

What Does Biblical Infallibility Mean?

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the meaning of infallibility, not to establish the grounds on which infallibility rests. However the writer questions the view that inerrancy is not "required" by the Biblical teaching of its own inspiration.¹ Rather, he here assumes with Frederick C. Grant that in the New Testament "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."²

Neither does the paper intend to lay a foundation for the doctrine of propositional revelation. We assume a position similar to Bernard Ramm's in his *Special Revelation and the Word of God*.³ Nor is it the purpose of this paper to discuss the implications of textual criticism for the nature of inspiration. It is assumed that textual criticism has generally confirmed the trustworthiness of by far the greatest part of the Greek and Hebrew texts. References to the Bible may be regarded as being to those passages on which there is not such variation in the manuscripts as to affect in any material way the meaning conveyed.

An important distinction between the Bible as given and the Bible as interpreted should also be noted. The doctrine of infallibility applies to the Bible as given, not to the interpretation of any individual. Therefore it is not the province of this paper to deal with the complex issues of hermeneutics, although they cannot be avoided entirely. It is assumed, however, that an objectively infallible standard is not in vain. Although no interpreter can claim inerrancy for himself, interpreters are not equally in a morass of subjectivity since there is an objective standard of comparison in Scripture. The Bible's meaning can be approximated by the use of sound principles of hermeneutics, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the help of previously Spirit-illuminated interpreters in the history of the Church.

Positively this paper explores a means of understanding and communicating the significance of Biblical infallibility to our generation. One of the most influential schools of thought is called Philosophical Analysis, a recent development from earlier Logical Positivism. In order to help young people familiar with Philosophical Analysis to understand the import of Biblical infallibility we may employ its terms as far as possible for meaningful communication. In so doing our own concept of the applicability of the doctrine of Biblical infallibility to our times may be enriched and expressed with increased precision.

I. MEANING AND LANGUAGE

Contemporary Philosophical Analysis and semantics vigorously stress the difference between logical meanings and the verbal sentences conveying them. Long ago Augustine had classically expressed the distinction in his dialogue "On the Teacher" (*De Magistro*). The words uttered by a teacher are not identical with the thought he hopes to teach nor the realities

¹ Everett F. Harrison, "The Phenomena of Scripture," *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), pp. 238, 250.

² Frederick C. Grant, *Introduction to New Testament Thought* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 75.

³ Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

to which they refer. As a result of this analysis Augustine cautioned against confusion of linguistic signs with their meanings or with the things they signify. The New Testament itself distinguishes to some extent *logos*, emphasizing the meaning of words, from *rhéma* underlining the uttered or written terms.

Although this distinction has a long and noble ancestry it has frequently been ignored in discussions of Biblical inerrancy. Logically, errorlessness or truth is a quality not of words, but of meanings. Ben F. Kimpel in his *Language and Religion* explains, "Language... is only a means for articulating a proposition. Hence the truth-character of an affirmed proposition is not a feature of its language-form....

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Language is not essential for having true beliefs. It is essential only for *affirming* the them.⁴ How can this important distinction be related to the doctrine of inspiration? May we not preserve it by employing "inerrancy," which explicitly claims truth, only for the propositional content of Scripture, and by using "infallibility, which may mean "not liable to fail, only for the verbal expressions of Scripture.

Acknowledging that the Bible is both inerrant in content and infallible in expressing it, we do not maintain mere conceptual inspiration or mere "record" inspiration,⁵ but both. That seems to have been the point of verbal inspiration. Furthermore we shall seek to determine how verbal inspiration may be understood plenarily in these terms. It will be helpful to note not only the distinction between content and wording but also a number of subdivisions within each of these categories. To facilitate reference to these classifications in the remainder of the paper, the following chart lists rather widely accepted kinds of meaning in the left hand column and parallel uses of language in the right hand column.

AN ANALYSIS OF MEANING AND LANGUAGE⁶

KINDS OF MEANING

A. COGNITIVE MEANINGS

Assertions which are either T or F.

