

## **Biblical Inerrancy: A Fresh Look at the Evangelical Claims**

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The Bible has generated much dust and controversy right across the world over the centuries. Different schools of thought exist (and continue to be generated) in regard to the nature, comprehensiveness, perspicuity, authority and veracity of the Christian scripture. None has raised more dust than the latter component relating to the trust worthiness of scripture. Is the scripture entirely true? Can it be trusted as truly and verily the written inspired word of God? Is it as accurate as it claims? How can we verify and be sure that it is what it is claimed to be by its proponents/defenders as well as its self-claim to inspiration? This and many related issues are addressed in this paper, though from an aerial view touching on matters bordering on inspiration and therefore inerrancy.

### **Brief Synopsis of the Varying views on the Nature and Claims of the Bible**

In a post-modern context, varying views clamour for attention, visibility or a unique niche. Much relative contemporary and mutating thinking is the currency of the day. However, truth in its essential nature does not change (Young 1963; Geisler 2010; Downing 2020). What may vary is the interpretation of it, so some claim (Carson 2007); Klein et al, 2004). By that token, people hold differing views on the all-important subject of inerrancy and how to prove or disapprove it. Some hold that the Bible is to be assumed to be inerrant and thus not questioned (i.e. the Protestant, Presuppositional & Fideistic schools). Others hold that there is need to verify the facts independent of the Bible so that we arrive at truth. These are the rationalists. According to this school, evidence and facts affords harmonisation and incorporation of newer scientific discoveries or proposed theories. Another term for this school is the *evidential inductive school* championed by John Montgomery, Josh McDowell or Pinnock among others. Without even going outside the borders of evangelical scholarship, there is more than enough to discuss, enquire and debate in relation to inerrancy. It is high time the scriptures were re-evaluated to see what they exactly say in relation to what people have written about them. This is a reasonable test for the truthfulness of an assertion. In the final analysis, we conclude whether it is rational to hold inerrancy today. That said, the saint must be ready to encounter a wide range of views in regard to inerrancy, some plausible and others crazy or inconsistent with the Holy Writ.

### **What *inspiration* means**

Inspiration is the belief that God was in the writing of the scriptures using human instrumentality. These individuals wrote using their natural faculties with different styles but, in effect, were directed to write the word of God. This means God preserved them from writing erroneous, contradictory or inconsistent things (Young 1963). Further, it means that the Bible is trustworthy and reveals the mind and will of God. The Bible is thus inspired in the sense that God breathed the words and ideas as He led the writers to so pen down exactly what God wanted to be communicated to humans. Peter and Paul capture some of these sentiments very well in their writings.

### **What *inerrancy* means or Implies**

Inerrancy is the belief that what God has inspired is necessarily without fault, error or contradiction. The rationale is that if God has intended to communicate particular truth, and cannot lie, then that truth must be clear (perspicuous), succinct and free of any errors. This position is held by authentic conservative Evangelicals that claim that the Bible is true, reliable and perfect from first to last, although admittedly, some aspects of the sacred page are hard to explain or reconcile, given our finite minds (Young 1963).

### **What *errancy* view Stands For and Why Supported by Some Quarters**

*Errancy* is the belief that the Bible is not full proof but harbours some errors or inconsistencies which render it imperfect. Although it has these errors, correctable by advancements in discoveries, the Bible is none the less a good source of sound advice and ideas. Many People, even some so-called, Evangelicals support this view (e.g. the neo-orthodox school) because it is in sync with the post-modern mind set, frees them from difficult questions on apparent conflicts between Science and Religion, exonerates them from being Fideistic or some such perceived extremism. In short, this allows them to be “*open minded*” and thus freely to hold different views as they become publicly popular. A case in point is the 1967 Confession which in effect rejects the 1647 Westminster Confession (or even the BCF1689) of faith by claiming that the confessional view of inspiration and inerrancy was narrow and incorrect! We know better today, so they seem to claim. This school of thought claims that Evangelicals must be real and down to earth, coming to terms with the fact that the Bible indeed has “*holes*” in its structure and content. The earlier this is acknowledged, the better the way forward for religion to survive, be acceptable and perhaps respectable. They further claim that people holding on to this view

are damaging the Christian faith by their naïve, if not stubborn position. Nothing could be further from the truth!

