

FOREWORD TO DAVID SMITH'S *WARFIELD**

by Alan D. Strange

DAVID SMITH is part of a revolution: not a political revolution, but a scholarly one calling for a reexamination of how we understand B.B. Warfield, and others, with respect to their appropriation and use of Scottish Common Sense Realism (SCSR). Thomas Kuhn, renowned Princeton and MIT philosopher and historian of science, spoke of “normal” science as that which works within an established, stable paradigm. As anomalies—data that do not fit the reigning paradigm—accrue, however, they threaten the “normal” operations of science. Those who seek to make sense of such anomalies outside of the regnant paradigm become harbingers of a paradigm shift, part of a revolution to replace one interpretive grid with another.¹ David Smith is no Che Guevara, but he is involved in a revolution in the way in which scholars are viewing the philosophical influences that pertained at Old Princeton Theological Seminary in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Scholars of American intellectual and church history have, for more than the past half century, viewed Old Princeton (1812-1929; upon which latter date the Seminary was re-organized) as ruled by Scottish Common Sense Realism. David Smith, as part of a growing group of scholars, in this work, challenges the reigning paradigm of SCSR dominance at Old Princeton. Smith does not deny that the professors there imbibed and even promoted SCSR; he does deny, however, that SCSR enjoyed the hegemony with which the reigning paradigm of the last fifty years has credited it. This volume on Warfield is an important part of the revolution that is reassessing evidence and that involves a paradigm shift in which the influence of SCSR is properly relativized and contextualized within the life and history of Old Princeton.

To be sure, others like Paul Helseth² and Fred Zaspel³ have preceded Smith in this revolutionary undertaking. Helseth, Zaspel, Smith and others have directly addressed the need for a reassessment of Old Princeton and its relation to SCSR. Other scholars, however, who have worked within the old established paradigm—the one that depicts Old Princeton in the thrall of SCSR—began to soften their stance on this question in more recent years. For instance, E. Brooks Holifield does not take as hard a stance on Princeton-as-captive-to-SCSR as does his mentor, Sydney Ahlstrom, who may, in fact, be said to be one of the architects of the older paradigm. In his volume, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), Holifield divided his work into three major

* See David Smith, *B. B. Warfield's Scientifically Constructive Theological Scholarship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011). Used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers.

1. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Second Edition, Enlarged (1962; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

2. Paul Helseth, *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillippsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2010).

3. Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B.B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Pub., 2010).

parts, the second of which he labeled *The Baconian Style*, under which heading he treated, among others, the Princeton Theology. This means that he views the Princetonians as heirs of Francis Bacon and the Enlightenment scientific methodology that he developed and promoted. Though Holifield's work ends with the U.S. Civil War, what he says about the Princeton theology properly applies to the whole period of Old Princeton and would thus encompass both Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and B.B. Warfield (1851-1921).

Holifield, though a student at Yale of Sydney Ahlstrom, argues a bit more subtly than Ahlstrom did with respect to the Princeton theology (Smith deals at length with Ahlstrom herein). Ahlstrom thought that Princeton's adoption of Scottish Common Sense Realism amounted to a capitulation to rationalistic humanism and involved breaking the link with Hodge's Reformed heritage, sundering his theology from that of John Calvin and John Knox.⁴ Holifield does not put things quite that starkly. He acknowledges Hodge's use, for instance, of SCSR, but also writes, "If the Princetonians read scripture through Scottish Realism, however, they read it even more through lenses provided by seventeenth-century theologians and confessions."⁵ Here Holifield appears to exceed his mentor Ahlstrom in understanding that whatever use Princeton made of SCSR, it did not render them Calvinist defectors. And this is just the point of David Smith in this work.

Holifield's approach is more consonant with the approach of Richard Muller, who has rather decisively demonstrated that "Calvin against the Calvinists" theory (an approach that would pit Calvin against his successors of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) is no longer tenable. It was particularly the Barthianism of Ahlstrom and others that suggested that there was a chasm between Calvin and his followers, with Karl Barth and his followers seeing Calvin's successors as betraying, ossifying, and scholasticizing Calvin's original and fresh vision.

