On the Emotional Life of Our Lord

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield

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Foreword

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) was arguably the greatest Reformed theologian of the twentieth century. He served as instructor and then professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis at Western Theological Seminary (Allegheny, Pennsylvania) from 1878-1887. In 1887 he assumed the position he would occupy until his death, Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology, at Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton, New Jersey). Warfield so set his stamp upon this last generation of "Old Princeton" that his younger colleague and founder of Westminster Theological Seminary, J. Gresham Machen, commented shortly after Warfield's funeral, "It seemed to me, that the old Princeton – a great institution it was – died when Warfield was carried out."[1]

Like his own professor, Charles Hodge, before him, the arc of Warfield's career extended from the study of the New Testament to the study of Systematic and Historical Theology. Warfield the biblical scholar and Warfield the theologian were one and the same man. What lends power and depth to his theological work is his incisive and penetrating exegesis. What lends balance and precision to his exegetical work is his biblically faithful systematic theology.

Nowhere are Warfield's abilities as an interpreter of Scripture and as a Reformed theologian on display more than in his essay, "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord." Originally published in a volume commemorating the centennial

1. Quoted in N. B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 310.

anniversary of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1912, the essay was never included in the posthumous ten-volume *Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Oxford, 1932), nor in the two-volume *Selected Shorter Writings* (P&R, 1971, 1973).[2] Its sole twentieth century reprint, according to Meeter and Nicole's bibliography, was in the collection of Warfield's Christological essays and sermons, *The Person and Work of Christ* (P&R, 1950).[3] "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord" is long overdue for an introduction to a twenty-first century audience, and we may be profoundly thankful to Log College Press for doing just that.

No introduction can possibly replicate, much less convey, Warfield's gripping reasoning and his often moving prose. Readers simply have to experience these things for themselves. But what is Warfield attempting to accomplish in this essay, and how does he accomplish it? Answering these questions may help readers better profit from what they are about to read.

To begin, Warfield humbly acknowledges the sheer difficulty of his essay's subject matter. Warfield urges us to avoid some of the extremes that have plagued reflection on the emotions of Jesus. We must neither minimize nor exaggerate the emotions attributed to him in the New Testament. But even in the space between these extremes, Warfield argues, we

2. The centennial volume is *Biblical and Theological Studies by the Members of the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary Published in Commemoration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the Seminary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).

3. John E. Meeter and Roger Nicole, *A Bibliography of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, 1851-1921* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1974), 40.

face an additional challenge. How are we to think of Jesus' emotions in relation to his two natures? Our theanthropic Lord is *sui generis*, without predecessor, peer, or successor. While he is unipersonal and not bipersonal, in the one person are joined his "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures" – "without conversion, composition, or confusion" – the divine and the human (WCF 8.2). And yet, Warfield argues, the difficulty presented by our Lord's unique person is not insurmountable. Some of the emotions attributed to him in the Gospels "by their very nature" belong to his humanity. Others "belong to the human soul, if not exclusively, yet along with the divine Spirit."

With this Christological framework in place, Warfield proceeds to explore the emotions attributed to Jesus in three categories. First, there is "compassion." Second, there is "anger." Third, there is "joy." Warfield's discussion of compassion, and its close companion, love, explores the witness to these emotions first in the Synoptic Gospels and then in the Gospel of John. The Synoptics characteristically describe Jesus' compassion; John, his love. Since "love lies at the bottom of compassion," John takes us "with simple directness . . . to the bottom of things," setting on display the full range of Jesus' love in the days of his flesh. Warfield's reflections on "anger" in the Gospels provide illuminating surveys of the puzzling account of Jesus' anger towards a leper whom he heals (Mark 14:3), and of the stirring account of Jesus' anger as he stands before the grave of Lazarus (John 11:33,38). Warfield's discussion of Jesus' "joy" is concerned to dismiss the distorted portraits of Jesus either as a dour depressive or a worldly *bon vivant*. He masterfully

describes the harmony between the sorrows that lay upon the ministry of Jesus and the frequent testimonies to his "joy" within his earthly ministry – "Joy he had: but it was not the shallow joy of mere pagan delight in living, nor the delusive joy of a hope destined to failure; but the deep exultation of a conqueror setting captives free. This joy underlay all his sufferings and shed its light along the whole thorn-beset path which was trodden by his torn feet." Such joy, Warfield insists, was entirely consistent with the "ultimate depths of human anguish" that Jesus experienced at Gethsemane and Calvary.