1. Formally

The truth or falsity is determined by the definitions of the terms, the principles of logic, or the principles of mathematics.

2. Empirically

The truth or falsity is determined by observable, sensory, scientific evidence. Any proposition that is cognitively meaningful must be verifiable; some empirical evidence must be relevant to the confirmation or disconfirmation of it. Such meaning may also be designated as literal.

USES OF LANGUAGE

A. INFORMATIVE SENTENCES

Usually declarative

1. Formally informative

Convey nothing about matters of fact, but only about definitions of words and logical or mathematical relations.

2. Empirically informative

Convey propositions regarding matters of fact, states of affairs, existence, or reality

⁴ Ben F. Kimpel. *Language and Religion* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 93.

⁵ Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 92-112.

⁶ These classifications are not presented as final or absolute, but suggestive. Additional categories may well be required by the Scriptural materials. See Herbert Feigl, "Logical Empiricism," *Twentieth Century Philosophy*, ed. D. D. Runes (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1943), p. 379.

B. NON-COGNITIVE MEANINGS

1. Emotive
2. Motivational
3. Interrogative
4. Exclamatory
5. Pictorial, imaginative

C. MEANINGLESS NONSENSE

1. Alleged assertions about unverifiable existences or realities.

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II. INERRANCY AND KINDS OF MEANING

The term inerrancy here specifically designates meaning which is not false but true. By definition cognitive meanings alone can be true or false of objective reality, i.e., reality independent of the speaker. Non-cognitive meanings on the other hand express something only of the speaker. We shall consider the relation of inerrancy first to those Biblical meanings which are related to the objective world. Cognitive meanings themselves have a twofold classification as the chart reveals. There are those assertions which may be regarded as true or false formally, that is by reason of their definition or by reason of the principles of mathematics, or logic. In the second place, there are those cognitive propositions which are true or false empirically, that is by reason of some observable scientific evidence which tends either to confirm or disconfirm them. Are there such cognitive propositions in the Bible? And if so, what does it mean to say to our contemporaries that they are inerrant?

A. FORMALLY COGNITIVE MEANING

In order to keep the discussion within reasonable limits, we shall consider of the formal types of cognitive assertions only the logical. Formal logical principles seem to be implied in Romans 11:6. The content of the verse is clearly dependent upon such basic laws of logic as the principle of identity, the principle of excluded middle, and the principle of non-contradiction. Israel's election, Paul argues, is by grace, not works. "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." No experimental inquiry need be instituted here, the argument is settled by application of these logical principles. Assuming the principle of identity, grace is grace and works are works; assuming the validity of the principle of excluded middle, Israel's election must be either by grace or works; and assuming the validity of the principle of non-contradiction, it cannot be by grace and not by grace. What then, does inerrancy mean in a passage like this? If the Scriptures teach inerrancy concerning their own content, then are not their assertions in didactic passages formally true and not false?

Syllogistic reasoning appears in the argument of Galatians 3:15-17. Paul argues: No confirmed covenant is one that is disannulled or altered. The covenant with Abraham is a confirmed covenant. Therefore the covenant with Abraham is not one that is disannulled or altered (by the law 430 years later). Again Paul's case depends upon formal principles; it does

B. NON-INFORMATIVE SENTENCES

1. Expressive
Convey emotive meaning e.g., poetry.
2. Directive
Convey exhortations, commands.
3. Questions
4. Exclamations
5. Figures of speech

C. PSEUDO SENTENCES

1. Declarative sentences conveying nonsense.

not require any experiential confirmation. The truth of his conclusion rests squarely on the validity of the principles of syllogistic reasoning. The rules of a valid syllogism are followed. In a passage like this, what does inerrancy mean? Would not the doctrine of inerrancy mean that assertions dependent on formal logical principles in didactic passages are cognitively true and not false? Can the reasoned case of an inspired author be based on fallacious logic?