Many of us who were not at all influenced by Barth but by Ralph Danhof, John Vander Stelt, Cornelius Van Til, or other twentieth-century thinkers have believed that Princeton, under Hodge and Warfield particularly, capitulated to the objective, rationalist impulse and erected a theology that Ahlstrom has described as a "complex burden to be borne." In varying measures, significant historians of the American Presbyterian Church, like Mark Noll and George Marsden, also viewed Old Princeton through this lens, and have written about Old Princeton as captive to the Scottish philosophy (particularly when considering Old Princeton's "Enlightenment rationalism" or "modernism" in light of postmodernism). Nonetheless, as David Smith amply demonstrates in this volume, Warfield's appeal was to "right" reason, which ultimately only the regenerate enjoy, and the notion that Hodge and Warfield privileged the objective at the expense of the subjective suggests that those who insinuate such need to do more reading in these Princetonians.

I freely confess that as a young Van Tilian (in seminary and beyond), I, too, understood Hodge and Warfield as captive to SCSR and thus as Calvinists who had capitulated to Enlightenment modernism. David Smith, as part of the paradigm shift that does not pit Calvin against the Calvinists, helpfully demonstrates that whatever use that Warfield made of SCSR, he remained chiefly captive to the Scriptures and Confessions. In seminary, we heard

4. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24.3 (1955), 266.

5. Holifield, 381.

about how different Old Amsterdam (Kuyper, Bavinck, et al.) was from Old Princeton. It is the case, in this writer's opinion, that Hodge and Warfield did not understand the antithesis as did Kuyper and then Van Til (who had their own differences) and that the Princetonians might have conceded too much at points to reason. I am not, e.g., convinced of the wisdom of an approach in apologetics that seeks first to prove theism in general and then to demonstrate Christian theism. That Hodge and Warfield took such an approach, however, does not mean that they rejected presuppositional reasoning either, as Smith shows herein.

Van Til's approach is an advance, in my opinion, on the apologetics of Hodge and Warfield (Van Til's approach being one that more self-consciously and consistently employs a transcendental critique and sees the proof of the ontological Trinity and the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, i.e., the Christian worldview, as the impossibility of the contrary). But it is not at every point as radically different as hitherto claimed, albeit Van Til is, I believe, an epistemically more consistent Calvinist than the Princetonians. At the same time, I can appreciate Smith's warning about an over-emphasis on presuppositions, one that fails to examine, and account for, data in historical context. And, frankly, much that professes to be Van Tilian is simply post-modernism hiding under the skirts of Van Til. Certainly Hodge and Warfield were foundationalists, but so was Van Til when that term is rightly understood (what could be more foundational than Van Til's radical approach?).

Since becoming a student of Hodge, in particular, however, I have not found Hodge to be as different from Kuyper and Van Til as I earlier thought. To be sure, Old Amsterdam and Old Princeton have different approaches, the former rejecting apologetics (because of the antithesis) and the latter promoting apologetics (appearing to believe in epistemological common ground). Van Til, of course, cuts the difference, promoting apologetics (there is common grace, after all) while firmly affirming the antithesis. Smith's work, along with fellow-laborers like Paul Helseth, is helping us all to see that the difference between Kuyper, Van Til, and Warfield is not as great as we previously thought and as many of us were taught.

The origin of Scottish Common Sense Realism is somewhat disputed, but it is not disputed that its chief exponents were Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), who came to the philosophy chair at Glasgow in 1729; Thomas Reid (1710-1796), who taught moral philosophy at Glasgow, and whose *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764) was considered formative of the movement, particularly as an answer to the skepticism of David Hume; and Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), who succeeded Adam Ferguson in the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh in 1785 and was considered the popularizer of the movement because of his impressive rhetorical and oratorical gifts. It was particularly John Witherspoon, however, who imbibed SCSR and brought it with him to the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) when he came to serve as its sixth president (1768-1794).

What the SCSR movement taught is also not easy to summarize but Smith does a good job of it in this volume. For our purposes here we might note that Reid claimed that our most basic beliefs are intuitive and thus "common sense." This stands over against Hume, who claimed that we know only sensations, not the thing-in-itself. Knowledge, then, for Hume, because solipsistic, reduces to skepticism. Reid utterly rejects this, arguing, as Paul Helm notes, "No one can live as if there is no external world, or as if he had

no memory, or as if there is no other person in the universe besides himself. And so the theoretical repudiators of common sense must live a lie.”⁶ The Princetonians argued this way not infrequently. To be sure, SCSR suffered from epistemological shortcomings (granting the anti-theist a warrant for his common sense beliefs that he ought rather be made to justify), and was not ultimately the kind of answer that Hume’s skepticism needed.

