Is the Doctrine of Inerrancy Necessary for the Church Today?

by

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Introduction

> 4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.[1]

The above quotation is from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, formulated in 1978 by the top evangelical leaders of the day as a response to the growth of liberal views toward the authority and integrity of the text of Scripture within the church. The document goes on to state:

> 5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.[2]

From this it is evident that the signatories believed the issue of inerrancy to be one of utmost importance for the believer. Commenting on Article XVIII of the statement, Dr. James White states:

> Inerrancy is the foundation of sound exegesis; exegesis is the means by which we honor God in His Word. Deny inerrancy, and the authority of the Word disintegrates… When inerrancy is denied (openly or functionally), the foundation of theology is removed, and nothing people have found can replace it. It may take time, but *the denigration of Christian truth that flows from the abandonment of the highest views of Scripture is simply inevitable.* It cannot be avoided.[3]

Differing views on inerrancy have become current within the evangelical church. There are those that hold to the position stated above, that is that the Bible is without

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[1] From the section "A Short Statement" in The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. This document can be found reproduced in numerous places including Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), pp. 493-502, G. K. Beale, The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism (Wheaton, Il: Crossway Books, 2008), pp. 268-279, and online at http://www.churchcouncil.org/ICCP_org/Documents_ICCP/English/01_Biblical_Inerrancy_A&D.pdf.

[2] Ibid.

[3] James R. White, Scripture Alone (Minneapolis, Mn: Bethany House, 2004), pp. 79-80 (the italics are in the original text).

error in everything that it reports, whether theological, historical, or scientific. Most who hold this position do not consider the Bible to be a historical or scientific textbook, and hence the information given on these subjects, while true, are not necessarily accurate to modern standards of historiography or technical precision. God chose to inspire these writings at a point in time when such accuracy was not necessary to communicate those things He wanted the human authors to say. Hence, the authors of Scripture report what they see and experience in terms understandable to their culture. This information is not erroneous, and in fact for the most part is accurate enough even for the modern reader.[4]

There are those that believe inerrancy only extends to the Bible's pronouncements regarding theology and spiritual matters. With regard to matters of science and history, God did not give supernatural aid to the writers' understanding, and hence on those matters they are prone not simply to inaccuracy, but also to factual error. Since the Bible is not supposed to give guidance on matters of science and history, such inaccuracies are not considered detrimental to the authority of Scripture. On issues of faith and morality —the issues that really matter—the Bible is to be trusted and believed.[5]

Another position, a step further removed from the above "limited inerrancy" position holds that the term "inerrancy" applies only to Scripture's overall purpose: to lead people to Christ. Insofar as this is accomplished by the text, it can be said to be without error. To ascribe factual accuracy to Scripture is inappropriate since the Bible is not intended to be a record of facts but a means of salvation.[6]

At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who would reject any notion of inerrancy at all and regard the various writings that make up the Bible as works of men writing within their own timeframe without divine aid of any kind. Those who hold this

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[4] Millard Erickson distinguishes between this view, which he calls "Full inerrancy," and "Absolute inerrancy." He defines "Absolute inerrancy" as a position where a high level of accuracy is expected from the Biblical text such that where there seems to be a lack of precision, an appeal to ancient standards is not enough: a resolution to the problem must be found (Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 222). This extreme view is a minority opinion.

[5] Ibid., pp. 222-3; Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology Updated Edition (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), p. 93.

[6] Erickson, p. 223.

view are not considered evangelicals (and would not consider themselves such), since they reject the supernatural *a priori*. For this reason their position is outside the scope of this paper.

Beyond "full inerrancy," there is a spectrum of opinion with regard to how the term "inerrancy" should be understood, of which those cited above are merely the most common. There are also those who advocate disposing of the term "inerrant" altogether and finding a different term to use without the "baggage" it carries from the "fundamentalist" ideas of strict factual accuracy.[7] A. T. B. McGowan, an advocate of such a change in vocabulary, argues that "inerrant" is neither a biblical term nor a biblical concept,[8] and regards the adoption of the term and its associated meaning as a product not of diligent hermeneutics but of the battle with liberalism:

> Unfortunately, in the heat of battle a hardening of positions often takes place, where people are often forced into more and more extreme statements by their opponents, afraid to give any quarter lest the battle be lost. This is, I believe, what happened in the debate over the doctrine of Scripture.[9]

While McGowan does appreciate the position of the framers of the *Chicago Statement* and accepts their more measured arguments in favor of "inerrancy,"[10] he rejects the apparent rationalism of the concept, favoring the term "infallible" over "inerrant."[11]

The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of inerrancy as it applies to the text of Scripture. It will examine the history of the concept from the pages of the New Testament and the Early Church, and consider whether it is an unnecessary addition to

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[7] Donald Bloesch refers to the "theological and cultural baggage" that comes with the term which he considers to be "questionable in light of our expanded knowledge of the literature and history of the Bible." See Donald Bloesch, Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 1994), pp. 36-37.

[8] A. T. B. McGowan, The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage (Downers Grove, Il: IVP Academic, 2007), pp. 114-5.

[9] Ibid., p.121.

[10] Ibid., p. 104.

[11] Ibid., pp. 115-7; p. 164.

evangelical belief, or a vital part of the evangelical understanding of the nature of God's Word. This author will then weigh the arguments and draw conclusions.

The History of Inerrancy

For those who take issue with concept of inerrancy, one of the chief arguments for dispensing of this view of Scripture is that it cannot be traced to the pages of Scripture itself, and in fact has its origins with the nineteenth century theologians A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield. McGowan traces the views of these great Princetonians through the rise of Fundamentalism. He argues that the doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy developed along with the various doctrinal positions that arose as a by-product of the Fundamentalist movement (Dispensationalism, restrictions on cultural engagement, political activism and the "Religious Right," King James Onlyism, etc.). Even when that movement splintered, due to a belief that "the name [i.e., "Fundamentalist"] had been hijacked by a group of people who were theologically narrow, socially exclusivist and politically extremist,"[12] both expressions of the movement continued to use inerrantist language to refer to the Bible. Even the new "neo-evangelicals" did not abandon the term.

