

## AUTHORITY AND UNIQUENESS OF SCRIPTURE REPORT

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The issues of biblical uniqueness and of biblical authority, along with their corollaries, are matters vital to the Christian Church. Today many questions are being asked that strike at the heart of Christian assurance. These questions reflect the attitude of the age. Inside and outside the church, men are asking: "Can we really expect to find more than relative truth even in the Bible? And if so, just how are we to tell what is *true truth*?"

Claims rivaling those of the Bible are being presented to any who are skeptical of divine revelation. Such claims propose other "sacred writings" and represent attempts either to replace the Bible or to supplement it by offering the Bible *plus* culture, or the Bible *plus* tradition, or the Bible *plus* unique interpretation. These supplementary writings modify and, inevitably, negate the pure Word of the Bible (Mark 7:13; II Pet. 2:1).

For three days during the International Congress on World Evangelization, the Theology of Evangelization Study Group A wrestled with these and related topics. We hope that our conclusions and the following sketchy glimpses into our discussions will help other Christians as well to attain the goal we sought — a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith (I Tim. 1:5).

Our discussion group was to serve not as a replacement for the paper but as a supplement to it. At the start of our discussion not all of us, by any means, were in agreement. After the resumé of the study paper and initial remarks by Dr. Kim, a recognizable minority opinion was still evident. As our discussion progressed, however, and as our facility in cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary communication increased, many apparent conflicts were eliminated. This paper, therefore, reflects the thinking of the vast majority of those present throughout the three sessions.

### 1. *The uniqueness and authority of Scripture*

*a. Uniqueness.* We affirm the uniqueness of the Bible. It is the basic instrument used by the Holy Spirit to reveal the redemptive love of God in Christ Jesus, for it alone adequately transmits the message of the saving work of God (John 20:30, 31; Rom. 2:1 ff.; II Tim. 3:14, 15). All other sacred writings, documents, and books are to be judged in the light of the Bible and are to be given credence only inasmuch as they conform to Scripture (Col. 2:8-10).

*b. Authority.* We affirm the divine authority of the unique Bible. It is God's in-scripturated Word given to Christians for all times and carries with it God's full weight of authority.

God, the Creator and Father, has given Jesus, the Son, his own full and divine authority (Matt. 28:18). This same Jesus both taught, and by example confirmed, the authority of the Old Testament of the

Bible, even to the minutest detail (Matt. 5:17-19; Luke 16:17; 24:25), and utilized it as an authoritative statement which cannot be broken (Matt. 4:11; John 10:35; Luke 24:32).

In New Testament times, Jesus committed his authority to his Apostles both before his crucifixion and during his post-resurrection appearances (John 14:12-13; John 20:21). The Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed, taught, and wrote on his authority (Acts 19:11; I Pet. 1:23-25; I Cor. 2:12, 13; I Thess. 1:13). Apostolic authority in the New Testament continues in effect today — a body of truth conveyed first by Apostolic preaching and then by written Apostolic tradition (II Thess. 2:15; I Cor. 15:1-6).

Thus the entire Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, is God's authoritative message to us today. Affirming and accepting the authority of the incarnated and risen Christ, who taught and even submitted himself to the full authority of the Scripture (John 19:28), we too recognize the full authority of the Bible. For the same reason, moreover, we dare not overlook the claims that the Bible makes for itself as to its unique authority since such claims ultimately derive from the commission given to the Apostles by the Lord (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:20, 21; I Pet. 1:25).

### 2. *Relationship to evangelization*

We affirm the unique role of the Bible as the indispensable means for world evangelization (Heb. 4:12; Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30, 31; Heb. 3:4; II Tim. 3:14). We cannot know the true divine Christ apart from the Scriptures. Thus, the biblical Gospel must be the foundation for any Christian witness.

The task of *world* evangelization demands a message from God for *all peoples of the world*. The experiences of an individual or group cannot be the base for the universal Gospel; rather our message must be based in God's divine Word of revelation, the Bible, which is applicable to all men (Matt. 24:14). It is this Word, not personal opinions (II Tim. 4:2), that we are to preach. Such witness God has promised to bless (Isa. 55:11), and he will not deny his promise (Num. 23:19).

### 3. *Terminology and straw men*

We affirm the verbally inspired Bible to be the inerrant Word of God. Perhaps the largest amount of discussion time was devoted to this section. The affirmation is followed by elaborations in some detail in order to refute "straw men" often wrongly labelled as the Evangelical viewpoint.