Warfield draws several conclusions from his survey of the New Testament's testimony to Jesus' emotions. Jesus experienced the whole range of emotions that any human being experiences. He is "a human being like ourselves," even as "he assumed the flesh of unfallen man." Further, we must insist upon Jesus' individuality, that is, "the impression of a distinct individuality acting in accordance with its specific character as such." The New Testament frequently lands upon the term "meekness" or "humility" to capture Jesus' character. But it would be mistaken to say that Jesus was temperamentally meek or humble. Rather, Jesus' "individuality" was "mark[ed by] harmonious completeness" – "nothing that is human was alien to him, and . . . all that is human manifested itself in him in perfect proportion and balance." Because of sin, we are frequently conquered or overtaken by our emotions. But Jesus "remains ever in control" and "various as they are, [his emotions] do not inhibit one another"; "strong as they are . . . they never overmaster him."

For Warfield, the emotions of Jesus are significant to us

in three ascending ways. First, the emotions of Jesus furnish "proofs of the truth of his humanity." Second, they provide "an incitement to [disciples] to a holy life accordant with the will of God." Thus, "we must become imitators of him, until we are metamorphosed into the same image." But, third and most fundamentally, "when we observe [Jesus] exhibiting the movements of his human emotions, we are gazing on the very process of our salvation: every manifestation of the truth of our Lord's humanity is an exhibition of the reality of our redemption." Every testimony to and expression of the emotional life of Jesus directs us, in other words, to the one who assumed our humanity in order to save sinners and bring them to everlasting life.

This introduction has sketched something of a roadmap to this exquisite essay. But just as reviewing a map is no substitute for the journey, so this introduction is no substitute for this essay's magnificent display of Warfield's reasoning and prose. A contemporary once described Warfield as "the most Christ-like man that I have ever known."[4] Let this Christ-like scholar, then, direct you to the feet of the "man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5) that you may believe and serve this magnificent Savior.

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4. "Letter from F. T. McGill to John Meeter," cited in Fred G. Zaspel, *Warfield on the Christian Life: Living in Light of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 32.

On the Emotional Life of our Lord

It belongs to the truth of our Lord's humanity, that he was subject to all sinless human emotions.[1] In the accounts which the Evangelists give us of the crowded activities which filled the few years of his ministry, the play of a great variety of emotions is depicted. It has nevertheless not proved easy to form a universally acceptable conception of our Lord's emotional life. Not only has the mystery of the Incarnation entered in as a disturbing factor, the effect of the divine nature on the movements of the human soul brought into personal union with it being variously estimated. Differences have arisen also as to how far there may be attributed to a perfect human nature movements known to us only as passions of sinful beings.

Two opposite tendencies early showed themselves in the Church. One, derived ultimately from the ethical ideal of

1. "Certainly," remarks Calvin (*Commentarios in Harmoniam Evangelicarum*, Matthew 26:37), "those who imagine that the Son of God was exempt from human passions, do not truly and seriously acknowledge him to be a man." "But Christ having a human nature the same for substance that ours is, consisting both of soul and body," argues Thomas Goodwin (*Works*, Edinburgh ed., 1862, iv. p. 140), "therefore he must needs have affections – even affections proper to man's nature and truly human. And these he should have had, although this human nature had, from the very first assumption of it, been as glorious as it now is in heaven." "In what sense the soul is capable of suffering," says John Pearson (*An Exposition of the Creed*, New York ed., 1843, p. 288), "in that he was subject to animal passion. Evil apprehended to come tormented his soul with fear, which was as truly in him in respect of what he was to suffer, as hope in reference to the recompense of a reward to come after and from his sufferings."

the Stoa, which conceived moral perfection under the form of ἀπάθεια, naturally wished to attribute this ideal ἀπάθεια to Jesus, as the perfect man. The other, under the influence of the conviction that, in order to deliver men from their weaknesses, the Redeemer must assume and sanctify in his own person all human πάθη, as naturally was eager to attribute to him in its fulness every human πάθος. Though in far less clearly defined forms, and with a complete shifting of their bases, both tendencies are still operative in men's thought of Jesus. There is a tendency in the interest of the dignity of his person to minimize, and there is a tendency in the interest of the completeness of his humanity to magnify, his affectional movements. The one tendency may run some risk of giving us a somewhat cold and remote Jesus, whom we can scarcely believe to be able to sympathize with us in all our infirmities. The other may possibly be in danger of offering us a Jesus so crassly human as scarcely to command our highest reverence. Between the two, the figure of Jesus is liable to take on a certain vagueness of outline, and come to lack definiteness in our thought. It may not be without its uses, therefore, to seek a starting point for our conception of his emotional life in the comparatively few[2] affectional movements which are directly assigned to him in the Gospel narratives. Proceeding outward