Although this is not the place to examine the status of formal logical principles, a few words are necessary. According to the Analysts, propositions true on formal logical grounds are true because (1) we have arbitrarily ruled that the game be played that way, or (2) have surreptitiously hidden the conclusion in the premises so that our argument is tautologous. However, Paul in the two Biblical passages mentioned hardly seeks to spell out the implications of arbitrarily conceived rules of thought or first premises. Rather, he employs formal logic to support what is in fact the case concerning God's gracious election and the Abrahamic covenant. How can these passages be made to fit the Analyst's shibboleths of "merely formal", "arbitrary", and "tautologous"? Indeed they are formally valid, but the contexts imply more than that. These propositions are both formally and actually true. And

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how can these passages be made to fit the neo-orthodox shibboleth of "mere witness" to the mighty covenant acts of God? They are that, but they are more than that. They spell out the propositional implications of these divine acts. If these passages are inerrant, the truth of their propositional content is certified both formally and actually.

B. EMPIRICALLY COGNITIVE MEANINGS

Some cognitive assertions are true or false not in virtue of formal logical principle but in virtue of empirically observable evidence. The Bible contains many assertions whose truth is not formally validated, but could be tested through human experience. Under the continuing influence of logical positivism, many contemporary analysts still limit human experience which attests cognitively true propositions to the witness of the five senses. And the Bible includes many such propositions. The descriptive statement of Acts 1:12 is a verifiable one. The disciples, after the ascension, "returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey." That event was testable by the senses on the day it occurred. And by means of sensory observation, the disciples had confirmed the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. They heard him speak; they saw him eat before them; and they were invited to touch him (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:25-28). What then can it mean to say that such passages are inerrant? It cannot mean merely an accurate record of what may not have happened. Rather, if inerrant the assertions are true and therefore the facts specified real. The disciples did take the trip from Olivet to Jerusalem; Christ in His scarred body did talk, walk, and eat with the disciples after His death.

Now to account for Scripture data it is necessary to broaden the criterion of verifiability as held by positivistically inclined contemporaries. The positivists themselves have been forced to adopt a weakened form of the verification principle such as that of A. J. Ayer in his *Language, Truth and Logic*. Non-positivists consider it arbitrary to limit the meaningful experience to that of our bodily senses. Because of the complexity of human experience, the verification principle as applied to the five senses may be only one clue to meaning; there may be many others. Empirical philosophies of religion like that of the late Edgar S.

Brightman have stressed the richness of all human experience including experience of values and of God. We may well expand the verification principle after the pattern suggested by F. W. Copleston to the effect that there must be some difference between that situation in which an empirically meaningful proposition would be true and those in which it would be false. "We can conceive or imagine facts that would render it true or false," or "some experiential data are relevant to the formation of the idea."⁷ It cannot dogmatically be asserted that no pre-historical and no metaphysical proposition satisfies this general requirement. Nor does this criterion open the door to snarks and boojums which make no conceivable difference in any situation whether alleged to exist or not.

On such a broadened criterion, the following Biblical statements must be considered as empirically cognitive. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). The disciples' reception of the invisible Spirit on the Day of Pentecost made an experiential difference in their lives. The assertion to that effect is either true or false, and if inerrant it is true. In such a passage as Genesis 2:10-14 describing four rivers flowing out from Eden the content is not verifiable on a strict positivistic view of history. The alleged state of affairs antedates extant writing from the time and there is no known way now of confirming or disconfirming such propositions. However, if the Scriptures in fact intend to assert the actual existence of the four rivers then what does inerrancy of such statements imply? Must we not

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conclude that there were such rivers? There is conceivable empirical difference between the ancient world which had these four rivers and an ancient world which did not have them.

The Scriptures also make assertions concerning the being of God as in Exodus 3:14, "I AM THAT I AM," or Hebrews 11:6, "He that cometh to God must be. lieve that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." What does inerrancy mean in relation to these passages? Does it not imply the truth of the propositions even though they are not verifiable in the strict positivistic sense? Is it not the case that although no man has seen Him at any time, an eternally active God exists? Admitting frequent metaphor, parable, and other figures of speech, must we not acknowledge that if a concept of inerrancy applies at all, every literal assertion made by didactic passages of Scripture is true? If so, the state of affairs or the reality designated actually existed, exists, or will exist as the Scriptures specify.

