FUNCTIONAL INERRANCY:
A NEO-EVANGELICAL VIEW OF
BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

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Introduction

Since the publication of Harold Lindsell's polemical defense of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy in his *Battle for the Bible*, several neo-evangelical scholars have been endeavoring to articulate a doctrine of Scripture which is, so it is argued, more in keeping with the classical Christian tradition. Due in part to weariness with the internal wrangling among evangelical theologians over the doctrine of Scripture and the conviction that some expressions of biblical inerrancy were overstated and inconsistent with the biblical phenomena, these scholars have begun to set forth a view which might best be described as "functional inerrancy." The Scriptures do not err in fulfilling their function to communicate salvation in Christ and to equip the believer for all aspects of his faith and practice. They are not, however, inerrant in all that they affirm or teach, particularly in matters of history, geography and cosmology.

For these scholars a more functional view of Scriptural inerrancy, one which focuses our attention upon the message and the effectiveness of the Bible's transmission of this message, promises a resolution to a debate over inerrancy that seems to have reached an impasse. Though there are differences among them, there is a growing consensus that views the history of earlier discussions of inerrancy as a kind of historical reaction born out of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century battles between modernism and fundamentalism. The "Princeton theology," particularly the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility defended by Benjamin B. Warfield, for example, is viewed not so much as an expression of the historic Reformed doctrine of Scripture, as a somewhat extreme development which arose out of a

defensive posture against the encroachment of liberalism and biblical criticism which subjected the Scriptures to rationalistic attack.[2] According to these evangelical theologians, the time has come to move beyond the defensive polemics characteristic of earlier formulations of the doctrine of inerrancy, and to develop a view which retains a proper emphasis upon the authority of the Bible as the Word of God but which avoids tying that emphasis to an unbiblical notion of verbal inerrancy.

Not surprisingly, this development within "neo-evangelicalism," sometimes identified with the idea of "limited inerrancy" or "infallibility in matters which pertain to salvation and faith," has provoked a divergence of great significance within evangelicalism itself. On the one hand, there are those, identified with the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, who defend a doctrine of inerrancy in line with that of historic Reformed orthodoxy,[3] and on the other hand, there is a growing number of evangelical scholars who are revising and re-articulating the doctrine to meet the challenge of biblical criticism in a new way.[4] It is becoming increasingly difficult, therefore, to speak of "an" or "the" evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Within the camp of evangelicalism itself, there is an unfortunate and growing difference between the "strict" or "exhaustive" inerrantists and the "limited" or "functional" inerrantists. Though we cannot begin to survey the history of this development here, it simply underscores the urgency of a continued reflection upon the subject of inerrancy in terms of its importance for our affirmation of the authority and reliability of the Scriptures.

Since the doctrine of the Word of God is foundational to any Reformed theology that takes seriously the authority and infallibility of the Bible, it is especially important that this neo-evangelical revision of the doctrine of inerrancy be carefully studied and evaluated. Does it represent a helpful resolution of the difficulties which attend the doctrine of inerrancy? Is it a view which corresponds substantially to the historic confession that the Scriptures are an "infallible rule for faith and practice"? Or is it an unwise accommodation to

biblical criticism, one which is inconsistent with a proper affirmation of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible?

Though I do not propose in what follows to provide a survey of the recent debate over inerrancy among evangelical theologians, nor to address in a comprehensive way the host of issues that have arisen in this debate, I do propose to engage in a study and evaluation of two representatives of what may be termed a "functional inerrancy" position. The study will be addressed to the question whether this position is an unwise and unwarranted attenuation of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy or whether it promises a helpful resolution of the "battle for the Bible" debate. In order to accomplish this objective, the study will proceed as follows: first, a summary exposition of the position of these two representatives will be given; second, the position of "functional inerrancy" will be critically examined; and third, some aspects of a necessary affirmation of biblical inerrancy will be articulated.

I. *Two Representatives of a Doctrine of Functional Inerrancy: Clark H. Pinnock and Douglas Farrow*

In my judgment there are two particularly outstanding representatives of this neo-evangelical view of functional inerrancy, Clark H. Pinnock and Douglas Farrow. Pinnock is widely recognized as a significant evangelical scholar and his view of Scriptural inerrancy is especially interesting, since he has self-consciously moved from an earlier view of strict inerrancy to a more functional view. Douglas Farrow, though not nearly so well-known as Pinnock, has also articulated what he terms a "functional inerrancy" position in his *The Word of Truth and Disputes About Words*.[5] The high quality and direct relevance of Farrow's contribution warrant our consideration of it together with that of Pinnock.

