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THE ISSUE OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY IN DEFINITION AND DEFENSE

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INTRODUCTION

The past decade of intensive discussion over Biblical inerrancy has left this evangelical debate still largely unresolved. That it is primarily a discussion among evangelicals is evident. Liberal theologians have become so convinced of Biblical fallibility that inerrancy can no longer be equated with any form of inspiration in their theology. Writing about European theology in particular, Henry states,

On the Continent even the most conservative New Testament scholars tend to make concessions to biblical criticism not characteristic of American fundamentalism. No faculty member of the university related seminaries champions an inerrant Scripture.¹

Helmut Thielicke, the famed Hamburg pastor and theologian, is an example of those who are willing to make such concessions. For all of his warmth and interest toward the American fundamentalists while on an American tour, he was nevertheless unable to give a conservative answer to the question put to him: "Are there errors in the Bible?"² Expressing his surprise at the question he explains he had never heard it put in this form and was familiar with it at most in the history of theology as it was put forth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³ With reference to the Bible's historical "errors" Thielicke remarks, "I could have enormously embarrassed my esteemed interlocutor by enumerating some very simple historical facts."⁴

One would have wished, for the sake of discussion, that some erroneous "historical facts" had been produced on this occasion. But to Thielicke the case was closed and needed no further discussion.

To Evangelicals who have rejected the Neo-orthodox compromise on Scripture, the question of inerrancy still remains. For some time now the Evangelical Theological Society has been under pressure concerning this issue. Speaking to a meeting of the Society, Payne said:

Several times during the past year I have received critical inquiries as to what the Evangelical Theological Society means by saying, 'The Bible is . . . inerrant' in its doctrinal affirmation; the not so veiled suggestion of the inquirers was that if the E. T. S. would only adopt a more latitudinarian interpretation of inerrancy it could retrieve some of its errant colleagues.⁵

Some, with Hubbard, prefer not to use the term, feeling it may be misunderstood. Commenting on the Wenham Conference of June 1966 in an alumni news letter of Fuller Seminary, Hubbard says:

It seemed to be the consensus of the participants that our emphasis today should be on the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture without necessarily using the word inerrancy, which for some conveys a somewhat mathematical precision and often forces us to be defensive.⁶

That the term "inerrancy" can be misunderstood is evident. It therefore needs to be carefully defined and explained. To avoid the use of a legitimate term does not resolve an issue. If the Bible is authoritative and trustworthy it must be also an inerrant communication from God. Preus has well stated:

The inerrancy and the authority of Scripture are inseparably related. This fact has been consistently recognized by Reformation theologians who have often included inerrancy and authority under the rubric of infallibility. . . . An erring authority for all Christian doctrine (like an erring Word of God) is an impossible and impractical contradictio in adjecto.⁷

What needs to be recognized is that the term "inerrancy," rather than simply being a "shibboleth" (as it has been called)⁸ by which evangelicals should be separated from non-evangelicals, is an essential term to describe this doctrine of Christianity. A Bible that is fallible is a Bible that is not inspired. A Bible that is inspired is a Bible that is infallible.⁹ The truth of the Christian faith stands or falls with the doctrine of inerrancy.

As has been already observed, much of the confusion about inerrancy among evangelicals rests in the problem of a suitable definition. Simple definitions can be given: "The Bible possesses the quality of freedom from error"; "In all their teachings the Scriptures are in perfect accord with the truth." Such statements are correct in themselves but are insufficient to a full appreciation of inerrancy and do not explain the phenomena of Scripture in this regard.

Simple definitions do not resolve major issues dividing evangelicals. Is it possible for a person to hold to a doctrine of infallibility while questioning the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch or questioning the historicity of Adam? Some would answer in the affirmative.¹⁰ Others would categorically deny such a possibility.¹¹ Is it possible to have an authoritative Scripture if the Bible is only partially inspired? Were the sources used by the Biblical writers always reliable? These and similar questions are being debated by evangelicals who claim belief in inerrancy.

To ascertain the meaning of this doctrine several factors must be investigated. On what basis is inerrancy to be regarded as a doctrine? What qualifications must be recognized in a definition in view of the phenomena of Scripture? What constituents are necessarily included in the idea of Biblical inerrancy?

