

Contemporary American Evangelical Issues on Inerrancy Debates in History and Practice*

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Introduction

There are at least two approaches that could have been taken to this topic. The first would have been to deal with what are termed higher critical attacks on the church's doctrine of inerrancy. That analysis would have included critiques of works by the British scholar N.T. Wright¹ or the German theologian Michael Welker,² among others. Helpful as that approach might have been, it seems that more important for an ETS meeting would be to deal with problems that flow either directly from evangelical sources or have measurably disrupted evangelical thinkers.

However, by choosing to focus primarily on evangelical writers I have to admit that there are both existential and cognitive difficulties in the analysis. On the one hand, some of the scholars involved in this debate are former colleagues and students. Furthermore, the debates between some of them have gotten sinfully personal, as can

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¹ N. T. Wright, *The Last Word : Beyond the Bible Wars to a new understanding of the authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005).

² Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*. Translated by Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013). See R. Gamble review (forthcoming) *Westminster Theological Journal*.

sadly be expected when someone is fighting to retain his academic position. On the other hand, faulty teaching needs to be opposed because it will unnecessarily unsettle faith.³

The cognitive difficulty lies in the many necessary theological distinctions significant to proper communication. Some topics are very precise and involve extensive technical background information. Another practical difficulty is the vast amount of recent publications.

While choosing this more limited direction, it must also be admitted from the outset that there are some important topics that, because of time constraints, cannot be addressed. For example, there is much debate on how evangelicals should interpret the Exodus event.⁴

Another important topic is the impact of postmodernism on evangelical interpretation which I had planned to cover in the lecture, but cannot.⁵ This paper does not provide a total picture of inerrancy but focuses on debatable issues. Another session will handle that. Finally, today's analysis will seek to follow the requirements of the 9th commandment to protect and preserve a brother's good name. Author's names will be used infrequently and when mentioned will refer to primary texts cited in their proper context. Moving to the topic, analysis will begin at the time of the reformation.

I. Brief Historical Analysis as Background

A. From the Reformers through the WCF on Scripture. First, the reformers maintained both continuity and discontinuity with their medieval predecessors. In continuity with medieval systematics, the reformers agreed that theology should differentiate between the notions of revelation and inspiration. However, they moved beyond medieval systematic theology's more loosely connected

³ G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 83. Cites D.A. Carson, "Three more books on the Bible".

⁴ Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 70.

⁵ For more information, see Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 229.

notion of *principia theologiae* to a deeper analysis of the sources of a *principium unicum theologiae*.

After the reformation, Protestant doctrine developed in light of the need for internal confessions as well as external polemics aimed against Roman Catholicism. These developments brought unity as well as some discontinuity. All doctrinal advances, whether great or small, are born out of heated discussion. To suggest a theological advance within protestant systematics is not the same as arguing for theological discontinuity. The reformer's successors maintained all of the protestant distinctives in the doctrine of scripture.

1. Independent Loci. One advance as Protestantism matured was a change in the systematic ordering of doctrine. Later Protestants stated the *loci* more technically and strictly than had the Reformers.

The doctrine of Scripture became an independent *locus* of systematic theology; in part as a reaction against Roman Catholic polemics aimed against the Protestants. The development of a distinct *locus* of scripture was seen in both Reformed and Lutherans creedal statements. For example, the WCF placed the doctrine of Scripture first before the doctrine of God.

2. A second advance came from the arena of biblical interpretation. Some of the exegetical advances can be attributed to a better knowledge of Hebrew and cognate languages. There was a deeper wrestling with passages not fully examined by the reformers. There were also new advances in hermeneutics.

3. Debate. Having seen the need for an independent *locus* and having made advances in interpretation, nevertheless, the reformed community was not unified on the best approach to the topic of scripture. The debate among Protestants related to the proper theological method as well as the most faithful techniques of biblical interpretation. They stressed the objective authority of the text, an emphasis that is important for later discussion of our topic.⁶

⁶ In modern society, objective authority is based on factuality. Thus, if scripture is factual, then it is an authority. See Merrick & Garrett, *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 16.

B. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Debates: from Descartes to Nietzsche. Fundamental to an inerrant, authoritative bible is the fact that it gives epistemological certainty. In many ways, the history of western philosophy is the search for epistemological certainty.

The French Catholic philosopher Descartes had searched for epistemological certainty. He thought that he found it in the *cogito ergo sum*. For him, true knowledge was not dependent upon sense experience.