Hodge and Warfield, whatever use they made of SCSR, remained firmly within the Calvinistic sphere, serving as loyal devotees of the Westminster Standards. Hodge, in all his writings, including and perhaps especially in his *Systematic Theology*, defended the system of doctrine contained in Westminster against all comers, particularly taking on all the German rationalists and higher critics of his day who sought to undermine the Word of God and its articulation in the Reformed confessions. Warfield did the same thing in his own day, though more so. Never was there a more thorough or devastating critic of modernism and liberalism than Warfield. As Smith puts it, “Warfield...gave a great amount of attention to countering the theological conceptions represented in the Protestant liberal theology of his day. He attempted to demonstrate that this latter theology was not only unfaithful to Scripture, but also failed to give a credible account of all the available data for which the theologian was accountable.” This was no mere rationalism or evidentialism on Warfield’s part, but a ministerial use of reason to examine the available evidence within a framework of faith. “Warfield,” Smith continued, “believed that this liberal theology was indebted to Schleiermacher and Kant, and sought to reconstruct Christianity upon an anthropocentric foundation that manifested itself in rationalism or mysticism” [page numbers not yet available].

Far from being a rationalist, then, Warfield, as had Hodge, opposed rationalism, on the one hand, and mysticism, on the other. If rationalism is the Word without the Spirit, then mysticism may be said to be the Spirit without the Word. Old Princeton, as did Calvin, opposed both, insisting that the same Spirit who inspired the Word must illumine it to the hearts and minds of the hearers. It is, in fact, this insistence on the part of Hodge and Warfield on the utter necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit for any real spiritual fruit or understanding that marks them as worthy heirs of Calvin. Warfield denominated Calvin as the “theologian of the Holy Spirit.” Calvin was rightly called this by Warfield because of Calvin’s more mature doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Before Calvin, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was underdeveloped in the West. It was Calvin and the Calvinists who developed a mature doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

A bit of reflection on the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit might prove useful here because it is a link in the chain binding all Calvinists together. In the ancient church, particularly in the West, the focus of doctrinal development fell primarily on the early loci in the systematic encyclopedia: the doctrine of God, man, and Christ, particularly as developed at the first four ecumenical councils; the doctrine of the Holy Spirit received scant treatment comparatively. Even in the extensive development of the doctrine of Christ, however, the doctrine of the *person* of Christ received most of the attention, leaving underdeveloped the doctrine of the *work* of Christ.

6. “Scottish Realism,” in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 759.

In the middle ages, the doctrine of the work of Christ received attention, particularly in the writings of Anselm, who moved us away from a ransom theory of the atonement to one involving the satisfaction of God's offended honor. This was progress, though not enjoyed by the Eastern church, which remained comparatively underdeveloped in her doctrine of the work of Christ. The Eastern church split in 1054 from the Western and had not experienced then or since much development from the time of the seven councils (occurring from the fourth through the eighth centuries), emphasizing experience (often mystical) more than doctrine.

Though the doctrine of the work of Christ developed in the West in the middle ages, the doctrine of soteriology and pneumatology, the application of the accomplished redemption that is ours in Christ, which is to say, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, lagged. Both the doctrine of the Spirit and of the church were present in Augustine (Ambrose having translated Basil of Caesarea's work on the Holy Spirit; the East, through the Cappadocians, Athanasius, and other had developed a doctrine of the Spirit, but it tended to be mystical), but the church in the middle ages developed the doctrine of the church, privileging ecclesiology over development of the doctrine of the Spirit. For example, Lombard and Aquinas do not develop pneumatology. Aquinas, in his thirteenth-century *Summa Theologica*, proceeds from the doctrine of God, man, and Christ to the doctrine of the sacraments and the church. A lack of significant development of the doctrine of the Spirit meant that the medieval church, particularly in the High Middle Ages, tended to downplay the divine application of redemption by the third person of the Holy Trinity and to emphasize the role of the sacraments and of the church, tending, in fact, to fold soteriology and pneumatology into ecclesiology. It is little wonder that without a vigorous doctrine of the Holy Spirit that there was an overdeveloped doctrine of the sacraments and of the church and the adoption of the view that the sacraments were efficacious *ex opere operato*.

