding of traces of human influence in the style, wording or forms of statement or argumentation'⁴⁰ undermines the view that the Bible is the word of God. We should expect to find the Holy Ghost using human speech 'as He found it', with its human idioms and phrases. Thus the Bible can speak 'of the sun setting, or call the Roman world "the whole world."⁴¹ The 'intentions and professions of the [human] writers'⁴² must be considered in interpretation. For example, 'If the author does not profess to be quoting the Old Testament *verbatim*... then no objection arises against his verbal inspiration from the fact that he does not give the exact words.'⁴³

Warfield sees 'obvious marks of human authorship in the Biblical books' in 'for example, differences in vocabulary, style, and the like'.⁴⁴ It is even possible to see 'the marks of fervid impetuosity of a Paul — the tender saintliness of a John — the practical genius of a James, in the writings which through them the Holy Ghost has given for our

³⁷ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Row, 1979), 345.

³⁸ Warfield, *Works*, 1:96.

³⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:419.

⁴⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 1:419.

⁴¹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:419.

⁴² Warfield, *Works*, 1:420.

⁴³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:420.

⁴⁴ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 543-544.

guidance.⁴⁵

Warfield also claims approvingly that Calvin was not insensible to the 'human charm' of Scripture, paid attention to the art of the human authors and distinguished pleasant and harsh styles of the writers.⁴⁶

The prophetic mode of inspiration

However, despite his emphasis on concursive operation, Warfield does sometimes distinguish modes of inspiration in contrast to it and recognises 'the exception of the comparatively small portion [of Scripture] which came by direct revelation.'⁴⁷

In particular, Warfield speaks of prophetic revelation as especially characterized by internal suggestion of the words of God to the prophet and insists strongly that the words are not the prophet's own. When the Bible speaks of God putting words into the prophets' mouths (Jer. 1:9, cf. v.14; Isa. 51:16; 59:21; Num. 22:35; 23:5, 12, 16) Warfield argues that the words they speak are the Lord's and not their own, adding that: 'It is a process of nothing other than "dictation" which is thus described (2 S. xiv. 3.19⁴⁸).' Yet even here Warfield is cautious to explain: 'though, of course, the question may remain open of the exact processes by which this dictation is accomplished.'⁴⁹

Warfield argues that 'the universal mode of revelation to them [the prophets] was one which was in some sense a vision'⁵⁰ though

It is an exaggeration...to insist that...all the Divine communications made to the prophets must have come to them in external appearances and objective speech, addressed to and received by means of the bodily eye and ear.... It is also an exaggeration to insist that...the prophetic state must be conceived as that of strict ecstasy, involving the complete abeyance of all mental life on the part of the prophet (*amentia*).... It is quite

⁴⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 1:398.

⁴⁶ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 1:398-399.

⁴⁷ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 2:631.

⁴⁸ *Sic.* Warfield is citing 2 Samuel 14:3, 19.

⁴⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:19.

⁵⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 1:20, drawing on the language of prophets seeing the word of Yahweh, etc., e.g., Isa. 1:9; 2:1; 13:1; 29:10-11; Obad. 1; Amos 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; 2:1-2; Jer. 38:21; Lam. 2:14; Ezek. 1:3-4; 8:3.

clear from the records which the prophets themselves give us of their revelations that their intelligence was alert in all stages of their reception of them.⁵¹

According to Warfield 'the intelligence of the prophets is alert throughout the whole process of the reception and delivery of the revelation made through them'⁵² but not in the composition of their oracles or even their choice of words. In the prophetic visions,

... the movements of the mind are determined by something extraneous to the subject's will, or rather, since we are speaking of supernaturally given dreams and visions, extraneous to the totality of the subject's own psychoses. A power not himself takes possession of his consciousness and determines it according to its will.... This [divine] control is represented as complete and compelling, so that under it, the prophet becomes not the 'mover,' but the 'moved' in the formation of his message.... What the prophets are solicitous that their readers shall understand is that they are in no sense co-authors with God of their messages. Their messages are given them, given them entire, and given them precisely as they are given out by them.⁵³

2 Peter 1:20-21 is a key text for Warfield.⁵⁴ Though he warns that the notion must not be strained, there is a kind of 'passivity' on the part of the prophets as they are 'borne' by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵

Warfield discusses the objection that this has God 'dealing mechanically' with the prophets 'pouring His revelations into their souls to be simply received as in so many buckets'.⁵⁶ Warfield's response is that

...there is no just ground for asserting that God is incapable of employing the intelligent beings He has himself created and formed to His will, to proclaim His messages purely as He gives them to them; or of making truly the possession of rational minds conceptions which they themselves

⁵¹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:21.

