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HERESY IN AMERICA 1890-1935:

Two Case Studies

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Christianity has often defined itself historically by what it is not, as much as by what it is. The modern Christian Church of the late 19th early 20th centuries struggled to define itself dogmatically. From an American religious perspective, heretical controversies defined the times. This paper specifically focuses on the move away from what some considered as the orthodox, historical, Christian doctrine in the modern era by two late 19th and early 20th century churchmen. Historical context is therefore important considering this unique period in American religious history. The study draws upon research about Charles Augustus Briggs' trials within the Presbyterian Church that transpired between 1891 and 1893. It also focuses on Algernon Sidney Crapsey's heresy trial in 1906-1907 in the Protestant Episcopal Church. It further considers the historiography of the trials by examining the interpretations of various historians concerning this epoch in American religious history.¹

Historians have written frequently about the heresy trials of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Generally speaking, various authors have attempted to portray the positive aspects of the writings and the public utterances. Some have even examined the constructive qualities of the convicted heretical churchmen themselves. With that point of view in mind, the two churchmen in question were undoubtedly committed to their congregations, their students, and the other people they served. They also ostensibly felt that they were making the correct choices for Christendom by declaring the "utterances" they made at the various times of their careers. Both felt they were standing for the truth. This study does not deal with the intentions of the men in question. Both came to their respective places of "heresy" processually through their lives' experiences.²

Picking up the story at the onset of the problems of modern Presbyterianism in America as seen through the lens of the deposal of Charles Augustus Briggs fails to do justice to the complex history that brought the church's issues to a head in the 1890s. Controversy had been raging for some time within the Presbyterian church. Between the 1850s and 1870s the "Princeton Theology," defined by the strong conservatism and reformed dogmatic tradition was realized through the intellectual adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the writings and teaching of Charles Hodge. Traditional interpretations gained further notoriety and widespread acceptance subsequently through the scholarship of B.B. Warfield. Charles Hodge, his son Archibald, and Warfield attempted to define and maintain the doctrinal standards of scriptural inspiration.³

¹ Historians have generally used the term modern as it is used here in the context of that which has developed from the time of the Reformation period in western civilization. Modern in this chronological sense is distinguished from the term modernism as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

² Charles Augustus Briggs *The Authority of Holy Scripture* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891. See also Algernon Sidney Crapsey's Autobiography, *"The Last of the Heretics"* New York: Knopf, 1924.

³ A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield asserted that scripture is indeed "inspired," however the terminology needed updating in consideration of new Theological developments. Various understandings of words have changed over time (original meanings were defined by their etymology). The inspired texts were those original texts from which the copies were made that are free from human and cultural influences as they were the "original autographs."

The established center of Presbyterianism in America remained at Princeton Seminary. However, the denomination was in transition as intellectual developments challenged the status of the traditional biblical interpretations especially through creedal conformity. Various issues underscored the denominational resistance at Union Seminary. Several controversies had already blackened the skies around the denomination. In 1874, Dr. David Swing faced further Presbyterian judicial review after being acquitted for “utterances” concerning the status of creeds. Simply stated, Swing felt that the creeds and formularies of the church were only relevant to the time and place when they were established.⁴

Controversies like these brought into question the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith as the standard creed of the Presbyterian Church since 1646. As would others, Dr. Swing politely faded into the background establishing his own independent church, rather than continue to battle over these issues. His sustained prosecution of old school theology was realized by his insurrection from the authoritarian control of the Presbyterian system. His withdrawal highlighted the controversial degree to which the historical Christian faith as defined by doctrinal confessions and creeds were well under attack prior to the 1890s.⁵

The fundamental problem was that for purposes of ordination and the maintenance of orthodox standards, churchmen were required to subscribe to the dogmatic statements of faith to be ordained. (This was normal practice usually regardless of denomination). Maintaining that standard subscription constituted their remaining in good standing in the church. However, many churchmen who had taken ordination vows were subsequently in violation of them by consequence of their scholarship, pedagogy and in many cases their outright preaching from the pulpit. The very question of retaining their good standing through sustaining their ordination vows when they failed to agree with them, therefore impugned their integrity. Yet, most had maintained their positions, especially in seminary settings, by virtue of their lack of immediate influence on the lay communities they served. An unwritten academic code which included the concept of independent tenure status allowed for their deviation away from their vows. The tenure principle was birthed in Germany in the 19th century along with the embrace of many of the heterodox ideas that permissively accompanied their permanent academic standing.⁶

The “burning question of Presbyterianism,” became the growing movement to revise the Westminster Confession of Faith. Many conservatives thought that the basic tenets defining Presbyterianism as a Reformed theology endemic to the confession were being placed on trial.⁷

⁴ Joseph Fort Newton *David Swing, Poet- Preacher* (Chicago: Unity Publishing Co., Abraham Lincoln Centre, 1909).

⁵ Eulogy in, *The San Francisco Call* “David Swing is Dead,” (Page. 1, Column 6. October 4, 1894).

⁶ See George Justice “Academic Tenure: What it is and why it Matters” *The Conversation* Phoenix: Arizona State University publication, June 18, 2001.

⁷ Harvey Hill, “History and Heresy,” *Religious Authority and the Trial of Charles Augustus Briggs* *U.S. Catholic Historian* Vol. 20 No. 3, (Summer 2002). 5.

For modernists in the Presbyterian Church evangelism by its very nature contested some doctrinal imperatives and caused them to question whether “old school,” distinctives were the reason why the more outreach oriented, often Arminian leaning denominations were growing disproportionately. By the first decade of the early 20th century, with the merger of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church USA had compromised its stance on some of the staunch soteriological concepts that had once defined it. The concessions included the significance of “man’s free will, double predestination” and what some called “the salvation of infants”.⁸

One could certainly argue also that Briggs was, through the aegis of his position, also pursuing a more “organic Christianity.” His idea inspired by German scholasticism, was that a purer form of original, ecumenical Christianity was necessary. The concept considered the Body of Christ as an “organism,” rather than an organization. Organisms grew and developed progressively over time. They learned new things and matured through their development. Changes in their environments (as Darwin had postulated), caused them to evolve differently. Organizations, however, were human establishments, the results of human endeavors. As such they were necessarily disposed to error and schismatic behavior. Briggs’ experience in Germany, notwithstanding his time as a pastor and professor had convinced him that traditional dogmatism like that associated with the creeds and confessions, was the dilemma responsible for the enormous challenge of denominational separation and interpretive inconsistency.⁹

In tracing Briggs’ progressive ecumenical drive one historian wrote,

Briggs’ theological studies during the late 1860s enabled him to derive a central idea that informed both his subsequent ecumenical thinking and his scriptural studies. Convinced that God’s best work in creation exhibited the same organic unity that animated His trinitarian being, Briggs believed that both the Church of God and Holy Scripture must manifest this same type of unity. In the 1870s and 1880s Briggs naively felt that the dynamic spirit of unity was so powerfully at work in the Christian churches that it was sufficient for him to aid it through biblical theology that exhibited the organic unity of scripture and its image of the Church as a mystical body consisting in various members.¹⁰

Briggs had been a member of Union Seminary’s faculty since 1874 where he was the Davenport Professor of Hebrew and the Cognate Languages. Both seminaries distinctly represented the clear divisions within the Presbyterian church USA. In 1870, Briggs became the co-editor of the *Presbyterian Review* along with A.A. Hodge of Princeton. The journal was a joint effort between Princeton and Union seminaries to find unity between the two factions. It did not.