A century later, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1784), Kant wanted knowledge to begin with sense experience. However, he knew that all knowledge did not arise from sense experience and that there needed to be a synthesis of rationalism (knowledge not from sense experience) with empiricism.⁷ Kant wanted to have a Cartesian “thinking self” who also somehow had twelve organizing categories, and from those innate categories structured what he received by sense experience, and thus had knowledge of the “thing in itself”. Kant believed in an autonomous (self-sufficient) human mind that must not be subservient to any type of authority outside of itself.

Kant’s philosophy denied the possibility of divine revelation. Since God was relegated to the noumenal realm, if he existed at all, he could not be able to communicate to the phenomenal. Finally, Kant understood that history could only give scholars facts, nothing more. For him, there was no purpose to the flow of human history.

Nietzsche (1844-00) began the demise of the Kantian union of Cartesian rationalism and empiricism. Nietzsche said that Kant’s “thing in itself” was only a postulate, not a part of the mechanism itself. Since Kant’s “thing in itself” had vanished under Nietzsche’s atheistic glare, then there were no facts, and everything is in flux. In his own day, philosophers did not pick up on all of Nietzsche’s ideas. In stead they focused on logic, empiricist methodologies, and what is termed representationalism. However, Nietzsche would come back to haunt the 20th century.

⁷ W. Andrew Hoffercker, “Enlightenment and Awakening” in *Revolutions in Worldviews* (P&R), 264.

C. Early 20th Century Debates. 1. B. B. Warfield asked the question, “What does an exact and scientific exegesis determine to be the Biblical doctrine of Inspiration?”⁸ His answer was that the New Testament authors saw their writings as equal in authority to the OT, and were thus “inspired”. Their writings were not an expression of their will, but God’s will.⁹ Because it is thus inspired, then the Bible gives readers divinely mandated epistemological security.¹⁰ This is the answer to every philosopher’s dream!

Warfield was aware of the problems with the dictation theory of inspiration and its inability to account for differences in biblical vocabulary and style.¹¹ He rejected the idea that when the human appears the divine exits.¹² Maintaining both elements (human and divine) was, for him, of the highest importance.¹³

He furthermore argued that the inspiration of scripture was not simply limited to matters of faith and practice (what some term “infallibility”). He warned against any who would acknowledge that some parts of scripture were inspired- for example the great matters of faith, but in other parts argue that God let the biblical authors rely upon their natural powers of sight or study.^{14 15}

⁸ Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 174-75: “...any objections brought against the doctrine from other spheres of enquiry are inoperative; it being a settled logical principle that so long as the proper evidence by which a proposition is established remains unrefuted, all so-called objections brought against it pass out of the category of objections to its truth into the category of difficulties to be adjusted to it.”

⁹ Warfield, “The Authority and Inspiration of the Scriptures,” in *Selected Shorter Writings of Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1973), 2:540: “It ascribes to the authors such an attending influence of the Spirit in the process of writing, that the words they set down become also the words of God; and the resultant writing...the expression of God’s will.”

¹⁰ Warfield, “The Authority and Inspiration of the Scriptures,” 2:541.

¹¹ Warfield, “The Divine and Human in the Bible,” 2:543-44.

¹² Warfield, “Divine and Human in the Bible,” 2:546.

¹³ Warfield, “Divine and Human in the Bible,” 2:547, 547-8: “... for every word in the Bible, it is asserted that it has been conceived in a human mind and written by a human hand.”

¹⁴ Warfield, “Inspiration,” in *Selected Shorter*, 2:626.

2. The Twentieth Century Linguistic Turn. Nietzsche had already proven that Kant's anchor, the "thing in itself", was gone. There was thus a need for a new metaphor, and this need, at least in part, propelled what is called the linguistic turn. The "linguistic turn" came with the advent of logical positivism and the early Wittgenstein.

For the logical positivist, "truth" became words that were organized in a logical, mathematical form that supposedly represented both the world as well as the mind. The belief was that the knowing subject was not to contribute to a true knowledge of the object. The concern was the way in which language could be a legitimate vehicle for modern epistemology.

The early Wittgenstein was a logical atomist, and his ontology was that words had to refer to a substance that existed independent of language. If words do not refer to something, then there will be no meaning in their use.

Language mirrors a state of affairs. It was a "label" view of language. The purpose was to identify or name an object with a fixation on explanation. In other words, language's principle function was correctly to name or identify objects. There was supposedly a pure relation between the human mind and the objects that were external to the mind.

The later Wittgenstein (of the *Philosophical Investigations*) followed Ordinary language analysis. Meaning was now focused in the words' use. Something is required to name an object, and naming presupposes categories and procedures that make identifying the object possible.¹⁵ He argued that what are termed "basic facts" can be identified only when there was already a category for "factness." That category (factness) demanded a world of relations and meanings. Someone cannot speak from a position that resides outside of language.

