

INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY: A NEW DEPARTURE

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If I have told you earthly things, and
ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I
tell you of heavenly things? Jn. 3:12

In his classic work, *The Progress of Dogma*, James Orr contended that the Christian Church, in each great epoch of its history, has been forced to come to grips with one particular doctrine of crucial significance both for that day and for the subsequent history of the Church.¹ In the Patristic era, the issue was the relation of the persons of the Godhead, and particularly the christological problem of Jesus' character; the Ecumenical Creeds represent the success of Orthodox, Trinitarian theology over against numerous christological heresies, any one of which could have permanently destroyed the Christian faith. Medieval Christianity faced the issue of the meaning of Christ's atonement, and Anselm's "Latin doctrine," in spite of its scholastic inadequacies, gave solid expression to biblical salvation-history as represented by the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the Reformation Era, the overarching doctrinal problem facing the Church was the application of redemption in justification; Luther's stand for *sola gratia, sola fide* arrested an anthropocentric trend which could have turned the Christian faith into little more than pagan religiosity.

And contemporary Christianity? What great doctrinal issue does the modern Church face? Writing just before the turn of the present century, Orr thought that he could see in Eschatology the unique doctrinal challenge for modern Christianity. Subsequent events, however, have proven this judgment wrong: the doctrinal problem which, above all others, demands resolution in the modern Church is that of the authority of Holy Scripture. All other issues of belief today pale before this issue, and indeed root in it; for example, ecumenical discussions, if they are doctrinal in nature, eventually and inevitably reach the question of religious authority—what is the final determinant of doctrinal truth, and how fully can the Bible be relied upon to establish truth in theological dialog? As the Patristic age faced a *christological* watershed, as the Medieval and Reformation churches confronted *soteriological* crises, so the contemporary Church finds itself grappling with the great *epistemological* question in Christian dogma-

1. James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (4th ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton [1901]), *passim*. The lectures comprising this book were originally delivered in 1897. Orr was Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology in the United Free Church College, Glasgow.

tics.² And, let it be noted with care: just as the Church in former times could have permanently crippled its posterity through superficial or misleading answers to the root-questions then at issue, so we today have an equal obligation to deal responsibly with the Scripture issue. If we do not, future generations of theologians may find that no criterion remains by which to solve any subsequent doctrinal problems, and the theologians of the twentieth century will have gained the dubious distinction of having made their discipline (and the Church which looks to it for its doctrinal guidance) totally irrelevant.

The Ostensible Nature of the Issue

To the unsophisticated observer of the twentieth-century theological scene, it might seem that the present epistemological issue in theology is simply whether the Bible is inspired or not. (Later we shall be reminded that the unsophisticated, like children, often have disarming insight.) However, those who are dissatisfied with the traditional formulations of the Scripture doctrine argue in the strongest terms that the real issue is not whether the Bible is inspired or not, but the *character* and *extent* of inspiration. The claim is made that a non-traditional approach to biblical authority in no way denies the existence of inspiration; it merely defines more closely what is meant by inspiration and how far such inspiration extends in Holy Writ.

Thus it is held that Scripture is inspired as a theological norm—as God’s authoritative message in matters spiritual—but that in matters historical and scientific we must recognize the human, fallible element in the biblical witness. “So,” writes Roy A. Harrisville of Luther Seminary, “we admit to the discrepancies and the broken connections in Scripture, we let them stand just as they are—this is part of what it means that faith has its sphere in this world and not in some cloud cuckoo-land.”³ And the editors of *Dialog*, in a recent issue devoted to “Scripture and Tradition,” are willing (albeit grudgingly) to continue the use of the expression “Scripture is

2. In this connection it is instructive to note that a recurring theme in present-day “broad-church” Lutheran theological writing is that Bultmann should be regarded as a 20th-century Luther; as Luther directed men from ethical works-righteousness to the saving Christ, so it is argued, Bultmann points men from intellectualistic works-righteousness (i.e., relying on an inerrant Bible) to Christ. (See, for a typical statement of this view, Robert Scharlemann, “Shadow on the Tomb,” *Dialog*, I [Spring, 1962], 22-29; and cf. Thomas C. Oden, “Bultmann As Lutheran Existentialist,” *Dialog*, III [Summer, 1964,] 207-214.) This comparison has the single merit of emphasizing that, as justification was the key theological issue Luther faced, the Scripture problem is the theological watershed of our time. Otherwise, the Luther-Bultmann parallel is completely wide of the mark. As I have written elsewhere: “Whereas Luther turned from moral guilt to confidence in the *objective* facts of Christ’s death for his sin and resurrection for his justification, Bultmann turns from his intellectual doubts to *subjective* anthropological salvation—a direct about-face from the objective Gospel Luther proclaimed” (J. W. Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past* [“History in Christian Perspective,” Vol. I; Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Bros., 1963], p. 160).
3. Roy A. Harrisville, “A Theology of Rediscovery,” *Dialog*, II (Summer, 1963), 190.

inspired” if by it is meant that “Scripture is God’s absolutely authoritative and authorized fundamental witness to revelation”—as long as no attempt is made to apply such inspiration to “an inerrancy of the ‘parts,’ of the historical and scientific opinions of the biblical authors.”⁴ In a subsequent issue of *Dialog*, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s *Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations* (“A Study Document on Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy,” 1964) is criticized for not labeling as erroneous the *Brief Statement’s* inclusion of the historical and scientific data of the Bible in its definition of inspiration.⁵ A more esoteric expression of the same general view is that the Bible is totally inspired—indeed, infallibly inspired—but that such inspiration does not necessarily produce inerrant results in matters historical or scientific, since God’s word infallibly accomplishes only what He *intends* it to accomplish (i.e., the revelation of *theological* truths, not the imparting of historic or scientific absolutes).

In sum, then, the present controversy over biblical authority ostensibly centers on a split between inspiration and inerrancy. It is claimed that the former can and should be held without the latter. Not only will the Christian no longer have to defend the Bible against scientific and historical criticism, but he will be freed to enter more fully into a purely faith-relationship with Jesus Christ.

In the last analysis, a rejection of the doctrine of inerrancy involves primarily a mental readjustment. Nothing basic is lost. In fact, when all the evidence is examined, those essential elements which the advocates of the doctrine of inerrancy have cherished and sought to protect are more firmly supported than ever before. Scripture is the product of inspiration and it is the indispensable source for coming to know God’s claim upon us and his will for us.⁶

The contention of the present writer, over against these above-expressed views, is that inspiration and inerrancy cannot be separated—that like “love” and “marriage” in *Annie, Get Your Gun*, “you can’t have one without the other.” This traditional position may seem on the surface to neces-

4. “Controversy on Inspiration,” *Dialog*, II (Autumn, 1963), 273. The same editorial asserts that the inspiration controversy “is surely one of the emptiest”; if so, why devote a journal issue to an attempt to demolish the traditional position on inspiration?
5. Of the Commission’s *Report*, the *Dialog* editor writes: “The statement on biblical ‘inerrancy’ does not come off very well. Admittedly this is a sensitive question and an emotionally laden word in the Missouri Synod; and if public opinion is a determinant, one can understand why the only point raised against *A Brief Statement*—the official document of the Synod which describes the Scriptures as the infallible truth even in ‘historical, geographical, and other secular matters’—is the question whether it ‘does justice to the rich variety present in the content and mode of the utterances of the Scriptures.’ But, synodical public opinion aside, the objection to that sentence in *A Brief Statement* surely is not that it is insufficient but that it is wrong; and the Report ought to say so” (“Right Key—Wrong Melody,” *Dialog*, III [Summer, 1964], 165).
6. Dewey M. Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 187.

sitate a traditional defense of it, along the lines of the vast number of admittedly drab works on the subject produced by "fundamentalists" since the days of the Scopes evolution trial. However, nothing could be farther from the truth. Note carefully that I have not said merely (as others have said) that inspiration and inerrancy *should* not be separated (i.e., that they *can* be separated but for various biblical and theological reasons *ought* not to be), but rather that scriptural inspiration and inerrancy *cannot* exist apart from each other (i.e., that to separate them results not just in error, but in plain and simple *meaninglessness*). I am convinced that the dullness and the sameness in standard orthodox defenses of biblical inerrancy point to an impasse in previous thinking on the subject—and constitute a demand for ground-breaking along different lines. By way of certain new techniques derived from the realm of analytical philosophy, I believe that one can see exactly where the central difficulty lies in the present-day attempt to dichotomize inspiration and inerrancy. The result of this investigation will, it is believed, leave the reader with but two meaningful alternatives: a Bible which is both inspired and inerrant (or better, inerrant because it is inspired), or a Bible which is no different qualitatively from other books.⁷ The superficially attractive half-way house of an inspired, non-inerrant Bible will be seen to evaporate in the mist—as a concept having neither philosophical nor theological, but only emotive, significance.

The Peculiarity of the Issue

The contemporary advocates of an inspired but non-inerrant view of the Bible appeal constantly to the pressure of recent scholarship as justifying and indeed demanding their viewpoint. A recent letter from a well-known Professor of New Testament Interpretation took me to task for my biblical position on the ground that "a new era of biblical theology began to dawn some twenty-five years ago; and, I believe, any biblical matters cannot ignore what has happened in this field." Warren A. Quanbeck of Luther Seminary has recently argued in more explicit terms that inerrancy was unable to survive the onslaughts of modern historical and scientific scholarship:

Theologians read the Bible as a collection of revealed propositions unfolding the truth about God, the world, and man. Because the Holy Spirit was the real author of Scripture, every proposition in it was guaranteed infallible and inerrant, not only in spiritual, but in secular matters.