A. Clark H. Pinnock's *The Scripture Principle*[6]

Pinnock's *The Scripture Principle* is not the first study penned by him on the subject of Scripture. It was preceded by an earlier *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology*[7] and *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*.[8]

Whereas these earlier works defended in vigorous and emphatic terms the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, *The Scripture Principle* approaches the issue more circumspectly and cautiously.[9]

Pinnock introduces his study of Scripture by arguing for the need to re-articulate a doctrine of Scripture in the context of the new situation faced by evangelical scholarship. It is no longer adequate simply to reproduce the historic orthodox doctrine of an inerrant Bible, as has been the case in conservative evangelical circles where an absolutely inerrant Bible has become the foundation upon which the church stands or falls. Frequently, this reproduction of the traditional view of biblical inerrancy has been defended in a simplistic and rationalistic manner; the assumption has been that any breach in the dam of biblical inerrancy would unleash a flood of liberal criticism and a wholesale denial of biblical authority. Neither is it adequate to capitulate to the rationalistic criticism of those who treat the Scriptures as though they merely expressed the religious experience and insights of diverse human authors. There is a "crisis," Pinnock argues, in the Scripture principle today that can only be met by way of a new view of Scriptural authority and infallibility, one which moves between and beyond the polarities of rigid conservatism and unrestrained liberalism.

Pinnock aims, therefore, to set forth a Scripture principle that moves beyond the intellectual skirmishing and internecine squabbling of recent evangelical discussions of Scripture toward one which upholds the classical view of biblical authority while taking seriously the growing awareness of the humanity of the Bible. This is vitally important because of the foundational place of Scripture in all Christian faith and practice; without recognizing the authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures, the church's faith and the discipline of theology have no canon or measure which carries full authority.

The central thesis of Pinnock's book is that we need to "stress the practical effectiveness of the accessible Bible in facilitating a saving and transforming knowledge of God in Jesus Christ" (xviii). Rather than permitting the "battle for

the Bible" to blur our focus by diverting our attention to the defense of an absolutely inerrant and perfect book, we must approach the Bible as the Word of God in the words of men which unfailingly communicates to its hearers in the power of the Spirit the knowledge of God. In so doing we will be prepared to acknowledge that it is "not a book wholly free of perplexing features, but one that bears effective witness to the Savior of all" (xix).

In the development of this thesis Pinnock distinguishes three dimensions of any re-articulation of the Scripture principle for the church. The first dimension is one which acknowledges the indispensable place of the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. The second dimension recognizes that this Word of God comes to us in the form of human words that reflect all the features that pertain to our humanity. The third dimension, one which Pinnock believes has been especially neglected among evangelicals, relates to the ministry of the Spirit in authenticating and confirming the biblical message.

The Word of God

Pinnock devotes the first major section of his study to the development of the theme of Scripture as the Word of God. Integral to the history of revelation as the self-disclosure of God is the the provision under God's providence of the inspired Scriptures. The history and process of God's disclosure of his purpose and will to his people, albeit characterized by a diversity of modes of revelation, reaches its apex in the inscripturation of revelation, the provision of a canon of inspired writings that constitute the measure and norm for the church's faith and practice.

The burden of Pinnock's discussion of the history and pattern of revelation is the argument that this provision of the Scriptures is "intrinsic" to biblical faith (16). It is simply unthinkable (and contrary to fact) that the God of the covenant would administer his covenant without a written account of his gracious dealings with his people, including a specification of the privileges and obligations inherent in this covenant. The Scriptures are covenant documents, the

written canon given by God himself under the Old and New Testaments to confirm his works and promises and to set forth the shape of the believer's obedience. As Pinnock puts it,

> Scripture was not added on to biblical faith but is intrinsic to it. Salvation, as far as one can trace it, is supported by documentation in which the covenantal obligations are spelled out and sustained. . . .God had spoken to his people Israel in the past, and the Scriptures were seen to be an extension of this modality of divine speech, revelation cast into written form for the direction of the church (16).

The Bible constitutes God's gift to his church of a permanent and perpetually valid disclosure of his salvation and will. This disclosure provides an "objective" revelation of God's Word which regulates the thought and the practice of the church.[10]

Within this broad framework of Scripture as the precipitate of revelation in the history of redemption, Pinnock turns to the important subject of *inspiration*. How may we understand and describe the process of inspiration whereby God "authored" and gave the Bible to the community of believers?

Pinnock approaches this question by evaluating firstly the Old Testament witness. The Old Testament reflects "a process of Scripture collection and formation" that was "in motion from the very beginnings of Israel's existence"(35). This process was not monolithic or uniform, but involved a complex set of factors (including a number of writers, redactors, and canonical shaping over a period of time) which are not always fully observable by us today. This means that we have to be willing to "distinguish between kinds and degrees of inspiration" (35). The Bible is not so much a book as it is a library of books, comprised of a diversity of literary genre--poetry, proverb, law, oracle, story, parable, and prayer. To employ prophetic inspiration--the Lord's placing his words in the mouths of his servants--as a paradigm for inspiration with respect to the whole of the Old Testament,

would be an illegitimate extension of its employment and would do an injustice to the diversity of means whereby the Word of God is communicated in the Old Testament (36).