> Despite their rejection of the anti-intellectual attitude of fundamentalism and despite their affirmation of the importance of biblical scholarship, including textual scholarship, they retained the same commitment to inerrancy as the fundamentalists. The inerrancy of Scripture remained a key concept in binding together those who were opposed to various strands of post-Enlightenment liberal theology.[13]

Donald Dayton has also drawn the same conclusion, asserting that rather than being the church's historic position on Scripture, inerrancy rather derives from Hodge and Warfield.[14] Richard Lovelace notes that this same criticism was leveled at Hodge and Warfield by Charles Augustus Briggs and Henry Preserved Smith.[15] Bloesch, on the

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[12] Ibid., p. 96.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Richard Lovelace, "Inerrancy: Some Historical Perspectives," in Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (eds.), <u>Inerrancy and Common Sense</u> (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 19.

[15] Ibid.

other hand, concedes that "there is a long tradition in the church that represents the teaching of Scripture as being without error."[16] He notes that the Latin term *inerrabilis* can be found as far back as Augustine, and also into the Middle Ages.[17] But in using this term, did they mean what the modern inerrantist means, that is, that the Bible is without factual error?

When looking through church history to find inerrantists it is important to realize that simply because a doctrine was not clearly articulated in years past does not mean that those people did not believe that doctrine. It can be argued that the doctrine of the Trinity was not clearly set forth until the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon in the fourth and fifth centuries; however, it is clear from the New Testament and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers that the basic truths contained within that doctrine were part of Christian orthodoxy from the earliest of times. The earliest Christians may not have formulated a cogent statement, but it is clear they believed that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine Persons, and along with God the Father they consist one eternal Being.[18] In the same manner, it does not matter as much whether one can find a church father that expresses belief in an "inerrant Bible"; what matters is whether their writings betray a confidence that the very words of Scripture are without error.

Robert D. Preus makes the case that the earliest Christians shared with Tannaite Judaism the idea of Scripture as being God's Word and without contradictions. They already accepted the Old Testament to be inspired and authoritative, and the New Testament writings came to be held in the same regard.[19] These early believers held the New Testament to be the Word of God since it was "God-breathed," and their authors were moved by the Holy Spirit to do their work.[20] Richard Lovelace concurs with this

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[16] Donald Bloesch, <u>Holy Scripture</u>, p. 33.

[17] Ibid., pp. 33-4.

[18] For evidence of this, see James R. White, <u>The Forgotten Trinity</u> (Minneapolis, Mi: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), especially chapter 13.

[19] Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church through Luther," in Norman Geisler (ed.), <u>Inerrancy</u>, pp. 358-9.

[20] Ibid., p. 361.

assessment and goes on to suggest that Irenaeus even spoke in terms that could be understood as affirming plenary verbal inspiration.[21] There do not appear to be any explicit statements along this line, however; yet it is still possible to detect ideas of the sacredness of the very words of the Bible. Not only is this implicit in the concept of "God-breathed" writing, but it is clear that at the root of the early attempts to allegorize Scripture by Origen was the idea that since each word of Scripture was given by God, it held more meaning that was apparent on first blush. As J. N. D. Kelly states:

> [Origen] regarded Scripture as a vast ocean, or (using a different image) forest, of mysteries; it was impossible to fathom, or even perceive, them all, but one could be sure that every line, even every word, the sacred authors wrote was replete with meaning.[22]

It would make sense, therefore, that every word in Scripture was placed there by God Himself. While not explicitly stated, it could be inferred that Origen relied upon the fact that each word was accurate and true in order to base his allegories upon them.

Perhaps the first solid statement regarding inerrancy, however, comes from the pen of Augustine. Writing to Jerome he says:

> On such terms we might amuse ourselves without fear of offending each other in the field of Scripture, but I might well wonder if the amusement was not at my expense. For I confess to your Charity that I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it. As to all other writings, in reading them, however great the superiority of the authors to myself in sanctity and learning, I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them; but only because they have succeeded in convincing my judgment of its truth either by means of these canonical writings themselves, or by arguments addressed to my reason. I believe, my brother, that this is your own opinion as well as mine. I do not need to say that I do not suppose you to wish your books to be read like those of prophets or of apostles, concerning which it would be wrong to doubt that they are free from error. Far be

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[21] Richard Lovelace, "Inerrancy: Some Historical Perspectives," p. 20.

[22] J. N. D. Kelly, <u>Early Christian Doctrines</u> 5th ed. (London, England: A & C Black, 1977), p. 73.

such arrogance from that humble piety and just estimate of yourself which I know you to have, and without which assuredly you would not have said, "Would that I could receive your embrace, and that by converse we might aid each other in learning!"[23]

Here, Augustine says in no uncertain terms that he regards the canonical books to be error-free, such that if he finds something in them that confuses him, he would sooner ascribe it to a faulty copy, a bad translation, or his own failure to comprehend than to ascribe error to the passage itself. He also claims that this view is shared by Jerome, whom he presumes would not consider his own work to be of same level of accuracy as that of God's Word.

Of the medieval writers, in Preus' estimation, only Duns Scotus comes anywhere close to affirming inerrancy, although others certainly accepted the divine origin and authority of Scripture.[24] Perhaps in an age where tradition was beginning to play a larger role this is only to be expected. However, the magisterial Reformers were distinctly Augustinian in their approach to God's Word. Luther referred to the Scriptures as "truthful" and to be believed "however absurd that which God says in His Word may appear to reason."[25] Lovelace notes that scholarly opinion on Calvin, even among those hostile to the doctrine of inerrancy, is that the Genevan Reformer held to a position on inerrancy close to Hodge and Warfield.[26]

This should be sufficient to establish that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is not a nineteenth century creation, but can be traced back to the earliest church. It may be a bit much to state that it was always the consistent or even predominant view of the church, not because it was not, but because there is insufficient evidence to make such a dogmatic

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[23] Augustine, Letter 82.3, from http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102082.htm.

[24] Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church through Luther," in Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy, pp. 366-372.

[25] Martin Luther, Sämmtliche Schrifen 13, quoted in Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church through Luther," in Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy, p. 373.

[26] Richard Lovelace, "Inerrancy: Some Historical Perspectives," pp. 23-4.

statement. Again, one cannot expect theologians of the past to speak directly and succinctly to issues that were not points of controversy in their day.