Again it is impossible here to attempt anything like a full justification of this position or its enormous implications. However, a brief consideration may indicate the writer's position on some of the problems involved. To assert inerrancy, is not to assert full comprehension of any of the events or things designated. Granting propositional revelation and a high view of inspiration, we still know only in part. But we *know* in part! Following the Biblical writers can we not call knowledge of God truth?

Someone may object that the limited character of the concepts God had available as He began to reveal Himself rule out cognitive truth ontologically. A father puts things in a very circumscribed way to "get through" to his child—even to the point of distortion. How much more then does God have to abandon infinite truth to get through to finite man! Such an argument fails to take into account several important factors. God did not decide to communicate with man after all possible temporal conditions contributed to make this

⁷ F. W. Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Burns and Oates, 1956), pp. 46, 48.

impossible. Communication with man was among His eternal purposes, was it not? Providence from the moment of the first creative act worked toward the realization of that purpose in the cultures, the moral ideas, the thought patterns, and languages. Revelation was not frustrated by unforeseen limitations of earlier creative activity! On a Biblical view provision for communication was planned and equipment for it was included in the mind of man from the beginning.

Overlooking these points, Eugene Heideman argues that verbal inspiration necessarily implies fallibility. In choosing to use Hebrew, God was limited to its available erroneous concepts. The belief that the sun went round the earth and low moral concepts exemplify his point.⁸ May we ask Mr. Heideman if he has considered sufficiently the fact that truth-claims must always be evaluated in terms of the writer's purpose? It could be no part of the Biblical writer's intention to scoop Copernicus' view of the solar system. The language of phenomenal appearance (the sun going around the earth) is true within its intended realm of discourse. But what about the concept of Hebrew justice? Did not God have to make use of a crude, vengeful idea in revealing His justice? No, the principle of an eye for an eye also must be judged in its historical setting and purpose. The law did not provide freedom for all to take personal vengeance on wrongdoers. Whereas people had taken justice into their own hand the national judges were now provided with an objective law of retribution. Its point was that in Israel's courts the punishment should fit the crime, a principle not foreign to our allegedly high views of justice nor to that of the Divine judgment seat. Admittedly in the progress of revelation God took the Israelites where they were and accomplished amazing things with them for His redemptive purposes. But where they were at the

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beginning was no accident. God in His providence had long before intended the use of the Hebrew language and its concepts for a medium of His revelation to mankind.

No attempt is made here to deny that the Divine revelation does, like the Divine incarnation, stoop to man and make use of anthropic and cosmic modes of revelation. It is claimed however, that these forms of revelation are true as far as they go, and not distortive. They are true, however, not as the very archetypal ideas in the mind of God Himself, but as a copy of them expressed to man, His image. The knowledge of propositional revelation then is true as a copy or ectype of the original, because revealed truth is the object of worship. However; it is no service to worship to deny the accuracy of Biblical propositions concerning God. Neither is it the part of piety to allege that the Bible is full of nonsense.

C. NON-COGNITIVE MEANINGS

Non-cognitive propositions, according to the Analysts, are those which do not assert any matter of fact in the objective world, but simply express something about the speaker. While the earliest Positivists may have denied the meaningful ness of emotive, motivational, interrogative, exclamatory, and pictorial types of meaning, recent Analysts have extended their concept of meaning to include at least these. On this theory when a football fan screams, "Hurrah!" he is not asserting a verifiable state of affairs but simply venting his emotions and possibly seeking to evoke a similar reaction in others. Are there statements in the Bible which do not intend to assert states of affairs in publicly observable reality but rather to express the

⁸ Eugene W. Heideman, "The Inspiration of Scripture," *The Reformed Review* XV (Sept., 1961), 29.

writer's emotions? Such a meaning may be in view when a prophet like Isaiah cries, "Woe is me!" We shall not expect archaeology to confirm or disconfirm the truth of that proposition. What then does inerrancy mean for content like this? If these Biblical expressions are inerrant is not their point about the speaker or writer in fact true concerning him? Emotive meanings may be said to be inerrant in that they adequately convey what the writer felt or sought to evoke in others.