### **Some Correct and Incorrect Proofs and Arguments for Inerrancy**

A correct view and understanding of proofs and arguments for inerrancy are key. This is for a good reason because some have used wrong premises to argue for proofs when in fact they were in actually expressing a subjective opinion or experience. Some of the perceived wrong premises, according to pundits, may include the following. 1. Internal witness of the Spirit 2. Personal Testimony to the truth 3. Some (not all) Confessional/credo claims. 4. The Bible's claims to inerrancy. The latter point may shock the reader most but the fact is that these are as result of what the Bible assumes and is given the abundant evidence that it produces by its essential nature or characteristics. Gerstner carefully but wisely propounds the thoughts we here advance and they make sense. Note carefully that while the above claims may give credence to the trustworthiness of the Bible, they are not the basis of establishing or knowing how we know that the Bible is entirely inspired and therefore inerrant. The Bible is the revealed word of God, not a means to or a mere guide but just that: the actual word of God (I Thessalonians 2:13). Although the scripture does not explicitly teach inerrancy, it bears scattered statements right across it's landscape, it none the less is true in all its assertions and statements.

### **Arguments Against Inerrancy**

There is an increasing colony, galaxy or may we say, school of people that rip the Bible apart, accusing inerrantists of suspending their mental, rational judgement. They (i.e. rationalists) claim that it is high time evangelicals owned up and came to their senses that the Bible is not flawless, especially that mere mortals were used to pen down the scriptures. These pundits further claim that the propositional nature of the scriptures warrants a justifiable belief that the Bible may have some inconsistencies which knock it out from being fully inspired; but only parts of it may be. Other opponents of inerrancy argue that because some apparent contradictions existing in the Bible cannot be resolved or reconciled with Scientific evidence, then there is a prima facie case to posit errancy, disregard or rubbish scripture. Some of the potent arguments include the following:

1. Some scriptures are inconsistent and contain some errors: An example is the acts 7:1-4 compared to what obtains in the detailed narrative of other scripture (e.g. Genesis). Although in the minority of cases, these point to some inconsistencies but do not negate the central truth or idea being communicated.

2. Some parts of scripture apparently contradict natural Science or physical evidence. An example, according to this school, to claim that the sun “*rises or sets*” is unscientific and yet this error is repeated all over the Bible! Could that explain why some people in these days prefer to phrase “earth rise” to “Sun rise”? We cannot tell for sure!
3. There is no way of knowing that what the Bible claims is true because no empirical evidence exists nor can they be tested. An example is the truthfulness of the miracles that the Bible claims happened. To the rational and empiricist mind, factual evidence, experimentation, sense experience and reason is what counts not claims of faith. The Fideist appears to detest and loathe such objective enquiry in the quest to arrive at truth. If anything cannot be proved, then it does not exist, as simple as that!

### **Implications of Holding Inerrancy**

Holding on to inerrancy in the fullest sense of the word has far reaching implications, just as the opposite view equally does. Some of these implications are briefly highlighted below:

- Inerrancy means the Bible must be believed without question.
- Reason alone cannot arrive at truth, it must be specially revealed by God through faith. Although reason and proofs may help to give a reasonable and rational argument for the truth, they of themselves are impotent to save or generate faith in an individual.
- Although on-going research and discovery is plausibly helpful for clearer understanding of things, they only act as complementary (to our present understanding of scripture or its world then) if not a commentary on what God has already declared in His word.
- The scripture is entirely inspired verbally and plenary from first to last word. E.J Young and Warfield expound this truth very well.
- Inspiration extends to the very words, ideas and thoughts expressed in the Bible. Although God used human instrumentality to have His word written, yet these men were so influenced to write the inerrant word of God using their natural faculties. They did not have their faculties suspended or fall into trance kind of scenarios but what they produced was, by that token, without error, flaw or inconsistency, as produced in the original autographs as enshrined in the original languages.
- This further means that Scripture cannot error, misrepresent truth or ever be self-contradictory. A right deeper understanding or best hermeneutic approach must be consistently applied to resolve apparent

inconsistencies. While we may not have ancestors today or immediately, diligent application, enquiry into the word should yield answers in time. Christians should never be afraid or intimidated if they do not have immediate answers. According to Obrien (1990), most of the difficult issues are resolved as more light becomes available.