Inerrancy in the Bible

Bloesch is correct when he says that the paramount question is "whether the Bible itself teaches its own inerrancy."[27] All who consider themselves Evangelical agree that the Bible is the church's final authority, so all sides of the inerrancy debate would therefore agree that whichever position is correct will be the one that is best sustained by the testimony of God's Word. In other words, did Jesus and the Apostles hold to inerrancy, and do the inspired biblical writers articulate that view?

 In his survey of Jesus' view of the Old Testament, John Wenham notes that while acknowledging that the Scriptures were written by men, ascribing passages to their human author (e.g., Isaiah in Matthew 13:14, David in Matthew 22:43), Jesus often simply refers to biblical passages with the phrase "Scripture," or with the Greek phrase γέγραπται, "it is written," with God as the implied author (e.g., Luke 4:21, Matthew 26:54).[28] "The inspiration implied by these phrases is not applied only to oracular prophetic utterances but to all parts of Scripture without discrimination—to history, to laws, to psalms, to prophecies."[29] Elsewhere Wenham takes to task those who would distinguish "inerrancy" and "infallibility" as if Jesus held to the latter and not the former. He believes the testimony of the Gospels affirms Jesus did not make such distinctions, and His citation of various passages from the Old Testament without once questioning their accuracy shows that Jesus considered them to be without fault.[30]

One passage in particular that may be cited with regard to Jesus' view of Scripture is Matthew 5:17-18:

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[27] Donald Bloesch, Holy Scripture, p. 34.

[28] John Wenham, Christ and the Bible 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Books, 1994), p. 33.

[29] Ibid.

[30] John Wenham, "Christ's View of Scripture," in Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy, p. 22. This article is, in fact, an expansion of chapter one of Wenham's book Christ and the Bible. For examples of Jesus referring to, or quoting, the Old Testament without qualification or correction, see Mark 12:10, 29-30, Luke 18:19-20, and Luke 24:13-35.

> Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

It could be argued that here Jesus is simply affirming the words of Isaiah: "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8), which is not so much a declaration of Scriptural inerrancy and infallibility, but of the eternal validity of God's Word. However, it should be noted that these words come just before Jesus quotes from the Ten Commandments and presents to His audience the true significance of these commands. He does not change them, or correct them; in fact He affirms their truthfulness by applying them in such a way that their eternal verity is unmistakable.[31]

Without doubt the Apostles followed their Master in His attitude toward Scripture. Acts 4:25-26 records Peter quoting Psalm 2, which he says was spoken "by the Holy Spirit" through David. Paul did not question the fact that when Hosea records something God said, God actually said that very thing (Romans 9:25-26). Further, Paul, addressing the Jews in Rome, quotes Isaiah claiming that "the Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet" (Acts 28:25). The author of Hebrews similarly quotes Old Testament Scripture ascribing it to God regardless of the human writer, for example, 1:5, 3:7-11, 10:15-17. Some of these passages are indeed places where the speech is ascribed to God, so one might think it only natural to refer to these as being from God and not from the prophet that wrote the words down. However, this only underscores the point that the author of Hebrews did not see any reason to think these were *not* God's words, despite the fact they were recorded by means of human agency. In other words, these words were considered to be God's, not God's as interpreted, corrected, embellished, or redacted by Isaiah, Moses, or whoever. Peter confirms this view of the control that God had over the transmission of His words when he states that in prophecy "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21).

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[31] See Matthew 5:21-48.

Two passages in particular to consider regarding the Apostolic view of Scripture are 2 Timothy 3:16, and Galatians 3:16. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says:

> All[32] Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The term translated "inspired" is crucial to one's understanding of Paul's view of Scripture here. In Greek, the word is θεόπνευστος, and it literally means "God-breathed." B. B. Warfield's conclusion to his extensive and detailed examination of the word states that rather that being descriptive of either the nature or effect of Scripture, "it is primarily expressive of the origination of Scripture."[33] The term "inspired" comes from the Latin *inspiratus*, and, probably by virtue of its use in the Vulgate, has become the traditional rendering for the Greek. However, as Warfield points out, the term actually refers to the *origin* of Scripture. Men did not write words that were then enlivened by the Spirit of God; rather, "the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation."[34]

Paul goes on to describe how these words from God can be used: for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. To appreciate the significance of this description of Scripture, one must look to the context of the passage. Paul is warning Timothy that false teachers and evil men will infiltrate the church by means of deception.

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[32] There are those that say πᾶσα here should be translated "every." While some may prefer to understand the adjective θεόπνευστος as standing in an attributive relationship with the noun γραφὴ, it is the opinion of this writer that such a construction is not the most natural way to understand the passage (i.e., "Every God-breathed Scripture" as opposed to "All Scripture is God-breathed"). Certainly, Greek often omits the copula ("is"), and so it could just as easily be supplied after the conjunction ("Every God-breathed Scripture is also profitable…"). However, as Edwin Blum points out, the two adjectives appear to be connected by the conjunction and should both be taken as predicative of the noun. Further, 1 Timothy 4:4 has a parallel construction wherein the adjectives are understood to be predicates. See Edwin A. Blum, "The Apostles View of Scripture," in Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy, p. 46. Finally, the rendering "Every God-breathed Scripture is also profitable…" leaves open the possibility that there are Scriptures that are not God-breathed, which, given the understanding of Scripture as a whole among the Apostles as discussed previously, would be an outright contradiction.

[33] B. B. Warfield, "God-Inspired Scripture," in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield Volume 1: Revelation and Inspiration (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Books, 2003), p. 280.

[34] Ibid. One should bear in mind that this conclusion is reached after many pages of technical discussion in response to an alternative translation that was offered at the time by Dr. Hermann Cremer.

He depicts them as "unholy," "lovers of pleasure," "unloving," "conceited," "holding

to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

Timothy's only sure defense against such men is to "continue in the things you have

learned and become convinced of"—i.e., the Old Testament that he was taught from

youth (2 Timothy 3:14-15). This is Timothy's foundation that he is to use to combat

false teachers and to proclaim these truths so that the church may be protected (2

Timothy 4:1-5).

