

Princeton and Evolution

By Fred G. Zaspel

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1876, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, age twenty-five and just recently graduated from seminary, served a brief internship with the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio. His first sermon was reproduced in the local newspaper the following day, and it is the earliest theological work of any kind that we have from this giant Princetonian.¹

His text was Romans 3:4—“Let God be true, and every man a liar.” He noted in his introduction that this statement was made, in context, in reference to God’s promise to provide salvation freely, as promised. But the sermon was given to an expansion on and application of the proposition itself, that God is always true, no matter what any man may ever think or say. Indeed, Warfield insisted, the proposition is self-evident—“however men may oppose themselves to [God], may scoff at his revelations and laugh at his promises, he will be infinitely and eternally true, even though thereby all men be proved liars.” All the declarations and doctrines of Scripture, God’s revelation, are “without exception and without any admixture of error, simply and only true, though all the world should deny them.” Again, this is self-evident. Where God has spoken we come humbly, as willing learners, and rejecting as absurd all that would contradict it.

This of course was the famous note that marked Warfield’s entire career, and his statement and defense of this doctrine of the inspiration and, therefore, complete reliability of Scripture was landmark.

But even if Warfield expounded this doctrine more precisely and thoroughly than any, it was nothing new to Princeton. Old Princeton was famous for its unswerving fidelity to the historic Christian faith and a vigorous defense of the truthfulness of Scripture.

And all this is of particular interest when we come to

consider the Princeton response to the theory of evolution. Just how did their commitment to biblical authority and inerrancy shape their assessment and response to this revolutionary “discovery” of science?

HISTORICAL SETTING

If it is true that in historical as well as biblical studies “context is everything,” then certainly in this particular study the reminder is particularly relevant. Natural scientists and philosophers had floated various theories of evolution long before Darwin. But Darwin’s 1859 *Origin of Species* was a truly landmark event that propelled the idea into the mainstream. Now it had been granted the sacred status of “science,” and without question it was the spark of a scientific revolution of the greatest magnitude. Whether or not the science itself was faulty and whether or not it was driven more by philosophical considerations, its impact changed scientific discussion forever. It brought tidal waves of implications for social sciences and theology that of course are still felt today.

It is difficult for us to appreciate the shockwave felt by nineteenth-century Christians as *The Origin of the Species* began to gain notice. Already in 1867 John Newberry could say, in his presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, that Darwinism had “shaken the moral and intellectual world as by an earthquake.”²

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1. *Dayton Daily Democrat*, July 25, 1876.

2. Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 31; cf. Bert James Loewenberg, *Darwinism Comes to America: 1859–1900* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 9–10.

Darwinism was not at first met with an impressive response in America. Biologists gradually began to accept evolution, but as a whole they were not happy with Darwin's mechanism—natural selection operating on random variations. Most favored the Lamarckian theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics. And for a period in Warfield's day *Darwinian* evolution was on the wane. And of course while scientists remained skeptical, theologians could safely ignore the question.

But by the mid 1870s the tide had completely turned. Evolution now was being touted everywhere as "ascertained fact." In 1876 Thomas Huxley, "Darwin's Bulldog," could announce, without blushing, presumably, that the doctrine of evolution rested on exactly the same degree of scientific verification as did the Copernican theory of heliocentricism at the time of its promulgation (Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 44). Fewer and fewer scientists were willing to oppose it or even question it. By 1880 there was near unanimity in the scientific community, and by the turn of the century, evolution was "established fact." Popular opposition remained, but the debate was over. Darwin was the new Copernicus, and all but the most unenlightened knew it.

Questions of definition did arise in those years. What exactly do we mean by "Darwinism" and "evolution"? What is the process? What is the mechanism? Even Darwin himself published some refinements to his theories during those early years. But increasingly "Darwinism" and "evolution" became synonymous, whatever precise differences there may have been.

Some questions of verification were raised from various quarters. Some favorites of Charles Hodge, for example, were: how can we account for the gradual formation of organs? How can we explain the gradual development, say, of the eye? Of what value is a half-developed eye?³ And if natural selection accounts for survival of the fittest, how can we account for the *arrival* or origin of the fittest? And for that matter, what is the real evidence for natural selection? And what real evidence is there for the theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics? Severing the tail of successive generations of mice did not result even in shorter tails, nor had 4,000 years of circumcision alter the male Jewish anatomy in any way. Where is the evidence for this new theory?

