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## An Excerpt: From Inscrutability to Concursus

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### Introduction

Benjamin B. Warfield has always been a favorite theologian of mine. As a seminary student, I heard the likes of R. C. Sproul and Sinclair Ferguson offer their own admiration for this great man. At the time, none of my peers seemed to know much about him personally. Perhaps the only story I heard was that of his husbandly devotion to his beloved and invalid wife, Annie. However, the writings of Warfield were most impressive to me. Here was a brilliant man with a balance of wit and wisdom. At one moment, he could pierce the heart of the argument with theological acumen while in the next explain that the arguers had retrieved their logic from the wastebasket of the past and wrapped it in the swaddling clothes of rationalism before offering it to the church as a “new idea.” Warfield had the gift of challenging theological nonsense. We need that today.

So, when Dr. Lane G. Tipton suggested that I do a little digging in order to discover the identity of that “certain school of writers” Warfield mentions who appealed to the divine-human personality to explain the Bible as a divine-human book I was hooked.<sup>1</sup> However, that initial question led me to think not only about the analogy that Warfield used to describe the Divine-human relationship in the authorship of the Bible but the mode of inspiration itself. And what I have uncovered from the primary sources is a picture of a theologian doing theology at an extremely high level.

Archibald Alexander Hodge had invited young Warfield into a theological controversy with Union Theological Seminary and particularly Charles Briggs. Both Hodge and Warfield described the American theological landscape at that time with regard to inspiration as underdeveloped and in need of improvement. Warfield would invest nearly the remainder of his life in this work. Consequently, Warfield’s doctrine of Scripture might rightly be called a doctrine under theological construction.

However, before the eyebrows begin to rise, let me explain what I mean. When Warfield was twenty-nine years old, Western Theological Seminary called him to the chair of New Testament Literature and Exegesis. During his inaugural address, he said of the Westminster Standards, “I sign these standards not as a necessary form which must be submitted to, but gladly and willingly as the expression of a personal and cherished conviction.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, for Warfield, the confessional standards of the Westminster Assembly supplied both a theologically orthodox place to stand and room to move. Therefore, the construction that we will witness is an exegetically, Biblically, apologetically, and confessionally orthodox construction, but it is construction nonetheless.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 160.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 419.

I realize that what I offer in the following pages may be described as a new perspective on Benjamin B. Warfield. However, I would describe it a bit differently. I have gotten close enough to the man to see how human he really was, and that has simply added to my already extensive admiration. Warfield began his career faithful to the Scriptures and the standards of the church; and as he matured in both life and faith, he grew to love both more and more, not less. Of course, he did not love the standards because they were equal to the Scripture, but because the standards are the *norma normata* or the rule that is ruled by the *norma normans*, which is, of course, Scripture. Warfield is the kind of model we need today. That is, we need men like him, men who end their career with more love for God's Word than when they started. Though the limitations and failures of this work are, of course, my own, it is this Warfield that I hope you will see in these pages.

### **The World Closer to Home**

In 1874, Henry B. Smith, who had studied the new methods in Germany, retired from his post at Union Theological Seminary due to ill health. Smith believed that Charles August Briggs was the right man to replace him. Charles Briggs, having graduated from Union Theological Seminary and having studied for three years in Germany, was strongly recommended by Smith and Philip Schaff for the position of professor of Hebrew and cognate languages at Union Theological Seminary.<sup>3</sup> Briggs happily took up Smith's mantle, determined to be an advocate for the critical methods he had learned while abroad.<sup>4</sup>

Briggs was the type of man who had no shortage of political savvy or personal determination. Having failed to establish an international theological journal with Scottish cooperation, Briggs saw an opportunity at home.<sup>5</sup> Realizing in the wake of the New School/Old School reunion of 1869 that the opportunity was ripe to establish a forum wherein the methods of historical criticism could be freely aired and judged, Briggs acted.<sup>6</sup>

After Briggs's appointment, he urged President William Adams of Union Theological Seminary to write Princeton Theological Seminary, suggesting the creation of a theological journal for both institutions to oversee.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of the journal would be "to treat all subjects in a broad and catholic spirit, comprehending those historical phases of Calvinism which combined in the Presbyterian Church at the reunion."<sup>8</sup> Princeton agreed and a New York publishing company distributed the first edition of the *Presbyterian Review* on January 11, 1880, to several hundred subscribers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1996), 83.

