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Miracles, Charismata and Benjamin B. Warfield

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The nature of the charismatic gifts and the extent to which the gifts are present in the contemporary church are controversial subjects among theologians, and particularly divisive issues among evangelicals.¹ Attention to the history of the church shows that the gifts of the Spirit have nearly always been attended by controversy. One thinks immediately of the Montanist movement in the second century,² Edward Irving and his followers in the nineteenth century,³ and more recently of course the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.⁴ (For our purposes we can characterise the Charismatic movement as the appropriation of Pentecostal experience, if not always the accompanying theology, by those within the mainstream denominations). Many remain deeply suspicious of claims to have revived the gifts of the Spirit in the church, and among evangelicals

¹ George Mallone, *Those Controversial Gifts* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984).

² K. Aland, 'Bemerkungen zum Montanismus und zur frühchristlichen Eschatologie' in *Kirchengeschichtlichen Entwürfe* (Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1960), 105–48. Most theologians and church historians, e.g., F. L. Cross and Henry Chadwick, are in my view unnecessarily critical of Montanism. The movement is viewed from contemporary anti-charismatic or 'orthodox' positions and then classified as heretical. Certainly there were excesses in the pursuit of asceticism within Montanism, but by and large, as H. B. Swete noted, 'the movement . . . was beneficial, especially perhaps in the West, where tradition and convention were apt to exercise too great a control', *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 83.

³ C. G. Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973).

⁴ The standard history of the rise of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement is Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London, 1972); he adds a brief postscript to this in 'After Twenty Years Research on Pentecostalism', *Theology* 87, 1984, 403–12.

such a stance often reflects or explicitly follows the line of argument proposed by Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921) in his Thomas Smyth Lectures (1917–1918), delivered at Columbia Theological Seminary, and published under the title *Counterfeit Miracles*.⁵ He more than any other single writer has shaped evangelicals' negative attitude to Pentecostalism and charismatic renewal: this is due in no small part to the fact that he is widely regarded as having given systematic expression to the views of the Reformers, particularly Calvin, on these matters.⁶ George Mallone has recently remarked, with understandable exaggeration, that 'B. B. Warfield's teaching on the cessation of the gifts has now influenced almost an entire century of the church's life.'⁷ Warfield's name (in this context)⁸ is synonymous with the cessationist view that the gifts were confined to the early church, and consequently are not present or manifest in the church today.

In this paper I shall assess critically Warfield's position and consider whether his restriction of the charismatic gifts to the apostolic period is tenable, either historically or theologically. I have divided my material into three parts. In the first part, and by way of introduction, I very briefly review the biblical evidence on the gifts of the Spirit, in order to provide the necessary background for an appreciation of Warfield's position. In the second part I set out Warfield's argument for the conviction that the gifts are confined to the apostolic period. In the third and final part I bring some criticisms to bear on this position; criticisms which I believe should caution others from following him in his rejection of the contemporary occurrence and relevance of the gifts, or to express myself more

⁵ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (London: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1918]); all page numbers incorporated into the text of this article refer to this volume. The article on 'Miracles' in the *New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 782–84, reflects Warfield's influence, as does O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), and his position was explicitly followed and popularised by Walter J. Chantry in *Signs of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976).

⁶ See John Murray, 'Have Miraculous Gifts Ceased?' *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3, 1985, 55–59. For the most part those who confine the gifts to the apostolic period can claim to have the Reformers on their side; on Luther see David F. Wright, 'Luther's Quarrel with the Schwäurmer', in I. Howard Marshall (ed.), *Christian Experience in Theology and Life* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1988), 55–82, and on Calvin see Peter F. Jensen, 'Calvin, Charismatics and Miracles', *Evangelical Quarterly* 51, (1979), 131–44.

⁷ Mallone, *op. cit.*, 20.

⁸ Warfield is also regarded by many evangelicals as giving classic expression to the view that the Christian Scriptures are inerrant; see his *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964).

carefully, criticisms which should caution against rejecting the authenticity of contemporary expressions of the gifts *on the basis of Warfield's argument alone*. Of course other arguments can and have been advanced in support of the cessationist position, but I have confined myself to Warfield's position.

I. Gifts of the Spirit: Lexical and Biblical Perspectives

There are a number of words in the Greek New Testament which are normally translated as 'gifts' in English versions of the Bible, but the Greek term which is most relevant to our concerns is *charismata*, which is the plural form of *charisma*, 'gift' (some Greek words add the suffix *-ta* to indicate plural form).⁹ The word *charisma* is familiar to English readers because of its use by the German sociologist Max Weber to denote exceptional qualities of leadership possessed by certain individuals.¹⁰ Such usage, provided that the focus is placed firmly on one's capacity to serve rather than exploit others, basically expresses the biblical meaning of the term, at least in its formal sense: Weber used it with a different material application. *Charisma* is derived directly from *charis*, meaning 'grace',¹¹ a relationship easily recognised in Greek, and also in

⁹ There is no undisputed instance of the use of *charisma* before Paul; see H. Conzelmann's article in Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IX, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 402–03, and Siegfried Schulz, 'Die Charismenlehre des Paulus: Bilanz der Probleme und Ergebnisse,' in J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds.), *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 445–46. In the Septuagint *charisma* occurs only twice in variant readings of the deuterocanonical Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), at 7:33 (for *charis*) and 38:30 (for *charisma*, 'anointing'). Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–50 CE) uses the term in *Legum Allegoria* 3:78, where the meaning is virtually equivalent to *charis*. A similar usage is contained in the *Sibylline Oracles* 2:54, whose provenance is of uncertain date. However these instances are widely regarded as late additions to the texts, and in all probability are post-Pauline. Ernst Käsemann has suggested that the word was coined before Paul's time, though he was the one who gave it a technical sense and introduced it into (Christian) theology, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 63–64; he is followed in this judgement by Hans Küng, *The Church* (London: Search Press, 1968), 188.

¹⁰ Weber's clearest definition of 'charisma' appears in the context of a discussion of various types of authority in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisations* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 358–59: charismatic authority is to be distinguished from traditional authority; see also *idem.*, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 46–47, *et passim*.

¹¹ The close theological connection between the gifts and grace is vividly brought out in a number of places in the New Testament. Paul juxtaposes the two words in Rom. 12:6, 'we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us' (cf. I Cor. 1: 4–7), as does Peter in I Peter 4:10.