Evolution met its strongest resistance in the South, but even there it eventually won out even in conservative theological circles. The flashpoint was Columbia

3. Charles Hodge, *What Is Darwinism? And Other Writings on Science and Religion*, ed. Mark Noll and David Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 95–96.

Theological Seminary. Many Presbyterians in the South had called for a chair of science and religion to be added to the seminary in order to combat the growing infidelity growing out of the natural sciences. Ministers needed to be equipped to provide answers. So in 1861 one James Woodrow was appointed. He was trained in science at Harvard and Heidelberg, an ordained Presbyterian minister, and a solid conservative and inerrantist. For twenty-four years he taught that evolution was "probably not true." Then in 1884 he taught that it was "probably true"—a divinely guided process of development. Conflict arose, of course, but the seminary board backed him. So the board itself was replaced, and Woodrow was dismissed.

The "Woodrow Affair" was an event of immense significance. On the one hand it shows the triumph of conservative Presbyterians in the South. But on the other hand it shows how deep the divide was and how hard the victory was won even in the conservative South.

There was similar openness among Baptists. Jumping ahead several years, for example, when A.T. Robertson of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was asked his thoughts about evolution he responded, simply, "I can stand it if the monkeys can!" (Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 73).

And there was a similar mixed response at Princeton also.

One area of majority agreement was the question of the age of the earth. Virtually all theologians of all persuasions, even fundamentalist, agreed that the earth was much older than previously thought. Accordingly, new understandings of Genesis were born—day age theories and gap theories, to highlight the most common. The Seventh-Day Adventists held strong to a young earth, interpreting the geological data in reference to Noah's flood. But they were virtually alone. Evangelicals *en masse* would not return to the view of a young earth until the years following 1961 and the release of *The Genesis Flood*, by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, and the popularization of the flood geology.

Interestingly, as a side note, *The Genesis Flood* was originally slated to be published by Moody Press, but this staunchly evangelical publishing house was concerned that the firm insistence on six literal days could offend their constituency! And so the book was picked up by Presbyterian and Reformed.

Still, to the idea of evolution many conservatives remained opposed, an opposition that climaxed, of course, in the famous Scopes Trial of 1925.

Backing up to the turn of the century, there was overwhelming acceptance of evolution from all quarters

of the scientific world. And it has been suggested that not a small part of its success was due to the openness of many religious leaders. In 1868 James McCosh was called to the presidency of the College of New Jersey (later named Princeton University), and he became the first Protestant leader to advocate evolution. And advocate it he did, without any hesitation, even turning it into an argument for theism. In 1880 the editor of a religious weekly estimated that one fourth and perhaps one half of the ministers in the leading evangelical denominations no longer held to the historicity of Adam and Eve.⁴

For liberal theologians there was no problem—evolution was God’s method of creation, and that was that. Many conservative theologians, feeling overwhelming pressure to capitulate, attempted various attempts to reconcile the theory with Scripture. Only the most conservative theologians remained in opposition, concerned especially that evolution threatened such Biblical essentials as the *imago Dei*, Christian morality and ethics, the fall, and so on. But even they faced the problem of a lack of unanimity: Old earth? Young earth? Gap? Days? Ages? Just how do we read Genesis? And with no unified front, it was only the more difficult to present a convincing case.

And finally among scientists there was a growing acceptance of natural selection after all. This was an important development, for with natural selection there is no room left for the notion of *purpose* or *design*. And with no design, there is no designer. As Charles Hodge so famously insisted, Darwinism is atheism (Hodge, 156).

It is interesting that during these years virtually no prominent scientist abandoned his church affiliation (Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 40–43). But clearly the traditional understanding of God as immanent, sovereign, and all-controlling had been seriously undermined.

In a very real sense, Darwin was “the symbol of an era” (Loewenberg, 12). The nineteenth-century tidal wave of evolution was both a *cause* and a *symptom* of the decay of the traditional doctrine of God. It was a world marked by human intellectual and technical advance on every front. We now understand the world and how it works, and we can understand it without any reference to God. Is God really ruling over the affairs of heaven and earth? Was he really active in creation? And if not creation, then providence? Inspiration? Say, just how much do we need God after all?

For that matter, it would seem that evolution provided an explanation for Christianity itself. Not just the

world but religion also was the result of evolutionary processes, culminating in Christianity—thus reducing Christianity to a natural religion.

