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A Philosopher Looks at the Bible

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by
Donald
Wayne
Viney

Occasional Paper Number 1

Friends of Timmons Chapel • Pittsburg State University

Twenty-seven years ago I was privileged to see my booklet, *A Philosopher Looks at the Bible*, as the first publication in a series that was to be known as Occasional Papers. The series was the brainchild of Joseph Grady Smoot (1932-2018), founder of the Friends of Timmons Chapel, the organization that sponsored my lecture and its publication. Unhappily, Grady's dream of a continuing series was never realized as there was only one more booklet in the series, Jo McDougall's *Roots and Recognition: Where Poetry Comes From* (1994). Nevertheless, I will always be thankful to Grady for his vision, and to the "Friends" for their support, which allowed my ideas to gain a wider audience.

My conviction of the truth of the basic ideas of the booklet has only increased with the years. I was pleased to find Timothy Beal's *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of An Accidental Book* (Boston and New York: Mariner, 2011). Professor Beal's statement that "The Bible is not a book of answers but a library of questions" (p. 175) could serve as a summary of the views I defend in this booklet, although Beal develops this idea more thoroughly and convincingly than would have been possible for me in a single lecture. I was pleased to write a very favorable review of Beal's book posted on amazon.

If there is a single argument of my booklet that is original it is the refutation of *the doctrine of biblical inerrancy*, which is stated on page 12 and formalized in footnote 3, page 41. This is not the typical argument against inerrancy, for my claim is that the doctrine of inerrancy itself, in conjunction with a well-known fact about the Bible, commits the inerrantist to an inconsistent triad of positions. Instead of insisting that the Bible itself is inconsistent, this argument establishes that the doctrine of inerrancy is complicit in establishing its own falsity. The most reasonable way I see for the inerrantist to escape the argument is to accept that translations can be inerrant. That move, however, raises the question of why anyone should suppose that the autographs are privileged in the first place. My wider claim is that no writing in which people are involved can be strictly inerrant, whether or not God inspired the text. The failure of inerrancy allows one to raise anew the question of what "divine inspiration" means. This, in turn, is an invitation to entertain alternate—and in my view, superior—concepts of God. The philosophical and theological issues run deep and I have dealt with some of them in other things that I have written.

Donald Wayne Viney
Pittsburg, Kansas, August 19, 2019

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donald Wayne Viney, born in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in 1953, moved with his family to Fort Collins, Colorado, in 1966. He received a B.A. degree in Philosophy from Colorado State University in 1977 and a Ph.D. degree in Philosophy from the University of Oklahoma in 1982. From 1982 to 1984 he taught at the University of Oklahoma and East Central University as a part-time instructor. In 1984, he joined the faculty of Pittsburg State University where he is currently an Associate Professor of Social Science. He is the author of *Charles Hartshorne and the Existence of God* (SUNY, 1985) as well as several articles on the philosophy of religion.

Acknowledgements

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Dedication

This monograph is dedicated
to the memory of Rev. Regina Falletti (1950-1991),
first my student, then dear friend, and finally,
by her irrefragable and contagious enthusiasm,
an invitation to the abundant life.

The Friends of Timmons Chapel

The Friends of Timmons Chapel, established in 1988, provide support for programs in the arts devoted to fiction, poetry, music, philosophy, and religion. The Friends of Timmons Chapel Advisory Council make a significant cultural contribution to the students and faculty of Pittsburg State University by arranging for these events and holding them in Timmons Chapel.

The Friends of Timmons Chapel Advisory Council established the Occasional Papers of Timmons Chapel to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the chapel celebrated in 1991.

Occasional Papers

1. Donald Wayne Viney, *A Philosopher Looks at the Bible*, (1992).

A Philosopher Looks at the Bible

It is God who taught us the questions. And the questions are always with us.

Elie Wiesel, "Why Christians Can't Forget the Holocaust" *U.S. Catholic*, 55 (1990): 8.

God has given us a rational nature and will call us to account for it.

William Ellery Channing (Channing, 9)

As Spinoza said, once for all, the Bible is not a treatise in philosophy. Still less is it in any literal sense the word of God. It is a very human collection of writings by no doubt gifted and dedicated ancient members of our species interpreting their experiences.

Charles Hartshorne (Sia, 305)

The light of reason is no less a gift of God than that of revelation.

Gottfried Leibniz (Leibniz, 71)

... one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth.

Simone Weil (Weil, 69)

William James said that philosophic study is the habit of always seeing an alternative (Kallen, 58). I am fond of telling my students that philosophers are more interested in questioning answers than in answering questions. Inherent in the discipline is a streak of irreverence which, at its best, is playful. I propose to apply this playful irreverence to the Bible. In the climate of religious conservatism that prevails in

many Christian communities, my views may be seen as dangerous to orthodoxy. Liberal that I am, I have never shown deference to a statement merely because it is orthodox. In any event, the only just way of approaching my (or anyone's) views is to judge them not by the mundane facts of my biography or even by the extent to which they are orthodox, but only by the quality of argument that supports them. I am confident that a critical mind can be put to the service of faith as well or better than an uncritical one. I agree with William Ellery Channing who said, "...grant that the use of reason in religion is accompanied with danger. But we ask any honest man to look back on the history of the church and say whether the renunciation of it be not still more dangerous" (Channing, 8).

Philosophical interest in religion usually takes the form of examining claims about the existence and nature of God, the evidence for miracles, and speculations about the nature and destiny of human beings. I too, have these interests and have spent more than my share of time writing about them. But for the purposes of this paper, I have set them aside in favor of equally interesting questions about the nature of the Bible and divine inspiration. My purpose is partly critical and partly constructive. On the critical side, I intend to deny and present arguments against a popular understanding of the Bible as being the word of God. Even by its own standards, the Bible should not be regarded as the word of God. On the constructive side I offer alternative proposals for understanding Scripture and divine revelation.

Although I discuss the idea of the word of God and of divine revelation, I am not directly concerned with the question whether the Bible is true, that is to say, whether statements in the Bible or implied by the Bible are true. In my opinion, this is an unwise place to begin since it almost always leads to putting the wrong sorts of questions to the Bible, and as a not so surprising consequence, getting the wrong sorts of answers. Part of my argument is that we need to make sure we have the right questions before we start looking around for answers. If propositional revelation (the revealing of true statements) is not the only or most important way in which God might be disclosed, then it would be a serious mistake to become a Christian because you think that the Bible is true or to become an atheist because you think that the Bible is false.

While I look with disfavor on the Bible-is-true-or-false approach, the theory that I examine in the critical portion of this paper does not. Therefore, I have added four appendices dealing with contradictions, falsehoods, and prophecies in the Bible. The upshot of these appendices is that the Bible contains contradictions, falsehoods, and failed prophecies. The upshot of this paper, however, is that these supposed failures say little or nothing about whether the Bible was inspired by God.

The Bible Itself

Before I get to my critical and constructive proposals it would be useful to dwell briefly on the Bible itself, what it is and how it was formed. I will restrict my remarks to Christianity. Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants each have their Scriptures which they refer to as "the Bible." Fortunately, there is quite a bit of overlap among these various Bibles. Each of the branches of Christianity accepts the 39 books of the Jewish Scriptures, originally written in Hebrew. And all of Christendom accepts the 27 books of the New Testament, written mostly in Greek. The disputed parts of the Bible are what Catholics call the Deuterocanonical (second canon) books and what Protestants call the Apocrypha (meaning "things that are hidden" or less charitably "of dubious authenticity"). These seven books and additions to books, written in Greek, form part of the Catholic Old Testament. Some Protestant Bibles include these books as edifying religious literature but not as inspired Scripture. In any event, the differences among Christian Bibles is not great and should not be exaggerated (see Appendix IV pp. 37-40).

Nothing of what I have to say will turn on the dispute over the Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal books. However, the dispute is worth noting since it highlights the fact that Bibles are products of religious traditions. During the Reformation publishers began, for economic and theological reasons, to print Bibles without these books. I wonder how many people

know that the original King James Version included them as part of the Old Testament. One may, if one is a Protestant, argue that God never intended for those books to be part of the Bible in the first place. That *may* be true (I have no definite opinion on the matter). But it does not change the fact that *some* people did a cut-and-paste job on what *other* people understood to be the Bible and then proposed that the result was "the Bible." I am reminded of a Tom Swifty my brother, Mike Viney, shared with me: "A book is missing from the Bible," Tom said ruthlessly!

Disagreements over which writings are holy writ are as old as the writings themselves. We read in the New Testament about the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. One of these differences was which writings in the Hebrew canon were to be considered most sacred. Christians also faced these problems. The first attempt to promote a specifically Christian Bible was in the second century after Christ. Marcion proposed a canon that excluded the vast majority of writings that today's Christians accept. Less radical proposals were offered later, some including writings that modern Christians reject, others excluding writings that modern Christians accept. Few Christians today would recognize books like the Shepherd of Hermas, First Clement, the Epistle of Barnabas, or the Apocalypse of Peter. Yet, at one time, and by many Christians, these were considered holy writings. Similarly few Christians today question the authority of Hebrews, James, Second Peter, Second John, Third John, Jude, and the book of Revelation. Yet, at one time, and by many Christians, these were not considered authentic.