<sup>4</sup> M. James Sawyer, *Charles Augustus Briggs and Tensions in Late Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press, 1994), 113.

<sup>5</sup> Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Mark S. Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 51.

<sup>7</sup> Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> A. A. Hodge and Charles A. Briggs, "The Idea and Aims of *The Presbyterian Review*," *Presbyterian Review* 1, no. 1 (1880): 4.

<sup>9</sup> Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 84.

In keeping with the journal's aim "to give the freshest results of Biblical criticism and historical investigation," and his own desire to vindicate Biblical criticism in the Presbyterian Church, Briggs submitted, for the October 1880 issue, a historical account of the William Robertson Smith trial in Scotland.<sup>10</sup> Smith had been summoned before the ecclesiastical bar for teaching and popularizing in essays, books, and most visibly, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, German critical conclusions about the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>11</sup> According to Briggs, of all the various articles written by Smith, "the one on the Bible, gave great offence" to the orthodox contingent in the church for three reasons:

(1) By their bold and fearless rejection of views long established in the church, and regarded by most people as inseparable from orthodox views of the inspiration and authority of the Bible as the Word of God; (2) by the confident and assured statement of opinions that were strange to the British and American public as if they were unquestionable and accepted by all competent scholars; (3) by the bald statement of theories that were ordinarily associated with Foreign Rationalists in their attacks on the Christian religion, without those qualifications and explanations that would be expected from an evangelical Presbyterian, in separating himself from them.<sup>12</sup>

Briggs's agreement with Smith manifested itself in the tone and content of the article. For example, with a stroke of the pen he dismissed "the competency of the church courts to judge the veracity of the complicated new critical theories."<sup>13</sup>

In Briggs's zeal, he played his cards for all to see. The statement went beyond the purview of the journal's stated purpose, and more to the point, beyond the judgment of Briggs's coeditor, A. A. Hodge. Not surprisingly, Princeton Seminary's A. A. Hodge responded with a note suggesting disagreement with Briggs's assessment of the case. Perhaps Hodge expected Briggs to withdraw the article, but retreat was not in the script that Briggs was writing.

After personal correspondence, it was agreed that a full and frank discussion of the issue that had vexed the Scottish church should be dealt with in a series of eight articles, to begin in April 1881, only after the Scottish church had decided the fate of Robertson Smith.<sup>14</sup> Both "sides," Hodge, Briggs, and two additional scholars each of their choosing, would reasonably and calmly argue their case. And so, the incident began a remarkable exchange of essays in the *Presbyterian Review* from April 1881 to April 1883, not to mention the introduction of a new and welcomed voice into the discussion.

The opening salvo in the series came from A. A. Hodge. The article was simply titled "Inspiration." Hodge chose to write the first part providing a definition of inspiration and exfoliating its presuppositions, genesis, and emphasis. For the second portion, which would be apologetic in nature, Hodge secured the help of a young theologian by the name of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. And so began a theological rivalry that would continue for at least a decade.

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<sup>10</sup> Hodge and Briggs, "The Idea and Aims of *The Presbyterian Review*," 4.

<sup>11</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 16.

<sup>12</sup> Charles A. Briggs, "The Robertson Smith Case," *Presbyterian Review* 1, no. 4 (1880): 738.

<sup>13</sup> Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 84–85.

<sup>14</sup> Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism*, 57–58.

## Warfield and Briggs and Inspiration

The series of articles decided upon by Hodge and Briggs moved ahead as planned, and for three years the debate was carried on in, for the most part, scholarly and measured tones by several well-selected exegetes and theologians. The acerbity of Briggs himself stood out as the primary exception.<sup>15</sup> Following the Hodge/Warfield article published in the April 1881 edition of the *Presbyterian Review*, Briggs answered with his “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration” in July of that same year.