⁸ Ahlstrom, 1972, 814.

⁹ John J. Feeney Jr. “Charles A. Briggs and the Organic Reunion of Christendom.” *Historic Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* Vol. 47 No. 1 (March 1978), 93-112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

Questions were raised over a heresy trial of a Scottish Presbyterian who had been subsequently convicted which caused both editors to publish apologetic opinions for their interpretations of the inspiration of the scriptures. One wrote from the inerrancy point of view while the other from what they called the “non-inerrancy perspective.”¹¹ As one author has written “inerrancy became the rallying cry for old school Presbyterians. New school theology represented “higher criticism, rationalism and anti-supernaturalism.”¹²

Although there was plenty of controversy swirling around Briggs before his trials, his new appointment was not contested until his inaugural address further publicly exemplified his modernist and liberal leanings. Briggs’ heresy trial was not the first manifestation of these types of controversies for the Presbyterian Church. Nor would his be the last. However, his case became extremely high-profile due to the perceived consequences of his appointment. Although Union Seminary had long accepted students from diverse denominations and had become increasingly ecumenical in its outlook, at the time of his trials, the Presbyterian Church USA still maintained control of its faculty appointments.¹³

As the “scientific” developments took place, the times changed and the foci shifted, various laymen began to realize that the seminaries that were training their future sons were increasingly in the “hands of the enemy.” Orthodox Presbyterian laymen worried about the future of and the legacy of their denomination. As Sydney Ahlstrom observed, “that was what made Princeton Theological Seminary so important- not only for Presbyterianism, but for all the denominations that honored the Reformed tradition, and even for some that did not.”¹⁴

The conservative call for orthodoxy was argued in *The Presbyterian Review* editorials by A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield. They underscored the importance of the definition of inspiration as a vehicle of God’s revelation to humanity. Both sides argued over the term “inspiration,” as it applied to the scriptures. New schoolers distinguished between plenary and verbal and concept inspirations. The liberal incursions necessitated doctrinal clarifications in an already changing and eclectic theological environment. Hodge and Warfield wrote,

The writers of this article are sincerely convinced of the perfect soundness of the great Catholic doctrine of Biblical Inspiration, i.e., that the scriptures not only contain, but ARE

¹¹ Why this was not simply labeled as what it was i.e., “errancy,” is indicative of the liberal technique of confusing definitions by renaming them something more obscure, especially if they carry definitive implications, to temper their true meanings.

¹² M. James Sawyer “Inspiration, Authority & Criticism in the Thought of Charles Augustus Briggs.” In, *OBible.org* June 3, 2004. <https://bible.org/article/inspiration-authority-criticism-thought-charles-augustus-briggs>

¹³ Sydney Ahlstrom *A Religious History of the American People* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, 812-824.

¹⁴ Ahlstrom, 1972, 812-813.

THE WORD OF GOD, and hence that all their elements and their affirmations are absolutely errorless and binding the faith and obedience of men.

They welcomed scholarly arbitration of the question of inspiration and inerrancy. However, they continued by declaring their trust in the mediation of the question by the “scriptures themselves.” They were confident that their position was accurate and consistent with the scriptures.

Nevertheless, we admit that the question between ourselves and the advocates of the view just stated, is one of fact, to be decided only by an exhaustive and impartial examination of all the sources of evidence, i.e., the claims and phenomena of the Scriptures themselves.

When concluding the section they stated,

There will undoubtedly be found upon the surface many affirmations presumably inconsistent with the present teachings of science, with facts of history, or with other statements of the sacred books themselves. Such apparent inconsistencies and collisions with other sources of information are to be expected in imperfect copies of ancient writings; from the fact that the original reading may have been lost, or that we may fail to realize the point of view of the author, or that we are destitute of the circumstantial knowledge which would fill up and harmonize the record. Besides, the human forms of knowledge by which the critics test the accuracy of Scripture are themselves subject to error. In view of all of the facts known to us, we affirm that the candid inspection of all the ascertained phenomena of the original text of Scripture will leave unmodified the ancient faith of the Church. In all of their real affirmations these books are without error.¹⁵

The scholarship of both the Hodges and Benjamin B. Warfield thoroughly rejected the new school clamor for revision to the Westminster Confession of Faith. They sought to uphold the established creed as a means of preserving the historic faith. They relied on their studies and knowledge of the scriptures while trusting in the enduring intellectual expertise of the 17th century churchmen rather than utilizing even newer means of conservative interpretation like the dispensational fundamentalists did.¹⁶

The editorials necessitated a rejoinder from Briggs who had subsequently become the spokesperson for the new school liberals. Briggs noted that orthodoxy meant something beyond orthodoxism, which is what he contended the conservatives posited.¹⁷ It was a perversion of the concept. His diatribe was levelled against the Hodges and Warfield in particular. In successive

¹⁵ A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield “Inspiration” *The Presbyterian Review* 6 (April 1881), 225-260.

¹⁶ George Marsden *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

¹⁷ One assumes he meant Orthodoxism was a classificatory category like other isms, i.e., communism, socialism, etc., rather than an existential, wholesale definer of the categoric isms.

publications Briggs wrote astringently against the conservative concepts of verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the scriptures. One publication prior to his inaugural address haughtily pointed to all who believed as conservatives did. It was also particularly personal and insulting to the major old school theology figures at Princeton.¹⁸

Briggs however, had departed from the concepts of inerrancy of the scriptures and verbal inspiration well prior to his appointment at Union Theological Seminary. He utterly distained Reformed Scholasticism. Briggs had been trained in Germany as had many of the other liberal theologians of the late 19th, early 20th centuries.¹⁹ Liberalism in religion gained ascendance due to its academic status in Europe.²⁰ So with these intellectual, “masters of theology” rapidly dominating the western academic milieu and the concept of “religion as science” finding greater acceptance in American institutions of higher learning, it was little wonder that controversy with orthodox churchmen was about to explode. Briggs wrote to his uncle, “When a new light dawns from above, most men cling to the old and can’t believe that any new light possible. I cannot doubt but that I have been blessed with a new divine light. I feel a different man from what I was a few months ago. The Bible is lit with a new light.”²¹

Briggs like most liberals, acknowledged the importance of history in the new theology. That included the historical analysis of the scriptures. In the critical study of the theological past, history and historicity was as necessary as what it was in the study of evolutionary changes that had taken place in biology.²² Therefore, the scriptures were subjected to the same historical analysis as any other significant books of history. That assessment also extended to the scientific

¹⁸ Charles Augustus Briggs *Whither* New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889.