Some asserted that verbal inspiration implies mechanical dictation as the method employed by God. It does not permit, therefore, an appropriate recognition of the truly human authorship of the books of Scripture. In reply, the consensus was that verbal applies to the *extent* of God's inspiration of the Scriptures and does not describe a methodology of inspiration. Dictation, especially, is not to be implied. Rather "verbal" denotes that the Holy Spirit so superintended the writers of Scripture that his guidance extended down to all the words used by each writer. This did not, however, inhibit in any sense the free ex-

pression of the personality of each biblical author. As thoughts and concepts are conveyed in words, so God conveyed his thoughts to us in the human words of Scripture by means of a verbal guidance very different in nature than human dictation.

The teaching of Scripture itself is clear on this point in many places. References are made to "Isaiah says" (Matt. 15:7; Luke 3:4; John 12:39), "David says" (Matt. 22:23, 24; Luke 20:42, 44; Acts 2:25), "Moses says" (Matt. 22:24; Mark 12:19). Luke examined his sources carefully and wrote in his Gospel what "seemed good to him" (Luke 1:1-4). John organized his Gospel in accordance with his purpose (John 20:30, 31). Such phrases point unambiguously to human authorship. On numerous occasions the historical books of Scripture refer to sources which the author used in preparation of Scripture (Josh. 10:13; I Kings 11:41; II Chron. 24:27).

The Bible is thus a fully divine product in which even the words were guided by God and produced by his inspiration, which is at the same time also a fully human production. Like our Lord, however, who in his divine human person was still free from the taint of human sin, so the Bible, a fully divine and fully human product, is able to speak God's truth in human language but without human falsehood. The words of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, for example, were not calmly copied by an unmoved scribe, but obviously poured forth in white heat from the burning soul of the apostle.

Early in the group discussion periods, some representatives balked at the use of the word "inerrant." One such objection related to scriptural use of exact scientific language. It was pointed out, however, that Scripture was not written in precise technical language. The word "inerrant" simply means "not wandering from the truth in any point." As applied to the Bible, it designates the entire trustworthiness of all Scripture says, without exception. At the same time, Scripture must be interpreted fairly in accord with what each passage in context is really endeavoring to affirm. For example, when the Bible uses the phrase "the sun rises" it is no more in error than twentieth-century man who uses the same phrase in daily conversation. It is not given for scientific description, but makes a true statement about the world in ordinary language.

In a similar misunderstanding, "inerrant" is often criticized as a phrase which demands literal interpretation of every word and phrase. Again this is not the case. Christ referred to King Herod as "that fox," but we are not forced to picture a literal four-footed furry creature.

The un-chronological order of many biblical statements was also raised up as a "straw man" to refute inerrancy. It has been said, for example, that various books of the Bible contradict each other in matters related to chronology. If, however, an author does not claim to be writing in chronological order, as is often the case, his listing of events should not be faulted if it varies from that of another author. Each author was free under God's inspiration to choose any data of special interest and concern to him, and to record it in whatever order best suited the purpose of his writings. As long as the author does not state that he is actually giving the events

in a strict chronological order, we too must give him that freedom.

#### 4. *Translations and autographs*

We affirm the verbally inspired Word of God to be inerrant in all of its autographs.

In the discussion regarding the inerrancy of the Bible, some raised the problem of conflicting translations, all of which "certainly could not be inerrant." The response of almost all those present and particularly in the discussion was that absolute inerrancy (freedom from untruth) lay only in the autographs of the prophets and the apostles, not in every extant text or translation.

This does not mean that our present texts are unreliable or without any authority. Most of the words of the original manuscripts we *do* have with us today in our present texts. They share in the divine authority of the originals to the degree that they are faithful renderings of the original texts. Our current texts are generally very trustworthy and, therefore, very authoritative.

The evangelical who knows that the original is absolutely free from error has an objective standard by which he may test all current texts and translations (The value of knowing that the original manuscripts — not now in our hands — were inerrant is clearly evident by comparing how the believing evangelical arrives at truth, contrasted with how one who does not accept an inerrant original must arrive at truth. For the evangelical, the degree of certainty that he has the correct text, plus the degree of certainty that he has the correct interpretation of any biblical passage, is precisely the degree of certainty he may have that he has the truth without error and, in fact, the very truth of God himself. For the person who does not accept an inerrant original, on the other hand, the degree of certainty that he has the correct text and has interpreted that text rightly has only the limited certainty that he has what an ancient prophet or the religious teacher Paul or John believed — which in itself may be true or false!