⁵² Warfield, *Works*, 1:22.

⁵³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:22-23.

⁵⁴ See for example, Warfield, *Works*, 1:23, 27, 81-84.

⁵⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 1:23. Warfield distinguishes φέρειν (to be borne) from the weaker ἄγειν (to be led), or ὁδηγεῖν (to be guided or directed).

⁵⁶ Warfield, *Works*, 1:24.

had no part in creating.⁵⁷

Warfield argues that we can account for the differences of style and vocabulary between prophets' oracles not as a result of each particular prophet's own compositions but as 'the accommodation of the revealing God to the several prophetic individualities'.⁵⁸ He cautions that we should avoid thinking of the process as external or mechanical and that it is not 'as if the revealing Spirit artificially phrased the message which He gives through each prophet to the individuality of each, so as to create the illusion that the message comes out of the heart of the prophet himself'.⁵⁹ Rather, the process of inspiration

...includes, on the one hand, the 'accommodation' of the prophet, through his total preparation, to the speech in which the revelation to be given through him is to be clothed; and on the other involves little more than the consistent carrying into detail of the broad principle that God uses the instruments He employs in accordance with their natures.⁶⁰

Warfield argues that some degree of accommodation is necessary if God is to communicate in human language at all:

One would suppose it to lie in the very nature of the case that if the Lord makes any revelation to men, He would do it in the language of men; or, to individualize more explicitly, in the language of the man He employs as the organ of His revelation; and that naturally means, not the language of his nation or circle merely, but his own particular language, inclusive of all that gives individuality to his self-expression.⁶¹

The differences between Isaiah's and Jeremiah's oracles are not because Isaiah composed the ones he transmits and Jeremiah his, but because in speaking to and then through these particular individuals, God chose to use language they would have naturally used had they been composing the oracles they pass on.

If this seems hard to accept, it is important to note that Warfield is driven to this account of prophetic inspiration by his attention to the

⁵⁷ Warfield, *Works*, 1:24-25.

⁵⁸ Warfield, *Works*, 1:25.

⁵⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:25.

⁶⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 1:25.

⁶¹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:25.

phenomena of Scripture, whereas concursus is his preferred default view. As Lane says, 'it would not be fair to accuse him of being dogmatic at this point, for Warfield's use of the dictation category is precisely the victory of biblical data as he sees it (the prophets' self-understanding) over dogma (concurus).'⁶² Lane concludes judiciously,

To summarize, Warfield, through his conception of concursus does manage to hold together the divine and the human authorship of Scripture. His assertion that the Bible is truly the words of men is not just a formal rhetorical statement designed to evade the dreaded charge of dictation. It represents a real creative role that Warfield gives to the human authors. That he was not over-scared of being tarred with the dictation brush is seen by his acceptance of the term to describe the process of prophecy – because this is how he feels that the prophets themselves force him to describe it. It is only at this point that Warfield can fairly be charged with weakening the humanity of Scripture. Many will of course feel that he was right to do so in this particular instance.⁶³

The case for inspiration

Warfield's case for the inspiration of the Bible⁶⁴ is largely exegetical. As with the mode of inspiration considered above, it would be misleading to charge that his view of Scripture is simply the triumph of a preconceived theory or dogmatic presupposition over the phenomena of Scripture. Warfield maintains that it is by interacting with the raw data of the Bible itself that one is driven to a commitment to inerrancy. He says,

It [the doctrine of verbal inspiration] is based wholly upon an exegetical fact. It is based on the exegetical fact that our Lord and His apostles held this doctrine of Scripture, and everywhere deal with the Scriptures of the Old Testament in accordance with it, as the very Word of God, even in their narrative parts. This is a commonplace of exegetical science, the

⁶² Lane, 'Warfield', 87.