Historians tell us that the books of the New Testament were never decided by a synod or council. Instead, the New Testament was a product of the life of Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean. A complete list of New Testament books was first made by Athanasius in the latter part of the fourth century after Christ (in his 39th festal letter, 367 CE). By the seventh century there was universal agreement about which books comprise the New Testament. Considerations such as popularity, citation by an early authority, apostolic authorship, and whether the text represented the "rule of faith" *(regula fidei)* figured into the formation of the canon. If any single criterion was decisive it was the last, that the writing represented the "rule of faith." Of course, to be canonical just means that a thing represents the rule of faith. Therefore, the criterion was viciously circular: a writing is accepted as representing the rule of faith if it represents the rule of faith (Kee, 383)! This is not meant as a criticism for I am not sure it could or should have been otherwise. Nevertheless, as in the case of the Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal books, people (collectively) made decisions about what would and would not be considered holy Scriptures. Whether God agreed with their decisions is a question beyond the scope of this paper.

The Bible as the Word of God

One of the really mixed blessings of the Protestant Reformation is the focus on the Bible as a central element in the life of faith. On the positive side, people should read their Bibles for themselves and not have to rely on religious officials to be spoon-fed the Scriptures. The first Bible that Martin Luther ever held in his hands was chained to the shelf (James, 17). This Bible, chained, could serve as a symbol of the fetters of tradition. The invention of the printing press and Luther's rebellion helped make the Bible available to the person in the pew. An indication of the seriousness with which these developments were taken by the Church is that reading the Bible was occasionally forbidden and many editions and translations of the Bible were officially banned (Haight, 3-5). The Bible is one of the most banned books ever printed, and this is largely due to the tireless efforts of Church censors.

The unfortunate result of the focus on the Bible is that the book itself may become an object of excessive reverence: faith in God requires, or at worst degenerates into, faith in the Bible. A barometer of this mind-set is the frequency with which the word Bible is used as an adjective–"Bible believer," "Bible college," "Bible based," etc. The intellectual underpinning of "Bible belief" is the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. A succinct statement of this doctrine is contained in "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" (Geisler 493-502), the product of some 300 scholars, pastors, and laymen at

the International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978. According to this document, the original manuscripts of the Bible, the autographs, were without error in what they reported or said about any subject, including the spiritual, historical, and scientific. Sophisticated inerrantists concede that we do not have the autographs and that, in its present form, the Bible is not entirely free of error. For example, Gleason Archer, a Hebrew scholar and prominent defender of inerrancy, admits that there are 14 discrepancies between Ezra 2:3-35 and Nehemiah 7:8-38 "in the Received Text" (Archer, 229).[1] However, the errors are said to result from scribal mistakes, most of which can be identified through careful study of the original languages.

Inerrantists maintain that, for the most part, the Bible has been so faithfully transmitted and translated that, for all practical purposes, the received text of the Bible is reliable and can be called the word of God. This is not to say that corruptions of the text have not occurred. The history of the printing and translating of Bibles provides numerous examples of the kinds of errors that could occur. For example, Psalm 91.5 promises God's protection from the "terrors" of night. Coverdale's Bible of 1535 translated the verse "Thou shalt not nede to be afrayed for eny bugges by night." The Geneva Bible of 1562 rendered Matthew 5.9, "Blessed are the placemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." In 1823, a Bible misprinted *camels* for *damsels* in Genesis 24.61. The result was that Rebecca and her camels mounted camels and followed Abraham's servant. A 1702 edition substituted *printers* for *princes* in Psalm 119.161. Thus, David laments "printers have persecuted me without cause." Some mistakes embody moral and theological errors. The so-called Wicked Bible of 1632 omitted the word *not* from the seventh commandment yielding "Thou shalt commit adultery." In 1653 another *not* was omitted, this time in 1 Corinthians 6.9, resulting in the unrighteous being promised more than they deserved, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the Kingdom of God?" (Benét, 98-99).

These errors were short lived, but they illustrate the difficulty, even in the age of the printing press, of achieving a transmission of the text that does not distort the original. Fortunately, scholars are often able to detect corruptions of the Biblical text through comparisons of extant manuscripts and a knowledge of ancient tongues. One of the clearest examples is 1 John 5.7, the most explicitly trinitarian formula in the New Testament. Although this verse is in the King James Version, it is not in the Nestle Greek text. Modern translations, with the exception of the New King James Version, omit the verse. Inerrantists are correct in rejecting the common assumption that the Bible has been hopelessly corrupted and changed through transmission and translation. On the contrary, Bible scholars are confident that modern versions are closer to the original manuscripts than at any time since they were first compiled. This confidence stems partly from the fact that archaeology has provided us with more documents of, and pertaining to, the Bible than earlier scholars possessed. However, there is as we shall see, a big difference between saying that the process of transmission was reliable and saying that the Bible is the inerrant word of God.

Belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is widespread among evangelicals, and is virtually a defining characteristic of Protestant fundamentalism. Kathleen Boone points out that the creeds of fundamentalist organizations almost invariably mention belief in the inerrancy of the Bible before mentioning belief in God (Boone, 29). One need only examine J. Gordan Melton's three volume *American Religious Creeds* to confirm Boone's observation. Indeed, this is a measure of the extent to which fundamentalism diverges from historic Christianity: the great creeds of Christendom–the Apostle's, the Nicene, the Chalcedonian, and the Athanasian–never mention the Bible, much less an inerrant Bible. I have no doubt that many early Christians believed something like inerrancy. However, it was clearly not a defining characteristic of Christian faith. Although it is deviant, historically speaking, inerrancy is one very popular way in which the Bible is understood to be the word of God.

Those who reject inerrancy, both Christians and non-Christians, usually point to the many inconsistencies and false statements in the Bible as proof that the Bible contains errors. One might say that the debate turns on the question: Is the Bible holy or full of holes? However, the debate represents a

serious misunderstanding of the logic of inerrancy. The only Bible that inerrantists claim is inerrant is one that no one has ever possessed, namely, the complete autographic text of Scripture.[2] As we have already seen, sophisticated inerrantists concede that errors exist in "the received text." Therefore, contradictions and falsehoods in the Bible tell us nothing about the truth of the doctrine of inerrancy.

While it is impossible to study the Bible's original manuscripts, it is possible to show that the doctrine of inerrancy is self-inconsistent and therefore false. As we have seen, inerrantists do not claim inerrancy for any translation of the Bible; only the autographs are said to be without error. In the words of the Chicago Statement, "We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture..." (Geisler, 496), and "no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the *autographa*" (Geisler, 502). There are two problems with this view, one serious and one fatal. The serious problem is that the bulk of the autographs of the four Gospels were translations. Jesus spoke Aramaic (cf. Mark 5.41, 14.36, 15.34, and Matthew 27.46) but the Gospels were written in Greek. To avoid inconsistency inerrantists could be sure to say that it is translations *of the Bible* that are not inerrant, not translations *per se*. But this caveat will not save the inerrantist from a more glaring inconsistency. It is well known and not contested by inerrantists, that the quotations of the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament are not taken from the Hebrew originals but from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Therefore, the autographs contained translations of the Bible. The inerrantists must say that these translations *were* inerrant because they were part of the autographs, and *were not* inerrant because they were translations of the Bible. That is a straightforward logical contradiction.[3]

The inerrantist must take the reasoning a step further and say that some translations of the autographs are more accurate than the originals. For example, Matthew 1.23 quotes Isaiah 7.14, following the Septuagint, as saying that a "virgin" (Greek, *parthenos*) shall be with child. Now, the Hebrew word for virgin is *betulah,* but that is not the word that Isaiah uses.

Isaiah tells of a "young woman" (Hebrew, *'almah*) being with child. Inerrantists say that Isaiah's Hebrew is ambiguous and can mean either "young woman" or "virgin." Since inerrantists believe that the Hebrew Scriptures are to be understood in light of the New Testament they are saying, in so many words, that Isaiah is not as clear as he could have been, and this oversight is corrected by a translation.[4] This doctrinal consideration leads inerrantists to translate *'almah* in Isaiah as "virgin" rather than"young woman" (Boone, 48). That it *is* a doctrinal consideration determining translation is shown by the fact that in the inerrantist's favored modern translation, the New International Version, no other occurrence of *'almah* is translated as virgin (cf. Genesis 24.43, Exodus 2.8, and Psalm 68.25). Noninerrantists would say that the interpretive tail is wagging the textual dog (Boone, 64).

