

CHARLES HODGE, INSPIRATION, TEXTUAL CRITICISM, AND THE PRINCETON DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

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The doctrine Hodge inherited from Princeton

In 1811 Ashbel Green wrote “The Plan of a Theological Seminary,” which the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church adopted in that year. The next year, Princeton Theological Seminary was founded. The “Plan” called for a curriculum centered on the detailed teaching of the Bible:

“Every student, at the close of his course, must have made the following attainments, viz. He must be well skilled in the original languages of the Holy Scriptures. He must be able to explain the principal difficulties which arise in the perusal of the Scriptures, either from erroneous translations, apparent inconsistencies, real obscurities, or objections arising from history, reason, or argument. . . .

“He must be able to support the doctrines of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, by a ready, pertinent, and abundant quotation of Scripture texts for that purpose.”¹

On August 12, 1812, the investiture of Princeton’s first professor, Archibald Alexander, took place. He preached on John 5:39, “Search the Scriptures.” David Calhoun has summarized this important, foundational address:

“Alexander stated that two distinct duties faced the person who responded to that command: ‘first, to ascertain that the Scriptures contain the truths of God; and secondly, to ascertain what those truths are.’

“Dr. Alexander took his hearers through an investigation of the canon of the Old and New Testaments, the integrity of the text, and the authenticity and inspiration of the Scriptures. . . . Since the expounder of the Bible should be well acquainted with the very ‘words by which the Holy Ghost teacheth,’ knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages, he said, is a ‘necessary prerequisite.’ . . .

“Alexander then described ‘a help which, though put in the last place in this discourse, is of more real importance than all the rest’: ‘the illumination and assistance of the Holy Spirit.’”²

During his address Alexander expressed his own conservative views regarding the practice of textual criticism, yet he recognized the need for this important study of the text of Scripture:

“It is of importance, therefore, to be able to prove that the Scriptures have suffered no material injury, from the fraud of designing men, or from the carelessness of transcribers. In the former part of the last century [the eighteenth] this was a subject of warm

altercation in the church. For whilst some maintained that the sacred text had not received the slightest injury from the ravages of time, others boldly asserted that it was greatly corrupted. The agitation of this question led to a more extensive and accurate examination and collation of manuscript codices than had been before made, and gave rise to that species of Biblical criticism, which has, within the last half-century, assumed so conspicuous a place in Theological science [now called textual criticism]. Distant countries were visited, the dark cells of cloisters and monasteries explored, and all important libraries ransacked in search of copies of the Scriptures. Learned men, with unparalleled diligence, employed their whole lives in the collation of manuscripts, and in noting every, even the smallest variation, in their readings. Their indefatigable labour and invincible perseverance in prosecuting this work are truly astonishing. It has indeed, much the appearance of laborious trifling; but upon the whole, though not always so designed, has proved serviceable to the cause of truth. For though the serious mind is at first astonished and confounded, upon being informed of the multitude of various readings, ...yet it is relieved, when on careful examination it appears that not more than one of a hundred of these, makes the slightest variation in the sense, and that the whole of them do not materially affect one important fact or doctrine. It is true, a few important texts, in our received copies, have by this critical process, been rendered suspicious; but this has been more than compensated by the certainty which has been stamped on the great body of Scripture, by having been subjected to this severe scrutiny.”³

As a fourteen year old boy, Charles Hodge witnessed this solemn address and ceremony, and remembered it vividly years later.⁴ Later “Hodge always affirmed that he was ‘moulded more by the character and instructions of Dr. Archibald Alexander, than by all other external influences combined.’”⁵ Hodge’s subsequent doctrine of Scripture was the same as Archibald Alexander’s.

Major points in Hodge’s doctrine

Charles Hodge was born December 27, 1797, and graduated from the College of New Jersey at Princeton and from Princeton Theological Seminary. He later taught for fifty-eight years at Princeton. Through his teaching and voluminous writing Hodge codified and exemplified what was to be known as the “Princeton theology.” This teaching was centered in the Bible, and reflected Hodge’s understanding of the Bible itself.

Scottish Common Sense Realism

It often has been stated that Hodge and the other Princetonians held a “rationalistic” view about the Bible. They regarded its truth as a fact provable in the same way as natural scientific theories were proved—by observation and induction. This approach placed great confidence in the “scientific method.” This method assumed that the mental processes of all people, Christian and non-Christian alike, would lead to proper conclusions if the relevant facts were known. This confidence in the senses and in human reasoning from them has been called Scottish Common Sense Realism; it had already been popularized among American Presbyterians by John

Witherspoon, who had come from Scotland to lead the College of New Jersey in the eighteenth century.