German, but obscured in English (*charis* with the not uncommon Greek suffix *-ma*, indicating the result of an action; thus gifts which result from God's gracious action).¹² Some writers who are keen to stress the derivation of *charisma* from *charis* have suggested that 'grace-gift' best translates the former.¹³

In the New Testament the word *charisma* occurs only in the accredited Pauline epistles, except for an isolated reference in 1 Peter 4:10, which echoes Pauline usage. It is a theological term which has both a general and a specific usage. In general usage, *charisma* focuses on God's gift of salvation or some aspect of salvation: in Romans 5:15-17 and 2 Corinthians 1:11 *charisma* is virtually equivalent to *sōteria*, whereas in Romans 6: 23 *charisma* is used to underline the gracious and free nature of *sōteria*; in places where the association with salvation is less direct the context almost invariably remains soteriological (Rom. 11:29). In a narrower theological sense *charisma* and *charismata* refer to specific endowments and talents which God bestows upon individuals for the upbuilding of the Christian congregation (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). The gifts are personal and individual, but their orientation is communal: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' (1 Cor. 12:7). As John Koenig has noted, 'gifts of God . . . differentiate believing individuals from one another for the purpose of enhancing their mutual service.'¹⁴

Nowadays it is customary to designate the gifts as 'gifts of the Spirit', or even more simply as 'spiritual gifts'. Both descriptions are Pauline. The word 'spiritual' (*pneumatikon*) in an adjectival sense is linked to *charisma* in Romans 1:11, and in a number of other places the *charismata* are said to be endowments of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7, 11). Incidentally, it would also be equally Pauline to speak of the gifts as 'gifts of God' (Rom. 11:29, 12:6?; 1 Cor. 7:7; 2 Tim. 1:6). Paul introduces his longest and most systematic treatment of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 by use of the term *pneumatikōn*, which is usually translated as 'spiritual gifts' (though some have suggested that

¹² Cf. Gotthold Hasenbüttl, *Charisma: Ordnungsprinzip der Kirche* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1969), 104-105.

¹³ For example, Ronald Fung, 'Ministry, Community and Spiritual Gifts' *Evangelical Quarterly* 56, (1984), 5.

¹⁴ John Koenig, *Charisma: God's Gifts for God's People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 14.

'spiritual persons' is a more appropriate translation; see also 14:1).¹⁵ However, once beyond introducing the subject, Paul prefers to use the designation *charismata* (1 Cor. 12:4, 9, 30, 31). This suggests the possibility that *pneumatikōn* was a distinctively Corinthian term for the gifts, maybe even the description or self-designation of a group of 'spiritual' Corinthians, who regarded themselves as superior to ordinary believers on the basis of their particular 'spiritual' endowments.¹⁶ Paul uses their term to introduce the subject but quickly substitutes his own word, *charismata*, a word particularly pertinent to his purpose—given its derivation from *charis*—to challenge the proud and superior attitude of this so-called 'spiritual' group within the church. For Paul, Christian experience has its origin in God's grace: we are saved by grace (Rom. 3:24), and continue in grace (Rom. 5:2). The Christian life is determined by grace at every point, and of course this grace has a Christological orientation. Likewise, the *charismata*, as the name implies, which were the source of so much pride to the Corinthians, are in fact further 'gifts' from God: abilities and ministries distributed according to his sovereign will (1 Cor. 12:4–11; cf. Heb. 2:4). Nevertheless, after introducing and giving content to his own terminology, Paul is quite happy to use the term *pneumatikōn* again in 1 Cor. 14:1; but this time he can take for granted that it will be reinterpreted by his Corinthian readers as equivalent to *charisma*, and thus given a new and deeper meaning.¹⁷

There are a number of lists of the *charismata* in Paul's epistles,

¹⁵ The genitive form *tōn pneumatikōn* which Paul uses in 1 Cor. 12:1 may be neuter, meaning 'spiritual things' (hence spiritual gifts), as the word does in 1 Cor. 9:11; 14:1; 15:46, or masculine, meaning 'spiritual persons', as the word does in 1 Cor. 2:25; 3:1; 14:37. Standard Bible translations (e.g. AV, RV, RSV, NIV, NRSV, REB) and the majority of commentators construe *tōn pneumatikōn* as neuter: F. F. Bruce is an important exception in 1 & 2 *Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971).

¹⁶ Cf. Ronald Fung, *op. cit.*, 6, and the literature cited there; also Max Turner, 'Spiritual Gifts Then and Now', *Vox Evangelica* XV, (1985), 7–64, referring to 30, and Ulrich Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt: Die Paulinische Charismenlehre auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen Gemeindefunktionen* (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, 1972²), 150f.

¹⁷ Among New Testament writers this strategy of adopting an opponent's vocabulary and giving a new meaning to it is not confined to Paul: cf. John's use of the stoic term 'logos' in the Prologue to his gospel (1.1–14); see Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith* 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 77–83, and *idem*, *Modern Faith and Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990), 4–5 and 11–12. In *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980) John K. Riches makes out a convincing case for the view that Jesus took up and adapted the religious vocabulary and ideas of his day and gave them a deeper and even different meaning.

and when we compare these similarities and differences emerge.¹⁸ For our purposes it is sufficient to confine ourselves to the lists of gifts included in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Extraordinary manifestations or functions of the Spirit are to the fore in 1 Corinthians 12: 4–11: prophecy, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, miraculous powers, gifts of healing, discerning of spirits, tongues, the interpretation of tongues. This is the list most often referred to by Pentecostals, and has given currency to the idea that there are nine specific gifts of the Spirit.¹⁹ However, a little later in the same chapter, Paul provides a further list of gifts (12:27–30). This time the emphasis falls on particular groups of people who are equipped for service in the church and on less dramatic or extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit: apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracle, healers, helpers, administrators, and speakers in tongues. Clearly there is some correspondence between these two lists—gift of prophecy/prophet, gift of healing/healer, but the correspondence is not exact. The list in Romans 12:6–8 returns to a functional understanding of the gifts: prophesying, ministering, teaching, exhorting, sharing, helping, and so on. The other places in the New Testament where the gifts are mentioned add little to the picture that is emerging; except perhaps for 1 Corinthians 7:7, where Paul seems to suggest that celibacy is a gift from God for him. Celibacy seems less obviously a gift which edifies the church, except in the sense that, as with Paul, it frees the individual from domestic and family responsibilities and thus frees one for Christian service.²⁰

Paul nowhere draws a distinction between natural and supernatural gifts of the Spirit. Such a distinction is essentially modern in origin. This is not to say that some ancient or medieval writers did not acknowledge that some of the miracles or grace-gifts were contrary to nature, thus supernatural rather than natural, but by and large ‘contrary to nature’ was interpreted (following Augustine) as

¹⁸ Also 1 Cor. 13:1–3; 14:26 and Eph. 4:11.