If it is difficult to give a consistent definition of inerrancy without special pleading, it is even more difficult to defend it as a reasonable approach to the Bible. The three popular arguments for inerrancy are (1) that it is taught by the Bible, (2) that Jesus believed in inerrancy and (3) that a perfect God would not inspire a Bible with errors. The argument from Biblical authority is particularly weak since it invites us to presuppose the very thing that is in question. If everything the Bible teaches is true, and if the Bible teaches inerrancy, then the Bible is inerrant. Suppose we admit, but only for the sake of argument, that the Bible teaches that it is itself inerrant. The question remains whether its teachings are true. As Georgia Harkness said, "The fact that a statement is found in the Bible does not make it true" (Harkness, 25). This is a principle that holds of any book, not least of which are those books proclaiming themselves to be divinely inspired. The Quran repeatedly refers to itself as divinely inspired (Surahs 26.6, 17.105-106, 3.7), but no inerrantist of whom I am aware takes this as evidence that the Quran is God's word. By parity of reasoning no one, including inerrantists, should use supposed statements about inerrancy in the Bible as evidence that the Bible is inerrant.

Another problem with appealing to the Bible to support inerrancy is that the Bible does not teach that it is inerrant. The proof of this is simple: the Bible sometimes refers to other

parts of itself, but it never refers to itself as a whole; since it never refers to itself as a whole it cannot possibly teach that it is itself wholly inerrant. The usual proof-text for Biblical inerrancy is 2 Timothy 3.16 which says "All Scripture is God-breathed... " (NIV). This is essentially a conditional statement to the effect that, *if* a text is Scripture then it is God-breathed. The passage does not say which texts count as Scripture. The truth of this statement is compatible with the Bible being a merely human product, or even, God forbid, the work of space aliens.[5] Nothing in the Bible tells which writings are properly Biblical. The Chicago Statement denies "that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament" (Geisler, 495). But this is not a view that one can pull from the Bible. One may choose to accept all and only the 66 books of the Bible (73 if you are Catholic) as the Scriptures. But simply calling them Scriptures does not mean that they are inerrant. Therefore, the inerrancy of the Bible does not follow from the 2 Timothy passage.[6]

A parallel argument shows that Jesus did not teach inerrancy. The only Bible to which Jesus refers is "the law, the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24.44), in other words, the Hebrew Scriptures (see p. 37). He says nothing about the Bible as we have it today. Nor is it plausible to argue that Jesus believed the Hebrew Scriptures to be inerrant. He respected the Scriptures and quoted them many times. He even said that "until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5.18). But this did not prevent him from being critical of the law's eye-for-an-eye morality (Matthew 5.38-42, Exodus 21.24, Leviticus 24.19), and of liberalizing the laws about the Sabbath (Matthew 12, Exodus 20.8-10). The early Christians came to understand Jesus's teachings (perhaps in Matthew 15), as freeing them from strict adherence to the Scripture's dietary laws (Acts 10.9-16, Romans 14.18-21). Jesus's attitude toward the Scriptures is nowhere more evident than in his teachings about divorce. The Pharisees, following Deuteronomy 24, believed that divorce was divinely sanctioned (Matthew 19.3, 7). Jesus flatly disagreed and attributed the law about divorce to a concession to human stubbornness (Matthew 19.8). I can imagine an inerrantist from Jesus's day complaining that Jesus was playing fast and loose with the laws of God.

The argument from God's character to Biblical inerrancy does not fare any better than the first two arguments. The argument is that God inspired the Bible, and God, being perfect, would not allow falsehoods to blemish the original text. But why should we accept this? I can think of three good reasons not to. First, the Bible was, at best, a joint product of God and human beings. There is simply no guarantee even with an infallible God, that error would not slip in from the human side. Second, the inerrantist's argument puts a premium on origins at the expense of outcomes. Authors frequently revise their work, and if God inspired the Bible through fallible prophets, there is every reason to believe that God would be no less concerned with inspiring amanuenses and translators. The inerrantist arbitrarily confines God's activity of inspiration to the past. Finally, the inerrantist's argument presupposes that God's primary aim, where the Bible is concerned, was to give us true propositions. The primary aim could as well have been to give us an idea of what it means to live our lives in devotion to God, regardless of whether we possess incontrovertible truth.

My case against inerrancy should not be confused with an attack on the Bible. It is one thing to criticize proposals about the Bible, quite another to criticize the Bible. The doctrine of inerrancy is a proposal about the Bible. My claim is that it is a bad proposal. When the doctrine of inerrancy is presupposed, any attempt to question the historical or scientific accuracy of statements in the Bible is automatically construed as an attack on the Bible, or worse, an attack on God. This is unwarranted. There *are* inaccuracies in the "received text" of the Bible as Archer says. But this is not evidence that the Bible is uninspired, or has nothing to tell us about God, unless you presuppose that God must have given us an inerrant book. I believe that there are better ways to understand divine inspiration.

Some people may resist my conclusions because they feel that, without an infallible authority to guide their spiritual lives, they would be adrift, without direction and without a guarantee that what they believe is true. The psychological

need for security is powerful and I would not be surprised if it explains, to a large extent, the fact that people hold so tenaciously to doctrines like Biblical inerrancy when the evidence so overwhelmingly refutes them. The need for security is real, but whether we need the sort of security that doctrines like inerrancy offer is another question. It is after all, a false security. Ironically, the argument from the need for security also embodies a failure of faith. It says, in effect, that we are too fragile to accept the truth, that our eyes would be blinded by its unveiling, our lives ruined by being exposed to it.

If the doctrine of inerrancy is false it does not follow that the Bible is not, in some sense, the word of God. Many Christians, not alone inerrantists, refer to the Bible in this way. This way of speaking is not grounded in the Bible, for as I have already mentioned, the Bible does not refer to itself as a whole. If we put the question to the Bible, "What is the word of God?" the answer will come back that the word of God is not a "what" but a "who." Jesus Christ is the word, the *logos,* of God according to John's Gospel (John 1.1, 14). The metaphor suggested in John's language is richer than any doctrinal creed that subsequent church councils formulated. Just as spoken words express thoughts, so Jesus is the expression of divine thinking. The definitive expression of God, the word of God, Biblically speaking, is a person, not a book.[7]

Of course, the primary way that we know the character of the historical Jesus is through the New Testament, particularly the four Gospels.[8] Thus, one could say, expanding John's metaphor, that one hears the word of God *through* the Bible. This way of putting it invites us to stop thinking of the Bible as a book that God wrote or dictated. It is, rather, a means by which one may hear God speaking. John's metaphor also frees us to believe that there are other ways in which God might be heard. The writer of Hebrews says that God spoke "to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1.1). And what does the Son say? In the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8.3 saying that one lives by every word, every *rhema,* that proceeds from the

mouth of God (Matthew 4.4). Or again, it is the *rhema* that the daughters and sons of God are to hear (John 8.47). *Rhema* can mean "word," "thing," "event," "matter," or "happening." Again, the metaphor is fruitful. One is to live by or to hear every word, thing, event, matter, or happening that is from God.

Harkness says that referring to the Bible as the word of God is "a legitimate metaphor for us to use, provided it is rightly understood" (Harkness, 21). The chief danger in the metaphor is that it may suggest that the word of God cannot be heard apart from the Bible. The Bible certainly does not teach this. The heavens themselves tell the glory of God according to the Psalmist (Psalm 19.1; cf Romans 1.20). If one insists on the metaphor, say that the Bible is *a* word of God rather than that it is *the* word of God. One of the saddest misuses of the Bible is to hold truth hostage by citing Bible verses. Nels F. S. Ferré once remarked that "truth has too often had to fight its way against the zealous supporters of the Bible" (Ferré, 46). So-called Bible believing Christians have fought advances in science such as the Copernican cosmology and evolutionary biology, advances in medicine such as inoculation and the use of anesthetics, and advances in social justice such as the abolition of slavery and universal suffrage. However much we may praise this great book, let us praise the truth even more.

Divine Revelation

The discussion to this point could be summarized in the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick,

> We used to think of inspiration as a procedure which produced a book guaranteed in all its parts against error, and containing from beginning to end a unanimous system of truth. No well-instructed mind, I think, can hold that now (Fosdick, 30).

The word of God, I have claimed, may be heard through the Bible, but the Bible is not itself the word, or at least not the only word. This is not to say that the Biblical writers were not inspired by God. But inspiration does not take the form of

ancient stenographers producing an errorless manuscript dictated by God. What is required is a theory of inspiration that does justice to both the infallibility of God and the fallibility of human beings.

