

# Foreword

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## PRAYER AND WORK

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

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

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

—B. B. Warfield

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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