Archibald Alexander had taught from this perspective. His lecture “Nature and Evidence of Truth,” his first seminary lecture on philosophical subjects, given in 1812,

“stands squarely in the tradition of Scottish Common Sense Realism. His great intellectual nemesis, as it had been for the Common Sense philosophers [Thomas Reid, James Beattie, and Dugald Stewart], was David Hume. His defense against Hume, similarly, involved an assertion of self-evident truths, the reliability of physical senses, moral senses, and human testimony, and the givenness of cause-and-effect relationships”⁶

In similar fashion, Hodge often spoke of the theologian as gathering facts from the Bible, just as a scientist gathers facts from nature. Both sets of facts come from the same God of truth and can be observed and interpreted with confidence. An example can be seen in a sermon he preached on September 16, 1866, entitled “Thy Word is Truth.” His sermon outline contained these thoughts:

“The proposition, ‘Thy word is truth,’ is a very wide one. By the word of God is meant, or may be meant,

“1. Any revelation of God. A word is a revelation. It is an outward manifestation of thought. Anything, therefore, by which God reveals himself, his purposes, or any fact, is his word. In this sense the whole creation is an outspoken word of God. It reveals him. And all that it makes known of him, of his ways, his character, will or purposes is truth. It accords exactly with what God is, and what it legitimately teaches concerning him may, therefore, be relied upon with implicit confidence.

“The external world is not a phantasm, an empty show. It is not delusive, but is what it reveals itself to be, and never disappoints those who rely upon its teachings.”⁷

Calvinistic view of epistemology

Yet, in spite of this confidence in human observation and reasoning, Hodge consistently returned to the Calvinistic doctrine of the depravity of man and its effects on the mind. The unregenerate person is not able to come to the knowledge of God apart from the new birth given by the Holy Spirit. Hodge thus made this important modification to the Common Sense system.

“Hodge’s discussion of method [in his *Systematic Theology*] does show that the Princeton Theology had grown more sophisticated over the years. Hodge does not waver on the primacy of propositions, but he gives much more scope in the theological enterprise to ‘moral nature,’ the messages of the ‘heart,’ and the work of the Holy Spirit than had Alexander. He does not retreat from the Princeton insistence on the ‘facts’ of Scripture, but he shows more sensitivity than had Alexander to the way in which human perspective may distort an apprehension of facts. He relies almost as heavily on a mechanistic picture of the world, but he does not place the principal emphasis on evidentialist apologetics that Alexander did before him and Warfield would after.”⁸

In 1841 Hodge published *The Way of Life*, a short book for new Christians about the basics of the Christian life.⁹ Mark Noll has commented about the significance of this work. It stated that the Bible stands alone and proves itself to the elect apart from external proofs.

“*The Way of Life* is important for an analysis of the Princeton Theology because of its approach to Scripture. Hodge here treats the Bible as self-authenticating and is not troubled as his predecessor and successor were by the need to demonstrate its truthfulness. A full analysis of Princeton’s apologetic must take into account the reasoning of this work before rushing to conclusion about the ‘rationalistic’ or ‘scholastic’ character of the Princeton Theology.”¹⁰

Hodge pointed out that God must free the mind from its control by sin; then the Scriptures will be believed:

“If this evidence [for the Bible’s divine origin] is addressed to the understanding, there must be strength of mind enough to comprehend its nature and bearing; if addressed to the moral faculty, there must be moral sensibility to appreciate it, or it will be like light shining on the eyes of the blind. The internal evidence of the Scriptures is in a great measure of this latter kind. It consists in their perfect holiness. In proportion as men are corrupt, they are blind to this kind of evidence. It may exist in all its force, and men be insensible to it.”¹¹

In *The Way of Life* Hodge provided four arguments showing that “The Scriptures Are the Word of God”:¹²

- 1) The internal evidence of the Divine origin of the Scriptures
- 2) The internal evidence of their Divine origin is the proper ground of faith in the Scriptures
- 3) External evidence of the Divine origin of the Scriptures. The testimony of the church
- 4) The argument from prophecy