Because of this insistence on the Bible's inerrancy in historical and scientific matters, the blows struck by studies in historical and natural science were crushing in their force. When men approached the Bible as a collection of historical books they saw plainly the human character of its writers and their obvious dependence upon

7. Such a Bible could of course have a higher (quantitative) degree of *literary* inspiration than the average book (cf. Shakespeare as compared with Mickey Spillane), but this is clearly not the type of "inspiration" with which any theologian (except the unreconstructed, pre-World War I liberal) is concerned.

the sources of information available in their day. They recognized also that the scientific outlook of the writers was that of their time, and could not be a substitute for present-day scientific investigation and experiment. When theologians insisted that the religious message of the Bible stood or fell with its scientific and historical information they assumed an impossible apologetic task.⁸

The strangeness in this line of argumentation lies in two principal considerations: (1) The alleged factual errors and internal contradictions in Scripture which are currently cited to demonstrate the impossibly archaic nature of the inerrancy view are themselves impossibly archaic in a high proportion of instances; and (2) the most recent scholarly investigations and intellectual trends bearing on the validity of biblical data have never been more hospitable to inerrancy claims. Let us consider, in this connection, the recent series of anti-inerrancy arguments adduced by Robert Scharlemann:

Unless one makes all sorts of special qualifications for the term "error," this statement [that "the scientist can accept the entire Bible as God's inspired Word for it is inerrant"] can simply not be supported by an examination of the Bible itself. Let me cite two examples which, since they are not from the area of "science," are likely to be less provocative.

A reporter could ask the question, "Was the Greek word *houtos* the first or last word in the superscription on the cross at Jesus' crucifixion?" From Luke (23:38) he would receive the reply, "It was the last." From Matthew (27:37) he would receive the reply, "It was the first." By any normal definition of error, either Matthew or Luke is in error concerning this reportorial matter; perhaps both of them are.

A second example is the classical one. Matthew 27:9 ascribes to Jeremiah a quotation which is actually found in Zechariah.

These are not isolated cases. Numerous examples can be found if one is interested in hunting for them. When was Jesus crucified? According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke it was on the 15th of Nisan; according to John it was on the 14th of Nisan. At least one of them must be in error. Unless one so defines "error" that it does not really mean an error in the normal sense; or unless one holds to the word "inerrancy" with a sort of blind dogmatism, the assertion that the Bible is inerrant, "that is, contains no error," simply cannot be supported by the Biblical evidence itself.⁹

This account of representative "contradictions" derives in no sense from modern scholarship; the alleged discrepancies have been recognized for centuries and have been dealt with in a variety of effective ways. Haley, in his great work on supposed biblical contradictions, stated in 1874 what had been obvious to readers of the superscriptions since the accounts were

8. Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Bible," in *Theology in the Life of the Church*, ed. Robert W. Bertram (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 23. This book is an outgrowth of the Conference of Lutheran Professors of Theology, and thus well reflects the general trends of Lutheran theological thought in America today.

9. Robert Scharlemann, Letter to the Editor, *The Lutheran Scholar*, April, 1963.

originally set down: "It is altogether improbable that three inscriptions, in three different languages, should correspond word for word;"¹⁰ and in reference to the Zechariah quotation in Matthew, he presents two perfectly reasonable ways of dealing with the problem, both of which are derived from earlier scholarship:

According to the Jewish writers, Jeremiah was reckoned the first of the prophets, and was placed first in the book of the prophets; thus, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc. Matthew, in quoting this book, may have quoted it under the name which stood *first* in it; that is, instead of saying, "by the Prophets," he may have said, "by Jeremy the prophet," since *he* headed the list.

Or, the difficulty may have arisen from abridgment of the names. In the Greek, Jeremiah, instead of being written in full, might stand thus, "Triou;" Zechariah thus, "Zriou." By the mere change of Z into I [i.e., by later scribal copyists], the mistake would be made. The Syriac Peshito and several MSS. have simply, "by the prophet."¹¹

Alleged contradictions of this kind were, in fact, more than adequately handled by such orthodox fathers of the Reformation era as Andreas Althamer.¹² As for the 14th Nisan-15th Nisan crucifixion difficulty, which has also had much attention through Christian history, the most recent biblical scholarship has provided what may well be the final answer to the problem: A. Jaubert, a French specialist on the Dead Sea Scrolls, has shown that two calendars were employed in first-century Palestine (the official lunar calendar and a Jubilees-Qumran calendar) and that there is every reason to believe that the double dating in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, far from being a contradiction, simply reflects these two calendar systems.¹³

In point of fact, as Jaubert's investigations illustrate, the present climate of research is more hospitable to an inerrancy approach than was the nineteenth century or the early decades of the twentieth. Archeological work daily confirms biblical history in ways which liberal criticism would have regarded as patently impossible a few decades ago.¹⁴ The Einsteinian-relativistic reinterpretation of "natural law" has dealt a death-blow to Hume's arguments against the miraculous and has removed the rational possibility of

10. John W. Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 154.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 153. Cf. also William F. Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* (5th ed.; St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1955), pp. 51-53, 73-74; and Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 172-75.
12. Andreas Althamer, *Conciliationes Locorum Scripturae, qui specie tenus inter se pugnare videntur, Centuriae duae (Vitebergae: Zacharias Lehman, 1582)*. This excellent work, of which I possess a personal copy, treats 160 "discrepancies" and went through at least sixteen editions (1st ed., 1527).
13. A. Jaubert, *La Date de la Cene. Calendrier biblique et liturgie chretienne* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957). I have treated this matter in some detail in my article, "The Fourth Gospel Yesterday and Today," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXIV (April, 1963), 206, 213.
14. For a semi-popular overview of this trend, see Werner Keller, *The Bible As History*, trans. William Neil (New York: William Morrow, 1956).

using antimiraculous presuppositions for dehistoricizing such biblical accounts as Jonah-and-the-Leviathan.¹⁵ The collapse of form-critical techniques in Homeric and other classical literary criticism, and the presently recognized debility of that approach even in the literary study of English ballads, has raised overwhelming doubts as to the whole presuppositional substructure of the Dibelius-Bultmann approach to the New Testament documents.¹⁶ All in all, the traditional position on inspiration is able to command more respect today than it has during any generation since the advent of rationalistic higher criticism.

However, there is obviously something to the claim that "a new era of biblical theology began to dawn some twenty-five years ago"—an era which, in spite of developments such as those just described, could not tolerate plenary inspirationism. What has constituted the enormous pressure against the inerrancy view? Why have contemporary theologians found it necessary to ridicule the position and to treat it as a hopelessly outmoded one, in spite of such formidable proponents of it as the philosopher Gordon Clark, the theologian Edward John Carnell, and the New Testament lexicographer W. F. Arndt? Why have such considerations as archeological findings and classical scholarship not moved the mainstream theologians in the direction of plenary inspiration? The answer is most definitely *not* (in spite of loud protests continually voiced) the weight of new factual evidence against an inerrant Bible. Such "evidence" simply does not exist; as we have noted and illustrated, the contemporary critic of an inerrant Scripture is still citing alleged discrepancies and supposed scientific objections which have been adequately dealt with over and over again.¹⁷ *The issue is not empirical; it is philosophical.* That is to say, there has been an alteration in the philosophical Zeitgeist which, apart from the question of particular factual evidence, makes scriptural inerrancy offensive to much of contemporary theological thought. What precisely is this new element in the current climate of theological opinion?

A hint of an answer is provided by Rupert E. Davies in his attempt

15. On the invalidity of Hume's argument in light of the replacement of Newtonian by Einsteinian conceptions of scientific law, see Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past*, pp. 288-93; and C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), especially chap. xiii.
16. I have discussed this matter in considerable detail in my lecture series, "Jesus Christ and History," delivered on January 29 and 30, 1963, at the University of British Columbia. These lectures are currently being serialized in *HIS Magazine*, the first article having appeared in the December, 1964, issue. See also in this connection, H. J. Rose, *Handbook of Greek Literature from Homer to the Age of Lucian* (London: Methuen, 1934), pp. 42-43; and A. H. McNeile and C. S. C. Williams, *Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 52-58.
17. If the Genesis 1-3 problem here comes to mind, the reader should consult such classic refutations of supposed "scientific error" in the biblical account as are found in two monographs of the American Scientific Affiliation: *Modern Science and Christian Faith* (2nd ed., 1950) and *Evolution and Christian Thought Today* (2nd ed., 1960).

to refute John Wenham's inerrancy position. Writes Davies:

I cannot believe that truths which go away into mystery can be expressed once for all in propositional form; and the Bible never claims that they can. Its purpose is to draw attention in many different ways to the saving Acts of God.¹⁸

Here a suggestion is made that the Bible deals with a different kind of subject-matter than is capable of being expressed propositionally. Biblical truth is not propositional and static, but dynamic and active; its focus is on acts, not assertions.

For the late A. G. Hebert, one of the prime modern opponents of plenary inspiration, the "propositional" view of biblical truth is a relatively recent and unfortunate result of applying scientific categories in the religious sphere.