¹⁹ Don Basham, *A Handbook on Tongues, Interpretation and Prophecy* (Pittsburgh: Whitaker Books, 1971), 14, *et passim*: Basham identifies three categories of three gifts each; thus the nine gifts are subsumed under the categories of Gifts of Inspiration, Revelation and Power: cf. Dennis and Rita Bennett, *The Holy Spirit and You* (Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos, 1971), 78–83, *et passim*. A fourfold, more open-ended classification is given by Arnold Bittlinger, *Gifts and Ministries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 16–17. He speaks of Gifts of Proclamation, Service, Special Power and Prayer.

²⁰ It is unlikely that Paul thought of marriage as a ‘special gift (*charisma*) from God’ (1 Cor. 7.7), *contra* E. Käsemann, *op. cit.*–1, 69f; F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, 68, and D. A. Carson, ‘The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament’, in Michael Scott Horton (ed.), *Power Religion: The Selling out of the Evangelical Church?* (Bucks, Moody Press/Scripture Press Foundation, 1992), 94.

contrary to what we know of nature:²¹ natural and supernatural were not set in opposition to each other; this is very much a post-Newtonian development, when the newly formulated scientific laws increasingly became regarded as allowing no exceptions.²² For Paul along with the other writers of the New Testament, both the ordinary and the extraordinary in nature were regarded as illustrative of God's character and providential ordering of the world. At the human level, the old self becomes a new person and takes on a new nature in Christ, supernaturally orientated at every point (2 Cor. 5:16–17). Yet at the same time it needs to be remembered that the old self still reflected God's image prior to its renewal in Christ. To distinguish the gifts into natural and supernatural categories, with a view to disparaging the latter, is to compromise the radical nature of Christian conversion and to obscure the essential newness of life in Christ; whereas to distinguish the gifts into natural and supernatural categories, with a view to disparaging the former, is to compromise God's creative activity and sovereignty and to undermine the reality of God's image in man.

A proper reading of what Paul has to say on the gifts also suggests that there is no fixed number of gifts: the various lists and references to the gifts seem to be open-ended. There is overlap between lists, but there is no uniformity of items or exact order of importance. Certainly some gifts can be regarded as more important than others, for example the gift of prophecy seems to be more highly prized by Paul than speaking in tongues. Yet as he argues in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, when he develops his metaphor of the church as the 'body of Christ,' each church member, whatever his or her gift, has a role to play in the congregation: each believer's gift is essential and contributes to the whole. The diversity of gifts allow for a diversity of service; and who can number or anticipate the gifts which will be of service to the church in its different cultural and historical contexts?

²¹ 'There is, however, no impropriety in saying that God does a thing contrary to nature, when it is contrary to what we know of nature'. St Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean* 26.3, quoting from Philip Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st. series, vol. 4 (reprinted, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1956), 321. For discussion see Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 3–11.

²² Descartes (1596–1650) was the first to use the expression 'laws of nature', and for him the necessary character of such laws followed as a consequence of being grounded in God: Descartes can even speak of 'deducing' the laws of nature from a consideration of God's character, chiefly his immutability, *Discourse on the Method*, Part 5, included in *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, translated by Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach (London: Thomas Nelson, 1970), 38–44; for commentary see Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 253–77.

Finally, and following on from what has just been said, we may note that Paul does not distinguish between permanent and non-permanent or temporary gifts. Later ecclesiastical attempts to identify those gifts which have a relevance throughout the history of the church and those which have a relevance to a limited period of Christian history are quite foreign to Paul.²³ This is not to say that such distinctions are without theological merit, it is rather to underline the fact that Paul did not think in such terms. He was after all a missionary teacher and a man of his times. Paul wrote and thought about the gifts in a missionary and pastoral context.²⁴ He was addressing immediate concerns. If there is an argument in Paul for the cessation of the gifts, it is not something that strikes us in a straightforward reading of his writings, or in the writings of any of the biblical writers for that matter. Granted, however, this in itself may have little bearing on the issue of the continuance of the spiritual gifts beyond the apostolic period. It may well be that there is some deeper theological pattern in the biblical writings, discernible only with hindsight and a clear understanding of the totality of revelation, which suggests that the *charismata* are confined to the apostolic period. Warfield believed so, and it is to his argument we shall now turn.

II. Warfield's Argument for the Cessation of the Gifts

The substance of Warfield's interpretation of the nature and character of the spiritual gifts is expressed in the opening chapter of *Counterfeit Miracles*, and this will naturally be the focus of our discussion. Warfield begins by defining the *charismata* as 'extraordinary capacities produced in the early Christian communities by direct gift of the Holy Spirit' (5). However, he immediately qualifies this by noting that the term *charismata* is 'broad enough to embrace what may be called both the *ordinary* and the specifically extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.' (5-6, my emphasis). Yet this qualification is not entirely what it seems, for Warfield makes it clear that he is not

²³ In some circles it is popular to insist that Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 13:8 on the 'passing away' of prophecies and the 'ceasing' of tongues, when 'the perfect (*to teleion*) comes', is a reference to the withdrawal of the *charismata* at the completion of the New Testament canon of scripture. The objections to this interpretation are well set out by Max Turner, *op. cit.*, 38-39, who concludes that, 'This position is exegetically indefensible. . .', 38.

²⁴ The pastoral and contextual nature of Paul's theology has been stressed by J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), and E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

simply differentiating the commonly cited spiritual gifts into ordinary and extraordinary categories (though he may be doing this as well), rather he is extending the category of spiritual gifts, on the basis he tells us of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12–14, to include the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. This widening of the category of spiritual gifts (which may be exegetically unwarranted)²⁵ has the unfortunate consequence of confusing the issue of whether the gifts should be regarded as ordinary or extraordinary, or if some such distinction is to be made between gifts, where precisely it should be drawn. We can also raise the issue of what exactly he means by calling the gifts extraordinary and/or ordinary, for the terms are not explained (but see below). Yet this is not the end of the matter, for the problems are further compounded when Warfield goes on to speak of ‘miraculous’ gifts, in a context which makes it clear he also believes that there are ‘non-miraculous’ gifts. How does this classification relate to the earlier classification of ordinary and extraordinary gifts?

