

## THREE BOOKS ON THE BIBLE: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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*The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture.* William J. Abraham. Oxford: University Press, 1981, 126 pp., \$27.95.

*The Scope and Authority of the Bible.* James Barr. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980; London: SCM, 1980, 150 pp., \$7.95 paper.

*Biblical Inspiration.* I. Howard Marshall. London: Hodder, 1982; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, 125 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Although all three of these books deal with what older writers used to call bibliology or the doctrine of Scripture, the aims and conclusions of each work are substantially different from those of the other two. For that reason a critical review of them may help to clarify a considerable part of the current state of play on this perennially important subject.

The first book, badly overpriced, was written by an Irish Methodist minister who now teaches theology and philosophy of religion at Seattle Pacific University. Abraham writes from within the evangelical camp, broadly conceived. His aim is to introduce a new concept of inspiration, one he judges to be more compatible with the Biblical texts and with modern scholarship than that espoused by, say, ETS members.

In the first chapter Abraham sets forth his criticism of what he calls the "conservative evangelical" view. One of its root problems, he argues, is that it is far too dependent on Packer and Warfield. Warfield was the great deductivist—i.e., he "approached the issue of inspiration deductively" (p. 16). He began with firm ideas about inspiration and deduced "by normal rules of inference what this entailed for the content and character of the Bible" (p. 16), forcing the hard data of Scripture to be squeezed into this logical mold. But the idea of inspiration with which Warfield worked was faulty, and therefore his inferences were groundless. Abraham believes that Warfield depended more than he realized on Louis Gaussen's famous *Theopneustia*,<sup>1</sup> which (he alleges) espoused a dictation theory of inspiration. But as scholarship discovered difficulties, various modifications and qualifications had to be introduced. For instance, the significance of errors was sometimes simply played down, as in Charles Hodge's famous "specks on the Parthenon" passage (though Abraham, p. 19, does not point out that Hodge's next lines show that he himself did not admit that there are any such

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<sup>1</sup>L. Gaussen, "*Theopneustia*": *The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scripture* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1888 [French original 1841]).

specks, but only that if there are they cannot be seen as a threat to the entire structure of Christian revelation). The root problem with Gausssen's view is that "the claim to inerrancy rests on theological doctrine and not on inductive empirical evidence" (p. 20). Warfield, discerning some of the empirical difficulties but not the dilemma in the kind of logic being used, introduced modifications. Here Abraham follows Sandeen.<sup>2</sup> Warfield, it is argued, innovatively distanced himself from the dictation theory, spoke rather of the concursive action of the Spirit, and restricted strict inerrancy to the autographs. But although Abraham considers it self-evidently true that if God speaks, what he says must be entirely true, this connection can be maintained for the Scriptures only under a divine dictation theory. Abandon the dictation theory, Abraham insists, and one is left with a choice: Either one is surreptitiously using dictation categories under the guise of some ill-defined concursive action of the Spirit, or one must abandon the support for inerrancy grounded on divine speaking. Abraham judges that "conservative evangelicals" have done the former. Although they deny it, their doctrine of verbal inspiration is tantamount to the formally rejected dictation theory. The result is that evangelicals utilize a loaded hermeneutical system, employing the standard critical tools only in ways that do not threaten their doctrine of inerrancy. To talk about doing history in the conservatives' environment "is talking about a special kind of history practised only by those who believe in inerrancy" (p. 27).

The second chapter bears the title "The Inductive Approach," by which Abraham refers to the attempt to formulate a doctrine of Scripture on the basis of an inductive study of the actual phenomena of Scripture. Here Abraham proceeds by analyzing the work of three or four scholars. William Sanday,<sup>3</sup> whom Barr judges the one to be primarily responsible for persuading the Anglican Church to abandon the theory of verbal inspiration,<sup>4</sup> is here praised for his openness but criticized for depending too much on the confusion of divine inspiration with divine speaking. R. P. C. Hanson<sup>5</sup> believes that the only plausible meaning to be attached to inspiration is the classic one (which he associates with Origen) but that this view is no longer tenable. Abraham responds that although the classic doctrine cannot be salvaged, he himself has a better model to suggest. The third writer Abraham assesses is H. Wheeler Robinson,<sup>6</sup> who a generation ago argued that the inspiration of the Bible "is best understood as akin to aesthetic or intellectual inspiration" (p. 48). Abraham criticizes this view of inspiration for trading on an unsubstantiated view of revelation. "Generally it asserts that God is revealing himself more or less to the same degree in all history and creation. Unfortunately not everyone is aware of this. What is needed, therefore, is a highly sensitive religious mind that is sufficiently endowed with insight to bring

<sup>2</sup>E. R. Sandeen, *The Origins of Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

<sup>3</sup>W. Sanday, *Inspiration* (London: Longmans, Green, 1903).

<sup>4</sup>J. Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977) 348 n. 33.

<sup>5</sup>R. P. C. Hanson, *The Attractiveness of God: Essays in Christian Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>H. W. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946).

to light what God is always and everywhere speaking himself" (p. 50). Abraham reveals what evangelical credentials he has by dissenting radically from Robinson, largely on the grounds that Robinson has surrendered to naturalistic metaphysics, sacrificed all elements of special, divine activity in the inspiration of Scripture, and overlooked how dependent we are on God's revelation of himself if we are to know anything about him. The fourth and final scholar Abraham discusses is James Barr.<sup>7</sup> Barr holds that inspiration "expresses the belief . . . that in some way the Bible comes from God, that he has in some sense a part in its origin."<sup>8</sup> But he insists that whatever inspiration means as predicated of the people who wrote Scripture, it means the same thing when predicated of believers today. On this view it becomes difficult to see why Scripture should be granted any normative status whatever. And, as Abraham points out, Barr's understanding of inspiration is in any case unacceptably vague.

The heart of Abraham's book is his third chapter, where his own proposals for the meaning of "inspiration" are finally introduced and explained. Abraham begins from the fundamental conception "that God is a transcendent, personal agent" (p. 58). Indeed, insists Abraham, "without the fundamental category of agency we have ceased to be theists, for theism by definition is belief in a personal God who is analogous in crucial respects to human agents" (p. 59). "Analogy" thus becomes a crucial factor. When we are told that God speaks to the OT prophets, we cannot understand this to mean that God speaks exactly as men do—complete with vibrating vocal cords—but in a way analogous to our speech. Abraham follows Basil Mitchell, who states that "a word should be presumed to carry with it as many of the original entailments as the new context allows, and this is determined by the other descriptions which there is reason to believe also apply to God."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, elsewhere Abraham vigorously defends the view that some parts of the Bible do record God's speaking to men.<sup>10</sup> What the analogical principle means in practice is that we must determine the semantic range of a word in the context of human agency before we can meaningfully grasp how far and in what ways it may be used of God as an agent.

Applied to the verb "inspire," this procedure enables Abraham to select the model of a teacher who inspires his students. This removes the notion of inspiration from any necessary connection with divine speaking. Abraham claims he is doing exactly what all of us do when we think through what it means to say God loves or knows or forgives: He begins with what these terms mean in human relationships and then extrapolates analogically to God.

The idea of a teacher who inspires his students is a polymorphous concept: It involves many elements and cannot be reduced to a single, narrowly defined mode. Moreover, students will be inspired by a teacher in varying degrees ac-

<sup>7</sup>Especially in *Old and New in Interpretation* (London: SCM, 1966) and *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1973).

<sup>8</sup>Barr, *Bible* 17.

<sup>9</sup>B. Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973) 19.

<sup>10</sup>See his more recent book, *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism* (Oxford: University Press, 1982).

ording to their ability, temperament and interests. No student is entirely passive when he is thus inspired, and such inspiration does not preclude the possibility of other inspiring influences. The work such students produce will doubtless owe something to the thought of the teacher (how much so will depend in large part on the student) but will also reflect in some measure the student's own mind and not that of his teacher.

Abraham recognizes that all analogies have their limitations. And this one may be too "intellectualist" (p. 65) and does not sufficiently allow for the fact that God's inspiring is intentional (p. 67—though I wonder why it should not be said that in some measure a teacher intends to inspire). Nevertheless Abraham leans on his analogy enough to suggest that although God acts and sometimes speaks, he inspires the writers of Scripture in various degrees according to their capacity. Biblical inspiration is a polymorphous concept embracing many different divine activities, and the resulting work of those whom God has inspired will embrace a mixture of God's mind and the human mind as the degree of inspiration varies. "We cannot tell in advance what parts are reliable and to what degree; historical study will have a genuine role to play in our assurance about reliability" (p. 69). Because this model avoids any necessary connection with divine speaking it removes the awkwardness associated with the inerrancy position. This is not of course a rejection of the possibility of divine propositional revelation but a denial that the whole Bible is constituted of propositional revelation. And the result, Abraham assures us, is that we are able to achieve peace between inspiration and historical criticism.

The fourth chapter finds Abraham defending the notion of divine speaking—a foretaste of his later book, to which reference has already been made.<sup>11</sup> He ably criticizes and interacts with John Hick and with the earlier Biblical theology movement as manifest in such writers as G. Ernest Wright, and he refuses to collapse revelation into providence or expand it into all of history. The result, for Abraham, is a Bible that is inspired by God (in the sense just explained) and that contains some passages of divine speaking, but also a number of errors. Abraham thus maintains, as it were, that God did actually speak to the prophets. But he does not wrestle at length with language that suggests he spoke through the prophets on some occasions when he was not speaking to them (a point to which I shall return). Nevertheless Abraham concludes that because God's spoken word, together with reports of God's action, is recorded and enshrined in the Bible, regardless of what errors are also there "we have secure warrants for treating the Bible as canon in the life of the Church today" (p. 90).