2. There is some exaggeration in the remark: "The notices in the Gospels of the impressions made on his feelings by different situations in which he was placed, are extraordinarily numerous" (James Stalker, *Imago Christi*, 1890, p. 302). The Gospel narratives are very objective, and it is only occasionally (most frequently in Mark) that they expressly notify the subjective movements of the actors in the drama which they unfold.

from these, we may be able to form a more distinctly conceived and firmly grounded idea of his emotional life in general.

It cannot be assumed beforehand, indeed, that all the emotions attributed to Jesus in the Evangelical narratives are intended to be ascribed distinctively to his human soul.[3] Such is no doubt the common view. And it is not an unnatural view to take as we currently read narratives, which, whatever else they contain, certainly present some dramatization of the human experiences of our Lord.[4] No doubt the naturalness of

3. Direct mention of our Lord's human 'soul,' under that term (ψυχή), is not frequent in the Gospels: cf. Swete on Mark 14:34, "Though the Gospels yield abundant evidence of the presence of human emotions in our Lord, (e.g., 3:5, 6:6, 10:14, John 6:33), this direct mention of his 'soul' has no parallel in them if we except John 7:27; for in such passages as 10:45, John 10:11 ψυχή is the individual life (see Cremer s. v.) rather than the seat of the emotions." J. A. Alexander on Mark 14:34 remarks that "my soul" there "is not a mere periphrasis for the pronoun, (*I*), but refers his strange sensations more directly to the inward seat of feeling and emotion." Cf., however, the Greek text of Psalm 13:6, 12, 45:5; but also Winer, *Grammar*, etc., Thayer's tr., 1872, p. 156. The term πνεῦμα occurs rather more frequently than ψυχή, to designate the seat of our Lord's emotions: Mark 8:12; John 11:33, 13:21; cf. Mark 2:8; Matthew 27:50; John 19:30.

4. Such an attempt as that made by W. B. Smith (*Ecce Deus,* 1911, p. 101), to explain away the implication of our Lord's humanity in the earliest Gospel transmission, is, of course, only a "curiosity of literature." "Mark," says he, "nowhere uses of Jesus an expression which suggests an impressive or even amiable human personality; or, indeed, any kind of human personality whatever." What Mark says of Jesus, is what is commonly said of God – of Jehovah. The seeming exceptions are merely specious. He ascribes "compassion" to Jesus: it is the very core of the oriental conception of God that he is merciful. He speaks of Jesus "rebuking" (ἐπιτιμάω) or "snorting at" (ἐμβριμάομαι) men: these are expressions suitable to God and employed in the Old Testament of Jehovah. He tells us that Jesus "loved" the rich

this view is its sufficient general justification. Only, it will be well to bear in mind that Jesus was definitely conceived by the Evangelists as a two-natured person, and that they made no difficulties with his duplex consciousness. In almost the same breath they represent him as declaring that he knows the Father through and through and, of course, also all that is in man, and the world which is the theatre of his activities, and that he is ignorant of the time of the occurrence of a simple earthly event which concerns his own work very closely; that he is meek and lowly in heart and yet at the same time the Lord of men by their relations to whom their destinies are determined – "no man cometh unto the Father but by me." In the case of a Being whose subjective life is depicted as focusing in two centers of consciousness, we may properly maintain some reserve in ascribing distinctively to one or the other of them mental activities which, so far as their nature is concerned, might properly belong to either. The embarrassment in studying the emotional life of Jesus arising from this cause, however, is more theoretical than practical. Some of the emotions attributed to him in the Evangelical narrative are, in one way or another, expressly assigned to his human soul. Some of them by their very nature assign themselves to his human soul. With reference to the remainder, just because they might equally well be assigned to the one nature or the other, it may be taken for granted that they belong to the human soul, if not exclusively, yet along with the divine Spirit;

young man – the *only* ascription of love to Jesus, by the way, in the Synoptics: but the rich young man is just a symbol, the symbol of Israel, whom Jehovah loves. And so on.

and they may therefore very properly be used to fill out the picture. We may thus, without serious danger of confusion, go simply to the Evangelical narrative, and, passing in review the definite ascriptions of specific emotions to Jesus in its records, found on them a conception of his emotional life which may serve as a starting-point for a study of this aspect of our Lord's human manifestation.