A careful reading of what Warfield says in pages 3–5 suggests that he equates ordinary gifts of the Spirit with non-miraculous, or what he prefers to call ‘gracious’, gifts and extraordinary gifts with miraculous gifts. Thus for him faith, hope and love are gracious or ordinary gifts, whereas ‘“a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation”, as well as “a psalm or a teaching” ’ (5) are extraordinary or miraculous gifts; basically all other gifts apart from faith, hope and love should be assigned to the latter category. There are a number of problems with this distinction. In the first place, as we have already noted, the distinction between ordinary/non-miraculous and extraordinary/miraculous gifts is never made in the New Testament. Secondly, some of Warfield’s designated miraculous gifts do not appear to be particularly miraculous, except perhaps on some broad definition according to which all God’s activities are miraculous: but then such an interpretation would undermine his original distinction between miraculous and non-miraculous gifts! Take Christian teaching one of Warfield’s examples, or the gifts of encouraging and administration, which are also designated as *charismata* by Paul: in what sense are such gifts miraculous? The question becomes more pointed when it is noted that Warfield thought of the miraculous in terms of what is

²⁵ Quite clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul does not consider love to be one of the *charismata*.

beyond or contrary to nature.²⁶ However, it is probably better curtailing critical comments at this point, until Warfield's more comprehensive account of the nature and character of the spiritual gifts is set out in more detail. As we shall see, his division of the gifts into miraculous and non-miraculous categories is coextensive with a further division between temporary and permanent gifts.

According to Warfield, spiritual gifts, in the sense of miraculous gifts, had (note the past tense) the precise purpose of authenticating Jesus' original apostles as messengers from God. 'These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such; . . . they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it' (6). Miracles and miraculous gifts are confined in Christian history to the apostolic age: they are the marks and credentials of special revelation and as such authenticated the apostles as messengers from God. The purpose of God's miraculous attestation of the apostles was to prove 'to the world that a new revelation had been given from heaven' (24). Thus 'the extraordinary gifts belonged to the extraordinary office and showed themselves only in connection with its activities' (23). Once this connection is made, Warfield moves quickly to his conclusion. The revelation vouchsafed to the apostles is now recorded for us in the New Testament. Consequently, just as the period of God's revelation in Christ is over, so too is the period of the *charismata* and miraculous occurrences (26). The precise purpose which the gifts once served is no longer relevant to the contemporary situation of the church; in an important sense the gifts are redundant, though of course the non-miraculous gifts of faith, hope and love continue. Indeed on Warfield's understanding, should further post-apostolic miracles occur, they would effectively challenge the uniqueness and finality of apostolic Christianity, which in turn is inseparable from the uniqueness and finality of Christ (28). (From this point I shall simply equate the charismatic gifts with what Warfield designates as the extraordinary or miraculous gifts.)

Equipped with this theological *schema*, which he develops in his opening chapter, Warfield devotes the remainder of his book to a case by case dismissal of claims to miraculous occurrences in post-apostolic church history. His main target is the immediate post-apostolic period, though he extends his discussion to include Roman

²⁶ This understanding of the miraculous is implicit in *Counterfeit Miracles* (see 54), but explicit in other writings; see *Shorter Works of Warfield*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), 167-204.

Catholicism, faith-healing, the nineteenth century Irvingite movement, and Mary Baker Eddy. He finds no well attested miracles beyond the apostolic period.

III. Warfield's Argument Criticised

Essentially, there are two main strands in Warfield's argument: (1) the testimony of later ages to the cessation of miracles and the *charismata*; (2) the teaching of the Bible as to their nature and origin. But how convincing are these considerations? I shall deal with each in turn.

1. Historical Considerations

From the close of the New Testament age to the third century and beyond, the appeal to continuing miracles was a standard apologetic argument of the church; and there is no shortage of reported miracles in the literature of the period. This is why Warfield devotes so much space to disputing and discrediting the claims to miraculous occurrences associated with this age (the appeal to miracles was of course revived by John Locke (1632–1704) in the seventeenth century).²⁷ He employs various strategies: that miracles are accredited to individuals whose teaching does not accord with biblical truth; the citation of Christian writers from the post-apostolic church who acknowledge that the age of miracles is past; that post-biblical miracles are insufficiently well attested; belief in post-apostolic miracles represents an infusion of heathen modes of thought into the church; that reports are not specific enough, or secondhand;²⁸ the dismissive reports of contemporaries to supposed miracles, and the advancement of non-miraculous explanations.²⁹ The problem, however, is that a number of these negative points would be equally telling if applied to some of the biblical miracles.

²⁷ John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity with a Discourse on Miracles*, edited by I. T. Ramsey (London: A. & C. Black, 1958), for commentary see Colin Brown, *op. cit.*, 42–46, *et passim*. Locke's position has recently been revived by Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Interestingly, although there are important differences between Locke's and Warfield's apologetic appeal to miracles, both believed that miracles were confined to the apostolic age; see Locke, *op. cit.*, 90–99.

²⁸ The difficulty with this point about reports of miracles being secondhand is that if accepted without qualification it would call into question much of the information provided about Jesus in the Gospels: few would want to defend the notion that the gospels were *entirely written* by eye-witnesses.

²⁹ I think there is an anti-Roman element in Warfield's dismissal of post-apostolic miracles, which he exploits to his advantage; see 29 and 35, for example.

For example, as Colin Brown has pointed out in his discussion of Warfield's position, the raising of Lazarus, as reported in John 11, is not well attested, being recorded only in John's Gospel, there is no corroborative evidence, other naturalistic explanations could be given, and so on.³⁰ The point here is not to dispute the veracity of the story, it is rather to note that if the same considerations adduced by Warfield in his dismissal of post-apostolic miracles were applied to some biblical stories, then a similar negative verdict would be required in the latter cases as the former.

This strongly suggests that Warfield's comments are rationalisations intended to protect an already accepted hypothesis, *viz.* that there can be no post-biblical miracles. No amount of evidence will be allowed to challenge this. Basically, the interpretative grid or framework through which Warfield views the historical evidence for miracles and the exercise of the spiritual gifts beyond the apostolic period excludes their possibility. Warfield would have difficulty accepting such a judgement, for throughout his treatment of post-apostolic claims to miraculous occurrences, he repeatedly invites his reader to become acquainted with the facts of the matter. For him the evidence is straightforward and direct, and it supports his position: there is little or no evidential support for post-apostolic miracles. He concludes his historical survey by declaring, 'It seems to be the experience of *every one who has made a serious attempt to sift the evidence* for [post-apostolic] miraculous healings that this evidence melts away before his eyes' (191, my emphasis). Warfield is obviously aware that others have reached different more positive conclusions from his own. No doubt his retort to them would be that unlike him they have not made a serious attempt to sift the evidence. The truth is however that we all select and assess historical evidence, or any kind of evidence for that matter, according to our own prior commitments and presuppositions. Warfield operates with a naive understanding of the interpretative task.³¹ In an important sense, there is no such thing as a straightforward appeal to the facts; for what we take to be factual and the relative significance to be assigned to different facts are in part determined by our overall conceptual or interpretative scheme. There is a dialectical or reciprocal relationship between interpretation and evidence: the interpretation is justified by reference to the evidence, yet the interpretation itself shapes and

³⁰ Colin Brown, *op. cit.*, 201.