In his fifth chapter Abraham turns to exegetical considerations. Most of this book is irenic in tone, though frequently condescending. But here a trace of mockery creeps in. Warfield spoke of an "avalanche" of evidence to support his view, but Abraham responds: "This is, of course, ridiculous and gross exaggeration. There is no such avalanche at all. There are in fact three general groups of texts" (p. 93). The first is the classic prooftexts of 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:21; the second is made up of texts that show Jesus' attitude to the OT; and the third embraces texts where "little distinction is made between what God says and what Scripture says" (p. 93).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

On the first, Abraham points out that 2 Tim 3:16 deals primarily with the function of Scripture, not its inerrancy, and that it says nothing about the autographa. 2 Peter 1:21 says nothing more than that the Holy Spirit moved certain men to prophesy. Turning to Jesus' view of the OT, Abraham begins by saying that Jesus emerges from the matrix of first-century Judaism, which held what we call the OT to be of paramount religious significance but no theory of inspiration. Indeed Abraham draws attention to "the momentous silence about inspiration on the part of Jesus in the Gospels" (p. 97). John 10:35 is an *ad hominem* argument whose primary purpose "is not to articulate a position on inspiration but to defend the relation that exists between Jesus and the Father" (p. 98). Matthew 5:17-18 says no more than that Jesus fully expresses the "inner intention and purpose" of the OT, and we should remember that Jesus himself effectively abolishes some laws and finds one part more binding than another (p. 101). As for the NT passages that say God speaks when some OT passage is cited even though that passage does not purport to be a direct quotation from God, Abraham says that the "key point to be made is that if we do rely on them they support not a theory of divine inspiration but a theory of divine dictation. They support the view that the content of the Bible was spoken by God rather than that it was inspired by God" (p. 105)—and, allowing no intermediate concursive theory, Abraham feels he has already adequately refuted this view. The conclusion, then, must be this: "The best way to construe these passages is to see them as expressing traditional Jewish respect for the content of the Old Testament canon. We should not read any more into them than this" (p. 106). Justification for this approach is now sought in the way Jews at the time revered the Scriptures—even though, as we have seen, Abraham tries to distance himself from this conclusion when he is dealing with Jesus' background.

The final postscript (misnumbered chap. 7) repeats many of the earlier arguments and attempts to justify Abraham's place within evangelicalism by arguing that such figures as John Wesley did not hold to inerrancy in quite the way moderns do.

Doubtless Abraham would be disappointed if he did not receive a thoughtful critique of his position from several quite different theological quarters. I would summarize my own reservations about his work as follows.

First, Abraham's criticism of Warfield depends in part on a misunderstanding of Gausson. It is true of course that Gausson used "dictation" language. But when he came to treat the role of the human authors of Scripture he forcefully insisted that they were not merely "the pens, hands, and secretaries of the Holy Ghost," for in much of Scripture we can easily discern "the individual character of the person who writes."<sup>12</sup> It has been repeatedly shown that many older writers used "dictation" language to refer to the results of inspiration, not its mode—i.e., the result was nothing less than the words God intended to be written, but this does not mean that God resorted to dictation as his mode of producing the text. This use of language is apparent in Calvin, Whitaker, Turretin and many others. The only reason why Abraham has missed this in Gausson is because he has unfairly abstracted Gausson's "dictation" language from the broader matrix of his thought.

<sup>12</sup>Gausson, *Theopneustia* 128.

Second, it follows therefore that Warfield was not as innovative in this area as Abraham suggests. Warfield more explicitly develops the concursive theory of inspiration and more explicitly denies that dictation is the mode of inspiration, but in doing so he was in line with many previous theologians who had never taught that dictation was the mode of inspiration. In exactly the same way Warfield's ascription of infallibility to the autographa was not innovative, for a pervasive line of reasoning stretching back at least as far as Augustine had acknowledged errors in the extant manuscripts and assigned them to copyists. In this area, too, Warfield was more explicit than his theological forbears, owing to advances in textual criticism, but he was demonstrably not innovative in this respect.

There is a sad yet amusing irony in Abraham's revisionist historiography, for it clashes a little with quite a different attempt at revisionist historiography, even though both rely on the work of Ernest Sandeen.<sup>13</sup> The other attempt, by Rogers and McKim,<sup>14</sup> focuses on the question of the authority of Scripture and argues that the Church before A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield with few exceptions held that Scripture was authoritative in matters of Christian faith and practice but not in matters of science, history and the like. Rogers and McKim have been decisively refuted from the historical sources themselves by John D. Woodbridge.<sup>15</sup> Now Abraham, focusing not on the authority of Scripture but on the mode of its inspiration, argues that the Church before Hodge and Warfield held to a now discredited mode of inspiration, and that is equally false. The effects of the two works, however, are rather different. Rogers and McKim accuse Hodge and Warfield of tightening up the doctrine of Scripture that had come down to them, whereas Abraham accuses Warfield of trying to loosen the inherited tradition in the light of scientific advances but of failing to do so adequately. The study on which both depend is Sandeen's, but in this respect Sandeen's work is demonstrably deficient,<sup>16</sup> even though it has wielded enormous influence on some other historians who have not adequately tested his results.<sup>17</sup> Hodge and Warfield were among the most gifted and sophisticated exponents of the traditional doctrine of Scripture in their day, but they were certainly not the innovators they are accused of being.

This means that if Abraham criticizes the concursive theory of inspiration defended by Warfield he is not taking on a late, last-ditch attempt to salvage a modified form of the dictation theory of inspiration. Rather, he is taking on a

<sup>13</sup>See n. 2.

<sup>14</sup>J. B. Rogers and D. K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper, 1979).

<sup>15</sup>J. D. Woodbridge, review article, *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980) 165-236; *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>16</sup>See esp. J. D. Woodbridge and R. Balmer, "The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal," in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 251-279, 396-410.

<sup>17</sup>E.g. G. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University, 1980). See esp. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* 219 n. 88.

central tradition of the Christian Church. Of course its historic centrality does not make it right or wrong, but it may shift perceptions a little about what is being attempted.

Third, Abraham's disjunction between the deductive and the inductive in formulating a doctrine of Scripture is indefensible, even though such a disjunction is frequently found. For a start, it has been shown that there are distinct groups of inerrantists, each constructing its doctrine of Scripture rather differently from the others.<sup>18</sup> Abraham's lumping of all inerrantists into one camp simply is not true to the facts. More important, any complex theory in virtually any field (some branches of mathematics might be excluded) is built up by a mixture of deduction and induction—indeed, by more than these two, but by what is variously called retroduction, abduction or adduction.<sup>19</sup> The method is found in the natural sciences as well as in the humanities and constitutes a major part of theory formation and justification. In the views of most theorists, adduction (as I shall call it) is not so much separate from deduction and induction as a category that retains both while going beyond them to describe the creative thought, the sudden links and the establishment of paradigms that account for the evidence as accumulated and understood to that point. I dare not turn this article into an extended outline of theory formation, but there are many implications of adduction as applied to the formulation of any theological doctrine, not least a doctrine of Scripture. Some of these implications are nicely spelled out by Feinberg.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately Abraham's book betrays no knowledge of such matters, let alone sensitivity to them, and the result is that his most triumphant attacks on the position he seeks to overthrow are frequently aimed in the wrong direction—viz., at straw men he himself has erected. It is simply not true that the inerrantist relies exclusively on deductivist logic.

Fourth, Abraham's mishandling of deduction and induction shows up in another way. He repeatedly insists that the inerrantist depends for his argument on an a priori definition of inspiration and mocks Warfield's claim to an avalanche of evidence. In fact, Warfield was right. The best recent survey of this avalanche, complete with classification of the many different kinds of Biblical evidence (very little of it dependent on a definition of "inspiration," a priori or otherwise) is that by Grudem<sup>21</sup> (written after Abraham's work). But because of

<sup>18</sup>E.g. R. C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (ed. J. W. Montgomery; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973) 242-261; P. Helm, "Faith, Evidence, and the Scriptures," in *Scripture and Truth* 303-320, 411.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. A. F. Holmes, "Ordinary Language Analysis and Theological Method," *BETS* 11 (1968) 131-138; J. W. Montgomery, "The Theologian's Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology," in *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1970) 267-313; J. I. Packer, "Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority," *Themelios* 1/1 (Autumn 1975) 3-12; esp. P. D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy* (ed. N. L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 265-304, 468-471; and the much larger literature on theory formation and justification.

<sup>20</sup>Feinberg, "Meaning," esp. 275-276.

<sup>21</sup>W. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth* 15-59, 359-368.

Abraham's reductionistic handling of the inerrantist literature in this regard, he fails to wrestle with the fact that a substantial number of arguments advanced by the traditional view depend on evidence that the Bible is God's word in the sense that what the Bible says God says. Abraham seeks to condemn this view by saying that it cannot distinguish itself from the dictation theory it formally rejects. But it does, as we have seen, distinguish itself from the dictation theory in terms of the mode of inspiration. The classic view, in other words, attempts to integrate more of the evidence than Abraham admits into the discussion. If Abraham were to respond that the resulting theory of the mode of inspiration, labeled concursive, is suspiciously vague, inerrantists might reply (1) that it is no more vague than confessional statements about the unity of deity and humanity in Jesus Christ, statements with which Abraham himself would apparently agree, and (2) that in any case it better accounts for the hard evidence that we actually have. It certainly does not help the debate to write off substantial parts of that evidence in advance.

Conceivably Abraham could advance the argument by asking, in effect, "But what about such-and-such a bit of evidence?"—pointing to some well-known apparent discrepancy. The remarkable fact is that Abraham in his book demurs from mentioning a single such example, restricting himself to generalizations of this sort: "I would maintain that any responsible historical criticism, whether professing to be Christian or not, must admit that the discrepancies that exist in the Gospels and elsewhere are genuine" (p. 26). Without hard examples it is difficult to know exactly what Abraham has in mind. But the traditional evangelical is likely to respond along these lines: (1) Exegetically there is often a greater number of responsible alternatives than cursory study will allow. In every case these must be carefully explored. (2) The problem of formulating a doctrine of Scripture must not be set up by beginning with all the difficulties. Difficulties cannot responsibly be ignored, but hard cases make bad theology as well as bad law. (3) The amassing of gross quantities of evidence, which is proper, will sympathetically attempt to consider and correlate both Warfield's "avalanche" and the commonly cited difficulties. (4) When this is done, whatever crucial words are used in the formulation of the doctrine—e.g., "true," "infallible," "sufficient," "inerrant" or whatever—will have to be carefully qualified and defined, for no complex doctrine in any field ever escapes such restrictions. (5) If the evidence that demands some such formulation as "what Scripture says, God says" is very substantial and the anomalies relatively few, then either the apparent anomalies will have to be fitted into it rather than the other way around or else we will have to conclude that no coherent doctrine of Scripture is possible. (6) All such evidence considered, the traditional view claims that its interpretation is the best "fit." If in a few cases it is prepared to suspend judgment because of difficult pieces of evidence, it does not see this as admission of defeat any more than a theory in science admits defeat at that point. The theory must be rejected or modified only if there is unambiguous counter-evidence, or a clear counter-example, or if there arises another theory with a better "fit." But where none of these is the case, it ill behooves opponents of the view to list (or in Abraham's case, to refrain from listing and merely allude to) the difficulties without thoughtfully working through the strengths of the theory and its supporting evidence. Interestingly, a well-known evangelical theologian once challenged a section of the



American Academy of Religion to produce the best five counter-examples they could, and there were no takers. (7) In any case, any responsible doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture does not see itself as infallible and therefore is not open to the charge of being an all-or-nothing position that some of its more zealous but less-well-informed proponents suggest.