THE BASIS OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

If Scripture contains the communication of God to man, it can be logically inferred that its contents will reflect the nature of God. Both the nature of God and the character of Christ are at stake in our view of the Bible.

The Nature of God

If the Bible is the Word of God but is not completely true, it must be either because God was deliberately lying or because He was ignorant of the facts. Neither of these alternatives is acceptable to the Christian. Deceit and ignorance are not characteristics of God. To associate such attributes with His Word would be equally devastating. Thus Archer states:

The original manuscripts of the Biblical books must have been free from all mistakes, or else they could not have been truly inspired by the God of truth in whom is no darkness at all. God could never have inspired a human author of Scripture to write anything erroneous or false.¹²

The Scriptures repeatedly affirm the veracity of God (I John 1:5). He is a God of truth and light. If the Bible is His Word, it must reflect His attributes.

The Words of Christ

In a polemic against inerrancy Stevick states that, "Even to make the affirmation of Biblical inerrancy is philosophically perilous."¹³ In support of his statement he claims that to maintain that a body of historical literature is inerrant--that it cannot be mistaken--implies a knowledge of all the facts. Any argument about the presence of errors lies in the scientific arena where any categorical statement of infallibility is out of place. To dare to affirm categorically the inerrancy of the Bible is to lay claim to omniscience.¹⁴

If Stevick is correct, his attack would completely discredit the writers of Scripture. According to Grant, "It is everywhere taken for granted that Scripture is trustworthy, infallible and inerrant. . . . No New Testament writer would ever dream of questioning a statement contained in the Old Testament."¹⁵ But is Stevick correct in his assertion? Is it "philosophically perilous" to affirm Biblical errancy? Is not anyone who believes that he is competent to make the judgment that there is actual error in the original manuscripts of the Bible setting himself up in the position of God? When anyone claims there are errors in Scripture, he is doing so in the face of express statements of the Bible which assert the contrary. Jesus Christ says, "The Scripture cannot be broken."

Stevick might well take cognizance of the fact that his challenge to inerrancy can be followed with a counter-challenge. As Pinnock has observed, "Until the interpreter is omniscient and all the evidence comes in, it is impossible to press the theory of 'inductive errancy.'"¹⁶

But if Stevick desires an omniscient witness to inerrancy, he may have one. The God-Man, Jesus Christ, has given such a witness.

The witness of Christ is clearly in evidence in Scripture. Christ's resurrection testimony can be found in Luke 24. Luke 16:17 declares that the Bible is true to the smallest letter and Matthew 5:17 tells us the Jewish canon is accurate to the jot and tittle. There can be no doubt but that Christ taught verbal inspiration. Harris observes:

Jesus' whole attitude to the Old Testament is one of complete acceptance. He believed its prophecies and cited its miracles. He accepted the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the reality of Adam and Eve, of Jonah, of Noah.¹⁷

Lightner, in elaborating on Jesus' use of the Old Testament, explains that Jesus not only applied this inerrancy to matters of ethics and morals but to matters of history and geography as well. His teaching of inerrancy and infallibility applies both to revelational and non-revelational matters, to that which the writer only knew through special divine revelation and to that which was already known as matters of history.¹⁸

And lest there be a retreat to the argument that the original autographs, though they may be inspired, are nevertheless unavailable to us, Wenger reminds us, "It was the Old Testament almost exactly as we have it, which our Lord knew, and which he assured us was the infallible truth of God."¹⁹

Thus, the facts of Scripture obligate us to choose between an acceptance of Christ as the Son of God who believed in an inerrant Bible or an acceptance of a view that Christ was not omniscient and the Bible cannot be accepted as inerrant. We really have no alternative but to choose between the two.

The basis to any belief in inerrancy must therefore ever be kept in the forefront. Nothing less than the character of God and the Person of Christ are involved. And any definition of inerrancy must take into account the attributes of God and the statements of Christ to ascertain the type of inerrancy to be held.

QUALIFICATIONS IN A DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

Perhaps the most perplexing problem of Biblical infallibility lies in the determination of what inerrancy involves and what it does not involve. Critics, formulating their own criteria,

have judged the Scriptures by them and found the Bible wanting. But is this arbitrary conception of inerrancy valid?