There were evolutionary theories before Darwin, but with Darwin evolution triumphed—and that within only a few decades. It is scarcely an overstatement to say that Darwin rules the world, even from the grave.

THE PRINCETON RESPONSE

This pressure could not but be felt even at Old Princeton. The Princetonians understood that they had basically two options: they could disprove evolution, thereby vindicating Scripture and Genesis in particular; or they could demonstrate, simply, that evolution was not incompatible with Christianity—in which case they could remain indifferent to the question. In the main, the latter was the road most taken.

The first shot fired predates Darwin’s *Origin* by some fourteen years. In the October 1845 issue of Princeton’s theological journal, edited by Charles Hodge, Albert Dod, math professor at the college, provided a review of Robert Chambers’ recent *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*⁵—a theistically oriented argument for a pre-Darwinian evolutionary understanding of the universe. Dod’s review was firm in its opposition. Nor was he impressed with the purported theism of the argument—of what good is the idea of a creator who does not govern? Very distressed over the religious and moral and theological implications, Dod rejected Chambers’ evolutionism outright.

Just ten years later, 1855, the college appointed Arnold Henri Guyot, a Swiss geologist, to its faculty. Guyot was a committed Christian of noted piety, and he was an evolutionist, but obviously not of the not yet known Darwinian sort. He worked closely with the seminary also. Hodge cites him a couple times in the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, and Guyot’s influence on Hodge on questions related to geology and the age of the earth is obvious.

When Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* was released in 1859 it received no notice in Princeton’s journal. It was not yet an issue, but in the following years the topic of

4. Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 3.

5. *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 17:4 (Oct. 1845), 505–557; cf. the excellent historical treatment of this in Bradley Gundlach, “The Evolution Question at Princeton: 1845–1929” (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1995), 1–20; I find disagreement with Gundlach’s assessment of Warfield’s understanding of evolution, but his dissertation is otherwise the most useful survey of the study available.

“developmentalism” and evolution began inevitably to gain attention.

The Princetonians were very hesitant to use the vocabulary of science and theology in “conflict.” They were committed to the idea of the harmony of all revealed truth, and it was a mark of Old Princeton scholarship that they were eager to gain knowledge from whatever field of investigation. More to the point, theology is itself a science—a disciplined, comprehensive systematization of a given field of knowledge—and, thus, science can no more be in conflict with theology than it can with zoology. But inevitably the warfare vocabulary became increasingly common, driven as the science was by naturalistic and materialistic philosophical underpinnings.

We have noted already the 1868 arrival of James McCosh to the college. McCosh, a Presbyterian minister, was utterly committed to evolution and was convinced that it should be used to show design in nature. So far from an argument against God, it was evidence *for* God!

Charles Hodge was chairman of the board of the college when McCosh was called, and there is no evidence then or at any point of any conflict between them. Hodge carefully distinguished between evolution and Darwinism. Darwinism’s natural selection was atheistic and without design and therefore banished God from the process. With certain qualifications and conditions Hodge allowed evolutionary theories that were theistic, and he and McCosh evidently found agreement at this point. But Hodge himself was never persuaded. He argued that evolution was impossible and unproven. “It is conceded that a man may be an evolutionist and yet not be an atheist and may admit of design in nature,” he said. “But we cannot see how the theory of evolution can be reconciled with the declarations of the Scriptures” (Hodge, 138). Even so, Hodge seems rather indifferent to the question. After all, he approved the hiring of McCosh.

Hodge also approved the Seminary hiring of Charles Aiken in 1871, Archibald Alexander Professor of Christian Ethics and Apologetics. Aiken was an outspoken evolutionist also, advocating even human evolution—and this prior to Darwin’s 1871 *Descent of Man*.

McCosh at the college was evolutionary, as was Aiken at the seminary. Hodge stood between, neither accepting nor opposing, so long as it was defined within certain parameters.

A.A. Hodge, son of Charles Hodge, followed the path of his father. He published some statements regarding

the permissible limits of evolution, even exonerating James Woodrow, and these remarks have often been taken as evidence that Hodge himself had accepted some evolutionary theory. But an 1884 private letter to Warfield regarding the Woodrow affair indicates clearly otherwise. Hodge writes, “I think modern science is *preposterously far off* from proving anything as to the evolution of the lower species, . . . and far more emphatically so as to the evolution of the human species.”⁶ Bradley Gundlach first brought this letter to light in his 1995 dissertation, “The Evolution Question at Princeton.” He noted then that this letter had never before been used in scholarly assessment of A.A. Hodge; nor have I seen it used since. But it is definitive, and it was written just two years before Hodge’s death. “Archy” Hodge held the same view as his father—he *allowed* for evolution within certain limits, but he did not accept it himself.