The doctrine of Inerrancy was not very harmful in an age which thought of "truth" primarily as belonging to the revelation of God and of the eternal meaning of man's life. The Bible was regarded as teaching chiefly spiritual truths about God and man. It was otherwise when the "scientific age" had begun; truth was now commonly understood as the matter-of-fact truth of observable phenomena, and so great a man as Locke could make the outrageous statement that the existence of God was as certain as the propositions of geometry. The Inerrancy of the Bible was understood as guaranteeing the literal exactness of its every statement. This is the Fundamentalism which has been a potent cause of modern unbelief. This materialistic Inerrancy needs to be carefully distinguished from the theological and religious Inerrancy in which earlier ages believed.¹⁹

Even if one leaves aside the minor fallacies in this statement (e.g., the confusion of geometry with observable phenomena),²⁰ one cannot accept the historical explanation of the inerrancy position here presented. Throughout the history of the Church there has been continual concern to maintain and defend the total factual reliability of the Bible. To take only one prominent example, St. Augustine, by all odds the most important theologian of the Patristic age, argued with vehemence for an inerrant Bible. As the definitive study of his biblical position asserts:

18. *Is the Bible Infallible? A Debate between John Wenham, Vice-Principal of Tyndale Hall, Bristol, and Rupert E. Davies, Tutor at Didsbury College, Bristol* (London: Epworth Press, 1959), p. 27.

19. A. G. Hebert, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), pp. 306-307. Hebert's misrepresentations of biblical orthodoxy as "fundamentalism" have been decisively answered in J. I. Packer's "*Fundamentalism and the Word of God*" (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1958]).

20. Locke's statement is grounded in rationalism, not in empiricism, and as such offers no proper analogy to the biblical inerrancy position. Russell and Whitehead, in the *Principia Mathematica*, and Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, have shown that geometrical propositions are tautologous, i.e., that they have no necessary connection with "observable phenomena." Neither the biblical writers nor the plenary inspirationists have argued that biblical truth is mathematical/tautologous; rather, they have asserted that it is observationally reliable (as in the case of the historic revelation of Christ himself).

There is no point of doctrine more plainly asserted or more vigorously defended by St. Augustine, than the absence of falsehood and error from the divine Scriptures Indeed inerrancy is so intimately bound up with inspiration that an inspired book cannot assert what is not true It is impossible for Scripture to contain contradictory statements. One book of Scripture cannot contradict another, nor can the same author contradict himself.²¹

From earliest times the Church was concerned with the propositional accuracy of the biblical text, for such a concern followed directly from the Church's commitment to the inspiration of Scripture. Actually, the so-called "dynamic," non-propositional view of truth has its origin not in pre-scientific times, but in very recent thinking.

The source of this essentially new approach to the nature of biblical truth, over against traditional plenary inspiration, will become more evident if we look closely at a typical recent expression of it. Let us hear Warren Quanbeck's "re-examination of theological presuppositions":

Since human language is always relative, being conditioned by its historical development and usage, there can be no absolute expression of the truth even in the language of theology. Truth is made known in Jesus Christ, who is God's Word, his address to mankind. Christ is the only absolute. Theological statements, which have an instrumental function, find their meaning in relation to him; they do not contain the truth nor give adequate expression to it. At best they point to Jesus Christ as the one in whom one may know the truth. Truth is not a matter of intellection only, but of obedient discipleship. Only by "abiding in Christ" can one know the truth.²²

To any historian of philosophy, the antecedents of this view are patently obvious—and they lie not in the realm of biblical/theological presuppositions, as Quanbeck and other adherents of this position believe, but in the realm of philosophical apriori. The idea that "there can be no absolute expression of the truth" in propositional form has clear alignment with the venerable philosophical position known as *metaphysical dualism*, which in one form or other has always claimed that the Absolute cannot be fully manifested in the phenomenal world. From Plato's separation of the world of ideas from the world of things and the soul from the body, to the medieval "realists" with their split between universals and particulars, through the Reformation Calvinists' conviction that *finitum non est capax infiniti*, to the modern idealism of Kant and Hegel, we see this same conviction in various semantic garbs. It is this absolute separation of eternity

21. Charles Joseph Costello, *St. Augustine's Doctrine on the Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1930), pp. 30-31. Costello's work constituted his thesis for the doctorate in theology, and is fully grounded in the primary works of Augustine. It is noteworthy that Augustine, in the 5th century, effectively treated the Zacharias-Jeremiah "contradiction" which R. Scharlemann presented in 1963 as a decisive counter to biblical inerrancy! (see Costello, pp. 34-37, and cf. our text above at nn. 9-11).

22. Quanbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

and time that lies at the basis of the contemporary theological split between *Geschichte* and *Historie*, as I have indicated elsewhere;²³ and it is most definitely the same aprioristic dualism that motivates much of contemporary theology in its refusal to allow the Eternal to express Himself in absolutely veracious biblical propositions.

But metaphysical dualism is only the minor element in the anti-inerrancy position taken by Quanbeck and others. "Truth," he writes, "is not a matter of intellection only, but of obedient discipleship" and "Christ is the only absolute." Here we see the redefinition of truth in *personal*, as opposed to propositional, terms. Truth is arrived at not through words or through investigation, but "only by 'abiding in Christ.'" Martin Scharlemann, in an unpublished paper presenting this same general approach to biblical inspiration, concludes: "In a very real sense, therefore, it is impossible to speak of revelation as an objective reality, independent of personal reaction on the part of him to whom a disclosure is made . . . Knowledge is not a matter of acquiring information but of being confronted with God Himself as He is revealed in His Son."²⁴ Such terminology and conceptual content point unmistakably to the *existentialist movement* in modern philosophy, which, stemming from Kierkegaard, has affirmed that "truth is subjectivity" and that "existence," as manifested in personal relationships, precedes and surpasses in quality "essence," i.e., formal, propositional assertions or descriptions concerning reality.²⁵ In the hands of its most influential contemporary Protestant advocate, Rudolf Bultmann, existentialist theology claims to "cut under the subject-object distinction"²⁶ so as to arrive at a "dynamic" view of biblical truth untrammelled by questions of propositional facticity or objective validity.

No philosophy has so captured the minds and hearts of the contemporary world as existentialism; for how can one listen to "propositional" assertions of "objective" ideals when the West has barely survived two terrible self-created holocausts and seems bent on nuclear self-destruction? Only in personal existential relationships does any hope seem to lie. So speaks the average member of the Western intelligentsia; and, as has happened not a few times in the history of theology, the professional theo-

23. J. W. Montgomery, "Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology of History," published both in *The Cresset*, XXVII (November, 1963), 8-14, and in the *Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin*, VI (May, 1963), 39-49. In this article I deal primarily with the baleful implications of the *Geschichte-Historie* dualism in christology and in theology of history.
24. Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Bible As Record, Witness and Medium" (mimeographed essay), p. 11. The same approach is found in William Hordern's *Case for a New Reformation Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), where the amazingly circular statement appears: "Objectivity is possible only when there is a faith-commitment made to objectivity" (p. 44; cf. pp. 62-69).
25. Cf. Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, trans. Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949).
26. Paul Tillich, "Existential Philosophy: Its Historical Meaning," in his *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 92.

logian does him one better: in religious life as well, truth can only be found in personality (Christ), and one should discard as irrelevant and harmful excess baggage the traditional view that Scripture offers propositionally objective truth to man. Thus the cultural pressure to existentialism, combined with a powerful tradition of metaphysical dualism,²⁷ impels much of modern theology to reject inerrancy. Modernity is indeed the source of the new approach to Scripture; but it is not a modernity characterized by new discoveries of empirical fact which have forced modifications of traditional thinking. Rather, it is a modernity of philosophical *Zeitgeist*.

Bultmann has argued, in defense of his use of existentialistic categories in interpreting biblical data, that existentialism is really not an alien philosophy, but a heuristic methodology that does not commit one to extrabiblical positions. It is almost universally agreed, however, both by professional philosophers and by lay interpreters of existentialism, that this viewpoint does indeed constitute a philosophy, and that its presuppositions (e.g., "existence precedes essence," "the objective-subjective distinction must be transcended," "truth is found only in personal encounter," etc.) can and must be subjected to philosophical analysis and criticism. Such a process of critical analysis has been going on now for some years, and the results have been devastatingly negative for the existentialist position. Indeed, faced with the blistering criticism directed against existentialism by analytical philosophy in particular, contemporary thought is now beginning to move away from Albert Camus' dread city of Oran into more congenial philosophical habitats.

It is now our task to apply the techniques of analytic philosophy to the anti-inerrancy position on Scripture that derives from an existentialistic-dualistic *Weltanschauung*. In doing so, we shall discover, possibly to our amazement, that contemporary theological denials of inerrancy necessarily tie themselves to philosophical stars which are rapidly burning out.

The Meaninglessness of Existentialistic and Dualistic Affirmations

We shall commence our critical task with an examination of analytical technique in general and its application to existentialism and dualism in particular. The relevance of the following discussion to the inerrancy issue will become evident in the subsequent sections of the paper.

While theologians of the last two decades have been especially concerned with the epistemological problem of biblical authority, contemporary philosophy (particularly in England) has likewise focused attention on central epistemological issues. Faced with the welter of conflicting philosophical and theological world-views propounded through the centuries, twen-

27. Ironically, to be sure, Existentialism has sought to destroy all metaphysical speculation, including Dualism. But since Existentialism itself has a metaphysic, it cannot successfully destroy metaphysics; and it often (as here) finds itself a strange bedfellow to other (uncongenial) metaphysical tendencies.

tieth-century analytical philosophers have attempted to cut back to the basic question: How can truth-claims be verified? In a brief paper such as this, it would be impossible to discuss the history of this analytical movement, arising from the pioneering *Principia Mathematica* of Russell and Whitehead, extending through the "logical atomism" of Wittgenstein's amazing *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and culminating in the (misnamed) "logical positivism" of Von Mises and the "linguistic analysis" or "ordinary language philosophy" of the later Wittgenstein and Ryle.²⁸ But, in very general terms, the conclusions of these analytical thinkers can be summarized in regard to the problem of verifiability.