3. Method. The philosopher's goal was no longer to "explain" but simply to describe. The old "explanatory" approach, specifically the attempt to move from particular to general truth, was deemed wrong. What was important was the "game of

¹⁵ His method of explaining the relationship was with the word "concurus". Warfield, "Inspiration," 2:629.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, 31.

life" or "Language Game", with emphasis on action and description, rather than on propositions.¹⁷ There can be no "timeless truths".¹⁸ This background information makes it possible to turn to contemporary debates on inerrancy.

II. Contemporary Debates on Inerrancy.

A. Introduction. Since the time of the enlightenment, liberal scholarship has attacked the authority and inspiration of God's holy word. As mentioned in the introduction, this lecture will not focus on liberal critiques, important as they are. Rather, sadly, the biblical doctrine of Inerrancy has recently been challenged on at least two broad areas from within the evangelical world itself. The first subject of attack concerns how Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) culture and texts relate to the OT and the second controversial area is the use of OT quotations in the NT. Both of these problems have roots squarely placed in past theological and philosophical developments.

B. Ancient Near Eastern Texts. Various fairly recent discoveries have made it possible to compare the Bible, as a piece of literature, with the texts of its surrounding cultures. Some of those discoveries include late Second Temple Jewish sources known as the OT Pseudepigrapha as well as the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Particularly problematic for inerrancy are the parallels with Babylonian creation myths and Sumerian cataclysmic flood myths.¹⁹ The question posed by contemporary evangelicals is whether the doctrine of scripture, as classically formulated, has adequately dealt with the challenges that arise from this new learning.²⁰ Some believe that it has not, and must therefore be revised.

Specifically, some argue that the proper starting point for analysis of the Genesis creation story is to affirm that the roots of the biblical creation account are

¹⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, 7, 19.

¹⁸ The issue for Enns is epistemological certainty. Enns, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 113: "Must Christians truly believe that God left for the church a private epistemology, by which we know truth differently and better than others?"

¹⁹ See Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 28.

²⁰ Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 59 citing Enns, "Response to Beale 1", *JETS* 49 (2006), 317.

nestled in an ANE mythological setting.²¹ If theologians do not properly account for that historical and literary setting, they argue that evangelicals may base their doctrine of inerrancy on a false foundation.²²

What they argue is that OT biblical writers had absorbed the ANE mythical worldviews, and then reproduced those incorrect worldviews in the scripture that they wrote. Moses actually believed that his worldview, which was the same as the ANE mythical worldview, was reliable. That was the nature of his own socially constructed mythical reality.²³ These supposedly evangelical scholars will affirm that the Genesis creation account is still inerrant, but they argue that evangelicals need to revise the way in which we view how the Bible is inerrant.²⁴ Deeper analysis, including how to deal with this large topic, is in a following section.

C. OT quotation in the New.

1. A second advance concerns new research in OT interpretation. In the early 1980's, the American ETS debated whether the infancy narratives in Matthew were "factual". Robert Gundry argued that they were "midrash" and not intended to be factual reports in terms of literal or modern standards for history writing. He argued that the events were "true" and were understandable in the first century in a different way than in the 21st. Gundry's views were deemed unacceptable for membership. The issue against Gundry was that Midrash was incompatible with the kind of truth of an inerrant bible.²⁵

2. Paul's Background. A second advance concerns new research on Paul's Jewish background. Interest was probably begun as a counter swing or reaction against R. Bultmann's notion of Gnostic origins for Paul's religion.²⁶ Some investigators have argued that Paul's "Jewishness" was not as much Rabbinic as Hellenistic, while others

²¹ Enns, "Response to Beale", 320 as cited by Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 59.

²² Enns, "Response", 321. Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 59

²³ Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 73.

²⁴ Enns, "Response", 323; Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 60.

²⁵ See Merritt/Garrett, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 11-12, 312.

²⁶ See early works of J. G. Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 32-35.

have taken the opposite approach- that Paul was not at all dependent upon Hellenism and was completely molded by Pharisaic rabbinism.²⁷ Understanding Paul's background is complex, but there are reliable conclusions.

There is no doubt that Paul used current rabbinic interpretive practices.²⁸ One example is his "pearl and strings" method.²⁹ Gal. 3:19-20 was an example of an *ad hominem* argument.³⁰ A third example is that the Rabbi's would conflate passages, as Paul did in his analysis of the Exodus and the Red Sea at 1 Cor. 10:1-4.³¹ [See Enns analysis following].³² A fourth is that Paul used literalistic exegesis. In other words, the prohibition against pork was a literal command- it means not to consume a ham sandwich.³³ A more complex example includes his treatment of Abraham, whom he regarded as prototypical of salvation history. This is the "literal" meaning of Abraham.³⁴

There are also examples of Paul's use of Hillel's Rules, called *middot*.³⁵ The

²⁷ H. J. Schoeps, *Paul, the Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, (ET 1961) argued for Hellenism and W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, for Pharisaic.