To formulate a definition of inerrancy it would seem mandatory that the phenomena of Scripture be allowed to explain its own assertions. The phenomena of Scripture can aid us in determining more precisely what the exact nature of the text is which inspiration has secured. And if Jesus believed in inerrancy, His statements should be sufficient definition of the type of inerrancy to be held. In the light of the Scriptural phenomena, several factors should be recognized.

Verbal Exactness of New Testament Quotations
from the Old is Not Necessary for Inerrancy

The New Testament writers frequently quote loosely and without verbal exactness from the Old Testament. Undoubtedly many of the quotations were from memory and were indirect. Often the quotations were made according to the Old Testament sense only or were simply allusions to the Old. By paraphrasing their quotations, it is not difficult to understand why changes in the use of pronouns or prepositions would appear.

Several reasons can be given for such methods of quotation. Buswell notes that the reading public of the Bible times would easily understand that most quotations were free renderings given from memory. The difficulty of referring to passages in the bulky scrolls, and the scarcity of these scrolls is evident.²⁰

Furthermore, we must recognize that the New Testament writers had to translate their quotations. The meaning of the original text is not always best conveyed in a very literal translation. When the Septuagint was used, we understand that, while the New Testament writers were not attributing inspiration to this version, they were nevertheless inspired to quote those texts as they did.

Roger Nicole makes this further observation. The New Testament writers did not have the same rules for quotations as are enforced today in words of scientific character. There were no quotation marks, no ellipsis marks, no brackets to indicate editorial comments and no footnote references to differentiate quotations from various sources.²¹

The important point to be recognized concerning these quotations is that they were made for a purpose and this purpose does not always require exact precision. The quotations (or allusions) are a true representation of what the Old Testament writer had intended.

Figures of Speech Employed by Biblical Writers
Do Not Contradict Inerrancy

That Scripture employs figures of speech is recognized by all. Common are such examples as meiosis (Gal. 5:14), hyperbole (Matt. 2:3), synecdoche (Gal. 1:16), personification (Gal. 3:8), metonymy (Rom. 3:30), etc. Figurative language is part of normal literary form and cannot be considered errant language. It expresses truth and meaning in its own particular way.

Some have asserted that Scripture, by rounding numbers and employing hyperbole or metaphors, is not concerned about precision of fact and in this sense is subject to error. This, Preus asserts, misunderstands the intention of Biblical language, for figurative language is precisely the mode of expression which the sacred writers' purposes demand.²² So long as the language of Scripture accurately represents the author's meaning and is not misleading or un-factual when claiming to deal with facts, it meets the requirements of inerrant communication.

There may be times when it is difficult to determine whether language is to be understood as literal or figurative. Proper hermeneutical principles must come into play on such occasions and in most instances the author's thoughts can be discerned. It has been common for some modern writers to disregard normal hermeneutical laws by regarding certain events of Scripture as myths or parables. In this way, Thieliicke asserts that the virgin birth is merely expressing the thought of Christ's superhuman character and does not express the thought of a biological miracle.²³ In other words, the account may be "literally" false while it is "spiritually" true and necessary. Such a treatment of Scripture destroys its historical character. Scripture does not present material as historical or factual when in truth it is only "spiritual" in nature.

It is possible, of course, to have a real event portrayed in figurative language. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 may be examples. But Packer reminds us that there is a world of difference between recognizing that a real event may be symbolically portrayed, and arguing, as some non-evangelicals do, that because an event is symbolically portrayed, it need not be regarded as a real event at all. We do injustice to Scripture when we turn narratives which purpose to record actual events into mere symbols of human experience at our will.²⁴

Figures of speech therefore should be regarded as proper vehicles of communication. Their use in Scripture in no way jeopardizes infallibility. They yield truth and meaning in their own particular way.

Biblical Standards of Historiography Need Not Conform
to Modern Standards for Inerrancy

Many aspects of Biblical historiography have remained unchanged in modern practice. If a writer of Scripture quotes from any particular source with approval and judges it to be

true, we assume that it is true. Similarly, when the writers describe events that have taken place, we assume the events are a part of true history. Whether they are written in the language of a reporter (e.g. Acts 27-28), or in a manner accommodating the understanding of less cultured people (e.g. anthropomorphic and figurative expressions) is irrelevant. The important thing is that they report accurately what has taken place as an event of history.

