DIFFICULTIES WITH INERRANCY

ROBERT L. SAUCY, Th.D.

It is not our present purpose to attempt to discuss in detail the whole gamut of problems connected with the inspiration of Scripture, but rather to examine briefly some of the major objections, methods, and thoughts behind these.

The charges against the inerrancy of the Scriptures can be broadly categorized under two heads: Historical-Critical and Theological. Which of these is prior and which dependent on the other is perhaps open to question, but both have an affinity in their esteem of human opinion.

Difficulties arise from the area of the Historical-Critical, not because these areas have uncovered any new demonstrable facts contradictory to the words of Scripture, but because they come from what has been termed a revolutionary historical approach to the Bible. The essence of this new approach is the application of a naturalistic historical development methodology to the contents of the word of God. The Bible is approached as any other book and scrutinized with the tools of modern and often spiritually uncommitted scholarship. The biblical writers are historically enmeshed into their fallible human environment in varying degrees both as to form and content of their message. Thus a supernatural inspiration is denied and the doctrine destroyed with charges of error.

The radical conclusions of this method are not accepted by all advocates of an errant Bible today, but much of the erroneous methodology is. We refer to the plea for an inductive examination of the phenomena of Scripture. Most certainly, inductive methodology must not be discarded in ascertaining the doctrine of inspiration, but it must include a thorough induction of the Bible's own relevant data on the subject. The modern advocates of errancy claim adherence to this principle as Beegle affirms, "A truly Biblical formulation of inspiration must give equal weight to the teaching and to the facts of Scripture." But one looks in vain through his recent study of the subject for a thorough inductive study of the Scriptural doctrine or of a reckoning with the exegetical studies of those who have made such studies. The problem with the modern inductive approach is just this: it imposes the contemporary scientific method of natural man upon the word of God and makes it the standard of truth and error. The Bible is approached from outside of the faith as any

human book, and the critical methods of humanistic unbelief are made
the judge of all biblical data. Whatever does not square with contempo-
rary knowledge is wrong.  

It is not only the acceptance of the a prioris of unbelief that leads to
difficulties with inerrancy, but also the imposition of modern technical
thought patterns upon the general nontechnical statements of Scripture.
As genuine critical scholarship reveals the ancient methodologies of bib-
lical times, many of these difficulties disappear. 4 The data of the Bible must
be judged by its own standards.

Unless one is willing to accept the radical naturalistic historical
development a priori, modern scholarship on a factual basis has revealed
few if any difficulties that have not been known for centuries and
answered effectively in various ways. On the contrary, new research is
gradually decreasing biblical difficulties and giving stronger support to
the belief that the difficulties yet remaining are due not to error, but
to lack of knowledge.

It appears then that the empirical problems raised today are done
so only to buttress other deeper objections of theology and philosophy.
This is quite evident when for example, Thielicke answers the question
of biblical inerrancy negatively without mention of any historical data
and makes it a point of doing so. 5 From theology it is charged that an
inerrant inspiration denies the humanity of the word of God and is
in fact guilty of Docetism. 6 It denies the "gracious condescension of God
into our history." 7

In order to more fully justify this charge, the doctrine of verbal
inspiration is often grotesquely caricatured into some theory of mechanical
dictation. "Because he [God] thus enters into a history with us," Thielicke
says, "he moves the hearts of his servants and is not content merely to
guide their pen or goose quill for them." 8 Such a statement by itself might
be ignored as jesting hyperbole, but he goes on to dogmatize:

This is actually the way in which the advocates of the doctrine
of verbal inspiration conceived it to have happened. What this was,
expressed in modern terms, was a fantastic idea of heavenly cyber-
netics in which God was the guide of a process of automatic
writing. 9

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. For full discussion see B. B. Warfield, "The Real Problem of Inspiration," in
The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and
Reformed Publishing Company, 1948); Theodore Engelhard, Scripture Cannot Be
Blacked (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), pp. 30-78.
7. Ibid., p. 9; Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I, 2, 509-10
9. Ibid., p. 6
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
1955), p. 27.
14. Beegle, op. cit., p. 84
15. Cf. E. J. Young, The Word is Truth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans
16. See Klaas Runia, Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture (Grand Rapids, Michi-
Peter said, “Thou hast the words of eternal life” (Jn. 6:68). The disciples encountered the person of Christ through infallible historical words. There is no reason to deny the same process today.

Coupled with the exaltation of Christ and a personal relationship to Him is the subtle suggestion that inerrancy is after all a minor issue and actually dangerous to personal faith. Christianity is Christ, He will take care of His word. Thielicke states this forcefully in parable form. The disciples are out with Christ on the sea of Galilee. While Christ sleeps the disciples are “Prowling about the ship, listening to the creaking in the ship’s sides and peering from the railings into the water to see whether they can discover some Bult- or frogman down there boring a hole in the ship’s side.” The fundamentalist, he concludes, is worrying about the ship even though the Lord is in it. He has reversed the true order of interest.” With the same reasoning, Barth makes verbal inspiration simply a product of rationalism as opposed to faith.

Finally the doctrine of inerrancy is charged with hindering the work of the church, a charge which no Christian relishes. After reminding us that we need to be about the affairs of God’s Kingdom proclaiming the gospel, Beegle pictures the doctrine of inerrancy as a “sound barrier” as it were,” which “if we can get through...we will be ready to challenge the tremendous moral and spiritual problems that confront us on every side.” Unfortunately, this near-sighted concern has a certain neutralizing effect on the maintenance of the doctrine of inerrancy among those oriented toward involvement on a minimal doctrinal basis.

The present controversy over inerrancy as far as we can see has revealed no new factual basis for departing from the orthodox stand. The issue today is much the same as that expressed by Warfield in his day and in fact extends back to the garden of Eden—the Word of God versus the word of man. The scholarly and the scientific have saturated our time in all areas including the Bible. In this milieu it behooves every believer to make certain to whom he is listening.

Talbot Theological Seminary
Anaheim, Calif.

17. Thielicke, op. cit., pp. 33-34.
18. Barth, op. cit., IV, 1, 368.
19. Beegle, op. cit., p. 188.