Fifth, Abraham's own handling of inspiration is disappointing. (1) He attempts to formulate an entire doctrine of Scripture from this one concept without seriously considering such Biblical themes as the word of God (to mention but one), except to dismiss them occasionally as dangerously close to an indefensible dictation theory. Why inspiration should be made so determinative when it crops up only once in all of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16) is nowhere established. When Abraham observes "the momentous silence about inspiration on the part of Jesus in the Gospels" (p. 97), one might have expected him to question the centrality of his chosen category. But instead he somehow takes this as evidence against the concursive understanding of inspiration rather than looking around for broader evidence to see just what Jesus' view of the OT Scriptures really was. (2) Abraham greatly depends on an appeal to human analogy to determine what might be meant by the clause "God inspires X." This is not in itself illegitimate, though I believe it has more dangers than Abraham perceives. But the argument is singularly weak in this instance for three reasons. First, it is not evenhanded. If Abraham had applied the same method to the many (not just one) passages that speak of earlier Scripture being the words of God or having been spoken by God (even though the passages in question are not ascribed directly to God), then he would have had to adopt some form of divine speaking theory himself. Second, he nowhere asks what the Greek term *theopneustos* means—an exegetical step where the much-maligned Warfield was considerably more rigorous. And third, he fails to observe that the one NT passage that speaks directly of inspiration (2 Tim 3:16) refers to an inspired text, not to inspired authors. This is so much a part of the literature on the subject that the oversight is surprising. But more important, it rules out the validity of Abraham's chosen analogy—viz., a teacher inspiring his students. If his theory of inspiration does not square with Greek usage, if the analogy on which it depends positively conflicts with the one passage where inspiration is explicitly mentioned, and if the analogical principle on which Abraham relies is not applied to the plethora of evidence about divine speaking, it is hard for even the most sympathetic reviewer to salvage much of the thesis.

Sixth, the chapter on exegetical considerations is painfully weak. I have already drawn attention to the failure to deal with the mass of evidence accumulated by (*inter alios*) Grudem and to Abraham's failure to discuss *theopneustos* even when he is considering the meaning of 2 Tim 3:16. I have elsewhere dealt at length with Matt 5:17-18<sup>22</sup> and shall refrain from repeating myself here, except to say that as Abraham earlier confused results and mode of inspiration, he here and in John 10:35 confuses mode and purpose of inspiration. Elsewhere Abraham cites 1 Cor 7:10, 12, 25 as evidence that Paul sometimes gave instruction that was merely "his own opinion" that "cannot be construed as being given word for word by God" (p. 103). But the view Abraham is opposing nowhere claims that every bit of Scripture was given word for word by God, if that expres-

<sup>22</sup>See my "Matthew," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).

sion suggests the mode of inspiration. And in this case Paul is almost certainly distinguishing not between levels of authority in the resulting text but between his own teaching (which has divine authority) and that of the earthly Jesus (which has divine authority). And when Abraham does briefly discuss the NT passages where God is said to be speaking in OT Scriptures not directly attributed to his propositional dictation, Abraham, still reacting against what he perceives to be a form of the dictation theory, evacuates the texts of their meaning by reducing them to traditional Jewish expressions of respect for the Scriptures and no more.

Seventh, Abraham's attempt to make Wesley a proponent of some kind of limited errancy is not very well conceived. True, Wesley is open "to inductive considerations" (p. 116), but so are Calvin, Gaussen, Warfield and Packer. Contra Abraham, however, it is not at all clear that Wesley and the Methodist commentator Adam Clarke are "prepared to admit that errors exist" (p. 116) in the Scriptures. Abraham refers to their treatment of Matt 1:1 as a case in point. But in fact Clarke<sup>23</sup> does not call the omission of names in the genealogy an error at all but part of the Jewish way of compressing and organizing such records ("a sort of technical method of summing up generations"),<sup>24</sup> which Matthew faithfully preserves. I do not know of any serious conservative commentator, inerrantist or not, who fails to make similar observations. How this makes Wesley anything less than an inerrantist is beyond comprehension—especially since Wesley himself criticized another author who insisted the Biblical authors "made some mistakes": Responds Wesley, "Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth."<sup>25</sup>

We must be thankful to Abraham for compelling us to think through these issues afresh. It is perhaps regrettable that he attempts to cast himself as a center-stream evangelical while relegating his opponents to the "conservative evangelical" stream. I would be prepared to argue that if numbers and history are relevant to such assessments, perhaps his opponents might continue to use the "evangelical" label for themselves after all, and without feeling threatened or defensive. Whatever the labels, it must be emphatically stressed that if he

<sup>23</sup>A. Clarke, *Commentary* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1837), 5. 36-37.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39. Abraham does not provide the reference to his source for Wesley, and I was not able in a brief search to locate it. A later compilation of exegetical and expository remarks of "John Wesley, Adam Clarke, Matthew Henry and others," compiled as *The Methodist Commentary on the New Testament* (London: Charles H. Kelley, 1893) and recently reprinted as *One Volume New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), avoids charging the evangelist with error by pursuing another kind of argument: Matthew was simply following the public records, which were adequate to prove Jesus' lineage, and it would have provoked more controversy than it was worth if there had been any attempt to "correct the mistakes, if there were any." In other words, the evangelist is praised for faithfully passing on the public records that may or may not have been dubious in incidental points, even though he himself knew better—so far does this compilation stretch in trying to spare him from any taint. In other words, the faithfulness and truthfulness of the evangelist is here located in the way he passes on what the public records preserved, not in whether those records were faultless. But this is worded to make this case become analogous to, say, a Luke who faithfully passes on the doubtful wisdom of a Gamaliel.

<sup>25</sup>J. Wesley, *Journal*, 6. 117. See also the discussion and bibliography in Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* 213-214 n. 39.

wins few of his opponents to his position, it is less because of their truculence, obscurantism and ignorance than because he has not only failed to engage with the best of their literature but has presented a case that is historically, methodologically and exegetically weak.

The second book, by Barr, is in certain respects the best of the three if thoughtful interaction with the literature, cogent presentations, and clarity of thought are anything to go by. This does not mean I am persuaded by all he has written: In broad theological terms, of the three authors Barr stands farthest removed from my own position.

In some ways this is a difficult book to assess because it is not a sustained thesis or critique but a reprinting of seven papers or lectures delivered or published elsewhere. Most of Barr's published work belongs rather more to demolition than to innovation, but that is true of only two or three chapters in this collection.

In the first chapter, "Story and History in Biblical Theology," Barr argues that the narrative complex of the Bible is better designated "story" than "history." He does not deny that history in some sense is basic to Biblical faith, but the history of which this is true cannot be identified with the story told by the Biblical texts. A great deal of this assessment depends, of course, on the definition of "history" and "story." Is creation "history"? If by this we mean that the creation happened, then creation is in my view historical; but if we mean that a human being was present to record whatever happened, then creation is not historical. And even if creation is "historical" in the first sense, it is still necessary to reflect on the relation of the Biblical text to the "happenedness" of the reality. Barr assesses, e.g., Noah and the flood as nonhistorical a little too quickly: What interventions of God, if any, would Barr allow to be "historical"? That sort of question he does not seriously address. That Biblical narratives move "back and forth, quite without embarrassment, between human causation and divine causation" (p. 7) is taken as evidence that the Bible is not primarily historical, but again we would have been helped if Barr had defined history a little more clearly. Does he mean "that which happens," "that which happens in the space-time continuum," "that which happens in the space-time continuum and is accessible to methods that allow no supernatural discontinuities (even if such occur)," that such discontinuities cannot occur, or something else? What part, if any, does literary genre play in his determinations? Again, Barr sees it as an integral part of history that there be "critical evaluation of sources and reports" (p. 8). I would have thought that under this criterion as good a case could be made for the Chronicler or for Luke as for Herodotus.

Barr's purpose is to distinguish the Biblical "story" from both (in the case of the OT) the history of the period in Israel as it is reconstructed by historians and archaeologists and the history of tradition that ultimately produced the Biblical texts. There is certain justification for the distinction: No one would seriously argue that the OT sets out to provide a history of the Jews and nothing more, or that other sources may not flesh out our understanding of what went on under, say, a certain king, sources that reconstruct a broader "history" that is less concerned to give a theological interpretation of restricted events. But Barr's categories are so loose that almost any form of uncontrolled historical recon-

struction, not to say speculation, could nestle comfortably under his umbrella without adequately subjecting its methods to rigorous criticism.

The second essay, Barr's Inaugural Lecture as Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford University, answers the question, "Does Biblical Study Still Belong to Theology?" Barr's discussion is relevant primarily to the situation in Britain. He notes that there has been an increase in the percentage of students who pursue some aspect or other of Biblical study but who do not contemplate ordination or church ministry, and this makes the question of the chapter critical. He distinguishes between statements of the type "God is x," or "We believe God is x," or "We ought to affirm God is x," from those with the form "This or that Biblical writer said, or thought, that God is x." The second type of statement, Barr reasons, represents the kind of study that anyone can pursue, and it belongs in the university; the former represents what belongs to the believer, and it stands a little more closely attached to the theological college. Barr says that although he knows personally most of the OT scholars of this generation he knows very little of their personal theological beliefs, and this confirms him in the view that there is no necessary relation between Biblical studies and theology. The university approach limits such Biblical study in important ways, but this cannot be helped. Barr concludes with some telling insights into the roles of empathy and presupposition in such study.