¹⁹ Albrecht Ritschl and Frederick Schleiermacher reverberated through the halls of academia in the United States due to the intellectual status granted by western civilization to the German academy in general. The ambiguities of metaphysical feeling and intuition and the reductionistic thought that faith and religion was outside of impersonal rationalism and should be considered and studied within that context underscored the thought of the masters of German philosophy like Hegel and Kant. Schleiermacher rejected orthodoxy, Christ’s divinity and His vicarious atonement and sought to reinterpret scriptures the according to a more enlightened form of thinking. His work determined that the scriptures must be analyzed according to history and rational data. Ritschl sought to “complete the Reformation” through scholastic rigor and critical analysis and by demonstrating how faith was outside of the cosmology of reason. He saw religion as a series of “value judgements” and “individual subjectivism,” and as such his theology became a type of agnosticism. He was also at the forefront of the movement that sought to provide an understanding of how Christianity was expanded to the community through the concept of the kingdom. This would later develop more fully as the social gospel movement. Carl Gustaf Adolph (von) Harnack took this further by challenging the traditional New Testament interpretations, the gospel of John in particular, as ahistorical, and various creeds of the church. He also promoted the Social Gospel as the answer for the diminishing value of Christian ethics.

²⁰ For more information on the growth of German religious liberalism and its influence please see, Johannes Zachhuber *Theology as Science in 19th Century Germany: From FC Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Baur is responsible for establishing the Tubingen School of Theology.

²¹ C.A. Briggs letter to Marvin Briggs (Briggs Transcripts n.d.) The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries, Union Theological Seminary, New York Union Theological Seminary Archives 1 (Finding Aid for Charles Augustus Briggs Papers, 1841 – 1913 Subseries 1B: Correspondence Ledgers, 1841-1913) Briggs studied under Isaak Dorner at the University of Berlin 1866-1869.

²² Historicity here is understood as historical authentication.

study of history comprehensively involving the study of comparative religiosity, historical theology, and historicism. Historicism provided a new kind of historical determinism. Ahlstrom wrote in explaining this liberal perspective, “There was no non-historical vantage point for man, only the changing conceptions of absolutism.” It could be philosophically understood therefore as an historically associated, “all-encompassing relativism.”²³

Briggs was subsequently appointed as professor of Biblical Theology in 1891. The new position given his controversial status signified that further consequences were evident in the appointment. Any hope that this would remain an isolated academic affair at Union collapsed with Briggs’ acceptance speech that left most, except for his applauding students in a quandary. The inaugural address was quickly published in 1891. It created further problems not only for the old school conservatives, but overall, for the Presbyterian Church USA as well. As such, Briggs’ viewpoints that differed significantly from the tenets of the Westminster Confession of Faith (not to mention the historic dogmas of the Christian faith, especially those underscored by the sola doctrines that Reformed Christianity so venerated), were made public for all to scrutinize.²⁴ Moreover the rhetoric was inflammatory and “militant.” There was no way that the General Assembly could ignore either the tenor or the tone of the inaugural address.

The main points of contention brought out in the inaugural were clear in Briggs’ statements. He said,

It has been taught in recent years and is still taught by some theologians, that one proved error in scripture destroys the authority of scripture. I shall venture to affirm that, so far as I can see, there are errors in the Scriptures that none has been able to explain away; and the theory that they were not in the original text is sheer assumption, upon which no mind can rest with certainty.²⁵

So, it is unclear and a rather slippery argument that wagers whether Briggs was saying that he agreed or disagreed with the statement that proven errors rescinded the authority of scripture. But he certainly agreed that there were errors in scripture. Moreover, he inferred that there may have been errors in the original texts as well. Therefore, following this line of reasoning as understood by the tone of the inaugural address, old schoolers believed that Briggs not only questioned the authority of scripture, he was saying, as the newly appointed professor of Biblical Theology, that it was reasonable to deny its authenticity.

As he continued his tone became more and more combative. He went on to state that,

²³ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 1972. 772-774.

²⁴ Charles Augustus Briggs *Inaugural*, 1891.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

It is just here that the Higher Criticism has become such a terror in our times. Traditionalists are crying out that it is destroying the Bible because it is exposing their fallacies and follies. It may be regarded as certain that Moses did not write the Pentateuch or Job; Ezra did not write the Chronicles, Ezra or Nehemiah; Jeremiah did not write Kings or Lamentations; David did not write the Psalter but only a few of the Psalms; Solomon did not write The Song of Songs or Ecclesiastes, and only a portion of the Proverbs; and Isaiah did not write half of the book that bears his name. The great mass of the Old Testament was written by authors whose names and connection are lost in oblivion. But who tells us that these traditional names were the authors of the Bible? The Bible itself? The creeds of the Church? Any reliable historical testimony? None of these! Pure conjectural tradition! Nothing more!²⁶

Just prior to the second section of his address (entitled, “The Barriers of Divine Authority in Holy Scripture”) in his inaugural Briggs stated even more emphatically and contentiously that,

The Bible has been treated as if it were a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, nursed and carefully guarded, lest it should be injured by heretics and skeptics. It has been shut-up in a fortress, surrounded by breastworks and fortifications as extensive as those that envelope Cologne and Strasburg. No one can get at the Bible unless he force his way through these breastworks of traditional dogmatism, and storm the barriers of ecclesiasticism.

Therefore, the thought of Briggs as one who tried to implement a “more moderate form of higher criticism,” was contested through his own combative tone at the inaugural of his position as chair of Biblical Theology at Union Seminary. Historiographic analysis demonstrates that those closest to the time of the trial berated Briggs for his contentiousness. His tone, as much as anything else demonstrated his unwillingness to moderate his ideas about higher critical thinking, or to find room for other modes of Presbyterian interpretation. One could argue that contextually, that characteristic was what was supposed to define the term liberal after all.²⁷

However, Briggs’ description of what he called “inspiration” was complex, rational and was obviously well thought out. He demonstrated his intellectual capacity by drawing from the contemporary social scientific research on linguistics and anthropological research about that nature of language and communication, sometimes coming to conclusions presciently before research in the fields had even been established. Through this lens he distinguished between verbal inspiration and plenary inspiration. He believed that God was inerrant and infallible. He communicated with man, but man is fallible and errant in his ways. The communication between God and man was essential. But because man was involved the problem of errancy was part of the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Nevertheless, the elitist attitude of considering anything different from one’s own research or writings usually proves the illiberality of the liberal camp. D.G. Hart and J. R. Meuthner, "Turning Points of American History – Part 8: Confessional Revision of 1903", by *New Horizons* (Aug/Sept 2005). See also, Hugh, Chisholm, ed. "[Briggs, Charles Augustus](#)". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vol. 4 (11th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1911). p. 586.

