

THE DIVINE SPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE¹

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INTRODUCTION

There are many difficult issues to which Christian theologians must give attention but it seems to me that, at the present time, none is more vital than the doctrine of Scripture. I say this because what we believe about Scripture determines what we believe about everything else. If we take the view that the Scriptures are God given and without error then our views on every other subject will be determined with reference to Scripture. It stands to reason that, if God has spoken and if what he said has been written down under the supervisory action of the Holy Spirit, then the Scriptures become the final authority for decision-making and the ultimate arbiter of truth. If, on the other hand, we believe that the Scriptures are simply an interesting record of what Jews and Christians have believed over the centuries but that these beliefs are not binding upon believers today, then we may reach quite different decisions in respect of doctrine, ethics and the life of faith.

Over the past 150 years, the churches have been deeply affected by types of theology which do not accept the orthodox doctrine of Scripture. The dramatic changes in philosophy and theology in the years since the Enlightenment have brought the doctrine of Scripture into very sharp relief. There is a sense in which one of the early Church Fathers, together with one of the sixteenth-century magisterial Reformers and, for example, a seventeenth-century Scottish minister, might happily have agreed together on the doctrine of Scripture. That harmony and unity has all been changed by the Enlightenment, the birth of Liberal Theology, the philosophical influence of existentialism and, even more so, by the recent advent of such views as postmodernism and relativism.

It is no longer even possible to take it for granted that those who call themselves 'evangelical' or 'Reformed' will hold to the same position on Scripture that was held by those who were described in this way even forty years ago and this should give us real cause for concern. No wonder, then, that Francis Schaeffer's last book was called *The Great Evangelical*

¹ Publishers' names are included in bibliographical information in the footnotes of this article at the author's request.

*Disaster*² in which he argued that evangelicals had abandoned a truly evangelical view of the Bible and were giving way to existentialist and neo-orthodox views. In that book Schaeffer said that our view of the Bible is the 'Watershed of the Evangelical World'. In other words, it is a defining position, such that our view of Scripture determines whether or not we are truly evangelical.

RECONSTRUCTING THE EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

With these concerns in mind, for some time now I have been working on a book on the doctrine of Scripture. This paper, which in an earlier form was part of a lecture given at the 2003 Scottish Evangelical Theology Society conference, is a summary of the main themes being developed in that book. In seeking to re-state and defend the orthodox doctrine of Scripture at the beginning of the twenty-first century, I hope to show that several key aspects of the doctrine of Scripture can be approached in a different and more theologically productive manner.

Principally, my argument is that we need to focus much more on the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture. This is best achieved, I will suggest, by a recasting of the vocabulary used in our construction of the doctrine of Scripture. First, I will argue that we should cease to use the word 'inspiration', both on exegetical grounds and because of the confusion which arises through modern English usage of the word. My suggestion is that we replace it with the expression 'divine spiration'. Second, I will argue that we should cease to use the word 'inerrancy' as the primary expression of our defence of the authority of Scripture, using instead the word 'veracity', although retaining 'inerrancy' as a useful limiting concept. Third, I will argue that we should cease to use the word 'illumination', because it is open to misunderstanding, opting instead for the words 'recognition' and 'comprehension'.

It would be a brave scholar who would argue that evangelicals have always brought clarity to discussions on the doctrine of Scripture. Through a failure to understand the differences between evangelicalism and fundamentalism,³ through a failure to engage with biblical scholarship and sometimes through sheer obscurantist and anti-intellectual approaches, evangelicals have often damaged rather than helped the case for the

² *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), Vol. 4, 301-405.

³ See my forthcoming essay 'Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism', *Reformed Theological Journal* 20 (2004).

authority of Scripture. As evangelicals, we must argue for our position on biblical and theological grounds, rather than falling back upon tradition or fundamentalism. We do not properly state and defend the evangelical doctrine of Scripture by retreating into an untenable ghetto mentality, ignoring genuine matters of concern. Rather, we must engage with those who take a different position and we must do so graciously.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is my view that, although evangelicals have spoken about the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture, there has been insufficient emphasis upon this theme. My recasting of the vocabulary of the doctrine seeks to place the emphasis where it rightly belongs. When the apostle Peter addressed himself specifically to the question of the origins of Scripture, his answer focussed on the Holy Spirit. He wrote, 'knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:20-21 ESV). Let us be very clear about what is being taught here: Peter is saying that the writers of the Bible did not simply sit down one day and decide to write something for posterity. Rather, they were under the constraint of the Holy Spirit. They could do no other! In other words, Peter is here testifying to the divine origin of the Bible in the work of God the Holy Spirit. As we shall see later, the work of the Holy Spirit is also the key both to recognising Scripture *as* Scripture and also to understanding its meaning and significance. With that in mind, let us recast some vocabulary!