⁶³ Lane, 'Warfield', 88. Similarly, Krabbendam asks: 'Did he [Warfield] emphasize the divine element to the point that Scripture is deified and its humanity is relegated to obscurity, or even excluded?' And concludes: 'The answer to this question must be decidedly in the negative.' ('Warfield', 426.)

⁶⁴ See also Gerstner, 'Warfield's Case'.

common possession of the critical schools of the left and of the right, a prominent and unmistakable deliverance of Biblical Theology.⁶⁵

Whilst the church has given an impressively united and enduring testimony to the authority of Scripture, the case for inspiration does not depend on the traditional witness of the church. Rather, the church down the centuries has rightly read the doctrine of inspiration out of the Bible itself. As Warfield says,

...this [church-doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture] is the doctrine of inspiration which was held by the writers of the New Testament and by Jesus as reported in the Gospels. It is this simple fact that has commended it to the church of all ages as the true doctrine; and in it we may surely recognize an even more impressive fact than that of the existence of a stable, abiding church-doctrine standing over against the many theories of the day, - the fact, namely, that the church-doctrine of inspiration was the Bible doctrine before it was the church-doctrine, and is the church-doctrine only because it is the Bible doctrine.⁶⁶

Warfield rejects the notion that his defense of inerrancy involves a vicious circle: he claims he is not presupposing and using the infallibility of the Bible to demonstrate the infallibility of the Bible.⁶⁷ Warfield says,

It is obvious that the primary source of evidence for inspiration... is the declarations of Scripture itself. (1) This is not reasoning in a circle: the question of inspiration does not come into discussion until the general trustworthiness of the Scriptures as sources for Christian doctrine has already been established; and the establishment of this belongs to the general 'evidences of Christianity,' and not to the specific evidence for inspiration.⁶⁸

Rather, Warfield attempts a disinterested historical study of the Bible

⁶⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 1:180.

⁶⁶ Warfield, *Works*, 1:60.

⁶⁷ In the final analysis, an argument for ultimate authority must in a sense be circular and self-referential since an authority is no longer ultimate if it is authorised by something else. There can be no higher authorisation for God's word than God himself speaking.

⁶⁸ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 2:632.

to establish the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament.⁶⁹ Warfield finds that Jesus endorses⁷⁰ the Old Testament and commissions and authorises the New Testament. If the apostles are thought to be trustworthy teachers of doctrine, Warfield argues that they must be believed when they make claims for their own authority.⁷¹

Sandeen argues that the Princeton theologians departed from the Reformed tradition by de-emphasising the witness of the Holy Spirit to the authority of the Bible in favour of a complete dependence on reason emphasising the objective external evidence for the inspiration of Scripture.⁷² Balmer and Woodbridge concede that 'Sandeen points out correctly that B. B. Warfield did tend to emphasize the external evidences for the Bible's authority'⁷³ but they argue that 'on the other hand Warfield did not neglect the importance of the Holy Spirit as Sandeen and others have proposed'⁷⁴ citing the following passage from Warfield in support of their contention:

It lies more fundamentally still in the postulate that these Scriptures are accredited to us as the revelation of God solely by the testimony of the Holy Spirit – that without this testimony they lie before us inert and without effect on our hearts and minds, while with it they become not merely the power of God unto salvation, but also the vitalizing source of our knowledge of God.⁷⁵

Some Reformed Evangelical commentators, especially those influenced by Cornelius Van Til's presuppositionalist epistemology,⁷⁶

⁶⁹ For a more recent attempt at this sort of approach see John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Guildford: Eagle, 1993).

⁷⁰ E.g., Warfield, *Works*, 1:84-90.

⁷¹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:212-213.

⁷² Ernest R. Sandeen, 'The Princeton Theology: One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism' *Church History* 31 S (1962): 307-321, esp. 310-12.

