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## ***B. B. Warfield*** ***On the Humanity of Scripture***

**A. N. S. Lane**

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B. B. Warfield is best known for his defence of the divine authorship of scripture. In a generation where many were abandoning this belief, Warfield eloquently and powerfully argued for the acknowledgement of scripture as God's word, as 'breathed out by God' (θεόπνευστος) and therefore infallible. There are many studies of this aspect of Warfield's doctrine.<sup>1</sup> But Warfield also had much to say about the humanity of scripture, about the genuine human authorship of the biblical writings.<sup>2</sup> This aspect of his teaching has received little attention in the secondary literature.<sup>3</sup> The goal of the present article is to rectify this deficiency.

### **SCRIPTURE AS HUMAN AND DIVINE**

When the Christian asserts his faith in the divine origin of his Bible, he does not mean to deny that it was composed and written by men or that it was given by men to the world. He believes that the marks of its human origin are ineradicably stamped on every page of the whole volume. He means to state only that it is not merely human in its origin.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout his literary career Warfield consistently affirmed the real human character of the scriptures. In one of his earliest writings he states that 'we do not deny an everywhere-present human element in the Scriptures'.<sup>5</sup> In one of his last writings he demonstrates that, throughout the New Testament, scripture is seen as 'the product of man, but only of man speaking from God'. He concludes his survey of the New Testament material with a summary:

The Scriptures, in other words, are conceived by the writers of the New Testament as through and through God's book, in every part expressive of His mind, given through men after a fashion which does no violence to their nature as men, and constitutes the book also men's book as well as God's, in every part expressive of the mind of its human authors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A number of works will be referred to in the footnotes. I have not been able to consult the American theses on the subject, of which J. J. Markarian, *The Calvinistic Concept of the Biblical Revelation in the Theology of B. B. Warfield* (Ph.D., Drew University, 1963) appears to be the most significant.

<sup>2</sup> The following works have been used and will be designated as in [ ]: *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York, 1927) [RI]; most of the articles in this volume have been reprinted in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (London, 1959) [IAB] and will be cited in this source as it is more widely available; *Selected Shorter Writings* vol 2 (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1980) [SSW]; A. A. Hodge & B. B. Warfield, 'Inspiration', *The Presbyterian Review* 2 (1881) 225-260[I]. Hodge was responsible for pp 225-238. These pages are of some relevance for Warfield's view as he was happy for them to be issued under his name. The use of collected volumes of Warfield's essays can easily blind one to the fact that they were written over the course of many years. All quotations and primary citations from Warfield in this article will be dated in the footnotes.

<sup>3</sup> All the relevant passages noted in the secondary literature are cited in the footnotes.

<sup>4</sup> RI, 429 (1882) (my emphasis).

<sup>5</sup> I, 245 (1881).

<sup>6</sup> IAB, 151-153 (1915). See also IAB, 317f, 322.

In other words, the Bible is to be seen as both a human and a divine book. This does not mean that the Bible is partly human and *partly* divine. At this point the mature Warfield finds it necessary to qualify his earlier talk<sup>7</sup> of a human 'element' in the Bible.

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It would be inexact to say that [the N.T. authors] recognize a human element in Scripture: they do not parcel Scripture out, assigning portions of it, or elements in it, respectively to God and man. In their view the whole of Scripture in all its parts and in all its elements, down to the least minutiae, in form of expression as well as in substance of teaching, is from God; but the whole of it has been given by God through the instrumentality of men. There is, therefore, in their view, not, indeed, a human element or ingredient in Scripture, and much less human divisions or sections of Scripture, but a human side or aspect to Scripture; and they do not fail to give full recognition to this human side or aspect.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, 'of every word of Scripture is it to be affirmed, in turn, that it is God's word and that it is man's word. All the qualities of divinity and of humanity are to be sought and may be found in every portion and element of the Scripture'.<sup>9</sup> In the writing of the Bible, God and man are co-authors. The words of scripture are both the words of their human authors and 'the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will'.<sup>10</sup>

For Warfield, scripture is both human and divine. It is important, he maintains, that these two be held in balance. Neither may be exaggerated to the detriment of the other.<sup>11</sup> *Formally*, Warfield keeps to this rule himself. But in practice there is far more emphasis in his writings on the divine authorship of scripture. In most, but not all,<sup>12</sup> of the passages so far cited the reference to the humanity of scripture comes in the context of an emphasis on its divine authorship. Many, but not all, of his reference to the humanity of scripture are by way of concession. In the second passage quoted above, Warfield acknowledged 'an everywhere-present human element in the Scriptures'. Why? 'No mark of the effect of this human element therefore—in style of thought or wording—can be urged against inspiration'.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the reference to the humanity of scripture is in this instance a part of his apologetic for the divine authorship of scripture. In other writings, notably in his essay on *The Divine and Human in the Bible*,<sup>14</sup> he is concerned to affirm the human authorship of scripture as a truth to be held in equal balance with its divine authorship. But throughout his writings as a whole Warfield stresses the divine authorship of scripture far more than the human.

Why is there this imbalance in Warfield's writings? From his writings, three reasons may be gleaned which he himself would doubtless have offered by way of defence. First, at times he argues that the New Testament writers themselves emphasize the divine rather than the human

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<sup>7</sup> As in n 5, above. There are many other places where Warfield refers to the 'human element' in scripture (eg SSW, 544, 547).