equation. Therefore, Briggs felt even in the original texts there could have been errors. He certainly felt that the prophetic sections and various other portions of the Old Testament were incorrectly interpreted and unable to be fulfilled as inferred.²⁸

Briggs's heresy trial, considered by some historians as the "most famous heresy trial in American history" proceeded in 1892. The contention over the Westminster Confession was at the very least, a secondary issue. Briggs had previously written about what he called a "progressive orthodoxy." Incorporating social scientific methodology into his assessment Briggs wrote that, "orthodoxy has a different meaning in different lands and different ages."²⁹ These kinds of statements made Briggs one of the chief proponents of revision of the Westminster Confession. He also brought into question whether the old school terms of orthodoxy and inspiration etc., retained the meanings they once had due to the progressive developments in science as they related to theology. Theology to men like Briggs had become scientific, empirical, and subject to higher critical standards of rationale. The controversy therefore intensified due to the further consequences that brought this into a communion-wide issue. Those who eventually tried Briggs at Union (in contrast to the later trial) hoped to reduce his case as simply a doctrinal issue. Briggs however, and all that he now represented made his eventual presentment an impending issue for the General Assembly.

Briggs had made some very divisive statements and assertions that were ironically even damaging to the ecumenicalism he supposedly championed. They undoubtedly widened the separation between the church's factions. His tone in the inaugural was criticized by his own colleagues at Union for being "dogmatic and irritating." Moreover, his perspective on revision of the Westminster Confession remained uncompromising. Ironically, Briggs took a hard line in his call for the dogmatic Calvinism of the past, emphasizing predestination and other divisive doctrines, to be softened. Hart and Muether write,

Briggs did not advocate merely removing a supposed Princetonian gloss from the Westminster Confession. Presbyterians, he argued, must also acknowledge the inadequacies and errors of the Confession. Since progress was of the essence of genuine Presbyterianism, the Confession itself encouraged its adjustment "to the higher knowledge of our times and the still higher knowledge that the coming period of progress in theology will give us." Failure to take this step would be to retreat to the errors of Rome and to abandon the very principles of the Reformation.³⁰

²⁸ Sawyer, "Inspiration" 2004.

²⁹ Charles Augustus Briggs *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1889. This statement was not terribly dissimilar to Dr. Swing's assertion of the significance of the chronological time period regarding the issuance of the creeds.

³⁰ Hart And Muether *New Horizons*, 2005.

When tried by his own seminary's faculty members he was found not guilty. That was no surprise since he simply underscored what most taught there anyway. But his trial did anything but put an end to the contention between the old and new school Presbyterians. The problem for the conservatives and the denomination in general was exacerbated further, by the finding of him as not guilty of heresy in the New York Presbytery. His caustic remarks were repeated and published recreating a platform for the church to retry him. However, when retried before the General Assembly Briggs was found guilty, suspended, and defrocked.³¹

Briggs was subsequently ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church rather than lose his position at Union. Union stuck by its contentious professor along with their commitment to modernism. Rather than become susceptible to the conservatism of the Princetonians they voted to remove their affiliation with the Presbyterian Church USA completely. Therefore, the heresy trial of Charles Augustus Briggs had virtually no immediate academic or economic consequence on the life of C.A. Briggs and his family. Moreover, he continued in his newfound "Anglicanism" to champion views that can only be considered as dogmatically Roman Catholic. They included advocating for the episcopacy, and in time the papacy. These ideas were even beyond the pale of most doctrinaire Anglo-Catholics at the time. His criticism of some basic Protestant positions like the assertion that the sanctification process continues on after death, further points to this kind of mindset. As a seminary professor he had distained "Reformed Scholasticism" as a means of indoctrination for pastoral candidates. Consequently, as an Episcopal churchman that issue was behind him.³²

At the time of the Briggs trial for heresy Algernon Sidney Crapsey was also transitioning from a dogmatic high church, Anglo-Catholic to a budding Broad churchman. The progressive changes he experienced correspond consistently to the changing conventions in American society over the course of his lifetime. As Americans embraced the cultural aspects of Romanticism in the late 18th, and early to mid-19th century, cultural changes were reflected in art, music, literature and architecture. One of the more recognizable aspects of the movement was reflected in the architecture of the churches in both Europe and America. Churches were built with grand facades and gothic spires. Nevertheless, the gothic style pointed to something that was happening within the buildings as well. In the Anglican and Episcopal Churches, this was expressed as an outward appreciation of the past through the Anglo-Catholicism of the Oxford Movement.³³ By the late

³¹ Chisholm, *Briggs*, 1911.

³² For more on "Reformed Scholasticism" see Ryan M. McGraw *Reformed Scholasticism: Recovering the Tools of Reformed Theology* New York: T & T Clark, 2019.

³³ At least one of the starting points of the Oxford Movement was from John Keble's provocative sermon, "National Apostacy," In, *Sermons Academatical and Occasional* (Oxford: John Parker, 1847). 129-148. The sermon was given on July 14, 1833.

1850s and early 1860s men like Edward Bouverie Pusey, John Keble and Robert Wilberforce were finding ways to return to the “via media” of the past.³⁴

A young Algernon Sidney Crapsey found refuge from a winter storm one evening in a Protestant Episcopal Chapel. As he gazed at the beauty of the accouterments and the ongoing liturgical ceremonies he was awestruck. He was drawn to the Episcopal Church which had resisted the iconoclastic “reforms” of many of the other Protestant denominations including the distaste for ritual, decorative trappings, organ music, statues, and stain glass windows. The Cranmerian arrangement and then the Elizabethan Settlement of almost three hundred years previous sought to maintain that which was splendid and beautiful in the church while reforming its creed to the refined 39 Articles. Crapsey’s attraction was not based on being “born in the Spirit of God” but on being captivated by the church’s majesty and the august splendor of its ceremonialism.³⁵

After a short stint in the Civil War when he almost died of pneumonia, he took on several positions even working at a dead letter office in Washington, DC. Heeding his uncle Franklin’s advice instead of Horace Greeley’s, he decided to go to New York City to seek his place in the world. While there he was captivated by a Rev. Ferdinand Cartwright Ever’s preaching and became a “disciple.” The church he attended included Anglo-Catholic allusions and the kind of ceremonialism that Crapsey had been previously drawn to. He eventually decided to become a minister in the Protestant Episcopal Church. He attended St. Stephen’s at Annandale College on the Hudson and then went to seminary at General Seminary in New York City. He later said about General seminary “I do not think there was ever an institution so inadequate to its purpose as this seminary when I was under its care.”³⁶

