

Chapter 1

THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE: Free From Errors or Full of Errors?

The logical starting point of our biblical examination of some popular beliefs is the evaluation of the prevailing views about the nature of the Bible itself. This is necessary because our view of the Bible ultimately determines how we define and test our beliefs.

Two major views of the nature of the Bible are common. One view concerns the concept known as “biblical errancy,” that is, “the Bible is full of errors;” the other pertains to the concept of “biblical inerrancy” which maintains that “the Bible is free from errors.” Each of these two views is subject to a variety of interpretations. For the purpose of our study, we will limit our analysis to the main teachings of each view.

Biblical errancy is the view espoused by liberal critics who believe that the Bible is a strictly human, error-ridden book, devoid of supernatural revelations and miraculous manifestations. Consequently, the Old and New Testaments are strictly human literary productions that reflect the shortcomings of their human authors. By contrast, conservative evangelicals believe in the absolute inerrancy of the Bible. They affirm that the Bible is absolutely without error in its original manuscripts. For some, the inerrancy of the Bible extends to every reference to history, geography, chronology, cosmology, and science.

This chapter endeavors to show that both the errancy and inerrancy beliefs undermine the authority of the Bible by making it either too-human or too-divine. This reminds us that heresies come in different forms, sometimes openly rejecting biblical authority and teachings while at other times subtly distorting scriptural authority and teaching.

Objectives of the Chapter

This chapter examines the controversy over the errancy-inerrancy of the Bible. These opposing popular beliefs are championed by liberal critics on the one hand and by conservative evangelicals on the other. We will first trace briefly the historical origin of each movement and then evaluate their teachings from a biblical perspective.

To place the current controversy in a historical perspective, we will briefly explore how the circulation of the Bible has been opposed both outside and inside the church. This will help us to understand the relentless efforts of the Evil One to prevent the message of God's revelation from reaching sincere people.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first mentions some past attempts to prevent the circulation of the Bible by Roman Emperors, the Catholic Church, English Kings and church leaders, Protestant church leaders, Moslem countries, and communist governments.

The second part examines Biblical Criticism—commonly known as Higher Criticism. This movement has been largely responsible during the past three centuries for undermining biblical authority.

The third part looks at the popular belief in biblical inerrancy as taught by a large number of evangelicals who maintain that God guided the minds of the Bible writers in such a way that they were prevented from making any error. For many the Bible is supposed to be without error, not only with respect to religious teachings, but also in such areas as geography, astronomy, history, chronology, and the natural sciences. We will show that this teaching overlooks the human dimension of Scripture.

The last part sets forth the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. We shall see that Adventists hold to a balanced view of the inspiration of the Bible by acknowledging that its source is divine, the writers are human, and their writings contain divine thoughts in human language. Properly understood the humanity of the Bible enhances its divine origin and authority.

Part 1

HISTORICAL ATTACKS AGAINST THE BIBLE

Roman Emperors Attempted to Destroy the Bible

During the first three centuries certain Roman emperors sought to uproot Christianity by destroying the Bible. On February 23, 303 A. D. Emperor Diocletian decreed that every copy of the Bible was to be handed over to the Roman police to be burned. Thousands of valuable Biblical manuscripts were destroyed in public squares. Some Christians lost their lives for refusing to hand over their Bibles.

The imperial decree aimed to eliminate the presence of the Christian religion by suppressing its guiding light and normative authority. Leading philosophers and government officials claimed that Christianity was largely responsible for the socio-economic crises that were plaguing the empire at that time.

The Bible Outlawed in Moslem Countries

With the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Bible has been consistently outlawed in strict Moslem countries. To this very day distribution of Bibles is strictly forbidden in Moslem countries. Countless Christians have lost their lives for attempting to distribute the Bible and/or share its teachings to receptive Moslems.

The success of ruthless Moslem rulers in uprooting the Bible and Christianity is evident in the countries they conquered. For example, prior to the Moslem conquest in the seventh century of North Africa, the countries of Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria were flourishing Christian nations that produced such church leaders as Augustine and Tertullian. Today, Christians and Bibles are practically non-existent in these countries.

The circulation of the Bible has also suffered from within Christianity at the hands of the Catholic Church and of various English church leaders. More recently, communist regimes also have attempted to prevent the circulation of the Bible and to discredit its teachings. Each of the above powers in different ways has assailed the Bible by preventing its circulation among the laity.

Catholic Attempts to Prevent the Reading of the Bible

Historically the Catholic Church has opposed the translation of the Bible into the common languages of the people and its circulation among the laity. The right to read and teach the Bible was reserved for the clergy.

The Synod of Toulouse in 1229 A. D. presided over by a papal legate, celebrated the close of the Albigensian crusades by perfecting the code of the Inquisition and forbidding lay Christians to possess copies of the Bible. Canon 14 reads: "We prohibit that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testaments; unless anyone from motive of devotion should wish to have the Psalter [Psalms] or the Breviary for divine offices or the hours of the blessed Virgin; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books."¹

A similar decree was promulgated at the Council of Tarragona in A.D. 1234. The Second Canon rules that "No one may possess the books of the Old and New Testaments in the Romance language, and if anyone possesses them he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days after the promulgation of this decree, so that they may be burned..."²

In its fourth session, the Council of Trent (8 April 1546) reiterated the unmistakable Catholic opposition to the distribution of Scriptures by Bible

Societies because “It is manifest, from experience, that if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue [common language], be indiscriminately allowed to everyone, the temerity of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it”³

In his two encyclicals *Qui Pluribus* and *Nostis et Nobiscum*, promulgated respectively on November 9, 1846 and December 8, 1848, Pope Pius IX warned the Italian Archbishops and Bishops against the Bible Societies, saying: “Under the protection of the Bible Societies which have long since been condemned by this Holy See, they distribute to the faithful under the pretext of religion, the Holy Bible in vernacular translations. Since these infringe the Church’s rules, they are consequently subverted and most daringly twisted to yield a vile meaning. So you realize very well what vigilant and careful efforts you must make to inspire in your faithful people an utter horror of reading these *pestilential books*. Remind them explicitly with regard to divine scripture that no man, relying on his own wisdom, is able to claim the privilege of rashly twisting the scriptures to his own meaning in opposition to the meaning which holy mother Church holds and has held.”⁴

By calling the Bibles distributed by Bible Societies “*pestilential books*” to be treated by faithful Catholics with “utter horror,” Pious IX clearly expresses the historic Catholic condemnation of the reading of the Bible by lay people. The reason is that the reading of the Bible has led countless Catholics to discover that their fundamental beliefs are based on ecclesiastical traditions rather than biblical authority.