If the Bible were the direct creation of God we might expect it to be infallible. If God had no part in it then we would expect it to be fallible. If the Bible is a joint product of God and human beings, then we would expect it to bear the marks of both its divine and human origins. Consider first the people who had a hand in making the Bible. There were prophets like Moses and Jeremiah who spoke in the name of God. There were poets like David who wrote to praise God. There were eyewitnesses like Mary Magdalene who testified of the things they witnessed. There were others, like Paul and Luke, who testified of things they had been told. There were reporters, historians, and amanuenses, like the chronicler and Paul's scribes, who wrote the narratives. There were translators, like those who put the words of Jesus into Greek. There were redactors, like the Gospel writers who edited material already written. Finally, there were the canonizers who collectively and individually, decided which writings would become the Bible. These are the human origins of the Bible.

Since human beings had an integral role in making the Bible, it would be a mistake to suppose that the Bible, as a whole, is either true or false. An intelligent and well-balanced approach to the Scriptures would acknowledge the falsehoods and inconsistencies no less than the truths that are so liberally scattered through its pages. Some of its truths are historical. We learn of pharaohs, prophets, generals, judges, slaves, kings, queens, housewives, harlots, and simple fishermen. The rise and fall of cities, nations, and civilizations are recounted. The events are seen through the eyes of faith, but they are none the less historical for that. Although some events related in the Bible have the air of legend about them, the story of Noah's Ark for instance, many of the Bible's narratives have been corroborated by archaeology. The history recounted in the Bible is no worse than other ancient histories and it is better than most.

Other truths in the Bible are prescriptive, telling us not so much what is as what ought to be. The legal minutiae and ritual regulations of Leviticus are of interest mainly to scholars. But the wisdom literature, the prophetic tradition, and the commandments concerning mutual trust and respect have a worth that time has not ravaged. Matthew Arnold put it well,

> As well imagine a man [or woman] with a sense for sculpture not cultivating it by the help of the remains of Greek art or a man with a sense for poetry not cultivating it by the help of Homer and Shakespeare, as a man with a sense for conduct not cultivating it by the help of the Bible (Arnold, 51).

It is, to be sure, possible to take issue with the highest moral ideals of the Bible. But it would be unreasonable, not to mention unwise, to dismiss them as irrelevant or out-of-date.

Finally, there are the truths of what I refer to as the Bible's existential theology. The Bible is not a treatise in theology, but it contains an indispensable record of the experiences of men and women who believed they were accountable not only to each other, but also to God. One need not believe in God to appreciate the importance of these experiences. In other words, even if one denies that people in the Bible were divinely inspired, they were at least inspired by something they felt to be divine. This is the raw data not only of theology but of the psychology of religion.

For those who accept that there is a God who is actively involved with human beings, the experiences of the men and women of the Bible are a conduit to the divine. However, the discerning reader must distinguish between what these experiences tell us about God and what they tell us about people's ideas about God. Are we to believe that God could be stopped by chariots of iron (as Judges 1.19 suggests) or is nothing impossible for God (Matthew 19.26)? Is God quick to anger and willing to kill as in the story of Uzzah steadying the Ark (2 Samuel 6.6-7; cf. Exodus 4.24-26) or is God "slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34.6)? Is God threatened by human ambition and

achievements as the story of the tower of Babel indicates (Genesis 11.1-9; cf. Genesis 3.22-23) or is God quite incomparable to the creatures (Isaiah 40.25, Psalm 40.5)? Does God require animal sacrifice and burnt offerings (Leviticus), or is a broken spirit and contrite heart more to God's liking (Psalm 51.15-17)? Does God permit human sacrifice as in the case of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11), or is this practice abhorrent to God (Deuteronomy 12.31)? Does God visit punishments and rewards on children for the sins of their parents as the second commandment says (Exodus 20.5; Deuteronomy 5.9-10; cf. 2 Samuel 12.14-15), or is each person accountable for his or her own sins (Jeremiah 31.29, Ezekiel 18.2)? Does God command genocide as described in Joshua (Joshua 11.19-20) or does the compassion of God extend especially to children (Matthew 19.14)?

All of the ideas about God I have mentioned are found in the Bible. If they tell us something about people's ideas about God, they may also be interpreted as telling us something about God. Earlier I suggested that God would be as interested in inspiring the original authors of the Bible as in inspiring its transcribers and translators. Let me extend the analogy and ask why God would not want to inspire new texts, or be disclosed in ways that no Biblical writer could have imagined? If human authors revise their texts why not God? I will be told that God, unlike any merely human author, is perfect, and would therefore have no need of revisions. But this fails to take into account that God must work through human authors, with all their prejudices, ignorance, and naivete. It is not because of imperfections in God that revisions in divine revelation would be required; it is because of imperfections in us. There is always someone willing to call a stop to divine revelation saying, "this is God's word, and no more." Our question ought to be: has God stopped speaking or have we stopped listening?

The persistent message of the Bible is that God is not indifferent to human concerns but is, on the contrary, engaged in human history. This is the view that I accept. However, we can take the reasoning a step further by asking what it is that God inspires. Inerrantists emphasize what is called propositional revelation. God inspires primarily by giving us

true propositions about history, science, theology, and the like. A more comprehensive theory of revelation would not ignore the processes by which we come to know the truth. Every educator knows that it is largely through asking questions and knowing which questions to ask that we come to know the truth. When Gertrude Stein was dying of cancer she turned to Alice B. Toklas and murmured, "What is the answer?" When Toklas made no reply she went on, "In that case, what is the question?" (Fadiman, 522). Given the importance of questions, may not God inspire our questions as much as our answers? I think that it would be surprising for God to give us brains which are ideally suited for asking questions and then not expect us to use them. If we can accept this then we can accept that our curiosity can be an avenue for God's revelation.

We are accustomed to thinking of the Bible as a place where the answers to life's questions can be found. But the Bible is just as important as a source of questions that disturb the conscience and stir the soul. Sometimes the questions come from unlikely sources. There is Cain, who murdered his brother, asking God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4.9). There is the proud lawyer trying to trick Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10.29). And there is Pilate trying to ease his conscience by asking "What is truth?" (John 18.38).

Questions are put concerning the ultimate fate of our souls. The jailer asks Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16.30) and the lawyer asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10.25). Our failure of faith comes under attack in Jesus's question to the Pharisees, "Why does this generation ask for a sign?" (Mark 8.12). The complacency that identifies belief and commitment is challenged by James' question, "Can faith save you?" (James 2.14).

The questions of the Bible often invite reflection upon the nature of God and God's relations to us. Moses asks God, "What is [your] name?" (Exodus 3.13) which, because names were not simply labels but also had meanings, was a way of asking, "Who are you?". Reflecting on the ubiquity of God the Psalmist asks, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" (139.7). Or again, in light of the

vastness of the universe and our puniness, "what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8.4). Job is reminded of the mystery of divine power when God asks from the whirlwind, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38.4).

The great questions of the Bible also prepare us for authentic living by directing us past the diversions with which we fill our days. "What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1.3) asks Qoheleth. The book of Job takes the question a step further: why, if God is just, do the righteous suffer? There is more faith in Job's question than there is in all of the answers that Job's friends gave for his suffering. Habakkuk laments, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" (Habakkuk 1.1). There is Rachel weeping for her children, unconsolable (Matthew 2.18). And there is the anguish of Jesus on the cross, quoting the Psalms, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22.1, Matthew 27.46, Mark 15.34).

Finally, the Bible's questions call for decision and commitment where Jesus is concerned. "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" asks the high priest (Mark 14.61). And Jesus asks his disciples the question, "Who do people say I am?" which is a question that could be answered by an opinion poll. But then he asks more pointedly, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8.29, Luke 9.20, Matthew 16.15) which is a question about ultimate loyalties that can only be answered by each individual. The challenge of a specifically Christian faith is squarely put to the women at the tomb, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24.5).

The questions that the Bible raises, like all good questions, cry out for answers. Moreover, a good question left unanswered leaves a doubt in our minds. The American philosopher C. S. Peirce wrote that the "irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief" (Peirce, 10). The simplest way to rid oneself of the irritation and attain the state of belief is to treat the Bible as a catechism, a self-contained manual on life, with questions and answers that can be learned by rote. This approach to the Bible is guaranteed to remove the irritation of doubt, but it is not guaranteed to lead to the truth. The answers one finds in the Bible may not be correct. Again I quote Peirce, "as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false" (Peirce, 10). One can hold a false belief with as much sincerity and conviction as a true belief. The fact that many people call the Bible the word of God does not mean that the things that it teaches, or that people think it teaches, are true. The catechism approach to the Bible makes the mistake of thinking that a statement is true merely because it is in the Bible.