The criterion which we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact is the criterion of verifiability. We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false.²⁹

This "Verifiability Criterion of Meaning" arose from the discovery (set forth by Whitehead and Russell in the *Principia*) that assertions in mathematics and deductive logic are tautologous, i.e., they state nothing factual about the world, but follow from the apriori assumptions of the deductive system. Such "analytic" sentences can be verified without recourse to the world of fact, since they say nothing about the world; but other assertions (non-tautologous, or "synthetic" affirmations) must be tested by the data of the real world if we are to discover their truth or falsity.

Thus any proposition, upon inspection, will fall into one of the following categories: (1) Analytic sentences, which are true or false solely by virtue of their logical form, *ex hypothesi*. Such assertions, though essential to thought and potentially meaningful, are often termed "trivial," since they never provide information about the world of experience. Example: "All husbands are married," whose truth follows entirely from the definition of the word "husband." (2) Synthetic sentences, which are true or false according to the application of the Verifiability Criterion set forth above. Such sentences are sometimes termed "informative," because they do potentially give information about the world. Example: "Jesus died at Jerusalem," which can be tested through an examination of historical evidence (3) Meaningless sentences, embracing all affirmations which are neither analytic nor synthetic. Such sentences are incapable of testing, for they neither express tautological judgments (they are not statements whose

28. For a short introduction to these movements, see Victor Kraft, *The Vienna Circle*, trans. Arthur Pap (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953).

29. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, [1946]), p. 35. Since the publication of the first edition of his work (1936), Ayer has somewhat refined his statement of the "Verifiability Principle" (see his Introduction to the new edition, pp. 5-16); however, in substance, his original statement remains unaltered and its classic simplicity warrants its continued use.

truth depends on their logical form) nor do they affirm anything about the real world which is testable by investigating the world. Example: the philosopher F. H. Bradley's claim that "the Absolute enters into, but is itself incapable of, evolution and progress." Such a statement is clearly not tautologous, for it is not deduced from the aprioris of logic, nor is it capable of any test which could conceivably determine its truth or falsity. Thus it is meaningless, or nonsensical (in the technical meaning of "non-sense," i.e., without verifiable sense).

The importance of the analytic approach to questions of truth and falsity cannot be overestimated. As a result of its application, vast areas of philosophical speculation and argument have been shown to lie in a never-never land of meaninglessness—a land where discussion could continue forever without any possibility of arriving at truth or falsity. The analysts have successfully cleared the philosophical air of numerous positions about which discussion of truth-value is a waste of time, because their verifiability is impossible in any case.³⁰

It should be emphasized, however, that "category three" statements are meaningless only in the special sense of non-verifiability. When Ayer speaks of the analytical "elimination of metaphysics," one should not conclude that non-testable philosophical or religious assertions do not deserve study. They do: but only from a historical or psychological viewpoint. Such statements as "The Absolute enters into evolution and progress," while not telling us anything about logic or about the constitution of the world, does tell us something (a great deal, in fact) about its formulator, Bradley, and about the history of philosophical ideology. Wittgenstein illustrates the matter well by one of his typically striking parables:

Imagine that there is a town in which the policemen are required to obtain information from each inhabitant, e.g. his age, where he came from, and what work he does. A record is kept of this information and some use is made of it. Occasionally when a policeman questions an inhabitant he discovers that the latter does not do *any* work. The policeman enters this fact on the record, because *this too* is a useful piece of information about the man!³¹

30. Attempts have been made, of course, to destroy the Verifiability Criterion. Few traditional, speculative philosophers have been happy with Feigl's remark that "Philosophy is the disease of which analysis should be the cure!" But the Verifiability Principle still stands as the best available road map through the forest of truth-claims. One of the most persistent attempts to refute the Criterion has been the effort to show that it is itself a meaningless assertion, being evidently neither an analytic nor a synthetic statement. However, this objection has been effectively met both by Ayer, who argues that the Criterion is actually a definition (*op. cit.*, pp. 15-16) and by Hempel, who shows that it, "like the result of any other explication, represents a linguistic proposal which itself is neither true nor false" ("The Empiricist Criterion of Meaning," published originally in the *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, IV [1950], and reprinted, with newly appended remarks by the author, in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer [Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959], pp. 108-129).

31. The parable was told by Wittgenstein to Stout and is related by Norman Malcolm in his *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 66.

Malcolm, who relates the parable, comments: "The application of the parable is, I think, that if you do not understand a statement, then to discover that it has no verification is an important piece of information about it and makes you understand it better. That is to say, you understand it *better*; you do not find out that there is nothing to understand." Thus analytical philosophy does not, *pace* its detractors, attempt to silence all discussion of non-verifiable matters; rather, it attempts to limit discussions only to the "understandable" aspects of these matters: namely, to the emotive considerations represented by metaphysical assertions. It is in light of this qualification that we must interpret Wittgenstein's two great assertions, which have so powerfully influenced all subsequent analytical work:

Alles was überhaupt gedacht werden kann, kann klar gedacht werden.
Alles was sich aussprechen laesst, laesst sich klar aussprechen.

Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.³²

Now in practice how does the Verifiability Principle achieve this desirable limitation of speech to what can be said meaningfully and clearly? Let us consider several examples, which will progressively move us into the philosophical-theological application of analytical technique.

(A) "There are angels living on the planet Uranus."³³ This might seem, on the surface, to be a meaningless proposition, for no present test of verifiability exists by which the truth or falsity of the claim can be determined. However (on the assumption that angels are visible creatures), a test can be conceived; it would involve the use of space craft to make the journey to Uranus, whereby, through direct observation, the proposition could be tested as to its truth-value. Thus the proposition, being hypothetically testable, is meaningful. However, let it be noted well, if "angels" are defined in such a way that there is no conceivable way of determining their presence even if one succeeds in arriving at their habitat, then proposition (A) would indeed be meaningless (except as an emotive assertion, such as "I like angels"). Consider Antony Flew's parable, developed from a tale told by John Wisdom:

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot." The other disagrees, "There is no gardener." So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* could be both smelt and touched though he could not

32. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, propositions 4.116 and 7.0 (cf. Wittgenstein's "Vorwort"). For a discussion of these propositions in light of the *Tractatus* as a whole, see Max Black's long awaited and just published commentary, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), *passim*.

33. This is a variation on Moritz Schlick's (now outdated!) propositional example: "There are mountains on the other side of the moon."

be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"³⁴

This parable shows with utmost clarity how meaningless are religious assertions which are removed entirely from the realm of testability. Is not one of the most fundamental reasons for the strength of the Christian proclamation that "God was *in Christ*"—since apart from God's revelation of Himself in our midst, we could never know with certainty whether the garden of this world had a loving Gardener at all? But more of this later.

(B) "The world was created in 4004 B.C., but with built-in evidence of radiocarbon dating, fossil evidence, etc., indicating millions of years of prior developmental growth." This assertion, given current popularity by Whitcomb and Morris in their controversial, anti-evolutionary book, *The Genesis Flood*, is a nonsensical proposition.³⁵ Why? Because it excludes all possible testability. *Any* alleged scientific fact marshalled against 4004 B.C. creation is, by the nature of the original proposition, discounted as having been built into the universe at its creation. Moreover, the statement is reconcilable with an infinite number of parallel assertions, such as "The world was created ten years ago (or ten minutes ago) with a built-in history." Such assertions as (B) are really no different from meaningless cosmological affirmations of the type: "The universe is continually increasing in size at a uniform rate" (obviously, in such a case, our instruments of measurement would *also* be increasing in size uniformly, and would not therefore be capable of yielding any evidence of the increase!). The Christian can take comfort that *his* God is not like Descartes' "Evil Genius"—that He does not introduce deceptive elements into His universe, thereby driving His creatures to meaningless affirmations about the world.

(C) "The resurrection of Christ, though an historical event in the full sense of the term (*Geschichte* and *Historie*), nonetheless cannot be verified by the methods of objective historical scholarship; it is evident only to the eyes of faith." This position, developed by Karl Barth and emphasized in his 1952 debate with Bultmann, is revealed as meaningless when placed under the searchlight of the Verifiability Principle. For how could one

34. Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flew and Macintyre (London, SCM Press, 1955), p. 96.

35. This was shown in detail by Thomas H. Leith of York University, Toronto, Canada, in a paper titled, "Logical Problems with Discussion of the Age and Origin of the Universe," delivered at the 19th Annual Convention of the American Scientific Affiliation, August 27, 1964.

possibly know if Christ's resurrection (or any other event) was in fact historical if it could not be tested by the ordinary methods of historical investigation? As a parallel, consider the following argument: "In my backyard is an orange hippopotamus. He is really there, but his presence cannot be tested by any techniques employed to show the existence of the other things in my backyard." Such a claim is nonsense. Either the hippopotamus is there, or he isn't; and if no empirical test will show that he is, then one must conclude that assertions concerning his existence are meaningless. Likewise, if Christ's resurrection really occurred in history (*Historie*), then historical investigation will indicate it; if not, then one must give up any meaningful claim to the resurrection as a *historisch* event. Either the Orthodox theologians are right, or Bultmann is right; no meaningful middle-ground exists.