The Waldenses Persecuted for Distributing the Bible

For centuries the Waldenses faced physical, civil, and economic persecutions at the hand of the Catholic House of Savoy for translating and distributing portions of the Bible. The most cruel massacre of the innocent Waldenses took place in the Italian Piedmont valleys in 1655 by the army of Charles Emmanuel II, the Catholic Duke of Savoy. The whole Protestant world was shocked by this brutal massacre of thousands of Waldenses. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), Lord Protector of England, protested vigorously and John Milton, his foreign secretary and poet, dedicated this famous stanza of *Paradise Lost* to the thousands of slaughtered Waldenses:

“Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.”

The Bible in the Experience of our Family in Italy

Incidentally, it was a Waldensian fellow carpenter who loaned a Bible to my father while he was still a young devout Catholic. Reading that Bible proved to be not only a turning point in my father’s religious experience, but also a major influence on the future of our family. When father sought the help of a priest to clarify Bible texts which contradicted Catholic teachings, the priest abruptly snatched away the Bible from my father’s hands, saying: “This book will breed only confusion and unrest to your soul. Leave it with me.” My father lost his Bible and had great difficulty in buying another copy because the main supplier was the British and Foreign Bible Society which operated secretly out of a nameless apartment.

I experienced first hand the same Catholic opposition to the circulation of the Bible during the four summers I spent in Italy (1952-1956) selling Bibles supplied to me by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Each summer I earned a scholarship to attend the Seventh-day Adventist Academy in Florence by selling Bibles and other religious books. On numerous occasions devout Catholics frantically sought me out to take back the Bibles they bought, because their priest told them that they were Protestant Bibles that would contaminate their homes.

Only since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has the Catholic Church encouraged its members to read annotated Catholic Bibles. This recent decision has not significantly increased the reading of the Bible by Catholics because in Catholic countries the Bible is still perceived to be a book that only priests are authorized to read and interpret to the people. As a result, the vast majority of Catholics are still biblically illiterate. They rely solely on whatever Bible teaching their priest offers them.

English Churchmen Attempted to Prevent the Circulation of the Bible

Wycliffe’s Bible. Surprisingly, even English church leaders have attempted to prevent the translation and circulation of the Bible. The first hand-written English language Bible, known as the Wycliffe Bible, was

strongly opposed by English churchmen and the Pope himself. The translation was produced in the 1380's by John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor and theologian, with the help of his associates. Eventually the translation was revised by Wycliffe's younger contemporary John Purvey in 1388.

The translation was based on the Latin Vulgate since he and his colleagues did not know Hebrew or Greek. Since Wycliffe's Bible predated the printing press, the hand-copied Bibles circulated widely and were eagerly read. These manuscript Bibles brought Wycliffe into conflict with church officials at Oxford where he lived and taught during much of his life.

Wycliffe believed that the Bible ought to be the common possession of all Christians and ought to be made available for common use in the language of the people. He pursued his goal with vigor and determination against enormous opposition.

Several times Wycliffe was brought to trial in church courts, but his influential friends protected him. He died a natural death in 1384 at the age of 55 and was buried at his Lutterworth church where a memorial tablet on the wall says that his Bible "drew on him the bitter hatred of all who were making merchandise of the popular credulity and ignorance."

Twenty four years after Wycliffe's death, a church synod met at Oxford in 1408 to formally outlaw the reading of his Bible, especially in English translations. People were threatened with excommunication for reading the Bible. England had a Bible in its language before most other nations, but its reading was forbidden.

Despite severe penalties, many people continued reading Wycliffe's Bible in secret. The Pope was so infuriated by Wycliffe's opposition to the organized church and by his translation of the Bible into English that 44 years after his death, at the Council of Constance in 1415, he ordered Wycliffe's bones to be dug-up, burned, crushed and scattered in the river!

Tyndale's New Testament. Another noteworthy example of attempts by English church leaders to prevent the circulation of the Bible is Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament from Greek texts. He was a brilliant Bible scholar trained at Oxford and Cambridge. The ignorance of the clergy and of the laity about the Bible greatly distressed him. He was determined to educate the English people about the Word of God by translating it into their own language. But he faced enormous opposition from both secular and religious powers in England. Consequently, he was forced to go to Germany to continue his English translation of the New Testament.

In 1526 the first 3000 copies of the octavo edition of Tyndale's English New Testament were published in Worms, Germany. When copies reached England, Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London, ordered them to be collected and burned at St. Paul's Cross in London. Eventually, Tyndale's New Testament became the basis for the King James translation.

Tyndale was relentlessly attacked for daring to translate and publish the Bible into English not only by London Bishop Tunstall, but also by William Warham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and by Thomas Moore, the Chancellor of the English Parliament. These men sent secret agents to trap him as he moved around from his Antwerp base.

Tyndale was finally arrested and imprisoned in the Castle of Vilvorde, a few miles from Brussels. Early in October 1536 he was strangled in the courtyard of the castle. The effectiveness of the opposition to Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament was such that of the 18,000 copies smuggled to England, only two known copies remain.

Communist Attacks against the Bible

In the past 100 years Communist governments have attempted to discredit the Bible and to prevent its circulation in their countries. They have used both educational and legal measures. Educationally, people have been taught that the Bible is a superstitious fairy tale book to be rejected by enlightened communist minds. Legally, many people have been arrested and imprisoned for attempting to smuggle Bibles into communist countries.

Autocratic political and religious systems feel threatened by the Bible because its message summons people to give priority to God in their thinking and living. When people accept the God of biblical revelation, making Him first and supreme in their lives, they will not give in to the demands of autocratic political or religious rulers who demand absolute allegiance to their persons, teachings, or parties.

Conclusion. The past attempts to suppress the Bible by burning it or banning it have proven to be futile. Christians have been willing to suffer torture and death rather than deny its truths which made them free. The Bible remains unchallenged year after year as the world's best selling book. It is still the greatest force for the moral renewal of our human society.

Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, predicted that within 100 years Christianity would be extinct. Instead, the irony of history is that twenty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society used

his very house and printing presses to publish copies of the Bible! No other book in history has been so hated, burned, and banned. Yet it still survives today and reaches almost all the people of the world with its close to 2000 translations. Its principles still serve as the moral foundation of many societies.