⁷³ Randall H. Balmer & John D. Woodbridge, 'The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal', in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1992 edition): 251-279, at 271.

⁷⁴ Balmer and Woodbridge, 'Princetonians', 271.

⁷⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 5:115.

⁷⁶ See e.g., Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 46-48, 117, 551, 596-612. Similarly see John Frame's comments on Wenham's *Christ and the Bible* in *Banner of Truth* 118-119 (July-Aug., 1973) available at <<http://www.frame->

have thought that Warfield's apologetic for the inerrancy of the Bible is excessively evidentialist and rationalistic, underestimating the noetic effects of the fall and assuming that it is possible to demonstrate the truth of Christianity and the inspiration of the Bible to the satisfaction of a supposedly 'neutral' disinterested enquirer. It is worth noting this caution, but as has been shown, Warfield was well aware of the necessity of the Spirit's work in bringing about a proper acceptance of the Scriptures.

The Westminster Confession doctrine of Scripture

Warfield calls the Westminster Confession 'the richest and fullest formulation of Reformed thought...the most complete, the most admirable, the most perfect statement of the essential Christian doctrine of Holy Scripture which has ever been formed by man. Here the vital faith of the church is brought to full expression'.⁷⁷ Similarly, and more specifically, he says, 'There is certainly in the whole mass of confessional literature no more nobly conceived or ably wrought-out statement of doctrine than the chapter "Of the Holy Scripture," which the Westminster Divines placed at the head of their Confession and laid at the foundation of their system of doctrine.'⁷⁸

He argues that the Confession represents the mature consensus of Reformed theology:⁷⁹ 'the Westminster doctrine of Holy Scripture is the general teaching of the Reformed theology'⁸⁰ and 'no single assertion is made in the first chapter of the Confession which is not the common faith of the whole Reformed theology'.⁸¹

It is largely necessary to depend on Warfield's approving exposition of the Westminster Confession for his account of a doctrine of Scripture which goes beyond the occasional defense of inspiration and inerrancy that has been considered above.

poythress.org/frame_articles/1973Wenham.html> [last accessed 17 September 2009].

⁷⁷ Warfield, *Works*, 1:57.

⁷⁸ Warfield, *Works*, 6:155.

⁷⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 6:159. Similarly, Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 2:561.

⁸⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 6:161.

⁸¹ Warfield, *Works*, 6:169.

The necessity of Scripture

Warfield rejects the view that 'special redemptive revelation, has been communicated in deeds, not in words'.⁸² Revelation aims to produce knowledge and understanding for the sake of salvation, so 'the series of redemptive acts of God has not been left to explain itself, but the explanatory word has been added to it.'⁸³ Further, revelation is in fact itself a redemptive act of God.⁸⁴ The Bible is a revelation rather than just a record of, or witness to, revelation.

The necessity of special revelation preserved in Scripture follows from the insufficiency of natural revelation for salvation and the cessation of supernatural revelation.⁸⁵

...it pleased the Lord...for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment of the Church...to commit the same [the declarations of his will] wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.⁸⁶

For Warfield the necessity of the Scriptures rests on the fact that

...they are the permanent embodiment and sole divinely safeguarded and, indeed, only trustworthy, extant form in which the revelation of God and of His will which is necessary to salvation exists...they are necessary, since this alone saving revelation is extant now only in their pages.⁸⁷

The clarity of Scripture

Warfield defends the Westminster Standards' understanding of the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture, arguing that it sufficiently clearly teaches 'those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation...in some place or other'⁸⁸ that both the learned and the unlearned may understand it adequately for its purposes,

⁸² Warfield, *Works*, 1:11.

⁸³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:12.

⁸⁴ Warfield, *Works*, 1:12-13.

⁸⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 6:193-195, citing WCF, 1.1; 10.4; WLC, q. 60.

⁸⁶ WCF, 1.1, quoted in Warfield, *Works*, 6:194-95.

⁸⁷ Warfield, *Works*, 6:196.