It should be recognized that the Biblical authors, following the accepted procedure of their day, did not record matters of chronology and genealogy in a way we may expect today. As Preus observes, Scripture often spreads out time for the sake of symmetry or harmony, and genealogies often omit many generations. *Hysteron proteron* is often employed and also prolepsis (John 17:4; 13:31).²⁵ But incompleteness does not suggest error where there is a purposeful selection and elimination of details. It is imperative therefore that the writer's perspective and purpose be kept in mind when evaluating his historical accuracy.

The Language of Scientific Empiricism Need Not Be
Employed in Scripture for Inerrancy

It is unfair to the writers of Scripture to conclude that their language of simple observation must be judged by standards of scientifically precise language. It was not their intention in such instances to provide scientific explanations of things. They were employing the language of description and as such it was suitable for their purpose.

We need not therefore conclude that the writer who speaks of "four corners of the earth" (Rev. 7:1), is teaching that the earth is in the shape of a cube. Similarly the fact that bats are classified with birds (Lev. 11:19) or that the hare and the coney "chew the cud" (Lev. 11:5-6) implies no suggestion of error. These classifications were not intended to be scientific.

The proper hermeneutical approach should always endeavor to understand the intent of the writer. In this way, as Payne observes, we will find the writers accommodating. Accommodating, not in the sense of "explaining away" but of recognizing actual contemporary and cultural meanings, as opposed to those less historically valid interpretations that might be dictated by our 20th century observation.²⁶

One point of caution needs to be added. While the Biblical writers were not seeking to speak in modern scientific language, we should not conclude that they were unable to make statements of scientific import. On this point more will be said later.²⁷ Suffice it to say now that each statement of scientific significance must be seen in its own context and interpreted in the light of valid hermeneutical principles.

The phenomena of Scripture therefore forbid us to place arbitrary connotations upon our definition of inerrancy. Christ and His apostles recognized both the infallibility and veracity of the Scriptures while being aware of communicative modes of their day.

CONSTITUENTS TO A DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

There are certain constituents necessary to a definition of inerrancy without which belief in this doctrine would become meaningless. Qualifications were necessarily discussed to ensure that the Scriptures are judged from valid criteria. But if infallibility is to express belief in a Bible that is wholly trustworthy and reliable, then certain integrants cannot be excluded from a definition.

Inerrancy Applies Equally to all Parts of Scripture

The word "plenary" has been commonly used by Evangelicals to describe their view of inspiration. Its use has expressed the idea that Scripture is inspired in all parts including not only doctrinal portions but those also which relate to geography, history and chronology. That such a view is in harmony with the Biblical authors themselves is evident. The New Testament writers refer equally to ethical teaching (Heb. 12:5; Gal. 6:7) and to historical teaching (Heb. 11:4, 5, 7) as authoritative teaching. Quite frequently doctrinal and historical matters are so related to one another that to question the historical aspect is to question the doctrinal value as well. The miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the Exodus loses its doctrinal value when denied historically. A God who could do no miracles then is not a God to be trusted for miracles later.

A deviation from plenary inspiration can be found in the misuse of the idea of "progressive revelation." While it is evident that God's revelation came gradually and built upon previous revelation, it is incorrect to suggest that the early revelation was less inspired or even contradictory to the final revelation. Carnell is therefore out of order to suggest that later revelation was a "correction" to the previous revelation and was "an abrogation of whatever was imperfect in the earlier stages."²⁸ Payne, in rejecting such interpretive methods, states that "when any lower stage is considered rectifiable, it thereby ceases to be God-breathed; and to speak of revelation's 'progress' becomes a misnomer."²⁹