There are also in the Bible other non-cognitive materials such as motivational statements, exhortations, and commands, expressing the speaker's will and stimulating others to action. Is it not beside the point to look for confirmation or disproof of these meanings on the part of any objective science? If so, then it is irrelevant to assert their cognitive inerrancy in the sense Analysts commonly understand. However, such a phrase as "Love one another" (John 15:17) may meaningfully be considered inerrant in truly stating the speaker's will and desire. Interrogative meanings also tell us something true of the questioner. A question from Satan for example, inerrantly expresses his challenge of God's Word: "Yea hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1). Exclamations also adequately state the speaker's feeling, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, ... !" (Mt. 23:14). If such non-cognitive thoughts are inerrant do they not truly assert what was the desire, the question, and the emphatic feeling of the one who said them at the time they were spoken? Pictorial language inerrantly portrays the author's view of a given thing. The metaphor, "The tongue is a fire" (James 3:6), does not teach a literal matter of fact but vividly illustrates James' concept of the potential dangers of speech.

What then does inerrancy mean in such non-cognitive passages of the Bible? In these cases the point of infallibility is simply that we have a true assertion of what the writer felt, commanded, asked, exclaimed, or pictured. The question of whether those feelings and exclamations are exemplary or not must be determined by the context. If there is no explicit indication of approval or disapproval in the

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immediate context then we must resort to the broader context of the thought of the Bible in its entirety. The applicability of commands must be similarly judged. These non-cognitive categories of the Analysts may seem arbitrarily to exclude implicit cognitive elements in them. Men like E. L. Mascall, University Lecturer in Philosophy of Religion at Oxford, argue that there are no completely non-cognitive forms of language. Mascall goes so far as to say that art is essentially a cognitive activity revealing truth.⁹ If the non-cognitive types of meanings here listed do carry some implicit objective implications that may be regarded true or false in an external state of affairs, as the points of figures of speech clearly do, then all that we have said concerning cognitive inerrancy applies to those implications. However, what has been said concerning the inerrancy of the emotive, motivational, interrogative, exclamatory, and pictorial types of subjective meaning also holds. In other words, to the extent that the Biblical materials are non-cognitive they are here regarded as inerrant in reference to the speaker, and to the extent that they teach cognitive assertions they are also regarded as inerrant objectively. The knotty problem of determining what is cognitively taught and what is not can only be resolved in individual passages by devout scholars employing sound principles of hermeneutics and respecting the judgment of other Spirit-led exegetes throughout the Church's history.

⁹ E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1957), p. 93.

Some may fear possible consequences of leaving to interpreters the distinguishing of objectively inerrant propositions from the subjectively inerrant ones. Admitting the dangers of misinterpretation in determining the objective or subjective reference of Biblical statements, we cannot escape the responsibility. Such decisions are as unavoidable as those between what is literal and figurative, or between narratives that are exemplary and those that are not. There is no virtue in denying the necessity of facing these issues of interpretation with louder affirmations of belief in inspiration. Even a stalwart like A. T. Pierson frankly acknowledged, "Every student must observe what in Holy Scripture carries authority and what only accuracy." After citing Satan's words to Eve and the questionable counsel given Job by his friends, Pierson adds, "Even prophets and apostles apart from their character and capacity as such, being only fallible men, were liable to mistakes (I Kings 19:4; Gal. 2:11-14)." What is Pierson's conclusion? "Any theory would be absurd that clothes all words found in Scripture with equal authority or importance. But whatever is meant to convey God's thought is used with a purpose and adapted to its end, so that, as the angel said to John on Patmos: 'These are the true sayings of God' (Rev. 19:9)."¹⁰