My own assessment of the situation is a little different. (1) The common university approach, at least in my experience of study in Great Britain, usually avoids profound questions of truth and ultimate loyalty. If a university scholar comes to the conclusion that what Paul writes in, say, Rom 3:20-26 is true—i.e., it is not only true that Paul wrote it but that what Paul says accurately portrays how the God who actually exists justifies the ungodly while maintaining his own justice—it is not clear how he can legitimately maintain the stance of neutrality. I am not simply saying that advocacy does not necessarily destroy credibility or objectivity (and if it did, we should rigorously fire university scholars from every position of advocacy—e.g., all Marxist historians) but that the nature of Biblical Christianity demands unqualified allegiance to divine revelation. If a believing scholar raises his intellectual judgments above the demand for unqualified allegiance and total discipleship, what damage is he doing to the very structure of the revelation in which he professes to believe? Of course this danger is not restricted to university scholars. Far from it: The essence of the modern trend toward secularization is the removal of the normative power of Christianity from the central areas of life—research, science, commerce, politics, economics, judicial decisions, etc.—thereby restricting it to the purely private and personal, and this trend affects much more than universities. But the danger is perhaps particularly acute there, since in no other arena is so much emphasis placed on the distance the thinker must maintain from his chosen field. (2) But the worst danger may be to the students. It is hard to avoid magnifying intellectual attainment at the expense of such things as, say, prayer, love for neighbors, wholehearted obedience to the gospel, childlike faith, corporate worship and sensitive evangelism. I am not saying that Christians cannot develop mature and well-balanced Christianity in the university setting but only that it is extraordinarily difficult. Nor am I saying that frankly unbelieving Biblical scholars have made no genuine advances. But I am saying that the cost to the spiritual poise and maturity of the

following generations of Church leaders has been very high. I am thinking not only of the destruction of faith in some but of its distortion and domestication in many others, as the cutting edge of Christian discipleship is displaced by the pleasant thrill of intellectual discovery. Again, I am not in the slightest consigning such pleasure to the pit. Rather, I am suggesting that the university setting often tames the gospel and the Scriptures while unduly elevating scholarly achievement, and if that is not the essence of idolatry I do not know what is. (3) Nevertheless I am certainly not advocating that Christians should withdraw from the university setting of Biblical studies—especially in the British context. Believers need to stand in the vanguard of intellectual turmoil and deal with the world as it is. That is surely part of loving God with the mind as well as with heart and soul and strength. But they must do so with eyes wide open to the dangers. Our very failure to articulate the dangers is an index of the gravity of the problem.

Barr's third chapter bears the title "Historical Reading and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture." He is concerned to ask whether historical study of the Scriptures is essentially a secular approach without justification from within theology itself, or amenable to theological justification. "Christianity is an historical religion," we might all agree. But what does this mean? Barr lists six different options. He begins to sift them in the light of recent discussion and offers some suggestions in answer to the problem he has set himself.

But before turning to his suggestions it is important to understand what Barr means by "the historical-critical method," whose role in Biblical exegesis he is analyzing. By "historical" he means "a reading which aims at the reconstruction of spatial-temporal events in the past: it asks what was the actual sequence of the events to which the text refers, or what was the sequence of events by which the text came into existence" (p. 30). By "critical" he means that such a reading "accepts the possibility that events were not in fact as they are described in the text . . . . No operation is genuinely historical if it does not accept this critical component: in other words, being 'critical' is analytically involved in being historical" (pp. 30-31). I raise two questions: (1) Granted that the pursuit of the spatial-temporal aspect of events described in Scripture is one important component of exegesis, to what extent and by what means may such pursuit, important as it is, safeguard itself against a methodological inability to perceive intervention in the spatial-temporal continuum from beyond that dimension? In other words, how does it protect itself against the a priori exclusion of revelation, against succumbing to philosophical materialism? Can any genuinely Christian historian be entirely content with an understanding of history derived from Troeltsch? (2) More important, how does Barr's definition of "critical" allow for an historian to be anything other than an agnostic and a skeptic about everything he or she studies? I would have thought that "critical" should be used of the justification of methods, opinions, findings, conclusions. A "critical" opinion in this sense is one that offers justification for itself. It is opposed to the subjective opinion or the purely personal opinion. By contrast Barr's approach, demanding that the historian constantly allow for the "possibility that events were not in fact as they are described in the text," at very least needs clarification. If an historian approaches any text with such commendable openmindedness, that is one thing. But if after sustained study he comes to the conclusion that within the

genres and self-imposed limitations of the text the events there recorded are as they are described, then it seems rather curt to deny such an historian's work the adjective "critical," reserving it for his more skeptical colleagues. Barr's footnote is revealing: He is attempting by definition to eliminate conservative scholarship not only from the "critical" class but from the "responsible analytic historian" class. Unfortunately, to achieve this he has unwittingly adopted a definition that is as Procrustean and obscurantist as anything his most despised fundamentalist might dream up.

Barr's broader answer to the question he has set himself in this chapter is roughly threefold: (1) Historical analysis of the Bible shows how far the description in the text stands from the actuality and therefore prepares us better to hear Scripture as story than as history; (2) for the same reason it destroys all docetic views of revelation that evade revelation's historicalness and make it history *sui generis*, and thus it contributes to the Reformation principle *sola fide*; (3) but above all the "legitimation of historical and critical reading lies in the relation between scripture, tradition and the church" (p. 59)—i.e., historical-critical reading of Scripture makes it more clearly the reading of tradition and thus prepares us for a deeper understanding of the proper theological role of Scripture in the history and contemporary life of the Church. Along the way Barr offers preliminary critique of Brevard Childs' form of canon criticism, a critique more recently developed at greater length.<sup>26</sup>

At almost every point I would like to put things a little differently. Arguably, for instance, *sola fide* as understood by the magisterial Reformers has very little to do with Ebeling's use of the term, dependent as it is on an existentialist hermeneutic interested in reducing the object of faith cherished by the Reformers. In this connection it is astonishing that Barr does not consider the possibility that historical study of Scripture may find some theological justification in the substantial verification of history-claims in Scripture and thus contribute to faith. One might go so far as to suggest that appeal to the Reformation principle as Ebeling and Barr handle it, common as it is, is irresponsible from the historical-critical point of view. I wonder too if the haste with which historical particularity in revelation is labeled docetic (though historical docetism is light years removed from this problem) is in reality a failure to face up to the scandal of a self-incarnating God. And in exactly what sense does Scripture function as canon when the highly diverse reconstructions of what really happened become the most valuable source of insight into the way Scripture shapes ecclesiastical traditions?

The fourth chapter is more of a popular lecture and provocatively raises the question, "Has the Bible Any Authority?" Barr begins "with a vigorous 'Yes'" (p. 52). Why does the Bible have authority? "The answer, I think, is as follows: the Bible has authority because its authority, in some form or other, is built into the structure of Christian faith and the Christian religion" (p. 52). This less than totally perspicuous answer is then teased out through the following pages. What quickly becomes apparent is that the Bible is not in any sense a normative authority. Otherwise put, Barr uses "authority" in a greatly attenuated sense.

<sup>26</sup>See the lengthy appendix to J. Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: University Press, 1983).

Thus the Bible's theism may be suitably modified or transformed by non-Biblical philosophical theism. The Bible helps in calling people to faith by asking questions ("The Bible is more a battleground than a book of true facts" [p. 53]—a rather unnecessary disjunction). The Bible is less interested in presenting the shape of the past than in pointing to the future—i.e., it is more eschatological than historical. These and other themes are of course common throughout Barr's work and are here merely summarized in convenient form.

One of the most interesting points that Barr raises (and the one that has become central in his latest book)<sup>27</sup> is that "the men of the Bible had no Bible: there was no Bible in the biblical period" (p. 56). When Abraham believed God he did so without resort to a Bible. On this point Barr in this essay rests two principles: (1) The traditional order God → revelation → Scripture → Church should be replaced by God → people → tradition → Scripture; and (2) faith's relationship to God is more fundamental than the Bible itself, and thus in principle it is "perfectly possible, not only to question the scientific or the historical accuracy of various biblical passages, but also to question the adequacy of the picture of God which they represent" (p. 56).

Like so much of Barr's work, his extrapolation from a corner of the truth masks difficulties he might have avoided. I mention but two: (1) Although it is true that no Biblical person enjoyed a complete Bible, many of them enjoyed substantial parts of the Bible—and I would have thought it imperative in any discussion of Biblical authority to raise questions about how the later people of the Biblical period saw the authority of the Bible they already enjoyed and how they related their faith to it. More broadly, the alternative schematics are too disjunctive. (2) Even if we return to a man like Abraham who had no part of the Bible to hand, his faith is predicated on the basis of a God who supernaturally and propositionally revealed himself to the man. The basis of his faith is therefore not exactly the same as Barr's (unless Barr is claiming he has recently received supernatural and propositional revelation from God). Something similar could be said for the mixture of reverence for and transmutation of the OT in the light of the coming of Christ: It depends on the arrival of new, supernatural revelation. Moreover Barr does not here wrestle with the move from eyewitnesses to ear-witnesses to written-witness. To deal with the temporal priority of an event in Scripture over the recording of it in Scripture as if there were enormous existential implications for the proper basis of contemporary faith, without wrestling with the nature of revelation, truth and witness, is remarkably reductionistic. Some of these lacunae are addressed in Barr's later work, though perhaps not always satisfactorily.

By far the longest chapter, and the one etched in the highest concentration of acid, is the fifth: "The Problem of Fundamentalism Today." The essay offers a condensation of some of the main points in Barr's most famous book<sup>28</sup> and some "afterthoughts" following the responses that followed that larger publication. If a person of conservative Christian persuasion (whatever the label) has a sense of humor, this is an immensely enjoyable and profitable piece. "If we could see ourselves as others see us . . ."

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Viz., *Fundamentalism* (see n. 4 supra).

Barr ties fundamentalism not to those who hold in general terms to the authority of Scripture but to those who say "that the doctrinal and practical authority of Scripture is necessarily tied to its infallibility and in particular to its historical inerrancy" (p. 65). This definition could be interpreted in more than one way. For instance, I do not myself think that it is necessary to hold an inerrantist view for a person to bow to the Lordship of Christ and experience grace and forgiveness, only that if the inerrantist position is properly defined and delimited it is not only the most consistent view but also the one that best squares with the hard evidence and the sustained central tradition of the Church. Would Barr consider me a fundamentalist or not? I am not sure, but presumably most if not all ETS members would in Barr's view fall under his rubric. I should add that "fundamentalism" has slightly different semantic overtones in America than in Barr's homeland, but here I shall retain Barr's usage.

Fundamentalism as a movement has some learned scholars, Barr concedes, but no "first-rate theological thinkers" (p. 66). It is essentially a conservative ideology "endowed with religious sanction and made into the kernel of the message of Scripture," and as such it "becomes demonic" (p. 68). Fundamentalism is characterized not so much by emotionalism and bigotry as by rationalistic intellectualism that strangely marries intellectual self-deception with a fervent hunger for intellectual recognition (regrettably, Barr is more than half right on this point). Those conservative scholars who rise above the crowd often espouse views their followers neither understand nor accept, and when they enter into debate with their intellectual peers they do so on the terms and in the categories of the broader scholarly community (though arguably Paul does the same thing in Acts 17).