<sup>8</sup> IAB, 150 (1915).

<sup>9</sup> SSW, 547 (1894). SSW, 631 is almost identical. SSW, 543-548 is rewritten to reappear as SSW, 628-6631 (1909), with much verbal overlap. There are some significant changes introduced in the later version—cf nn 21-23, 61f, below.

<sup>10</sup> IAB, 173 (1893). See also SSW, 544, 547. On scripture as both God's and man's word, see also IAB, 421f; SSW, 605-607.

<sup>11</sup> This is the whole point of SSW, 542-548 (1894). See also SSW, 630.

<sup>12</sup> Of the passages cited in nn 4-11, the exceptions are IAB, 150, 322, 421 f; SSW, 542-548, 605-607, 628-631.

<sup>13</sup> I, 245 (1881). There is a similar argument in IAB, 437f.

<sup>14</sup> SSW, 542-548 (1894).

authorship of scripture.<sup>15</sup> Second, in Warfield's time it was the divine authorship of scripture that was under attack. This was the point of controversy, the point where truth was under fire,<sup>16</sup> so naturally Warfield devoted his attention to that point. Finally, Warfield maintained

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that the human authorship of scripture was in his time all but universally acknowledged. 'Probably no one today so emphasizes the divine element in Scripture as to exclude the human altogether'.<sup>17</sup> But the word 'altogether' is significant. Maybe conservative theology in Warfield's time did not 'exclude the human *altogether*'. But did it give *adequate* recognition to the human in scripture? Warfield was quick to criticize those who, while not altogether excluding the divine aspect of scripture, failed to portray it adequately. Was he equally sensitive to failure to portray the human aspect adequately?

### THE MODE OF INSPIRATION

How can a writing have two authors, one human and one divine? In order to maintain the genuine human authorship of God's written word it is not sufficient merely to affirm that there are human authors. There needs to be at least some account of how this dual authorship is possible.

While recognizing that it was impractical at that late stage to abandon the word completely, Warfield warned against the word 'inspiration'. It is not a biblical term and if we are to use it we must beware of importing ideas which are foreign to biblical thinking. Etymologically, 'inspiration' suggests the idea of 'inbreathing', implying that the Bible is 'a human product breathed into by the Divine Spirit'. But the biblical picture is more one of the scriptures being 'breathed out' by God, of the Bible as 'a Divine product produced through the instrumentality of men'.<sup>18</sup>

If God is the author of the Bible, who 'breathed it out', does this not mean that the human writers simply received the text of scripture by divine dictation? Warfield repeatedly denied this. But had such a view ever been held? In one of his earliest works Warfield claimed that 'the Reformed churches have never held such a [mechanical] theory [of inspiration]', citing Charles Hodge for support in this contention.<sup>19</sup> Shortly afterwards, Warfield co-authored with A. A. Hodge (Charles' son) an important article on inspiration. In this article Hodge acknowledges that 'many' former advocates of verbal inspiration had maintained 'extremely mechanical conceptions of Inspiration'.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter Warfield himself acknowledged that some seventeenth-century theologians had taught a mechanical theory of inspiration which made the human writers 'mere implements in the hands of the Holy Ghost', merely the pens of the Holy Spirit. On this view, 'it was denied that the human writers contributed any quality to the product, unless, indeed, it might be their hand-writing!'<sup>21</sup> But the 'obvious marks of

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<sup>15</sup> RI, 131, 147f (1910).

<sup>16</sup> SSW, 544f (1894). In IAB, 421 (1879), he explicitly defends Gausson's heavy emphasis on the divine authorship of scripture on precisely these grounds.

<sup>17</sup> SSW, 544 (1894).

<sup>18</sup> IAB, 153f (1915). See also IAB, 132f. W. J. Abraham, in his *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford etc, 1981) falls into precisely this error of making the category of 'inspiration' normative and then reading into it extra-biblical ideas. Cf my review of the book in *Themelios* 8.1 (September 1982) 32f.

<sup>19</sup> IAB, 421 (1879).

<sup>20</sup> I, 233 (1881).

<sup>21</sup> SSW, 543 (1894).

human authorship' in the biblical books prevented this view from becoming dominant and Warfield considered it no longer a threat in his own day.<sup>22</sup> At a later date he went on to acknowledge that 'in every age of the Church there have been representatives of the theory of dictation', although he

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immediately follows this by stating that 'only in the Protestant theology of the seventeenth century, however, did it tend to become dominant'.<sup>23</sup> However, in this instance he is including those who have modified the theory of dictation in such a way as to exclude mechanical dictation and to allow that the human writers wrote 'freely according to their individual peculiarities'. While such theologians have used the word 'dictation', they have not held to the theory of mechanical dictation and the difference between their view and Warfield's view is verbal. But while Warfield seems to have changed his mind to some extent about the existence or otherwise of such theories in the past, he was consistent in rejecting them himself.<sup>24</sup>