Another deviation from plenary inerrancy is found in the view which limits inerrancy to "revelational" matters found in Scripture and denies it to other matters. Fuller thus maintains that if the doctrinal verses of the Bible explicitly teach only the inerrancy of revelational matters--matters that make men wise unto salvation--and if the phenomena bear this out, loyalty to Biblical authority demands that we define inerrancy accordingly.³⁰ In further explanation and defense of this view, Fuller states that when the doctrinal verses teach or imply inerrancy, it is always in connection with revelational knowledge, not in connection with knowledge which makes a man wise to botany, meteorology, cosmology or paleontology, i.e., to knowledge which is non-revelational simply because it is readily accessible to men.³¹

By retreating to such a view of Scripture, Fuller has relegated to himself an impossible task. To assure the Bible of its authority he must be able to develop a new kind of "red letter" edition which will distinguish the doctrinal or essential from the non-revelational and non-essential. Is he able to assume the position of a judge to differentiate between matters of importance and matters of error?

Such a "partial inspiration" view denies the unitary nature of the Bible. Does not everything in Scripture at least indirectly pertain to doctrine (II Tim. 3:16)? Are not relatively minute details of Old Testament history regarded as factually true as the major events? On what basis could we deny the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah while considering the faith of Abraham a "revelatory" matter? In view of the fact that difficulties are found not only in "minor" matters but also in vital areas (e.g. the harmonization of the resurrection appearances), what guarantee do we have that any part of Scripture is inerrant? The problems related to a belief in inerrancy for revelational matters only is "both arbitrary and impossible to apply."³²

An example of the difficulties encountered when one differentiates between the revelational and non-revelational can be found in trying to interpret the creation account. Genesis 2:7 states, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The fact that God created man would appear to be obviously "revelational." Young maintains that this verse also teaches an instant creation of man. As Young explains, the Hebrew behind "a living soul" in Genesis 2:7 is nephesh hayah. The same words are found in Genesis 1:21 and 1:24. There they are translated "living creature." The words mean "animate" or "alive." It was at this point that the inanimate clay became alive.³³

Now the question arises: Is it possible that the teaching of creation is "revelational" but the teaching of instant creation is non-revelational and in error? Would not instant creation be a part of the Bible's teaching that wrongly pretends to make a man "wise unto paleontology"? Can the Christian follow evolutionary theorists who say man came gradually out of development from the brute, and should the Christian "give up the immediate-creation theory out of respect for paleontology."³⁴ It is obvious how arbitrary and impossible the maintenance of a view of "revelational" and "non-revelational" Scripture becomes. The words of Harrison are well taken when he says,

Evidence is lacking in the statements of Scripture for the notion that the Word is a product of a division of labour, God working with the writers on doctrinal matters and leaving them to their own wisdom on historical matters.³⁵

To those who feel that denial of inerrancy for "non-revelational" Scripture is a way out of the problems related to belief in an infallible Scripture, the words of Payne are also apropos:

Those therefore who feel that the only teachings that the Holy Spirit wishes to convey through Scripture are such teachings as concern faith and morals, would exhibit greater candor by frankly denying Biblical inerrancy (and plenary inspiration). . . .³⁶

Inerrancy Applies to the Autographa of Scripture

It should go without saying that if holy men of God spoke from God as they were borne by the Holy Spirit then only what they spoke under the Spirit's superintendence is inspired.

Each copy of what they spoke would not be "God-breathed" as was the original so that inerrancy of transmission is not to be expected.

Of course, we do not possess the originals which could be examined to establish or disclaim inerrancy. Some have therefore assumed that the whole issue of inerrancy of the autographa is practically irrelevant even if it is doctrinally important.³⁷ Such an assumption disregards the divine origin of Scripture as described in II Peter 1:20-21. It makes a great difference as to whether a document was right at the start but was slightly miscopied and whether it was wrong from its beginning. A document wrong from the beginning would make textual criticism a fruitless exercise. There would be no value in working back to such an original.

But do not copyist errors negate the importance of infallible autographa? They certainly would if the transmission of the Biblical text corrupted it beyond recognition. But the evidence is against such a perverted text. Archer observes that a careful study of the variants of the various earliest manuscripts reveals that none of them affects a single doctrine of Scripture.³⁸ With reference to the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 (dated a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known) Archer further states:

They proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 per cent of the text. The 5 per cent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.³⁹

Transmission with such accuracy and care should leave no room for denial of the authority of Scripture. The message of an inerrant autograph has not been lost.