²⁸ H. Ridderbos, "An Attempt at the Theological definition of inerrancy, infallibility, and Authority," *International Reformed Bulletin*, 11 (1968), 38.

²⁹ In this example, someone collects passages from different portions of the Bible to support a particular argument. Each passage is a separate pearl, the passages are of the same type (not a combination of pearls and diamonds) and together they make a more beautiful object (the necklace). Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 99-100.

³⁰ The meaning here is different from normal use. See Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 103.

³¹ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 66.

³² Peter Enns, "The moveable well in 1 Cor. 10:4," *BBR* 6 (1996), 23, 27, 28. Enns disagrees with Kaiser, who asserted that it was unknown in Paul's day. Enns says that it is early, and also documented, n. 12.

³³ Literalist interpretation was not as prominent in the Talmudic literature. Literalist was considered basic for further exegetical development. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 15-16. It does not mean what later patristic commentators like Origen and others thought.

³⁴ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 58, 66.

³⁵ See J. Jeremias, "Paulus als Hellelit", *Neotestament et Semitica* ed. E. Ellis, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 92-94. E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 41.

first *middot* was “from the less to the greater” found at Romans 5:15-21.³⁶ The second rule was termed “Equivalence”, found at Romans 4:1-12.³⁷ Another (the fifth) rule was the “general to particular”,³⁸ and Romans 13:8-10 is a beautiful example.³⁹ Hillel’s 7th rule was that meaning came from context and application from self-evident inference, which Paul used at Romans 4:10.

Paul also had some similarities to the exegetical methods of the Qumran community, and, according to Ridderbos, actual thematic corollary with them in Paul’s important theme of the believer being “in Christ”.⁴⁰ Thus, while experts debate some of the types as well as extent, Paul used some current rabbinic practices.⁴¹

3. Normativity. It appears to many that the apostolic writers did not have one coherent (Jewish) exegetical system as they handled the OT in the NT.⁴² The larger question is whether the New Testament’s use of Old Testament scripture is meant to be a “normative use” for Christians today.⁴³ Examining the question more closely by

³⁶ The rule was: “What applies in less important cases will apply in more important ones.” Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 18-19. See also Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 66, and Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 20.

³⁷ When a particular word was used in different contexts, then the same consideration applied to each context. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 18. See Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 66, and as Longenecker translates, *Biblical Exegesis*, 101: “verbal analogy from one verse to another; where the same words are applied to two separate cases, it follows that the same considerations apply to both.”

³⁸ A general principle may be restricted in application when it falls under certain qualifications. Likewise, particular rules may be generalized for similar reasons. Another way to say it was: “inference from general to special cases” or “the general and the particular”.

³⁹ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 66. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 19. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 20. For the sixth rule, see Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 101.

⁴⁰ See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 37-39.

⁴¹ Paul did not use *Pesher* interpretation very much. See Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 67; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 113.

⁴² Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 65.

⁴³ See E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His followers preach the right doctrine from the wrong texts? An examination of the presuppositions of Jesus’ and the apostles

dividing it, many evangelicals assert that NT interpretations of OT Scripture are materially normative for Christian exegesis and theology. Others argue that it is not. Stated more precisely, are the specific exegetical methods used by the NT writers either normative or exemplary for contemporary Christian interpretive practice today?

While the Roman Catholic Church has a clear doctrine of normativity relative to scriptural interpretation (the Pope as normative), Protestants are not so single minded on the issue.⁴⁴ Evangelicals have wrestled with these questions for quite a while, and a proper presentation takes us back more than 35 years as two evangelical writers came to similar conclusions on the topic.

In a Theological Journal published by a Naparc denomination, former colleague Andy Bandstra said that the NT was not intended to be a hermeneutics textbook, that the NT authors never meant to lay down hermeneutical rules, and that making NT use of OT passages such a textbook is an illegitimate use.⁴⁵ Bandstra’s opinion was similar to that expressed in the evangelical British publication *Tyndale Bulletin*.⁴⁶ Both men claimed that the NT’s use of the OT is not normative for hermeneutical theory and I disagree with both.⁴⁷

Fascinatingly, after a further thirty years of reflection, the British author has continued to hold to his earlier position.⁴⁸ According to the British scholar, to assert that the NT is a textbook for hermeneutics of the OT may sound “pious, reverent, and holistic”- nevertheless it is incorrect.⁴⁹ It is incorrect first because the OT used some

exegetical method” *Themelios* 14 (1989), 89-96. E. Earle Ellis, “Jesus’ use of the OT and the Genesis of NT theology” *BBR* 3 (1993), 59-75.”