How does Warfield avoid teaching inspiration by divine dictation? If scripture is 'breathed out' by God, does that not mean that God dictated it to the human authors? No. 'What is declared by this fundamental passage [2 Tim. 3:16] is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of *how* God has operated in producing them.'<sup>25</sup> But if, as Warfield maintained, the Bible is verbally inspired and God is the author of the very words of scripture, what role is left to the human writers save that of being secretaries? Warfield's answer is that while God is the author of scripture, so are the human writers. God and men are co-authors.<sup>26</sup> Here Warfield refers to A. A. Hodge who, in their joint work on inspiration, explained the meaning of verbal inspiration. Inspiration is called verbal to make it clear that it extends not just to the thoughts of the writers but to the very words that they used. It must not be supposed that God merely put ideas into the minds of the biblical authors and then left them to put them into words as best they could. But in claiming that words themselves are inspired it is not implied that the human writers are not also their authors. 'The thoughts and words are both alike human, and, therefore, subject to human limitations, but the divine superintendance and guarantee extends to the one as much as the other.'<sup>27</sup>

Many people find it hard to grasp Hodge and Warfield at this point. If one starts with the assumption that where God is active, man is inactive and vice versa, it becomes impossible to grasp their teaching, let alone to accept it. On this assumption, if scripture is God-breathed, the writers are mere secretaries; if inspiration is verbal, the human writers contribute nothing. But Warfield will not accept this assumption.

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<sup>22</sup> SSW, 543f (1894).

<sup>23</sup> SSW, 628-630 (1909).

<sup>24</sup> Cf nn 19-23 above; IAB, 173, 437; SSW, 605-607. Interestingly in the light of recent criticisms (eg Abraham, *Divine Inspiration*, 28f), Warfield defends Louis Gaussen from the charge (IAB, 421f; SSW, 604f).

<sup>25</sup> IAB, 133 (1915) (my emphasis).

<sup>26</sup> IAB, 173 (1893).

<sup>27</sup> I, 232f (1881), cited in IAB, 173, n 9. E. R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago & London, 1970) 124f, clears Warfield of the dictation charge. But he inconsistently proceeds to claim that God's control of the words used by the writers [ie verbal inspiration] implies dictation. M. Parsons, 'Warfield and Scripture', *Churchman* 91 (1977) 214, correctly observes that verbal inspiration need not imply mechanical inspiration, of which he clears Warfield. H. Krabbendam, 'B. B. Warfield versus G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture', in N. L. Geisler (ed), *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979) 426f also clears Warfield.

Others appear to conceive of the two factors [divine and human] in inspiration as striving against and seeking to exclude each other, and of the two elements in the product as lying over against each other, dividing the Bible between them. Crude and mechanical as it appears, such a conception seems extraordinarily common, and makes itself heard in the most unlikely places.<sup>28</sup>

It is a mistake to imagine that the divine and the human in the Bible

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are competing elements, so that 'where one enters the other is pushed out'. Once this approach is adopted, there will soon be found to be no room for divine inspiration. 'If, then, it be discovered that the whole fabric of the Bible is human—as assuredly is true—men who start with this conception in mind must end with denying of the whole fabric of the Bible that it is divine.'<sup>29</sup> It is because they start with this false antithesis that some recent writers have sought to tar Warfield with the dictation brush. James Barr is impatient with Warfield's denials of dictation because he assumes that where Warfield acknowledges a human element in scripture he ought to weaken the divine element and vice versa. Thus for Barr, to affirm total divine authorship is to smuggle in dictation and to allow human elements is inconsistent.<sup>30</sup> W. J. Abraham chides conservatives for being inconsistent in holding to inerrancy while rejecting dictation.

Without dictation inerrancy is without warrant, for the two are linked by way of logical inference. Dictation is the foundation from which the claim to inerrancy flows; it does not flow from inspiration unless the two are confused.<sup>31</sup>

Abraham recognizes that Warfield and his followers reject dictation, but argues that 'the claim to inerrancy rests on a covert appeal to dictation'.<sup>32</sup> The assumption seems to be that those who reject dictation must as a result regard scripture as somehow less divinely inspired. But Warfield rejects dictation not because he does not believe that every word is divinely inspired, but because he also believes the human writer to be the genuine author. Warfield quarrels with the dictation theory not because it attributes too much to the divine author but because it does not leave any significant room for the human author.<sup>33</sup> Clark Pinnock falls into the same trap as Barr and Abraham. He cannot take the conservative denials of dictation seriously. 'Materially they believe in it [dictation], but not formally... It is quibbling over words to deny it so vigorously.'<sup>34</sup> He cannot take seriously Warfield's claim that God and man are co-authors of scripture because he cannot see the coherence in the claim that God completely controls the course of history through his providence.<sup>35</sup> He is quite right to see the link with providence and to perceive that the basic issue is the nature of God's dealings with his world. Warfield accuses those who see the divine and human in scripture as mutually exclusive of thinking in deistic terms.

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<sup>28</sup> SSW, 630 (1909).

<sup>29</sup> SSW, 545f (1894).

<sup>30</sup> J. Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London<sup>2</sup>, 1981) 290-293.

<sup>31</sup> Abraham, *Divine Inspiration*, 34. (Pp 34-36 deal with this matter).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 291, argues that 'fundamentalists' reject dictation because they 'do not want to be saddled with a bigger miracle than they can help'. Warfield, in SSW, 606f, demonstrates that his claim is in fact greater than that made by dictationists because for him God influences not just the pen but the whole personality of the biblical authors.

<sup>34</sup> C. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco, 1984) 101.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 101f.