Barr takes many telling jabs. His criticism, for instance, of the crass dependence many fundamentalists have on their leaders is a case in point. Biting overstatement can be useful in helping us see our faults. Yet sometimes his analysis is in my view less than evenhanded. I mention but three of many examples: (1) It appears that if evangelical scholars do not make use of, say, the new hermeneutic, they are throwbacks and obscurantists; and if they do, they are not really evangelicals (or fundamentalists). There seems to be no place for a judicious balance—in this case, an exploration of the field by evangelicals who honestly try to see what may be learned from each development and to assess what changes in their tradition are thereby mandated or advisable. (2) Barr shifts back and forth between criticizing fundamentalism as a movement and fundamentalism's scholarship. Thus he laments the Biblical ignorance of many fundamentalist laymen and their consequent dependence on their leaders, but I venture to say that the Biblical illiteracy of the masses of fundamentalism (as Barr understands the term) is considerably less than that among the masses in his own ecclesiastical and ideological circles. (3) Conservatives are repeatedly lambasted for holding up their view of Scripture as a line that can be used to develop an in/out mentality: Some are in, others are out. But has not Barr himself developed a similarly restricting line? Those who insist there are manifold errors in Scripture are eligible to become first-rate theological thinkers and may be admitted to the fraternity of true scholars, while those who do not are not. By this shall we discern true and false scholars. "If we could see ourselves as others see us . . . ."



Perhaps the most disappointing—indeed, astonishing—part of the essay reads as follows:

No one is going to be inspired or spiritually enriched by learning from a conservative commentary that St. Paul did after all write the letters to Timothy and Titus. No one is going to go forth to evangelize the world simply on the ground that a fundamentalist scholar has proved to his satisfaction that the Paul of Acts is in absolute agreement with the Paul of the Epistles. In fact nothing is more stodgy, dull, uninspiring and lacking in fervour than the fundamentalist scholarship of our time. For spirituality von Rad and Bultmann lie far ahead at every point. What conservative scholarship supplies, and what it is valued for, is not inspiration or spirituality, it is the rehearsal and reinforcement of the ideology of *conservatism* (p. 87).

In part, the problem here is once more the lack of evenhandedness. If no one is uplifted or inspired by learning that Paul wrote the letter to Titus, no one is likely to be inspired or uplifted by learning that Paul did not write the letter to Titus. But instead of setting the obvious antithesis against the conservative conclusion, Barr sets the sweeping work of von Rad and Bultmann. I have learned much from both men. But at the risk of mockery, I think it likely that few are spiritually uplifted in any distinctively Christian sense by being assured by Bultmann that angels, miracles, resurrection and a self-incarnating God are all impossible, that these and other NT terms must be invested with new and exclusively naturalistic meaning, that faith has no object other than an empty *dass*, that the incarnation, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are all properly collapsed into the existential moment of encounter with the kerygma—an encounter in which our bright hope is to emerge into authentic existence, and a kerygma that has no content but the kerygma itself. If it is wrong to read conservative ideology into Scripture, it seems no less wrong to read Heidegger into Scripture. Meanwhile I know many Christians who have been inspired and uplifted by, say, J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*. And as for evangelizing the world, I wonder if Barr has recently checked the figures regarding which groups are sending out most missionaries to all kinds of church planting and relief work?

I am first to admit that much conservative scholarship is indeed stodgy and dull. May God help us to do better, and may he forgive us our frequent self-satisfaction, our own conformity to privatized religion and compromised holiness. Yet in all fairness if I want to understand what, say, Mark actually says, as opposed to the latest speculations regarding how some pericope may conceivably have been composed, I find Cranfield and Lane far more helpful than Pesch. What I fear (though I hesitate to write it, since it sounds like a devastating charge indeed) is that in some measure Barr has not discerned any difference between, on the one hand, inspiration and spirituality, and on the other, the thrill of intellectual innovation and formulation. The latter has an important place: I would be disappointed if a physicist, geneticist, archivist or theologian did not enjoy scholarly advance and discovery. But to confuse that with inspiration and spirituality may betray Barr's captivity to the modern *Zeitgeist* that refuses to bow to anything more elevated than the lordship of fallen and finite intellect.

Time and space considerations forbid that I interact with Barr's final two chapters: I do no more than state his focus of interest in each case. In chap. 6, under the title "The Bible as Political Document" (first published in *BJRL*), Barr

surveys a variety of social and political organizations that have professed to base themselves on the authority of some part or other of the Bible (usually the OT) and considers to what extent the alleged dependency is justified as measured "against the actual intentions of that particular stratum of the Bible" (p. 91). And finally, in his last chapter, Barr considers "The Bible as a Document of Believing Communities."

The third book comes from the prolific pen of the professor of New Testament exegesis at the University of Aberdeen. It is an expanded form of two lectures first delivered at Wycliffe Hall, an Anglican ministerial training college in Oxford. It is neither a narrowly focused study of the meaning of "inspiration" nor a collection of loosely related articles on the Bible, but a sweeping survey of what might be called the doctrine of the Bible—i.e., the nature of Biblical revelation, the extent and significance of the Bible's truth claims, the appropriateness of categories like "inerrancy," some of the hermeneutical problems associated with its interpretation and application, and reflections on the nature of its authority. The style is chatty and winsome, designed for the reader with little technical background. With one exception, the book breaks no new ground but serves as a useful introduction to the author's interpretation of the current debate. It is by far the most conservative of the three books reviewed in this article.

Marshall winningly points out that books on this topic are inflammatory:

Should I so much as deviate to the left and suggest that not all that Scripture says is true in the strictest sense of that term, I shall come under strong criticism and possibly even excommunication from the right, not simply for saying so, but for saying so as a confessed evangelical; and should I throw in my lot unreservedly with my colleagues on the right, I shall undoubtedly suffer at the hands of my colleagues on the left, who will doubt not only any claim I dare make to be a biblical scholar but also my sanity (p. 7).

But he presses on valiantly anyway—and after a brief "Introduction" that raises questions in the same order by which the chapters of the book will answer them, he begins his first chapter under the question, "What does the Bible say about itself?" These few pages provide a broad survey, drawing attention to instances of divine dictation, the high status ascribed to the OT by Jesus and by NT writers, brief treatment of crucial passages such as 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20-21, mention of the self-conscious authority of the NT writers, the problem of the canon and the like. But it leaves out an enormous amount of material from consideration.<sup>29</sup> Some of the omissions, as we shall see, turn out to be significant.

The second chapter answers the question, "what do we mean by 'inspiration'?" Marshall briefly surveys and criticizes several inadequate theories: that inspiration entails simple dictation; that it means no more than that the Biblical writers eloquently expressed their own religious insight; that it means the Bible is nothing but witness to revelation whose locus is exclusively event; and the varied models developed by Karl Barth, Paul Aichele and William Abraham (in the first book reviewed in this article). In each case discussion is never more than a few paragraphs long and rarely mentions any of the major literature in

<sup>29</sup>See esp. the work by Grudem that covers roughly the same territory but far more comprehensively (cf. n. 20, *supra*).

the field, but the potted critiques are accurate, fair and courteous. Marshall himself opts for the traditional evangelical "concurvive action of the Spirit" theory, though he rejects as inadequate and misleading analogies drawn between the Bible and Jesus, both in some sense "Word of God," both in some sense simultaneously divine and human. Probably the weakest part of the chapter is the brief foray into epistemology at the end, a foray that reappears at several points in the book. Marshall could benefit by reading recent contributions by J. A. Passmore and George I. Mavrodes.<sup>30</sup>

The third and longest chapter answers the question, "What are the results of inspiration?" Here Marshall is his most innovative. He begins by quoting the definitions of "infallibility" and "inerrancy" in "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." Building on his foray into epistemology, he observes that acceptance of the Bible as the inspired Word of God is a matter of faith and concludes therefore that "the claim that what the Bible says is true cannot be anything else than a statement of faith, which may or may not be ultimately justified" (p. 51). This and several similar statements in the book are almost meaningless because faith is not discussed or defined, but they strike me as naive about the nature of theological method<sup>31</sup> in a context that cries out for some reflection on the relations among truth, historical method and faith.

The burden of this chapter, however, lies elsewhere. Marshall sets up a model contrasting Christians who begin with the actual characteristics of the Bible and who therefore conclude that inerrancy is an indefensible position, with those who hold to inerrancy and/or infallibility based largely on the proposition that it is God who cannot lie who stands behind this book. This classification is parallel to the inductivist/deductivist classification advanced by Beegle and others and already discussed in this article. Unfortunately Marshall, like Abraham, does not interact with the literature on this problem and therefore to some extent erects a straw man. Marshall at this point attempts to sidestep the problem by focusing on the question of what God actually wished to do by his concurvive inspiration of Scripture. "The purpose of God in the composition of the Scriptures was to guide people to salvation and the associated way of life . . . We may therefore suggest that 'infallible' means that the Bible is entirely trustworthy for the purposes for which God inspired it" (p. 53). Marshall argues that this analysis has the effect of shifting the focus away from the truth of the Bible to its adequacy for what God intends it to do. This step "opens up the possibility of a fresh approach to the Bible which may prove to be illuminating" (p. 53).

Pressing on with this fresh approach, Marshall points out that the true/false disjunction is applicable only to "propositions which convey factual information" (p. 56). A command such as "Take away the stone" (John 11:39) is neither true nor false. The proposition that Jesus said it may be labeled true or false, but the imperative itself is not amenable to this classification. The same is true of fictional narratives like parables, of much of the advice from Job's friends (cf. Job

<sup>30</sup>J. A. Passmore, "The Objectivity of History," in *Philosophical Analysis and History* (ed. W. H. Dray; New York: Harper, 1966) 75-94; G. I. Mavrodes, *Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion* (New York: Random House, 1970). The problem is related also to questions of theory formation and justification (see n. 18, supra).

<sup>31</sup>See nn. 18, 29.

42:7), and of much more. If all we mean by saying "Leviticus 11 is true" is that it is a true record of what God said to the Israelites, the statement is "somewhat banal" (p. 58) because the commands in that chapter are no longer directly relevant to us as Christians.

Even of statements that may legitimately be labeled true or false we must recognize, Marshall argues, how many are completely untestable, and therefore we must concede that the true/false category is sometimes unhelpful. Moreover, even the Chicago Statement is forced to point out that the proposition "Scripture is inerrant" must not be taken "in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed." Marshall concludes:

Here it is admitted that certain phenomena, which might well be regarded as errors and contradictions, must not be counted as such. The reason for making this concession is that no amount of exegetical ingenuity can avoid recognizing the presence of such phenomena in the Bible. The significant point is that, once this has been admitted, then it has been implicitly agreed that the definition of the kind of truth to be found in the Bible is dependent upon biblical interpretation of the difficult passages and cannot be drawn simply from statements in the Bible about its own nature (p. 61).