In New York City, Crapsey was ordained by the high church bishop, Horatio Potter in the Protestant Episcopal church. He worked for a time in Manhattan as a deacon and then an assistant at St. Paul’s Chapel at Trinity parish where Dr. Morgan Dix presided as its rector. His work resembled the dedicated work of Roman Catholic priests to the poor and needy. He lived above a grocery store that also had a barroom in it. His neighborhood had once been an elegant place of professionals but had become a place for the destitute and disadvantaged. He worked alongside the Episcopal Sisters of St. Mary who were devoted to principles similar to those of the Roman Catholic nuns. His job was a little of everything at the church. He was eventually appointed to the office of priest officiating. Nevertheless, when the parish hired an assistant who actually made

³⁴ Edward Bouverie Pusey *The Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Doctrine of the English Church, with a Vindication of the Reception by the Wicked and the Adoration of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Truly Present*. (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1857). See also the letters in three parts to John Henry Newman and etc. concerning the reunion of the Catholic and Anglican Churches in, *Eirenicon* (Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1870).

³⁵ Stephen Todd Neese *Algernon Sidney Crapsey “The Last of The Heretics”* Newcastle on the Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, 21.

³⁶ Crapsey, *Heretics*, 85.

more than the governor of the state of New York, Crapsey recalled that he didn't feel that the man was up to the position. He eventually married Adelaide Trowbridge and shortly after that was called in March of 1879 to St. Andrew's Church in the southern section of the city of Rochester, New York. There he put together plans for what would eventually become one of the largest parishes in upstate New York.³⁷

While there, Crapsey established an industrial school for the poor. His wife started sewing classes that would become a sewing guild and eventually a children's clothing company. Crapsey started a parish school for the children of the church. They were the pioneers of the kindergarten movement which caught on and with Crapsey's help was soon training students while establishing a Normal School for kindergarten teachers as well. He started societies like the Brotherhood of St. Andrew's to provide insurance for both illness and for members' and widows at the time of their death. He made the church one of the first "free churches" in Rochester, by introducing free seating. His efforts at St. Andrew's benefitted the entire community around him. While serving his church in the 1880's and 90s, he scrupulously worked hard at "being the ideal parish priest."³⁸

After serving at the burgeoning St. Andrew's for several years, he also became a "Missioner" making evangelistic forays into the American west, then still a frontier, and to Bermuda with his wife and the son of Nathaniel Rochester.³⁹ Though he was certainly still firmly within the Anglo-Catholic camp he was continuously broadening his perspectives. He would subsequently be offered the position of coadjutor for a bishopric in faraway Nebraska one of the places that he had taught at on his missioner's trip.⁴⁰ It was a short step from there to becoming the bishop of Nebraska. However, Crapsey desired the position of the Bishop of Western New York in his district of upstate New York after the previous bishop, Arthur C. Coxe had died in 1896. He was visibly upset when the bishopric went to a different individual. Crapsey then figured with his high profile and prestige that he could simply advocate for and soon gain a See for the area that his church was in due to the growing demographics of the region. The problem was that even though there was ample need for the position considering the growing population it would mean that the Diocese of Western New York would have to be split into a section that went from Rochester south to Elmira. The Western New York See would remain in Buffalo, Erie

³⁷ Neese, *Crapsey*, 30-47.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 63-73.

³⁹ While at Bermuda his evangelistic meetings were so popular that one evening as he was a little late getting to the church, the area was so packed with visitors that he had to be passed over people's heads in order to get him into the church to give the message. On the way back, during a storm at sea, Mr. Rochester was thrown violently into the wainscoting in the ship's hold and that was presumably one of the reasons that he died a short time after that in Rochester. See, Neese, *Crapsey*, 101-129.

⁴⁰ The Protestant Episcopal Church shied away from using the terms "evangelist or missionary," as a matter of decorum and to distinguish the kind of work that they did from the usual missionary or evangelist.

County, the Niagara Frontier and south to the Pennsylvania border. However, the new Bishop of Western New York, William D. Walker opposed the split.⁴¹

Perhaps he was too high church and becoming too broad for the laymen of western New York. He was very certainly well-known and had an extremely large church attendance. Following that disappointment, he suffered a serious illness that brought him close to death. When he recovered, something had changed. His life took a distinctly different turn after that. During a trip paid for by his congregation to Great Britain, Crapsey had an epiphany when noticing the splendor of the cathedrals in the midst of the squalor of Glasgow, London, Manchester and other major cities. He was perhaps still stewing over the thought of how he had not become the Bishop of Western New York. He became increasingly critical, perhaps to the point of cynicism considering how the Anglican communion was based on an aristocratic structure that provided lavishly for its bishops and hierarchy while the general laity under establishment laws of an Erastian system were forced to support it.⁴²

Crapsey mentioned that by the 1880s and 90s he had become very disenchanted and confused about his personal faith. He began to consider the progressive insights of several British socialists. He was clearly aware of the progressive developments going on around him. He was slowly moving away from the more conservative Anglo-Catholic faction towards the broad church. He began to write about the inclusivity of Anglicanism and how “Anglicanism believes everything.” He elevated himself to the position of prophet which in his mind was greater than that of a bishop. With the ordination of Briggs to the Episcopal ministry shortly after his deposal from Presbyterianism, Crapsey had a concrete basis for an exemplar. Moreover, that same year, as Crapsey supported the controversial Phillips Brooks in his elevation to the bishopric of Massachusetts, one critic wrote, “men would soon need to see around corners rather than take a straightforward view of things.” The man who had previously assiduously defended conservative Anglo-Catholicism had begun to make peace with his broadening views as well as his mystical place in the church. Brooks died in 1893 and his doctrinal legacy remains enigmatic.⁴³

Crapsey’s publications, including his autobiography, help explain his actions over time. They can also provide (at least to some degree), a psychological profile of his life. Crapsey became increasingly enamored with progressivism, the modernist perspective, the intellectual renditions of the liberal incursion and the broad-church faction. Beginning in the late 1890s, Crapsey also began to write about the importance of unity in the church. Much of the invective leveled at the conservatives by liberal churchmen had to do with their unwavering support for the creeds and confessions that defined their denominational standpoints. Subscription to creeds in the

⁴¹ Crapsey, *Heretics*. The bishop was Bishop William Walker.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 75-77.