Why may we not believe that the God who brings his purposes to fruition in his providential government of the world, without violence to second causes or to the intelligent free agency of his creatures, so superintends the mental processes of his chosen instruments for making known his will, as to secure that they shall speak his words in speaking their own?<sup>36</sup>

For Warfield, the divine and human authorship are in partnership,

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not in competition. He considers 'the Spirit of God and the spirit of man as cofactors in the production of Scripture, working so together that the whole product is both human and divine in all its parts'.<sup>37</sup> He asserts 'the coactivity of both the human and divine authors in the production of Scripture'.<sup>38</sup> Warfield calls this theory that of *concursum*. He sets it out as follows:

The fundamental principle of this conception is that the whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities which enter it, however, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluent with them; so that the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word, and every particular. According to this conception, therefore, the whole Bible is recognized as human, the free product of human effort, in every part and word. And at the same time, the whole Bible is recognized as divine, the Word of God, his utterances, of which he is in the truest sense the Author. The human and divine factors in inspiration are conceived of as flowing confluent and harmoniously to the production of a common product. And the two elements are conceived of in the Scriptures as the inseparable constituents of one single and uncompounded product.<sup>39</sup>

Bravely spoken! But what does it *mean*? Does it have any 'cash value' or is it just rhetoric? Since Warfield is still accused of being a closet dictationist it is important to examine the extent to which the human authors are given a real role in the composition of scripture. In an important passage,<sup>40</sup> Warfield discusses how the scriptures came to be written.

Of course, these books were not produced suddenly, by some miraculous act—handed down complete out of heaven, as the phrase goes; but, like all other products of time, are the ultimate effect of many processes cooperating through long periods.<sup>41</sup>

As is well known, Warfield maintained that it is the original copies of scripture, the 'autographs', which are inspired and infallible. This position is sometimes criticized for

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<sup>36</sup> SSW, 611 (1888). See also the texts cited in n 56, below.

<sup>37</sup> SSW, 605 (1888). In the passages quoted at nn 37, 38, 48 Warfield is summarizing the views of others, but with approval.

<sup>38</sup> SSW, 606 (1888).

<sup>39</sup> SSW, 547 (1894). See also SSW 546-548, 629, 631. J. H. Gerstner, 'Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy', in J. W. Montgomery (ed), *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1974) 133f; Krabbendam, 'B. B. Warfield' 427f; J. B. Rogers & D. M. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco, 1979) 336f all briefly discuss Warfield's concept of *concursum*.

<sup>40</sup> IAB, 154-158 (1915). The whole passage could almost be an extended commentary on Hodge's statement in 1, 230f.

<sup>41</sup> IAB, 154 (1915).

failing to recognize that many of the books of the Bible as we now have them are the end products of a long process of literary development. But Warfield himself was well aware that the biblical writings had a prehistory and saw no problem in it. 'The production of the Scriptures is, in point of fact, a long process.'<sup>42</sup> To be fair, it should be noted that Warfield is here thinking primarily of the process that takes place within the author himself. But the prehistory of the text raises no issues fundamentally different from those raised by the

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prehistory of the author. Furthermore, Warfield recognizes 'the progressive revelation of Divine truth itself'<sup>43</sup> and a theory of inspiration which finds room for that should have no difficulties with the idea of the literary prehistory of the text.

A major factor in the production of scripture is the preparation by God of the authors—

a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives, and, indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them.

Inspiration, therefore, is not 'an isolated action of the Divine Spirit operating out of all relation to historical processes'.<sup>44</sup> God prepared for the writing of each book by preparing the writers themselves.

If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.<sup>45</sup>

The same process can be seen in the writing of 'sacred history', such as Chronicles, or of a psalm or of a didactic epistle. The preparation of the psalmists is particularly interesting since the psalms contain some of the most 'human' parts of scripture. God in his providence prepares the psalmist by giving him the right hereditary bent from his parents, the right quality of religious sensibility, the right religious example and training, the right circumstances of life to develop these tendencies, and the right experiences to quicken in him the desired emotions. Finally, he is placed in precisely those exigencies which would call out the expression of these emotions.<sup>46</sup>

All this falls into the realm of providence. Finally comes 'the additional Divine operation which we call technically "inspiration"':

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<sup>42</sup> IAB, 156 (1915).

<sup>43</sup> IAB, 155 (1915).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. D. Westblade, 'Benjamin B. Warfield on Inspiration and Inerrancy', *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 10 (1980) 38, twists Warfield at this point. He claims that for Warfield the human characteristics of the writers cannot condition or qualify their writings 'for otherwise' we would have no pure word of God. What Warfield rejects in the passage cited (IAB, 155) is the idea that the human characteristics condition and qualify the writings in such a way that we have no pure word of God. He then proceeds to show how the human characteristics are there but do not prevent the end product from being just as God wants it (IAB 155f). This is quite different from Westblade's account of him.

<sup>46</sup> IAB, 156f (1915). See also IAB, 85f.