³¹ For an appreciation of the complexity of the whole issue of biblical interpretation see Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

conditions the evidence.³² Of course it should not be concluded from this that evidence is of no consequence, or that there is no way of distinguishing good and bad, correct and incorrect interpretations from each other. My own view with regard to post-apostolic miracles is that the evidence for their occurrence is reasonably good,³³ and that an explanation which takes account of this is to be preferred to other negative explanations. But to sustain such a judgement would require a much fuller discussion and consideration of the issues than is possible here. In any case, Warfield's conclusion that miracles and the *charismata* are confined to the apostolic period is for the most part determined by his conviction that this is the biblical view of things: he believes the Christian Scriptures rule out the possibility of post-apostolic miracles. He may indeed appeal to history as supporting his position, but such an appeal is largely secondary and derivative (see 57 and 59). Theological considerations have priority over historical considerations. If the adequacy of Warfield's position is to be tested, it should be tested in its faithfulness to Scripture; to this at least, given his firm belief in the authority of Scripture, he would presumably have no objection.

2. Theological Considerations

What then of Warfield's theological scheme, which he claims to derive from the Bible, whereby miracles and the *charismatic* gifts served 'to authenticate the Apostles as the authoritative founders of the church' (23)? It would in fact be possible to sidestep the full force of his argument by pointing out that the phenomenon of prophecy in the Bible is not always continuous with what Warfield refers to as 'periods of revelation.' Miraculous occurrences, according to Warfield, are confined to particular periods within the Bible.

³² See Michael Banner, *The Justification of Science and the Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) and Robert Prevost, *Probability and Theistic Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), both of whom are drawing on recent advances in the area of epistemology, in particular the philosophy of science (such writers as Popper, Kuhn, Suppe and Hanson), with a view to developing a cumulative case argument for the truth of Christianity.

³³ A good place to begin a survey of the evidence for the continuation of the gifts in the church is George H. Williams and Edith Waldvogel, 'A History of Speaking in Tongues and Related Gifts', in Michael P. Hamilton (ed.), *The Charismatic Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 61–113; particularly relevant (though confined to the gift of *glossolalia*) to the period which immediately followed the apostles is Harold Hunter, 'Tongues-Speech: A Patristic Analysis', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, 1980, 125–137. A positive assessment of the evidence for contemporary miracles of healing is Rex Gardner, *Healing Miracles* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986).

Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation *periods*, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes (25–26, my emphasis).

Interestingly, in *Counterfeit Miracles*, beyond identifying the apostolic period with a period of revelation, Warfield does not identify other periods of revelation, though as this quotation makes clear (for the plural ‘periods’ is used, and the reference is to Scripture, not just the New Testament), he certainly believed that the same association between miracles and revelation obtained in the Old Testament. It is important to note here that the evidence is against taking Warfield to mean that just as the complete New Testament age comprised one period of revelation so the Old Testament age comprised *one* further period of revelation. I say this for an obvious reason, in that miracles are simply not recorded throughout the entire Old Testament: there are historical periods when miracles are signally absent. In keeping with this, it is often noted that miracles in the Bible are almost exclusively confined to four particular periods: Israel’s flight from Egypt and entrance into the promised land, the inauguration of the prophetic era in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, the assertion of Yahweh’s supremacy over other gods as recorded in the book of Daniel, and of course the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. It seems natural then to suppose that when in *Counterfeit Miracles* Warfield refers to ‘periods of revelation’, and we have quoted him to this effect above, he is referring to these periods. His supporters and commentators certainly make this identification.³⁴ However, there is an obvious difficulty with this interpretation of the way miracles are distributed throughout the Old Testament, and this difficulty, I would suggest, prevents Warfield from advancing a ‘water-tight cessationist argument on the basis of it.

Miracles may well attend the ministries of Moses, Elijah, Elisha and Daniel, but they did not attend the ministries of Amos, Hosea, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and a host of other canonical

³⁴ As a supporter we can cite John J. Murray, *op. cit.* 1, 56, and as a commentator we can cite Colin Brown, *op. cit.*, 199. Brown refers to *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by John D. Davies, revised and rewritten by Henry Snyder Gehman (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), which identifies the same four periods as ‘periods of God’s redemptive revelation of himself.’ Warfield was a contributor to the original work, which first appeared in 1898, and would in all probability have been familiar with this identification.

prophets. Yet Warfield would not deny that these other unattested prophets received a *revelation* from God which they delivered to their contemporaries and which is now preserved for us in the scriptures. Strictly speaking, in any reconstruction of the history and traditions of the Old Testament, prophecy (we could also uncontroversially include visions here) needs to be distinguished from what Warfield refers to as *miraculous events*, for the former occurs with much greater frequency than the latter. In other words, revelation (i.e., prophetic revelation) from God is not inextricably linked to the occurrence of miracles. But what then is to forbid applying this, what Warfield holds to be, biblical understanding of the relationship of prophecy, miracles and revelation to post-Apostolic church history? Following Warfield, one could acknowledge that miracles and the miraculous gifts have passed away, as those upon whom the apostles conferred them died, while still maintaining that the gift of Christian prophecy, understood as revelation from God, continues in the church. This conclusion can be maintained by the application of Warfield's own distinction between periods of revelation where prophets are attested by miracles and other periods or dispensations when God speaks through a prophet but does not attest the message or the messenger by miraculous signs. Furthermore, as Warfield himself acknowledges, prophets are not always authenticated by miracles, consequently we should not necessarily expect miracles to accompany the ministry of contemporary Christian prophets.

This strategy of using Warfield's own line of argument to yield a conclusion he resists, namely that the gift of prophecy continues in the church, is not without limitations. The obvious limitation is that although Christian prophecy can be justified on this basis, the other gifts can not. If this were the end of the matter it would leave the cessationist position weakened, but hardly overturned. But it is not the end of the matter, chiefly for the reason that there are other more serious defects in Warfield's argument.