As far as difficulties in the Bible go, the faith produced by the Holy Spirit will overcome our doubts. Circumstantial evidence, incomplete knowledge, apparent contradictions with science—any of these of itself is not sufficient to destroy the Christian’s faith in the inspired Scripture. This attitude shows that Hodge followed a more Calvinistic approach than that of pure evidentialism. As he said in his *Systematic Theology*,

“The Christian need not renounce his faith in the plenary inspiration of the Bible, although there may be some things about it in its present state which he cannot account for.”¹³

Nature of inspiration

Hodge taught a complete system of theology regarding the inspiration of the Bible.¹⁴ This inspiration was truly divine, producing the Word of God written.¹⁵ It also was truly human in the manner of its style and expression. The Holy Spirit used men's own background and circumstances, and employed their own personalities, intellects, and interests. In only a few texts was there mechanical dictation; God used men as they were.¹⁶ The consequence of God's inspiring the Scriptures is their consequent infallibility and authority.

“In the sense in which the works of a man are his words, revealing his thoughts, will, purposes, the Scriptures are the word of God. He is their author. Their contents rest on his authority. They are not merely his as written by pious men, not a human form of divine truth, but God's own exhibition of truth.

“. . . From this it follows, (a) That they are infallible. (b) That they are holy. (c) That they are powerful. (d) That they are consistent. (e) That they are the appointed means of salvation.”¹⁷

Hodge arrived at his doctrine of Scripture by examining not only the statements in Scripture about itself, but also its contents in general. “Our views of inspiration must be determined by the phenomena of the Bible as well as from its didactic statements.”¹⁸ It was this procedure that led Hodge to the orthodox doctrine of inspiration: the Bible is the Word of God, but with integrity using the minds of the human authors.

Inerrancy of Scripture

In a sermon at Princeton preached in 1866, Hodge once again confessed his absolute faith in the Scriptures:

“The proposition ‘Thy word is truth’ is equivalent to, the Scriptures are true; all they teach concerning God, man, his character and state, his relation to God, concerning the person and work of Christ, the plan of salvation, the future life, and the future state of the Church is true. Everything conforms to what is real. Everything may be confidently relied upon. Nothing will ever disappoint legitimate expectation.”¹⁹

Unlike some “evangelical” scholars today, Hodge recognized that the Bible must be always true. Although not a textbook in science or history, its statements in those areas are true. This must follow from its divine inspiration. As the Word of God, the Bible cannot lie.

“The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are therefore infallible, and of divine authority in all things pertaining to faith and practice, and consequently free from all error whether of doctrine, fact, or precept.”²⁰

“Inspiration extends to all the contents of these several [canonical] books. It is not confined to moral and religious truths, but extends to the statements of facts, whether scientific, historical, or geographical. It is not confined to those facts the importance of

which is obvious, or which are involved in matters of doctrine. It extends to everything which any sacred writer asserts to be true.”²¹

Princeton (up until 1929) was widely known as a bastion in the defense of biblical inerrancy. Hodge claimed that this tradition did not start with him, but was biblical and catholic. He clearly defined and defended biblical inerrancy.

The Text of Scripture

That Charles Hodge regarded the original languages of Scripture as inspired is obvious, not only from his theological writings, but from his practice. For example, his published commentaries on Romans and First and Second Corinthians are clearly based on the Greek text.

Hodge recognized that the present text he was working with had various errors and discrepancies. These, he asserted, “may fairly be ascribed to errors of transcribers.”²²

As an interesting exercise, this writer compared Hodge’s commentary on Romans with a modern critical edition of the Greek New Testament.²³ Since he wrote this commentary in the 1830s and revised it in the 1860s, he did not yet have access to the earliest uncial manuscripts nor the papyri,²⁴ and he predated the work of Westcott and Hort, who published their New Testament text in 1881. Yet, even so, he demonstrated an understanding of many principles of textual criticism and a willingness to employ them in his interpretation of Scripture. In most places where the Received text differs from other families Hodge accepted the “common text” without comment.²⁵ Sometimes he did this when modern editions do not.²⁶ Hodge was not a textual critic, *per se*; most of his comments were exegetical and theological, and many times he simply skipped over textual questions. Occasionally, however, he would cite textual evidence for and against some reading without giving his own judgment.²⁷ Often, after discussion, he agreed with modern editors in supporting the Byzantine reading.²⁸ What is most significant is Hodge’s willingness to declare the Received or common text to be in error, and to adopt the readings from the older manuscripts which are accepted today; this he did in several places.²⁹ This insight into and acceptance of textual criticism was in advance of many other conservative scholars of his day.