The two articles were markedly different from the outset. Hodge and Warfield began their article with an attempt to move the discussion concerning inspiration forward in a manner consistent with historical theological development. For Hodge and Warfield, the debate was an opportunity to clarify theological constructs already rooted in Scripture and then stretch them toward their full exegetical and confessional capacity.<sup>16</sup> In this case, the subject was the word or idea of inspiration and these men took the opportunity to clarify the issues surrounding this aspect of the doctrine of Scripture, especially its mode of inspiration.

At the outset, Hodge and Warfield took notice of how the word *inspiration* was used to express the entire agency of God, which produced that divine element which distinguishes Scripture from all other writings.<sup>17</sup> Their concern to posit “a definite and never-varying sense” of the word *inspiration* was the result of “the embarrassment which is continually recurring in the discussions of this subject.”<sup>18</sup> From the beginning, these men declared a desire to move forward, not an agenda, but a theological position based on Scripture and confession.

What is more, these men did not think of themselves as innovators, but instead understood their actions to be consistent with the praxis of constructive historical theology.<sup>19</sup> Consider the following statement from the opening pages:

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<sup>15</sup> William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 78. Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, “The One Hundred and Third General Assembly,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 2 (1891): 495. Warfield writes, “Among these problems . . . was the disposition to be made of the appointment of Prof. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., to the recently established chair of Biblical Theology in Union Seminary. This disposition was not made in the spirit of irritation towards Dr. Briggs; but in that same spirit of patient forbearance with which the Church has for so long borne with what it deems his unfortunate manner.”

<sup>16</sup> Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, “Inspiration,” *Presbyterian Review* 2 (April 1881): 226.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> At this point, it may be helpful to at least acknowledge the article by Theodore Letis titled “B. B. Warfield, Common-Sense Philosophy, and Biblical Criticism” (*American Presbyterian* 69, 3 [Fall 1991]). Letis argues that Warfield was innovative, and worse, his innovations led to Princeton’s subsequent embrace of higher criticism within a decade (cf. 184, 186.) Several criticisms of Letis’s thesis might be made, but we will simply provide three. First, Letis does not deal with the genuine theological construction in which both Warfield and Hodge were willing participants. This lack of historical and theological context does not allow Letis to situate Warfield’s exegetical work in its proper place. Second, there is no attempt to deal with Warfield’s article “The Rights of Criticism and the Church,” in which he distinguishes his view of criticism from that of unbelieving criticism, which was something that Letis’s discussion could have benefited from on page 182. Third, it is simply historically irresponsible to suggest that the breakdown at Princeton occurred as a result of Warfield’s view of criticism. A reading of Ned B. Stonehouse’s *J. Gresham Machen* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2004) would bear out some of the political and theological trends which led to the demise of theological orthodoxy at Princeton Seminary.

The history of theology is full of parallel instances, in which terms of the highest import have come to be accepted in a more fixed and narrow sense than they bore at first either in Scriptural or early ecclesiastical usage, and with only a remote relation to their etymology; as, for instance, Regeneration, Sacrament, etc.<sup>20</sup>

These men obviously understood themselves to be engaged in legitimate theological activity that both had learned at the same theological well. Consider these words from Charles Hodge, professor of systematic theology at Princeton, the alma mater of both Hodge and Warfield:

The true method of theology is, therefore, the inductive, which assumes that the Bible contains all the facts or truths which form the contents of theology, just as the facts of nature are the contents of the natural sciences. It is also assumed that the relation of these Biblical facts to each other, the principles involved in them, the laws which determine them, are in the facts themselves, and are to be deduced from them, just as the laws of nature are deduced from the facts of nature.<sup>21</sup>

Taken at face value, Hodge and Warfield were attempting to bring precision and clarification to an often muddled and unclear discussion and doing so according to what they understood as proper theological method.