In light of this, could Paul merely see Scripture as "infallible" and "trustworthy"?

If Paul regarded Scripture as sufficient for the battle that lay before Timothy, would he

not have to consider the very words of Scripture to be true? Surely, if the Scriptures

contain error, would not these "evil men" be able to use those errors to undermine

Timothy's ministry? Paul's confidence in God's Word should not be taken lightly.

Moreover, if Paul considered Scripture to have its origin with the God who is true and

cannot lie,[35] it is highly likely he viewed Scripture to be inerrant.

Galatians 3:16 seems to offer evidence that Paul relied upon the accuracy of the

very words of Scripture to make theological arguments: "Now the promises were spoken

to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as *referring* to many, but

rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ." Paul's argument against the Galatian

Judaizers is that the promises of Abraham were not for both those who practice the Law

and those who trust in Christ, but ultimately for Christ (and, by means of corporate

solidarity, all those who put their trust in Him, as is implied by verse 29).[36] The point of

interest in terms of inerrancy, however, is the fact that Paul's argument hinges on the fact

that the word for seed in the original promise to Abraham is singular. Paul may have a

couple of passages in mind from Genesis: 13:15, 17:8, or 24:7 all make reference to

"your seed." In the Septuagint, which was probably the version of the Old Testament

with which Paul was most familiar, the Greek in all three passages reads καὶ τῷ σπέρματί

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[35] Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18. One might argue that errors in the biblical text do not necessarily imply that God has lied, but that He allowed human error to infiltrate Scripture. Again, given that the Scriptures have their primary origin with God, what end would it serve for Him to allow factual mistakes? This argument will be developed later.

[36] Edwin Blum, "The Apostles' View of Scripture," pp. 50-51; Richard H. Longenecker, <u>Galatians</u> (Dallas, Tx: Word Books, 1990), pp. 131-132.

σου. This is, indeed, the singular form of the noun.[37] The significance of this for inerrancy is, of course, that Paul is relying upon Genesis being an accurate account of what God actually said. If Moses had paraphrased, or incorrectly written down a plural form instead of a singular form, Paul would not have been able to make this argument. Also, the fact that Paul sees significance in the grammatical form of the word demonstrates that he considered these very words to be God-given and precisely as God intended.

That Jesus, His Apostles, and the authors of the New Testament had a high view of Scripture can, therefore, be demonstrated. While these views strictly pertain to the Old Testament, the biblical basis for establishing inerrancy for the Old Testament can be applied to the New with the same result.[38] The message that the Apostles proclaimed was one that was given to them by Christ, so their proclamation was God-given. This fact was recognized by the early church as can be seen by the authority they ascribed to the Apostles and their teaching. Jesus had promised them the Spirit Who would guide them into all truth and will remind them of the things Jesus had told them (John 14:26; John 16:12-13). Paul claims Christ-given authority (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10), and gives instructions to churches in the power of that authority (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 3:4-14; 5:27; 1 Corinthians 7:17). Peter's reference to Paul's letters as being among "other Scripture" shows the high regard in which his writings were held (2 Peter 3:15-16).

At the very least, this demonstrates that the doctrine of inerrancy can be maintained from Scripture. Despite this, there are those who would say that regardless of whether Jesus and the Apostles held to inerrancy, there are errors and contradictions in Scripture that need to be accommodated into one's view of Scripture, not just explained away. One needs to find a doctrine of Scripture that both maintains a high view of Scripture and also accounts for these phenomena.

Inerrancy and Higher Criticism

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[37] The Hebrew לְזַרְעֲךָ "to your seed" also utilizes the singular form of the noun, so the LXX is accurate in its translation at this point.

[38] The following is based on argumentation presented by John Wenham. See Wenham, <u>Christ and the Bible</u>, pp. 113-127.

It can be argued that the reason some evangelicals are anxious to dispense of the doctrine of inerrancy lies with the rise and influence of liberal higher criticism. "Higher criticism" is not the enemy of evangelical faith: it is simply the opposite of "lower criticism." Lower criticism involves examining the text of Scripture, and is commonly associated with textual criticism, which seeks to establish the text of the Bible from the numerous manuscripts available. "Higher criticism," on the other hand, deals with questions of authorship, date, genre, and other such topics.[39] These issues are important for understanding the Scriptures and properly interpreting them. Both types of criticism are open to misuse when unwarranted presuppositions are allowed to influence the results of one's investigations. In the case of higher criticism, liberal scholarship, with its assumed naturalism, and skepticism over the nature and origins of the Bible, has dominated for most of the last century. It is for this reason that the term has become associated with, at least from a conservative point of view, radical theories that seek to undermine the authority and authenticity of Scripture.[40]

As noted above, many evangelicals have felt compelled, in the face of liberal higher criticism, to affirm the integrity of the Bible, not only in terms of the consistency of its message, but also its veracity. This has given rise to much work in apologetics, with authors like Josh McDowell, Dr. Gleason Archer, and Dr. Norman Geisler writing works dealing with apparent contradictions and "difficulties" in the text of Scripture.[41] Such works are not always taken seriously by liberal scholars,[42] and it is, perhaps, in light of this that some have determined to raise the credibility of evangelical scholarship (at least in the eyes of liberal scholars) by trying to formulate a high view of Scripture that

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[39] J. Barton Payne, "Higher Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy," in Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy, pp. 86-87.

[40] A. T. B. McGowan, p. 105.

[41] Josh McDowell, The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict (Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson, 1993), Gleason L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), and Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, When Critics Ask (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Books, 1992) are just a few examples of the literature available written essentially in response to liberal higher criticism.

[42] See, for example, Lester L. Grabbe, "Fundamentalism and Scholarship," in Barry P. Thompson (ed.) Scripture: Meaning and Method (Hull, England: Hull University Press, 1987), where he criticizes evangelical attempts to reconcile apparent discrepancies in Daniel.

accounts for anomalies in the biblical text apart from traditional attempts at harmonization or other explanations.