Let us begin by noting that there are reports of miracles outside the periods we have identified in the Old Testament, e.g. the birth of a son to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18: 1–5; 21: 1–3); the speech of Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22: 28–30); Jonah being saved by a great fish and transported to dry land (Jon. 1: 17 and 2: 10), and so on (unless we simply discount these stories as either not miraculous or unhistorical!). Where do they fit in to Warfield's scheme of things? Equally, one can ask: in what sense do the stories in Daniel constitute a turning point or a period of importance in the history of redemption? What new revelation was given to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? How are these stories crucial to the history of salvation? They are not referred to as significant in the New

Testament, indeed they are not directly referred to at all.³⁵ The same question can be asked of the stories of Elijah and Elisha (who incidentally is also not referred to in the New Testament). One can recognise the crucial importance of the Exodus period and the occupation of the Promised Land, and similarly, the events of the birth of the church, but what of these other periods? Are not David's kingship or the return from Babylonian Exile, events unattended by miracles, at least as important politically and religiously as the events associated with Elijah, Elisha and Daniel? Warfield's thesis that miracles are confined to crucial periods of revelation is not entirely convincing. The facts do not fully fit it. His interpretative scheme has a certain plausibility when applied to the Exodus and Conquest of the Land in the Old Testament and the ministries of Jesus and his immediate followers in the New Testament, but it does not fit other periods: those periods when miracles occur in the absence of any crucial event or turning point in salvation-history and those crucial periods of salvation-history when no miracles occur. It is also worth noting that there are occasions in the Old Testament when God's call to repentance is responded to positively, even though the appointed messenger is not attested by miraculous signs. The obvious example is the inhabitants of Nineveh, who, according to Jonah 3:5, simply 'believed God' and repented without the performance of miracles.

One of the chief problems with Warfield's interpretation of miracles in the Bible is that he operates with a narrow understanding of their nature and purpose: miracles authenticate a messenger from God. This understanding of miracles is indeed found in the scriptures. In the Old Testament it is found in Exodus 4: 1-9; Numbers 16: 28-32; Judges 6: 36-40. In the New Testament it is clearly taught in Matthew 11:1-6; John 20:30-31, and 2 Corinthians 12:12. But even at this stage three cautionary notes need to be sounded. In the first place the Bible acknowledges that miracles can be performed by those opposed to God, false prophets and the like (Ex. 7:8-8:18; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 13:13). Secondly, there are individuals in the New Testament who were spokesmen for God who did not, as far as we know, perform miracles: John the Baptist is an obvious example and I have just mentioned Jonah above. Thirdly, on occasions Jesus certainly rejected calls to perform miracles to authenticate his teaching and person (Mk. 8:11-12, and parallels, Matt. 16:4 and Lk. 11:29). It would seem then that the ability to

³⁵ However, in all probability the stories are alluded to in Hebrews 11:33-34; see William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Texas, 1991), 386-387; also P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977), 509.

perform miracles is not a necessary requirement or an infallible sign of a spokesperson from God. In any case, leaving this aside, the purpose of the biblical miracles cannot be subsumed, as Warfield imagines, under one single category.

Miracles are frequently regarded by the biblical writers as manifestations of God's power and authority (Num. 14:22; Deut. 4:34; 29:3; Josh. 24:17; Ps. 78:43; Jer. 32:2). On at least one occasion a miracle is performed to authenticate the truth of a prophetic prediction: the divine promise that King Hezekiah will recover from his illness within three days is attested by the miracle of the shadow of the sun dial turning backwards ten degrees (2 Kings 20:8–11). The ten plagues visited on the Egyptians (Ex. 5:1–12, 29) are described as wonders performed by God to punish Pharaoh for his refusal to release the Hebrews from bondage. As the miracles associated with the Exodus dominate the Old Testament, so the miracles of Jesus dominate the New. In general the Synoptic Gospels view Jesus' healings and exorcisms as revealing the presence of God's kingdom among men: the long promised day of God's deliverance had arrived.³⁶ This is clearly stated in Matthew 12:28, 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (cf. Mk. 1:14–15; Lk. 11:20). Integral to the arrival or inauguration of the kingdom (as is expressed in our quotation) is the notion of the defeat of Satan and his forces, and this is a prominent theme in the gospels (Mk. 1:21–28). Within the context of the kingdom of God the miracles can perform different functions. They help define the scope of the kingdom (Mk. 7:24–30), they illustrate the character of God, they underline the importance of faith in God or in God's agent, and so on. On occasions it is recorded that Jesus performed miracles simply because he had 'compassion' on those who were suffering (Mt. 14:14, Lk. 7:13). These considerations call into question the simple and exclusive identification of miracles with the attestation of God's messengers. Not all of the biblical miracles conform to Warfield's suggested pattern, rather they reveal a diversity of purposes and patterns, and once it is recognised that miracles can be performed for different reasons, then there is no a priori objection to God acting miraculously in parallel ways today. For example, if Jesus once performed miracles out of compassion for the sick and suffering, can we exclude the possibility that he might do so today?

³⁶ See *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 157–73. A useful survey of recent work on the theme of miracles in the ministry of Jesus is provided by David J. Graham, 'Jesus as Miracle Worker', *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 4, (1986), 85–96.

In concluding my discussion of Warfield's account of the meaning and purpose of miracles I want to move away from strictly exegetical and move to more broadly theological considerations. Warfield's notion of miracles as authenticating a spokesperson from God interestingly reveals and presupposes a particular understanding of Christian faith: true religion is essentially didactic in character. Miracles authenticate a messenger from God, and on the basis of this we accept and believe the message. On this understanding miracles are strictly external to Christian faith. Their purpose is to accredit an individual so that what he says is regarded as from God.³⁷ The emphasis is on the message or revelation which is given by God's spokesperson. The performance of miracles gains or ensures a hearing for the attested teacher: his words are received as God's words, and according to Warfield the words of those who have been so attested are now recorded for us in Holy Scripture, hence its status as the Word of God. But what if God's revelation, while including teaching, is inherently miraculous? What if the miracles are not external to Christian faith as Warfield's theological scheme suggests? Surely, the miracles surrounding the Israelites' escape from Egypt and their journey through the wilderness do not just authenticate Moses as God's spokesman, the miracles are the revelation, they are God's revelation of himself: the miracles show us what *God* is like. Similarly, the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament does not simply authenticate Jesus as a spokesman for God, so that we revere his teaching, the resurrection itself is revelation: Jesus is raised and in being raised from the dead is shown to be Lord and Saviour (Acts 5:30–32); his resurrection is the proof that sin and separation from God have been overcome (Rom. 4:23–25; 1 Cor. 15:17). As Paul Helm has noted, 'at the heart of the biblical account of human redemption are miracles These miracles are not a prelude to something else, they are the warp and woof of the Christian faith.'³⁸

Recognition of the revelatory character of miracles themselves cuts deeply into Warfield's apologetic programme for the truth of Christianity, which runs alongside his polemic against post-biblical miracles. In fact the twin strategies of denying post-biblical miracles

³⁷ There is some affinity here with Origen's view that through miracles 'God wanted to establish the doctrine spoken by Jesus which brought salvation to men.' However, Origen did not limit miracles to the period of the apostles. He could say 'it [the doctrine] is increasing even in recent times when many cures are done in the name of Jesus and there are other manifestations of considerable significance', *Contra Celsum*, edited and translated by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 145.