A more serious problem with the catechism approach is that it prevents us from hearing the many voices with which the Bible speaks. The Bible has no single human author. It does not even represent a single religious tradition (one easily forgets that Jesus was Jewish). The views of its various authors are not always easily reconciled. For example, Paul and Silas tell the jailer that he will be saved if only he believes in Jesus Christ (Acts 16.31). The author of James, on the other hand, clearly believes that faith alone is not sufficient for salvation (James 2.14-17). Or again, compare the words of Paul, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10.13; cf. Joel 2.32) with the words of Jesus, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7.21). Different interpretations of these passages and others like them (e.g. Ephesians 2.8-9 and Luke 10.25-28) is the stuff of which schisms and new denominations are made. Interestingly, the author of 1 Timothy adds a further qualification for women, "she will be saved through childbearing..." (1 Timothy 2.15).[9] This is the stuff of which feminists are made!

I do not deny that the Bible often answers its own questions. Nor do I deny that the answers it gives can be the correct answers. I do not even deny that one can find ways of reconciling divergent views in the Bible--whether such interpretations are artificial, strained, or unwarranted is another question. My point is that we should be suspicious of attempts to domesticate the Bible and make truth a cheap

commodity. Truth is not given, once and for all, in a single place. What historian would consult only one account of an event? What biologist would rely on a single experiment? What astronomer would use nothing more than an optical telescope for information about the heavens? Why do we assume that it must be different with religion, where the stakes are higher and where the object of contemplation, reverence, and worship is a being of unsurpassable greatness? We should have enough faith to believe that God can be revealed outside of the Bible.

If I advocate learning from sources besides the Bible, I do not mean to suggest that the Bible should not hold a central place in one's life. Many people are reared on its precepts, taught by its stories, and nourished by its insights. They find comfort in its pages and strength to face life's deepest trials. Isaiah said, "those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40.31). This is no empty promise. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11.28). That is no idle invitation. He also said that he came that others may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10.10). That is no egotistical boast. If the Bible cannot be inerrant because human beings are fallible, the Bible cannot be unimportant because human life is uncertain. I once heard of a minister who visited a major university to give a lecture. A student challenged him saying, "Religion is only a crutch!" "Perhaps," replied the minister, "but who isn't limping?"

As vital as the Bible is to our spiritual well-being, I believe that we can take its revelations about God seriously without denying that God can be revealed in other ways, ways that include not only the religious, but the ethical, scientific, historical, and aesthetic as well. As high school students, some of us were satisfied to write a research paper using an encyclopedia as our only reference. Anything worth knowing about the subject, or at least anything a teacher might think worthwhile, we supposed, was contained in the pages of the encyclopedia. As adults, with a better appreciation of what Whitehead called "the immensity of things" (Whitehead, 168), we can smile at our naivete. In Paul's words, we have put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13.11). If we use the Bible to better appreciate the immensity of things, then well and good. But if we use the Bible to save ourselves the trouble of thinking, then we are worshipping gods of our own making, not the living God of whom the Bible speaks.

Conclusion

The Bible is fallible, but it is not dispensible. It is a human book and, as such, bears the marks of human error. Inerrantists deny this. But I have shown that, because of an excessive nervousness about the sanctity of the autographs, inerrancy cannot be stated without contradiction. Moreover, the Bible never claims inerrancy for itself; and the doctrine is, in any case, theologically gratuitous.

On the other hand, the Bible bears the marks of human genius, and for those who can accept it, the marks of inspiration. Its authors were often conscious of being in touch with and doing the biding of a God of unsurpassable greatness. If the authors were not divinely inspired they were at least inspired by something they felt to be divine. The result was the expression of truths of unequaled sublimity and durability. It is not too much to say, paradoxical as it sounds, that the Bible contains the human words of God and the divine words of humans.

The God who is the God of the Bible is also the God of all truth and of the processes by which we come to know the truth. We can expect to find this God at work wherever questions are sincerely raised. The Bible itself supplies us with a host of inspired questions. It cannot be impious, therefore, to ask them.

Appendix I:
Inconsistencies in the Bible

One should distinguish between a real inconsistency and an apparent inconsistency. A real inconsistency is where two statements cannot both be true. Logically, they are either contraries or contradictories. For example, "all swans are white" and "no swans are white" are contraries. They cannot both be true, although they may both be false. Statements are contradictories when they cannot both be true and they cannot both be false. For example, "Aislinn is my daughter" and "It is not the case that Aislinn is my daughter" cannot both be true and they cannot both be false.

An apparent inconsistency is a pair of statements which appear to be either contraries or contradictories, but which upon examination of the context in which they occur or the speaker's intentions, are found to mean something slightly differrent than what one originally thought. The apparent inconsistency is resolved by adding a qualifying clause. For instance, the two statements about the swans could be qualified so as to render them consistent: "All European swans are white," but "No Australian swans are white." Similarly, one could qualify the contradictories: "Aislinn is my step-daughter," but "It is not the case that Aislinn is my biological daughter."

The Bible is notoriously difficult to interpret, so one should exercise caution and not assume that every inconsistency in the Bible is real. Many of the inconsistencies are only apparent. For example, in one chapter in Exodus it says that the Lord used to speak to Moses "face to face," as one speaks to a friend (Exodus 33.11; cf. Genesis 32.30); it also says that God would not let Moses see his face, "for no one shall see me and live" (Exodus 33.20; cf. John 1.18). There is an apparent contradiction here. However, in the second passage, God is denying Moses's request to see God's glory (Exodus 33.18). Hence, the context indicates that what is in question in the second passage is a fuller manifestation of the divine presence than what Moses had, to that point, experienced.

While there are apparent inconsistencies in the Bible, I also believe that many of the inconsistencies in the Bible are real. As a rule, where an event or series of events is related by more than one writer, inconsistencies, at least as to details, result. An example I have already mentioned are the inconsistencies discussed by Archer between Ezra 2.3-35 and Nehemiah 7.8-38. The following list contains examples of other inconsistencies that I believe are real.

Genesis 1 says that human beings were created after the animals. Genesis 2 says the order was man, animals, woman. The two accounts are contrary, they cannot both be true, but they may both be false. Indeed, the sciences of geology and paleontology have, since before Darwin, declared that both accounts are false. Setting aside the factual issue, we may try to reconcile the accounts, as Augustine did. According to him, the days of Genesis 1 do not indicate a temporal sequence. God's creation of the world and its creatures, including humans, is instantaneous. Augustine's justification for this interpretation was an appeal to a faulty translation of Sirach 18.1, "He created all things together" (a more accurate rendering is "He...created the whole universe"). Genesis 2, on the other hand, gives the order in which things appeared, or sprang from their original seeds *(rationes seminales)*. The ingenuity of Augustine's explantion should not blind us to the fact that nothing in the text of Genesis warrants his interpretation.

1 Samuel 17.50 tells the familiar story of how David killed Goliath. 2 Samuel 21.15-22 relates how David was nearly killed by one of the giants. As a result David's men kept him out of battle. The passage says that Elhanan killed Goliath (2 Samuel 21.19). The writer of 1 Chronicles 20.5 says that Elhanan killed Goliath's brother. Archer argues that the writer of 2 Samuel miscopied an autograph which the text of 1 Chronicles essentially preserves (Archer, 178-179). A simpler explanation, more in keeping with the later date of 1 Chronicles is that the author of 1 Chronicles attempted to reconcile the contradiction by rewriting the story.

Genesis 6.6, Exodus 32.14, and 1 Samuel 15.11., say that God repents, or has a change of heart. Numbers 23.19, Malachi 3.6, and James 1.17, suggest that this is not possible.

Psalm 88.3-5, 115-17, Isaiah 38.18, Sirach 17.27, and Baruch 2.17, say that relations with God are severed at death. Psalm 139.7-10 and Romans 8.38-39 disagree.

The Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal books give contrary views of creation. The Wisdom of Solomon 11.17 says that God created the world out of formless matter. 2 Maccabees 7.28 declares that God did not make the heavens and the earth out of things that existed.

Matthew 1.1-16 and Luke 3.23-38 give different genealogies of Jesus. The usual way of reconciling the contradiction is to say that Matthew traces Jesus's lineage through Joseph, whereas, Luke traces it through Mary. Yet, both seem to go through Joseph. Matthew 1.16 says that Jacob was Joseph's father, but Luke 3.23 says that Joseph was the son of Heli. In order to adopt the theory that Luke is giving Mary's ancestory, inerrantists are obliged to disagree with what the text says. Thus, Archer says that Heli was Joseph's father-in-law (Archer, 316).

According to the Synoptic gospels, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples (Matthew 26.17f, Mark 14.12, 17, Luke 22.7, 14), but the fourth Gospel suggests that Jesus was already being crucified by that time (John 18.28). In general, the time table of the Synopics is at odds with John's time table. Going by the first three Gospels one would guess that Jesus's ministry lasted about a year. The length of Jesus's ministry according to John's gospel can be no less than three years judging by the Passovers he mentions (2.13, 6.4, 13.1–5.1 may also be a passover).

Divorce is absolutely forbidden according to Mark 10.9-12 and Luke 16.18. Matthew 19.9 and 1 Corinthians 7.10-11 allow exceptions.