Francis Landey Patton (president of the college and then of the seminary) evidently took the Hodge position also. In his 1885 “Evolution and Apologetics” (*The Presbyterian Review* 6:21, 138–144), Patton affirmed that evolution could be understood theistically, even as evidence of design. And he remained open on the question of just how God formed the original creation into its present form. But he insisted that evolution remained unproven. Like the two Hodes, he did allow for evolution within certain limits, but he did not concede it.

B.B. Warfield is a special case, not least because he is so commonly named among the theistic evolutionists.

Warfield was reared in a godly Presbyterian home—a home in which it was required of children to learn the Shorter Catechism by age six. He made profession of faith at age sixteen, was educated at home by a hired tutor, and from early years had great interest in the sciences. No doubt some of this interest stemmed from his experience on the ranch breeding cattle. His interest in science was so decided that when it came time in his schooling at home to learn Greek, he protested. He was sure he would not need Greek—he wanted to study science! Of course it is just a delightful irony that this one who would later become one of the leading Greek scholars of the age so despised the language at first! But his protest was evidently made very clear. His brother recalls it for us but remarks simply that in a home where it was required that children learn the Shorter Catechism by age six, youthful protests mattered very little.

Not yet the age of seventeen Warfield entered the sophomore class at the college in Princeton—the same year McCosh arrived. He excelled in all his studies, graduating with honors at the top of his class, with

6. I am indebted to Bradley Gundlach for this. See his “The Evolution Question at Princeton: 1845–1929,” 196–198.

perfect marks in math and science. After graduation at age nineteen he furthered his studies in Europe for a time, before finally changing directions and entering Princeton Seminary in 1873, aiming for Christian ministry. Throughout his career, however, Warfield's interest in science remained strong. He sometimes refers to himself as a "layman" in the studies of the natural sciences, but he was clearly not your average layman. His acquaintance and grasp of the various scientific aspects of evolution was clearly superior.

David Livingstone and Mark Noll lead off their joint 2000 article with the claim, "One of the best-kept secrets of American intellectual history is that B.B. Warfield, the foremost modern defender of the theologically conservative doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible, was also an evolutionist."⁷ Livingstone and Noll have promoted this characterization of Warfield often and effectively, and it has become the "canonical" understanding, unchallenged and often repeated.

Time does not permit me here to survey the evidence these scholars have proposed. In the July, 2010, issue of *Themelios* (35:2) I analyze it at some length.⁸ Let me just mention here their best argument. In 1915 Warfield wrote a lengthy article on Calvin's doctrine of creation in which he concluded that Calvin held to an evolutionary view (Warfield, *Works* 5:287–349). I cannot imagine that he convinced very many, but what is important here is that Warfield himself did so conclude. The question arises: why? And it is tempting to think that he *wanted* Calvin to have held an evolutionary view because he himself did. This is the best evidence that Warfield was an evolutionist, but surely, as intriguing as the question is, it isn't much. It is simply inconclusive. And whatever else may be said, Warfield explicitly indicates that he does not agree with Calvin's view.

In 1916, a year after the Calvin article, Warfield wrote a delightful reminiscence of his days at the college, now nearly five decades removed. In this article he mentions the arrival of McCosh and indicates that he (Warfield) was already at that time "a Darwinian of the purest water." This has often been taken as proof of Warfield's evolutionism, but the claim ignores statements Warfield makes later in the same paragraph. In the very next sentence Warfield affirms that he later "fell away from this, his orthodoxy." And in the very next sentences he relates a conversation he had with McCosh years later. McCosh, ever the defender of evolution, commented to Warfield that there was virtually no scientist under the age of thirty who was not an evolutionist. With typical humor Warfield writes that he was not sure McCosh understood what he meant when he replied that this

was no surprise to him, for he was about age thirty before he outgrew evolution himself!⁹

Humor aside, what is important here is Warfield's implication in all this, in 1916, just five years before his death, is that he had not been an evolutionist since about 1881!