³⁸ Paul Helm, 'The Miraculous', *Science and Christian Belief* 3, 1991, 84. In the following paragraph I draw on Helm's argument.

while accepting the biblical miracles and interpreting them as authenticating God's prophets and apostles are two sides of a single argument for the truth of orthodox Christian faith. According to Warfield the occurrence of post-biblical miracles must be denied so that a convincing case for the truth of Christianity can be advanced: the former, he believes, is necessary for the success of the latter. In his view miracles authenticate the apostles as spokesmen for God, consequently what they say should be accepted on the authority of God. Thus the Christian Scriptures should be accorded the status of revelation, for they preserve the message of the Apostles. The logic of this argument, as drawn out by Warfield, requires that no post-biblical miracles occur. Should they occur the finality and ultimacy of the Christian revelation would be challenged. Post-biblical or contemporary miracles would, on Warfield's understanding, authenticate a new prophet or spokesperson from God. Consequently the content of his or her address would have the authority of God, i.e., it would have the status of divine revelation, and as such, in his opinion, would undermine the sufficiency of Scripture for salvation, and by implication detract from the ultimacy of Christ. But as we should be beginning to see, this whole apologetic argument is flawed. It makes little sense to appeal to a miracle in the Bible in order to establish the truth of the message of the Bible, for the Bible itself contains the report of the miracle. In other words, one has first to trust the biblical report of the miracle in order to authenticate the message of the Bible: this is a viciously circular argument. Furthermore, as we have already noted, miracles are not external to the biblical message as Warfield supposes but are integral to it: Christian faith as presented in the New Testament is essentially or inherently miraculous. It may possibly make sense to invoke miracles to authenticate something else, say religious teaching, for example, but it does not make sense to invoke miracles to authenticate miracles.

Once Warfield's flawed apologetic argument is exposed, and with it the associated notions that the admission of post-biblical miracles seriously undermines the finality of Christ and the sufficiency of the Christian Scriptures, then Warfield's chief motivation for denying the contemporary occurrence of miracles and the *charismata* is removed. The way is open for a more impartial treatment of the relevant biblical evidence and a more judicious assessment of contemporary claims to miraculous occurrences. In fact, Warfield's contention that miracles authenticate a spokesperson from God could be reinterpreted as having a contemporary apologetic application, only this time requiring that post-biblical miracles occur. Signs and wonders accompanying the preaching of the

biblical message would provide contemporary evidence for the truth of Christianity and the present reality of Christ. Such an argument builds upon Warfield's insight that miracles do carry apologetic force under certain conditions, but this time an appropriate rather than an inappropriate set of conditions has been specified.³⁹

The same exegetical inexactness and tendency to conform to the biblical material to a preconceived pattern, which we have identified in Warfield's treatment of the nature and purpose of miracles, are also evident in his treatment of the role of the apostles vis-à-vis spiritual gifts in the early church. He simply assumes that Jesus' original twelve disciples (whom Luke refers to as the *Twelve*), less Judas with the addition of Matthias, with the later addition of Paul, are the apostles. He further contends that the ability to perform miracles and to manifest the gifts of the Spirit is confined to the apostles, so defined, and those on whom they laid hands:

... the power of working miracles was not extended beyond the disciples upon whom the Apostles conferred it by the imposition of their hands. As the number of these disciples gradually diminished, the instances of the exercise of miraculous powers became continually less frequent, and ceased entirely at the death of the last individual on whom the hands of the apostles had been laid. (23–24)

However, at almost every point, the weight of evidence (or perhaps the lack of evidence) does not support this interpretation. Too many critical problems are simply glossed over. For example, the issues of who exactly were regarded as apostles in the early church and on what basis are simply overlooked. Warfield fails to note that the Synoptic gospels are not in precise agreement on the identity of the Twelve. But more serious is the fact (also ignored by Warfield) that in the early church and the New Testament others apart from the Twelve and Paul are called apostles.⁴⁰ Paul recognises James, the brother of the Lord, as an apostle in 1 Corinthians 15:7 and Galatians 1:19, and possibly Barnabas also (1 Cor. 9:6, cf. Acts 14:4, 14). In Romans 16:7 Paul refers to Andronicus and Junia, 'my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the *apostles*'

³⁹ It should not be read into this that I endorse the kind of 'Power Evangelism' associated with John Wimber and the Vineyard movement. The problem here is that one element of the biblical teaching on signs and wonders is exaggerated to the exclusion of all else.

⁴⁰ See D. Müller et al., 'Apostle', in Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1975), 126–137, which is to be preferred to K. H. Rengstorf's article in Kittel, Vol. 1, 407–445; also Andrew C. Clark, 'Apostleship: Evidence from the New Testament and early Christian Literature', *Vox Evangelica* 19 (1989), 49–82, and Holger Mosbech, 'Apostolos in the New testament', *Studia Theologica* 2 (1948), 166–200.

—that he refers to them as apostles seems the most natural reading, though not the only reading of the Greek.⁴¹ We should probably also mention those preachers and missionaries referred to as apostles by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Philippians 2:25; though here perhaps the non-technical sense of an apostle as a simple messenger is what is meant. Thus there was a class of apostles in the early church in the general sense of church appointed missionaries. I am not suggesting that on the basis of New Testament usage no distinction can be made between the Twelve and Paul and all the others referred to as apostles (though it is certainly not as sharp as Warfield maintains). Rather I am pointing out that Warfield never allows the New Testament to speak for itself: it speaks with a voice which is in the chief part his own.

Even if we accept a distinction between apostles, can we confidently conclude that the ability to perform miracles and confer the *charismatic* gifts was confined to Warfield's narrowly conceived apostolic band? Can we seriously believe, as Warfield taught, that every individual in the early church who manifested a gift did so only because the hands of an apostles had been laid on him or her? To receive a spiritual gift one had to be in physical contact with an apostle! Not embarrassed by this, Warfield went on to acknowledge that the charismatic gifts would have been present in almost every church of the New Testament period, presumably because the apostles graciously and selflessly travelled around the Mediterranean world imparting gifts to others. If we allow this it makes it difficult to understand why Paul should have instructed the Corinthians to 'strive for the spiritual gifts' (1 Cor. 14:1), or entertained the hope that 'all would speak in tongues, or better still prophesy', if he knew such advice and expectation could never be realised without a further visit from him. We could even ask why on the numerous occasions when Paul's apostleship was challenged, he did not defend his position and status by pointing out that he had the ability and authorisation to confer *charismatic gifts*, an ability he alone shared with the Twelve; thus his critics would have been easily silenced. The truth is of course that the New Testament evidence on which Warfield's position is based is exceedingly thin, implicit rather than explicit, and for the most part controversial: the passages he quotes seem more naturally interpreted in other ways. He makes much of the incident recorded in Acts 8:14–25, where Philip's Samaritan converts did not 'receive' the Spirit (though Luke notes that they 'had received the word of God') until the apostles came