⁴⁴ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 38.

⁴⁵ Andrew Bandstra, “Interpretation in I Cor. 10:1-11”, *CTJ* (1971), 20.

⁴⁶ See Longenecker, “Can we reproduce the exegesis of the NT”, *Tyndale Bulletin* (1970).

⁴⁷ Bandstra moderated his opinion, 21- that his analysis should not lead “to the conclusion that therefore they can simply be dismissed as having no relevance for our present-day approach to exegesis.” But what Protestant would even think of “dismissing” the NT writers?

⁴⁸ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, Xxxiv-xxxvi.

⁴⁹ Longenecker, Xxxiv-xxxvi. It is the notion that like a flower’s stem and foliage, “to understand an exegetical method in terms of a particular culture is to deny the universal

very culturally conditioned methods to determine God's will. Also, while those OT methods were acknowledged in Hebrews 1 as "appropriate vehicles", nevertheless, he argues, "they are nowhere in the biblical records set out as necessary examples to be followed."⁵⁰

The same author sees that there were culturally conditioned methods used to determine God's will in the NT also. Thus, he is convinced that believers should make a distinction between "normative theological and ethical principles" that are found in the NT and "culturally conditioned methods and practices used in the support and expression of those principles".⁵¹

He cited examples from church polity and practice, sacramental practice, and to NT ethics, like foot washing. In these places Protestants disagree simply because the NT demonstrates the culturally conditioned expressions of the principles not the normative principles.

Following this British author's lead, the first hermeneutical task would be to determine the "normative principles" in the Bible. The second would be to see how the Biblical authors used "culturally conditioned means" to explicate the principle, or stated another way, how they actually contextualized the normative principle to their own time and culture. The third task would be then to re-explicate or re-contextualize the normative principle in our own culture.⁵²

In summary, Evangelicals must determine the best Greek text, study how Paul and other NT writers handled the OT, and have a precise hermeneutic determining the relationship between norm and application. This provides the background information necessary for facing problems interpreting Paul.

legitimacy of its interpretation."

⁵⁰ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, Xxxvi.

⁵¹ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, Xxxvii.

⁵² Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, Xxxviii: "...all the while recognizing the cultural and time-conditioned nature of their methods." Xxxix.

III. Interpreting Paul

A. Embracing Culture. In light of the two background articles as examples, in 1996 an American evangelical scholar teaching at a Seminary famous for its reformed orthodoxy disagreed with their conclusions. Instead of rejecting those OT exegetical tools as used by Paul as normative, he argued that the culturally conditioned Rabbinic methods must be embraced as the way that God wanted scripture to be understood and interpreted.

Peter Enns wants Biblical interpreters to give more credence to the fact that, *to a certain extent* [his italics], Paul's understanding of the Bible was determined by his historical situation.⁵³ He wants to emphasize that special revelation "demands a firm historical setting." Paul was a "product of his own time, and it is precisely this fact that explains the nature of comments such as what we see in I Cor 10:4."⁵⁴ Enns' presentation will be negatively evaluated in section IV.

B. Perceived Challenges and Solutions.

1. Challenges. In the last ten years, some conservative scholars have observed these recent exegetical advances as well as with what they perceive to be an inherent weakness in the evangelical view of scripture. They note that over 100 years ago Herman Bavinck was critical of the reformed confessions which leaned toward a more mechanical view of inspiration rather than a more organic view.⁵⁵ Thus, evangelicalism is not addressing contemporary scholarship because it simply cannot. The contemporary situation poses such severe challenges that the evangelical faith is no longer viable. They have concluded that the evangelical world is at an impasse.

2. Perceived Solutions. To solve the perceived problems they have made some suggestions. They want to move beyond present discussion between liberal and conservative to a new perspective. Their aim is to examine the data offered by biblical

⁵³ Enns, "The moveable well, 1 Cor. 10:4", *BBR* 6 (1996), 33.

⁵⁴ Enns, "The moveable well", 34.

⁵⁵ They argue that 17th century Reformed Dogmatics was limited in its understanding of the humanness of scripture; Bavinck, *RD* 1:415. For more information, see R. B. Gaffin, "Old Amsterdam and old Princeton".

scholars to see what implications that data has for a better doctrine of Scripture. Some are convinced that the basic doctrine of inspiration must be modified and replaced with one that is more open and curious toward contemporary challenges.⁵⁶

They can make what sounds like a compelling argument for a radical re-appraisal. They argue that some old Princeton theologians considered it legitimate to use phenomena, or human culture, to interpret Scripture, and add that former Westminster Professors used that method. They also argue that to oppose the method is to depart from the old Princeton and Westminster tradition.

