

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Holy Scripture by Gordon H. Clark

Editor's note: This article first appeared in the Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society Winter 1963, and since has been published in God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics. A new fourth edition of God's Hammer (\$12.95) was recently published this past July.

For the philosophic problem of the knowledge of God, for the construction of a theology, and as well for religious stability, a view of the Bible as revelation is most important. Currently many authors both in Europe and America are trying to meet the need.

In the December 24, 1962, issue of *The Presbyterian Outlook*, four southern professors join forces to propagate a particular view. The four are: Dr. Kenneth J. Foreman, Professor Emeritus of Doctrinal Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary; Dr. James H. Gailey, Jr., Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Seminary; Dr. James L. Mays, Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Union Seminary (Virginia); and Dr. John F. Iansen, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Austin Presbyterian Seminary. They write under the general title "Do We Need an Infallible Bible?"

The four articles are part of the widespread contemporary attack on the truthfulness of the Bible. It is instructive to see how their arguments are constructed.

Dr. Foreman, in the first article, addresses himself mainly to the question of the (alleged) need of an infallible Bible. He asks, "Do I need an infallible Bible to convict me of sin?" In all plausibility the answer is No. Of course, a man may be convicted of sin without ever having seen a Bible; he may simply hear an evangelist and the Holy

Spirit may convict him. Such a consideration indicates that the initial question is not quite the correct question to ask if we are interested in the truthfulness of the Bible.

After a few more slightly irrelevant questions, Dr. Foreman asks, "Is it necessary for the Bible's geography to be above reproach before I can put my trust in the God of the Bible?" The series of irrelevant questions with their plausible negative answers has supposedly conditioned the reader to continue with a negative here also. But if the question is examined a little, the negative is not so plausible. If the Bible is mistaken on geography, which ought to have been easy for the writers to put down correctly, it might very well be mistaken on theology, which is much more difficult than geography. To this question an affirmative answer is at least as plausible as the negative answer was to the first question.

There is another part of this first article that depends more on innuendo than on logic. The author writes concerning (alleged) discrepancies in the Scriptures: "Many believers in this theory (of inerrancy) about the Bible, when such discrepancies are pointed out as they cannot explain without arguments that sound suspiciously twisted, resort to the proposition that whatever errors may be found in our Bibles, there was none in the original manuscripts. This affirmation cannot be proved; it cannot be disproved. It will be worth discussing when we have the originals." The implication seems to be that it is not worth discussing now, and we are left with the fallible Bibles that we have.

This argument is an excellent example of begging the question. The innuendo begins with the

suggestion that attempts to explain discrepancies are (usually always) suspiciously twisted. Thus the mind of the reader is prejudiced against the truthfulness of the Scripture. The author hides the fact that the burden of proof lies on the critic to show that no explanation is possible. So many alleged discrepancies have by now been removed by archaeological discoveries that the person who accepts the Word of God needs no longer be terrified by the unsupported doubts of the unbelieving critic.

There is also another flaw in the argument. The author suggests that there is no use discussing whether the alleged error was missing from the original until we have the original. This seems to betray a forgetfulness of textual criticism. The differences between the Greek New Testament which we have and the autographs are few in number and of slight consequence. Most of them are differences in spelling, or in word order, or in some small detail that does not affect the sense. To suppose that we are so ignorant of the original wording as this argument requires is to cast aside the whole science of textual criticism.

It may be that we cannot prove true some particular statement in the Bible, but the reason is not that the autograph is missing. What is missing is corroborative evidence from historical or archaeological sources, without which the unbeliever refuses to accept the statement of the Bible. Therefore we do not acquiesce in Dr. Foreman's desire not to discuss these matters until the original is found – a requirement he is safe in making. On the contrary, we shall remind the world that the critics once asserted that the Hittite nation never existed.

Let us grant that archaeology can never prove the truth of every statement in the Bible, not even every historical statement. But our assurance of the truth of the Bible does not depend on the sort of proof these professors want. It depends on a consideration found in chapter one, section five, of the *Westminster Confession*, which these Presbyterian professors have not seen fit to refer to. This excellent summary of Biblical teaching says, "Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."

Dr. James L. Mays, ostensibly asserting the "authority" of the Bible, attacks its infallibility. And what is strange for a professor in a Presbyterian seminary, he does so by recourse to a Roman

Catholic argument. "If we had a book whose value consisted in its infallibility, we could not use this value unless there were infallible men to go along with it." This is essentially the claim of the Pope that an infallible text requires an infallible interpreter. But what honest Protestant ever accepted this popish dictum? Where is the compulsion in the assertion? How does the Pope or the professor justify his demand for an infallible interpreter? Have Protestants forgotten their heritage to the extent of being deceived by old Romish superstitions?