Part 2 BIBLICAL ERRANCY

The failure of past attempts to prevent the circulation of the Bible has not weakened the Devil's determination to destroy its authority and influence. During the past three centuries he has adopted a new strategy which has almost destroyed the high view of the Bible previously held in the Christian world. The result has been a theological crisis of unprecedented proportion. This crisis has been precipitated by the introduction of a new method of investigating the Bible known as "Biblical Criticism," or "Higher Criticism."

Definition of Biblical Criticism

The term "Biblical Criticism" describes the application of the modern literary and historical-critical methods to the study of the Bible. In theory, the intent of Biblical Criticism is to enhance the appreciation of the Bible through a fuller understanding of its literary history and message. In practice, however, Biblical Criticism destroys any confidence in the divine origin of the message of the Bible because it presupposes its writings to be merely a human literary production, error-ridden, and entirely conditioned by the culture of the time.

Lower Criticism

It is important to note that another category of criticism known as "lower" criticism functions different from "higher" criticism. *Lower criticism* concerns itself with ascertaining as nearly as possible the text of the original manuscripts from the surviving copies. In view of its function, lower criticism is commonly called *textual criticism*. The latter is more objective than higher criticism because its scope is limited to an analysis of available textual manuscripts.

Higher Criticism

The case is different with *Higher Criticism*. Though higher criticism is interested in the accuracy of the text, its overriding concern is to study the writings purely as *human literature*, rejecting *a priori* any possible divine inspiration of the writers and divine intervention into human affairs. Higher criticism inquires into the date of the composition, the authorship, the possible use of sources, and the culture that influenced the text. It is therefore frequently distinguished in literary, historical, source, form, and redaction criticism, depending on the aspect of higher criticism being examined.

The fundamental problem with higher criticism is its reliance on the critic's subjective speculations rather than on verifiable scientific investigation. James Orr makes this point in his major article on "Biblical Criticism" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, of which he was editor-in-chief. He wrote: "While invaluable as an aid in the domain of Biblical introduction (date, authorship, genuineness, contents, destination, etc.), [Biblical Criticism] manifestly tends to widen out illimitably into regions where exact science cannot follow it, where, often, the critic's imagination is his only law."⁵

This method of linguistic and historical research is not unique to our times. Similar methods were used in the past by Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350-428) who used grammatical and historical indicators to exegete biblical texts. Even Luther used this method in his exegetical analyses of Bible texts. What is new is a radical approach of the study of the biblical texts which consists in rejecting *a priori* any supernatural or miraculous divine manifestation in human history, thus forcing all the evidence to comply with these assumptions.

The Negative Impact of Biblical Criticism

The negative impact of Biblical Criticism can be seen in the increasing number of Bible scholars, preachers, and lay-Christians who have lost their confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible. While the Bible has historically been regarded as God's revealed Word, today liberal critics refuse to identify God's Word with the message of the Bible.

An increasing number of Christian leaders are joining the chorus of unbelief in casting doubts upon the trustworthiness of the Bible. This defection from a high view of the Bible is having a far more devastating impact on the future of Christian churches than the past attempts to suppress the Bible.

The anti-supernatural presuppositions of Biblical Criticism influences the methods used in contemporary biblical studies and the preaching of many ministers. Speaking of his own Baptist Church, Clark H. Pinnock, a respected Evangelical scholar who has served as President of the Evangelical Theological Society, sadly notes that “a considerable number of important Baptist leaders and thinkers have publicly and unequivocally rejected and sometimes denounced belief in the complete trustworthiness of the Bible. . . . And we must say that this shift of opinion has caused an ongoing and serious split between a large majority of Baptist people who hold the traditional Baptist and Christian view of the Bible and the majority of seminary and college professors who frankly do not.”⁶

An Unprecedented Crisis

With almost prophetic foresight, renowned systematic theologian A. H. Strong warned in 1918 of the severe dangers posed by negative Biblical criticism. “What is the effect of this method upon our theological seminaries? It is to deprive the gospel message of all definiteness, and to make professors and students disseminators of doubt. . . . The unbelief in our seminary teaching is like a blinding mist slowly settling down upon our churches, and is gradually abolishing, not only all definite views of Christian doctrine, but also all conviction of duty to ‘contend earnestly for the faith of our fathers.’ . . . We are ceasing to be evangelistic as well as evangelical, and if this downward progress continues, we shall in due time cease to exist.”⁷

These dire warnings highlight the unprecedented crisis caused by Biblical Criticism. At stake are two versions of Christianity: one based on divine revelation and the other derived from human reason. Surprisingly, as the authority of the Bible *is going down* in the Protestant world, the authority of the Pope *is going up*. The reason is simple. People resent tyranny, but welcome the voice of authority. And the Pope speaks with authority to the millions of Protestants who no longer know what to believe. To them the Pontiff has become, as Church Historian Martin E. Marty puts it, “a walking fortress of faith” in the midst of a godless society (*TV Guide*, Sept 5, 1987, p. 34).

The Ideological Roots of Biblical Criticism

Biblical Criticism developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, partly as a reaction against the rigid Protestant teachings which were based on a verbal concept of inspiration. To counteract Catholic teachings during

the Post-reformation period, Protestant theologians exalted the authority of the Bible by teaching the radical concept of verbal inspiration. The Liberals reacted against this radical view by going to the other extreme in rejecting any form of divine revelation.

Two major philosophical ideologies influenced the development of Biblical Criticism, namely *rationalism* and *evolutionism*. Rationalism, an outgrowth on the Enlightenment Movement of the eighteenth century, attempted to reduce Christianity to a religion developed by human reasoning rather than by divine revelation.

Evolutionism applied to the biblical text Darwin's theory of the evolution of the species from simple to complex. The result was that the religion of the Bible was viewed as a product of a religious evolution. As Church Historian Earl Cairns explains, "critics emphasized the development of the idea of God from the primitive storm god of Mount Sinai to the ethical monotheistic god of the prophets"⁸

The end result was that within a relatively short period of time, the Bible came to be viewed as a distinctively human document, stripped of any transcendent authority. Hence, the Bible must be studied and interpreted in the same way as other literature, according to the methods of literary research. Unfortunately, this forcing of the Bible into the categories of secular literature distorts its message and weakens its capacity to transform human lives.

While the Reformation weakened *ecclesiastical authority*, Biblical Criticism has weakened *biblical authority*. The result is that for many seminary professors and preachers, the Bible is no longer the normative, authoritative Word of God that reveals His will and purpose for mankind, but a fallible book that contains gems of truth mixed with error.