With that bulwark established, they have suggested that there is a proper framework to study how human culture has impacted scripture by using Bavinck's notion of an incarnational analogy. The incarnational analogy is simply a metaphor for Scripture's full divinity and humanity which helps to build a better model for Scripture's inspiration.

The incarnational analogy can be positively spelled out in this manner: there is no sin in the incarnated God-man. There is therefore no sin in the Bible. Christ was firmly centered in history and was without sin and the scriptures, in a similar manner, are also firmly situated in history and without errors.⁵⁷ The incarnation is a metaphor of Scripture's full divinity and humanity, and assuming its full divinity one can then focus attention on the problem area- accounting for the human elements. The incarnational analogy is "the proper way" to address the issue.⁵⁸

IV. Negative Evaluation and Proposed Solution. Having painted the problems and proposed solution, we are ready to enter into critiques.

A. Moveable Rock. Paul's text reads NIV, "and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." The author's question began on a small exegetical point which he expanded into a broad hermeneutical principle. The specific question was whether Paul's citation

⁵⁶ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 13.

⁵⁷ Enns, "Response" 323; Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 81.

⁵⁸ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 21.

of the "moveable rock" at 1 Corinthians 10:4 was based either upon a broad written Jewish tradition or an existing tradition with an independent origin.⁵⁹ The basic issue is not whether the tradition existed, which all acknowledge, but why there is a "rather pedestrian Jewish legend in the writings of a holy apostle."⁶⁰ The author's answer to his question is that Paul's statement about the rock was not conscious.⁶¹ That is, Paul inherited an "interpreted Bible" which he simply adopted as his own.⁶²

However, a better answer than a sophomoric Paul not aware of his own culture is that Paul applied the rock motif to Christ and emphasized God's continued covenant faithfulness to his people. Paul consciously adapted this tradition without necessarily adopting the tradition's exegetical methods.

However, the author strongly rejected the notion that Paul consciously adapted the tradition. He argued that this story was "Jewish lore", nevertheless this "Jewish lore" represented Paul's understanding of the event.⁶³

⁵⁹ Enns, "The moveable well", 31: "Paul's comment is not the result of conscious exegetical activity on his part. He is not encountering afresh the gap in the narrative between Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, nor has he discovered the wordplay in Num 21:16-20. Rather, he is merely one witness to a tradition that is itself the end product of exegetical activity." The rabbinic tradition about the rock was available to Paul in written form, a "rich Jewish exegetical tradition." See Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Cor." in *Commentary on NT*, 724.

⁶⁰ Enns, "The moveable well", 26-27. n 34 The tradition as a: "through pedestrian and uninspired Jewish legend[s]".

⁶¹ Enns, "The moveable well", 28, 32: "seems somewhat superfluous to the hortatory-didactic context of the passage. Paul could simply have said that the rock in the desert was Christ rather than making a passing mention of its mobility." "Why, after all," he asked, "in the midst of a dire warning from Israel's history, would Paul incorporate an exegetical tradition of a mobile rock?"

⁶² Enns, "The moveable well", 32: This is "the way in which Paul understood the provision of water in the wilderness narratives of the OT." It "obscures the issue" to ask how an apostle could have "employed" such a tradition. "Paul's understanding of the miraculous provision of water in the desert is a product of the exegetical environment in which he, as a learned Jew, lived and was taught."

⁶³ Enns, "The moveable well", 33 While it is common to assert Paul adapted the tradition, n. 18: "I am strongly inclined to disagree."

Such an analysis is fundamentally mistaken.⁶⁴ Paul used it as a call to faith and repentance, and wrote specifically to Gentile believers who were united to Christ. Paul got the teaching from Jesus, not the Rabbi's. It can be argued "on this rock I will build my church" is Jesus referring to himself as the rock.⁶⁵ Paul took the rock with water gushing out as a type of Christ whom the Father handed over to death for us, and that from him flows the living water of the spirit.⁶⁶ *Contra* Bandstra, Paul is a theological model for exegesis as well as for theology.⁶⁷ *Contra* Enns, Paul consciously modified the rabbinic tradition.

B. Incarnational Analogy. The previous presentation should demonstrate that the critique is based upon a well established foundation.

1. Continuity Argument. Before moving to a more substantive critique, it would be well to eliminate the defense that the contemporary incarnational analogy follows from teaching established at old Princeton. For the sake of argument alone, we could grant that background analysis could be true. However, even if great theologians of the past held mistaken notions, it does not change the fact that the notions are mistaken. With that line of analysis one could say that Arminius studied theology in Geneva under the tutelage of Theodore Beza. Thus, Arminius is simply following the path laid out by Beza. We know that such an argument does not hold water because we cannot blame Beza for Arminius' heterodoxy. In the same fashion, godly and orthodox past instructors at old Princeton cannot be held liable for present day mistakes.