⁸⁸ Warfield, *Works*, 6:232.

with ‘the due use of ordinary means’ including ‘the inward illumination of the Spirit of God.’⁸⁹ He is careful to say that, ‘It is, of course, not absurdly intended that every Biblical doctrine is taught in the Scriptures with equal clearness, with equal explicitness, with equal frequency.’⁹⁰ Warfield recognizes Scripture’s ‘frequent obscurities, its difficulties, its problems and its profound depths darkening to all human gaze.’⁹¹

The sufficiency of Scripture

Warfield affirms the completeness, finality and sufficiency of Scripture for the purposes for which it is given.⁹² Warfield carefully notes that the sufficiency of Scripture is a circumscribed doctrine: ‘It is not affirmed that the Scriptures contain all truth, or even all religious truth; or that no other truth, or even religious truth, is attainable or verifiable by men through other sources of knowledge.’⁹³

The Scriptures are however in need of no ‘supplement...to instruct us “what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.” It [the Westminster Confession] does affirm the absolute objective completeness of Scripture as a guide to the service of God, to faith, and to life.’⁹⁴

The preservation, transmission and translation of Scripture

Warfield summarises that ‘the Confession affirms the providential preservation of the inspired Scriptures in purity in the originals, and the adequate purity of the Word of God in translations.’⁹⁵

For Warfield such a doctrine follows from the facts outlined above that God intends Scripture to be the trustworthy, necessary, clear and sufficient means by which he actually does reveal himself subsequent to the Bible’s incription.

⁸⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 6:233.

⁹⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 1:208.

⁹¹ Warfield, *Works*, 6:233.

⁹² Warfield, *Works*, 6:224, citing WCF, 1.6.

⁹³ Warfield, *Works*, 6:224.

⁹⁴ Warfield, *Works*, 6:225.

⁹⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 6:237.

For Warfield as for the Westminster divines it was the original autographs of Scripture that were inspired,⁹⁶ and the original text that is 'authentic' and authoritative in the highest sense.⁹⁷

Sandeen argues that this emphasis on the original autographs as infallibly inspired is a theological innovation and a clear departure from the Reformed tradition, saying, 'once again Princeton is caught propagating a dogma which is flatly contradicted by the Westminster Confession' on the singular care and providence of God which has kept the text pure and authentic in all ages.⁹⁸ Sandeen contends that under the attack of modernism and in a context where the doctrine of Scripture was relatively under developed, Warfield and others invented the notion of infallible autographs. Conveniently for Warfield, since these autographs are lost, they are immune to the attacks of higher criticism and so it would be impossible to prove any error in the Bible as originally given, because every alleged mistake could be blamed on a later copyist. In Sandeen's view, 'the Princeton professors' insistence that they were doing nothing new, while creating a unique apologetic which flew in the face of the standards they were claiming to protect, cannot be judged as an historically honest or laudable program.'⁹⁹

However, *contra* Sandeen, Balmer and Woodbridge have shown that 'A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield did not view themselves as special innovators when they crafted their 1881 article on inspiration. They understood that their predecessors at Princeton held the doctrine of biblical infallibility in the original autographs as did Christians from other communions and other centuries.'¹⁰⁰

Balmer and Woodbridge demonstrate that Sandeen's account seriously misrepresents the doctrine of Warfield and the other Princetonians:

Professor Sandeen's presentation of the Princetonians generally portrays them as innovators, theologically quite removed from 'the Reformed tradition' and from other Christian communions.... [I]n reality their

⁹⁶ Warfield, *Works*, 6:238.

⁹⁷ Warfield, *Works*, 6:237.

⁹⁸ Sandeen, 'Princeton', 317.

⁹⁹ Sandeen, 'Princeton', 318.