G. K. Beale notes two other perhaps more significant factors that have lead to the current reassessment of Biblical inerrancy among some evangelicals. The first of these is the permeation of postmodernism within the church causing people to be uncomfortable with the traditional view of Scripture as setting forth propositional truth, and more at home with a Barthian view of Scripture becoming the Word of God as one meets with the text subjectively. The second is an increase in the number of conservative students getting their doctorates in theology from non-evangelical schools where they are nurtured in liberal higher critical views, and spend their careers trying to wed a high view of Scripture with these "new" insights of modern scholarship.[43]

Two approaches to this situation are either to regard the Bible as only inerrant when addressing issues of faith and morals,[44] or to acknowledge factual inaccuracies but use terms other than "error" to describe them. The basis of this latter approach is the understanding that while the *form* of Scripture may be imperfect, its *intent* is unimpeachable. Donald Bloesch, an advocate of this view, puts it like this:

> While acknowledging innocent factual inaccuracies in the Bible, I hesitate to call these errors. I readily grant that forms of expression in Scripture may conflict with science, but science is not the final norm, for scientific theories are constantly in flux. Because error does not touch what is truly divine in the Bible, it is more proper to speak of "difficulties" than of errors, of chaff but not tares. The writers may well take the liberty of changing some details in order to make a theological point, but this does not constitute error. Again, we must remember that their aim was not historical precision but theological interpretation.[45]

The key to understanding how one can speak of Scripture "conflicting" with science and containing "factual inaccuracies" and yet being without error is recognizing the difference between "inerrant" (as the advocates of this view understand inerrancy) and "infallible." For Bloesch, the Scriptures are truthful, authoritative, and infallible

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[43] G. K. Beale, The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism, pp. 20-21.

[44] "Limited inerrancy," as referred to above.

[45] Donald Bloesch, Holy Scripture, p. 117.

because this is the character of the Author of the Scriptures. Furthermore, he believes

it is only legitimate to speak of the Bible in those terms when speaking of the book as a

whole; the nature of the entire work does not necessarily filter down to every text or

report.[46]

It is interesting to note, however, that when Bloesch speaks of apparent historical

inaccuracies in the Scriptures, he often raises the same points that inerrantists would

raise. That is to say, he notes that one should not bring to the biblical accounts a modern

sense of historical accuracy, especially with regard to the reporting of numbers.[47]

However, he does subscribe to the view that not only did the writers of Scripture work

within the limited worldview of the ancients with its primitive assumptions and

mythologies, but this worldview often crept into the text of Scripture. One should not be

surprised, therefore, to find beliefs in Scripture that are not considered either

scientifically or historically accurate today. Since these are not intentional fabrications

but merely the honest convictions of a bygone age, one cannot consider them "errors" in

the strictest sense.[48]

The fact that God allowed unhistorical information into the text is referred to as

"accommodation"—that is, God naturally knows the real facts, but instead of correcting

the text or giving special illumination to the authors of Scripture, He allowed them to

speak from their own worldview within their own time. What ultimately matters is what

the Spirit is trying to teach through the Scriptures, not whether that teaching comes in the

form of myth or history.[49] Peter Enns takes this one step further, showing what he

considers to be Ancient Near-Eastern influence upon the Old Testament and how this fits

into his "incarnational" view of Scripture: just as Christ was both divine and human, in

the same way Scripture is divine and human.[50] It is only natural, therefore, to find both

elements of the human (limited historical knowledge, naïve scientific understanding, and

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[46] Ibid., p. 116.

[47] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

[48] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[49] Ibid., p. 109, 112.

[50] G. K. Beale, pp. 27-28.

the influence of myth) as well as the divine (inspired by God, authoritative, infallible) in Scripture.

The comparison between Christ and the Bible is not new. Gordon Lewis notes the view of Harry Boer who paralleled the humanity of the Bible and the humanity of Christ. However, Lewis goes on to critique this view, pointing out that if the humanity of Scripture manifests itself in the form of errors (or even "difficulties"), then the humanity of Christ would likewise manifest itself in sinfulness, which Boer denies. Lewis notes that the characteristic Reformed analogy was between the humanity and sinlessness of Christ and the humanity and inerrancy of Scripture.[51] McGowan points out that since in reality only God is divine, it is wrong to speak of Scripture as divine. Scripture can share divine attributes (e.g., holiness), but Scripture cannot be said to have a divine nature.[52] For Beale, the analogy is like comparing apples and oranges, since Christ's incarnate nature was one person with two natures, whereas Scripture has two persons (God and the human prophet that spoke or wrote the words), and one nature, "the scriptural speech act."[53]

To illustrate the kind of "errors" or "difficulties" that liberal higher critics and non-inerrantists might cite, the following three have been selected as good representatives to show the argumentation used by those who challenge inerrancy, and the way in which the inerrantist might respond to these "difficulties."

Historical Imprecision

Mention has already been made of the fact that the Bible often records numeric information which, by comparison with parallel passages, can be shown to be either contradictory or imprecise. For example, Numbers 25:9 says that the plague sent by God as punishment for Israel's idolatry killed twenty-four thousand people; 1 Corinthians 10:6 puts the figure at twenty-three thousand. Second Samuel 10:18 records that David slew

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[51] Gordon R. Lewis, "The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy, p. 231.

[52] A. T. B. McGowan, p. 120.

[53] Beale, p. 40.

seven hundred Aramean charioteers; 1 Chronicles 19:18 puts the figure at seven thousand. Gleason Archer, an advocate of inerrancy, counts eighteen numerical discrepancies between Chronicles and Samuel/Kings.[54]

Further, there are times when historical facts are given that appear to conflict with known extra-biblical record, the results of archaeology, or with similar facts recorded elsewhere within Scripture. Examples of these include the references to Belshazzar as "king" in Daniel 5 when none of the extant documents relating to this period refer to Belshazzar as "king."[55] First Chronicles 21:1 indicates that Satan incited David to take a census of Israel, whereas 2 Samuel 24:1 says that it was God who incited David. In Matthew 26:34, Jesus tells Peter that before the cock crows he will deny Him. The account of the same incident in Mark 14:30 relates Jesus telling Peter that before the cock crows twice Peter will deny Him.