Results of inspiration

If the Bible is truly infallible, it must have a bearing on what we believe in all areas of study. Two areas of special interest to Hodge were theology and science. The Bible’s relation to these two areas is an important part of the Princeton tradition.

Bible and science

Archibald Alexander wrote an essay in 1829 entitled “The Bible and the Natural World.” He declared that the Bible must be supreme over our understanding of nature, a position which should modify the classification of him as a pure evidentialist.

“That which reason often missed, or mistook, and at best spelled out with hesitation, the voice of revelation declares with decisive authority.

“Reason may vaunt herself when the discovery is made, but she owes her clearest light and firmest convictions to the voice of inspiration.

“The Bible furnishes the full and satisfactory commentary on the book of nature. With the Bible in our hands, the heavens shine with redoubled lustre. . . .

“Without the book of revelation, the book of nature would be as a volume sealed; but with this key, we can open its wonderful pages, and receive instruction from every creature of God.”³⁰

Hodge was a keen student of several branches of science. He took seriously scientific evidence and investigations. He believed that the Bible and science agree if they are properly understood:

“As these two great sources of knowledge must be consistent in their valid teachings, it is the duty of all parties to endeavor to exhibit that consistency. Philosophers should not ignore the teachings of the Bible, and theologians should not ignore the teachings of science. . . . It is unreasonable and irreligious for philosophers to adopt and promulgate theories inconsistent with the facts of the Bible, when those theories are sustained by only plausible evidence, which does not command the assent even of the body of scientific men themselves. On the other hand, it is unwise for theologians to insist on an interpretation of Scripture which brings it into collision with the facts of science.”³¹

Hodge followed this statement with two examples in which these two sources of knowledge should adjust to each other. First, some scientists were claiming that the human race evolved from more than one human pair; in this case the scientists needed to pay heed to theology, which clearly taught the unity of human race. Second, mediaeval theologians had rejected the Copernican view of the solar system; in that case theologians needed to adjust to science.

Hodge took scientific evidence seriously, but he never set it above clear biblical teaching. One example is his treatment of the newly popularized Darwinian theory of evolution. While Hodge admitted the possibility that God might have used evolution to produce the various species of living things, he vehemently opposed that theory as it was being promoted. His reason for this opposition was its denial of biblical teleology; the theory declared that God’s direct superintendence of creation was unnecessary, even intrusive, which directly opposed the biblical doctrine of creation.³²

Bible and theology

As far as Charles Hodge was concerned, the Bible is supreme over all other observed sources of information. The theologian can use all sources, but it is the Bible alone which infallibly interprets the information he gathers.

“The duty of the Christian theologian is to ascertain, collect, and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to Him. These facts are all

in the Bible. This is true, because everything revealed in nature, and in the constitution of man concerning God and our relation to Him, is contained and authenticated in Scripture. It is in this sense that 'the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants.' It may be admitted that the truths which the theologian has to reduce to a science, or, to speak more humbly, which he has to arrange and harmonize, are revealed partly in the external works of God, partly in the constitution of our nature, and partly in the religious experience of believers; yet lest we should err in our inferences from the works of God, we have a clearer revelation of all that nature reveals, in his word; and lest we should misinterpret our own consciousness and the laws of our nature, everything that can be legitimately learned from that source will be found recognized and authenticated in the Scriptures; and lest we should attribute to the teaching of the Spirit the operations of our own natural affections, we find in the Bible the norm and standard of all genuine religious experience. The Scriptures teach not only the truth, but what are the effects of the truth on the heart and conscience, when applied with saving power by the Holy Ghost."³³

The Bible is supreme over our subjective or intuitive conception of truth:

"All Truth must be consistent. God cannot contradict himself. He cannot force us by the constitution of the nature which He has given us to believe one thing, and in his Word command us to believe the opposite. . . . All the truths taught by the constitution of our nature or by religious experience, are recognized and authenticated in the Scriptures. This is a safeguard and a limit. We cannot assume this or that principle to be intuitively true, or this or that conclusion to be demonstrably certain, and make them a standard to which the Bible must conform. What is self-evidently true, must be proved to be so, and is always recognized in the Bible as true. . . . This inward teaching or demonstration of the Spirit is confined to truths objectively revealed in the Scriptures. It is given, says the Apostle, in order that we may know things gratuitously given, *i.e.*, revealed to us by God in his Word (1 Cor. ii.10-16). It is not, therefore a revelation of new truths, but an illumination of the mind, so that it apprehends the truth, excellence, and glory of things already revealed. . . . This experience is depicted in the Word of God. The Bible gives us not only the facts concerning God, and Christ, ourselves, and our relations to our Maker and Redeemer, but also records the legitimate effects of these truths on the minds of believers. So that we cannot appeal to our own feelings or inward experience, as a ground or guide, unless we can show that it agrees with the experience of holy men as recorded in the Scriptures."³⁴

Since the Bible is the Word of God, the most important and infallible rule for the theologian, the Bible must be interpreted as it is in fact, the revelation of God and his will. Hodge offered these three rules for interpreting the Bible:

"1. The words of Scripture are to be taken in their plain historical sense. . . .

"2. The Scriptures . . . are the work of one mind, and that mind divine. From this it follows that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. God cannot teach in one place anything which is inconsistent with what He teaches in another. Hence Scripture must

explain Scripture. If a passage admits of different interpretations, that only can be the true one which agrees with what the Bible teaches elsewhere on the same subject. . . . This rule of interpretation is sometimes called the analogy of Scripture, and sometimes the analogy of faith.

“3. The Scriptures are to be interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which guidance is to be humbly and earnestly sought. . . . The unrenewed mind is naturally blind to spiritual truth. . . . Congeniality of mind is necessary to the proper apprehension of divine things.”³⁵

Hodge faithfully followed these rules of interpretation as he developed over many years his system of theology. While not perfect and always consistent (no theologian is!), Hodge largely defined that Princeton doctrine of Scripture which for many years led the Bible-believing church against the inroads of unbelieving criticism and Modernism.

Hodge's successors at Princeton

Archibald Alexander Hodge

A. A. Hodge, son of Charles Hodge and his successor as the theology professor at Princeton, carried on the tradition and work of his renowned father. For one thing, he wrote a two-volume biography of his father.³⁶ He admired his father's basing his theology on the Bible rather than on the systems of other theologians or philosophers. Pointing out that Charles Hodge began his career as a biblical scholar, he observed that

“the result was inevitable that his theology should bear the mark of his own personal history and habit, and that it should be distinguished from that of the majority of his eminent contemporaries, alike of the New England and of the German schools, as being a simple induction from the teachings of Scripture, instead of being adjusted to, if not founded upon, some of the prevalent philosophical schemes of the day.”³⁷

A. A. Hodge recognized the importance of ascertaining as closely as possible the original Hebrew and Greek texts, employing ancient manuscripts, quotations from the church fathers, and ancient versions.³⁸ This work was being done in his day, and he approved of this work:

“Many hundreds of these [manuscripts] have been collated by eminent scholars in forming the text of modern Hebrew and Greek Testaments. The differences are found to be unimportant, and the essential integrity of our text is established.”³⁹

Hodge paid much attention to the doctrine of inspiration, and fully defended the biblical position taught at Princeton.⁴⁰ It was in defense of this doctrine that he approved the continuing work of textual criticism:

“The Church has never held the verbal infallibility of our translations, nor the perfect accuracy of the copies of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures now possessed by us. These copies confessedly contain many ‘discrepancies’ resulting from frequent transcription. It is, nevertheless, the unanimous testimony of Christian scholars, that while these variations embarrass the interpretation of many details, they neither involve the loss nor abate the evidence of a single essential fact or doctrine of Christianity. And it is moreover reassuring to know that believing criticism, by the discovery and collation of more ancient and accurate copies, is constantly advancing the Church to the possession of a more perfect text of the original Scriptures than she has enjoyed since the apostolic age.”⁴¹

A. A. Hodge & B. B. Warfield—Inspiration

One of the most famous and seminal Princeton works concerning the inspiration of the Bible was a journal article jointly written by A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield and published in the *Presbyterian Review* in 1881.⁴² This article has become the “definition” of the Princeton doctrine of inspiration. It defends the autographs as being without error of any kind, when properly interpreted, as the authors intended.