1. Divine Spiration

The use of the word 'inspiration' in relation to Scripture is problematic for two reasons. The first problem is that, as a translation of the Greek word *theopneustos*, it is exegetically inaccurate. In our English language translations of 2 Timothy 3:16, until the New International Version was published, the Greek word *theopneustos* was routinely rendered as 'inspired' but this is not a good translation. The word *theopneustos* literally means 'God-breathed' (as in the NIV) and the word 'inspiration' does not adequately and clearly convey this meaning.

The second reason for saying that the word 'inspiration' is problematic is related to modern English usage. Today, when people say that a poet, or an author, or a musician or a painter was 'inspired', they mean that there was a remarkable heightening of that artist's natural powers, enabling the

completion of a work of genius. There is normally no suggestion that this work of genius originated in the mind of God! Unfortunately, there is a tendency among those who write on the doctrine of inspiration to assume precisely the same meaning of 'inspired' when speaking about the authors of Scripture.⁴ Over against this, we must affirm exegetically that *theopneustos* is not speaking about the authors of Scripture but of the Scriptures themselves. In other words, the claim is not being made that the authors were 'inspired' but rather that the Scriptures were 'God-breathed'.⁵

For this reason, I propose that we abandon the word inspiration. When I initially reached this conclusion, I thought that we should use the word 'expiration', because that clearly has the connotation of 'breathed out'. Unfortunately, as my colleague Dr Alistair Wilson pointed out, it also has the connotation of a *final* breathing out, indeed a terminal breathing out! I then reached the conclusion that we should use the word 'spiration'. When I shared this idea with Alistair he wanted to know if it was in the dictionary – although he graciously conceded that to invent a word was acceptable! My decision to opt for this word was helpfully supported when I went to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* where the word 'spiration' appears.⁶ It is defined there as, 'The creative function of the deity conceived as the action of breathing.'⁷ Professor David Wright later expressed the view that an adjective was needed⁸ and so I intend to speak of 'divine spiration'.⁹

⁴ In the book I am writing there will be a chapter comparing views on inspiration from a range of writers, including J. K. S. Reid, G. C. Berkouwer, Donald Bloesch, I. H. Marshall, W. J. Abraham and Peter Jensen.

⁵ I fully understand that these claims are related but they are, nevertheless, quite distinct.

⁶ It is not in every dictionary, not even in every version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁷ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959 reprint).

⁸ In private correspondence following a discussion at the SETS conference.

⁹ I am still pondering the interesting suggestion of my colleague Dr Nick Needham, who says that this expression might have other beneficial consequences by anchoring the work of the Spirit in relation to Scripture in a trinitarian ontology. In trinitarian theology, spiration refers to the action of the Father, who eternally spirates – breathes forth – the Spirit. Could one say that the spiration of Scripture is also an action of the Father through the Spirit? For example, when we breathe, breath (spirit) is not necessarily all that comes out. Our breath can also form a word. Could it be that the Father breathes out (spirates) the Word through the Breath (Spirit)?

As I indicated earlier, by using the expression 'divine spiration' instead of the word 'inspiration', we can emphasise more clearly the action of God the Holy Spirit in producing the Scriptures. We are affirming that the Scriptures had their origin in the mind and action of God and that they constitute a revelation from him. God the Holy Spirit is the Person within the godhead who enables this revelation to take place.

2. *Veracity*

Having argued that we should speak of 'divine spiration', rather than of 'inspiration', it is now necessary to consider another difficult word, namely, 'inerrancy'. Given the sensitivity which often surrounds the use of this word, particularly in the USA (less so in Europe) and given that it has often become a test of orthodoxy, we must begin by setting the use of the term 'inerrancy' in its historical and controversial context.

The doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture became a rallying point for those evangelicals who were opposed to 'Modernism', the name given to post-Enlightenment views, the theological expression of which was Liberal Theology. It is still a key word today in identifying a community of believers and scholars who share a worldview in which the teaching of Scripture is the final determining factor in all of our theological, ecclesiastical and personal decision-making.¹⁰

Classic expression was given to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture by B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge, professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, in an article entitled 'Inspiration', first published in 1881.¹¹ In that 1881 article, Hodge and Warfield gave expression to the doctrine of inerrancy, although without using that word. As Roger Nicole points out, 'the words *inerrant* and *inerrancy* do not occur, although the terms *errorless* and *without error* are repeatedly used by both writers and the whole intent of the article is to make it clear that the superintendence of God in Scripture guarantees the errorless infallibility of all scriptural affirmations'.¹² They argued that the *autographa*, that is, the original manuscripts of the biblical books as penned by the authors, were entirely without error.

¹⁰ For example, it is required for membership in many organisations, not least the Evangelical Theological Society in the USA.

¹¹ 'Inspiration', *Presbyterian Review* 2 (1881), pp. 225-60. This article was more explicit than but not contrary to, the views earlier expressed by Charles Hodge in his own article of the same name: 'Inspiration', *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 29 (1857), pp. 660-98.

¹² A. A. Hodge & B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. xiv.

Warfield went on to write a great deal on the doctrine of Scripture.¹³ Indeed, the subject was of primary concern to him, not least because of the battles raging within the Presbyterian Church over this very issue.¹⁴ In particular, he responded to those who argued for a 'Limited Inspiration' view, notably Henry Preserved Smith who was found guilty of heresy because of his views on Scripture, which he made public in defence of Charles Briggs.¹⁵ It also became a distinguishing mark of the theological position held by those who taught at Princeton Theological Seminary.¹⁶

Hodge and Warfield did not imagine that they were saying anything new, merely spelling out the orthodox doctrine of Scripture in order to resist the encroachments of a more Liberal position. As far as they were concerned, this had always been the position of Reformed theologians and indeed of the whole Christian church, until relatively recently. The historian Mark Noll agrees,

¹³ The first volume of the Oxford edition of Warfield's collected writings and the first volume of the later Presbyterian & Reformed edition of Warfield's collected writings were both devoted to the doctrine of Scripture: *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927); *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948). See also the 1979 reprint of the 1881 article on 'Inspiration' in a volume edited and with an introduction by Roger Nicole. This volume contains a number of useful bibliographical and other appendices: A. A. Hodge & B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979). For a more complete list of Warfield's writings see J. E. Meeter and Roger R. Nicole, *A Bibliography of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, 1851-1921* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974).

¹⁴ Professor Charles Briggs of Union Theological Seminary, New York, who was found guilty of heresy due to his denial of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture and suspended from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in 1893, was co-editor with Warfield of the *Presbyterian Review*. For an analysis of the Briggs case, see Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), pp. 48-62.

¹⁵ See Henry Preserved Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy: A History and a Defense* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co, 1893). Warfield's response to Smith, entitled 'Professor Henry Preserved Smith, on Inspiration', was originally published in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* in January 1894. It was more recently published, with an introduction by J. Marcellus Kik, as: B. B. Warfield, *Limited Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962).

¹⁶ M. A. Noll (ed.), *The Princeton Defense of Plenary Verbal Inspiration* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1988).

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Most Christians in most churches since the founding of Christianity have believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. Or at least they have believed that the Scriptures are inspired by God, and so are the words of eternal life. The term *inerrancy* was not common until the nineteenth century. But the conviction that God communicates in Scripture a revelation of himself and of his deeds, and that this revelation is entirely truthful, has always been the common belief of most Catholics, most Protestants, most Orthodox, and even most of the sects of the fringe of Christianity.¹⁷

There were, of course, some who rejected this doctrine of inerrancy, despite being close to Hodge and Warfield on other doctrines. James Orr, the Scottish theologian who contributed to *The Fundamentals* and who, as editor of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*,¹⁸ invited Warfield to contribute the article on 'Inspiration', nevertheless, rejected Warfield's doctrine of inerrancy. He spelled out his opposition to this doctrine in his book *Revelation and Inspiration*.¹⁹ Orr held a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture but did not believe that it was wise, or even possible, to speak of inerrancy. His own view was that inspiration must be set and understood in the context of revelation, whereas he understood the inerrantists to be arguing that you must first prove inspiration and then go on to talk about revelation. He notes,