The non-inerrantist responds to these by claiming that the Bible was never intended to be a history textbook, and hence any historical or scientific information it relates should always be understood within the limited knowledge and understanding of the world at that time. While the biblical record can be trusted to give accurate information with regard to salvation and matters of ethics, God did not see fit to supernaturally correct the worldview of the ancients. As both a divine and human book, it betrays its humanity in its historical inaccuracies and contradictions, and its scientific naivety. Those non-inerrantists who consider the Scriptures to be generally historically accurate might still appeal to the fact that, as a work of human hands—albeit inspired—it is bound to reflect this humanity. Since many of the historical problems do not relate to the central message of the Bible, their existence should not cause the Christian to lose faith. Indeed, they can be accepted as a sign of God accommodating to the original audience by using human instruments in all their frailty.

The Use of Myth and Extra-Canonical Material

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[54] Gleason L. Archer, "Alleged Errors and Discrepancies in the Original Manuscripts of the Bible," in Norman Geisler (ed.), Inerrancy, p. 61.

[55] Lester L. Grabbe, "Fundamentalism and Scholarship," p. 140.

It is one thing for the New Testament writers to cite the Old Testament in defense of their theological arguments since the Old Testament is considered by them, and evangelicals, to be inspired and, for inerrantists, to have the same level of accuracy as the New. Hence, an appeal to Old Testament texts is an appeal to God's Word. However, there are occasions when New Testament writers draw upon non-canonical material and even contemporary mythology to substantiate their arguments. The problem with such usage is that it implies that either the New Testament writers believed these writings to have equal authority to the Old Testament, or that the myths were factual such that they could be relied upon as history. Jude explicitly references the apocryphal Assumption of Moses and, along with 1 Peter, draws from Enoch in his language about fallen angels or spirits imprisoned and awaiting punishment.[56] In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul makes reference to a "rock" from which the Israelites drank that followed them in the wilderness. Peter Enns believes that Paul is basing his information upon extra-biblical sources for the concept of a "moving rock (or well)," namely Pseudo-Philo's Book of Antiquities, Tosephta Sukka, and Targum Onkelos to Numbers.[57] Enns believes that Paul accepted this tradition as fact, which is why he makes reference to it in such a brief and offhand fashion:

> Paul's incidental comment in 1 Cor 10:4 suggests that he was an inheritor of an "interpreted Bible." He is not himself interpreting the rock of the Old Testament, nor is he consciously adducing an existing exegetical tradition; rather, he is simply talking about the biblical story in the only way he knows how, in accordance with the way he (and apparently his audience as well) had received it. In other words, the exegetical tradition of the "moveable well" actually represents the way in which Paul *understood* the provision of water in the wilderness narratives of the Old Testament.[58]

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[56] R. T. France, "Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis," in <u>Themelios</u>, 1.1 (Autumn 1975), p. 13. France is not suggesting these passages are problematic for inerrancy, merely indicating their existence.

[57] Peter Enns, "The 'Moveable Well' in 1 Cor 10:4: An Extrabiblical Tradition in an Apostolic Text," in <u>Bulletin for Biblical Research</u>, 6 (1996), pp. 23-38. This can be found online: http://www.ibr-bbr.org/IBRBulletin/BBR_1996/BBR_1996_03_Enns_Well_1Cor10_4.pdf.

[58] Ibid., p. 32.

Clearly, the issue this raises for inerrancy is the fact that Paul is appealing to a non-biblical, and presumably erroneous tradition as part of his warning to his readers not to be disobedient despite God's care and provision for them, as Israel had been in the wilderness. In making a theological point, Paul appears to draw from popular myth that he seemed to believe was historical. The non-inerrantist may be able to dismiss Paul's error while accepting the point he is making, but the inerrantist has to deal with the possibility that an incorrect statement has been recorded as fact.

Loose Citations

Evangelicals have not been shy to acknowledge that the level of historical accuracy one should expect from ancient times would allow for paraphrase and "loose citation" without compromising inerrancy. The fact that the words spoken by people may not correspond exactly to what they originally said, but would capture the essence of their meaning, is agreed upon by many inerrantists. This can be safely assumed since the signatories of the Chicago Statement all approved of this statement:

> We also deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as… the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.[59]

The issue that inerrantists needs to address with regard to this pertains to the fact that parallel quotations in the Synoptic Gospels are sometimes cast by liberal higher critics as "corrections" or alterations by one Evangelist to the work of another in order to make a point or to avoid theological issues. An example of this can be found in Mark 10:16-17 and Matthew 19:17. In Mark, Jesus replies to the rich young ruler, "Why do you call me good? No-one is good except God alone." In Matthew's version of the story, Jesus says to the rich young ruler, "Why are you asking me about what is good? There is only One who is good." The liberal higher critic has no problem assuming first that Jesus may or may not have ever said such a thing, and second, if He did, then it is probable that Mark's quotation is original and Matthew has modified Mark. The

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[59] The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article XIII.

reasoning behind this would be that Mark's version appears to question Jesus' sinlessness, and Matthew would want to avoid such an implication. The non-inerrantist would not object to such variations, although he or she may not interpret the reasoning behind the difference in that way. Either both Evangelists are simply citing what they believe Jesus said—perhaps in accordance with the tradition passed down to them, or one is changing the other to bring out a particular nuance that is relevant to his situation. In either scenario, the exact words that Jesus said are not important; all that matters is that the same essential message is communicated.

Inerrantists, for the most part, are willing to accept that the Gospel writers do not necessarily make precise quotations. They consider precise quotation to be a modern academic standard that should not be expected of ancient writers.