Hodge and Warfield recognized that the Scriptures had to be defended and interpreted in a normal manner. An error could be proved only if three conditions were met: (1) the original text of the passage is certain, (2) the interpretation of the passage is certainly the intended one, and (3) the passage is contrary to known truth or to another certainly preserved and interpreted passage of Scripture. They conclude, “We believe that it can be shown that this has never yet been successfully done in the case of one single alleged instance of error in the Word of God.”⁴³

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield

B. B. Warfield succeeded A. A. Hodge as theology professor at Princeton. In addition to the above-named series of articles written in conjunction with A. A. Hodge, Warfield, more than any other Princeton theology professor, tirelessly wrote in defense of the inerrancy of Scripture. Many of his most important articles have been reprinted in a book frequently consulted today.⁴⁴ Warfield, already a noted New Testament scholar and professor, applied his biblical learning to the theological debate with great skill and erudition.

Just before coming to teach at Princeton, Warfield had become involved in the field of New Testament textual criticism. After reviewing the Greek text of Westcott and Hort, which appeared in 1881, Warfield wrote other articles and finally a textbook on the subject.⁴⁵ This was the first such textbook written by an American. Warfield stated that this science shows the substantial reliability of the biblical text, and that significant variations were extremely limited. He encouraged the “proper use of textual criticism” to “establish the text even nearer to the original. . . . His positive attitude toward textual criticism influenced many to appreciate the science and to value the new translations of the Bible based upon its work.”⁴⁶

The view of Scripture defended by Warfield was that previously taught at Princeton. Only the autographs were directly inspired by God and without error. Copies and translations were supervised under God's providence, not his immediate inspiration, and thus may contain errors.⁴⁷ Warfield, writing of the insights of the Westminster divines into this point, made this distinction clear:

“The genuine text [of Scripture] 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 the ordinary means. In the sense of the Westminster Confession, therefore, the multiplication of copies of the Scriptures, the several early efforts towards the revision of the text, the raising up of scholars in our own day to collect and collate manuscripts, and to reform the text on scientific principles—of our Tischendorfs and Tregelleses, and Westcotts and Hort—*are all parts of God's singular care and providence in preserving His inspired Word pure.*”⁴⁸

John Gresham Machen

J. Gresham Machen was the famous New Testament professor at Princeton in the early twentieth century who fought the attacks of Modernism against the Bible. He carried on the Princeton doctrine of Scripture and encouraged its careful study by all Christians. His New Testament Greek primer is still in print,⁴⁹ and has been the effective introduction to the language for hundreds of theological students for many decades.

Machen dedicated his life to defending and promoting the trustworthiness of the New Testament. In addition to many other writings, two full-length scholarly works met the most advanced destructive critics on their own ground, and thoroughly vindicated the truth of the Scripture in all their statements discussed.⁵⁰

Concerning the text of the New Testament, Machen appreciated the work of modern textual criticism, not as an attack against the Bible, but as a necessary branch of biblical study. For those without the means to carry out this study personally, he had these words of encouragement about the state of the text of the New Testament:

“The study of the manuscripts of the Bible is a wonderfully reassuring thing. The Greek text of the New Testament, for example, from which the Authorized Version is taken is based not upon the best manuscripts but upon inferior manuscripts. Yet how infinitesimal is the difference between those inferior manuscripts and the best manuscripts—how infinitesimal in comparison with what they have in common! I do not mean that we ought not to take care in the use of the Bible: I do not mean that we ought not to try by every means within our power to determine what the exact wording of the autographs was. I do think that careful Christian scholarship is a very important thing. Yet God has provided very wonderfully for the plain man who is not a scholar. You do not have to depend for the assurance of your salvation and the ordering of your Christian lives upon passages where either the original wording or the meaning is doubtful. God has provided very wonderfully for the transmission of the text and for the translation into English. . . . Read it, my friends. It is God's Book, not man's book. It is a message from the King. Read it,

study it, trust it, live by it. Other books will deceive you, but not this book. This book is the Word of God.”⁵¹

Hodge’s successors today

As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Hodge, we can best honor his memory by studying, learning, believing, and following the teachings of the Bible. Unlike most contemporary theologians, Hodge was Bible-centered. His life, consecrated and dedicated to teaching the Scriptures, provides an inspiring example.

After the reorganization of Princeton Seminary in 1929, that school departed from its belief in the infallible Scriptures and from the theology of Charles Hodge. It remains for those of us who consider ourselves disciples of that Reformed Christianity taught by Hodge and his coworkers at Princeton to continue his tradition of faith, scholarship, and humility before the Holy Scriptures.