It is urged, e.g., that unless we can demonstrate what is called the 'inerrancy' of the Biblical record, down even to its minutest details, the whole edifice of belief in revealed religion falls to the ground. This, on the face of it, is a most suicidal position for any defender of revelation to take up. It is certainly a much easier matter to prove the reality of a divine revelation in the history of Israel, or in Christ, than it is to prove the inerrant inspiration of every part of the record through which that revelation has come to us.²⁰

He was particularly concerned that, if someone should choose to use the term 'inerrancy', they should not regard it as being of the very 'essence' of the doctrine of inspiration. He writes,

¹⁷ Mark Noll, 'A Brief History of Inerrancy, mostly in America', in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), pp. 9, 10.

¹⁸ 'Inspiration', in James Orr (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915).

¹⁹ J. Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), pp. 197-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.197-8.

such 'inerrancy' can never be demonstrated with a cogency which entitles it to rank as the foundation of a belief in inspiration. It must remain to those who hold it a doctrine of faith; a deduction from what they deem to be implied in an inspiration established independently of it; not a ground of belief in the inspiration.²¹

Orr was also very reluctant to use the expression 'verbal inspiration', noting that it 'is one to which so great ambiguity attaches that it is now very commonly avoided by careful writers'.²² While recognising the problems caused by this ambiguity, he does recognise the positive value of what is normally being affirmed when the phrase is used:

It opposes the theory that revelation and inspiration have regard only to thoughts and ideas, while the language in which these ideas are clothed is left to the unaided faculties of the sacred penman. This is a defective view. Thought of necessity takes shape and is expressed in words. If there is inspiration at all, it must penetrate words as well as thought, must mould the expression, and make the language employed the living medium of the idea to be conveyed.²³

Nevertheless, he goes on to say,

'Verbal inspiration', however, is often taken to mean much more than this. It is apt to suggest a *mechanical* theory of inspiration, akin to dictation, which all intelligent upholders of inspiration now agree in repudiating. In the result it may be held to imply a *literality* in narratives, quotations, or reports of discourses, which the facts, as we know them, do not warrant.²⁴

In illustrating this point, he treads a difficult route, which seems almost to contradict what he has already said about inspiration extending beyond the ideas of Scripture to the very words themselves. He writes, 'It is well known that in the reports of Christ's words in the Synoptic Gospels there is often a very considerable variation in expression – a difference in phraseology – while yet the *idea* conveyed in all the forms is the same. At most one side or another of the truth is brought out with slightly different emphasis.'²⁵

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁵ *Idem.*

Recently, however, some have gone even further in their criticism of Warfield's position and argued that the doctrine of inerrancy, far from being the historic position of the Reformed church, was, in fact, a creation of Warfield's or that of his contemporaries. Professor Ernest Sandeen, for example, argued strongly that inerrancy originated with Warfield and certain other nineteenth-century theologians.²⁶ The most significant proponent of this view has been Jack Rogers. In his doctoral thesis, written under the supervision of G. C. Berkouwer, he argued that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* ought not to be interpreted as teaching the doctrine of inerrancy.²⁷ This was followed by a much more sustained attack on the doctrine of inerrancy, from an historical basis, in a book co-written with Donald McKim.²⁸ In this book they argued that there could be traced a 'Central Christian Tradition' concerning the doctrine of Scripture which was held by all major theologians, including the Early Church Fathers and the Reformers and which was contrary to the doctrine of inerrancy. This 'Central Christian Tradition' stands between the extremes of rationalism and mysticism, which have been seen in every age of the church. In this 'Central Christian Tradition', the Bible is to be accepted by faith and not by rational proofs; it is not to be regarded as authoritative in matters of science or on other subjects but rather as a means of salvation. The Bible must be viewed also in terms of the concept of 'accommodation', that is, the affirmation that God has spoken to us in ways which we as sinful human beings can understand. Therefore, to 'erect a standard of modern, technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church'.²⁹

They argued that Barth, Berkouwer and the 1967 Confession produced by the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, are the true representatives of this 'Central Christian Tradition' and therefore the true successors of Calvin and the Reformed tradition. The principal argument of Rogers and McKim is that, in the nineteenth century, Princeton Theological Seminary