Suppose it were true that an infallible text required an infallible interpreter. Then, of course, the Bible would require a papal encyclical for its interpretation. But since the encyclical, on this theory, is itself an infallible text, it too requires an infallible interpreter. Whoever this might be, his interpretation, also infallible, would require another infallible interpreter; and so on *ad infinitum*. Obviously the papal claim of this Presbyterian professor is absurd. When, then, the professor concludes, "The authority of the Bible is best commended to the world, not by a fearful defense of its infallibility, but by lives which show the reality of that authority," we reply, without minimizing the lives of any saints who obey the Bible, that we are not fearful of our defense of infallibility against this fallacy of false disjunction. The professor ought to be fearful of his lack of logic.

Indeed, we wish to ask these men what authority the Bible can have, if it is not true. The Neo-orthodox, or whatever name best suits them, talk a good deal about the Bible and its authority. But they are not at all clear as to why we should believe, submit to, or honor a book that is marred with discrepancies and errors. Karl Barth, it will be remembered, attributes to the Bible not only geographical mistakes and number mysticism, but errors in theology. But if a doctrine is false, why should it be authoritatively preached? The logic of such a position is more than puzzling.

Now, Dr. Mays asserts that the Bible is authoritative. And in doing so, he makes some statements that are so commendable that he himself ought to pay attention to them. He says

Presbyterians are supposed to build faith on the Bible, to get what is said in theology from Scriptures. And that includes belief about the Bible. We have to look at it and examine it to learn what it is right to say in faith. It is presumptuous to refuse to look and to tell God what we need without

considering what he has, in his grace and wisdom, given us.

This is excellent advice. But none of the four professors follows it. As is the case with Barth also, their theory of the Bible is not what the Bible says about itself. It is something they have imposed on the Bible from without. The quotation just made says that we should frame our view of the Bible – its inspiration, its authority – from what the Bible itself says. What then does it say?

The Bible says that all Scripture, that is, all the words that were written down in the Old Testament (at least), is breathed out by God. Holy men spoke – they spoke words – as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The Old Testament has many instances of the phrase, “the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Many other times we read, “The word of God came to.” *Deuteronomy* 18:18 says, “I...will put my words in his mouth,” and a similar phrase occurs in *Jeremiah* 1:9. Everywhere the Bible speaks of itself, it teaches verbal inspiration. The words are the words of God. It is nowhere said that the words contain geographical discrepancies and theological errors. No examination of the text itself can produce evidence that the words are not inspired. If we take our belief about the Bible from what the Bible says about itself, we must conclude that the words are the words of God who cannot lie.

Verbal inspiration is an unpopular doctrine in many seminaries today. Of the many distasteful things that the Bible says, its teaching of verbal inspiration is perhaps the most distasteful of all. Ingenious attempts are made to avoid it, deny it, or replace it with something else. It is castigated as mechanical – though how God’s speaking can rightly be called mechanical is hard to see. It is called static, and presumably static is a noise that obscures the message. Instead of static and verbal inspiration, a theory of dynamic inspiration is proposed. The only trouble is that it is not a theory. It is simply a word that carries an appealing connotation, so that the unwary reader may be deceived into thinking poorly of verbal inspiration without having any definite view to replace it. In brief, the Neo-orthodox views on inspiration are un-Biblical. They are not arrived at by listening to what the Bible says, but by imposing on the Bible preconceived notions of what revelation must be.

In particular, the Neo-orthodox views of the Bible are a denial and contradiction of the teaching of Jesus Christ himself. Did Christ ever admit errors – geographical or otherwise – in the Old

Testament? Did he ever make complicated attempts to harmonize the divine infallibility of the Bible with its human fallibility? Did he ever teach that God can reveal himself in false statements as well as in true statements, as Brunner does? What was Christ’s view of the Bible?

Christ’s view of the Bible can very quickly be indicated. Christ said: It is written! If you do not believe Moses’ *writings*, how will you believe my *words*? For the Scripture cannot be broken.

Do we need an infallible Bible? We need an infallible Bible, unless we are willing to contradict the teachings of Christ. We need verbal inspiration if we are to believe the call to repentance and the doctrine of justification. We need inerrancy if we are to have any confident knowledge of God. For, if the Bible is mistaken in its doctrine of inspiration, why should we think it correct in its doctrine of God, repentance, or anything else?

Our only alternatives would be to believe nothing of what the Bible says, or as most liberals and Neo-orthodox thinkers do, to adopt some principle by which we determine what in the Bible we choose to believe and what we prefer to reject. In either case, we must admit that the Bible itself is no *authority* for us. We do not believe a doctrine because the Bible teaches that doctrine, but because on some other ground – rational, mystical, or otherwise – we acknowledge its truth.

Our Lord held to a very different view of the Bible. He commanded his disciples to believe all of it (*Luke* 24:25). And if Christ does not tell us the truth when he says that the Scripture cannot be broken and that the words of Moses are as true as his own, why should we believe him when he says, Come to me, all you who labor?

By all means we should take our view of the Scripture from our Lord Christ and from the authority of the Scripture itself. And this is what the liberal critics refuse to do, even while saying that it should be done.