Ironically, it did not take long to illustrate the need for the precision for which this part of the article called. An editorial appeared in the July 1881 edition of the *Presbyterian*, which accused Hodge and Warfield of having reduced the theory of verbal plenary inspiration “to that of mere providential superintendence over its external production.”<sup>22</sup> Warfield responded the very next month. One can almost hear the exasperation in Warfield’s tone when he wrote, “How anyone could see in the *Presbyterian Review* article any lowering of the claims of inspiration, and especially the lowering asserted in your editorial, simply amazes me.”<sup>23</sup> Warfield continued to clarify once again the distinction between God’s providence and the divine element of inspiration.

The point was obvious; clarity was certainly the need of the hour in this discussion and for good reason. Both Hodge and Warfield understood that “the prevalent habit of ‘concession’ to the world’s thinking” is “the mother of all heresy.”<sup>24</sup> And for most of the nineteenth century, theology had been hospitable to Kantian thinking in Schleiermacher who had started with a definition of religion and then sought to prove that Christianity was the most satisfactory form of the impulse thus far developed.<sup>25</sup>

Having understood the Kantian theological concessions of the nineteenth century, Hodge and Warfield articulated their concern with precision: “The only really dangerous opposition to the church doctrine of inspiration comes either directly or indirectly, but always ultimately, from

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<sup>20</sup> Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 226.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration*, ed. Roger R. Nicole (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker, 1979), 75. (Editorial, *Presbyterian*, July 30, 1881.)

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 2:675. (“Heresy and Concession,” *Presbyterian Messenger*, May 7 1896.)

<sup>25</sup> Hutchison, *The Modern Impulse*, 123.

some false view of God's relationship to the world."<sup>26</sup> With the influx of the New Theology and its stress on divine immanence and radical transcendence, Hodge and Warfield recognized the trend toward pantheism, which would eventually lead to the denial of special revelation.

Nevertheless, Hodge and Warfield prove themselves to be neither theologians who balance one extreme with another nor ones who minimize important doctrines for fear of being misunderstood. Thus, for them, there is no fear in the assertion that "the whole genius of Christianity . . . presupposes the immanence of God in all his creatures, and his concurrence with them in all of their spontaneous activities."<sup>27</sup> Hodge and Warfield realized that a sound view of inspiration and especially its mode required a right view of God's relationship to the world.

Thus, in order to explain that the currents of God's divine activities not only flow around us and within us, without interfering with personal attributes or free rational activities, the doctrine of divine immanence must not be feared but maintained.<sup>28</sup> What is clear from these pages is that Hodge's and Warfield's view of nineteenth-century liberalism's distortions of the doctrine of God did not discourage them from maintaining a robust view of God's immanence.

What is more, it is not in spite of but rather because of their bold view of immanence that Hodge and Warfield were able to affirm a mode of inspiration that they believed would maintain God's special revelation amid dangerous pantheistic theological trends. Consequently, Hodge and Warfield went on to identify superintendence as the essence of the mode of inspiration distinguishing it from other providential activities.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the God who is transcendent works within his creatures immanently to produce his word. Hodge and Warfield lay emphasis on the idea that a correct understanding of mode in an age of radical immanence will preserve the idea of a special revelation.

Briggs saw things differently. But his opening paragraph betrayed an internal struggle. He readily admitted to seeing himself as a man caught between two extremes with himself as a mediator. Whereas Hodge and Warfield begin without so much as a greeting but instead open with a discussion on the etymology of the word *inspiration*, Briggs admits his own reluctance, hesitation, and even fear, "lest in the present state of the question we may be unable to satisfy extreme men on either side, and thus be caught in a place where two seas of intensely hostile prejudiced elements meet."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Briggs announced his plan to seek a middle way, writing,

We embark upon the enterprise, therefore, as a voyage of exploration, not expecting to solve all difficulties or to escape dangerous issues or to avoid mistakes or even blunders, but to do what we may be enabled to do, honestly and faithfully to contribute to the solution of the problem, with an assurance of the absolute authority of the Word of God, a conviction that Truth is mighty and will prevail over our prejudices, a trust that the currents of Criticism since the Reformation have not flowed up to the present crisis in vain, and at the same time with a sincere desire to be corrected by our brethren in those

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<sup>26</sup> Hodge and Warfield, "Inspiration," 227.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs, "Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration," *Presbyterian Review* 2 (July 1881): 550.

matters in which we may unconsciously drift astray.<sup>31</sup>

While the Hodge/Warfield article is unquestionably constructive, the Briggs article is exploratory and cautious and sets out little hope of resolving difficulties.