Biblical Criticism of the Old Testament

The origin of Biblical Criticism is generally traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Men such as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Thomas Hobbes (1668-1712), and Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) analyzed the Bible as ordinary literature and began doubting the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, viewing it as the result of a long compilation of several editors.

Later scholars developed the "documentary theory" of the Old Testament. The culminating work was done by Julius Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena* (1878) where he presents the well-known Graf-Wellhausen four-stage (JEPD) documentary hypothesis. According to this hypothesis the Old Testament was produced by several writers or redactors between

the ninth and the fourth century B. C., each of whom reworked the material according to his own religious traditions.

The application of the principles of Biblical Criticism not only radically changed the dates and the authorship of the Old Testament books, but also introduced a completely secular and evolutionistic study of their sources.

Biblical Criticism of the New Testament

The application of the anti-supernaturalistic assumptions of Biblical Criticism were applied to the New Testament at about the same period. In 1778 Herman Samuel Reimarus published his *Fragments* where he denies the possibility of miracles, thus alleging that the New Testament writers were pious liars.

The liberal criticism of the New Testament culminated in the work of Rudolf Bultmann who was determined to strip away the mythology of the New Testament writers. He contends that all the references to heaven, hell, miracles, the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Atonement through Christ's death, the Ascension and Second Advent are myths and absurd superstitions, too incredible for modern people to believe.

For Bultmann, the New Testament is the outgrowth of an oral tradition in which the church creatively added supernatural elements to the life and teachings of Jesus. Consequently, the study of the Bible must be approached in existential terms. People must find authenticity, security, and meaning to their existential meaning beyond the words of Scripture. Bultmann has exercised an enormous influence on the thinking of New Testament scholars and church leaders of main line denominations

An Evaluation of Biblical Criticism

A fundamental problem of the critical movement is its failure to accept certain limitations in the investigation of the Bible. One such limitation is that dictated by the unique character of the Bible. No other religious book has produced a similar moral impact on people.

In the Biblical record, King Josiah was moved to repentance and reform by the reading of the law (2 Kings 22:10-13; 23:1-25). The translation and reading of portions of the Old Testament by Ezra brought about sweeping reforms in the lives of the people (Neh 8:1-6; 9:1-3). The translation and

circulation of the Bible in the 16th century inspired reformatory movements in various parts of Europe. No other book by Plato, Muhammad, or Buddha has influenced moral changes or given such a lofty concept of God as the Bible.

This means that any critical investigation of the Bible must take into account that the Bible is not merely one of the many surviving religious documents of antiquity, but a unique book whose dynamic differs from any other book. Only with an attitude of reverence can a genuine investigation of the Bible be conducted.

Critics should also accept the limitation of the evidences available to test the accuracy of the Bible. To conclude that some statements of the Bible are inaccurate because they do not agree with the information available means to ignore that sometimes the Bible is the sole witness of the events reported. During this past century new discoveries have often corroborated the trustworthiness of the biblical record.

An evaluation of the critical movement would not be complete without mentioning the spirit that animates their critical investigation of the Bible. Are the critics motivated by their presuppositions or by their religious faith? What is supreme in their thinking, their theories or their faith? The fundamentals of a biblical faith are divine creation, revelation, incarnation, resurrection, Second Advent, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

By contrast, liberal critics have no place for these beliefs. Ultimately, the question is this: By which authority shall we investigate the Bible? Will our thinking be guided by critical presuppositions or by the internal witness of the Scripture? If we make the critics' assumptions supreme, then we are obligated to reject anything in the Bible that does not fit them. Sadly, this is what has happened. Liberal critics have chosen to investigate the Bible on the basis of their humanistic and evolutionary assumptions, and consequently have been compelled to reject the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

When people make their personal philosophy their ultimate authority, it is not a long step before their reason becomes their own god. This is indeed the step that some liberal critics have taken. By accepting the evolutionary assumption that all things exist in a state of change and becoming, they assume that God is changing, the Bible will be outgrown, and Christianity will soon become a religion of the past. This leaves us without absolute truths, no moral standards, no meaning for this present life, and no hope for our future destiny.

Conclusion

The major characteristics of Biblical Criticism can be summed up in two words: *humanistic* and *naturalistic*. It is *humanistic* because it assumes that the Bible is man's word about God, rather than God's Word to mankind.

It is *naturalistic* because it assumes that the Bible is the result of an evolutionary process. It is the outgrowth of people's apprehension of God, edited and amended over centuries. This evolutionary view ultimately robs God of His creative and redemptive power. It also deprives human life of meaning and hope for a glorious future.

The end result of Biblical Criticism is that the Bible loses its distinctive authority, becoming merely a piece of religious literature, important for the themes presented, but without any normative authority for defining beliefs and practices. If the Reformation weakened *ecclesiastical authority* by exalting *Sola Scriptura*, Biblical Criticism has weakened *Biblical authority* by exalting *human reasoning*.

The negative impact of liberal criticism calls for a responsible reexamination of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. In the next section we shall see how conservative Christians have responded to the attacks of liberal critics by developing the "Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy."

PART 3 BIBLICAL INERRANCY

The question of the inspiration and authority of the Bible rarely troubled Christians until a century ago. They looked upon the Bible as the *source* of their belief. They accepted the authority of the Bible without defining it in terms of being free from error. None of the major Catholic or Protestant creeds discuss the notion of possible errors in the Bible. Only since the beginning of the nineteenth century has this question dominated the religious scene.

A major contributory factor has been the negative impact of liberal criticism which, as noted above, reduced the Bible to a collection of religious documents filled with textual difficulties and errors. This critical movement has led many Christians to abandon their commitment to the infallibility of the Bible. In order to defend the traditional Christian view of the inspiration and authority of the Bible against the attacks of liberal critics, conservative Christians developed what has become known as the "Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy."

Defining the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is not easy because it comes in a variety of forms. David Dockery, a Southern Baptist conservative scholar, has identified nine different types ranging from mechanical dictation to functional inerrancy.⁹ For the purpose of our study we will limit our comments to the two most common views of inerrancy known as “absolute” and “limited” inerrancy.