So Marshall turns to an examination of some of these difficult Biblical phenomena. The least that can be said for this approach is that it is methodologically superior to that of Abraham: At least we come down to hard cases. First Marshall introduces examples of "historical approximation" and other imprecision—condensation, reporting of general content and not actual words, and the like. He then turns to the manifest presence of interpretation of historical events in the Biblical texts. For example, King Omri in 1 Kings 16 is dismissed as an evil man, without drawing attention to facts known by us from non-Biblical sources—Omri's great power, administrative genius and international reputation. In these kinds of situations, Marshall suggests, such severe restraints are to be placed on the term "inerrancy" that its usefulness must be called into question. He then turns to a third kind of phenomenon, exemplified by Luke's ordering of Theudas and Judas (Acts 5:26-27) compared with that in Josephus. Marshall rejects as implausible suggestions that Josephus was the one who got it wrong or that the two authors were referring to different rebels. This is an instance, he charges, where regrettably the strict inerrantist retreats into his invulnerable position by holding to historical implausibilities. His problem, Marshall suggests, is that he has not permitted his doctrine of Scripture to be adequately informed by the phenomena of Scripture. If we adopt this more responsible course, then "our understanding of the truth of the Bible must allow" for "a genuine historical mistake . . . and other mistakes" (pp. 64-65). We must permit the phenomena of Scripture to determine our doctrine of Scripture. This should not alarm us unduly, Marshall suggests, for there are far more uncertainties about the Bible that are generated by textual variants, difficulties in interpretation and problems of discerning appropriate application. Marshall asks: "[If] God's purposes did not include the provision of a guaranteed text, a guaranteed interpretation and a guaranteed application for today, what right have we to assume that he gave an original text that was guaranteed to be utterly precise?" (p. 69). And, finally, Marshall points out that the domino theory—if inerrancy falls, orthodoxy falls—

is not a logically rigorous position. In any case, inerrancy is scarcely a guarantor of orthodoxy since many cultists are inerrantists. The upshot of the chapter is that Marshall thinks the term “inerrancy” should be abandoned because it “needs so much qualification, even by its defenders, that it is in danger of dying the death of a thousand qualifications. The term ‘infallible’ in the sense of ‘entirely trustworthy’ is undoubtedly preferable” (p. 72).

The issues are important enough to the readers of this *Journal* that a measured response, however preliminary, may not be entirely out of place. First, although it is important to ask what God wished to accomplish by his concursive inspiration of the Scriptures, it does not follow that Marshall’s formulation of that purpose (“to guide people to salvation and the associated way of life”) justifies his shift in focus from the truth of the Bible to its adequacy for what God intends to do. One might equally argue that the purpose of Christ’s coming was “to guide people to salvation and the associated way of life,” but that does not render irrelevant questions about Christ’s truthfulness nor sanction a corresponding shift in focus from the nature of Christ’s truthfulness to the adequacy of his performance. The inherent instability of this position is perhaps underscored when we remember that Abraham argues that if the concursive theory is correct, it is hard to see how inerrancy does not follow—which is why Abraham rejects the concursive theory. Marshall accepts the validity of the concursive theory but seeks to sidestep the implications by shifting the focus from the truthfulness of the resulting text to the purpose of the resulting text. But one cannot legitimately duck a question in one category by introducing a question in another category. Moreover, it is not altogether clear that Marshall’s formulation of the purpose of Scripture is fair to the issue at hand. One might have suggested with equal propriety that the purpose of Scripture as God inspired it is to bring glory to himself, or that its purpose is to explain truthfully God’s plan of redemption to a fallen race in order to bring many sons to glory. Of these two suggested formulations of Scripture’s purpose, the latter reintroduces the question of truth. All three of these formulations—Marshall’s suggestion and my two—are Biblically and theologically defensible and mutually complementary. It follows therefore that Marshall’s formulation not only jumps categories in order to sidestep the truth question but does so by a questionable reductionism even of the purpose of Scripture.

Second, Marshall is certainly right to insist that the true/false disjunction is applicable only to statements of fact, but that rather misses the point. Very few one-word summaries of a Christian doctrine turn on a merely lexical unpacking of the term (e.g. doctrine of the Church, doctrine of last things, doctrine of reconciliation, even doctrine of God). If therefore Marshall wants to dismiss the term “inerrancy” as inappropriate to the phenomena, he must analyze the term as a theological construct—the “doctrine of inerrancy,” if you will—as handled by its best exponents (for no position is ever legitimately overthrown by exposing the weaknesses of its sloppiest defenders). Consider, then, the generally rigorous essay by Paul Feinberg on “The Meaning of Inerrancy” (to which, regrettably, Marshall does not refer),<sup>32</sup> which offers the following as a proposed theological summary: “Inerrancy means that, when all facts are known, the Scriptures in

<sup>32</sup>See n. 18.

their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with social, physical, or life sciences." Now I am aware of what phrases like "when all facts are known" and "in their original autographs" conjure up for some people, but such matters have been treated with some rigor not only by Feinberg but by many others. Carl Henry's *magnum opus*, for instance, receives no consideration at all in any of these three books.<sup>33</sup> But my main point here is that Marshall has failed to wrestle with inerrancy as a theological construct.

Third, even if inerrancy is restricted to its lexical meaning rather than allowed to stand for a theological construct and therefore is applicable only to statements, it is remarkable that it is an historical statement, a statement of fact (i.e., re Theudas and Judas) that Marshall advances as an instance where the Bible is not telling the truth. This kind of problem passage, however, cannot legitimately be lumped together with questions of precision or selective reporting. The latter is a necessary corollary of human finitude. Questions of precision are largely definitional and contextually delimited in some way. For instance, if I say I live about 15 miles from work I speak the truth. If I say 16 miles I also speak the truth, for the odometer testifies to 15.6, which is closer to 16 than 15. If I say 15.6, I am still speaking truth—even though if measured with an accurate laser in straight-line distance 15.6 would be much too high—for in this case the context of conversation intimates driving or biking or train distance ("distance from work"), not straight-line distance. I would, however, be saying something untrue if I said I lived 15.02 miles from work, for this suggests a precision to the second decimal place when precision of that order would come out closer to 15.65. Thus the contextual parameters delimit the degree of precision expected. The book of 1 Kings does not pretend to give a pagan assessment of Omri: It openly assesses him on the basis of his idolatry and of his contribution to the seduction of Israel. Thus it would not be possible to begin to construct a comprehensive, modern biography of Omri from the slant offered by 1 Kings, but it is hard to see how truth has been compromised. A person or text may speak truly without speaking exhaustively, the more so when there are contextual clues as to the focus and perspective being adopted. (Fifty billion years into eternity, if I may speak of eternity in the categories of time, the assessment of Omri provided by 1 Kings will seem much more relevant than the assessment provided by his pagan neighbors anyway.) Similar judgments could be made about the range of reportage in the gospels. But the Theudas/Judas listing belongs to quite a separate camp. Here there is no question of mere precision, but of truth versus error. The same confusion of category recurs throughout Marshall's book (e.g. p. 122).

Fourth, if at this point we are reminded that Luke's chief point is not to sort out which rebel came first but to draw attention to the transience of their rebellion, we are nevertheless still moving in a framework of the truth/error or true/false disjunction, not in the framework of mere precision. And matters that fall into the true/false classification were precisely the ones that were meant to be safeguarded by those who used the word "infallibility" thirty or forty years ago. But theological pressure from the left (I mean no insult or hurt) gradually re-

<sup>33</sup>C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (6 vols.; Waco: Word, 1976-83).

stricted the word “infallible” to “matters of faith and practice” or to “what God intended to achieve” conceived in exclusively salvific categories. This development is one of the factors that has prompted some evangelical scholars to prefer the term “inerrancy.” They hope thereby to regain what has been lost by the shunt associated with “infallibility.” What is remarkable is that Marshall dislikes the word “inerrancy” and treats it as a purely lexical construct, while adhering to the term “infallibility” and treating it as a theological construct of recent vintage. If both terms are treated on a lexical basis alone, he would have equal problems with both (e.g., can a command be judged infallible any more easily than inerrant?), but if both terms are treated as theological constructs it would quickly be discovered that the best theological construction on inerrancy is virtually indistinguishable from the best theological older construction on infallibility. It would then be obvious that those who champion the term “inerrancy” are not the theological innovators but merely the lexical innovators. And even this is to concede too much, for one can find countless examples of theologians insisting the Scriptures are without error—theologians going back all the way to the fathers. Thus even the lexical “innovation,” if it can be called that at all, is in the shift from “infallible” to “inerrant” as the focus of debate within evangelical circles now that the former term has become a little more slippery than it once was. This point is extraordinarily important for, as we have seen, there has arisen a revisionist historiography that tries to prove that the “inerrancy” view is historically innovative and therefore of dubious theological pedigree. So far as I am able to judge, the facts are quite otherwise.<sup>34</sup>

Fifth, for two reasons I am mildly surprised that Marshall makes so much of the Theudas/Judas passage. The first is that his judgments on possible solutions are offered without defense. “It could be argued,” he writes, “that Josephus got his dates wrong (the view taken by the Jerusalem Bible). This, however, is very unlikely” (p. 63). Why is it so unlikely? Marshall has done more than most scholars to show how reliable Luke is where he can be tested, and all agree that Josephus sometimes gets his facts wrong. And this is only one of two or three possible solutions. These reflections do not constitute a blind appeal to the merely possible in order to preserve an ill-founded doctrine. Rather, it is a responsible weighing of probabilities that includes not only the data in this particular instance but the massive evidence that supports the (older) “infallibility” construct—i.e., the “inerrancy” construct. Part of the problem, again, is a failure to come to grips with the way any theological or scientific theory is formed. Second, I am surprised that for such an important step in his argument Marshall did not try to find a clearcut, unambiguous example of what he calls “historical mistakes.” Is this the worst that the classic doctrine of Scripture has to fear?

Sixth, although it is true that textual variants, difficulties in interpretation and problems of discerning appropriate application all engender uncertainties of various kinds, Marshall’s conclusion (“what right have we to assume that [God] gave an original text that was utterly precise?”) can scarcely be said to follow, for: (1) The words “utterly precise” are probably a slip, for Marshall himself points out that inerrantists do not insist on utter precision. (2) But it is a slip of some significance, for it is again appealing to the “precision” category to allow

<sup>34</sup>See n. 15.

through an historical error—i.e., something contrary to fact. If Marshall for “utterly precise” were to substitute the words “without historical error,” he might perceive that his rhetorical question is a *non sequitur*. (3) But more important, the Scriptures nowhere encourage us to think there will not be textual variants, or that its material will be unambiguously clear, or that no problems of application will ever arise. But the Scriptures do encourage its readers to hold that all it says is reliable and true, along the lines of the theological construct I have sketched in.