We might well ask what criteria Pierson used to determine which narrative passages carried authority and which only accuracy of recording. In some cases, he suggests, God's disapproval is evident in the context, whereas in other cases the sentiments and acts are obviously controlled by the Holy Spirit and represent the mind and will of God. Where no such contextual indications are available the judgment must be made in accord with general Scriptural teaching on the subject. May we not suggest similar standards for judging passages cognitive or non-cognitive? If contextual evidence indicates that proposition has no cognitive import we abide by that. If an assertion which displays the characteristics of cognitive propositions is taught by Christ Himself, or prophets and apostles, the content inerrantly conveys truth concerning reality. If the context fails to clarify the cognitive intent of a proposition its intention can only be determined in accord with the general tenor of Scripture on the subject or related subjects. The interpreter who faces these issues will work with sound principles of hermeneutics and avail himself of the judgment of Spirit-led exegetes from the past as safeguards against dangerous misinterpretation.

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D. INERRANCY AND MEANINGLESSNESS OR NONSENSE

If inerrancy applies to the Bible in any respect, does it not mean that in any didactic passage there can be no nonsense? Although there may be serious assertions incapable of verification on a strict positivistic principle, if the Holy Spirit kept the thought of Scripture free from error He preserved the writers from including any assertions that were not true to the facts. Employing a broadened sense of verification, we may say that inerrancy means there is no intended assertion of Scripture which does not make some difference in the total complex of reality.

Let us sum up the discussion of inerrancy and the content of Scripture. As inspiration is applied to Scripture content it guarantees the objective inerrancy not of every thought conveyed in the Bible, but of everything cognitively taught in it.¹¹ Insofar as the Bible

¹⁰ A. T. Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures* (Los Angeles: The Biola Book Room, 1910), pp. 16-17.

¹¹ Cf. J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), p. 169, and Smede's comment.

chooses to assert the existence of scientifically verifiable or unverifiable realities, the Bible is true; the events or realities specified are actual. Furthermore there is no nonsense in Scripture. This is not to say; however, that the Bible's propositional truth is presented with twentieth century technical precision. Its accuracy must be judged in terms of the writer's own purpose. Needless to say the Bible writers' purpose was not to address specialists in an honorary scientific society. In accord with the popular purpose, if the Scriptures are inerrant at all, we must conclude their didactic assertions are true. Furthermore non-cognitive assertions about the speaker or writer are held to be inerrant for their particular purposes. From the consideration of the content of Scripture; we turn to a discussion of the verbal expressions through which the meanings are conveyed.

III. INFALLIBILITY AND USES OF LANGUAGE

Infallibility is here used to emphasize the non-failing character of God's written Word as a vehicle for its meanings. This concept applies fruitfully to Biblical sentences. The Word of God through the prophets and apostles will not return void; it will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it. (Isa. 55:11). Not one jot or tittle will fail until all God purposed through it is fulfilled (Mt. 5:17-18; Lk. 16:17; Jn. 10:35).

How then does infallibility apply to informative sentences which convey formal or empirical truth? B. B. Warfield has well stated the point. "Inspiration is a means to an end and not an end in itself; if the truth is conveyed accurately to the ear that listens to it, its end is obtained."¹² In other words to assert the infallibility of Scripture is to assert that it is grammatically adequate in conveying the Divinely intended meanings." A sentence is grammatically adequate when it clearly articulates meaning, and it is grammatically inadequate when it does not do so."¹³

Viewed in this light, the writers' sentences are infallible even though their purpose may be not to present cognitive propositions, but to convey non-cognitive meanings. Thus, non-informative sentences are clear and adequate to their respective tasks. Emotive expressions in the poetical books are as infallible as empirically informative statements in Acts. The directive sentences of the ten commandments are as infallible as the informative statement that God cannot deny Himself. The meaning of questions is conveyed as accurately as the content of John 3:16. Exclamations clearly portray the intended spirit; and figures of speech adequately present their point. All of the Bible, whatever its kinds of sentences, is equally infallible and equally effective in conveying the various meanings intended by the Holy Spirit through the inspired writers. From the fact that the Bible contains no nonsense it follows that the writers were preserved from penning any psuedo sentences.