⁴¹ See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. II (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 751 and 788–89 for translation and comment.

down from Jerusalem and laid hands on them. I don't want to engage in a long and detailed exegesis of this passage, or the story of Cornelius, which is also highly relevant, as it marks the admittance of the first Gentile to the Christian faith. But I would counsel against using these stories as paradigmatic and normative for all subsequent conversions and manifestations of the Spirit in the church of the New Testament period.⁴² We may note that there are important differences between the two stories, differences which work against the kind of harmonisation and systematisation required by Warfield. The story of the Samaritan converts appears to suggest a two stage process of Christian initiation: one turns in repentance to Christ and on a subsequent occasion one receives the Spirit (the equivalent Pauline terminology is that of 'being filled with the Spirit') Whereas in Cornelius' household some believed and simultaneously received the Spirit; which for Luke is equivalent to saying that they spoke in tongues. An interesting contrast can also be noted in the way the reality of the Spirit was conferred in each case: the Samaritans had hands laid on them by the apostles, Cornelius' household did not, for as Luke records, while Peter was still speaking 'the Spirit fell on all who heard the word' (Acts 10:44): so much for Warfield's notion that the reception of spiritual gifts only followed the laying on of hands (he himself grants this as an exception)!⁴³ Another exception is the story of the Mission of the Seventy (Lk. 10:1-20) who healed and cast out demons in Jesus' name—no apostolic laying on of hands here or restriction of the working of miracles to the Twelve; this time the evidence is conveniently ignored. We could go on at much greater length and discuss these passages or indeed address the wider issues which are raised by them and other relevant passages for our understanding of the nature of the reception and work of the Spirit, particularly the Spirit's work in distributing charismatic gifts among the Christian community. But I hope enough has been said to cast doubts upon the adequacy of Warfield's interpretation of the role of the apostles in these matters.

Finally, in connection with the apostles, could I simply record that

⁴² See Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 149-178, and more recently, *Acts for Today* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 203-221.

⁴³ The laying on of hands performed different functions in the New Testament: to commission (and not only the apostles commissioned) or set apart for service, to heal, to bless, to impart spiritual gifts, to readmit to fellowship, and so on; see E. Lohse, 'Cheir', in Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 424-437, and H. G. Schütz, 'Hand', in Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1976), 148-153.

Warfield's elevation of their role in the early church, according to which miracles authenticated them and *charismatic* gifts are tied to their presence, and even physical touch, strikes me as almost reaching the proportions of introducing a cult of personality into Christianity. Surely the emphasis of the New Testament miracles is upon the inauguration of God's kingdom in the ministry of Christ. Warfield's interpretation directs our gaze to the apostles as workers of miracles rather than to God the author of miracles. The miracles are thoroughly Christocentric and theocentric not apostle-centred. Furthermore, the kingdom or kingly rule established by God in Christ is still present to us, as the church proclaims the good news that salvation is available to all who repent and turn to Christ, regardless of colour, class or creed. We live between the times, between the time of the inauguration of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus and the time of Christ's *Parousia*. The kingdom, while established in Christ, still awaits its final realisation, when God's rule will be manifest for all to see, no longer hidden only to faith but publicly revealed.⁴⁴ Miracles and the *charismata* are signs of the kingdom of God, and as such are as relevant today as they were in the days of the apostles. Those who deny the continuing reality and occurrence of the *charismata*, be it on the basis of Warfield's particular form of dispensationalism or even Schofield's, are effectively denying the realised and present character of the kingdom of God. The New Testament affirms that the new age has dawned and that the kingdom is a present reality: miracles and the *charismata* witness to this.

Conclusions

On the basis of my analysis and consideration of Warfield's position I conclude that he has failed to provide any convincing reason, either historical or theological, for believing that the charismatic gifts were confined to the apostolic period. This of course does not establish the positive conclusion that the charismatic gifts are manifest in the church today. For example, one might still argue that there are other, stronger, biblical and theological arguments, not referred to by Warfield, which support the cessationist view. Or again, one could argue that we cannot be sure that the phenomena referred to as the

⁴⁴ See I. Howard Marshall, 'The Hope of a New Age: The Kingdom of God in the New Testament', in *Jesus the Saviour* (London: SPCK, 1990), 213–257, E. P. Sanders, *op. cit.*, 123–241, and Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963), who is much less radical here than in later works.

gifts by Pentecostals and Charismatics do in fact correspond to what Luke and Paul meant by the gifts of the Spirit. The issue here is one of identification: are the purported manifestations of the Spirit today correctly identified with the gifts spoken off in the New Testament? Clearly the debate goes on. However, what can be said with confidence is that Warfield's has provided no good reason for believing that the gifts were withdrawn by God at the end of the apostolic period. Those who dismiss contemporary claims to have revived the gifts of the Spirit on the strength of his argument would be wise to think again.

One final and not unimportant point: we can characterise Warfield's cessationist argument as strictly *formal*; formal in the sense that the contemporary legitimacy and occurrence of the gifts are discussed without any reference to the actual content of the gifts. For the most part, I have replied in similar terms. But to some extent this seems an odd theological procedure, not that formal considerations are not relevant, for they clearly are, but that considerations of content have been so entirely ignored. It may well be that Warfield's argument and my rebuttal are quite peripheral to the real issues: what do the gifts teach about God? Is what is asserted on the basis of them compatible with the content of Scripture? Do the gifts contribute to holiness of life and do they bear fruit in terms of Christian conduct? Considered in these terms, perhaps old oppositions and arguments about the *charismata* can be transcended.⁴⁵

Veni, Sancte Spiritus

Abstract

The nature of the charismatic gifts and the extent to which the gifts are present in the contemporary church are controversial subjects among theologians. Many remain deeply suspicious of claims to have revived the gifts of the Spirit in the church, and among evangelicals such a stance often reflects or explicitly follows the line of argument proposed by Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921) in his *Counterfeit Miracles*. In this paper Warfield's restriction of the charismatic gifts to the apostolic period is set out and criticised. The material is divided into three parts. In the first part, the biblical

⁴⁵ I would like to thank the Rev. Robert England and Professor Robert McKim, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for written comments on an earlier version of this paper.

evidence on the gifts of the Spirit is summarised. In the second part Warfield's argument is introduced. In the third and final part criticisms are brought to bear on Warfield's position. It is concluded that Warfield has provided no good reasons for rejecting the authenticity of contemporary expressions of the gifts.