By it, the Spirit of God, flowing confluent in with the providentially and graciously determined work of men, spontaneously producing under the Divine directions the writings appointed to them, gives the product a Divine quality unattainable by human powers alone.<sup>47</sup>

The spontaneity of the human authors is particularly to be noted. 'God uses men in inspiration, through the spontaneous activities of their own human powers.'<sup>48</sup> The scriptures are written 'through and by man as the agent voluntarily active and intelligent in its communication.'<sup>49</sup>

What analogies does Warfield use to explain the process of inspiration? Rogers and McKim state that he 'took care to reject the analogy of the divine and human natures of Christ as an explanation of

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the divine and human in Scripture'.<sup>50</sup> This is not quite true. In a passage that they quote, Warfield indicates the points where the analogy does not hold. But no analogy holds at every point and Warfield is stating that the analogy is weak rather than rejecting it.

The analogy holds good a certain distance... But the analogy with Our Lord's Divine-human personality may easily be pressed beyond reason... Between such diverse things there can exist only a remote analogy; and, in point of fact, the analogy in the present instance amounts to no more than that in both cases Divine and human factors are involved, though very differently.<sup>51</sup>

But, he continues, 'even so distant an analogy' can help us to see that just as Jesus was truly human yet without sin, so the scriptures can be truly human yet without error.<sup>52</sup>

Rogers and McKim correctly observe that Warfield preferred analogies to the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification and to the activities of God in providence and grace.<sup>53</sup> A. A. Hodge, in their joint work, pointed out that:

The only really dangerous opposition to the Church doctrine of Inspiration comes either directly or indirectly, but always ultimately, from some false view of God's relation to the world, of His methods of working, and of the possibility of a supernatural agency penetrating and altering the course of a natural process. But the whole genius of Christianity, all of its essential and most characteristic doctrines, presuppose the immanence of God in all His creatures, and His concurrence with them in all of their spontaneous activities.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> IAB, 158 (1915).

<sup>48</sup> SSW, 607 (1888). See also passages quoted at nn 36, 45, above.

<sup>49</sup> SSW, 606 (1888), where Warfield quotes Basil Manly with approval (his emphasis). See also I, 226, 231, where Hodge affirms the spontaneity of the human authors and that they were 'free and active in their thinking and in the expression of their thoughts'.

<sup>50</sup> Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 337.

<sup>51</sup> IAB, 162 (1915).

<sup>52</sup> IAB, 162f (1915). Westblade rightly draws attention to the christological analogy here, but misquotes Warfield, applying to scripture words which Warfield applies to Christ and could not have used of scripture ('Warfield', 38).

<sup>53</sup> Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 337.

<sup>54</sup> I, 227 (1881).

This is seen in the belief that God sustains the universe, governs it by his providence and saves men by his grace. In each case, God is at work without in any way 'interfering with the personal attributes or the free rational activities of the creature'.<sup>55</sup> So it is with inspiration. Warfield takes up the illustration. He repeatedly refers to the analogy with providence and with grace.<sup>56</sup> As God works out his providential purposes 'without violence to second causes or to the intelligent free agency of his creatures', so also he directs the biblical writers 'to secure that they shall speak his words in speaking their own'.<sup>57</sup> God's workings in providence, grace and inspiration are to be conceived 'as confluent with the human activities operative in the case; as, in a word, of the nature of what has come to be known as "immanent action"'.<sup>58</sup> It is important to realise that this is more than just an analogy. It is rather that providence, grace and inspiration are each based on the same principle of God's relation to the world and his activity in it.

The philosophical basis of this conception [*concursum*] is the Christian idea of God as immanent as well as transcendent in the

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modes of his activity. Its idea of the mode of the divine activity in inspiration is in analogy with the divine modes of activity in other spheres—in providence, and in grace wherein we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who is working in us both the willing and the doing according to his own good pleasure.<sup>59</sup>

It is natural that those who do not accept this conception of God's relation to the world and his activity in it will have problems with Warfield's idea of *concursum*. But while they may find it hard to accept, they ought at least to acknowledge that it is clearly distinct from dictation. It should also be noted that if Warfield's conception of God's relation to the world and his activity in it is rejected, it is very hard to make any sense of the biblical doctrine of providence.<sup>60</sup>

So far the impression has been given that for Warfield the principle of *concursum* explains the inspiration of the entire Bible. So Warfield seems to imply in an earlier writing.<sup>61</sup> Fifteen years later Warfield incorporated much of this material into another work, with a significant addition (here emphasized): 'The whole Bible is recognized as human, the free product of human effort, in every part and in every word—with the exception of the comparatively small portion which came by direct revelation.'<sup>62</sup> This qualification refers back to the beginning of the work, where Warfield distinguishes between different ways in which 'the divine has entered into the production of the Scriptures'. From the preparation of the material and of the authors through to the actual writing of the text, 'divine influences of the most varied kinds have been at work, extending all the way from simple providential superintendence and

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<sup>55</sup> I, 228 (1881).

<sup>56</sup> IAB, 153, 156, 160; SSW, 546, 611, 615.

<sup>57</sup> SSW, 611 (1888).

<sup>58</sup> IAB, 160 (1915).

<sup>59</sup> SSW, 546 (1894).

<sup>60</sup> Pinnock, *Scripture Principle*, 101f, rightly sees a connection between Warfield's view of inspiration and the Calvinistic doctrine of providence. He does not seem to realise that the rejection of the *concursum* principle makes it hard to formulate any doctrine of providence which bears more than a passing resemblance to the biblical doctrine.

<sup>61</sup> SSW, 546-548 (1894).