It is not until Calvin (1509-1564) that we take up where Augustine (354-430) left off and develop the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Warfield recognizes this as the genius of the Protestant Reformation: the merits and mediation of God the Son who accomplished our salvation become ours when the Spirit, by the means of grace, applies it to us. In Calvin's *Institutes*, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not overleapt after the person and work of Christ are set forth. Rather, Calvin recognizes that as long as Christ remains outside of us, He does us no good. Calvin follows his discussion of the redemptive work of Christ with a vigorous and full treatment of the Holy Spirit's application of such to God's people. Warfield, in writing on Calvin, understood thoroughly what the Reformation brought to the table that had been missed in the medieval church: that we are justified, adopted, sanctified, and glorified, all because of the work of the Holy Spirit to bring Christ home to us and to bring us home to Christ.

The Princetonians were very much theologians of the Holy Spirit, Hodge and Warfield making it plain time and again that without the work of the Spirit there is no real understanding. The Spirit's subjective work, in other words, was necessary for objective knowledge, truly and properly. The Spirit, the Princetonians believed, was needed not only for soteric purposes, but for epistemic ones, as well. In fact, since they believed that knowledge was the first stage of and foundational to faith, one must have right knowledge and reason to enjoy saving faith. The Holy Spirit must work in us to renew us so that we can know the truth and embrace Christ freely offered in the gospel.

The Princetonians are not rationalists and cannot be because of their vigorous doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Old Princeton's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is key to understanding that, whatever use Princeton made of SCSR, the Princeton theologians never left the Reformed ranch. Being a theologian of the Holy Spirit marked Calvin and it marked his followers, the Calvinists, who enjoyed essential continuity with him because of a like commitment to the application of redemption by the Holy Spirit. In fact, Richard Gaffin has argued this as a distinctive feature of the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til: the conviction that only the one in whom the Spirit has worked enjoys both epistemic and soteric renewal. It is only the man who has the Spirit who receives the things of the Spirit and who has the mind of Christ. Only the spiritual man can rightly reason.⁷

The natural man can not rightly reason or properly understand anything. Calvin is saying this. Warfield is saying this. Van Til is saying this. Whatever differences those three have, they have in common a vigorous doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Princetonians, along with all true Calvinists, affirm the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit both to illumine the understanding with respect to revelation (both general and special) and to renew the heart. Andrew Hoffercker,⁸ David Calhoun,⁹ and a few others have understood this. The work of such was not able to dislodge the prevailing paradigm that Princeton was a captive of SCSR. But this work of Smith's, together with that of his fellow revolutionaries, contributes to what appears to be a paradigm shift in which the vigorous Calvinism of Old Princeton is once again appreciated.

Part of the charge against Warfield is that he so stresses the objective and the rational that he voids the faith of vitality. This is a base canard, made only by those who, after the fashion of Schleiermacher, would evacuate the faith of any intellectual content and reduce it to a feeling of dependence (trust without knowledge). A true rationalist, as some claim Warfield to be, would reduce faith to knowledge and assent and strip it of trust. Warfield makes neither of these missteps: he proclaims a fully biblical faith and sets forth a gospel to be believed and a Christ to be trusted. One of Warfield's great articles, in fact, was his masterful "Emotional Life of our Lord." This lengthy article spoke of how this one who was fully God (thus impassible) and fully man had a full-orbed emotional life. This article amply demonstrates that Warfield's theology was not rationalistic or poikilothermic, but as properly pious and warm-blooded as any theology might ever be.

Warfield's doctrine of the Holy Spirit saves him from rationalism and over-objectification. His work on the emotional life of Christ shows him to be no Stoic. His apologetics, while still pre-evangelism (unlike Van Til's), shows him to be warm, pious, and engaged with his hearers, an earnest defender of the Westminster Standards and of the historic Reformed faith, not one who capitulated to SCSR and fatally compromised the faith. Warfield believed in the unitary nature of truth: as a result, he rejected the fact/value dichotomy; affirmed both the objective and subjective in his epistemology; and, sensitive to history and the coordination of philosophy and theology, viewed apologetics as a partner of evangelism and integral to Christian discipleship. David

7. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Some Epistemological Reflections on I Cor. 2:6-16," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995), 103-124.

8. W. Andrew Hoffercker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1981).

9. David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 2 vv. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).

Smith's first-rate work is commended to the reading public in the demonstration of these assertions.