¹⁰⁰ Balmer and Woodbridge, 'Princetonians', 268.

commitment to biblical infallibility echoed the teachings of various Christians, from St. Augustine to Calvin to William Whitaker to William Ames. Moreover their emphasis on the infallibility of the original autographs was shared by other Evangelicals in the nineteenth century. These Evangelicals, like earlier Christian humanists, assumed that the textual critic should attempt to recover the originals to whatever extent it is possible to do so, and that the Bible's claims about its own inspiration applied only to the original writings.¹⁰¹

Warfield argues that the Confession sees the original language copies of the autographs as preserved in their purity by the providential care of God, but not infallibly so. He allows for errors in the copies but argues that 'What mistake is in one copy is corrected in another'¹⁰² so that 'the genuine text has been kept safe in the multitude of copies, so as never to be out of the reach of the Church of God in the use of ordinary means.'¹⁰³ According to Warfield, the Westminster divines 'meant to assert that the various readings in the several copies did not prevent the preservation of the text absolutely pure in the multiplicity of copies'.¹⁰⁴

Most Evangelicals would be generally sympathetic to Warfield's insistence that it is possible to be confident about the original authentic text of the Bible. By the providence of God, the text of the Bible is remarkably well preserved and it is common to hear Evangelicals say, as Warfield does, that no point of doctrine hangs on a disputed text.¹⁰⁵ However, this is probably an instance similar to the case of Warfield's account of the prophetic mode of inspiration in which Warfield's Reformed Evangelical successors would not necessarily follow him in detail with complete confidence, if he is

¹⁰¹ Balmer and Woodbridge, 'Princetonians', 271.

¹⁰² Warfield, *Works*, 6:238.

¹⁰³ Warfield, *Works*, 6:239.

¹⁰⁴ Warfield, *Works*, 6:240.

¹⁰⁵ Warfield, *Works*, 6:241. For example, Ward says: 'it turns out that God providentially oversaw the naturally fallible process of the copying and transmission of the texts, with the result that those many texts which have been preserved make it possible, where they do differ from one another, to reconstruct the wording of the original with a very high degree of confidence in almost every case.... Although in some places in Scripture doubt still remains over the precise wording of the original text, no teaching of any significance depends on such a disputed text.' (*Words of Life*, 91.)

taken to mean that textual criticism can establish the original text precisely and unmistakably in every case.

Relationship with Christ and the Bible

Critics of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture have sometimes feared that it places the Bible in the place that properly belongs only to Christ.¹⁰⁶

For example, J. F. Peter criticises Warfield for 'failure to give a proper place to the fact of Jesus Christ'.¹⁰⁷ On Peter's view it is a very serious failing in Warfield that he allegedly does not adequately appreciate the unique fact of the person of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God. Peter claims that, 'It is a pity that he [Warfield] did not... make Christ the norm by which other modes of revelation are to be assessed.'¹⁰⁸ However, this criticism of Warfield cannot be sustained. As was discussed above, Warfield clearly makes the appeal he does to Scripture as the authoritative written words of God largely because he is persuaded that this was Jesus' own view of the Bible. *Contra* Peter, Jesus is therefore serving precisely as Warfield's 'norm by which other modes of revelation are to be assessed.' Peter follows T. F. Torrance's criticism of Warfield. In a review of *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, Torrance said,

The basic error that lurks in the scholastic idea of verbal inspiration is that

¹⁰⁶ For example, see the discussion in John Barton, *People of the Book? The authority of the Bible in Christianity* (Louisville, KY; Westminster / John Knox, 1988) and the conservative evangelical response in Timothy Ward, 'The Incarnation and Scripture' in David Peterson, ed., *The Word Became Flesh: Evangelicals and the Incarnation – papers from the sixth Oak Hill College Annual School of Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 152-184. Barton argues that: 'it is not primarily the Bible that is the Word of God, but Jesus Christ. I do not think one could find a single Christian who would dissent from this proposition, for to do so would plainly be to commit what is sometimes called bibliolatry: the elevation of the Bible above Christ himself... Christians are not those who believe in the Bible, but those who believe in Christ.' (*People*, 81, 83). Ward explains: 'Barton is arguing that the classical doctrine of Scripture leads inevitably to the Bible taking some of the ground that only Christ should occupy in the lives of Christian believers' ('Incarnation and Scripture', 155); see also Ward, *Words of Life*.