Absolute Inerrancy

Dockery provides a fine definition of “absolute inerrancy” from the perspective of an advocate: “The Bible in its original autographs, properly interpreted, will be found to be truthful and faithful in all that it affirms concerning all areas of life, faith, and practice.”¹⁰

A similar definition was formulated by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy which was formed to defend the inerrancy of the Bible from the negative attacks of liberal critics. In 1978 approximately 300 evangelical scholars and church leaders came together in Chicago to attend a conference sponsored by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. After three days of deliberations, they issued what is known as *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.

The statement is designed to defend the position of Biblical inerrancy against the liberal conceptions of biblical criticism. The undersigners came from a variety of evangelical denominations and included well-known scholars such as James Montgomery Boice, Carl F. H. Henry, Roger Nicole, J. I. Packer, Francis Schaeffer, and R. C. Sproul. The statement elaborates on various details in Articles formed as couplets of “We affirm ... and We deny ...”. For the purpose of this study we quote only a few significant statements.

“We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. . . . Being wholly and *verbally God-given*, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives. . . We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the *very words* that He chose, overrode their personalities. . . .

“We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy.”¹¹

This definition sounds like the dictation theory which is negated by the unique literary style of each writer and by the existence of discrepancies in the Bible texts. Yet, the acceptance of this position is seen by many evangelicals as a watershed of orthodoxy. They equate the authority of the Bible with its inerrancy because they assume that unless the Bible can be shown to be without error in non-religious matters, then it cannot be trusted in the more important religious areas. They go as far as claiming that Christians cannot legitimately be considered evangelical unless they believe in the absolute inerrancy of the Bible. The denial of such a belief is supposed to lead to the rejection of other evangelical doctrines and to the doom of any denomination or Christian organization. Shortly we shall show that these claims lack both biblical and historical support.

Limited Errancy

Advocates of limited inerrancy object to conditioning the authority of the Bible to its being free from error. They restrict the accuracy of the Bible only to matters of salvation and ethics. They believe that divine inspiration did not prevent Bible writers from making “errors” of historical or scientific nature since these do not affect our salvation. For them the Bible is not free from errors in all that it says, but it is infallible in all that it teaches regarding faith and practice.

A good example of this position is the work of Stephen T. Davis. In his influential book *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility*, Davis writes: “The Bible is *inerrant* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any topic whatsoever. The Bible is *infallible* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice. In these senses, I personally hold that the Bible is infallible but not inerrant.”¹²

The many limitations placed on inerrancy to salvage the credibility of the theory make as much sense to the average lay person as terms like “square circle.” Ultimately the question is not whether the Bible is without errors, but whether it is trustworthy for our salvation. To argue that divine inspiration prevented Bible writers from making errors on matters of faith and practice, but allowed them to make mistakes when dealing with historical or scientific matters means to create an unreasonable dichotomy.

It would mean that the supervision of the Holy Spirit (inspiration) was partial and intermittent, depending on the subject being recorded. Such a view is negated by the clear statement “*All* Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16; Emphasis supplied). The question is not: Is the

Bible fully or partially inspired, but, in what sense did the Holy Spirit influence Bible writers to ensure the trustworthiness of their messages? This question will be addressed in the last part of this chapter.

A Brief History of the Inerrancy Debate

Before examining some of the problems of the absolute inerrancy position, it is helpful to mention briefly its history. In his article on “Biblical Inerrancy,” Stephen L. Andrews offers a concise survey of the inerrancy debate.¹³ He notes that most historians trace the origin of the inerrancy debate among evangelical to the late nineteenth century when battles took place between liberal critics and fundamentalists. The so-called Princeton divines, A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield were most influential in championing the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.¹⁴

The inerrancy position developed by the Princeton divines assumes that the Bible must be inerrant if it is in a real sense the “Word of God.” Simply stated, their reasoning is that if God is perfect, the Bible must be perfect (inerrant) because it is the Word of God. This absolute view of inspiration, despite protests to the contrary, results in a “dictation” view of inspiration which minimizes the human factor. This view was opposed by James Orr and G. C. Berkouwer, both of whom defended the limited inerrancy view.

Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible*

The debate began to heat up again in the 1960s and reached a boiling point with the publication of Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* in 1976. In his book, Lindsell goes to great length to show the alleged negative impact of the limited inerrancy view in evangelical churches and seminaries. He even went as far as naming the leading evangelical scholars who departed from the cardinal evangelical doctrine of absolute inerrancy, teaching instead limited inerrancy.

The reactions from both sides were intense. Fuller Theological Seminary defended its limited inerrancy position by publishing a symposium of essays edited by Jack Roger, a Fuller professor.¹⁵ At the same time the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was formed to defend the absolute inerrancy position as expressed in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy cited earlier.

The following year Lindsell wrote his sequel, *The Bible in the Balance*, in which he responds to the criticism generated by his previous

book. Since 1980 a host of eminent evangelicals have joined the inerrancy debate. The debate has somewhat subsided, but evangelicals remain deeply divided: absolute inerrantists versus limited errantists. It appears that what is fueling the inerrancy debate and causing Christian people to fight one another over this question is a vested interest in defending denominational interpretations of key doctrines. The ultimate concern appears to be the interpretation of Scripture, rather than its inerrancy.

Evaluation of Absolute Inerrancy

The theory of absolute Biblical Inerrancy is largely based on deductive reasoning rather than an inductive analysis of the biblical texts. The basic argument can be summarized in three statements: (1) The Bible is the Word of God, (2) God is never the author of errors, (3) therefore the Bible is free from error.

Lindsell expresses this view clearly saying: “Once it has been established that the Scriptures are ‘breathed out by God,’ it follows axiomatically that the books of the Bible are free from error and trustworthy in every regard.”¹⁶ In other words, for inerrantists, as Everett Harrison puts it, “inerrancy is a natural corollary of full inspiration.”¹⁷

Is this a sound reasoning? Does inspiration presuppose absolute inerrancy, that is, a text free from inaccuracies or errors of *any* kind? The Bible testifies to its own inspiration, but not to the inerrancy of all the information it provides. Inspiration is never defined in the Bible in terms of being free from errors. One will search in vain for a biblical passage that teaches that there are no inaccurate or misleading statements in the Bible. The reason is that its writers were not apologists or systematic theologians who had to deal with the modern critical views of the Bible.

The two classic statements on inspiration tell us that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16), and “no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21). The question is: In what sense is the Bible “inspired—God-breathed” and written at the “moving” of the Holy Spirit?