New Testament writers were occasionally mistaken in what they attributed to the Hebrew scriptures. Thus, Matthew 2.23 quotes a prophecy that is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament. Matthew 3.3, Mark 1.2-3 and Luke 3.4 follow the Septuagint and thereby give a different meaning to Isaiah 40.3 than what it has in the Hebrew. The Synoptics speak of a

voice crying *in* the wilderness whereas Isaiah says that the voice is crying *about* the wilderness. Matthew's liberal use of Hebrew scriptures is apparent at 27.9 where there is a quote attributed to Jeremiah. The quote is not in Jeremiah. The reference to 30 pieces of silver is in Zechariah 11.12-13. Jeremiah 18.1-3 speaks of a potter's house and Jeremiah 32.6-15 relates the purchace of a field, but only Matthew knows of the potter's field.

Especially bothersome to inerrantists are a couple of inconsistencies between Jesus's words and the Hebrew scriptures. 1 Samuel 21.1-6 says that Ahimelech was the high priest when David entered the temple and took the holy bread. Mark 2.25-26 says it was Abiathar. Inerrantists attempt to side step this inconsistency by claiming that Jesus did not intend to imply that Abiathar was high priest when David took the bread, only that David took the bread when Abiathar was alive and when he (Abiathar), was soon to become high priest. The implausibility of this explanation is apparent when one recalls that 1 Samuel reports the conversation between David and Ahimelech and doesn't even mention Abiathar.

The other inconsistency between Jesus and the Hebrew scriptures concerns 2 Chronicles 24.20-21 which says that Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, was murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. According to Matthew 23.35 Zechariah, son of Barachiah, was the murder victim. The Zechariah who was the son of Barachiah lived about three centuries later (Zechariah 1.1), and the only information about how he died is an early book on the lives of the prophets that says he died a peaceful death. The inerrantist's explanation of this is that Zechariah, son of Barachiah, suffered a martyr's death similar to the other Zechariah and that Jesus's words are the only known record of this fact! This explanation fails because it ignores the context of the passage. The intent of Matthew 23.35 is to talk about the martyrs of the Hebrew scriptures from Genesis to Chronicles (the last book in the Bible according to the Hebrew canon). The first martyr listed was Abel and the last was Zechariah, son of Jehoiada.

The issue of faith and works has long been a source of tension within Christian circles. Ephesians 2.8-9, "For by

grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God–not the result of works, so that no one may boast," seems to contradict James 2.14-17, "Can faith save you?... So faith by itself, if it has no work, is dead." For James, "work" is a necessary condition of salvation; for the author of Ephesians it seems not to be necessary. A similar problem is found in Romans 10.13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." In contrast Matthew 7.21 says, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

Appendix II: **Falsehoods in the Bible**

If there are any genuine contradictions in the Bible then there are false statements in the Bible; one of a pair of contradictory statements must be false. Thus, if any of the contradictions listed in Appendix I are irreconcilable then there are false statements in the Bible.

We may also conclude that there are false statements in the Bible if any of its pronouncements are at variance with what we know from other sources to be true. As with inconsistencies, one must be careful to attend to the meaning of the text lest one mistake metaphor, simile, or hyperbole for falsehood. In making the following list I have done my best not to fall into that trap. In other words, I do not believe that one can plausibly explain the following as figures of speech misunderstood.

According to Henry Morris, "The Bible is a book of science!" (Morris, 229). The following examples demonstrate that it is not a very reliable science book. As my brother Mike Viney has said, the writers of the Bible may have been inspired, but they weren't enlightened.

Problems abound in the creation narratives of Genesis. According to Genesis 1 there are days and nights before the sun is created. We also learn that the sky is a firmament, or a dome (1.7) and that there are waters above and below it. This fits with Job 37.18 which describes the skies as being spread

out "hard as molten mirror" (cf. Psalm 104.2 and Isaiah 40.22). Genesis 1 also says that vegetation existed before sunlight. It is also of interest that "the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind" (1.21) appear before land animals (1.24). Thomas Huxley long ago pointed out that this is contrary to the fossil evidence that says that birds and the mammals in the oceans–whales, dolphins, and the like–appear later than land animals (Huxley, 139f). It is important to note that this discrepancy does not turn on the question whether evolution is true. The geologists and paleontologists had come to these conclusions before Darwin ever published his theories.

Genesis 30.37-39 gives an interesting but quite false view of acquired characteristics in sheep. Jacob's flocks produced young that were "striped, speckled, and spotted" because they bred in front of a trough with peeled rods of poplar, almond, and plane set in it. The writer may be suggesting that the drinking of the water caused the curious markings. In any case, there is no scientific warrant for such a view.

The book of Leviticus poses problems for inerrantists in its contrary to fact statements. It says that camels do not have divided hoofs (11.4) and that rock badgers and hare chew the cud (11.5-6). It classes bats as birds (11.13, 19) and it describes some insects as quadrupeds, "going on all fours" (11.20-23). When inerrantists do not ignore these falsehoods they vary in their explanations of them. Concerning the hare (Hebrew *'arnebet*) Henry Morris says, "The arnebeth is evidently now extinct, so that we do not know exactly what it was, but at any rate it was not a hare" (Morris, 245). Gleason Archer, whose opinion in this matter may have more weight since he knows Hebrew, translates *'arnebet* as hare and admits that it is no ruminant, although it appears to be (Archer, 126).

No one who is innocent of the deliverances of modern astronomy could read the Bible as saying that the earth is in motion. But a great deal in the Bible suggests that the earth is stationary and that the sun revolves around it. Both 1 Chronicles 16.30 and Psalm 93.1 say that the world is firmly established and shall never be moved (cf. 1 Samuel 2.8 and

Psalm 104.5). The motion of the sun around the earth is implied by two miracles. Joshua 10.12-14 says that God made the sun and moon stand still in the heavens at Joshua's request. The other miracle is reported in 2 Kings 20.9-11 and Isaiah 38.7-8. As a sign that he will keep his promise to Hezekiah, God causes the shadow on the sun dial to go backwards by 10 steps. Inerrantists claim that the writers of the Bible were not proposing a theory of the solar system, but merely describing the way things appeared. I agree, but this undermines the claim that the Bible gives us an accurate picture of the world. At best it gives us an accurate picture of how the writers of the Bible understood their world. If one looks for a cosmology in the Bible it is surely a geocentric one that will be found.

The Bible identifies a place beneath the earth called Sheol, as the dwelling of the dead. The clearest indication that Sheol is literally under the earth is Numbers 16.33, where the people of Korah are swallowed up by the earth and go down "alive into Sheol." Job 26.5-6 and Ezekiel 26.20-21 are also explicit. Other references to Sheol confirm this literal reading (Psalm 86.13, Isaiah 14.9-11, Ezekiel 31.15, 32.18 f). Needless to say, modern theories about the composition of the earth leave no room for Sheol.

If Sheol was conceived as being underground, heaven was conceived as being a place above the earth to which a tower might reach (Genesis 11.4), or men like Elijah (2 Kings 2.11) and Jesus (Acts 1.9, 1 Thessalonians 4.15-17), could ascend.

The words "brain" and "brains" do not occur in the Bible. Nor is there any sign that the writers of the Bible had the slightest clue as to the importance of the brain for consciousness. According to the Bible, thinking is done with the heart (Proverbs 23.7, Isaiah 10.7, Matthew 9.4, 15.18-19). In their ignorance of the function of the brain the Biblical writers ascribed epilepsy (Matthew 17.14-19, Mark 9.14-29, Luke 9.37-43) and related disorders (Mark 5.1-13, Matthew 8.28-34, Luke 8.26-33) to demon possession. No one today, including inerrantists, seriously considers exorcism as a legitimate cure for these sorts of problems.

Appendix III: **Prophecy in the Bible**

The subject of Biblical prophecy is a quagmire of misunderstanding, eisegesis, and sensationalism. From time to time, Biblical prophecies have been construed as predictions and have served as a central support in Christian apologetics. The argument is that the fulfillment of predictions found in the Bible verify its divine inspiration. This argument from prophecy continues to convince many popular Christian apologists (cf. Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth*) but, for the most part, modern scholars have not used Biblical prophecy in this way, and will even concede that some prophecies failed (cf. NRSV comment on Daniel 11.40-45, OT 1146). Two notable obstacles stand in the way of using prophecy as a clear and convincing argument for the Bible's divine inspiration, (1) knowing that a prediction was made, and (2) knowing that the prediction was fulfilled.

Knowing that a prediction was made is complicated by both historical and exegetical considerations. On the historical side, there are debates among scholars as to when Biblical works were first written. For example, Archer dates the book of Daniel to around 530 BCE (Archer, 284), but the more usual dating by Protestant and Catholic scholars, is to the persecutions that occurred from 167 to 164 BCE under Antiochus Epiphanes (NRSV, OT 1126; NAB, 981). The earlier date would secure parts of Daniel as a record of predictions; the later date undermines Daniel's value as predictive prophecy, for the events "predicted" would be in the author's present or past.