There is far more Biblical evidence for the classic view than is marshaled in this book. One of the interesting kinds of evidence not touched by Marshall is the range of historical tidbits from the OT picked up by NT writers in order to make a point—e.g., Jacob gave a field to Joseph (John 4:5), Elijah was sent to the widow of Zarephath (Luke 4:25-26), Rahab received spies and sent them out another way (Jas 2:25), the Queen of the South came to hear Solomon (Matt 12:42)—to mention only four of scores of examples. Never is there the faintest suggestion that previous Scripture gets its historically insignificant details wrong. Much more evidence of many kinds could be adduced. And when it is amassed and contemplated there is very good reason for thinking that historical difficulties (and of course there are some very tough ones) should not be treated exactly like textual variants. God has not declared himself on textual variants, but he has declared himself on the truthfulness of his word.

Seventh, it is true that to interpret the proposition “Leviticus 11 is true” to mean no more than that Leviticus 11 is a true record of what God said to the Israelites at the time is not very satisfying. But even so, it may be of more importance than Marshall suggests. If someone denies that Leviticus 11 is true in that sense, it may be because he believes God cannot communicate propositionally, or because he so reconstructs the history of Israel that he does not believe the law was largely given before the advent of all the early prophets, or for several other reasons. Whatever the cause, the effect is to say something rather substantial about the veracity of Scripture, about God, and/or about Scripture’s broad presentation of Israel’s history. The order of major revelatory appointments in the OT is not immaterial to the Bible as a whole, nor even to the gospel itself (as Paul makes clear in Galatians 3).

Eighth, Marshall jumps categories yet again when he asks the question, “True for whom?” (p. 57). In Leviticus and Deuteronomy we find legislation distinguishing between clean and unclean foods, legislation that was binding on the Israelites of the time. But the NT seems to overthrow these laws (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:45). Thus the laws are not “true” for us as Christians today—i.e., they are not valid for us. This is the sort of argument that James D. G. Dunn makes much of in his recent pair of articles in the *Churchman*.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, this criticism of his opponent’s viewpoint is internally inconsistent with Marshall’s earlier insistence that “truth” is inapplicable to imperatives. This new criticism is achieved by applying “true” to imperatives after all, but by taking it to mean “valid” or “currently legally binding” and then asking, “For whom?” I know no evangelical scholar who thinks every piece of legislation or every imperative is

<sup>35</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, “The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture,” *Churchman* 96 (1982) 104-122, 201-225.



binding on all men everywhere in every age. And the thoughtful inerrantist has long since wrestled with problems of development and organic growth in redemptive history, struggling to understand the unity of the Bible in a broad framework that allows for prophecy and fulfillment, types, abrogation and/or supersession of certain statutes and covenants in the light of fresh revelation, and much more. This is not to say there is widespread agreement on all these difficult matters, but it is to say that conservative scholars have thought about these matters a great deal, and it does them an injustice to raise a rather elementary legal change and introduce it as if it were a major obstacle to their view of Scripture. The fact of the matter is that the problem raised is irrelevant to the inerrantist's view of Scripture, and therefore to raise it in this context betrays either a substantial ignorance of historical theology or a considerable failure to understand what the traditional doctrine of Scripture means. Moreover, if it were taken as a serious objection against inerrancy it could equally be posed as a serious objection against the (modern) form of infallibility that Marshall defends: We might ask, not "True for whom?" but "Infallible revelation of God's purposes for whom?"—and use the same example.

Ninth, Marshall is entirely right to point out that there is no logically cogent demonstration that the domino theory inevitably triumphs. Indeed there are some interesting counter-examples. Nevertheless, one might have expected an evenhanded treatment of these matters. We would then be reminded how often individuals and even denominations make shipwreck of their faith once the traditional view of Scripture is lost—if not in the first generation, then often in the second—even if this is not the inevitable result. This alone of course would not be an adequate reason for holding to the high view of Scripture that I am advancing: It is worth holding only if it is true. Similarly, although inerrancy does not guarantee orthodoxy, neither does, say, a high Christology: One might be heterodox in other areas, or doctrinally orthodox but utterly callous and loveless. But that is scarcely an argument against orthodox Christology or against orthodox views of Scripture.

What Marshall rightly says in this chapter, however—and it is important for his more conservative brothers to hear it—is that in practice his position is much closer to that of the inerrantist than it is to any other. This is a debate among brothers, among friends, among Christians, among those whose positions are close. I think Marshall's position is wrong, and I would go further and say that despite the immense good his books and learning have been to the Church I fear that on this issue he may do some damage. But we had better learn from one another, sharpening and correcting our own understanding of the Word of God, maintaining cool hands and warm hearts and avoiding hot heads and cold hearts.

The fourth chapter seeks to answer the question, "How are we to study the Bible?" Marshall begins by drawing sketches of the most antithetical positions: the mindless anti-intellectualism of one extreme and the ruthless anti-supernaturalism of the other. He then turns to the interpretation of 1 Cor 16:22 as a test case and thoughtfully reasons his way through the problems. On the one hand, critical work is necessary even to produce translations, lexica and dictionaries; on the other, the critical theories of Bousset about the genesis of "Lord" as applied to Jesus reflect poor historiography and unself-critical enslavement to

reductionistic presuppositions.

Marshall proceeds to set up three models of Biblical interpretation. The first he labels the "dogmatic approach." He criticizes it for thinking itself above historical, source-critical and other questions, and rightly shows that such a position is in fact impossible: Every interpretation involves some "critical" judgments. The second approach is the "historical-critical method," which he identifies with the radical philosophical materialism and frankly atheistic historiographical presuppositions of Ernst Troeltsch, and which he therefore rejects, primarily because of its working presuppositions. But although this method "has failed to give a satisfying explanation of the Bible" (p. 85)—at which point I asked myself "Satisfying to whom?" and wondered if satisfaction is a more important criterion than truth, and decided I was being too critical of what is doubtless a charitable scholarly euphemism—Marshall rightly points out that one "must not condemn all its works out of hand, since undoubtedly much valuable work has been done by proponents of it, and we would be the poorer without what has been done" (p. 85). True enough, and perhaps Marshall felt the need to say something like this because the chapter was "written with those readers especially in mind who are suspicious of biblical study because of the dangers which they see in it" (p. 93). I would have thought, however, that evenhandedness would have pointed out that although the Church would have been poorer without much of this study, it would also have been considerably richer without much of it.

The third model, the *via media* Marshall himself prefers, is the "grammatico-historical method," an expression that is simply meant "to indicate that biblical study involves both linguistic and historical study" (p. 36). Using these three models Marshall returns to 1 Cor 16:22 and suggests how each approach might tackle the text.

The last four pages of the chapter then seek to relate these questions (to do with how the Bible is to be studied) with the concerns of the previous chapter. To focus his remarks Marshall points out that John refers to passages from Isaiah 6 and 53 as both being spoken by Isaiah (John 12:38-41), even though most scholars contend our "Isaiah" is a composite. One group will say that if John says Isaiah said it, that settles it. A second group will argue that John believed Isaiah wrote it but was wrong. A third will support the view that John was writing *ad hominem* and not intending to make a statement about the authorship of Isaiah one way or the other. Marshall argues that "if the weight of the evidence favors multiple authorship" (p. 90) then we are confined to one of the last two options. His next remarks are crucial:

The point is that it is dangerous to adopt a view of the Bible which rules out the findings of honest, unbiased study. To tread the path between the Scylla of suspending judgment on critical issues and the Charybdis of qualifying one's doctrine of the entire trustworthiness of Scripture is not easy. There is no simple formula which will enable us to solve all our difficulties. Faith is never free from risk or from the duties of self-examination and self-correction. If, however, we are prepared to take this attitude, then we may with good conscience defend ourselves against the objection that methods of biblical criticism which I have discussed are cunningly contrived to avoid any possibility of our doctrine of Scripture being disrupted by contradictory or erroneous teaching. . . . Nothing I have discovered in close study of the New Testament over a quarter of a century has caused me to have any serious

doubts about its entire trustworthiness for the purposes for which God has given it; I cannot claim that I have studied the Old Testament so closely (p. 91).

Several observations may extend the discussion a little further. First, Marshall's three models of approaches to Biblical interpretation are painfully simplistic. Worse, they (doubtless unwittingly) manipulate the incautious reader into thinking there are dodos and twits on the right, apostates and rebels on the left, and reasonable people who agree with Marshall in the middle. I have no quarrel with Marshall's approach to 1 Cor 16:22, but surely there are many scholars who associate themselves with the historical-critical method while distancing themselves from Troeltsch's skepticism, and others who would align themselves with the grammatico-historical method while achieving conclusions considerably more radical, or more conservative, than Marshall's. The spectrum of approaches to Biblical interpretation cannot be labeled so neatly.

Second, "the findings of honest, unbiased study" is a pleasant-sounding phrase that masks the astonishing faddishness of a substantial amount of Biblical study. To take one example, most European university experts on John, writing before Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu*, ascribed to the fourth gospel a greater degree of historical reliability than they accorded the synoptics, largely on the grounds that (1) John reports no exorcisms and (2) his reported miracles are called "signs" and frequently point toward discourses (which were judged less offensive to the post-Enlightenment mind than were miracles). After Strauss the tide turned and John was given lower marks for historical reliability, largely on the grounds that his Christology was the highest and therefore the latest and least reliable. Several more shifts in the interpretation of the gospel of John have of course taken place since then. At which point, then, may we profitably speak of "the findings of honest, unbiased study" in this regard?

But lest I be misunderstood, I insist that I am not trying to depreciate scholarly study or force it to bend the knee to undefended dogmatic considerations. I am arguing that scholarly results (conceived as those that are well justified and enduring) and the current consensus of scholars are not necessarily the same thing. Scientists remind us how difficult it is for them to develop, justify and sustain a theory, even though they often have the great advantage of working in an experimental field that enables them to test their conclusions in ways unavailable to Biblical scholars. Worse, Biblical scholars (as Northrop Frye keeps pointing out) frequently resort to methods and judgments that are ruled inadmissible even in other literary fields. The entire area of Biblical studies is ripe for some far-reaching methodological analysis. Marshall does not discuss the nature of the argumentation that leads many scholars to adopt, say, a theory of multiple authorship of Isaiah. Of course in a book of this nature he could scarcely be expected to do so. But that means his appeal is to little more than current majority scholarly opinion, which would, in its "findings of honest, unbiased study," equally reject even Marshall's brand of bibliography, not to mention matters even more central to Christian life and thought. We obviously need a more profound analysis than we are here offered.