> Our present practice of scholarship has led us to insist on a very high level of accuracy whenever we transcribe the words of another. But we have no ground to insist that this standard must have prevailed in biblical days. Thus we find that the New Testament writers, and presumably our Lord Himself, quoted the Old Testament with a considerable measure of freedom, adapting the words of ancient writers in many cases to the contemporaneous situation. They freely omitted elements which did not appear relevant or inserted words that would elucidate more fully the sense in which they construed the ancient oracle. Similarly, in the four Gospels we have evidence that considerable freedom was used in the reporting of conversations in the days of our Lord. We have no right to posit a procedure which in our judgment the writers of the Bible should have used and then to proceed to judge them in terms of their conformity or lack of conformity to it. We need rather to observe the facts of the situation and to be satisfied with the way in which they were led to make their sacred record. Moreover, it would be wrong to imagine that one writer arbitrarily changed something which he found in another inspired writer on the ground that it did not conform to truth. Those who hold to inerrancy will retain the conviction that a real underlying harmony exists between various accounts which differ somewhat in details.[60]

The above quotation from Nicole addresses two separate issues. The first is that ancient writers may have edited their sources (in this case, the Old Testament) to draw out what was relevant to the situation being addressed. This should not be a problem for inerrancy since the biblical writers are not changing the wording to either put words into

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[60] Roger Nicole, "The Nature of Inerrancy," in Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (eds.), <u>Inerrancy and Common Sense</u>, pp. 84-85.

the mouth of the original writer, or make the original writer say something they never intended to say. The second issue pertains to free quotations in the New Testament. Nicole's argument is, first the use of precise quotations is a modern standard and should not be applied to the first century author. Second, that the writers did not make arbitrary changes to conform to their understanding of truth; there is underlying harmony between the differing accounts.

Nicole's response is fairly representative of the inerrantist view. However, this writer is not convinced that Nicole has adequately addressed the issue for non-inerrantists. First, it has already been noted that the New Testament writers considered verbal accuracy to be important, as seen in the case of Paul quoting God's words to Abraham recorded in Genesis with regard to his "seed." Would not the same attitude to accuracy in quotation apply to the Gospel writers, especially when quoting Jesus, especially since His words would form the basis of Christian doctrine? Second, if inerrancy means that what the Bible records is true, if Jesus did not actually say what He is recorded as saying—especially when introduced with the phrase "Jesus said…"—is this not either a mistake or, worse, a deception? The inerrantist might appeal to the fact such accuracy is a modern standard. But if these words are God-breathed, surely they should be accurate, especially if they are definitional to Christian belief?

These three issues—historical imprecision, the use of myth and extra-biblical sources, and the use of loose citations—are commonly used by liberal higher critics to undermine the authority of Scripture. They are also used by non-inerrantists to try to demonstrate that the inerrantist position is untenable. The concern of the non-inerrantist is that by insisting on inerrancy despite such issues, the inerrantists damage the evangelical cause due to the credibility lost among academics and skeptics. The inerrantist, however, maintains that inerrancy is demanded of the text of Scripture, and this is not despite the issues raised. Indeed, these issues are not really problematic. The following are possible responses the inerrantist could make to each problem area.

Response to the Issue of Historical Imprecision

The inerrantists agree that one cannot impose modern scientific standards of accuracy upon the ancient text of Scripture. Often the intent of the biblical writers was

not to give a precise detailed account, but to speak in general terms—especially when recording historical detail. Article XIII of the Chicago Statement makes it clear that to affirm inerrancy is not to appeal to a level of precision that was unexpected in ancient historiography. However, it would be wrong to suggest that the biblical writers were not concerned about historical accuracy at all. Luke himself testifies that his intent on writing his Gospel (and, one presumes, Acts) was to provide an account of what had happened "so that you may know the exact truth [τὴν ἀσφάλειαν] about the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4).

For the inerrantist, the Bible cannot be subdivided into the "accurate" and "inaccurate" parts. The Bible is either wholly God's inerrant Word, or it is not. If one removes inerrancy as a foundation for one's understanding of Scripture, one is left to determine based on human reason what can be trusted to be accurate and what cannot. The authors of Scripture did not introduce historical passages with some kind of caveat to the effect that "the following passage may not be historically accurate." Granted, they believed they were writing accurate history; but why should the evangelical grant them latitude to be wrong about history, and not when recording theology? In the same way, Paul did not introduce Romans with a disclaimer that these are just his opinions and he could be wrong. Paul was as convinced of the divine truth of what he said theologically in Romans as he was regarding the historicity of Genesis 1 and 3 (see 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and Romans 5:12-15).

Bloesch contends that "what appear to be historical inaccuracies and internal contradictions can be readily discerned in Scripture by any searching person."[61] He then goes on to admit that "some discrepancies can possibly be explained on the basis of mistakes in translation and transmission" and that parallel passages may differ due to one being precise and the other being an approximation.[62] In other words, while Bloesch wants to allow the Bible to contain "difficulties" and "tensions," he still feels compelled to resolve as many as he can. Bloesch believes inerrancy is ultimately an appeal to rationalism. The divine aspect of Scripture is not "rationally comprehensible teaching,"

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[61] Bloesch, p. 109.

[62] Ibid., p. 110.

but "the mystery of salvation declared in Jesus Christ," which may be given in propositional form, but not comprehended; stated, but never fully grasped. "The divine content or wisdom of God is hidden in the Bible and awaits its disclosure by the action of the Spirit."[63]

But how does the non-inerrantist conclude that a particular passage is not to be understood as accurate? Is it not by use of reason? The non-inerrantist is guilty of applying rational principles for determining what can and cannot be accepted as historically and scientifically precise. God has given men the capacity to utilize reason in order to make sense of the world He created. Reasoning from the Scriptures is not a non-spiritual exercise; when done on the basis that God's Word is true and for the purpose of understanding His Word and His world better, it is supremely spiritual and edifying.

Numerical discrepancies can be answered by the fact that such variation would be acceptable within ancient standards of accuracy. Also, some differences can be explained by transcriptional errors that can easily be made, especially considering that Hebrew numbers were represented by letters. A single misinterpreted letter, or badly transcribed letter, could affect the way the passage was copied, or translated into Greek—the version Paul would have used.[64]

Response to the Issue of the Use of Myth and Extra-Canonical Material

The first point that needs to be made is that the use of extra-(or non-) canonical material within the canon of Scripture does not confer canonical status to those works. Simply because a biblical author quotes a non-biblical source, one should not infer that the non-biblical source is of the same nature as inspired Scripture. While unbelievers are suppressing the knowledge of God (Romans 1:18), that does not mean they are never able to say things that are true, or even display extraordinary insight from time to time. The culture in which the New Testament writers lived was imbued with both Jewish and Greek philosophy, so it is not inconceivable that an educated man like Paul would be

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[63] Ibid., p. 114.