Like the Hodges before him, Warfield was in some ways relatively indifferent to the question, allowing the possibility of evolution if carefully defined and *if ever proven*. He even concedes at some points that the Scriptures could accommodate the theory *if it were ever proven*. But he never conceded that it had, in fact, been proven, and he never indicates that he himself had accepted it. With the theory unproven, Warfield maintained that we are left either, 1) to accept it at face value, say, as Darwin proposes; or 2) to accept it as the means God has employed in creation—McCosh's view; or 3) to view evolution as more or less probable or more or less improbable. This third view is the view Warfield took, understanding evolution as an unproven theory, and referring to McCosh's claim that proof for evolution was as sure as that for Newton's theory of gravity he comments that McCosh "has allowed his enthusiasm to run away with his judgment."¹⁰

WARFIELD'S CRITICISMS OF EVOLUTION

Warfield in fact criticized evolution on several fronts. First, he stressed heavily its *inadequacy*. By the nature of the case, he insisted, evolution cannot treat the question of origins. It addresses only a theory of divine providence.

Second, he criticized its *inherent naturalism* and even *anti-supernaturalism*, just as Charles Hodge had argued before him. In his 1896 "Supernaturalism," for example, he warned that evolution finds its taproot in a pantheistic philosophy which allows no distinction between the natural and the supernatural, reducing all things to the natural. And with crystal clarity in 1901 he wrote,

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." That is the first sentence in the Christian revelation. That God alone is the first and the last, who

7. "B.B. Warfield (1851–1921): A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist," *Isis*, 91:2 (Jun., 2000), 283.

8. "B.B. Warfield on Creation and Evolution," *Themelios* 35:2 (July 2010), 198–211.

9. "Personal Recollections of Princeton Undergraduate Life"; *The Princeton Alumni Weekly* XVI:28, 652.

10. "Evolution or Development," B.B. Warfield, *Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Noll and David Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 115–116.

changes not; that all that exists is the work of his hands and depends on his power for both its existence and its continuance in existence—this is the unvarying teaching of the whole Bible. It is part of the very essence of Christianity, therefore, that the explanation of the universe is found in God; and its fundamental word is, accordingly, “creation” (*Evolution, Science, and Scripture*, 198).

Third, Warfield emphasized the *lack of evidence*. This was a criticism he sustained throughout his career. He complained that evolution was allowed to account for everything, yet evolution itself seems to need no accounting for. In his classroom lecture he argued that evolutionary scientists had “not yet made the first step” toward providing sufficient evidence for its theory. “In an unprejudiced way,” he commented, “looking over the proofs evolution has offered, I am bound to say that none of them is at all, to my mind, stringent” (121–122). Laymen have the right to affirm with confidence that the evolutionary hypothesis remains “far from justified by the reasoning with which it has been supported.” If the facts are with the evolutionist, he wrote, they “have themselves to thank for the impression of unreality and fancifulness which they make on the earnest inquirer” (*Evolution, Science, and Scripture*, 143).

In 1895 he wrote that students of logic could find some “entertaining examples” of fallacy in evolutionary reasoning. It just does not follow, for example, that if a proffered genealogy *might* account for the data found in upper strata of earth’s crust, it therefore *actually does* give account of the *whole* of the data found in the earth’s crust (168).

In 1898 he wrote that we should not be surprised that when evolutionary writers put evolution into the premises of their arguments they in turn find evolution in their conclusions! In 1908 he wrote,

What most impresses the layman as he surveys the whole body of these evolutionary theories ... is their highly speculative character. If what is called science means careful observation and collection of facts and strict induction from them of the principles governing them, none of these theories have much obvious claim to be scientific. They are speculative hypotheses set forth as possible or conceivable explanations of the facts.... For ourselves we confess frankly that the whole body of evolutionary constructions prevalent today impresses us simply as a vast mass of speculation which may or may not prove to have a kernel of truth in it.... This looks amazingly like basing facts on theory rather than theory on facts (246).

In 1916 he wrote,

Evolution is, then, if a fact, not a triumph of the scientist but one of his toughest problems. He does not know how it has taken place; every guess he makes as to how it has taken place proves inadequate to account for it. His main theories have to be supported by subsidiary theories to make them work at all, and these subsidiary theories by yet more far-reaching subsidiary theories of the second rank—until the whole chart is, like the Ptolemaic chart of the heavens, written over with cycle and epicycle and appears ready to break down by its own weight” (319–320).

Throughout his career Warfield insisted that the doctrine of evolution did not rest on evidence. Indeed, he argued that much of the evidence was against it, such as the geological record and the limited capacity of variation in any given organism.