- The Bible can be fully trusted as the word of God rather than as a mere guide to that end. The Apostle Paul gives hints towards that end.
- It may, in some instances, mean that people rejecting inerrancy may not be genuinely converted, although some declarations from some evangelical wings hold a contra view, allowing for one to hold errancy and yet be considered as regenerate like any other. In that case, they probably apply the Theological triage human construct. This good tool can be abused leading in different directions.

### **What Others have Said or Written About Inerrancy**

Norman Geisler in his monumental work *Christian apologetics*<sup>1</sup> does a great job in highlighting the different positions on offer in relation to truth. The first part of the book basically objectively expounds the many views, giving the positive and negative sides as well as limitations of each view. An example is the fideistic view, which Dr Geisler ably highlights, giving concrete examples for his case. Although we may not entirely believe or accept his positions, his book is a well worth profitable read. Another remarkable little volume is by Dr Robert Morey, *An introduction to defending the faith*. A small but loaded monograph, that introduces the Christian to different approaches to establishing and defending the truth. Both these writers (i.e. Morey and Geisler) hold inerrancy but have a special trait of being able to exploit and harmonise philosophy in their apologetics. Other worthies like Blanchard and Craig command our attention as they argue for inerrancy. Still others rip the Bible apart as a volume full of contradictions, inconsistencies and therefore errant. They claim that the Bible, like Science, is “*a work in progress*” which is subject to change and corrected as further light over issues comes to the fore. If this latter view holds, then the Bible ceases to be inspired or the word of God.

### **Lessons Gleaned from a Consideration of Inerrancy**

Reading through the five primary source articles as well as other authorities (consulted in the preparation of this paper), many thoughts inevitably cross cross the reader’s mind. We found the said sources heart-warming to read given the clear statements from the living and past saints relating to the doctrine of inerrancy with sound attempted accompanying proofs. It was however unsettling

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<sup>1</sup> Published by Baker Academics 2008

and alarming to observe some points advanced by Gerstner because some assertions initially knocked out some of our long held assumptions as to proof of inerrancy. This was unsettling because Gerstner appeared to torch, yea, attack some confessional points though as we read further, it became evident that what he was doing was to clarify ground for truth as it is in Jesus. Follow him patiently and I am not afraid of the result. Never suspend the use of your trained eye though! Below are some of the take home points and lessons we go away with in relation to this subject matter:

- Never assume that every evangelical holds inerrancy, let alone, the same definition and understanding of truth.
- The quest for truth is on-going and saints must never relent in their search, bearing in mind what scripture says.
- Even apparently sound Evangelicals can be mistaken on some theological points. An example is the venerable Karl Barth or others whose views border on error and heresy (i.e. neo-orthodoxy).
- Philosophical arguments and grasp is essential to the defence of truth. We should be thankful that during our ploughing a plethora of sources including our selected sources (like EJ Young or Warfield), we discovered just what a world of difference it makes having from the outset clearly defined some philosophical logical arguments in the introductory parts of this exploration. We have in mind the Principles of Hermeneutics or what the Bible claims about itself.
- The Bible is one, a unit, a canon which derives its authority and inspiration from God not men.
- It is important to be as objective in our search for truth (i.e. Inductive) and yet at the same time believe what the Bible says about itself (i.e. presuppositional, deductive).
- Minor inconsistencies here and there cannot and should not overthrow a hypothesis or law. What is needed is to discover and resolve/harmonise why these things are so. It may take time but by patient diligent self-application, we may come to some conclusions.
- What has been ingressed (i.e. internalised and deeply believed, in relation to one's noetic structure or web of beliefs [Moreland J.P.]) cannot easily be discarded even in the presence of new facts unless extremely compelling.
- The burden of proof of errancy lies with the accusers to demonstrate that inerrancy is irrational and unreasonable to hold. The Christian should never be under pressure or be intimidated at all by pundits holding a

contra view. It may be that they are forcing an inappropriate method to arrive at an answer. For instance, our method of concluding that someone has a psychological or spiritual problem may differ from determining the integrity of the world class Engineering feat such as a complex bridge.