²⁶ Ernest R. Sandeen, 'The Princeton Theology: One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism', *Church History*, Vol. 31 (1962), pp. 307-21; and Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

²⁷ Jack B. Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession: A Problem of Historical Interpretation for American Presbyterianism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

²⁸ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

(described as 'old Princeton' to distinguish it from the post-1929 institution, after J. G. Machen and others had departed to form Westminster Theological Seminary) developed the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. It did so, we are told, for two principal reasons. First, because it used Francis Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* as its textbook in systematic theology; and second, because the philosophical basis for its theology was the Scottish philosophy, often called 'Common Sense Realism'.³⁰

Specifically rejecting the doctrine of inerrancy as taught by Hodge and Warfield, they write,

If evangelicalism is to be a creative and renewing force in American life, it must come to historical clarity concerning the authority and interpretation of the Bible. Until now, the heavy hand of the Princeton theology has prevented that from happening. Because of its pervasive influence in American evangelical theology, few have dared to challenge the Princeton theology's post-Reformation scholastic theory concerning the Bible. Those who self-consciously hold to the old Princeton position continue to assert that it is the historic Christian, and Reformed approach. The large majority of evangelicals are far from the Princeton position in their actual use of Scripture. Most thoughtful evangelicals, for example, accept the usefulness of responsible biblical criticism. But because they have no alternative theory, they continue to hold to the Hodge-Warfield apologetic, which was designed to deny any scholarly contextual study. Evangelicals are often reminded of the dangers of liberal subjectivism. In a sincere desire to avoid that extreme, they claim the rationalistic scholasticism of old Princeton as their theory, even though their practice is far from it.³¹

The notion that Warfield, of all people, was against scholarly contextual study is an astonishing claim given his continued and vigorous engagement with the scholarship of his day and his promotion of solid academic study of the Scriptures.

The Rogers/McKim view has been challenged by those evangelicals who are committed to the doctrine of inerrancy.³² The most significant volume published in response to Rogers and McKim came from John

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 460, 461.

³² Randall H. Balmer, 'The Princetonians and Scripture: A Reconsideration' *WTJ* (1982), pp. 352-65. Also, John D. Woodbridge and Randall H. Balmer, 'The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal', in D. A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge (eds.), *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), pp. 251-79).

Woodbridge.³³ He argues against the Rogers/McKim proposal on two grounds. First, he says that Rogers and McKim have partly misunderstood and partly misrepresented the history of the doctrine of biblical authority. His historical analysis is very persuasive and those points where he demonstrates that Rogers and McKim have quoted inaccurately, incompletely or out of context, are well made.

His second main argument is that Rogers and McKim, far from putting forward the historic Reformed position, were rather proponents of a particular theological perspective, namely, the theology of Berkouwer. On this point, Woodbridge writes,

Nevertheless, it is not an adequate survey of the history of biblical authority. Rather it constitutes a revisionist piece of literature that apparently attempts to interpret the history of biblical authority with the categories of the later Berkouwer. Because those categories do not find antecedents in large tracts of the history of the Christian churches, Rogers and McKim's own proposal becomes forced and not very reliable.³⁴

One of the aspects of the Rogers/McKim proposal which Woodbridge did not deal with in any great detail, was the argument that the Princeton theologians developed a doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture because, *inter alia*, they built their theology on the Scottish philosophy of Thomas Reid (1710-1796), often called Common Sense philosophy or Common Sense Realism.³⁵ There is no doubt that the Princetonians were indebted to Common Sense Realism and used it as a basis for some of their thinking.³⁶ Were Rogers and McKim correct, however, in arguing that it played a major part in determining their theological system and, more specifically, in providing the basis for their doctrine of inerrancy?

³³ John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority, A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.151.

³⁵ For a detailed study of Common Sense Realism see: S. A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960).

³⁶ See Paul Helm on the Common Sense Philosophy in Hendrik Hart, Johan Van Der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1983). For its impact on one Princetonian see: James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890).