¹⁰⁷ J. F. Peter, 'Warfield on the Scriptures', *RTR* 16.3 (October 1957): 76-84, at 77.

¹⁰⁸ Peter, 'Warfield', 79.

it amounts to an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. It is only strictly christological theology which can obviate that heresy, but Dr. Warfield's theory of inspiration neglects the christological basis of the doctrine of Scripture, and fails therefore to take the measure both of the mystery of revelation and the depth of sin in the human mind.¹⁰⁹

Warfield is alive to such concerns and is careful to state the supremacy of Christ over the Bible. In his view the Bible mediates and preserves rather than threatens or replaces the authority of Christ:

Christianity is often called a book-religion. It would be more exact to say that it is a religion which has a book. Its foundations are laid by apostles and prophets...but Jesus Christ alone is the chief corner-stone. He is its only basis; he, its only head; and he alone has authority in his Church. But he has chosen to found his Church not directly by his own hands, speaking the word of God, say for instance, in thunder-tones from heaven; but through the instrumentality of a body of apostles, chosen and trained by himself, endowed with gifts and graces from the Holy Ghost, and sent forth into the world as his authoritative agents for proclaiming a gospel which he placed within their lips and which is none the less his authoritative word, that it is through them that he speaks.¹¹⁰

Similarly, for Warfield and the Westminster divines, the ultimate authority is not somehow the Bible *per se* in abstraction but God 'the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture',¹¹¹ always remembering that the Spirit speaks all the words of Scripture.

Warfield thus warns against pitting Christ against the apostles and their teaching as it is preserved authoritatively in the New Testament for, 'we have no Christ except the one whom the apostles have given us.'¹¹² A high view of the Bible does not threaten the place and authority of Christ since the Scriptures are the instrument through which we know Christ and by which he governs his church:

... the cry, 'Back to Christ!' away from the teaching of His apostles, whose teaching He Himself represents as His own, only delivered by His Spirit through their mouths, is an invitation to desert Christ Himself. It is an

¹⁰⁹ T. F. Torrance, 'Review of B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*', *SJT* 7.1 (1954): 104-108, at 107.

¹¹⁰ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 2:537.

¹¹¹ WCF, 1.10.

¹¹² Warfield, *Works*, 1:187.

invitation to draw back from the Christ of the Bible to some Christ of our own fancy, from the only real to some imaginary Christ.¹¹³

Committed to the uniqueness of Christ, Warfield is willing to make only limited and cautious use of an analogy between the incarnation of the Word and the inscripturation of the divine words:

There is no hypostatic union between the Divine and the human in Scripture; we cannot parallel the 'inscripturation' of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God. The Scriptures are merely the product of Divine and human forces working together to produce a product in the production of which the human forces work under the initiation and prevalent direction of the Divine: the person of Our Lord unites in itself Divine and human natures, each of which retains its distinctness while operating only in relation to the other. Between such diverse things there can exist only a remote analogy; and, in point of fact, the analogy in the present instance amounts to no more than that in both cases Divine and human factors are involved, though very differently. In the one they unite to constitute a Divine-human person, in the other they cooperate to perform a Divine-human work. Even so distant an analogy may enable us, however, to recognize that as, in the case of Our Lord's person, the human nature remains truly human while yet it can never fall into sin or error because it can never act out of relation with the Divine nature into conjunction with which it has been brought; so in the case of the production of Scripture by the conjoint actions of human and Divine factors, the human factors have acted as human factors, and have left their mark on the product as such, and yet cannot have fallen into that error which we say it is human to fall into, because they have not acted apart from the Divine factors, by themselves, but only under their unerring guidance.¹¹⁴

Instead of emphasizing the incarnation as an analogy for Scripture, Warfield prefers to speak of the concurrent operation of the human and the divine in the authorship of the Bible against the background of God's sovereign providence and in the light of God's immanence and transcendence. He sees the work of inspiration as analogous to God's work in governing the universe and individual salvation where the reality of the divine work and rule on the one hand, and human

¹¹³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:189.