Fourth, Warfield argued that evolution had *no adequate cause*. On more than one occasion he complained of the seemingly endless demand of time. But aiming more deeply, he writes,

Aimless movement in time will produce an ordered world! You might as well suppose that if you stir up a mass of type with a stick long enough, the letters will be found to have arranged themselves in the order in which they stand on the printed pages of Dante’s *Inferno*. It will never happen—though you stir for an eternity. And the reason is that such effects do not [just] happen, but are produced only by a cause adequate to them and directed to the end in view.... Assuredly, what chance cannot begin to produce in a moment, chance cannot complete the production of in an eternity.... What is needed is not time, but *cause* (228–229).

Fifth, Warfield pointed out evolution’s *conflict with Scripture*. Warfield acknowledged that evolution could be consistent with Theism, but he noted many difficulties it has with Christianity and Scripture. The frank supernaturalism of Christianity, on face of it, is a seeming conflict. The creation of Eve is another “very serious bar in the way of a doctrine of creation by evolution” (130). Moreover, evolution cannot account for the origin of the human soul or its continued existence after the death of the body. It cannot account for the fact that man is a moral being with a conscience, a conscience bound up with the *imago Dei*. Nor can evolution provide any account for the incarnation of Christ. And in fact it reverses the biblical

teaching regarding humanity's fall into sin, positing instead a moral development.

All of these Warfield saw as biblical problems with evolution. Ironically, all through his career he conceded that Scripture could accommodate a carefully qualified or conditioned theory of evolution *if* it were ever proven true. Yet he insisted that evolution was in fact *unproven*, and he saw several lines of theological and exegetical conflict. And so, reflecting his confidence in Scripture, he affirmed that "man came into the world just as the Bible says he did" (*Evolution, Science, and Scripture*, 177).

In short, there is no evidence that Warfield adopted *any* evolutionary scheme. Even in 1915 he thought Calvin did, Warfield himself did not accept it. He saw Scriptural barriers, and he insisted that Adam was indeed the father of all humanity in all its diversity and "races."

The "canonical" view of Warfield and evolution must go. If I may borrow the language I quoted earlier, 'one of the best kept secrets in American intellectual history is that B.B. Warfield, inerrantist, was *not* an evolutionist.'

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Let us draw some observations from all this. First, *Princeton's openness to learn from science*. On one level, this is surely a commendable thing. The created order, that "second volume of divine revelation," reveals the creator as infallibly as Scripture. There is a harmony to all truth. Any discrepancy between science and Scripture necessarily reveals a misunderstanding of data on one side or the other. And to be intellectually honest the Princetonians were willing to be corrected in regards to their biblical interpretations. And references to Copernicus and Galileo were not uncommon in Princeton's journal.

Fair enough. But just what constitutes an *established fact* of science? Warfield many times pointed out how scientific opinions vary and change and how a given natural scientist would expose the mistaken conclusions of another. But the question cuts both ways—just where do the declarations of Scripture end and our misinterpretations begin? Just what does Scripture declare on these matters of origins? Are the early chapters of Genesis open to a non-literal interpretation? If so, in what details?

This is the rub we have all felt to one degree or another, and the Princetonians grappled with it also. In my opinion they conceded too much. But it is also my opinion that *they did not concede nearly so much* as is commonly said.

Second, *the question of evolution and the decline of Old Princeton*. Many creationists have surmised that the compromise of the Princetonians in regard to evolution contributed, at least in some degree, to the decline of Old Princeton. In response to this, first, I want to ask: just how extensive was the compromise? Yes, Princeton had Guyot, McCosh, and Aiken. But the major Princetonians never accepted any evolutionary theory. They allowed for it, if proven, within certain limits. But they insisted that it was *not* proven, and they saw several Scriptural barriers. For my part, I would argue that they were too open and that they felt pressured by a philosophically driven scientific community. But in the end it seems that it was their commitment to Scripture that did, in fact, keep them from embracing evolution.

Next, I want to ask, What is the evidence that establishes this cause-effect relationship between the Princetonians' views of evolution and the theological decline of their seminary. I am not aware of any. And I would guess that any acceptance of evolution within the Presbyterian Church was due not to anything at Princeton but to the larger decline of the day. Could the Princetonians have been more firm in their opposition? Certainly. But did their "soft" opposition contribute to the seminary's decline? I'm not so sure.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I doubt that it is best to describe Princeton's downfall as a "decline." It was more a *coup*, a takeover from liberal forces within the denomination. And I am not aware of any evidence that the initial defection of those liberal forces was prompted by anything related to Princeton's teachings regarding evolution. It seems much easier to see the downfall of Princeton as part of a broader defection that Warfield combated so valiantly for decades. And in that respect, at least, so far from contributing to Princeton's decline in any way, Warfield might be seen as holding it back.