Dr J. Ligon Duncan III has responded to this argument and demonstrated cogently that it is not substantial.³⁷ Interestingly, he demonstrated that Common Sense Realism was also the philosophical basis for the theologians at Yale, Harvard and Andover, who certainly did not teach inerrancy.³⁸ He also pointed out that Thomas Reid himself was a 'Moderate' Church of Scotland minister who would have had little sympathy for the Princeton school of theology. Duncan examines four nineteenth-century American Presbyterians: two Princeton theologians, Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield and two southern presbyterian theologians, Robert Lewis Dabney and James Henley Thornwell, all of whom believed in the inerrancy of Scripture. His intention was to examine what influence Common Sense Realism had upon their theology. He concluded that Common Sense Realism cannot be regarded as the source of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. He writes, 'Common Sense Philosophy's greatest contributions to nineteenth-century American Presbyterianism were in language, epistemology, apologetics, and methodology. At the same time, Realism contributed little to their theology or their view of Scripture.'³⁹

Duncan sets his response to Rogers and McKim in the overall context of this examination of these four presbyterian theologians. He outlines nine propositions, drawn from Rogers and McKim, in relation to the influence of Common Sense Realism on Princeton theology in general and the doctrine of inerrancy in particular.⁴⁰ Having concluded his case studies of the four theologians, he responds to the nine propositions point by point.⁴¹ He then concludes that,

³⁷ J. Ligon Duncan III, *Common Sense and American Presbyterianism: An Evaluation of the Impact of Scottish Realism on Princeton and the South* (MA Thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1987). Compare another shorter study on this area: D. Clair Davis, 'Princeton and Inerrancy: The Nineteenth-Century Philosophical Background of Contemporary Concerns', in John D. Hannah (ed.), *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 359-78.

³⁸ This is to say nothing of the fact that some common sense realists were not Protestants at all. For example, see the fascinating study comparing Thomas Reid and the French Jesuit philosopher, Claude Buffier: Louise Marciel-Lacoste, *Claude Buffier and Thomas Reid, Two Common Sense Philosophers* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982).

³⁹ Duncan, *op. cit.*, p.109.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-13.

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Almost all the problems in the Rogers and McKim interpretation of Common Sense's influence at Princeton can be traced to their unhistorical approach to the subject. They are not primarily interested in understanding Common Sense Philosophy's influence, but in securing a polemic against the Princeton doctrine of Scripture. This deficient approach is reflected in some of the characteristics of Rogers and McKim's analysis.⁴²

It was precisely to answer the Rogers/McKim proposal and similar questions that the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was set up. In October 1978, under the auspices of the Council, 300 theologians and church leaders met at Chicago to affirm their position. They produced *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*⁴³ and that statement remains today the position held by many evangelicals. The strength of the statement was that it not only said what its authors believed about inerrancy but also noted what they did not believe, in a series of Articles of Affirmation and Denial.

Personally, I am very happy to affirm my belief in the inerrancy of Scripture as defined by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy but I increasingly feel that the term is more useful as a limiting concept than as the main vehicle for defining what we believe about Scripture. My proposal is that we use the word 'veracity' on most occasions when we might otherwise use 'inerrancy' and that we retain the word inerrancy for discussions about the *autographa* and as a boundary marker. My intention in this is to emphasise that the content of Scripture is truth given by the Holy Spirit. The word 'inerrancy' often leads to somewhat sterile discussions about *autographa*, texts and versions and misses the main point, which is that the Scriptures are true because they have come to us from God the Holy Spirit. Also, 'inerrancy' refers only to the *autographa*, which we do not possess, whereas 'veracity' can be used to refer to the Bible versions we *do* have, given a proper understanding of inerrancy and of the providence of God.

There are many evangelicals who believe in the authority of Scripture but who are not prepared to use the word inerrancy. Often these evangelicals have a 'high' view of Scripture but they are not persuaded that we ought to speak of inerrancy. James Orr was in this category, as we have seen. Some have concerns about the *term* inerrancy and others about the *concept* of inerrancy. These evangelicals give a range of reasons for their unwillingness to use the word or concept of inerrancy.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴³ The statement is found in various places including: J. I. Packer, *God has Spoken* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), pp. 139-55.

Those who are unhappy with the *term* inerrancy use the following arguments:

1. It is not a biblical word.
2. It is not required by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* nor by the other main confessional statements in use in the churches.
3. It is not used in the famous A. A. Hodge/ B. B. Warfield article on 'Inspiration', which many evangelicals affirm as representing their view of Scripture.
4. Its use is relatively recent in origin.