⁴³ Neese, *Crapsey*, 112. Brooks was the author of the hymn, Phillips Brooks “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem.” (Public Domain, 1867).

minds of the liberals had unnecessarily created division and confusion. The new theology could provide a pathway to unity through academic rigor, rationale in research and unbiased biblical interpretation. Crapsey felt that he could help lead the way out of Plato's cave.⁴⁴

In the wake of the Briggs trial, liberally oriented Presbyterian churches in Rochester now even allowed for Rabbi's to share pulpits with their clergy. Academics and clerics alike began to laud the progressive development of the vast wealth of knowledge in all areas of intellectual inquiry. This involved the scientific research that affected every aspect of life in America, including the church. Humanistic rationale, socialism and the concept of social salvation were posited as the reasons for the optimism of the dawning of the new century.⁴⁵ Crapsey began to share tractates written for the public about theological issues that had become increasingly controversial. He began to attack doctrinal aspects of the creeds supposing, as others had, that they caused division since they were not supported by the neoteric interpretations of the new theology.⁴⁶

After celebrating his twenty-fifth anniversary festivities at St. Andrew's, Crapsey went on a walking tour of the United Kingdom with Judge John Warrant Castlemen from his congregation. St. Andrews had grown to include various professional people.⁴⁷ While on his tour he conferred with the judge about his idea of providing a lecture series that would "bring the church into the twentieth century." The judge encouraged Crapsey to continue with his quest towards "further religious reform." He had by this time become quite a celebrity in Rochester and his influence was recognized throughout the country as well. He had become the "darling of the broad-church faction."⁴⁸

However, the public in Rochester was surprised indeed by the extreme utterances he eventually made during his lecture series at St. Andrew's. Under the rubric of church history his lectures involved the past relationship of the church with politics and religion. Without any real historical competence, he adopted the liberal practice of applying an historical analysis through his narrative. Through the course of his lectures Crapsey eventually denied virtually all the cardinal doctrines of the faith. Subsequently, the editorial sections of the Rochester newspapers were filled with opinions from both sides of the dogmatic aisle.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, several Episcopalian clergymen in Rochester encouraged Crapsey to downplay his radical views. His

⁴⁴ A cartoon of Crapsey walking out of a cave into the sunlight with his arms raised appeared in one of the more liberal church magazines.

⁴⁵ Washington Gladden *Social Salvation* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004. The original publication was in 1901.

⁴⁶ See chapter 13, Neese, *Crapsey*.

⁴⁷ They included George Peabody, Spencer and Katrina Trask, (philanthropists), Edward M. Shepard, and members of the George Seldon family (the Rochesterian who invented the internal combustion engine. He eventually lost his patent to Henry Ford), and various members of the Sibley family.

⁴⁸ Neese, *Crapsey*, 191.

⁴⁹ In light of modern scholarship many liberals postulated that the charge of heresy was obsolete.

combativeness and insistence on maintaining his viewpoints however, eventually caused some of his ecclesiastical brethren to write to the bishop of the Diocese of Western New York to call upon a Standing Committee to investigate the matter more closely. Editorial opinions intensified further. Meanwhile the Bishop of Western New York, Bishop William D. Walker attempted to downplay the controversy that was brewing.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Crapsey continued to address the issue from his pulpit and in letters to various clergymen. Then he had a book published entitled, *Religion and Politics* which was taken directly from the lectures. He successively reiterated many of the same statements he had made in his controversial series. He then wrote a five-page article in the popular magazine *Outlook* entitled, "Honor Among Churchmen." In it he noted how it would be dishonorable for him to shy away from the controversy he was causing. He provided his justification for making the statements that he did while remaining in good standing in the church.⁵¹

It was becoming increasingly clear that regardless of the actions of the Committee of Investigation or of the diocese, he was pushing for adjudication of the matter completely. Eventually the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Western New York appointed an Investigative Committee. Hoping to end the controversy, they met with Crapsey and tried to find areas of mutual affirmation. When asked "in the context of the various interpretations of the scriptures if he believed that the scriptures were the Word of God," Crapsey replied, "Certainly if I may, as we must, apply this principle of interpretation, I hold and preach that in the Bible is to be found divine revelation." The committee and Crapsey worked together to provide questions and answers that granted the "greatest latitude possible to the principle of interpretation." However, when pressed, the presbyters involved in the committee were ambiguous about presentment. Ultimately, three of the five members of the committee voted to advise the bishop not to present him figuring that on the basis of his book and articles they would be unable to get a conviction.⁵²

Conservative church publications adamantly disagreed with the committee.⁵³ By this time the situation had exceeded the confines of the Diocese of Western New York. Several church journals and magazines carried articles about the issues raised in Crapsey's publications. Moreover, instead of letting the issue pass with the decision of the committee regarding their work to find common ground, Crapsey continued to press the matter. He continued to publish his opinions, as well as rebuttals to those that came out against him. He assiduously kept the matter current in the public eye. He continued to opine about the implausibility of subscription to the

⁵⁰ Editorial opinion, "From Heresy Trials Good Lord Deliver Us!" *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle* Tuesday, May 16, 1905.

⁵¹ A.S. Crapsey "Honor Among Churchmen" in, *Outlook* 2 September 1905, 25-29.

⁵² Neese, *Crapsey*, 257-265.

⁵³ See articles in *The Living Church* Nov. 18, 1905, also in *The Church Standard* Nov. 25, 1905.

historic creeds and formularies of the church. His book *Religion and Politics* was summarily placed on the *Roman Catholic Index* and was likewise condemned by various Protestants as well.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, Crapsey decided that he was exonerated, by the recommendations of the Investigative Committee. Consequently, he chose to return to the controversial venue that he had previously left by giving further lectures at St. Andrew's Church. This time, he came against the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. His version postulated that the second coming was a "spiritual interpretation." It was however, not going to physically happen. He continued, emboldened when he could have let it go. Crapsey was becoming a thorn in the flesh of the diocese. At a jubilee celebration of Christ Church in Rochester, Bishop Walker gave a speech that pointed discreetly, but without a doubt directly to all of the commotion caused by Crapsey's departure from the historical Anglican faith. Afterwards at a luncheon, the clergy made it clear that they at least, would take the scriptures literally when they refused to sit or eat with Crapsey.⁵⁵

Inspired by Bishop Walker's speech, on February 23, 1906, the Standing Committee, decided unanimously to present Algernon Sidney Crapsey for heresy. A previously elected ecclesiastical court, assembled for the trial. The charges stated, he had taught doctrines contrary to those of the church. The doctrines he controverted included that Jesus was the Savior of the world, that He was conceived of by the Holy Ghost, that He was born of a Virgin, that He was resurrected, and that He was a member of the Blessed Trinity. They further specified that he had taught that Jesus was born of middle-class parents, and that He had a simple father and mother, that He was the son of a carpenter, and that the miraculous birth narrative was one of the greatest misfortunes of the history of humankind.⁵⁶

Therefore, he expressed disbelief in "the doctrines of Jesus as God and Savior of the world, that He was conceived of by the Holy Ghost, that He was born of a Virgin, and of the Blessed Trinity." Furthermore, they contended that "he had violated his ordination vows by impugning or denying the doctrines of the church." The charges specified that "he denied that the scriptures were the word of God, containing all things necessary to salvation, and that he did not give faithful diligence to minister doctrine, sacraments and discipline as the Lord had commanded to do, nor was he faithful to drive away and banish all erroneous doctrines that were contrary to God's word." By administering the sacraments during the time of his utterances (1904-1905), "he had broken his ordination vows by framing and fashioning himself and his family according to the

⁵⁴ A.S. Crapsey *Religion and Politics* New York: Whittaker, 1905.