Third, and finally, we should consider *the importance of the evolution question itself*. Whatever the Princeton response, much is at stake—for starters, the clarity, trustworthiness, and reliability of Scripture. On the face of it, Scripture certainly seems to exclude evolution. Was Warfield right that if evolution were to be proven true Scripture could accommodate it? I don't think so. And it seems it was because of his commitment to Scripture he never did accept it. As he wrote in 1897, "man came into the world just as Scripture says he did."

Then there is the biblical teaching of the *imago Dei*. It is at least very difficult to see how any evolutionary theory could allow it.

Moreover, did humanity fall from original righteousness into sinfulness, or is our present moral state the result of development?

And what of the unity of the human race? The creation of humanity in Adam gives us a common dignity. Eliminate this biblical “instinct” (as Warfield described it) of the brotherhood of mankind in its origin and nature, and what ground is left to argue against racism? More importantly, what becomes of the biblical structure of sin and salvation? The notion of a common humanity, fallen in Adam, with a common nature of sin and a common need, and a common salvation accomplished by a common redeemer, all rests on the creation account of the early chapters of Genesis. The whole biblical worldview, the entire biblical story rises or falls accordingly.

The Princetonians knew all this, and this is why in their theoretical “allowance” of evolution, they insisted

on certain limitations—such as the unity of the race in Adam. Why, then, did they make any allowance at all? The answer, I can only guess, is to be found in an interplay of three factors: first, their utter confidence in the reliability of Scripture; second, their openness to the possibility of their own misunderstanding of it; and third, the runaway enthusiasm of the day with respect to evolution.

The issue in our day centers most critically on the historicity of Adam. And still the issue, ultimately, is a gospel one. And so we want to affirm with the later Warfield that man has come into being just as the Bible says he has. And we want to say with the twenty-five year old Warfield, and the Apostle Paul before him, “Let God be true, and every man a liar”—for the sake of God’s honor, for the sake of the Gospel, and for the sake of our salvation. ■

In Brief: Warfield: “Dr. McCosh as a Teacher”

Benjamin B. Warfield, “Personal Recollections of Princeton Undergraduate Life. IV—The Coming of Dr. McCosh,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Vol. XVI, No. 28 (1916) 652.

DR MCCOSH AS A TEACHER

The best thing that Dr McCosh brought to Princeton was himself. He had an inspiring personality and was a great teacher. So soon as I have said that, I feel bound, however, to stop and discriminate. He had absolutely no faculty for quizzing. I speak of course only of his early years in Princeton when I was his pupil. And he was perfectly helpless in the face of disorder. When disorder required to be controlled, he never by any chance fixed upon the right man as the author of it; and he did not know how to reprove without temper. He completely lacked a sense of humor. I do not mean that he had no humor of his own or that he was not sometimes the cause of humor in others. I mean that he saw with difficulty the humor that arose outside of himself. This delivered him of course bound hand and foot into the hands of the Philistines. That the students did not take advantage of him and render his life unendurable—as they did the lives of more than one instructor in my

day, fairly driving them out of the institution—was due to their genuine admiration for him as a man and as a teacher; admiration for the sincerity of his character, the elevation of his thought and life, the force of his intellect, in short for his real greatness. After all said he was a great man and a great teacher. It was in his lectures that his great qualities as a teacher showed themselves; and it was through them that he made his impact as a teacher on his pupils. He was distinctly the most inspiring force which came into my life during my college days.

No he did not make me a Darwinian, as it was his pride to believe he ordinarily made his pupils. But that was doubtless because I was already a Darwinian of the purest water before I came into his hands, and knew my *Origin of Species and Animals and Plant under Domestication*, almost from A to Zard. In later years I fell away from this, his orthodoxy. He was a little nettled about it and used to inform me with some vigor—I am speaking of a time thirty years ago!—that all biologists under thirty years of age were Darwinians. I was never quite sure that he understood what I was driving at when I replied that I was the last man in the world to wonder at that, since I was about that old myself before I outgrew it. ■