Those who are unhappy with the *concept* of inerrancy use the following arguments:

1. If textual inerrancy is so vital, why did God not preserve the *autographa* or precise copies?
2. If inerrancy only applies to the *autographa* (which we do not have) then surely it is a somewhat irrelevant issue?
3. If it takes about fifteen pages for the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy to state and defend the meaning of the word 'inerrancy', then surely there must be a question over its usefulness?
4. In defending inerrancy, how do we deal with the Synoptic Problem and other similar issues?
5. The amount of time, energy and writing which is required to defend the inerrancy of biblical statements which appear to conflict with geographical, historical and scientific facts is neither justified nor productive.
6. If God is able to use the errant copies (manuscripts and translations), which we actually have, why do we invest so much theological capital in hypothetical originals which we do not have?

These are all important questions and we must either find cogent answers to them or we must revisit our use of the term 'inerrancy'. There are, of course, good arguments put forward in favour of the term 'inerrancy'. Essentially, these arguments fall into two categories. There are those who believe that the doctrine of inerrancy is directly taught in Scripture and there are those who believe that inerrancy is a necessary implicate and

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consequence of believing that the Scriptures are God-breathed. Inerrantists themselves can be divided into three groups. First, there are those whom we might call 'Fundamentalist Inerrantists', who reject all textual criticism, are largely anti-academic, sometimes tend towards dictation theories and usually argue that the *King James Version* of the Bible is the only legitimate version. Second, there are those whom we might call '*Textus Receptus* Inerrantists', who offer a detailed textual argument in favour of the view that the *autographa* are accurately represented by (and only by) the so-called *Textus Receptus*.⁴⁴ Third, there are those whom we might call 'Chicago Inerrantists', being those who can affirm the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy as produced by the International Council for Biblical Inerrancy.

In my view, the position held by the Fundamentalist Inerrantists is not tenable. We cannot bury our heads in the sand and ignore the fact that the Bibles we use are translations, which are based on Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic texts and that these texts themselves vary considerably. For example, no two manuscripts of the New Testament, of which we have around 5000, are identical. Scholars are forced to compare texts and decide on the 'best and most probable' reading. The Fundamentalist Inerrantist often gives the impression that the Bible fell down from heaven intact and that no textual criticism has been necessary.

Another problem with the Fundamentalist Inerrantist is a tendency to choose a position because it is convenient and not because it has been proven. For example, it is certainly true that the hypothesis of an inerrant *KJV* makes life easier for the believer but that does not mean it is true. Some of the epistemological arguments seem to be based on the following argument: Without inerrant truth we can never have certainty; it is vital that we have certainty; therefore our English translation of the Bible must be inerrant. This argument falls down when we recognise that it is grounded upon our need for certainty rather than upon any objective truth which God has revealed. In any case, why should it be that one seventeenth-century translation of the Bible, into one European language, by a group of Anglican scholars should somehow be the only inerrant text of the Bible available to humanity? Why should it be the case that only the

⁴⁴ See, for example, T. P. Letis (ed.), *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate* (Philadelphia and Edinburgh: The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 1987); and T. P. Letis, *The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind*, 2nd Edition (Philadelphia and Edinburgh: The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 2000).

manuscripts available to those scholars at that time and in that place were supernaturally preserved by God in an inerrant condition?

For similar reasons, I am not persuaded by the *Textus Receptus* Inerrantists. The idea that only one manuscript tradition is authentic and that all of the other manuscripts are inauthentic does not stand up to close scrutiny and is very difficult to sustain. The scholarly debate on these issues is much more complex than some of the *Textus Receptus* Inerrantists allow and the literature is both important and demanding.⁴⁵

The most significant argument for inerrancy, in my view, comes from the Chicago Inerrantists. Indeed, this is the position which I have held for many years. This group defines inerrancy with extreme care and they make clear what they *do not* mean as well as what they *do* mean when using the term. There are still very real problems which have to be addressed but I believe the arguments they present to be essentially sound. Despite that, however, I still believe that the word 'inerrancy' is not an ideal word, precisely because it requires so much qualification and interpretation.