But, it is argued, can we not speak of Christ's resurrection, virgin birth, and other such religious events on the level of *Geschichte*, "metahistory," or "suprahistory"? It is exactly here that we encounter the *dualistic* tradition which, as already noted, constitutes one of the two essential elements in the contemporary anti-inerrancy view of the Bible. What about this eminent tradition of metaphysical Dualism that serves as the most extensive "footnote to Plato" in Western thought? Should we not think of the Absolute apart from earthly flux—God as Otto's "Wholly Other" or as Tillich's "Ultimate Concern," never fully identified with institutions, persons, books, or events in this world? Is it not of tremendous value to hold, with Plato and the medieval realists, that the phenomenal world can never dim the beauties of the eternal world of Ideas, and to affirm with Tillich that the "truth of faith" cannot be "judged by any other kind of truth, whether scientific, historical or philosophical"³⁶? The answer is simply that, whatever the supposed advantages of metaphysical or theological dualism, and however praiseworthy the motives leading to such dualisms, their result is analytical meaninglessness. Why? because, by definition, insofar as any statement about the "Absolute" or "God" does not touch the world of human experience, to that extent it cannot be verified in any sensible way. Thus have the analytical philosophers devastatingly criticized the metaphysical affirmations of the modern philosophical tradition represented by Hegel and Kant; and thus do the theological dualists on the contemporary scene fall under the critical axe of the same verifiability test. If, for example, the claim is made that Christ rose from the dead, but in the suprahistorical realm of *Geschichte*, not in the empirical realm of *Historie*, one has every right to ask: "What precisely do you *mean* by the realm of *Geschichte* and how do you know anything—much less a resurrection—goes on there?" A supra-experiential realm is, *ex hypothesi*, untestable, and therefore, like my orange hippopotamus mentioned earlier, irrelevant as a theological concept. It may (and does) tell us much about the theologians who rely upon it

36. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 95.

(particularly, that they fervently wish to avoid criticism from secular historians!), but it tells us nothing whatever about the truth-value of alleged events of a *geschichtliche* character. We know (or can know) whether a resurrection occurred in this world, and we know (or can know) whether God was incarnated in this world; but about a realm beyond all human testability, we can know nothing. To theological dualisms, Wittgenstein's final proposition has precise applicability: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

Existential affirmations, however, would seem to fall within the sphere of verifiable meaning, since they (unlike dualistic assertions) treat of "existence" rather than of "essence." What of this area of modern philosophy, which forms an even more important element than Dualism in the make-up of anti-inerrancy views of Scripture?

One must understand, first of all, that the assertions of Existentialism are not simply statements about verifiable, existent things or events; rather, they are specialized philosophical claims about the nature of man's existence in the universe, i.e., they are genuinely metaphysical affirmations. Consider such basic tenets of the existentialist world-view as the following: "Truth cannot be found in abstract propositions." "Truth is discovered in responsible decision." "Personal encounter is the only sure avenue to truth." "The subject-object distinction must be transcended."³⁷ Such beliefs as these are very definitely claims as to the nature of the world and of man's relationship to it, and as such deserve analytical inspection in the same way as other truth-claims.

And what is the result when existentialist affirmations are subjected to verifiability tests? An excellent illustration has been provided in Rudolf Carnap's examination of the following typical argument in *Was Ist Metaphysik Heidegger's?*:

What is to be investigated is being only and—*nothing* else; being alone and further—*nothing*; solely being, and beyond being—*nothing*. *What about this Nothing?* . . . *Does the Nothing exist only because the Not, i.e., the Negation, exists?* Or is it the other way around? *Does Negation and the Not exist only because the Nothing exists?* . . . We assert: *the Nothing is prior to the Not and the Negation* . . . Where do we seek the Nothing? How do we find the Nothing? . . . We know the Nothing . . . *Anxiety reveals the Nothing* . . . That for which and because of which we were anxious, was "really"—nothing. Indeed: the Nothing itself—as such—was present . . . *What about this Nothing?—The Nothing itself nothings.*

This argument, asserting the primacy of existence ("the Nothing") over essence ("the Negation and the Not") and the necessity of embracing it through personal recognition of estrangement ("anxiety"), is shown by Carnap to consist of analytically meaningless "pseudo-statements," whose

37. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* tr. Frechtman and Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).

“non-sensicality is not obvious at first glance, because one is easily deceived by the analogy with . . . meaningful sentences.” To assert that “the rain rains” is meaningful; but to argue that “the Nothing nothings” is something else again! “Even if it were admissible to introduce ‘nothing’ as a name or description of an entity, still the existence of this entity would be denied in its very definition, whereas [Heidegger] goes on to affirm its existence.”³⁸ In point of fact, all the basic metaphysical affirmations of Existentialism, in purporting to unfold the very heart of existent reality, overreach themselves and arrive not at reality but at nonsense.

The fundamental cause of meaninglessness in Existentialism lies in its convictions that the subject-object distinction must be overcome and that “I-thou” personal encounter must be substituted for propositional truth. One can certainly appreciate the historical factors that gave rise to these affirmations: the breakdown of idealistic philosophy, the coldness of “dead-orthodox” theology (cf. Kierkegaard’s *Attack upon “Christendom”*), the de-personalization of Western man in modern technological, scientific society, and the anxieties produced by decades of hot and cold wars. But appreciation of existentialist motives must not obscure the fundamental fact that meaningful thought absolutely requires the subject-object distinction, and that questions of truth cannot even be formulated apart from propositions. “Bohr has emphasized the fact that the observer and his instruments must be presupposed in any investigation, so that the instruments are not part of the phenomenon described but are used.”³⁹ The absolute necessity of the subject-object distinction is the source of the riotous humor in Robert Benchley’s story of his experience in a college biology course: he spent the term carefully drawing the image of his own eyelash as it fell across the microscopic field! If in any investigation—whether in science or in theology—the observer loses the distinction between himself and his subject matter, the result is complete chaos: not a “transcending of the subject-object barrier,” but a necessary fall into pure subjectivity. The more perceptive existentialists have indeed seen this; Sartre, for example, asserts that what all existentialists, atheistic and Christian, “have in common is that they think that existence precedes essence, or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point.”⁴⁰ Such subjectivity, however, is utterly non-testable; and utterances concerning “estrangement,” “existential anxiety,”

38. Rudolf Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language,” in *Logical Positivism*, ed. Ayer, pp. 69-73. Carnap’s paper originally appeared in German in Vol. II of *Erkenntnis* (1932).

39. Victor F. Lenzen, *Procedures of Empirical Science* (“International Encyclopedia of Unified Science,” 1/5; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 28. That the Heisenberg Indeterminacy Principle does not in any sense break the subject-object distinction has been shown by Lenzen and by many others.

40. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

and “nothingness” stand outside of meaningful discourse.⁴¹

Like logic itself, both the subject-object distinction and propositional thinking must be presupposed in all sensible investigations. Why? Because to argue against their necessity is to employ them already! When one asserts: “Personal encounters, not propositions, yield truth,” one is in fact stating a proposition (though a meaningless one), and is implying that there is sufficient distinction between “truth” and those who claim to possess it to warrant a clarifying statement on the subject! Existentialism’s passionate attempt to dissolve subject-object boundaries and to escape from propositions about reality to reality itself is thus bound to fail and necessarily to arrive at nonsense. Of objective propositional truth, as of logic itself, one must say what Emerson said of Brahma: “When me they fly, I am the wings.”⁴²

The Analytical Meaninglessness of a “Non-Inerrant Inspired Scripture

Our study to this point has yielded the following conclusions: (1) Biblical inerrancy is under severe attack in our time not because of the discovery of empirical data militating against the view, but because of the climate of philosophical opinion presently conditioning Protestant theology. (2) The current theological Zeitgeist, as pertains to the issue of biblical authority, is governed by existentialistic and dualistic aprioris. (3) The fundamental axioms of both Dualism and Existentialism are analytically meaningless. From these conclusions, it is but a short step to the central claim of this paper: that the current attempt to maintain a divinely inspired but non-inerrant Bible is as analytically nonsensical as are the dualistic and existential assumptions upon which the attempt rests. We shall proceed to make this point through an examination of four major anti-inerrancy inspiration-claims; these four positions, it is believed, cover the gamut of non-verbal-inspiration views in contemporary Protestantism.

(I.) “Holy Scripture is inspired, not in conveying inerrant propositions about God and the world, but in acting as a vehicle for true Christian existential experience.” This is, in substance, the position taken by Bultmann and by those who follow in his train. For Bultmann, “self-understanding of one’s existence” arises from the kerygma of the primitive church;

41. To avoid misunderstanding, I must anticipate myself by pointing out here that my argument does not negate a “Christian existentialism” (Christian subjectivity) founded upon testable, objective considerations (specifically, upon an inerrant Scripture); indeed, I myself have made much use of genuine Christian-existential categories (e.g., in my Strasbourg thesis for the degree of Docteur de l’Université, mention Théologie Protestants, 1964). But it is this very idea of an objective basis for existential subjectivity that the contemporary philosophical and theological existentialists deny; and this is the reason for my above-stated counter to subjectivistic Existentialism. Apart from an objective foundation, all existentialism is analytically meaningless.

