

Owing to some administrative oversight I have only recently received my copy of *Churchman* for July 1977. I hope it is not too late to comment on Mike Parsons' article 'Warfield and Scripture', which has pride of place in this number. It is in one sense of no great importance what Warfield believed, since the Christian's loyalty is to the teaching of Christ and not to that of any mere man. But it would be a disservice to the cause of truth if a whole school of thought were to be misunderstood through association with a misunderstood Warfield.

Frankly I quite fail to recognize in this article the Warfield whose writings I know. It would require a profound grasp of the subtleties of Reformed theology and of contemporary philosophical influences to unravel the complete theological and apologetic stance of so voluminous and so widely read a writer, but four things are plain to me:

1) Warfield was not dominated by 'an almost hysterical quest for certainty'. He was very clear, and rightly so, that a theological divide separates those who regard the Holy Spirit as the author of Scripture and those who do not. On the first view, since God does not make mistakes, the writings which he 'breathed' were inerrant. On the other view, only the human writers can properly be regarded as authors, and what they have written is liable to error. The first view does provide a basis on which the mother may with integrity teach the Scriptures to the child at her knee. The view which denies inerrancy is difficult to define, for it can be expressed in an infinite number of ways, depending on different assessments of probabilities in intricate technical studies. To point out that belief in, and obedience to, the words of Christ is to build on rock and that to fail to do so is to build on sand, does not imply that the quest for absolute certainty is the chief motive for the former. Every thoughtful person knows that life is full of uncertainties. What the Christian preacher needs to know is what he can *truthfully* say to Christ's little ones. When he turns to Christ for guidance, Christ bids him to make His own words his foundation.

2) Mike Parsons seems to miss the point that Warfield's standpoint in all matters of Christian truth is based, not on an *a priori* philosophy, but on exegesis. However much he may unconsciously have been led astray by man-made thoughts, Warfield's desire was that his mind should be moulded by God's revelation. His attitude to Scripture is based on a massive induction of what the biblical writers and Jesus himself have to say. To him it was clear that their hundreds of quotations from, and allusions to, Scripture add up to one consistent belief that 'what this says, God says'. If it could be shown that Jesus did not teach this, Warfield's case would collapse like a house of cards.

3) Warfield did not exalt reason above the inner testimony of the Spirit. He was as clear as anyone that a man's unaided reason could not bring him to God or to an understanding of the things of God, but he did maintain that man's reason renewed by the Holy Spirit played an essential part in faith. Faith is not to be contrasted with *reason*, but with *sight*. Warfield, equally opposed to rationalism and irrationalism, made a much needed protest on behalf of rationality.

4) It should not be supposed that Warfield was either naive or ignorant concerning biblical criticism. He lived in the days, as Barr reminds us, of the classical debates on the subject. In the Old Testament field, Princeton has A. A. Alexander on Isaiah, W. H. Green and G. Vos on the Pentateuch and R. D. Wilson on Daniel. In the New Testament field, the world of scholarship was ably served by scholars like Westcott, Lightfoot and Zahn. Warfield was overwhelmingly convinced of the soundness of the conservative case and of the basic irrationality of the new views. His defence of the minutiae of scripture is something which follows on after his reassertion of the general reliability of the biblical documents.

It would be sad if misunderstandings about Warfield were to become current coin. To trivialize the thought of this great Christian would be to impoverish the church. I hope that many will read him for themselves.

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Attention Please

• The Council of Ridley College, Melbourne, is seeking to appoint a clergyman of the Church of England as Principal of the college to succeed the Rev. Dr Leon L. Morris who retires from the position in May 1979, and applications are invited from interested persons by 8 July 1978. The college is both an independent evangelical theological college within the Diocese of Melbourne and a residential college affiliated to the University of Melbourne.

Further information may be obtained from the Secretary to the Council, Ridley College, The Avenue, Parkville, Victoria 3052, Australia. All correspondence will be treated as confidential.

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