Given, then, that the word 'inerrancy' has to be very tightly defined in order to serve its purpose in relation to the Scriptures; given that it has been used (and abused) in different ways; and given that it is not a biblical word and hence we are under no obligation to uphold it, should we not seek an alternative word in order to express what Scripture says about itself? I believe that the word 'veracity' is more constructive and, at the same time, focuses much more on the work of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:13,14, Paul says that God communicates to us 'in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual'. Instead of trying to safeguard the Scriptures by arguing that the *autographa* (which we do not possess) are verbally inerrant, I believe it would be more productive to emphasise that the Scriptures are spiritual and true, given to us by the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁵ Two standard introductions to the discipline are: Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd Edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also the important *Festschrift* for Bruce Metzger: Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes (eds), *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

3. Recognition and Comprehension

This brings me to my third suggestion for new vocabulary, namely, that we replace the word 'illumination' with two words: recognition and comprehension. I make this suggestion because the word illumination has sometimes been used in such a way as to imply that the Scriptures need to have light shed upon them before they can be understood. The real problem, however, is in the human mind and not in the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not need to be illuminated but rather the human mind, which has been damaged by the noetic effects of sin, needs to be given understanding. Only when the Holy Spirit enables, can these spiritual words and spiritual truths be identified as Scripture and properly understood.

If we consider the true condition of the unregenerate mind, as taught in Scripture, then we shall see the need for the Holy Spirit to enable us to recognise the Scriptures. For example, in Romans 1:18-25, Paul says some quite startling things. He says that:

- Every human being possesses true knowledge of God (v.19);
- This knowledge is of such clarity that human beings have absolutely no excuse if they deny that they know God (v.20);
- Sinful human beings deliberately suppress this knowledge and this truth (v.18);
- Such human beings have exchanged truth for lies (v.25);
- As a result the thinking of these human beings has become futile (v.21);
- Human beings who deny God are fools (v.22).

The implications of this teaching are of considerable importance. We are being told that every human being, without exception, has a true knowledge of God at some level of their being but that they deliberately suppress this knowledge because of their sinful condition. That sinful condition originated in Genesis 3 when our first parents opted to live self-centred rather than God-centred lives. The mind of an unregenerate human being, then, is twisted and perverted. Instead of holding to the truth, it deliberately suppresses it, and instead of worshipping and serving God, it prefers lies and foolishness.

There is, then, a real difference between believers and unbelievers when it comes to the mind. Paul expressed it like this: 'For those who live

according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot' (Rom. 8:5-7 ESV). That is to say, unbelievers have a 'mind-set' which is opposed to God. They are enemies of God in their *minds* as well as in their wills (see Col. 1:21). That is why Paul can say that 'In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Cor. 4:4 ESV). Only if we recognise the true condition of the human mind can we then properly understand the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the mind and the discovery of truth.

The best writers on the doctrine of illumination have always taken this position and emphasised that the problem of incomprehension relates to the human mind and not to the Scriptures but many others have not.⁴⁶ It seems to me that, if we use the words 'recognition' and 'comprehension', we can deal with some of the confusion and ambiguity which can arise from the word 'illumination'. In order to see the value of the proposal, we must ask the most significant question of all, namely, on what basis do we believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God? The answer, following Calvin,⁴⁷ is that such belief is only possible by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In other words, he enables us to 'recognise' the Scriptures as the Word of God.

This, however, is not the end of the story because the same Holy Spirit who gives us that 'recognition', also communicates the truth of the Scriptures to us in propositional revelation, such that we have 'comprehension'. In this way, God the Holy Spirit enables us to understand the meaning of the Scriptures, through the enlightening of our minds. This notion of the human mind receiving enlightening from the Holy Spirit is found in many places. For example, Paul says that 'The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. 2:14 ESV). The same idea is found in Jesus' answer to the question as to why he spoke in parables, in Matthew 13:11: 'And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given...".'

⁴⁶ In my view, much of the difficulty posed by Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture arises out of a confusion between *theopneustos* and illumination.

⁴⁷ *Institutes* I.vii.1-5.

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From these passages and others, it is clear that someone who is not a Christian can read and intellectually engage with the words of Scripture but cannot properly understand the Scriptures without the work of the Holy Spirit.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Let me now try to draw the threads of this proposal together. My argument is that first, the Scriptures came into being through the *divine spiration* of the Holy Spirit. Second, that they have *veracity* because they consist of spiritual truth expressed in spiritual words given by the Holy Spirit. Third, that they can only be identified as the Word of God through the *recognition* given by the Holy Spirit. Finally, that they can only be understood through the *comprehension* given by the Holy Spirit. Thus their origin, their nature, their identification and their interpretation are all intimately connected to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.