42. Cf. my *Chytraeus on Sacrifice* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1962), p. 27.

for the "post-Bultmannians," who, like Günther Bornkamm, Kaesemann, Fuchs, and Ebeling, are engaged in a "new quest of the historical Jesus," this "self-understanding" arises from a correlation between our personal existential situation and Jesus' own self-understanding of *His* existence.⁴³ But both Bultmann and his former disciples accept in general the same critical presuppositions and existential aprioris; for both, inerrancy is a hopeless, pre-existential identification of truth with propositions instead of with vital existential experience.

This approach to biblical inspiration is seen, on analysis, to be completely unverifiable and therefore nonsensical. For what is meant by "Christian existential experience"? and what gives one any reason to suppose that the Bible will serve instrumentally in promoting it? To determine what "Christian existential experience" is, one would have to define it in propositional terms (but "propositions" are ruled out in the original statement of the view!), and one would have to set up criteria for distinguishing truly salvatory experience from non-salvatory experience, and the Bible from other, non-existentially pregnant religious works (but all objective tests are ruled out by the existential refusal to employ the objective-subjective distinction!). Thus one is left in a morass of untestable subjectivity.

C. B. Martin, in discussing this problem of "a religious way of knowing" asks how one can know whether someone has a direct experience of God—or how the believer himself can know if he has this direct experience. Martin correctly points out that the claim to immediate existential experience on a believer's part is not analogous to experience claims in general, and is *per se* analytically meaningless.

In the case of knowing a blue sky in Naples, one can look at street signs and maps in order to be sure that this is the really blue sky in question. It is only when one comes to such a case as knowing God that the society of tests and check-up procedures that surround other instances of knowing, completely vanishes. What is put in the place of these tests and checking procedures is an immediacy of knowledge that is supposed to carry its own guarantee.⁴⁴

In actuality, however, "tests and checking procedures" for truly Christian existential experience have not "vanished"; they have been obliterated by those who refuse to take the objective fact of an inerrant Bible seriously. It is only a Bible capable of standing the acid test of objective verifiability that will provide the "map" of God's blue sky of religious truth. And apart from such a map, the domain of immediate religious experience will forever remain a *terra incognita* of confusion and meaninglessness.

(II.) "Holy Scripture is inspired, not in its scientific or historical

43. Cf. the essays in Helmut Ristow & Karl Matthiae, eds., *Der Historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1961).

44. C. B. Martin, "A Religious Way of Knowing," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flew and Macintyre, p. 83. See also my *Shape of the Past*, pp. 257-311.

statements, but in the theological truths it conveys." Relatively few Lutherans on the American scene are prepared to move fully into the Bultmannian position on Scripture represented by anti-inerrancy argument (I). The more usual approach among American Lutheran theologians who would bring the Church out of "captivity" to verbal inspirationism is to argue for a distinction between the religious and the non-religious content of the Bible: the former is indeed inspired and fully reliable, while the latter is subject to the human fallibility which besets all of man's undertakings.⁴⁵

The problem here is two-fold: first, how do we distinguish the religious from the historical-scientific (including the sociological and the moral!) element in the Scriptures? and, second, how do we show that the "theological" affirmations of the Bible are indeed inspired of God? The first of these questions we postpone temporarily—for consideration in the next section of this paper, where it will be shown that a dichotomy between "sacred" and "secular" is antithetical to the very heart of the Biblical faith. The second question alone, however, sufficiently reveals the meaninglessness of anti-inerrancy argument (II.). For here, obviously, one again encounters Dualism: a split between eternity (the theological element in the Bible: the *Heilsgeschichte*) and time (the scientific-historical content of Scripture: *Historie*).

An effort is being made to free the Bible from secular criticism; in effect, the proponents of this view argue, "It doesn't matter what historical and scientific errors, or what internal contradictions, are discovered in the Bible; its theological truth stands firm!" But note well: every theological "truth," to the extent of its isolation from empirical reality, becomes unverifiable and therefore meaningless. As one approaches the realm of idealistic "Absolutes," refutability does indeed become less and less possible, but this chimerical advantage is achieved by the corresponding loss of meaningless relevance. The (theoretical) possibility of proving a claim *wrong* is the *sine qua non* for the claim's meaningfulness, since those assertions which are so separated from the world that they are devoid of testability are a waste of time to discuss, except in psychological or sociological terms. The theologian who pleads for a "theologically inspired," historically errant Bible pleads a meaningless case, for insofar as theological truths are removed from the world of testable experience, nothing at all can be said of their truth-value. Like the "eternal truths" of Tantrism, such "theological truths" of Christianity might as well remain unexpressed. In avoiding the necessary offense of defending the Bible's historical and scientific content, the dualistic theologians have succeeded in rendering the Bible utterly irrelevant.

It should, moreover, be a sobering thought to those who have accepted the above-described dualistic approach in principle to be reminded that,

45. This is the general position espoused in *Dialog*; see above, our text at notes 4 and 5.

carried to its logical conclusion, such dualism will eventually necessitate the denial of infallibility *even to the "theological" content of Scripture*. Why? because the "theological," just like the "historical-scientific," element of the Bible was conveyed to human agents (the biblical writers) and therefore (on the dualistic apriori) must also have been touched by human fallibility. Martin Scharlemann overlooks this point completely when he argues:

The very limitations of the individual authors in terms of language, geographical, historical, and literary knowledge testify to the specifics of divine revelation. This is part of the "scandal" of the Bible. An insistence on its "inerrancy" is often an attempt to remove this obstacle. The use of the term almost invariably results in a docetic view of the Bible and so tends to overlook the fact that our Sacred Scriptures are both divine and human documents.⁴⁶

Actually, if one is to avoid all "docetism," the inevitable conclusion is that even in its theological affirmations the Bible is touched by the fallibility of its human writers (or perhaps *especially* in its theological affirmations, since these evidently constitute the major part of the Bible??).

Paul Tillich does not blink at the consequences of such a consistent (though, as we have seen, meaningless!) dualism; for him, *everything* in the Bible must in theory at least stand under judgment. Nothing on earth can be identified fully with Being Itself which constitutes the only true "ultimate concern." This is Tillich's "Protestant principle": "The only infallible truth of faith, the one in which the ultimate itself is unconditionally manifest, is that any truth of faith stands under a yes-or-no judgment."⁴⁷ Thus the Bible loses even theologically normative force; and what then constitutes the basis of "yes-or-no judgment" in religion? Clearly, as Professor Gordon Clark has argued in reference to Barth's theology, one must then accept as a norm or canon, "something or other external to the Bible"; and "since this external norm cannot be a wordless revelation, for a wordless revelation cannot give us the necessary information, it must be secular science, history, or anthropology."⁴⁸ The result is a reduction of special revelation to a vague and secularistic "natural revelation," which lands us again in the hopeless maze of unreconstructed Modernism. From the heights of the Unconditioned we are plummeted to the depths of a world lacking any inspired word from God. Such is the inevitable effect of analytically nonsensical revelational dualisms.

(III.) "Holy Scripture is inspired, not as a conveyer of infallible information, but insofar as it testifies to the person of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Tillich himself employs this approach when he identifies (but symbolically only, to be sure) the "yes-or-no judgment" on all things human

46. M. Scharlemann, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

47. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 98.

48. Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963), p. 224.

with "the Cross of the Christ." But it is especially the contemporary Lutheran anti-inerrantists who present argument (III.), since they—in spite of Reu's impeccable historical case⁴⁹—hold that Luther himself took this position. Writes M. Scharlemann: Biblical "knowledge is not a matter of acquiring information but of being confronted with God Himself as He is revealed in His Son."⁵⁰ Robert Schultz expresses his "hope that Lutheran theologians generally will move back through the accumulated traditions of verbal inspiration and reappropriate Luther's dynamic insight that the Scripture is that which teaches Christ."⁵¹

Argument (III.) incorporates the existential element from argument (I) and the dualistic element from argument (II.)—thus acquiring a double dose of analytical meaninglessness. The argument must be regarded as dualistic if it is not to avoid condemnation for simple circularity: the "Jesus Christ" spoken of must be a *geschichtlicher* "Christ of faith," not a *historischer* "Jesus of history," for the latter would be describable propositionally and subject to inerrancy tests—which obviously would defeat the whole point of the argument. The idea here, as in argument (II.), is to raise biblical inspiration beyond the level of historical, scientific judgment by focusing it upon a Christ-figure who stands above the realm of verifiability. But, as emphasized in analyzing argument (II.), such supraempirical claims by definition pass into irrelevant nonsense; and, as we shall see in the next section of this paper, a "Christ" of this kind is theologically nonsensical as well, for the biblical Christ entered fully into the empirical sphere, subjecting Himself to the full "offense" of verifiability.

The existential side of argument (III.) is pointed up in its anti-"informational" character; scriptural inspiration allegedly leads to confrontation with Christ, not to theological data. But, as we saw in our discussion of argument (I.), meaningful "confrontation" is possible only on the basis of verifiable data—for otherwise, there is no way of knowing whether one has engaged in a real confrontation at all! Particularly in the realm of religion it is desperately important to know the difference (to speak irreverently but precisely) between Christ-in-the-heart and heartburn. Apart from an objectively reliable, inerrant biblical description of Christ, the result is always, on the part of sinful man, the creation of subjective Christs to fit one's needs. This has, in fact, been the tragic history of twentieth-century theology: the creation of God in our philosophical or cultural

49. M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1944), reprinted in *The Springfielder*, XXIV (August, 1960). Cf. my review of W. J. Kooiman's *Luther and the Bible*, in *Christianity Today*, VI (February 16, 1962), 498.