2. Authorship of Scripture. The first substantive critique is that the

⁶⁴ There are similar points to the Rabbis. Paul shifted the account. Grant that a rock followed Israel. Paul identifies the rock with Jesus.

⁶⁵ There are also references to the event where it is God who splits the rock (not Moses) Isaiah 48:21; Psalm 78:15 and 105:41.

⁶⁶ Paul was not dependent upon "the fuller (and fanciful) legends found in later rabbinic material." His use of the Jewish interpretation had "a uniquely Christian twist. See Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Cor.," in Beale and Carson, 724. He may have been influenced by Philo, also.

⁶⁷ G. Vos, "The theology of Paul", *Redemptive History*, 355. Vos rightfully stated: "While belonging to the history or revelation, his teaching at the same time marks the beginning of the history of theology."

Incarnational analogy presented by Peter Enns diverges from classic Reformation teaching on the doctrine of Scripture, specifically relative to the Bible's divine authorship and unity.

A biblically faithful doctrine of Scripture, like all other *loci* of systematic theology, must be established on and developed from scripture alone. A proper doctrine will maintain that scripture, the word of God, is foundationally and essentially divine.⁶⁸ In inscripturation, the priority belongs to the divine, not to the human.⁶⁹ The doctrine of scripture is not from the word of God plus information from the world surrounding the Bible.⁷⁰ In that light, we cannot change our doctrine of scripture because of information gleaned from human scholarship.⁷¹ It is not the humanness of the biblical authors and their cultural context that determines what scripture is as a whole.

Granted, God's word was communicated in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek and delivered thousands of years ago. It is appropriate and important to seek to understand the biblical languages and culture. The fact that it was communicated in a language foreign to most of us today and in a time period far removed does not "condition" that it is God's word. All of the human elements (known as the Phenomena of Scripture) do not "make up" Scripture's nature.⁷² We would not create the doctrine of God based upon the presence of evil!

Enns counters that the evangelical view is actually not from scripture. Inerrancy sells God short. In fact, God doesn't care about historical accuracy and

⁶⁸ *WCF* I/4 notes that Scripture's author is God, not God and man.

⁶⁹ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 13-14 does not argue for divine priority but that it is "ultimately" from God and "God's gift to the church".

⁷⁰ It is like saying examine geology to determine creation. In some senses, this is like problems with the creation narratives or the flood. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 15, wrongly argues: "that we need to determine what the Bible as a whole is "on the evidence that comes from within the Bible itself, as well as from the world surrounding the Bible."

⁷¹ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 14, "engage the evidence and adjust our doctrine accordingly."

⁷² *Contra* Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 41: "What the Bible is must be understood in light of the cultural context in which it was given."

scientific precision. The evangelical view fails to deal with the nature of God's truth revealed in ancient texts. God speaks truth through "the idioms, attitudes, assumptions, and general worldviews of the ancient authors," he counters, and we need to hold our own cultural assumptions in check and not impose them on the text. God's truth requires contemporary readers to embrace the attitudes and assumptions of the worldview of the biblical authors. Contemporary inerrancy wrongly defines "truth" apart from that historical framework. Contemporary inerrancy is an ideologically driven approach to biblical interpretation. Enns also rejects biblical statements as something timeless with immediate application. For him, the Bible's text is bound to its time.⁷³

3. Unity of Scripture. A second critique focuses on scripture's unity. The Bible teaches that it has an overall thematic unity because it has one ultimate author, God himself. In significant contrast, the incarnational analogy argues that whatever unity may found is based upon the message of Christ, what he terms the "living Christ" or "incarnate word" or Christotelic focus", not God's being and character.⁷⁴ The presentation concludes with proposed solutions.

C. Proposed Biblically Faithful Solution to the Problem. Merrick and Garrett remind us, rightly, that inerrancy is not a solo doctrine and suggested answering six questions that reveal prior theological discussions of the phrase 'what scripture says, God says'.⁷⁵ This section will try to address a few of their questions.

1. Objective Authority. Overcoming the threats to inerrancy requires teaching and preaching that God's holy word has an objective authority. Evangelicals cannot maintain the doctrine of inerrancy and at the same time affirm that biblical writers like Moses unconsciously incorporated mythical stories- thinking that they corresponded to historical reality.⁷⁶ Evangelicals cannot say that while the biblical writers intended to

⁷³ Enns, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 86-91.