- A person has a right to hold a position, even one contrary to common belief. This is their right.
- There is need to be careful and meticulous in our study and quest for truth. Know and establish on what premise your basis of conviction lies.

### **Benefits of this considerations and pointers into the future**

Good primary source documents adduced for this study were five of them beside others but together gave a rich campus of the broader spectrum for the subject of *Inerrancy* as it has been held historically and the current trends, conversations and thoughts. Inerrancy has been held from the beginning and rests on inspiration. The fact that God kept only what was correct and necessary in scripture, error in the original autographs does not arise. The different facets and approaches to the same subject are most helpful to any reader as they are simple and easy reads. They are never technical at all. Dr Greg Bahnsen, J.P. Moreland, Norman L Geisler, Gerstner and other authorities evidently have researched deeply into the subject matter and are authorities in their own right. BB Warfield was another monumental authority on the subject (though from a strongly inductive empirical perspective as opposed to Van Til's balanced presuppositionalism which examines premises from which methods arise [Greg Bahnsen]). As earlier pointed out, the materials as easily legible though demand much reflective thinking as long as buttressed by a clear Biblical thinking framework that can easily discern between error and truth. The contrasts in epistemic perspectives even within Evangelical circles are sometimes helpful to fine tune one's thinking. The exposure to differing views further helps the reader critique and reject error, with sound Biblical reasoning. This approach helps "build immunity" against the ever so common errors of our day, of course, having first inoculated ourselves with truth, in sync with what John Newton's view. The reader goes away enrich, equipped and able to defend truth from an informed perspective. Herein lies the benefit. As for the future, we foresee more trouble and higher doctrinal turbulence as they scriptures are set aside in preference for humanistic thinking. Many once worthy and valiant soldiers have already been felled at the high altar of fame, materialism, rationalism and success. Many more are yet to go that way. The Christian needs to remain eternally vigilant to the glory of God. In the short run, scripture may appear outrun, trashed and forgotten but not in the long run because inspiration and inerrancy remain inherently true. The finger of God is still at work today and ever!

### **Conclusion**

The writing is clear on the wall, there is on-going ferocious debate on the subject surrounding inerrancy even within evangelical circles. One truth however, is evident, no one is free from some form of presupposition (or assumption) from which they operate though the degree varies. Though strong evangelicals like Fuller and Pinnock strongly support inductionism, they too fail to hold on to the absolute tenets of what Inductionism entails. They hold on to some aspects, claiming to side with historical theological giants like Warfield or Hodge. These men none the less come to differing conclusions and convictions in relation to their epistemological views. Others like Cornelius Van Til have been classified as fideistic because of their apparent opposition to empirical or rational evidence as a basis of belief. Presuppositionalism contends that the beginning point of all argument and discussion in relation to truth is the word of God without external proofs per se, because the Bible is what it claims to be, inerrant from first to last. Though not rejecting genuine investigation, presuppositionalism asserts that the primary premise (i.e. the metanarrative) of all true investigation or Science is the Bible. To hold otherwise, according to this school, is to exhibit classic unbelief, because external proofs merely are an exposition (or servants) on what is already true even before a discovery is made. And so, the battle rages on! The Christian however, is duty bound to investigate (philosophically and otherwise) these truths, basis and reason for such convictions and competently pass on the body of truth in relation to inerrancy to the ensuing generations. May God raise many more-clear minded Biblical thinkers fired up with a presuppositionally grounded epistemic mind set all for His glory! He is able and he will. Plantinga, Van Til, Geisler among others have left a solid foundation upon which we must safely walk in His name. We have no excuse!

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