<sup>62</sup> SSW, 631 (1909), drawn from SSW, 547. The idea of God's dictation to the prophets is already found in I, 229, 231, 235 (1881) (Hodge's part).

spiritual illumination to direct revelation and inspiration'.<sup>63</sup> (Warfield notes that if all these influences are to be subsumed under the one name of 'inspiration' (which is not how he would choose to use the word) 'then it is undeniable that some portions of the Bible are more inspired than others'.<sup>64</sup>)

At a later date Warfield spelt out more precisely three different modes of revelation. First there is 'external manifestation', such as in a theophany or miracle. Then there is 'internal suggestion', which includes prophecy, visions and dreams, which come 'not by the will of man but from God'. Finally there is 'concursive operation', which is 'that form of revelation illustrated in an inspired psalm or epistle or history, in which no human activity—not even the control of the will—is superseded, but the Holy Spirit works in, with and through them all in such a manner as to communicate to the product qualities distinctly superhuman'.<sup>65</sup> According to this classification, most of the Bible comes by 'concursive operation', while the prophetic element is the 'comparatively small portion which came by direct revelation'. Prophecy, unlike the rest of scripture, is given by 'dictation', 'though, of course, the

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question may remain open of the exact processes by which this dictation is accomplished'.<sup>66</sup> 'The precise function of a prophet [is] to be that he is "a mouth of God", who speaks not his own but God's words.'<sup>67</sup> 'It is undoubtedly the fundamental contention of the prophets that the revelations given through them are not their own but wholly God's.'<sup>68</sup> These statements are supported by a mass of Old Testament quotations. The prophets were passive with respect to the revelation given through them. But this statement needs to be qualified:

The term 'passivity' is, perhaps, however, liable to some misapprehension, and should not be overstrained. It is not intended to deny that the intelligence of the prophets was active in the reception of their message; it was by means of their active intelligence that their message was received: their intelligence was the instrument of revelation. It is intended to deny only that their intelligence was active in the production of their message: that it was creatively as distinguished from receptively active... Their intelligence is active in the reception, retention and announcing of their messages, contributing nothing to them but presenting fit instruments for the communication of them.<sup>69</sup>

Warfield notes that many will want to attribute a greater role than this to the prophetic authors, but 'in the prophets' own view they were just instruments through whom God gave revelations which came from them, not as their own product, but as the pure word of Jehovah'.<sup>70</sup> God used them as instruments, but 'He will use all the instruments He employs according to their natures; intelligent beings therefore as intelligent beings, moral agents as moral agents.'<sup>71</sup> God frames the message that he gives to the prophet in the prophet's own language, that is in 'his own particular language, inclusive of all that gives individuality to his self-expression'.<sup>72</sup> It follows, therefore, that:

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<sup>63</sup> SSW, 615 (1909).

<sup>64</sup> SSW, 627 (1909).

<sup>65</sup> IAB, 83 (1915).

<sup>66</sup> IAB, 86f (1915).

<sup>67</sup> IAB, 87 (1915).

<sup>68</sup> IAB, 89f (1915).

<sup>69</sup> IAB, 91 (1915).

<sup>70</sup> IAB, 92 (1915).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> IAB, 93 (1915).

The marks of the several individualities imprinted on the messages of the prophets, in other words, are only a part of the general fact that these messages are couched in human language, and in no way beyond that general fact affect their purity as direct communications from God.<sup>73</sup>

Warfield almost seems to be saying that God dictated his word to the prophets in such a way (using their individual styles, etc) as to make it look as if it had come by 'concurvise operation'. He is aware of this objection and seeks to answer it:

We should avoid thinking of it [God's use of the prophet's style, etc] externally and therefore mechanically, as if the revealing Spirit artificially phrased the message which He gives through each prophet in the particular forms of speech proper to the individuality of each, so as to create the illusion that the message comes out of the heart of the prophet himself.<sup>74</sup>

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But if the marks of individual style are not to be an illusion, must there not be an element of 'concurvise operation'? True, the prophets claimed that their message was given by God, but to argue that they therefore played no part in its composition is surely to fall into the very trap of which Warfield warns, that of seeing God's and man's activity as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, if prophecy needs to be given by dictation in order to be 'the pure word of Jehovah', does this not suggest that the rest of scripture is *not* 'the pure word of Jehovah'? Warfield himself feels the force of this argument since he immediately has to warn against pressing the distinction between prophecy and concurvise operation too far.<sup>75</sup>

For the mature Warfield, parts of the Bible *are* given by divine dictation. Two points may be noted here. First, he departs from his normal theory of 'concurvise operation' on the grounds of how the prophets themselves represent their teaching. One might wish to question Warfield's use of the dictation category here. But it would not be fair to accuse him of being dogmatic at this point, for Warfield's use of the dictation category is precisely the victory of biblical data as he sees it (the prophets' self-understanding) over dogma (*concurvise*). Second, it is to be noted that Warfield's position here arises from his sensitivity to the different literary genres of scripture. Warfield did not regard the inspiration of the Bible as a uniform process which affected every part in the same way. In addition to noting the differences between history, psalm and epistle, Warfield here takes note of the further category of prophecy, where the author says 'Thus saith the Lord'.