Consequently, Briggs's article has the appearance of being far less helpful than that of the Hodge/Warfield article. What is more, despite its exploratory intent, the article's tone seems aggressive and even reactionary. Briggs frequently implies or states that constructive theology is traditionalism, dogmatism, or scholasticism, all of which Briggs views in a negative light. Thus, Briggs is led to pronounce a verdict upon the type of theological construction that he sees in the Hodge/Warfield article.

The dogmatic scheme is too often the mould into which the gold of the Scriptures and the silver of the creed are poured to coin a series of definitions, and fashion a system of theology which not only breaks up the concrete and harmonious whole of the Scriptures into fragments, stamping them with the imprint of the particular conception of the theologian in order to their reconstruction.<sup>32</sup>

According to Briggs, Hodge and Warfield were attempting to make their private opinions the official doctrine of the church.<sup>33</sup> Several years later, Briggs would go so far as to describe the dogmatic "opinions" of Hodge and Warfield as "false doctrine circulating in a tract bearing the imprint of the Presbyterian Board of Publication, among our ministers and people, poisoning their souls and misleading them into dangerous error."<sup>34</sup> In fact, rounded off Briggs, "No more dangerous doctrine has ever come from the pen of men."<sup>35</sup> Likely, Briggs earned his reputation for acerbity through statements like this one.

However, Briggs claimed that he did not deny the right of dogmatism itself.<sup>36</sup> So long as dogmatism is in the harness with the methods of criticism, it has a right to proceed with its labors; but otherwise, its natural tendency is to cry out against criticism.<sup>37</sup> This comment is perhaps one of the most difficult statements to understand in the Briggs article, since just a few pages earlier he described these views (i.e., traditional, dogmatic, scholastic) as tares in a field of wheat.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, according to Briggs's article, the way forward is to be found in the new science of Biblical criticism, minus the systematic and logical exfoliation of Biblical doctrines. Alternatively, as Briggs might summarize the situation, standing over against dogmatism is

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 554.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs, *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), 64.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Briggs, "Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures," 558.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Charles Augustus Briggs, *The Authority of Holy Scripture: An Inaugural Address* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 41. Briggs writes, "We have undermined the breastworks of traditionalism; let us blow them to atoms."

criticism. For Briggs, this criticism meant studying the text of Scripture in the original languages, clinging to the inductive methods of scientific investigation, and not shrinking back from serious historical investigation of Scripture.<sup>39</sup>

But for Briggs it also meant, as he would say in his 1891 inaugural lecture, “A new doctrine of God is one of the greatest needs of our time.”<sup>40</sup> Briggs, in a footnote to this comment, indicates that the reader should consult his 1889 book, *Whither?*, for further details. There, Briggs accuses A. A. Hodge of allowing his dogmatic tendencies to ignore the idea that God is a *living* God.<sup>41</sup> However, what Briggs says at the end of this section is most interesting: “Dr. Isaac Dorner has rendered an inestimable service to the church in reasserting the doctrine of the living God.”<sup>42</sup>

Both Hegel and Schleiermacher figured prominently and explicitly in Dorner’s theological and philosophical background, and both profoundly influenced his methodology.<sup>43</sup> Barth observed that Dorner was able to combine both in his system which enabled him to point beyond other theologians of his day.<sup>44</sup> However, this move beyond Schleiermacher and Hegel appears to have taken the shape of more, not less, speculation about God. As a result, Barth finds Dorner’s theology ambiguous and “even in detailed points it proved to be a significant source of error.”<sup>45</sup> But what is important for us at this point is to realize that Dorner is “in the vicinity of Schleiermacher,” which means that, in faith, there is no absolute knowledge of God because, to a greater or lesser degree, Dorner had been fundamentally concessive to Kant.<sup>46</sup>

Briggs, who studied under Dorner while in Germany, wrote to Henry B. Smith of Dorner’s “magisterial methodology,” a method that he announced he would utilize in his own scholarship.<sup>47</sup> The unavoidable conclusion is that Briggs had bought into the fundamental ideas that motivated nineteenth-century liberal theology.