Third, although Marshall's approach may preserve him from the criticism that conservatives use the tools of Biblical criticism in a cunningly contrived way to avoid any possibility of disrupting their doctrine of Scripture, I am not sure he has considered the cost. Could it be that he has elevated literary tools that are

not as objective as they are purported to be above the Scriptures, which on so many grounds rightly lay claim to a far greater authority? Might we not with equal propriety argue that many scholars abuse the critical and literary tools at their disposal by using them in a cunningly contrived way to make it impossible for them to come to the conclusion that the Scriptures are indeed by the concursive action of the Spirit nothing less than the words of God? In short, perhaps conservatives have been on the defensive for too long.

Fourth, I wonder how Marshall would handle a really different case of ascription, like that in Matt 22:41-46 par. Here it is impossible to argue that the ascription of Psalm 110 to David is purely *ad hominem*, since the cogency of Jesus' argument depends on the correctness of that ascription. One wonders if this may have some bearing on how we judge other such remarks of Jesus as reported by the evangelists.

And fifth, if Marshall has discovered nothing to have caused him serious doubts about the NT's "entire trustworthiness for the purposes for which God has given it," probably most NT scholars could say the same thing, if they interpreted "for the purposes for which God has given it" in an appropriate fashion. The formula does not seem very discriminating. In any case, testimonies of this sort are useful encouragements to those who know and trust the speaker but are of strictly limited usefulness when placed in the context of broader debate. I could testify equally, though obviously from the vantage point of fewer years of experience and less skill than Marshall can command, that I have not found anything contrary to the doctrine of infallibility (classically conceived). Such testimony is scarcely determinative, for other scholars have reached quite different conclusions. And that raises some formidable questions in epistemology not broached by this book. But what scholar is likely to testify that he has found examples of texts that run absolutely counter to his conclusions?

In his fifth chapter Marshall asks, "How are we to interpret the Bible?" The title does not very clearly distinguish the contents of this chapter from those of the last, but Marshall's aim here is to consider issues of exposition and application rather than exegesis proper. He offers a potted history of medieval interpretation and praises the Reformers for their return to the principle "that the exposition of the Bible must be based on its exegesis" (p. 97).

Most of the principles Marshall enunciates or hints at are in themselves elementary and not particularly contentious. We must be aware of phenomenological language, learn to identify commandments we must obey by observing their links with central Biblical themes, and so forth. One or two of Marshall's examples, however, are problematic. For instance, he points out that Christians do not normally follow the OT food laws, regarding them as something belonging to a past time (p. 100), and on this basis he wonders if it might be reasonable to jettison belief in the existence of demons:

The New Testament certainly teaches that the demons may be conquered by the power of God, so that we do not need fear them, but the reality of demons is not denied. Is belief in the existence of demons and the like part of the package which we accept when we become Christian believers? Some Christians would want to insist that belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God does not necessarily involve belief in demons as well (p. 101).

Does not this line of reasoning confuse inner-canonical development with the

bias against the supernatural prevalent in the West? Believers would not be free from the OT's food laws if they did not hold that the coming and teaching of Jesus Messiah fulfilled certain OT patterns and introduced a later and fuller revelation of God's will, introducing a new covenant that in measure supersedes the old. What new revelation frees us from holding to the reality of demons?

Of course one might argue that language about demons is merely phenomenological and should therefore not be taken as any more normative or ontologically descriptive than something like "the sun rises." But in that case it is not parallel to the question of foods prohibited under the Mosaic code, for no one argues that those prohibitions were mere instances of phenomenological language. Marshall for his part argues that some of the debates about the relevance of any particular command can be resolved by determining how central and persistent a theme is in Biblical thought. For this reason he defends the truth and centrality to Christian thought of the notion of sacrifice and death as the foundation of forgiveness—e.g., in a passage like Heb 9:22 ("without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins"). But interestingly enough he never applies this criterion to demons and devils. He would have found a great deal of material to contend with: Genesis 3, Job, parts of Daniel, crucial passages such as Matt 12:28, much in Jesus' ministry, many texts in Paul, and more. But instead he makes appeal to the modern mind: "The important thing is that in the modern world many thinkers have expressed their belief in the existence of an evil power or influence in the universe which is greater than the individual evil wills of mankind: call it 'demonic' if you will" (p. 109). Marshall insists he is not denying "the *possibility* of such powers affecting individuals in the way described in the Gospels" (p. 110; italics mine), but this does not seem very reassuring. The rather personal demons of the Bible have become impersonal powers or influences, and statements of fact have become mere possibilities. In any case the gospels do not present all illness and madness as the work of demons any more than they present it all as the immediate result of specific sin. But they do present some such cases as the direct result of one or the other of these two potential causes. I know many African believers, lay people and scholars alike, who would take Marshall's conclusions to be an index of unwitting but hopeless enslavement to western culture, skepticism and the inroads of philosophical materialism. My own limited experience in the area is too grim and unpleasant for me to want to write about it. But however such private judgments be assessed, the identification of demons with modern speculation about the structures of evil or macro-evil or cosmic evil is exegetically tenuous at best.<sup>36</sup>

The most disappointing part of this chapter is Marshall's reflection on his own procedure, which he identifies with "seeking a canon within the canon" (p. 110):

For in practice all of us do work with a canon within the canon, drawing our main teaching from some books and passages and ignoring others. . . . It must, however, not be misused. It is one thing to use the principle to disqualify certain parts of the Bible as Scripture and effectively to reject them as Scripture; that way is not open to us. It is another thing to use the principle to identify the central message of the Bible and to assess the place of the various areas of the Bible in relation to it (p. 111).

<sup>36</sup>Cf. esp. P. T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context* (ed. D. A. Carson; Exeter: Paternoster, forthcoming).

But the "canon within the canon" rubric has normally been used to refer to those procedures that so elevate and interpret certain parts of the Bible that other parts of the Bible lose all their authority—i.e., they effectively become noncanonical. Marshall reminds us of Luther's views on James, but when Luther labelled James "a right strawy epistle" he was still uncertain about the canonical status of James. But the expression is not usefully applied to those who lay more stress on some parts of the Bible than others as they attempt to synthesize their theology, for as long as they stand under the authority of the entire canon there remains the possibility of self-correction, of correction by remonstrance, or of debate based on an appeal to a common canon. If, however, one defends the retreat to "a canon within the canon" in the ordinary sense of that expression, it is possible to make the Bible say almost anything one wants. And in that sense, not only do the omitted bits lose their canonical status but also the Bible as a whole can no longer meaningfully be thought of as a canon. The operative canon or rule or measure is the individual interpreter.

Marshall sees this danger, of course, and warns against it in the passage just cited. But because he extends the "canon within the canon" terminology to cover the procedures of those who are synthesizing their theology while unhesitatingly standing under the authority of the canon, he confuses quite different principles. What exactly does he mean by saying that we may identify the central message of the Bible and "assess the place of the various areas of the Bible in relation to it"? Does he mean that we may learn how to fit all the parts into the whole and make intelligent choices about which themes are more central—a procedure that still bows to the authority of the entire canon? Or does he mean that once we have identified the central themes, other parts may be written off without loss as errant or irrelevant to the modern setting—a procedure that is methodologically quite different from the other and in fact removes the locus of authority from Scripture as canon and transfers it to our more subjective choices about what is central in the Bible?

Marshall's discussion seems at this point to extend not only to the niceties of historical detail but to questions about the limits of Scripture's authority. This becomes explicit in the last chapter where, after a helpful review of his arguments up to that point, he asks one last question: "What are we to do with the Bible?"—a way of introducing his "examination of the theme of 'authority'" (p. 118).

Marshall begins by helpfully distinguishing between authority based on force and authority based on truth, classifying the Bible in the latter category. But the Bible's authority is a derived authority; God alone has supreme authority. The Bible's authority is limited, Marshall suggests, by two factors: (1) the range of its topics: It is authoritative in matters of Christian faith and practice, not on medieval European history or polymer chemistry; and (2) its truthfulness: "Its authority depends not only on the truth of its statements (where they can be tested) but also on the authority of its writers as men inspired by God" (p. 120). The first is in one sense clearly right: The Bible cannot conceivably be regarded as an authoritative text on polymer chemistry or quantum mechanics. But the wording is slippery: I would prefer to say that the Bible is authoritative in every area with which it deals—whether Christian gospel or history or anything else. This way of putting things still needs qualification, for by "an authoritative text on quantum

mechanics” we normally mean a work on quantum mechanics that is not only true but reasonably comprehensive, whereas an affirmation that the Bible is authoritative on all with which it deals says only that the Bible always speaks truth, not that it is broadly comprehensive on all it touches. For instance, the Bible deals with Pilate, and what it says about him (I would argue) is true, but the Bible does not give us a comprehensive treatment of Pilate. In that sense the Bible is not “an authoritative text” on Pilate.

We are thus driven to Marshall’s second factor: the Bible’s truthfulness. Here he returns to his earlier suggestion that the Bible may include historical mistakes. Since authority depends on truth, it follows that the Bible is not authoritative where it errs on such details. Marshall rhetorically asks, “May it not be the case that we are in danger of ascribing supreme authority to all that the Bible says instead of recognizing that it contains a mixture of material in different grades of authority?” (p. 122). His answer is “that we cannot suspend our mental and moral faculties” (p. 122). I agree with this bold statement, but wonder if Marshall really means not that we cannot suspend our mental and moral faculties but that we cannot submit our mental and moral faculties to the Bible’s truth claims. If so, the reason is presumably because he finds insuperable difficulties. In that case, however, the debate must return to the broader questions of evidence and argumentation with which this book does not deal. But as matters stand, despite Marshall’s laudable attempts to insist that the Bible is true and authoritative on the subject of Christian faith and practice, it is not entirely clear how he would respond to someone who holds that his or her “mental and moral faculties” require abandoning as nonessential or peripheral some element of Christian faith and practice that Marshall himself would defend. Despite a certain plausibility in Marshall’s argument, one comes away with the uneasy suspicion that the ultimate measure of Christian truth and life is not what God chooses to reveal but what man chooses to accept as true. That is not what Marshall is trying to say, of course, but I do not yet see how he can avoid this conclusion.

Marshall is always worth reading, and his tone is irenic throughout. There is very little trace of condescension toward those who are more conservative in their assessments than he—a common fault in this species of literature. But this is not Marshall’s best work. I came away from his book with increased confidence that the traditional doctrine of Scripture espoused by evangelicals has very strong credentials indeed—and I doubt if that was what Marshall intended to achieve.