

***The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield.**  
Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, 1948; often reprinted.  
446 pages.

—Reviewed by William R. Kane.

This volume contains articles published separately for various audiences pertaining to the nature and authority of the Bible. The different chapters require a variety of skills and interests in the reading of them and even more so in authoring them. The author must have historical research skills with a wide knowledge of Classical Greek literature, Hellenistic literature, and the writings of the early church fathers. The author needs expertise in evaluating variant readings of manuscripts (contemporary literature). The author needs exegetical expertise in both Greek and Hebrew. The author needs skills in Latin and German for evaluating other literature that pertains to the subject matter. The author needs logical skills in evaluating the arguments of antagonists. The author needs to have a profound view of the majesty of God, His sovereignty over all, and the humility to receive the truth of God as it is set forth in His word. Because the book is a collection of articles for varying audiences, readers may be drawn to different sections of the book according to their background and interests.

The first and third chapters on “The Biblical Idea of Revelation” and “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration” are reprints of Warfield’s articles in *ISBE*. Both of these articles are doctrinal in emphasis. The Scripture data relating to the doctrine are collected and harmonized into the Scriptural doctrines. Objections to the doctrines as well as objections to the exegesis of the passages of Scripture in evidence of the doctrine are handled in a sympathetic way. For example the different modes of revelation imply different interaction between God and the prophet or man who is the organ of revelation. According to the mode of revelation, the organ of revelation appears entirely passive when the mode is “external manifestation,” somewhat passive and somewhat active when the mode is “internal suggestion,” and very active when the mode is “concurative operation.” The critic of Biblical Revelation would use this to argue that different revelations are somewhat more or somewhat less the word of God and of more or less authority. While admitting the data, Warfield denies their conclusion because the Scriptures treat the revelations which are a result of the different modes all equally as revelation from God and hence as authoritative. “The plausibility of such reasoning renders it the more necessary that we observe the unvarying emphasis which the Scriptures place on the absolute supernaturalness of revelation in all its modes alike.”

The second chapter on “The Church Doctrine of Inspiration” is likewise doctrinal in emphasis with the difference being that the evidence lies in the writings of the church fathers and the creeds of the church. It is that evidence that answers the question “what is” the church doctrine. A second question is “what is the origin?” or “where did it come from?” Was this a slowly developing doctrine in the history of the church? Has it arisen from disputes within the church? It is seen to be the church doctrine from the beginning, because it was the Scriptural doctrine of inspiration. The church doctrine presupposes the

Biblical doctrine, and both the origin and persistence of the doctrine are based on its being the Biblical doctrine.

The fourth chapter on “The Real Problem of Inspiration” has a polemical emphasis. Here we see Warfield the logician. The questions are “Has criticism destroyed the doctrine of verbal inspiration?” and “Is it necessary to reconstruct the doctrine of inspiration and develop a whole new theology?” Warfield presents in logical form the basis of the doctrine, i.e., what needs to be proven in order to prove the doctrine. Objections to the doctrine which do not disprove the logical foundation of the doctrine can in no way disprove the doctrine itself. Warfield writes, “It being a settled logical principle that so long as the proper evidence by which a proposition is established remains unrefuted, all so-called objections brought against it pass out of the category of objections to its truth into the category of difficulties to be adjusted to it.”

The last three chapters consider the nomenclature of the Greek New Testament with respect to the doctrine of inspiration. The student might consider checking the various words in a lexicon. If there is a consensus, perhaps one would need go no further. The question that is answered in these chapter is, what if the lexicon is wrong or if there be no consensus? The investigation to determine the *usus loquendi* of the words involves the usage of the words with their synonyms in Classic Greek, the choice of Greek words in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, as well as the use of those words by the Hellenists in their literature, especially considering the Jewish meaning of those words as distinguished from the classics. In some ways there is a narrowing or restriction of the meaning and also an extension in applying words to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. In the New Testament writers and the early church fathers, one sees the words used closer to the Hellenistic usage as over against the Classic Greek with a further extension to the New Testament Scriptures. It is interesting to read the manuscripts with their variant readings with arguments pro and con for a particular reading. Even though Warfield is distinguished as a great theologian and apologist, we are reminded of his early work in the New Testament and his work, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. It is these chapters which lay the groundwork for the doctrinal studies of the earlier chapters.

Finally, the Introduction, written by Cornelius Van Til, is not so much an introduction to the work of Warfield, but rather a postlude. It was written thirty years after the death of Warfield and deals with theological and philosophical thought of those who followed Warfield. As such the Introduction should be read after the Warfield articles rather than prior to them. Van Til writes, “Since Warfield’s day the matter of the philosophical presuppositions that underlie the factual discussion of the data of knowledge has come to stand in the foreground of interest.”

Modern day theologians have not dismissed the doctrine of verbal inspiration, they have dismissed all of Warfield’s arguments without ever combating them. They have done this by setting aside an unstated assumption of Warfield. Warfield assumes the old (or Christian or Biblical) view of epistemology. The modern philosophers deny the knowability of the world as it is in reality. We can only know the world as we see it.

By this assumption, there can be no such thing as a revelation from God to be received or rejected by man, only an encounter with God. The modern theory denies absolute truth which is separate from the Knower. Truth is made relative to the Knower; hence we have “my truth” rather than “the truth.” Van Til discusses the presuppositions of various systems. It is difficult reading unless one has a background in philosophy. One great deterrent in grasping the Introduction is that the same words are used with different meaning by the different systems. Suppose you play a game of chess. We observe the shape of the different pieces, the names of those pieces, the moves associated with each piece, and the colors that distinguish your pieces from your opponent’s. With respect to any piece, there is no confusion with respect to whose piece it is or how it moves. Let us alter the rules of the game somewhat. Both you and your opponent have the same color pieces. Further the piece that looks like a knight, is called a knight, and moves like a knight in a standard game. But your opponent’s piece that looks like a knight is called a bishop and moves like a bishop, and so forth for the other pieces. In your first game your mind is filled with confusion. The semantics attached to what I see for my pieces is different than that for my opponent. After considerable experience with this modified game, the mind is accustomed to the different semantics and the confusion is gone except for occasional relapses. In the Introduction, the same terms used with different semantics according to the system employing them leads to the same confusion. As we become philosophically competent with the variant semantics we become less confused. As we read Van Til’s comments, we must always determine the viewpoint of the person quoted or paraphrased before we attach meaning to the words.