However, it might be argued, as M. James Sawyer does, that Briggs’s doctrine of immanence was, in fact, not driven by the pantheistic tendencies of nineteenth-century Protestant liberal theology, but rather was balanced with an equally strong concept of transcendence.<sup>48</sup> There is even some evidence of this view in his controversial 1891 inaugural address.

But Sawyer also admits that Briggs did make statements that might be interpreted as “a blanket

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<sup>39</sup> Briggs, “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures,” 558.

<sup>40</sup> Briggs, *The Authority of Holy Scripture*, 46–47.

<sup>41</sup> Briggs, *Whither?*, 94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (London: SCM, 1972), 563.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

<sup>47</sup> Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism*, 41.

<sup>48</sup> Sawyer, *Charles Augustus Briggs and Tensions in Late Nineteenth-Century American Theology*, 61.



denial of the supernatural in the traditional sense.”<sup>49</sup> For example, in 1904, in the *American Journal of Theology*, he wrote:

If it should ever transpire that all miracles could be explained from the use of appropriate means, and all that is called supernatural could be summed up under the category of law, the real facts, the real doctrines of our religion would not change; but only the methods of their explanation. Which is more glorious a God who is always interfering with his own laws, or he who has so perfected his laws that they brook no interference [sic]?<sup>50</sup>

This statement alone gives the reader the sense that Briggs was buying more and more into the view of immanence that arose from the nineteenth-century liberal theology that had been drawn from the well of Romantic theologians like Schleiermacher and Dorner. Briggs seems to emphasize the immanence of God to the extent that everything is supernatural.

If what we have argued concerning Briggs’s view of immanence is true, we would expect to see implications in his understanding of Scripture; and that is exactly what we see. In Briggs’s 1881 article, he makes two points over the course of his paper that help us to situate his view of inspiration within his understanding of God’s immanence. First, according to Briggs, the word of God is strictly and purely an instrument which conveys divine truth.<sup>51</sup> For Briggs, this meant that the Bible contained the divine word as a receptacle but was not itself that word.<sup>52</sup> Briggs draws out the natural implication of his position: the Spirit’s word and the written word are two separate things. To put it another way, the written word is not necessarily the Spirit’s word or even necessarily the Spirit’s production.<sup>53</sup> The Bible itself is simply a “means and not ends; they are avenues to God, but not God.”<sup>54</sup>

Second, according to Hodge and Warfield, inspiration, as defined in their article, “accounts for nothing whatever but the absolute infallibility of the record in which the revelation, once generated, appears in the original autograph.”<sup>55</sup> This was not the case for Briggs. He repudiated terms like *providential care* and *superintendence* when describing the external production of the Bible.<sup>56</sup> These actions are what an immanent God does naturally.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, as Briggs understood it, inspiration is that which lies behind the external letter of Scripture, but not in the way dogmatic theologians like Hodge and Warfield would describe superintendence. Rather, it is a divine afflatus or impulse “which enlightened and guided holy men to apprehend the truth of God in its appropriate forms; assured them of possession of it,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>51</sup> Briggs, “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures,” 563. Cf. 571–72.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 563.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 572.

<sup>54</sup> Briggs, *The Authority of Holy Scripture*, 27.

<sup>55</sup> Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 226. Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:155.

<sup>56</sup> Briggs, “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures,” 574.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

and called and enabled them to make it known to the Church by voice and pen.”<sup>58</sup> Warfield’s criticisms, therefore, seem to be on target. Despite the appearance that Briggs’s radical view of immanence follows the likes of Schleiermacher and Dorner, in the end Feuerbach is still grinning, because all is still anthropological.

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs, “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration,” *Presbyterian Review* 2 (July 1881): 574.