50. M. Scharlemann, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

51. Robert C. Schultz, "Scripture, Tradition and the Traditions: A Lutheran Perspective," *Dialog*, II (Autumn, 1963), 281.

image instead of the straightforward acceptance of His portrait of us and of His salvation for us as presented in Holy Writ.⁵²

Schultz is, we fear, unaware of the ghastly implications of his position when he expresses the hope "that Lutherans will once again find themselves bound to all in Scripture and tradition that teaches Christ, compelled to change all that is contrary to Christ, free to use creatively everything that does not matter, as well as to create new tradition."⁵³ What, we ask, will serve as the criterion for determining what in Scripture is "contrary to Christ" and "does not matter"? for setting the pattern of scriptural "change"? for the "creative use" of the "unimportant" in the Bible? Obviously not the biblical Christ Himself, who was concerned about the inerrancy even of scriptural jots and tittles! The theological criterion has clearly become an existential Christ-in-the-heart, who, because of his non-propositional, analytically indefinable character, can take on, chameleon-like, the qualities of his spokesman. Perhaps we are not as far away as we think from the *Deutsche Christen* of the Third Reich, whose "Christ" conveniently supported all aspects of their demonic ideology? It is well not to forget that from analytical meaninglessness, as from logical contradiction, *anything* can be "deduced," depending on the predilections, conscious or unconscious, of the deducer.

(IV.) "Holy Scripture is inerrant, but in its intent—in its dynamic ability to fulfil God's purposes—not in its static accord with objective scientific or historical fact." Here we consider an argument which would not deserve attention were it not for its deceptive quality. Argument (IV.) in reality says nothing which has not already been expressed more directly in the preceding three arguments. However, it conceals its analytic meaninglessness under the guise of the word "intent."

The question, of course, is not whether the Bible infallibly or inerrantly achieves the purposes for which God intended it; the orthodox Christian would be the last to deny this. The question is simply: How does one determine God's intent? Only two answers are possible: from an inerrant revelation, or from a source or sources external to special revelation. The former answer is hardly what the proponent of argument (IV.) wants; his purpose in stating the argument is to move away from propositional

52. When we do subject ourselves fully to the biblical testimony concerning Christ, we find, note well, that we must simultaneously accept the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of *all* of Scripture—for this was the belief of the biblical Christ Himself. This fact has been emphasized by numerous writers across the centuries; for a succinct marshalling of the evidence for it, see Pierre Marcel, "Our Lord's Use of Scripture," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1958), pp. 119-34. Moreover, to employ kenotic arguments in an effort to lessen the binding force of Jesus' attitude toward Scripture is to board a vehicle whose logically inevitable destination is theological solipsism, since a Jesus who accommodates to the first-century thought world in one respect cannot be assumed to have stated any absolutes in other respects; thus all of Jesus' words lose binding force if His view of Scripture is not held to be normative.

53. Schultz, *loc. cit.*

inerrancy to an "inerrancy" which will focus on "theological" considerations, or on "existential experience," or on "personal encounter with Christ"—i.e., on the existential-dualistic affirmations of arguments (I.), (II.), and (III.). Scripture is "inerrant" only when it achieves the purpose which *he* (the non-plenary inspirationist) accepts as appropriate to it.

Thus, again, we encounter the analytical nonsense of Dualism and Existentialism, and the subtle importation of non-revelational considerations by which revelation is judged. In point of fact, only God's Word is capable of indicating God's intent; and if this Word is not propositionally inerrant and perspicuous, man will never know the Divine intent in general—to say nothing of His intent as regards Holy Writ itself! But a study of the totality of Scripture confirms the historic claim of the Church that God intended by His special revelation to convey the truth of Christ within the solid framework of, and confirmed by, the entire truth of an infallibly inspired Bible.⁵⁴

In our discussion of arguments (III.) and (IV.), we have referred in passing to Christ's view of the Bible and the Bible's own attitude toward itself. These references lead us quite naturally to a theological evaluation of non-inerrancy views of scriptural inspiration. We have found that analytically such views are nonsensical; it now remains for us to see that from the standpoint of biblical theology also they are without any genuine meaning.

The Theological Meaninglessness of a "Non-Inerrant Inspired Scripture"

Advocates of the anti-inerrancy positions discussed in the preceding sections of this paper are united in their contention that the Bible itself, and Christ its Lord, present a "dynamic," "personalized" view of truth which is irreconcilable with the propositional, objectively historical approach to truth characteristic of plenary inspirationists. Emil Brunner, for example, asserts: "In the time of the apostles as in that of the Old Testament prophets, divine revelation always meant the whole of the divine activity for the salvation of the world. Divine revelation is not a book or a doctrine."⁵⁵ Frequently appealed to in support of this contention is Albrecht Oepke's article in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, where one is told that in the Bible "revelation is not the communication of rational knowledge" but rather "Yahweh's offering of Himself in mutual fellowship."⁵⁶ Though James Barr's revolutionary book, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, has

54. On the Bible's view of itself, see B. B. Warfield's classic essays published under the title, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948). This volume is a new edition of Warfield's *Revelation and Inspiration*, published by Oxford University Press and now out-of-print.

55. Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, tr. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 8.

56. *TWNT*, III, 575 (art. *καλυπτω*).

so much as about the door; and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was; and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when decisively shown that Neo-Orthodox, "biblical-theology-movement" apriori, rather than linguistic objectivity, lies at the basis of such articles as Oepke's,⁵⁷ the general question remains as to whether the biblical view of revelation is anti-objective, anti-propositional. It is worthwhile noting that if the latter is the case, then the Bible, like many of its modern interpreters, will pass into the never-never land of analytical meaninglessness, for its content will be devoid of testability; like the Scriptures of the Eastern religions, its "truth" will be "known" only to those who read it through the glass of prior belief—and it will say nothing to all those who, not having had an (indefinable, unverifiable) experience in relation to it, are understandably wary of such "experiences"!

But in fact the Bible does not operate within an existential-dualistic frame of reference. Fundamental to the entire biblical revelation are the twin convictions that subjective truth is grounded in and verifiable through objective truth, and that the eternal has been made manifest in the temporal.

Consider such prominent Old Testament events as Gideon and the fleece (Judges 6) and Elijah on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18). Gideon, realizing how easy it is to deceive oneself in matters of subjective religious assurance, asks an objective sign from God by which he can know that the Lord will deliver Israel from her enemies. God willingly complies, not once but twice: first, dew falls on Gideon's fleece but not on the surrounding ground; second, dew falls on the ground but not on the fleece. The point? Gideon, like any spatio-temporally bound member of the human race, was incapable of knowing by subjective, existential immediacy that the voice within him was God's voice; yet he had to know, for the lives of others as well as his own safety depended upon his ability to make a true religious judgment. In this quandary, God provided Gideon with external evidence—in concrete, empirical terms—showing that it was indeed He who spoke within Gideon's heart.

Elijah was faced with a common religious problem—one which existential immediacy is totally unable to solve. This is the problem of conflicting religious claims. The "false prophets" said one thing to the people;

57. Barr takes Oepke as "a very bad example" of the absorption of philology by theological apriori in the *TWNT*. He shows that Oepke's *αποκαλυπτω* article "is assimilated to modern theological usage to a degree that the actual linguistic material will not bear" (*The Semantics of Biblical Language* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961], p. 230).

Elijah said another. How were the people to know who was proclaiming God aright and who was the idolater? An objective test was the only way of ridding the situation of endless confusion and meaningless claims. So Elijah gave the false prophets the opportunity to demonstrate the "reality" of their God through his ability to perform an act of divine power on earth. The inability of the false prophets' truth-claim to hold up under such a test, when coupled with Yahweh's positive response to the identical test, provided the needed ground for belief in the true God.

Such examples could be multiplied in the Old Testament, but let us now turn to our Lord's own attitude toward religious verifiability. A close look at a frequently misunderstood event in His public ministry will be especially revealing. In all three Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 5) Jesus' healing of the palsied man is recorded in similar detail; here is the Marcan account:

And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

It is generally assumed that the answer to Jesus' question, "Is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven, or Take up thy bed and walk?" is "Take up thy bed and walk." Quite the opposite is the case. Perhaps it is easier to restore a sick man to health than to forgive sin, but Jesus' question has to do, not with acts but with *claims*; Jesus asks, not "Which is easier?" but "Which is easier *to say*?" Clearly it is easier to *claim* to be able to forgive sin than to be able to restore a palsied man to health miraculously, for the former is a theological affirmation which cannot *per se* be subjected to verification.

So what does Our Lord do? Does He leave His forgiveness claim in the realm of the unverifiable, as have numerous religious leaders through the ages? By no means; he connects the theological claim with an empirical claim whose verifiability is not only possible but inevitable. The argument thus runs: "You do not believe that I can forgive sins. Very well; I cannot show you that directly. But if I show you that I can, by my Divine power, remedy the empirical sickness that connects with the sin problem, will you have any reason left for denying my power to work in the theological sphere?" The empirical, objective healing of the palsied man was performed that men might "know that the Son of man hath power on earth

to forgive sins"—a fact that, had our Lord not coupled it with an objective test, could have been dismissed as meaningless and irrelevant by those who had doubtless heard such claims many times before. In precisely the same way does the New Testament present Christ's resurrection as the objective ground for belief in the theological significance of His death on the Cross.⁵⁸

The picture of the biblical conception of truth drawn from the foregoing passages is in no way altered by Jesus' affirmations, "I am the Truth" (Jn. 14:6), and "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (Jn. 18:37), or by any other "personalized" references to truth in the Bible. Of course such statements are part of the scriptural revelation; plenary inspirationists have never denied their existence or importance. The question is not whether truth is ever conceived of personally in the Bible, but whether it is *only* conceived of personally there. We contend that the biblical view of truth requires subjective (existential, if you will) truth to be grounded in objective, empirical facticity—for only then can existential truth be distinguished from existential error. Jesus' claim to be the Truth hardly warrants the conclusion that the facticity of His earthly acts, or the precise veracity of His words, is unimportant. Quite the contrary: It is the truth of His acts and words that drives us to commit our lives to Him as the only final answer to man's quest for Truth.