Warfield has been accused of lapsing into a mechanical dictation approach in a few specific passages. J. H. Gerstner takes exception to the statement that the result of inspiration is 'a pure word of God free from all human admixture'. Warfield should have said 'free from all sinful or errant admixture', he claims.<sup>76</sup> But this is really being pedantic. In another passage, not noted by Gerstner, Warfield again states that the Bible is 'the pure word of God, diluted

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<sup>73</sup> IAB, 94 (1915).

<sup>74</sup> IAB, 93 (1915).

<sup>75</sup> IAB, 95 (1915).

<sup>76</sup> Gerstner, 'Warfield's Case', 134, citing Warfield's *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York, 1931) 64. Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 373, n 95, refer to the same passage, as found in Warfield's *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia, 1956) 63f.

with no human admixture whatever'.<sup>77</sup> In neither passage is Warfield denying the reality of the contribution of the human authors. What he is denying is that they somehow diluted or corrupted God's word, that there is an element in the Bible that is *purely* human.

Rogers and McKim quote another passage where Warfield states that 'the authority of Scripture is shown to inhere even in its vocables, its tenses, its numbers, and its forms of speech, as God's words'.<sup>78</sup> To call this dictation is to forget the whole idea of *concursum*. A. A. Hodge's and Warfield's defence of verbal inspiration should suffice to meet this objection. The words of scripture *are* God's words—and man's. Inspiration so works as to secure that the human authors 'shall speak his [God's] words in speaking their own'.<sup>79</sup>

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To summarize, Warfield, through his conception of *concursum* does manage to hold together the divine and the human authorship of scripture. His assertion that the Bible is truly the words of men is not just a formal rhetorical statement designed to evade the dreaded charge of dictation. It represents a real creative role that Warfield gives to the human authors. That he was not over-scared of being tarred with the dictation brush is seen by his acceptance of the term to describe the process of prophecy—because this is how he feels that the prophets themselves force him to describe it. It is only at this point that Warfield can fairly be charged with weakening the humanity of scripture. Many will of course feel that he was right to do so in this particular instance.

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE HUMANITY OF SCRIPTURE

We have concluded that Warfield does take the human authorship of scripture seriously in his account of its composition. But does he give due weight to the *implications* of this belief? Does he allow it full scope in considering issues like the reliability and interpretation of scripture?

The result of inspiration is that the words of the human authors 'were rendered also the words of God, and, therefore, perfectly infallible'.<sup>80</sup> The Holy Spirit so dominated the human authors that 'their words became at the same time the words of God, and thus, in every case and all alike, absolutely infallible'.<sup>81</sup> The Spirit's superintendence secures, among other things, 'entire truthfulness' or 'inerrancy'.<sup>82</sup> In considering the reliability of scripture Warfield argues simply from its divine authorship. Rogers and McKim seem therefore to be justified in accusing him, in this area, of allowing 'no practical manifestation of the human element in Scripture'.<sup>83</sup> But this is not so. Scripture's infallibility is called 'absolute', but this is somewhat misleading as Warfield in fact qualifies it to take account of the human authorship. Warfield acknowledges the existence in scripture of a number of elements which are consequences of its humanity, without undermining its divine authorship: 'human influence in the style, wording or forms of statement or argumentation'; imprecise use of language such as

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<sup>77</sup> IAB, 86 (1915).

<sup>78</sup> *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894) 177, quoted in Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 337. In the context (pp 176f) Warfield is setting forth the teaching of Jn. 10:35; Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8, 22.

<sup>79</sup> SSW, 611 (1888). See also IAB, 420.

<sup>80</sup> IAB, 420 (1879).

<sup>81</sup> IAB, 422 (1879).

<sup>82</sup> IAB, 173 (1893).

<sup>83</sup> Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 345.

'the whole word' for the Roman world or reference to the setting of the sun; freedom in quoting from the Old Testament without doing so verbatim or in reporting the speech of Christ without using the *ipsissima verba*.<sup>84</sup> A. A. Hodge, in their joint work, states that 'the thoughts and words [of the biblical writers] are both alike human, and, therefore, subject to human limitations' and even that the scriptures 'are written in human languages, whose words, inflections, constructions, and idioms bear everywhere indelible traces of human error'.<sup>85</sup> He also argues that scripture is true without necessarily being precise:

There is a vast difference between exactness of statement, which

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includes an exhaustive rendering of details, an absolute literalness, which the Scriptures never profess, and accuracy, on the other hand, which secures a correct statement of facts or principles intended to be affirmed. It is this accuracy and this alone, as distinct from exactness, which the Church doctrine maintains of every affirmation in the original text of Scripture without exception.<sup>86</sup>

Warfield himself takes up this point later in the article:

No one claims that Inspiration secured the use of good Greek in Attic severity of taste, free from the exaggerations and looseness of current speech, but only that it secured the accurate expression of truth, even (if you will) through the medium of the worst Greek a fisherman of Galilee could write, and the most startling figures of speech a peasant could invent. Exegesis must be historical as well as grammatical, and must always seek the meaning intended, not any meaning that can be tortured out of a passage.<sup>87</sup>

Warfield's talk of absolute infallibility is unfortunate and lends some credibility to the charge made by Rogers and McKim and others. But in fact the infallibility of scripture is for Warfield qualified by its humanity, though not in such a way as to lead to the affirmation of error in scripture.