Was the Bible “wholly and *verbally God-given*,” as stated in *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*? Did God cause Bible writers “to use the *very words* that He chose”? This hardly seems to be the case. We know that Bible writers did not passively write down what God whispered in their ears because each of them used his own language style and sources available. It is a known fact that several of the books of the Bible were compiled from older documents such as histories of kings,

genealogies, and oral traditions. The fallibility of these sources is clearly reflected in the discrepancies we find in the Bible. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

Examples of Discrepancies in the Bible

In an article entitled “The Question of Inerrancy in Inspired Writings,” Robert Olson, Ph. D., former Director of the Ellen White Estate, and my former Bible teacher, offers an impressive catalogue of Biblical inaccuracies confronting scholars. For the sake of brevity, we cite only the first two listings of the catalogue:

“1. **Historical Uncertainties**—Did David kill 40,000 horsemen (2 Sam. 10:18) or 40,000 footmen (1 Chron. 19:18)? Did Jesus heal blind Bartimaeus as He approached the city of Jericho (Luke 18:35) or as He left it (Mark 10:46)? Was Hobab Moses’ brother-in-law (Num. 10:29) or father-in-law (Judges 4:11)? Did the cock crow once when Peter denied the Lord (Matt. 26:34, 69-75) or twice (Mark 14:66-72)? Does Cainan (Luke 3:36) belong between Salah and Arphaxad or not (Gen. 11:12)?

“2. **Numerical and Chronological Problems**—Did 24,000 die in the plague as in Numbers 25:9, or was it 23,000 as in 1 Cor. 10:8? Did Solomon have 40,000 stalls for his horses (1 Kings 4:25) or was it 4,000 (2 Chron. 9:25)? Was Jehoachin eighteen (2 Kings 24:8) or eight (2 Chron. 36:9) when he began to reign? Did Ahaziah come to the throne at the age of 22 (2 Kings 8:26) or 42 (2 Chron. 22:2)? Was David the eighth son of Jesse (1 Sam. 16:10,11) or the seventh son (1 Chron. 2:15)? Was the period of the judges 450 years in length (Acts 13:20) or about 350 years, as would be necessary if 1 Kings 6:1 is correct”¹⁸

The results of the census ordered by David and carried out by Joab, the head of his army, yields similar discrepancies. According to 2 Samuel 24:9, Joab reported to David that “there were in Israel eight hundred thousand strong men, capable of bearing arms; and in Judah five hundred thousand.” But in 1 Chronicles 21:5, Joab informs David that “there were in the whole of Israel one million and one hundred thousand men capable of bearing arms; and in Judah four hundred seventy thousand men capable of bearing arms.” Obviously, the two sets of figures differ significantly. One of them is inaccurate.

Another example is the price David paid to Arauna, the Jebusite, for the property where he built an altar and offered sacrifices to stay the

plague that was decimating the people. According to 2 Samuel 24:25, David paid fifty shekels of silver for the property, but according to 1 Chronicles 21:25, David paid six hundred shekels of gold for the same property. The difference between 50 shekels of silver and 600 shekels of gold is enormous and can hardly be explained as a scribal error.

The Holy Spirit Allowed for Discrepancies

It appears that two writers used two different sources. The Holy Spirit could have overcome the problem of the conflicting sources by whispering the correct figure in the ears of the two writers. Such a method would have eliminated the presence of discrepancies and the need for scholarly debates. But the fact is that the Holy Spirit did not choose to suspend or suppress the human faculties of the writers to ensure absolute accuracy. Instead, He chose to allow for errors that do not affect our faith and practice. It is unwise for anyone to tell God what kind of Bible He should have produced in order for its books to be inspired and inerrant.¹⁹

We have no right to define “inspiration” according to our subjective criteria of inerrancy in order to meet the challenge of biblical criticism. Instead, we simply need to look and see what sort of Bible has been produced under the supervision (inspiration) of the Holy Spirit. An open-minded look at the Bible *does* support the claim that it is inspired and authoritative for determining our beliefs and practices, but it *does not* validate the claim that it is free from any errors.²⁰

Were the Original Autographs Free from Error?

Defenders of absolute inerrancy claim that only the original autographs were inerrant, not the existing Bible. This means that existing discrepancies and errors are supposed to be the result of transmissional errors. The original copies of the various books of the Bible were without error because God inspired the Bible writers to write accurately.

The appeal to the original manuscripts to explain away existing errors leaves a permanently open door of escape for inerrantists. No matter how evident an error is, they can always evade the question by arguing that it is an error of transmission which was not present in the original manuscript. This argument, as Stephen Davis points out, “does seem intellectually dishonest, especially if there is no textual evidence that the alleged error is indeed due to a transmission problem.”²¹

The scientific study of the variant readings of Bible manuscripts has advanced to the point where scholars today can establish with amazing accuracy the reading of the original manuscripts. Moreover, these problems are few in comparison with the whole Bible and do not affect its teachings.

Does One Error Make the Whole Bible Suspect?

Some inerrantists argue that unless the Bible is without errors in every single statement it makes, then the trustworthiness of all its teachings becomes suspect. As Dan Fuller puts it, “If even one of its [Bible’s] statements could be in error, the truth of any of its statements becomes questionable.”²²

The problem with this argument is that it conditions the trustworthiness of the Bible’s teachings to the absolute accuracy of its historical, geographical, or scientific details. But nowhere do Bible writers claim that all their statements are without errors. The reason is that, for them, the major events or messages were more important than its circumstantial details.

One example will suffice to illustrate this point. Mark tells us that in sending out His disciples on a preaching mission, Jesus allowed them to take a staff: “He charged them to take nothing for their journey *except a staff*; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts” (Mark 6:8).

Matthew and Luke, however, have Jesus *specifically prohibiting* the taking of a staff: “Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, *nor a staff*” (Matt 10:9-10; Emphasis supplied). “Take nothing for your journey, *no staff*, nor bag, nor bread, nor money” (Luke 9:3; Emphasis supplied).

It is evident that the two accounts are inconsistent and at least one of the Gospels is in error. But this inconsistency does not destroy confidence in the event reported, namely, Christ commissioning His disciples. Apparently, for the Gospel writers the event was more important than its details.

The credibility of the great doctrines of the Bible does not hinge upon the precision of circumstantial details. The fear that if inerrancy collapses, then the great doctrines of the Bible collapse also, is groundless. The fact is that such doctrines are believed by many Christians who do not subscribe to the theory of absolute inerrancy.