The establishment of this starting-point is the single task of this essay. No attempt will be made in it to round out our view of our Lord's emotional life. It will content itself with an attempt to ascertain the exact emotions which are expressly assigned to him in the Evangelical narrative, and will leave their mere collocation to convey its own lesson. We deceive ourselves, however, if their mere collocation does not suffice solidly to ground certain very clear convictions as to our Lord's humanity, and to determine the lines on which our conception of the quality of his human nature must be filled out.

I.

The emotion which we should naturally expect to find most frequently attributed to that Jesus whose whole life was a mission of mercy, and whose ministry was so marked by deeds of beneficence that it was summed up in the memory of his followers as a going through the land "doing good" (Acts 11:38), is no doubt "compassion." In point of fact, this is the emotion which is most frequently attributed to him.[5]

5. Matthew 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13; Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32; Mark 6:34, 8:2. Cf. Mark 9:22. Not at all in John.

The term employed to express it[6] was unknown to the Greek classics, and was perhaps a coinage of the Jewish dispersion.[7] It first appears in common use in this sense, indeed, in the Synoptic Gospels,[8] where it takes the place of the most inward classical word of this connotation.[9] The Divine mercy has been defined as that essential perfection in God "whereby he pities and relieves the miseries of his creatures": it includes, that is to say, the two parts of an internal movement of pity and an external act of beneficence. It is the internal movement of pity which is emphasized when our Lord is said to be "moved with compassion" as the term is sometimes excellently rendered in the English versions.[10] In the appeals made to his mercy, a more external word[11] is used; but it is this more internal

6. Σπλαγχνίζομαι: see Bleek, *An Introduction to the New Testament,* § 33, (vol. i, p. 75); J. A. Alexander on Mark 1:41; Plummer on Matthew 9:36. Buttig's monograph, *De Emphasi* σπλαγχνίζομαι, we have not seen.

7. So Lightfoot, on Philippians 1:8.

8. It is found in the LXX in this metaphorical sense apparently only at Proverbs 17:5. Cf. Swete on Mark 1:41.

9. Οἰκτείρω, which does not occur in the Synoptic Gospels, and indeed only once (Romans 9:15) in the N. T. The adjective, οἰκτίρμοων occurs at Luke 9:36 (also James 5:11 only in N. T.); the noun οἰκτιρμός, occurs in Paul (Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Philippians 2:1; Colossians 3:12; also Hebrews 10:28 only).

10. A. V. Mark 1:41, 6:34; Matthew 9:36, 14:14; R. V. Mark 1:41; Matthew 9:36, 20:34.

11. Ἐλεέω (sometimes, ἐλεάω), Matthew 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30-31; Mark 10:47-48; Luke 17:13, 18:38-39; cf. Mark 5:19; Matthew 18:33. This word also is not found in John. In Mark 9:22 only is σπλαγχνίζομαι used in an appeal, and even there its more subjective sense is apparent. On ἔλεος and its synonymy see J. H. Heinrich Schmidt, *Synonymik der grieschischen Sprache* iii., 1879, § 143, pp. 572sq.; and the excellent summary statement by Thayer in

word that is employed to express our Lord's response to these appeals: the petitioners besought him to take pity on them; his heart responded with a profound feeling of pity for them. His compassion fulfilled itself in the outward act;[12] but what is emphasized by the term employed to express our Lord's response is, in accordance with its very derivation, the profound internal movement of his emotional nature.

This emotional movement was aroused in our Lord as well by the sight of individual distress (Mark 1:41; Matthew 20:34; Luke 7:13) as by the spectacle of man's universal misery

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Thayer-Grimm, *Lexicon etc., sub voc.* ἐλεέω. G. Heine, *Synonymik des N. T.-lichen Griechisch,* 898, p. 82, states it thus: "ἔλεος (חֶסֶד, חֵן) is the inclination to succor the miserable, οἰκτιρμός the feeling of pain arising from the miseries of others . . . οἰκτιρμός is the feeling of sympathy dwelling in the heart; ἔλεος is sympathy expressing itself in act." Σπλαγχνίζομαι is a term of feeling, taking the place of οἰκτείρω.