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As a result of this understanding of infallibility we may appreciate the reformers' doctrine of the Scriptures' perspicacity. In terms common to our generation would not the reformers assert that the Bible is capable of adequately accomplishing its goal of communication apart from any external interpretive authority?

¹² B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), p. 438.

¹³ Ben F. Kimpel, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

In view of contemporary understanding of the limitations of culturally conditioned languages is such a concept of infallibility tenable? Are the grammatical structures of Hebrew and Greek so readily adaptable for mediating the Divine meanings? Many contemporary theories of the origin of language assume that meaningful sounds evolved from earlier grunts, and all terms were devised with physical or phenomenal referents. If that be assumed, it is indeed difficult to transmit infinite meanings through finite vocables. But must a Bible believer accept the naturalistic theories of the origin of language? Eugene Nida assumes that we must.¹⁴ He claims that language was first used for the naming of animals. And language originated not by God's naming of them but Adam's. This he argues means that language is primarily a human convention participating in the finiteness of all that is human. We would not deny that the naming of the animals may be the origin of certain human words, but what of the communication between God and Adam? Dialogue between God and man presupposes that two-way conversation is possible. May not the Bible-believer also hold that God created man's capacity for linguistic communication? Of course this is impossible on a positivistic world view! But on a theistic world view, Gordon Clark argues, God created man and revealed Himself to him in words. Language is adequate for theology.¹⁵

It may be well then to observe some of the advantages of the view proposed in this paper for the use and understanding of the terms infallibility and inerrancy. One benefit of regarding truth a quality of propositions rather than sentences is a diminishing of the problem of some of the variations in the Gospel accounts, in other historical passages relating to the same event (Kings and Chronicles) and in the New Testament wordings of Old Testament references. One and the same logical content can be expressed by different wordings; i.e., active or passive, direct or indirect discourse, (etc.). The major point of inerrancy is to assert the truth of the meaning rather than the wording. Verbal inspiration in this context stresses the functional value of whatever sentences are used to convey accurately the intended meaning. Verbal inspiration would not imply that alternative expressions are necessarily falsifying.

A second value of this analysis may be a clarification of the role of the witness of the Holy Spirit. A factual or cognitive proposition has both an intension and an extension. "Its intension is its meaning. Its extension is the reality to which its meaning refers."¹⁶ Independently of the gracious witness of the Holy Spirit a grammarian can examine Biblical sentences and a logician analyze their precise intension. But only via the witness of the Holy Spirit can any man come into personal communion with God Himself, the reality to whom the sentences refer. This at any rate was Augustine's view of illumination which stimulated Calvin's thought on the testimony of the Spirit.

What then are the conclusions of this paper?

(1) Although there is a clear distinction today between meaning and sentences, inspiration may be viewed as implying neither merely conceptual or merely verbal supervision on the part of the Holy Spirit. Inspiration in this realm of discourse applies to both content and wording, meanings and sentences.

¹⁴ Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), pp. 224-25 as summarized by Eugene Heideman, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Gordon H. Clark, Religion, *Reason and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1961) p. 146.

¹⁶ Kimpel, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

(2) "Inerrancy" may be used most clearly for meanings which are cognitively taught by those with delegated authority as spokesmen for God, and for non-cognitive meanings relating to the speakers themselves.

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(3) "Infallibility" most helpfully designates the verbal media of the Scriptures as effective communicators of the Spirit-intended meaning through the Biblical writings.

(4) All that is written in Scripture is infallible. All that Scripture teaches cognitively is objectively true. All that Scripture teaches non-cognitively is subjectively true, i.e. true of the one whose idea is expressed. This then is a plenary view of verbal inspiration; all sentences are infallible, and all meanings are inerrant for their respective purposes.

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