The biblical conception of truth not only stands over against analytically nonsensical existentialisms; it categorically opposes the equally meaningless notion of a dualistic split between the "theological" and the "historical/empirical" or between "personal encounter" and "objective facticity." Here, indeed, we find ourselves at the very heart and center of the Christian faith: the doctrine of Incarnation. According to biblical teaching, the Old Testament revelation typologically introduces, and the New Testament writings express the fulfilment of, the genuine Incarnation of God in human history. The Prologue of John's Gospel summarizes this superlative teaching in the simple words: *ο λογος σαρχε γενετο*. As the Ecumenical Creeds of the Church consistently testify, this Incarnation was in every sense a real entrance of God into the human scene; the gap between eternity and time was fully bridged in Christ.

The soteriological necessity of this act has often been stressed through Christian history,⁵⁹ but at the same time the epistemological need for the Incarnation ought never to be forgotten. Apart from empirical confrontation with God in Christ, man's religious aspirations and conceptions would have forever remained in the realm of unverifiable meaninglessness. This is why throughout the New Testament the Apostles place such powerful stress on having "seen with their eyes" and "touched with their hands"

58. See I Cor. 15, and cf. my University of British Columbia lectures (*op. cit.*).

59. One thinks immediately of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* and Aulen's *Christus Victor*. Cf. my *Chytraeus on Sacrifice* (*op. cit.*).

the incarnate Word.⁶⁰ The biblical message recognizes finite man's need to "try the spirits" representing diverse religious claims and ideologies; and the only meaningful test is objective verifiability: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God" (I Jn. 4:1-3).

In biblical religion it is impossible to conceive of theological truth divorced from historical, empirical truth; this divorce would destroy the whole meaning of Incarnation. The theological truths of Scripture are thus inextricably united with earthly matters, and the truth of the one demands the truth of the other. The Bible recognizes as fully as does analytical philosophy that to speak of "theological truth" or of "existential encounter with God" apart from empirical veracity is to speak nonsense. When Bishop Wand asserts that "there is no external guarantee of inspiration,"⁶¹ he is asserting just such nonsense, for without the "external guarantee" of empirical facticity, "inspiration" becomes no more than an emotive plea—on the same level with the innumerable and conflicting immediacy claims to inspiration by religious fanatics.

Even Beegle, in his recent attempt to demolish biblical inerrancy, admits that "subjective truth cannot occur without some minimal amount of objective truth";⁶² but here he gives his whole case away. For what amount of objective truth is "minimal?" The Bible declares, as does analytic philosophy, that only where objective truth is unqualifiedly present can one avoid meaninglessness on the subjective side. Thus the "minimum" is unrestricted objective truth, which, in the case of the Christian revelation, means nothing less than an inerrant Bible. For wherever the Scripture were to err objectively, there doubt would be warranted subjectively; and wherever the words of Scripture were to carry historically or scientifically erroneous ideas, there the reader would have every right to reject the theological affirmations, which, in the very nature of God's revelation, are inextricably entwined with empirical facts.⁶³

And here, like it or not, we arrive at verbal inspiration, for, as contemporary linguistic analysis has so fully demonstrated, every genuine word carries genuine meaning and influences the context in which it is used. Therefore, each "jot and tittle" of Scripture has an impact, however slight, on the totality of the Bible; and this impact must be either for good or for ill. On the basis of the thoroughgoing incarnational theology of the Bible,

60. See, e.g., I Jn: 1:1-4, where existential "joy" (v. 4) is grounded in objective empirical contact with the incarnate Christ (vs. 1-3). Cf. also Jn. 20:24 ff.

61. J. W. C. Wand, *The Authority of the Scriptures* (London: Mowbray, 1949), p. 61.

62. Beegle, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

63. The fallacy of "minimum" objective facticity has been implicitly recognized in Kaesemann's damning criticism of Bultmann's claim that Christian existential experience requires only the "thatness" of Jesus as a historical person—the mere fact that he existed. Says Kaesemann (representing the "post-Bultmannian" reaction in contemporary European theology): Such minimal "thatness" will reduce the Christian gospel to a Gnostic redeemer myth and docetism.

we can affirm that the verbal impact is always veracious, not only theologically but also in all other aspects touched. For, in the final analysis, the biblical theology that centers on Christ the incarnate Word knows no distinction between "other aspects of life" and the religious: biblical truth is holistic, and its claim to theological validity is preserved from meaninglessness by its verifiability in the empirical domains that it touches.⁶⁴

A Final Clarification and Caveat

It has been not infrequently argued by those who would move Lutheranism away from the inerrancy view of biblical inspiration that the Lutheran Church is fortunate in lacking explicit statements on verbal inspiration in its historic creeds. We are informed that it is to our advantage that, unlike the Calvinists, our creeds contain no assertions concerning "the entire perfection" and "infallible truth" of Scripture.⁶⁵ Therefore, the argument continues, we are free to embrace fully, without loss of intellectual integrity, the non-propositional, non-verbal view of inspiration which has become so popular in recent years.

The analytical discussions comprising the bulk of this paper should have prepared us to see the fallacy in this superficially attractive line of reasoning. Let us see what the last of the Reformation Lutheran Confessions, the *Formula of Concord*, does say on the subject of biblical inspiration. The *Formula's* position in this matter is drawn from Luther:

[Luther] diesen Unterscheid ausdrücklich gesetzt hat, dass alleine Gottes Wort die einige Richtschnur und Regel aller Lehre sein und bleiben solle, welchem keines Menschen Schriften gleich geachtet, sondern demselben alles unterworfen werden soll.

Hoc discrimen (inter divina et humana scripta) perspicue posuit, solas videlicet sacras litteras pro unica regula et norma omnium dogmatum agnoscendas, iisque nullius omnino hominis scripta adaequanda, sed potius omnia subiicienda esse.⁶⁶

Here, it is true, there is no reference to infallibility or inerrancy. Yet the Scriptures are declared to be the "only standard and rule," to which all other writings must be "subordinated." Clearly, the Bible is held to stand in judgment over all other books—in all fields—and no man is permitted

64. I am not arguing (note well) that empirical verifiability of the historical and scientific content of Scripture automatically produces subjective *commitment* to the truth of its religious claims. The Pharisees could (and doubtless many of them did) refuse to believe that Jesus was able to forgive sin even after he had healed the palsied man. However, only where objective verifiability is present can genuine faith be distinguished from blind faith. To engage in the existentialists' "leap of faith" is to topple headlong into the domain of analytic meaninglessness, where one man believes in "Christ" and another in a pantheon of six-headed monsters! Only biblical inerrancy preserves biblical faith from condemnation as nonsensically irrelevant.

65. These phrases appear in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chap. i, sec. 5.

66. *F. C.* (Sol. Dec.), Preface, para. 6.

to judge the Scripture in any particular. Such a view of biblical authority differs in no way from the verbal inspiration position set out in this paper.

And, indeed how could it, if Luther and the theologians of the Confessions understood the implications of scriptural inspiration? We have seen that the incarnational theology of the Bible demands the plenary truth of Scripture—that the "historical-empirical" elements in the Bible must be regarded as no less veracious than the "theological" truths intimately bound up with them and epistemologically dependent upon them. Though the Lutheran fathers were not acquainted with the technical concept of analytic meaninglessness, they understood the Bible too well to believe that it would retain its theological value if its truthfulness in other particulars were impugned. The writers of the Lutheran Confessions did not face the epistemological issue of biblical reliability that we face today, but they knew full well that to allow the Scriptures to fall under *any* kind of negative criticism would tear the foundation out of all meaningful theology. That "the Word was made flesh" gripped them too powerfully to permit their losing the objective veracity of God's revelation.

Today the winds of philosophical change are veering away from existentialistic and dualistic world-views. The analytical tradition has delivered mortal body-blows to these metaphysical *Weltanschauungen*. And within the realm of analytical philosophy itself, every year that goes by sees greater stress placed upon "words," "language," and "propositions."⁶⁷ How unfortunate it would be if now, when the presuppositions of the anti-verbal inspirationists have been thoroughly undermined along with the aprioris of Existentialism and Dualism, and a new era of appreciation for the verbal proposition is on the horizon, Christians in the Reformation tradition should sell their biblical heritage for a mess of outdated philosophical pottage. In the Bible and in the Christ to whom it testifies God has given a *πληρωμα* of meaningfulness. May we not lose it in chasing the phantoms of analytical nonsensicality.

67. The analytical stage is now being occupied particularly by the "linguistic analysts," such as the "ordinary language philosophers" Ryle and Toulmin. Here also is to be classed the work of the later Wittgenstein (the posthumous *Philosophical Investigations*).