The Catholic Understanding of the Nature of the Bible

The question of the accuracy of the Bible text is not discussed in official Catholic documents. For the Catholic Church the accuracy of the Bible is an unquestionable fact based on her belief, clearly stated in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that the “*Sacred Scripture* is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.”²³

This sounds like a “Dictation Theory” since it defines the Bible as the speech of God recorded “under the breath of the Holy Spirit.” The problem with the Catholic teaching is twofold. On the one hand it attempts to make the Bible a strictly divine book to be revered like the body of Christ. On the other hand it elevates *Tradition*, that is, the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church, to the same divine nature of the Bible.

The *Catechism* explains that the *Sacred Scripture* is the *written Word of God*, while *Tradition* is *living transmission of the Word of God* entrusted to the church. In other words, God reveals Himself through both the Bible and the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church.

Quoting from the document *Dei Verbum* (“Word of God”) of Vatican II, the *Catechism* says: “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are bound closely together and communicate one with the other.”²⁴ Moreover, “*Tradition* transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ. . . . As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scripture alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.’”²⁵

This official statement expresses with amazing clarity the Catholic teaching that *Scriptura et Tradition*, that is, Scripture and Tradition, are the two channels of divine revelation and constitute the normative authority for defining Catholic beliefs and practices.

Evaluation of the Catholic View

By making her traditional teachings the “living transmission” of the Word of God, “accomplished by the Holy Spirit,”²⁶ the Catholic Church has substantially reduced and ultimately superseded the authority of the Bible. Cardinal James Gibbons acknowledges this fact saying: “The scriptures alone do not contain all the truths which a Christian is bound to believe, nor do they explicitly enjoin all the duties which he is obliged to practice.”²⁷

On a similar vein Catholic Prof. John L. McKenzie from Notre Dame University states: “The Bible is the Word of God, but it was the church which uttered the word. It is the church which gives the believer the Bible. . . .”²⁸ By elevating her teaching authority, known as *Magisterium*, above the authority of the Bible, the Catholic Church has succeeded over the centuries in promulgating a host of dogmas that blatantly violate clear biblical teachings. The following popular but unbiblical Catholic teachings are examined in subsequent chapters: immortality of the soul, Sunday sacredness, papal primacy, infant baptism, veneration and intercession of Mary and the Saints, penance, indulgences, purgatory, and eternal torment in hell.

Does Scripture Need to Be Supplemented by Tradition?

It is pure arrogance for any church to claim that her teachings are the “living transmission” of the Word of God that leads believers to the “full truth” contained only partially in Scripture. But this is what the Catholic Church claims: “The Father’s self-communication made through his Word in the Holy Spirit, remains present and active in the Church . . .”²⁹ Through the Holy Spirit “the living voice of the Gospels rings out in the church—through her in the world—leading believers to *the full truth*”³⁰ (Emphasis supplied).

The notion that the Bible contains only partially revealed truths to be supplemented by the teaching of the Catholic Church negates the all-sufficiency of Scripture. Paul declares that “All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Note that Scripture contains all the teachings needed for a believer to “be complete, equipped for every good work.” There is no need of *Tradition* to supplement Scripture.

Jesus spoke clearly against the deceptive way tradition can undermine the authority of Scripture. “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! . . .making void the word of God through your tradition” (Mark 7:9, 13).

The New Testament writers constantly appealed to the Scriptures, not Tradition, to defend the validity of their teaching (Matt 21:42; John 2:22; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Pet 1:10-12; 2:2; 2 Pet 1:17-19). Paul commended the Bereans for examining his teachings on the basis of Scripture, not tradition. “They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scripture daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Clearly, God's revelation contained in the Scriptures has been and still remains the final authority to define Christian beliefs and practices. Any attempt to supersede the authority of the Bible by the teaching authority of any Church represents, as Jesus said, "a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! . . . making void the word of God through your tradition" (Mark 7:9, 13).

Part 4
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE

Seventh-day Adventists hold the Bible as a unique revelation of God's will and plan for humanity. They accept it as the infallible and normative authority for defining beliefs and practices. They believe that in this Book God provides humanity with the knowledge necessary for salvation.

The first Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church offers a concise statement of the church belief about the Bible: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In His Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history."

This Fundamental Belief shows that Adventists agree with other conservative Christians that the Bible is divinely inspired and contains the infallible revelation of God's will for our lives. They fully accept the divine authority and complete reliability of the Scriptures, but they have never advocated the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

Adventist Objections to Absolute Inerrancy

Adventists do not subscribe to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy for five significant reasons. First, Adventists believe that Bible writers were God's penmen and not the pen of the Holy Spirit. They were fully involved in the production of their writings. Some of them, like Luke, gathered the information by interviewing eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry (Luke 1:1-3). Others, like the authors of Kings and Chronicles, made use of historical records available to them. The fact that both the writers and their sources were human, makes it unrealistic to insist that there are no inaccurate statements in the Bible.

Second, the attempts of inerrantists to reconcile the differences between the biblical descriptions of the same event often result in distorted and far-fetched interpretations of the Bible. For example, Harold Lindsell tries to reconcile the divergent accounts of Peter's denial of Jesus at the crowing of the cock by proposing that Peter denied Jesus a total of six times!³¹ Such gratuitous speculations can be avoided by simply accepting the existence of minor discrepancies in the Gospels' account of Peter's denial.

Third, by basing the trustworthiness and infallibility of the Bible on the accuracy of its details, the doctrine of inerrancy ignores that the main function of Scripture is to reveal God's plan for our salvation. The Bible is not intended to supply us with accurate geographical, historical, or cultural information, but simply to reveal to us how God created us perfectly, redeemed us completely, and will restore us ultimately.

Fourth, Adventists find the doctrine of biblical inerrancy to be devoid of biblical support. Nowhere do the Bible writers claim their statements to be inerrant. Such a concept has been deduced from the idea of divine inspiration. It is assumed that since the Bible is divinely *inspired*, it must be *inerrant* also. But the Bible never equates inspiration with inerrancy. The nature of the Bible must be defined deductively, that is, by considering all the data provided by the Bible itself, rather than inductively, that is, by drawing conclusions from subjective premises. A deductive analysis of the existing discrepancies in the Bible does not support the absolute inerrancy view.