Inerrancy Applies to the Very Words of Scripture

A belief in the inerrancy of Scripture necessitates belief in verbal inspiration. Words are the normal symbols of our thoughts and are necessary to communication. If the Bible is the communication of God to man, the precise content of that communication must be determined from the meaning of the words. Pinnock correctly observes that the very existence of revealed truth calls for the creation of an infallible Scripture to preserve and conserve it. It is verbal inspiration which assures us that the truth we possess is valid, having been effectively communicated to us by God.⁴⁰ In the succinct words of Packer, "If the words were not wholly God's, then their teaching would not be wholly God's."⁴¹

A philosophy of language has been advocated which denies that human language can express absolute truth.⁴² If this were true, of course inerrancy would be impossible. Such a theory, if consistently held, would deny the truth-value from all human assertions--including the ones made by the advocate of the theory. It would also deny the infallibility of Christ. Did He not speak human words and were they not truth when He spoke them?

Jesus' own use of the Scriptures demonstrates both His belief in the adequacy of human language to express eternal truth and the verbal inspiration of the Bible. When Jesus said, "I

am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. . ." (Matt. 22:23-33), He relied upon the present tense of the verb translated "I am" for support of His teaching of the resurrection. He quoted from Exodus 3:6 where God said to Moses, four hundred years after Abraham had died, that He was at that time Abraham's God.

A similar example of Christ's reliance upon verbal exactness is found in Matthew 22:43-45. In dispute with the Pharisees about the character of Messiah, Jesus builds His case from the one word "Lord" as used in Psalm 110.

Inspired words, therefore, are not only fully capable of communicating divine truth to man, but are also necessary constituents to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy.

Inerrancy Applies to the Complete Trustworthiness of Scriptural Teaching

It has already been made evident in this study that there are many factors involved when formulating a definition of Biblical inerrancy. Permeating all these factors, however, must be the one dominating factor--an inerrant Bible is a reliable Bible. It is a Bible that is incapable of deception. It will not be proven false or mistaken. It is a Bible that is completely trustworthy in all that it teaches.

Obviously the application of sound hermeneutical principles is of paramount importance. Scripture should not be criticized because of misinterpretations. It should be judged only on what is clearly taught. But once we have determined the socially designated meaning of a given portion or expression, the fact of Biblical inerrancy requires our loyalty to the truths signified. The natural sense of Scripture will not deceive the reader. Fiction will not be presented as if it were history. Miracles described as such will not be mere natural occurrences.

Such a view is quite different from one which simply holds to inerrancy in the writing and not the teaching of Scripture. The latter view calls into question the trustworthiness of any portion of the Bible drawn from existing documents, even though it was accurately recorded. Carnell, apparently subscribing to this view says:

. . . even if it could be shown that the Chronicles are not entirely compatible with other Old Testament histories, the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy would not be demolished. Orthodoxy would simply shift its conception of the thing signified. Just as the inspired author of Job gives an infallible account of what Eliphaz said, so the inspired author of Chronicles gives an infallible account of what was said in the public registers and genealogical lists.⁴³

What Carnell is actually saying is that even though a statement appears in Scripture as a fact of history or chronology we have no grounds for believing it to be true. We may have an inerrant record but we cannot be as sure we have a trustworthy one. In view of the fact that a large amount of Scripture is drawn from written and oral sources, Biblical authority is practically

surrendered in Carnell's view. To maintain a reliable Bible that is trustworthy in its teachings one must concur with Archer when he says:

Whatever Scripture asserts to have been historically true, regardless of the intermediate source of the information, must be understood as trustworthy and reliable. It makes no essential difference whether the source was written or oral. . . ; in either case the Holy Spirit eliminated mistakes and insured the inscripturation only of truth. . . . There is no need to resort to a theory of mistakes copied out in the original autographs and to do so endangers the authoritativeness of Scripture as a whole.⁴⁴

There is another view of inerrancy which is equally as destructive of the complete trustworthiness of Scripture. It is the principle that revelational purpose determines revelational content.