Rogers and McKim correctly note that Warfield was opposed to the teaching of James Stuart that Christ and the apostles accommodated themselves to current views of the inspiration of scripture, without themselves holding them. Warfield rejects this conception of accommodation.<sup>88</sup> They regret that 'Warfield did not take his understanding of accommodation from its use in the early fathers and Calvin. He seemed to be totally unaware of the concept as they used it—to refer to God condescending to human limitations for human benefit.'<sup>89</sup> It is true that Warfield is weak at this point and that his doctrine of scripture would

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<sup>84</sup> IAB, 437f (1879). See also I, 246.

<sup>85</sup> I, 233, 238 (1881).

<sup>86</sup> I, 238 (1881).

<sup>87</sup> I, 246 (1881) (his emphasis). Westblade, 'Warfield', 33f, correctly notes Hodge's and Warfield's qualifications here (which he calls 'a certain ambiguity'). Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 337 & 373, n 96, join with Markarian in citing passages where Warfield defends the style of 2 Peter. I have not been able to check the passages concerned, but it is noteworthy that in one of them the question at issue is whether the author was 'a pseudepigrapher of the baser sort'.

<sup>88</sup> Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 342, citing JAB, 189-195 (1893) & IAB, 117 (1894). See also Krabbendam, 'B. B. Warfield', 430.

<sup>89</sup> Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 342.

have been enriched had he been more ready to learn from Calvin here.<sup>90</sup> But Rogers and McKim miss a passage where Warfield does allow a positive use of the accommodation concept. In considering the role of the human author in prophecy, Warfield accepts the idea of 'the accommodation of the revealing God to the several prophetic individualities'. He goes on to explain what this means:

It includes, on the one hand, the 'accommodation' of the prophet, through his total preparation, to the speech in which the revelation to be given through him is to be clothed; and on the other involves little more than the consistent carrying into detail of the broad principle that God uses the instruments He employs in accordance with their natures.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that the human authorship of scripture has

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implications for its interpretation. As has already been seen, Warfield insists that 'exegesis must be historical as well as grammatical, and must always seek the meaning intended [by the human author], not any meaning that can be tortured out of a passage'.<sup>92</sup> Warfield concludes his article on *The Divine and Human in the Bible* in this way:

And full justice being done to both [divine and human] elements in the Bible, full justice is done also to human needs. 'The Bible', says Dr. Westcott, 'is authoritative, for it is the Word of God; it is intelligible, for it is the word of man.' Because it is the word of man in every part and element, it comes home to our hearts. Because it is the word of God in every part and element, it is our constant law and guide.<sup>93</sup>

When Warfield discusses the reliability and interpretation of the Bible he does take its human authorship into consideration. In the interpretation of scripture Warfield stresses the intention of the human author, thus making it clear that the human authorship must be treated with full seriousness.<sup>94</sup> With the reliability of scripture, some account is taken of the human authorship, but the stress is on divine inspiration. Warfield cannot fairly be accused of ignoring the humanity of scripture at this point, but he can be criticized for failing to take it sufficiently into account.

## POSTSCRIPT

Warfield presented a powerful case for the divine authority of scripture as the word of God and this has come to be seen as 'evangelical orthodoxy'. But as evangelicals have increasingly become involved in the realm of biblical criticism, many have felt that Warfield's doctrine is too rigid to be of use today. There are signs of an alarming split between the dogmatists who follow Warfield and the biblical scholars who are dissatisfied with him. How can this gulf be bridged? How can a doctrine of scripture be developed which is both orthodox and capable of explaining the phenomena of scripture? Some have sought to do this by

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<sup>90</sup> There is no discussion of accommodation in Warfield's 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God', in *Calvin and Augustine*, 29-130. For a classic statement of Calvin's idea of accommodation, see F. L. Battles, 'God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity', *Interpretation* 31 (1977) 19-38.

<sup>91</sup> IAB, 93 (1915).

<sup>92</sup> I, 246 (1881), quoted at n 87, above.

<sup>93</sup> SSW, 548 (1894).

<sup>94</sup> I, 246 (1881). Warfield's reference to what the author intended should not be seen as aligning him with the modern linguistic theory of 'authorial intention'.

abandoning Warfield's belief in scripture as God's word: what scripture says, God says.<sup>95</sup> But such attempts will not produce a doctrine which is orthodox. The way forward is not to weaken Warfield's firm grasp of the divine authorship of scripture, any more than denial of the deity of Christ is the cure for docetism. What is needed is not a *lessening* of our grasp of scripture as God's word, but a heightening of our grasp of its human authorship. Warfield gave full *formal* acknowledgement to the humanity of scripture, but he can justly be accused of failure to develop the implications of it. The way to avoid a split between the dogmaticians and the biblical scholars is not to abandon Warfield's view of scripture as God's word but to develop his doctrine of its human authorship.

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<sup>95</sup> See the comments on Abraham, *Divine Inspiration* in n 18, above. Pinnock, *Scripture Principle* is on the whole a most stimulating and helpful book, but it suffers from the defect that the author feels it necessary to back off the idea of 'what Scripture says, God says' in order to protect the humanity of scripture. The basic problem is that he cannot fully accept the principle of *concursum* (see n 60, above). I. H. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (London 1982) is a good example of a book by a leading evangelical biblical scholar which works with the concept of *concursum* (especially pp 40-44). As the author is well known for his Arminian stance, it shows that it is not necessary to be a Calvinist in order to hold to *concursum*.