[64] Gleason Archer goes into more detail regarding this issue, as well as other discrepancies. See Gleason Archer, "Alleged Errors and Discrepancies," in Norman Geisler (ed.), <u>Inerrancy</u>, pp. 57-82.

familiar with such works and would even reference them, if applicable, in his writings. That is not to say Menander, Aratus, and Epimenides were inspired, godly writers; but Paul was able to use their words to make a point, or draw the interest of his audience.[65]

In the case of Peter's use of Enoch, he certainly seems to be reflecting a well-known tradition, but he also transforms that tradition as a means for proclaiming the gospel.[66] Whether or not that tradition has a basis in fact is not something that can be determined objectively. One should certainly consider the possibility that by allowing it —or at least an allusion to it—into the biblical record, God is saying that there is some truth to the tradition. For the inerrantist, it is enough to say that what Peter describes is accurate, and this no more canonizes Enoch than Paul quoting Menander canonizes Menander. Enoch perhaps touches on a truth which Peter utilizes.

In response to 1 Corinthians 10:4, G. K. Beale has noted that there is a textual issue in Pseudo-Philo which removes this reference from consideration as a possible source for the "moveable rock (or well)" in 1 Corinthians 10:4. The remaining sources are too late to be considered contemporary with Paul, thus throwing into question whether the tradition was even known in Paul's day.[67] This simply means that Paul might not be appealing to popular myth at this point. Even if he is, as France points out, Paul is utilizing the tradition to make a typological point: "it is referred to not for itself, but for its illustrative value; the focus of his thought is Christ."[68] Hence, Paul is perhaps using the tradition in the same way he utilized Greek poets and philosophers.

Response to the Issue of Loose Citation

The use of "free citation" is considered acceptable to those who signed the Chicago Statement, but as noted above, there are still questions that need to be addressed. Does the fact that two Evangelists reporting the same incident can quote Jesus' words and give varying accounts of what those words are constitute error at least on the side of one

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[65] See 1 Corinthians 15:33, Acts 17:28, and Titus 1:12.

[66] R. T. France notes this in his article, "Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis," p. 13.

[67] G. K. Beale, The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism, pp. 118-9.

[68] R. T. France, "Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis," p. 14.

if not both Evangelists? The traditional response is no, since they are both essentially saying the same thing. The actual words reported may be different, but the intent is the same, and so there is no error. However, this does not seem to be too far from what Bloesch says about Scripture as a whole:

> The Bible contains a fallible element in the sense that it reflects the cultural and historical limitations of the writers. But it is not mistaken in what it purports to teach: God's will and purpose for the world… We cannot affirm that the propositions in the Bible are a priori infallible, but we can affirm that God's infallible revelation is communicated through these propositions.[69]

If one is willing to concede that Jesus' reported words need not be exact, then one should be willing to concede that historical facts and scientific data need not be accurate, as long as the essential message is faithfully communicated. If this is the case, then much of the apologetic work in defense of the historicity of the Bible over the last thirty years has been for no purpose.

An important element that must be accounted for, however, is the fact of divine inspiration. If God the Holy Spirit has truly inspired the biblical accounts, then He has caused the human authors to write what they have written precisely as He intended them to write it. That does not mean He caused them to write error; but it does mean that He superintended their memories of the events and the collection of their source material so that what they wrote was what He wanted them to record. It is very possible that, for example, Jesus dialog with the rich young ruler went on longer than the Evangelists record. The record of the event that they leave for us is not contradictory; and indeed, one can easily harmonize the accounts if one does not presume that Jesus could only have said one thing or the other. Jesus' actual words may have been a combination of both, and each Evangelist, under inspiration, selected that portion he remembered. This is neither outside the realm of probability, nor outside of everyday experience of human interaction. When people speak, they rarely speak in perfect sentences; they repeat themselves or clarify themselves. Someone reporting what someone else said will rarely

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[69] Bloesch, p. 115.

detail all the repetitions and clarifications, but they will still report the words that the original speaker used.

Conclusion

The issue of biblical inerrancy is not a peripheral one. The doctrine of inerrancy is not simply a dispensable artifact of a bygone age when the church needed some way to combat the rise in liberalism. Indeed, the concept of biblical inerrancy is rooted in the faith of the authors of Scripture, who themselves saw importance in the very forms used by the Old Testament writers, and even Jesus Himself who regarded every small portion of the letters of the Law to be everlasting. Ultimately, however, the doctrine of inerrancy is founded in the God who breathed the Scriptures into existence, who created those He would use to put pen to parchment, ordaining their time and place of birth, their environment and life experiences so that the words they used would be words He intended them to use but expressed in their style. This gives Scripture its human element; but the fact of the human authorship of Scripture cannot allow for errors, misstatements, or factual discrepancies. For Scripture to contain such elements would reflect upon the God who inspired it. As God is true, so His Word must be true. One cannot say simply that Scripture is "reliable" while then denying its inerrancy. It would be foolhardy to rest one's eternal destiny on something that is known to contain mistakes.

The issue of inerrancy is, therefore, one of epistemological importance. Scripture is not only the Christian's source of information about salvation and morality; everything that the Christian knows about God, His nature, His purposes, and the true nature of man is contained in Scripture. This information is contained in historical accounts: the Garden of Eden, the Burning Bush, Mount Sinai, Mount Carmel, the Judean desert, Golgotha. One cannot separate the historical from the theological and ascribe to one errancy and the other inerrancy. Either the whole is accurate and true, or the whole is fallible and unreliable. Since God inspired people to write within time, and hence one should accord to them the standards of historical and scientific reporting appropriate to their time, God did not inspire them to be wrong. A careful reading of Scripture shows that they did not

utilize language that contradicts science.[70] Often their observations are no more unscientific than modern man's might be (e.g., speaking of "sunset" and "sunrise"). For the Christian to have a firm foundation for his or her beliefs, and ultimately his or her life and worship, the Christian has to have a Bible that is both infallible and inerrant: a Bible that is dependable because it is true.

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[70] The creation account is often vilified for its architectural language, but G. K. Beale makes a case that the author was not thinking in literal terms, but using architectural concepts familiar in the Ancient Near East to make a broader point—especially with regard to the construction of the Temple. See G. K. Beale, The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism, pp. 161-218.

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