12. W. Lütgert, *Die Liebe im Neuen Testament,* 1905, thinks it important to lay stress on this side of our Lord's love. "In the Synoptic portrait of Christ the trait which stands out most clearly is the love of Jesus. He not only commanded love, but first himself practiced it. It is not merely his thought but his will, and not merely his will but above all his deed. He therefore not only required it but aroused it. It expresses itself accordingly not merely in his word, but in the first instance in his act. Jesus' significance to the Synoptists does not consist in his having discovered the command of love, but in his having fulfilled it. For them Jesus is not a 'sage' who teaches old truths or new, but a doer, who brings the truth true, that is, acts it out" (p. 53). "His love never remains a powerless wish, that is, an unsuccessful willing, but it always succeeds. The working of Jesus is described in the Gospels as almighty love" (p. 54). "Since his acts are really love, they have primarily no other purpose but to help. Their motive is nothing but the compassion of Jesus" (p. 56). Accordingly, Lütgert insists, no cry to Jesus for help was ever made in vain: "Jesus acts precisely according to his own command, Give to him that asketh thee" (p. 55).

(Mark 6:34, 8:2; Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32). The appeal of two blind men that their eyes might be opened (Matthew 20:34), the appeal of a leper for cleansing (Mark 1:41)—though there may have been circumstances in his case which called out Jesus' reprobation (verse 43)—set our Lord's heart throbbing with pity, as did also the mere sight of a bereaved widow, wailing by the bier of her only son as they bore him forth to burial,[13] though no appeal was made for relief (Luke 7:13). The ready spontaneity of Jesus' pity is even more plainly shown when he intervenes by a great miracle to relieve temporary pangs of hunger: "I have compassion on"—or better, "I feel pity for"—"the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way; *and some of them are come from far"* (Mark 8:2; Matthew 15:32)—the only occasion on which Jesus is recorded as testifying to his own feeling of pity. It was not merely the physical ills of life, however—want and disease and death—which called out our Lord's compassion. These ills were rather looked upon by him as themselves rooted in spiritual destitution. And it was this spiritual destitution which most deeply moved his pity. The cause and the effects are indeed very closely linked together in the narrative, and it is not always easy to separate them. Thus we read in Mark 6:34: "And he came forth and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them"—better, "he felt pity for them"—"because they were as sheep not having a shepherd, and he taught them many things." But in the parallel

13. Render, not "he had," but "he felt compassion," to bring out the emphasis on the "feeling."

passage in Matthew 14:14, we read: "And he came forth and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on" ("felt pity for") "them, and he healed their sick." We must put the two passages together to get a complete account: their fatal ignorance of spiritual things, their evil case under the dominion of Satan in all the effects of his terrible tyranny, are alike the object of our Lord's compassion.[14] In another passage (Matthew 9:36) the emphasis is thrown very distinctly on the spiritual destitution of the people as the cause of his compassionate regard: "But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." This description of the spiritual destitution of the people is cast in very strong language. They are compared to sheep which have been worn out and torn by running hither and thither through the thorns with none to direct them, and have now fallen helpless and hopeless to the ground.[15] The sight of their desperate plight awakens our Lord's pity and moves him to provide the remedy.

14. J. A. Alexander's note (on Mark 6:34, repeated verbally at Matthew 9:36 and 14:14) is therefore too exclusive: "What excited his divine and human sympathy was not, of course, their numbers or their physical-condition, but their spiritual destitution." It was both. Cf. Lütgert, as above, p. 68: "It is a characteristic trait of Jesus that he feels pity not merely for the religious, but also for the external, need of the people and that he acts out of this pity. The perfection of his love stands precisely in this-that it is independent of gratitude. He helps to help."

15. Cf. Plummer *in loc.*: "A strong word (ἐσκυλμένοι) is used to express their distress. . . Originally it meant 'flayed' or 'mangled,' but became equivalent to 'harassed' or 'vexed' with weariness or worry. . . 'Scattered' seems to suit shepherdless sheep, but it may be doubted if this is the exact meaning of ἐρριμένοι . . . 'Prostrated' seems to be the meaning here."