For the non-evangelical to discover the truth, he must pass Scripture through additional tests; and, unfortunately, in practice most of these additional tests are exceedingly subjective (like "what brings Christ to me," "what speaks to my heart," or "what is of faith"). No objective reasons can be given for such sieves applied to the teaching of Scripture. Certainly our Lord did not enjoin the use of any sieve to divide the good and true from the evil and false in Scripture. His word was to "believe all of it" (Luke 24:25).

#### 5. *The canon*

We affirm the full divine authority of only the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament (twenty-two according to the reckoning of these same books by the Jews) and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

The question of additional books in the Roman Catholic Bible compared to the Protestant Bible was raised in the group and brought forth considerable discussion. It was pointed out by various members of the group that the books in dispute are exclusively Old Testament

books. There is no disagreement as to which books belong to the New Testament. Neither our Lord nor the New Testament authors cited any of these disputed books (Enoch, referred to by Jude, is not one of them). More importantly, Christ (Matt. 5:17, 23:35; John 5:39) and his apostles (cf. II Tim. 3:14; Rom. 3:2) acknowledge the same Scriptures as did the Jews of their day. It is demonstrable that the Old Testament of the Jews, both of Palestine (cf. Josephus, *Against Apion*, I, 8:41, 42) and of the dispersion (cf. Philo cited by Eusebius, *De Pref. Evang.*, VIII, 6), was precisely the sacred books to which our Lord gave his allegiance. The apocrypha were existent at the time of Christ; but were not part of what he and the Jews considered Holy Scripture. They were gradually introduced into the canon in the Greek and Latin churches and were never insisted upon even by the Roman communion until after the Reformation period. In the light of their rejection by our Lord, evangelicals are obligated not to receive them in the canon of inspired Scripture, however interesting or profitable they may be as human literature and history (and on these points the apocrypha vary greatly from one book to another).

#### 6. Relation of the Holy Spirit to evangelization

We affirm the work of the Holy Spirit to be that not only of verbally superintending the writing of the inerrant Bible but also of enabling man to appropriate the objective truth of the Scripture so it becomes subjectively true to individual men in a personal way.

Often the *objective* truth of the Bible, which is that utilized by the Holy Spirit, is ignored, misconstrued, or denied; and the subjective work of the Holy Spirit on the heart is overly emphasized. Such a tendency was exhibited in a portion of our discussion. Consensus, however, emphasized *both* the past inspiration of the Bible *and* the present work of the Holy Spirit here and now as he illuminates men's understanding of it (Eph. 1:18), so that it is also God's contemporary living Word to men.

Only men regenerated by the Holy Spirit are able to come to a true understanding of what God has inspired by the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14; II Cor. 3:14-16). The Word is to be proclaimed with the assurance that the Spirit of the Living God (Heb. 3:12) will accompany the living Word (Heb. 4:12) in a supernatural way to bring conviction of sin to men and salvation to those who believe (Rom. 10:9, 10).

#### 7. Desiderata

Discussants laid special emphasis upon the necessity of keeping the preaching of Christ at the center of our message (Rom. 10:17). In preaching we are to submit to the divine authority of the Scripture. Humanly-devised methods are never to take precedence over the authoritative message. Faithfulness to our Lord demands that we preach the whole Christ of the whole of Scripture (John 5:39; Acts 20:27; II Tim. 4:2; Rom. 15:19).

In view of the authoritative and unique nature of the Bible, we urge men not to become a prey to "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8-10). We urge brethren not to

succumb to the call of another Christ or another gospel (Gal. 1:8, 9), but to rightly divide (treat) the Word of God (II Tim. 2:15) for it alone is the authoritative truth, provided for us by God and, therefore, profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting and training in righteousness, so that the men of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

#### Conclusion

As evangelical Christians we are men and women under divine orders. The Bible, God's unique and authoritative Word, instructs us as to how to carry on the work of evangelization in our world in obedience to Christ. We must constantly strive to conform our actions to that divine Word, our authority, guide, and message (II Tim. 4:2, John 5:31; Heb. 4:12). Amen, alleluia!