The exegetical problems with knowing that predictions occurred are equally profound. For example, many of the passages in the Hebrew scriptures that have been seen as predictions would have been understood very differently by the original authors. For example, Jeremiah 31.15-17 promises that Israel's exile in Babylon will end, and "Rachel's children" returned "to their own country." The author of Matthew's Gospel construes the passage as a prophecy about his own times when Herod's thugs murder the children in and around Bethlehem (Matthew 2.18). In cases like this–and they are

legion–it is arguable that a prediction was not fulfilled, but that an event reminds the author of something he read in the Scriptures. Richard Swinburne notes that, "Often, but not always, the way prophecy is to be read is shown by what happened to Jesus, the Messiah, rather than Jesus being the Messiah being shown by his fulfillment of prophecy" (Swinburne, 115).

Knowing that a prediction was fulfilled is no easier than knowing that it was made. Again, there are historical and exegetical complications. Historically, one must be sure that a narrative was not written so as to make it seem that a prediction was fulfilled. For instance, Micah 5.2 foretells that "one who is to rule in Israel" will come from Bethlehem. Both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels place Jesus's birth in Bethlehem, and Matthew mentions Micah's prophecy. Aside from the fact that Jesus never ruled in Israel, there are good and well-known reasons to doubt the veracity of the Matthew and Lukan accounts. The two accounts contradict each other and they are at variance with other things we know about this period of history (Fox, 27f). One may accept on faith that these difficulties are surmountable, but this precludes using the Gospel accounts as evidence that Micah's prediction was fulfilled.

Finally, there are exegetical difficulties in the way of knowing that predictions were fulfilled. The career of Jesus provides a classic example of this set of problems. Traditionally, the doctrinal difference between Christians and Jews has been that Christians believe Jesus to be the Messiah promised by the Hebrew scriptures while Jews do not believe this. Christians have emphasized the ways in which Jesus's career fulfills the prophecies and Jews have emphasized the ways in which Jesus's career fails to fulfill the prophecies. Prophecies which suggest a worldly king (e.g. Psalm 2.6f), who would command armies and subjugate nations (e.g. Psalm 110), do not correctly describe the career of Jesus. One Christian response to Jewish exegesis has been to interpret the prophecies of the Messiah's worldly reign as pertaining to Christ's second coming. For example, J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* contains a list of prophecies pertaining to Christ which distinguishes those

which refer to his first and second comings (Payne, 665-668). The prophecies of the second coming portray a more worldly leader of the kind first century Jews expected. I know of no compelling reason to accept Payne's interpretation of the Messianic prophecies apart from a commitment to some form of conservative Christianity. Again, this view of Biblical prophecy does not provide evidence for divine inspiration of the Scriptures so much as it presupposes it.

Another exegetical problem in interpreting the fulfillment of prophecy is the fact that a large portion of the Bible's prophetic writing is apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic writing contains prophecies that are heavily clothed in symbolism, emphasizing the titanic battle between good and evil, and offering hope for the ultimate victory of the good. This sort of writing was extremely popular between 200 BCE and 100 CE and is found in the Bible, especially in Daniel, Mark 13, and Revelation. Because of its symbolic nature, apocalyptic literature lends itself to a variety of interpretations and applications, not all of which are compatible. Boone illustrates this curious phenomenon by showing how three popular evangelists give completely contradictory interpretations of the symbolism of Revelation 9.13-19 (Boone, 42-44). The symbolism is ideally suited for playing on people's fears and for keeping Armageddon perpetually imminent; but it is not conducive to precise evaluation of whether a prophecy was fulfilled.

One of the more interesting problems facing the idea of predictive prophecy is that some prophecies, if fulfilled, would seem to contradict basic Christian beliefs. For example, Christians believe that Christ's death atones for the sins of humanity so as to render the animal sacrifices of old unnecessary. However, Ezekiel 43.18-27 foretells a time when the temple will be rebuilt and animal sacrifices resumed. The best that defenders of predictive prophecy can say about such things is that, whatever purposes the animal sacrifices serve, it is not to atone for sins (Archer, 280). An alternate interpretation is that Ezekiel's prophecy is a product of a time when Jews still hoped for the reinstitution of the ancient cult of animal sacrifice, but that modern Jews and Christians no longer hope for these things.

When the historical and exegetical difficulties of interpreting prophecy are set aside, there remains the problem that some of the apparent predictions in the Bible seem not to have come true as they should have. Jeremiah 34.4-5 foretells that Zedekiah would die in peace with appropriate funeral rites. But Jeremiah 52.10-11 records that Zedekiah was blinded by the king of Babylon after having watched his sons put to death and later died in prison. Huldah the prophetess makes a similar prophecy about King Josiah (2 Kings 22.20), but his death at the hands of Pharaoh Neco seems to contradict this (2 Kings 23.29).

Ezekiel 26 foretells the complete destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadrezzar. Ezekiel 29.18-19 reports that Nebuchadrezzar marched against Tyre, but not with the expected result–God gives the king of Egypt as a consolation. Tyre was seiged by Alexander in 332 BCE, rebuilt in 314 BCE, and, though never returning to its former greatness, exists to this day. Jeremiah, echoing Ezekiel, says that Egypt would fall to Nebuchadrezzar (43:8-13; 46.1-25). History teaches that the king invaded Egypt but that he never ruled over it.

Finally, many passages in the New Testament strongly imply that Christ's second coming was to occur within the lifetime of the first Christians (Luke 9.27; 1 Thessalonians 4.15f; Mark 13.26; and Revelation 22.7, 12, 20). This never occurred. By the time the last books of the New Testament were written the delay of Christ's return caused skepticism among his followers. Thus, 2 Peter 3.8-9 (2 Peter was composed circa 100 CE), rationalizes the delay by distinguishing time as mortals see it and time as God sees it.

In sum, Biblical prophecy provides no reliable evidence that the Bible is God's inerrant word. Biblical prophecies are more declarations of faith than predictions of the future. The prophets, in particular, are rewarding study for gaining insight into issues of justice and mercy, but not for gaining information about the future.

Appendix IV: **What is the Bible?**

The word Bible comes from the Greek *biblion,* meaning book. A Bible is a book held in reverence by people and through which, they believe, God speaks to them in a special way. Jewish and Christian Bibles are collections of books written by many different people in different times and places.

Jewish Scriptures

Oldest Biblical Writings, known to Jews as Tanakh and Protestants as the Old Testament.*. Written between 1000 and 300 BCE. Language: Hebrew.

Torah (Law)
Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Nevi'im (Prophets)
Joshua
Judges
1, 2 Samuel
1, 2 Kings
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

Kethuvim (Writings)
Psalms
Proverbs
Job
Song of Songs
Ruth
Lamentations
Ecclesiastes
Esther
Daniel
Ezra
Nehemiah
1,2 Chronicles

*The three-fold division is Jewish. Christians do not follow this division, but end the Old Testament with Malachi. Rabbis at the council of Jamnia in 90 CE determined the Hebrew canon.

Later Writings, known by Catholics and Eastern Orthodox as Deuterocanonical and by Protestants as the Apocrypha. Written between 300 BCE and 60 CE. Languages: Hebrew, mostly Greek.

Tobit
Judith
Additions to Esther
Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)
Baruch
Susanna, Daniel 13
Bel and the Dragon, Daniel 14
Prayer of Azariah
Prayer of Manasseh*
1,2 Esdras
1,2 Maccabees
3,4 Maccabees*
Letter of Jeremiah*

*not in the Protestant Apocrypha

Septuagint (LXX), basis of the Greek Bible. Septuagint was the first translation of the scriptures, begun in Alexandria, Egypt in the 3rd century BCE. It contained both the earlier Hebrew writings and the later Greek writings. This Greek translation would become the first Christian Old Testament.

Christian Scriptures

New Testament Writings* written between 50 and 100 CE. Language: Greek.

Matthew	1,2 Thessalonians
Mark	1,2 Timothy
Luke	Titus
John	Philemon
Acts	Hebrews
Romans	James
1,2 Corinthians	1,2 Peter
Galatians	1,2,3 John
Ephesians	Jude
Philippians	Revelation
Colossians	(Apocalyse)

*Athanasius (4th century CE) first lists all and only the 27 books that would come to be regarded as canonical. No Church council determined the canon.

Writings mentioned by early Christians* but never part of the New Testament. Written between 100 and 200 CE. Language: Greek.

Shepherd of Hermas
Wisdom of Solomon
Epistle of Barnabas
Apocalypse of Peter
Epistle of Clement
Wisdom of Sirach

*Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius

Septuagint, with both earlier Hebrew writings and later Greek writings, comprises the original Christian Old Testament.

First Christian Bible formed by the 4th century CE.