⁵⁵ Stephen Todd Neese "Algernon Sidney Crapsey and the Move for Presentment" *Anglican and Episcopal History* Vol. LXX No. 3 (September 2001), 324-352. See also, Neese, *Crapsey*, Chapter 18. The scripture reference is "With such an one, no not to eat." Quoted from 1 Corinthians 5: 11.

⁵⁶ Neese, *Crapsey*, 279- 296.

doctrine of Christ,” (alleging that he had thus been a bad example to his flock). Moreover, and as such, “he failed to maintain an example of quietness, fear, and love for all Christian people.”⁵⁷

Crapsey retained J. Breck Perkins, a congressman representing Rochester, New York, as his principal defense counselor. Another nationally famous defense lawyer, Mr. E. M. Shepard, (who had once ran for mayor of New York City), offered his services as well. The prosecution hired John Lord O’Brian of Buffalo, one of the finest prosecuting attorneys in the nation, along with Franklin D. Locke of Buffalo and a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Rhode Island, Judge John H. Stiness. Twenty years prior to the Scopes Monkey Trial, Crapsey’s trial was as high profile as one could possibly be.⁵⁸ Some as renowned as Seth Low the former mayor of New York City and the then president of Columbia University provided his liberal opinion of the far-reaching implications of the Crapsey trial.⁵⁹

As it proceeded the defense wanted to make the trial a test case about how it would establish a redefinition of the doctrines of the church. They hoped to emphasize what was academically, as well as ecclesiastically acceptable in the new day and age. They tried to make the case about the philosophical definition of truth and the freedom of expression as the ultimate rationale for holding the trial. The prosecution demurred. “The issue was one of fact,” wrote one correspondent, “not of determining the future faith of the church. The church was not on trial the priest was.”⁶⁰

As the trial continued, editorial opinions in newspapers from all over the country piped in with their commentary and opinions of the goings on in Rochester, New York. The trial became such a tumultuous affair that it had to be moved to St. James Episcopal Church in Batavia, New York, considered a more neutral location. Crapsey’s wife Adelaide refused to attend due to her reluctance to hear the obvious criticisms of her husband and because of her ongoing familial and vocational commitments. Instead, his daughter Adelaide who would become a famous poet in the following years accompanied him on the journey to Batavia. At least fifteen journalists, various dignitaries of the Protestant Episcopal Church and about twenty spectators from each side of the aisle, were allowed to attend the trial. The prosecution was confident and ready whereas the defense seemed ill-prepared. They sought extensions due to their busy, important schedules and Shepard failed to even show up the first day.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid., 289-290.

⁵⁸ Crapsey would later acerbically state that the court was tried by a group of country clergymen, (those who sat on the bench), but both the prosecution and the defense were highly trained legal experts.

⁵⁹ Letter to the editor from Seth Low in *The Churchman* April 7, 1906, (15) 523.

⁶⁰ Editorial in *The Living Church* March 17, 1906. Vol. XXXIV No. 20. In retrospect one realizes how utterly mistaken that viewpoint was, since the church had been on trial since its inception by forces that have continuously questioned the validity of the scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ.

⁶¹ Neese, *Crapsey*, 301-302.

Crapsey's defense was like that which Briggs argued by changing the focus from subscription to the creeds and formularies to the personal charge "to teach nothing, as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which he should be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the scriptures." The chief prosecutor however, John Lord O'Brian, kept the court focused on the issue at hand. That was, whether the defendant had indeed said and done what he was charged to have. O'Brian kept the main thing, within the purview of the main thing. The charges against the defendant were what was being adjudicated. The defense tried to call in experts in theology from various places, but their admittance was denied as inadmissible and irrelevant to the charges. They cited the work of C.A. Briggs as not only appropriate in modern theology, but also legitimized by his ordination in the Protestant Episcopal Church. One half of the courtroom, containing those spectators that supported the prosecution uttered a noticeable laugh with the mention of Briggs' name in association with biblical orthodoxy. The defense was unable to prevail. Without their impressive, and most important witnesses or corroborative testimony that would confirm that Crapsey's utterances were within what was now considered as the orthodox teachings of church, they had no case at all. O'Brian kept the court focused on the matter at hand. The trial was simply about the charges of heresy and the breaking of the defendant's ordination vows. Because O'Brian and Judge Stiness incessantly emphasized that focus, the panel of ecclesiastic judges had no problem coming to the conclusion that Crapsey was guilty of the charges placed before them.⁶²

Prior to the releasing of the statement of his conviction, newspapermen from all over the country came to the village of Batavia to get the scoop on the story. Every major newspaper in the USA as well as several from around the world carried the story of the modern-day heresy trial.⁶³ Reporters from the *New York Times* however proved to be the most resourceful as they snuck into the basement of the building where the judges were deliberating and used a listening device under the floor to find out what the verdict was before it was announced to the public. *The New York Times* reporters scooped the story two days before the ecclesiastical court publicly rendered the verdict. An appellate Ecclesiastical Court the next year in New York City refused to overturn the verdict.⁶⁴

Both Crapsey and Briggs were deemed heretics. Both had become heretics by their initial downplaying of doctrines as well as their emphasis on evangelism and their desire for a reunion of the faithful. Crapsey sought Catholicity, Briggs sought an "organic reunion of the church." Ironically, a young Briggs' earlier letters to his sister hoped for her to acknowledge Christ as her Savior and that the essence of Christianity was simple union with Christ." His experience in Germany with Issac A. Dorner and the Evangelical Union Party underscored his desire for union, his stand for rationalism, against Protestant scholasticism, and his wish for integration of church

⁶² Ibid., see 297-318.