Human Role in the Production of the Bible

A final reason why Adventists reject the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy is the recognition of the human role in the production of the Bible. "The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several authors. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Tim 3:16); yet they are all expressed in the words of men. The infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants."³²

Contrary to *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* that claims that the Bible was "*verbally God-given*," Adventists believe that the Holy Spirit impressed Bible writers *with thoughts, not with words*. "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts."³³

God inspired men, not their words. This means that the Bible “is not God’s mode of thought and expression. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”³⁴

Seventh-day Adventists recognize the presence of discrepancies or inaccuracies in the production of the Bible and in the transmission of its text. “Some look to us gravely and say, ‘Don’t you think there might have been some mistakes in the copyists or in the translators?’ This is all probable . . . [but] all the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.”³⁵

The presence of inaccuracies in the production or transmission of the Bible text is only a problem for those who wish to “manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.” The reason is that the presence of inaccurate details does not weaken the validity of the fundamental truths revealed in the Scripture.

The Divine and Human Character of the Bible

Adventists base their view of the nature of the Bible on two important verses: “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16) and “No prophecy came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21). These verses emphasize the divine-human character of the Bible. The messages of Bible writers originated from God, but were expressed in human language, reflecting the cultural and educational background of the writers.

The recognition of the divine-human nature of the Bible rules out the two mistaken views of the Bible we have discussed in this chapter. The first is the inerrantists’ view that exalts the divine aspect of Scripture, minimizing human participation in order to ensure that the text is completely free of all errors.

The second is the liberal view of critics who maintain that biblical writings simply reflect human ideas and aspirations. They believe they are the product of religious geniuses who were influenced—not by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—but by the culture of their time.

Adventists reject the mistaken views of the Bible held by inerrantists on the one hand and by liberal critics on the other. Instead, they hold to a balanced view of the Bible based on its testimony (2 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet

1:21) about its divine-human character. The divine-human aspects of the Bible are mysteriously blended together, somewhat similar to the union of the divine and human nature of Christ.

The book *Seventh-day Adventist Believe . . .* states: “A parallel exists between the incarnate Jesus and the Bible: Jesus was God and man combined, the divine and human in one. So the Bible is the divine and human combined. As it was said of Christ, so it can be affirmed of the Bible, that ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14). The divine-human combination makes the Bible unique among literature.”³⁶

The Humanity of the Bible

The humanity of the Bible can be seen, for example, in the use of the *koine* Greek, which was the language of the market place, rather than that of classical literature. It is evident also in the poor literary style of such books as Revelation which has a limited vocabulary and some grammatical errors. It appears in the use of oral traditions by men like Luke, or of written records by the authors of Kings and Chronicles. It is reflected in the expression of human emotions in places like Psalm 137 which describes the feeling of the Hebrew captives in Babylon, saying: “O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall be he who requites you with what you have done to us! Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” (Ps 137:8-9).

Such violent language expresses the hurt of human emotions, but not the mode of God’s speaking. The God of biblical revelation does not delight in smashing babies against the rocks. It is important to remember that “God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible.”³⁷

The Divinity of the Bible

The underlying unity of the teachings of the Bible suggests its divinity. About 40 authors wrote 66 books over a period of 1600 years, yet they all share the same view of creation, redemption and final restoration. Only divine inspiration could ensure the underlying thematic unity of the Bible over the centuries of its composition.

Another indication of the divine character of the Bible is its impact upon human lives and societies. The Bible conquered the skepticism, prejudism, and persecution of the Roman world. It has transformed the

social values and practices of societies that have embraced its teachings; it has given new value to life, a sense of worth to the individual, a new status to women and slaves; it has broken down social and racial discrimination; it has given a reason for living, loving, and serving to countless millions of people.

The divine character of the Bible is also indicated by its marvelous conception of God, creation, redemption, human nature and destiny. Such lofty conceptions are foreign to the sacred books of pagan religions. For example, in the Near Eastern creation myths, the rest of the gods is generally achieved either by eliminating disturbing gods or by creating human beings for them to work in order for the gods to rest.³⁸

In the creation Sabbath, however, the divine rest is secured not by subordinating or destroying competitors, nor by exploiting the labor of human beings but rather by the *completion of a perfect creation*. God rested on the seventh day because His work was “finished . . . done” (Gen. 2:2-3). He stopped *doing* to express His desire for *being* with His creation, for giving to His creatures not only *things*, but *Himself*. Such a marvelous concept of God who entered into human time at creation and into human flesh at the incarnation in order to become “Emmanuel—God with us” is absent in pagan religions where the gods typically partake of human failings.

The remarkable nature of the Bible is also indicated by its miraculous preservation through history, in spite of relentless efforts to destroy it. Earlier we mentioned the past attempts to suppress the Bible by Roman Emperors, Christian church leaders, and communist regimes. In spite of these deliberate attempts to destroy the Bible, its text has come down to us substantially unchanged. Some of the oldest manuscripts bring us close to the composition of the originals. They reveal the amazing accuracy of the text that has come down to us. We can be confident that our Bibles are reliable versions of the original messages.

Ultimately the validity of the Bible is vouched for by conceptual and existential considerations. Conceptually, the Bible provides a reasonable explanation of our human situation and of the divine solution to our problems. Existentially, the teachings of the Bible give meaning to our existence and offer us reasons for living, loving, and serving. Through them we can experience the rich blessings of salvation.

CONCLUSION

We have briefly traced the controversy between the errancy and inerrancy of the Bible. We have noted that the Bible is being attacked today by friends and foes. The pendulum is swinging to both extremes. On the one hand, the liberal critics reduce the Bible to a strictly human, error-ridden book, devoid of supernatural revelations and miraculous manifestations. On the other hand, some conservative evangelicals elevate the Bible to such a divine level that they overlook the human dimension of Scripture. They affirm that the Bible is absolutely without error in all its references to history, geography, chronology, cosmology, science, and so forth.

Ultimately both the errancy and inerrancy positions are extreme, unbiblical views that undermine the authority of the Bible by making it either too-human or too-divine. The solution to these extreme positions is to be found in the key word *balance*—a balance that recognizes both the divine and human character of the Bible.

In her own way the Catholic Church has undermined the authority of the Bible by making her traditional teachings the “*living transmission*” of the Word of God. This has made it possible for the Catholic Church over the centuries to promulgate a host of unbiblical teachings which have been largely responsible for leading countless Christians into apostasy.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically maintained a balanced view of the Bible by acknowledging both its divine and human character. Adventists believe that the Bible is the product of a mysterious blending of divine and human participation. The source is divine, the writers are human, and the writings contain divine thoughts in human language. This unique combination offers us a trustworthy and infallible revelation of God’s will and plan for our present life and future destiny. As stated in the first Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs: “The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”³⁹

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