Gnostics and Others

A number of writings circulated in the first centuries CE which were taken as authoritative by some groups but which were never accepted by the majority of Christians. Some of these works comprise what is called the New Testament Apocrypha. Other writings are Gnostic and date from the first two centuries CE. Gnostics emphasized secret teachings of Jesus. Knowledge of this writing was greatly advanced by the discovery in 1945 of the so-called Nag Hammadi library.

Some Gnostic Writings on Jesus

Gospel of Thomas
Gospel of Philip
Apocryphon of John
Gospel of Truth
Secret Book of James
Apocalyse of Paul
Letter of Peter to Philip
Apocalyse of Peter
Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)
Acts of Peter

Some Highlights of Bible Translation

ca. 300 BCE	Septuagint (LXX). Rabbis in Alexandria, Egypt undertake the first translation of the scriptures. The Hebrew scriptures are translated into Greek.
ca. 380-400 CE	Vulgate. Jerome translates the Old and New Testaments into Latin. He used the Hebrew text of the OT. Jerome noted the difference between the earlier and later writings of the OT. The difference is marked in Catholicism by calling the later writings Deuterocanonical meaning second canon.
ca. 1380-82	Wycliffe's Bible. First English translation of the Bible. John Wycliffe and Nicholas Hereford translate from the Vulgate.
1526	First modern vernacular Bible to segregate the Apocrypha, a Dutch Bible.
1546	Council of Trent (Catholic) declares that the Deuterocanonical books (Protestant Apocrypha) are canonical.
1599	Geneva Bible–first English Bibles without Apocrypha.
1582-1610	Rheims-Douay version. Exiled Catholics in Douay and Rheims, France translate the Bible into English, generally following Wycliffe.
1611	King James Version. This version included the Apocrypha. By 1616 publishers were issuing editions without the Apocrypha for both theological and economic reasons (a demand for less bulky and less expensive Bibles). Often the title pages would list the Apocryphal books but the publisher would simply omit them.

Recent English Translations of the Bible

1951 Revised Standard Version (RSV)--ecumenical
1966 Jerusalem Bible (JB), originally French--Catholic
1970 New American Bible (NAB)--Catholic
1978 New International Version (NIV)--Protestant
1982 New King James Version (NKJV)--Protestant
1985 Tanakh (Jewish Publication Society)
1985 New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)--Catholic
1989 Revised English Bible (REB)--Protestant
1989 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)--ecumenical

Notes

1. Archer also concedes inaccuracies in the following: 1 Samuel 6.19 and 13.5, 2 Samuel 8.4, 1 Kings 4.26, 2 Kings 18.13 (and the same mistake in Isaiah 36.1), 2 Chronicles 15.19, 16.1 (cf. 1 Kings 16.8), 22.2, and 36.9-10.

2. I doubt that the autographs would settle any important disagreement about inerrancy. Fundamentalists who do not realize that inerrancy applies only to the autographs have made liberal use of their imaginations in reconciling scriptural contradictions and there is no reason to believe that the autographs could, in any way, discourage this phenomenon.

3. One way to illustrate the contradiction of inerrancy is to note that inerrantists believe the following three statements which form an inconsistent triade:

(1) All of the autographs are inerrant.
(2) No translations of the autographs are inerrant.
(3) Some of the autographs are translations of the autographs.

The truth of any two of these statements implies the falsity of the third. (1) and (2) imply that no autographs are translations, and hence that (3) is false. (1) and (3) imply that the Greek translations of the Septuagint in the New Testament are inerrant; but that means that (2) must be false. (2) and (3) imply that the Greek translations of the Septuagint in the New Testament are not inerrant; but that means that (1) must be false. Therefore, the doctrine of inerrancy commits one to contradictory beliefs. Any doctrine that implies a contradiction cannot be true, so inerrancy cannot be true.

4. Another example where a translation is taken as more authoritative than the original is the text of Isaiah 40.3 (cf. Matthew 3.3, Mark 1.2-3, and Luke 3.4).

5. A professor emeritus of atmospheric sciences at Oregon State University, James Deardorff, has translated a document which he believes is the source of the Synoptic Gospels. The document is called the *Talmud Jmmanuel.* Deardorff related to me in correspondence that an Aramaic original of the document was discovered in 1963 by a Lebanese ex-priest who was led to

the discovery by space aliens. The ex-priest translated the document into German but lost the Aramaic original in 1974 during an Israeli attack on his camp. I tried to convince Professor Deardorff that, quite apart from the implausibility of the UFO part of the story, the *Talmud Jmmanuel* could not be given much credence without the Aramaic original. He was unconvinced by my arguments. The last I heard, Wildflower Press in Oregon was to publish the translation.

6. Another problem with using the 2 Timothy passage as a proof-text for inerrancy is that it says nothing about whether a God-breathed text would be inerrant. To address this problem the inerrantist must fall back on the third argument, from God's character.

7. If Jesus is the word of God then, of course, John's Gospel's saying so is true. If John's Gospel's saying this is true, then it is not unreasonable to make the further assumption that John's Gospel's saying so is divinely inspired.

8. The earliest non-canonical source for Jesus is the Gospel of Thomas. A Coptic translation of this gospel was found in one of the codices of the Nag Hammadi Library in 1945. The Gospel of Thomas, unlike the canonical gospels, contains no narrative; it is a collection of sayings, proverbs, parables, and prophecies of Jesus. Seventy-nine of the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas have parallels in the Synoptic Gospels (Koester, 87). The earliest possible date of composition for the Gospel of Thomas is the middle of the first century. The latest possible date of composition is the end of the second century. Since some of the sayings in Thomas preserve traditions that are as old or even older than those in the Synoptics (Koester, 89f, Cameron, 24), a date in the second half of the first century seems likely (Cameron, 25).

9. The usual explanation of the faith vs. works puzzle is to stipulate that faith somehow includes works--either works are indispensible evidence that one has faith or works are the natural result of having faith. This has always seemed to me simply a roundabout way of saying that faith alone is not sufficient for salvation.

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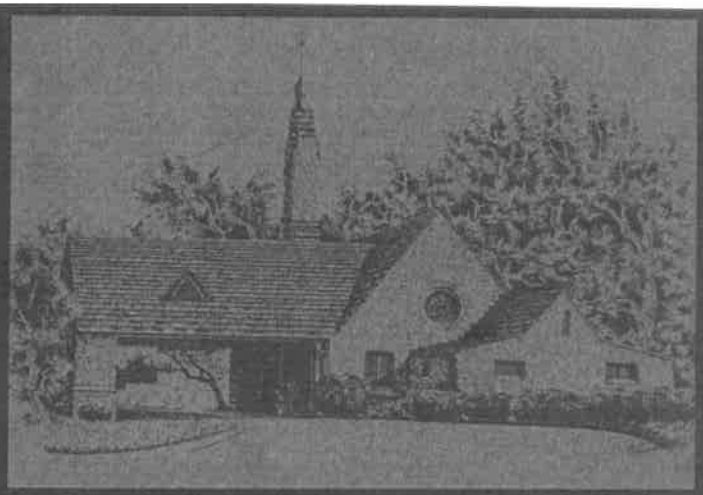
Index

Notes



Timmons Chapel

Timmons Chapel has graced Pittsburg State University's campus since its dedication on October 2, 1986. Mrs. L. K. Timmons gave the all-faiths chapel to the University as a sanctuary for a quiet place for meditation and prayer, for special services and programs, and for weddings. The children of Mrs. Timmons donated the Wicks five-rank pipe organ, with its 341 pipes concealed in the loft, and the bells.

Architect Richard N. Wakefield designed the Country English Gothic Chapel constructed from native limestone, white Bedford Stone, Vermont slate, and exposed metals of copper and bronze. The bronze bells, cast in Asten, Holland, have a relief design depicting the wedding of Canaan.

Hand-carved oak entrance doors lead to the matching oak screen inside. The screen, topped by the traditional pineapple signifying welcome, separates the narthex from the nave. The floor of crab orchard quartzite quarried in Tennessee has varied shadings. Irish artist Ronald N. Dixon, a graduate of Belfast College of Art and the recipient of the highest scholastic award in Great Britain, designed the stained glass windows. The lancet window depicts the Creation. The Rose window in the narthex captures variations of jeweled hues. The quaint chandeliers, hand-made in California, complement the red cedar ceiling supported by solid beams of Oregon Douglas fir.

Other unique features include nine wedding rings fashioned into the altar rail. Celtic craftsmen created the St. John Celtic Cross of antique brass mounted on an Iona Marble base. The fine-grain white oak used in the Chapel candlesticks, hand turned by Albert Mouthuy, came from lumber shipped to Girard, Kansas, about 1855 and used in a barn for some seventy-five years. The small garden on the lake side, a place of meditation, contains a statue of Saint Francis of Assisi carved from a Connecticut antique stone.