¹¹⁴ Warfield, *Works*, 1:108-109.

effort and responsibility on the other are preserved.¹¹⁵

The purpose of Scripture

Warfield certainly emphasises the factual and propositional truthfulness of Scripture and insists that revelation is intended to produce knowledge.¹¹⁶ However, he also has a keen sense of the Bible as the living words of God which the Spirit speaks to believers. For example, when the apostle Paul calls the Bible ‘the oracles of God’ in Roman 3:2, Warfield says that, ‘From the point of view of this designation, Scripture is thought of as the living voice of God speaking in all its parts directly to the reader.’¹¹⁷

Warfield states that, ‘whenever and wherever Scripture speaks, that is the Holy Ghost speaking’¹¹⁸ so that, ‘The words of Scripture...are not dead words, but are instinct with life.’¹¹⁹ Warfield speaks of the duty to use the Bible ‘to the nourishing of the Christian life and hope.’¹²⁰

Warfield is devotional in his approach to the Bible as well as polemical in his defence of it: ‘We know how, as Christian men, we approach this Holy Book, — how unquestioningly we receive its statements of fact, bow before its enunciations of duty, tremble before its threatenings, and rest upon its promises.’¹²¹ Warfield pictures a Christian finding the Bible a ‘support in every trial’, to be trusted as ‘our guide throughout life’.¹²² The Christian can have confidence in the Bible’s every word for comfort and strength. Warfield commends ‘the vital faith of the people of God in the surety and trustworthiness of the Word of God.’¹²³ Christians rightly ‘count no labor wasted, in their efforts to distill from the very words of Holy Writ the honey which the Spirit has hidden in them for the comfort and delight of the

¹¹⁵ Warfield, *Shorter Writings*, 2:546-547.

¹¹⁶ Warfield, *Works*, 1:12.

¹¹⁷ Warfield, *Works*, 1:94.

¹¹⁸ Warfield, *Works*, 6:255.

¹¹⁹ Warfield, *Works*, 6:256.

¹²⁰ Warfield, *Works*, 6:240.

¹²¹ Warfield, *Works*, 1:53.

¹²² Warfield, *Works*, 1:53.

¹²³ Warfield, *Works*, 1:53.

saints'.¹²⁴

Conclusion: Warfield's doctrine of Scripture today

The Reformed Evangelical doctrine of Scripture has not always remained unchanged since Warfield's day, though many continue to adhere to it without any essential alteration. From a conservative perspective, perhaps the most significant departures from Warfield's doctrine of Scripture amongst Evangelicals are notions of limited infallibility, which deny strict inerrancy,¹²⁵ and what might be termed Barthian shifts of focus to reception of the Bible rather than inspiration as the decisive moment of its becoming the Word of God.¹²⁶ It is surprising how strikingly Warfield anticipates and suggests lines of response to some of these approaches, which have increased in prominence since his day.

Of course Warfield's doctrine of Scripture should not be thought of as the last word on the subject. More could and should undoubtedly be said. New objections and challenges have arisen since his time especially, for example, with Postmodern approaches to texts, and fresh thinking and application will be required. Neither should Warfield be thought above criticism. As was pointed out, he might not be followed by all Evangelicals in the detail of his description of the prophetic mode of inspiration or the preservation of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, study of Warfield's doctrine of Scripture remains instructive. His basic thesis that what the Bible says, God says is persuasive and his defence of inspiration and its consequences convincing. Warfield still helps us to think through many of entailments of the classic Christian confession that the Bible is the Word of God written. His work can continue to play an important part in clarifying and defending a Reformed Evangelical doctrine of

¹²⁴ Warfield, *Works*, 1:56.

¹²⁵ See, e.g., I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Pinnock, *Scripture*; James D. G. Dunn, 'The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture', *Churchman* 96 (1982): 104-122, and 201-225.

¹²⁶ See, e.g., G. C. Berkouwer, 'The Authority of Scripture (A Responsible Confession)', in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1980), and the discussion in Krabbendam, 'Warfield'.

Scripture for the 21st century that is faithful to the phenomena of Scripture, harmonious with the classic Church doctrine of inspiration, Christ oriented and soul nourishing.

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