⁷⁴ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 110: "(T)he unity of the Bible is sought in the living Christ. It comes together in Christ." "...what gives the written word its unity is not simply the words on the page, but the incarnate word who is more than simply the sum of the biblical parts." See Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 109; Enns, "Response 2", 8-9.

⁷⁵ *Biblical Inerrancy*, 310.

⁷⁶ Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 67.

write history, we now know that what they wrote was in stead a myth. That is the same as to say that the biblical writers thought that they were recording history but they were wrong- because they were unaware that they were recording myth. We cannot counter and say that these were "divinely inspired mistakes". We cannot say that while what they wrote was historically incorrect it was still theologically correct.⁷⁷

2. ANE Texts. While recognizing that God accommodates himself to human capacity, evangelicals must use information from ANE material with care. We should not read the Genesis creation account as coming from the surrounding culture- and then was theologically "corrected" by God.

In other words, it is not that the meaning of creation is that instead of heathen gods being in control of the world, the God of Israel is in control. While it is true that the God of Israel is in control, the issue is that the Genesis account is "historical" while the ANE accounts are "mythical". Stated another way, the Genesis accounts are reliable history and the myths are non-historical.⁷⁸ While some want, wrongly, to argue that our view of inerrancy has kept us from fully seeing the intimate relationship between Scripture and ANE, in fact there are ways to interpret Genesis properly (maintaining inerrancy) in light of information gleaned from ANE sources.⁷⁹

3. Doctrine of God. A proper doctrine of God makes it possible for evangelicals to hold to a strong doctrine of inerrancy. God's self-existence means that

⁷⁷ One reason why these arguments are unacceptable is because they have already been encountered, and answered, in the past. We cannot say these things because in fact we have already dealt with them. In fact, a number of the arguments presented by the evangelicals are precisely the same arguments presented as a possible solution by the German higher critic Gerhard von Rad. Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 67,75.

⁷⁸ See Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 28-33, 36. Beale acknowledged that Enns saw tenth century BC biblical writings with a degree of accuracy more in keeping with contemporary standards. We must be careful not to convey the concept that the Genesis accounts are not historical. 37: "the most probable assessment of his views so far is that conceptually, at the least, he affirms that the biblical writers imbibed myths at significant points, recorded them, and ..." 38: cites Enns 45: "If the Bible does not tell us what actually happened, how can we trust it about anything?..."

⁷⁹ See *WCG*, 1:147-57. Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 68, 74.

he is not dependent upon anything besides his own being. In other words, God is the source of his own being. All of his virtues or perfections are included in the fullness of his being or self-existence. For created beings to have knowledge of such a God requires God's own self revelation to us- information that transcends what is humanly possible in terms of abstract thought. Now, based on the presupposition of God's perfect revelation of himself to his people in special revelation, this God who is self-contained fullness in himself has given his own self revelation in scripture to humanity. It is written by men but they were men carried by the Holy Spirit.

Safeguarding God's self-existence or aseity keeps evangelicals from mistakes concerning inerrancy.⁸⁰ Notice Enns' erroneous doctrine of God when he argues that Jesus' teaching "cannot be lined up neatly with the OT and judged to be a simple extension or revealing of what the OT says." The OT doctrine of God relative to other nations unmistakably and understandably "...reflects the ubiquitous tribal culture at the time."⁸¹

4. Define inerrancy correctly. In the literature we read of what some call the "classic doctrine" or "original inerrancy" or "perfect book inerrancy", thus in our discussions evangelicals need to define their terms carefully. Also, Evangelicals must differentiate between the nature of inerrancy and the way the Bible is used in the name of inerrancy. What some do, improperly, under the name of inerrancy is not necessarily inerrancy. Inerrancy is not necessarily joined to an unsound hermeneutic.⁸²

Connected to a proper doctrine of God and proper definition of inerrancy are the issues of God's relationship to his creatures, and the nature of scripture and truth.⁸³

⁸⁰ Garrett and Merrick, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 314-16 argue that God's identity is love, that God's love can only be understood through dialogical encounter, that sacrificial love is the essence of the gospel, and that all dialogue on inerrancy must be done without "ugliness".

⁸¹ Enns, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 112. Mohler, *Biblical Inerrancy* 120: "Enns believes that the Bible should be understood as ancient literature that reflects all the characteristics of other literature from the same era."

⁸² *Biblical inerrancy*, 132.

⁸³ See *Biblical Inerrancy*, 317.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, the doctrine of inerrancy has faced grave challenges by unbelieving philosophers and theologians of the past. Sadly, evangelicals are now facing significant challenges from within our own ranks. However, there are clear answers that can be offered to the challenges without the need to turn to false methodologies that will ultimately undermine the scripture's own teaching about itself.

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