¹ Article 4, Section 1, “The Plan of a Theological Seminary,” quoted in David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Volume 1: Faith and Learning, 1812-1868* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), pp. 423-24; also found in Mark A. Noll, *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 57.

² Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 1/34-35.

³ Archibald Alexander, “Inaugural Address” (August 12, 1812); reproduced in Noll, *The Princeton Theology*, pp. 72-73.

⁴ Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 1/33.

⁵ Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 1/105.

⁶ Noll, *The Princeton Theology*, p. 61; the lecture is printed on pp. 62-71.

⁷ Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879), p. 9.

⁸ Noll, *The Princeton Theology*, p. 117.

⁹ Charles Hodge, *The Way of Life* (1841; reprinted, London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959).

¹⁰ Noll, *The Princeton Theology*, p. 132.

¹¹ Hodge, *The Way of Life*, p. 18.

¹² Hodge, *The Way of Life*, pp. 11-40.

¹³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1871-72; reprinted London: James Clarke & Co., 1960), 1/171.

¹⁴ Cf. his lengthy discussion of the true doctrine in *Systematic Theology*, 1/151-172.

¹⁵ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/154.

¹⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/156-57.

¹⁷ Sermon preached at Princeton, Feb. 18, 1854; Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, p. 288.

¹⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/169.

¹⁹ Preached Sept. 16, 1866; Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, p. 9.

²⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/152.

²¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/163.

²² Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/169.

²³ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1886; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), and *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., ed. by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

²⁴ See Hodge, *Romans*, pp. 260, 357, 409, 421, 422, 428, where \aleph and B are not included in lists of manuscripts (of course, neither are the even earlier papyri, discovered in the twentieth century); however, in one place (Rom. 11:6) Hodge does cite manuscript B, where it agrees with the Byzantine text against other Alexandrian witnesses; there Hodge refers to it and the Syriac translation as “important authorities,” p. 357.

²⁵ See, for example, at Rom. 4:19; 15:33, pp. 127, 444.

²⁶ As in Rom. 11:6; 14:10; 16:6, pp. 357, 422, 448.

- ²⁷ As in Rom. 13:9; 14:9, pp. 409, 421. In these two cases he seems to approve of the omission of the disputed words.
- ²⁸ As in Rom. 5:1; 8:13, 15:32; 16:25-27, pp. 131, 265, 428, 444.
- ²⁹ See Rom. 3:28; 8:1; 8:11; and the subscription to Romans, pp. 100, 250, 260, 454. Hodge refers to the earlier uncial manuscripts as “the best manuscripts,” and “the oldest and best manuscripts,” pp. 100, 454.
- ³⁰ Noll, *The Princeton Theology*, pp. 96-97.
- ³¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/56-57.
- ³² Charles Hodge, *What Is Darwinism?* (1874; reprinted and ed. by Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994); this is Hodge’s argument throughout the book, but see for example pp. 85-92.
- ³³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/11.
- ³⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/15-16.
- ³⁵ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1/187-88.
- ³⁶ A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge, D.D. LL.D., Professor in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1880).
- ³⁷ A. A. Hodge, Preface to Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. iii.
- ³⁸ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (1869; reprinted, London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), pp. 41-42.
- ³⁹ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁰ See the entire chapter “The Inspiration of the Bible,” in A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (rev. ed. 1879; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), pp. 65-81.
- ⁴¹ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 75.
- ⁴² “Inspiration,” *Presbyterian Review*, 2 (April, 1881); reprinted with an introduction and helpful appendices by Roger R. Nicole as Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).
- ⁴³ *Inspiration*, p. 36.
- ⁴⁴ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. by Samuel G. Craig, intro. by Cornelius Van Til (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948).
- ⁴⁵ *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (England, 1886).
- ⁴⁶ David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Volume 2: The Majestic Testimony, 1869-1929* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), pp. 113-14.
- ⁴⁷ Calhoun has gathered significant evidence showing that this was the Princeton position on textual criticism during Warfield’s time and before, see *Princeton Seminary*, 2/469, n. 2.
- ⁴⁸ B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: Mack Publishing Company, 1972), p. 239; this article was originally published in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 4 (1893).
- ⁴⁹ J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (1923; reprinted, New York: Macmillan, 1951).
- ⁵⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), and *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965).
- ⁵¹ J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (1936; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 43-44.