⁶³ Ibid., Crapsey received letters of support from Great Britain, Egypt, and as far away as India.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

and state. However, his acceptance of the higher critical methodology compelled him to find “a truer harmony and unity in the Holy Scripture.”⁶⁵ Thus, he used the new theology, historicity and what he considered as the higher critical methodology to confirm the Bible to be his definition of the inspired word of God. Conversely, he used it to contradict the earlier scholasticism that relied on dogmatic models of interpretation for understanding the Bible. He saw the scriptures as “a vast organism in which the unity springs from an amazing variety.”⁶⁶ In the end,

he had taught that reason and the Church are both a fountain of divine authority, which, apart from Holy Scripture does savingly enlightens men, that errors may have existed in the original text of the Holy Scripture, that Old Testament predictions have been reversed by history and that the great body of Messianic prediction has not and cannot be fulfilled, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch and that Isaiah is not the author of the second half of the book that bears his name, and that the processes of redemption extend to the world to come (he had considered it a fault of Protestant theology that it limits redemption to this world and that sanctification is not complete at death.⁶⁷

Crapsey also distinguished between the pedagogy involved in concepts of the scientific research in theology that was happening at some more prestigious institutions and the scholastic theology of the previous eras. He wrote of the *Disappointment of Jesus Christ* being that “Christ’s hope and prayer for harmony had not been answered” in the church.⁶⁸ He stated that the two false theories of the church were that “the unity of the church centers in her own organization.” And that, “the unity of the church centers in her formal doctrine.”⁶⁹ His future heresies were based on erroneous assumptions and theoretical maneuverings endemic in his misinterpretation of history. Crapsey later embarked on a lecture series that he eventually published concerning the history of the church.⁷⁰ Briggs’ perception that the compulsion to reunify the church was so strong in America that his intellectual input would be a conduit for “organic reunion,” was naïve after all. The desire for Christians to separate over often the most ridiculous reasons has distinguished American evangelical religion for centuries.

After separating from the Presbyterian Church USA because of its increasingly liberal agenda J. Gresham Machen finally founded the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The proverbial worm had turned against the old school. He separated from Princeton and established a new school of ministry and theology at Westminster Theological Seminary north of Philadelphia, PA.

⁶⁵ Feeney, “Organic,” 93-95.

⁶⁶ Charles A. Briggs *Biblical Study* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1883).

⁶⁷ Hugh Chisholm ed.” Charles Augustus Briggs,” In, *Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol. 4 (11th edition) Cambridge University Press, 1911, 586.

⁶⁸ A.S. Crapsey “Causes and Remedy of the Disunion of Christendom” In, *The Disappointment of Jesus Christ* Tractate No. 1 Rochester, 1902) 4-10.

⁶⁹ For the scriptural view see Ephesians 4.

⁷⁰ See Chapter nine “Till We All Come in the Unity of the Faith.” In, Neese, *Crapsey*, 130-149.

The church that Briggs had hoped would become inclusive and ecumenical eventually tried the orthodox churchman because he stood against such luminaries as Pearl S. Buck (the Pulitzer Prize winning author and missionary), and the spreading of what he considered amounted to heretical proselytization by foreign missionaries. He was deposed. The Presbyterian Church USA had become the liberal church that was illiberal indeed in their embrace of the new progressive theologies. Eventually, liberal modernism was reviled against even by other progressive liberals. In the interim, the seminary at Union thought that it had regained some ecumenical sense of legitimacy with the growth of neo-orthodoxy in America. But it had become so culturally overly encumbered with similar nonsensical liberalism that such Christian luminaries as Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated that it (Union Seminary) was indistinguishable from the secular world since that there was no existential clarity to their beliefs anymore.⁷¹

The consequences of Charles Augustus Briggs' "conservative heresies" include his influence on the future of Christendom in America. It might be concluded that Briggs' influence (both positive and negative), was so great that it ripped apart his own denomination and effected the future of the one he turned to as well. His desire for ecumenicalism and his turn to Anglicanism influenced Algernon Sidney Crapsey's understanding of what he believed that the faith should be ultimately about, as well as the future choices that he made. Both men emphasized the significance of history, while both denominations struggled with the historical differences within themselves. Eventually Crapsey would not be the "last of the heretics," that he claimed to be. He would only be the last high-profile churchman that the Episcopal Church prosecuted. Others were eventually emboldened by the Crapsey trial and the spectacle that it created, not to mention the adoption of the more latitudinarian perspective the church now held. The resultant Episcopal Church became ever more radically inclined. Bishop John Shelby Spong eventually wrote that "all the traditional truths of the Christian faith are negotiable."⁷²

Although he was not the first, Briggs' high-profile heresy helped to set the course for the modern Christian Church in America. Crapsey's heresy case took those principles to the extreme. The unity that both Briggs and Crapsey sought after, worked instead to break the churches apart. Both heresies were apprehended and consummated in a historical context. As progressives they sought liberal reforms like popular democracy and scientific protocol. Both rebelled against the authoritarianism of the church and the traditional seat of that authority that was expressed in the creeds. Like the muckrakers they believed that they were exposing areas embedded within the systemic structure of religion that required scientific reform.

⁷¹ Bonhoeffer stated about Union Seminary "There is no theology here." James V. Heidinger II "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Reflections on American Theology" Seedbed June 13, 20017.

⁷² John Becker "The Central Heresy of the Episcopal Church." *Special to Virtue Online: The Voice for Global Online Anglicanism* September 1, 2007. www.virtueonline.org

Ironically, some of the terms used today in the evangelical church have their origins in the rhetoric of the heretics. Evangelicals today often proudly assert that the church is an organism and not an organization. Whereas it is obviously both. The concept affirms an independent American nature, at the expense of the organizational function of church authority. The emphasis on the personal relationship with Jesus Christ has likewise become a means of bypassing the authority of the church when personally desirous. It has often become a means of justifying the reception of direct communication from God. (God showed me this, or that, which gives the confused believer the opportunity to demand that his or her understanding is consummated by God Himself. Therefore, any hierarchical authorities except God himself have no real power after all to contradict what the individual believes as God given insight).

Inerrancy has become a Shibboleth for anti-intellectualism, whereas infallibility has been posited as an escape valve for liberals who refuse to engage about the doctrine of inerrancy. The distinctions between inspiration and revelation have become muddled, and divine superintendence over apostolic writings is no longer taught or understood. Finally, ecumenicalism has become a negative reference to the workings and desire of the dead, mainstream church regardless of the scriptural affirmation of the unity of the church registered in Ephesians 4 and elsewhere throughout the scriptures. In fact, without the mainstream embrace of the heterodoxy of the liberal modernists, (if we disregard the sovereignty of God in historical matters of evangelism, revival and ultimately salvation), it is doubtful that the evangelical church would have grown to heights it did in the late 20th century. Even in this, there is a certain implication about the rebellious nature of the believer concerning the authority of the church. The consumer culture of personal choice and independence distinguishes the church today. Church discipline is virtually non-existent, and pastors and elders realize that if they lean on matters too hard, the believer will simply go where they are affirmed instead. All of this is topped off by the incessant disputations and conspiracy theories endemic in 21st century Evangelical culture. One might postulate that the heresy trials of the late 19th and early 20th centuries did their work after all. In a certain sense then, Crapsey was not necessarily wrong then when he said that he was the last of the heretics. Error is rampant and unfortunately to a great degree, accepted in the Evangelical Church today. Mainstream American culture now embraces the term heretic as Crapsey eventually did, as a badge of honor.⁷³

⁷³ Neese, Crapsey, 2007. See also, Alister McGrath *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* New York: HarperOne, 2007. 1-13. (Introduction, Entitled, "Our Love Affair with Heresy.")

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