It is readily acknowledged that the first purpose of Scripture is to lead men into a saving faith in Christ (John 20:30-31). But, observes Preus, to say that Scripture is inerrant only to the extent that it achieves its soteriological purpose is a misleading position if it is made to be identical with inerrancy or confused with it. How does Scripture achieve this soteriological purpose? By cognitive language. By presenting facts, by telling a history.⁴⁵

It is evident that some evangelicals have carried the principle of revelational purpose to an unwarranted extreme--an extreme which nullifies other valid principles of interpretation.

On the principle of purpose, Bube questions the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The authors of the New Testament who speak of Moses' commands, Bube says, were concerned with communicating the revelational content of the words and their purpose did not include comments on scholarly questions of authorship.⁴⁶ Similarly Bube questions Adam's uniqueness as the first man, saying Paul's words in Romans 5 may be taken as a revelational presentation of the truth of God inherent in the Genesis account without necessarily giving sanction to the literal historicity of the details of that account.⁴⁷

To justify such an interpretation, Bube must first be able to show how Adam can be taken symbolically in an otherwise literal and historical context. He must also be able to justify a symbolical interpretation in view of the fact that Hebrew history taught and accepted the historicity of Adam. It would be nothing short of deceit for Paul to speak of Adam symbolically while he was aware that his readers would understand him to be speaking historically.

The extent to which the principle of revelational purpose can be misused is amazing. Eckelmann by this principle disregards other rules of interpretation applicable in Genesis 2:7 and maintains that man has a long continuous history which can be traced back over several million years to primitive manlike animals. Man gradually developed mentally, culturally and spiritually. We can no longer talk of the creation of man in the sense early nineteenth century people did.⁴⁸

The interpretations of Bube and Eckelmann cannot be justified in the light of other hermeneutical principles. A more serious view of Scripture's trustworthiness is necessary. Statements relative to science are not necessarily outside of God's purpose in Scripture. Woolley rightly notes, "A great many statements in the realm of natural science are to be found in the Bible, and they are true statements."⁴⁹ The principle of revelational purpose must never be allowed to deny Biblical history or integrity.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the doctrine of inerrancy as well as the confusion surrounding the subject make the study a necessary one. Evangelical clarifications of the subject become especially necessary in view of Liberal and Neo-Orthodox deviations from Biblical authority.

The deductive approach to inerrancy was considered basic to the view. The doctrine should be believed because Jesus taught it and because the Bible everywhere teaches it. The inductive approach can be misleading. We do not have all the facts nor do we always adequately understand them. We lack in knowledge of all the possible explanations of the facts and our minds may be conditioned from our studies so we dare not trust our own judgment on these matters. We must be careful therefore to base our belief in inerrancy on deductions from Scripture.

This is not to suggest that an inductive approach will contradict infallibility. The phenomena of Scripture of themselves will not err in defining inerrancy. They will be in harmony with the deductive approach. But all too frequently those who speak of inerrancy according to the phenomena of Scripture have interpreted (or rather misinterpreted) the phenomena to their own choosing. They apply a hermeneutic which does not accurately determine what the Biblical writers had in mind. Hermeneutics, as Payne has stated, can become a cloak for the denial of the inerrancy of Scripture.⁵⁰

One final thought must be added. Important as the doctrine of inerrancy may be, it cannot guarantee the orthodoxy of the Church or the person who affirms it. As Piepkorn notes, Orthodox Jews (in the case of the Old Testament), the Roman Catholic integralists, the neo-calvinist and postfundamentalist groups in the National Association of Evangelicals, the bulk of the organized membership of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements, the Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses all affirm the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures.⁵¹

But while Piepkorn is right in stating that belief in inerrancy does not guarantee orthodoxy, he is wrong in suggesting that it is therefore unimportant.⁵² Inerrancy neither guarantees adherence to Scriptural teaching in general nor that a valid hermeneutic will be followed in interpreting it. But without inerrancy the whole foundation of Scripture crumbles and theology loses its moorings. The modern state of Liberalism and Neo-Orthodoxy attests to this.

DOCUMENTATION

1. Carl F. H. Henry, Frontiers in Modern Theology. (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966), p. 14.
2. Helmut Thielicke, Between Heaven and Earth. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), p. 1.
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