Similarly, in his treatment of the New Testament witness, Pinnock argues that we are not given a systematic but only a "fragmentary" doctrine of the Scripture's authority and inspiration. It is quite clear from the New Testament use of the Old, and particularly from the appeal of Jesus and the apostles to the fulfillment of the Old, that written revelation in the form of Scripture arose necessarily out of the traditions of Israel and the church (54). Both the New Testament appeal to the Old Testament and its own apostolic and authoritative exposition of the person and work of Christ, Mediator of the new covenant, suggest that Scripture is a product of divine revelation, to be gratefully received by the church. However, it is the *function* and *use* of these Scriptures that is of paramount importance; they are the media whereby believers are enabled to know and to love God. It is particularly in respect to this function that the authority and reliability of the Bible must be described. Consequently, though the biblical witness does not speak directly to the question whether the text is "flawless" in every sense of the word, it does emphatically teach that the Bible effectively and unfailingly accomplishes its saving purpose (55).

Furthermore, we are not authorized on the basis of this biblical witness to adopt a view of inspiration which treats every word and line as *in the same degree* authored by God. Through a diverse literature God is pleased to speak and to convey his truth. Though ultimately he is the author of these Scriptures, penultimately his relation to the words of Scripture depends upon whether they are psalms, proverbs, parables, historical accounts, apostolic commandment or an agonized question (56).

For this reason it is not surprising to discover that the Scriptures do not directly claim to be "errorless" in the strict sense of the term. The notion of "inerrancy," which is a complex theological inference or "hypothesis," is nowhere explicitly asserted in Scripture. Rather, the Scriptures speak of their divine inspiration and general reliability in respect

to their concentration upon the "covenantal revelation of God" (58). Pinnock therefore asserts that "the inerrancy theory is a logical deduction not well supported exegetically. Those who press it hard are elevating reason over Scripture at this point" (58).[11] Though the desire to establish the strict inerrancy of Scripture may be understandable--due to the desire for religious certainty, the "logic of inspiration," and the experience of God's reliability--it is an unwarranted doctrine which simply opens the evangelical theologian up to the attacks of his liberal critics (59).

Summarizing his discussion of the inspiration and authority of the Bible as the Word of God, Pinnock develops a modest and cautious view of Scriptural reliability and inerrancy. We are permitted to argue on the basis of Scripture for a view which approaches the text of Scripture as the Word of God which comes with the authority of its divine Author. We must also insist that the divine inspiration and authorship of Scripture precludes any view which denies the coherence and reliability of the message communicated through the Scriptural text. We are not permitted, for example, to disregard clear biblical teaching because it conflicts with modern presuppositions or views, nor are we allowed to posit irreconcilable differences between the "theologies" of the biblical writers. The Scriptures teach in this sense a "broad and untechnical kind of inerrancy" but not "a technical and strict version of it" (75). Speaking of this kind of inerrancy, Pinnock writes,

> Inerrancy as Warfield understood it was a good deal more precise than the sort of reliability the Bible proposes. The Bible's emphasis tends to be upon the saving truth of its message and its supreme profitability in the life of faith and discipleship. It does not really inform us how we ought to handle perplexing features in the text (75).

There are two features of this functional view of inerrancy that Pinnock especially highlights. First, it allows us to affirm the trustworthiness of the Bible in the fundamental sense, without committing us to a "perfectly inerrant" Bible. Too often those who defend the latter view do so for "dogmatic" reasons which are inconsistent with the Bible's own

view of itself. A functional approach permits a confidence in the Bible without causing that confidence to stand or fall with the perfection of our present Bibles (77). Though it authorizes a high degree of reliability for the biblical writings, it does not commit us to our "modern" view of inerrancy. Second, it continues to provide us with a basis for adopting an "inerrancy expectation as a operational policy" (77). It provides us with a basis for approaching the Scriptures with a trusting attitude, certain that, judged by its purpose to communicate a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and a canonical description of God's will for our lives, it will not mislead us.[12]

In Human Language

In the second part of his study, Pinnock turns from the affirmation of the Bible as the Word of God, given to us by inspiration and bearing the authority of God who provided it for the church in his providence, to the *humanity* of the Bible. In his consideration of this dimension of the doctrine of Scripture, he chides conservative evangelical scholarship for its unwillingness to grant the full reality and significance of the fact that the Word of God comes to us *in human language*.[13] We must avoid, he argues, a doctrine of biblical inerrancy which neglects the humanity of the biblical witness and which betrays a "docetic" tendency to overemphasize the divine origin of Scripture at the expense of its human origin. We must approach the Bible, not only "from above," but also "from below."

Contrary to the docetic temptation to treat every biblical word and utterance as a direct divine oracle, biblical criticism has served the positive purpose of establishing the humanness of the biblical texts. Thus, biblical criticism, stripped of its Enlightenment presuppositions and rationalistic bias, has become a permanent feature of the church's approach to the text of Scripture; it is not possible to ignore any longer the reality of the historical and cultural features of the biblical texts.

In his description of the humanity of the Scriptures, Pinnock begins by isolating three categories which may be used

to express this humanity consistent with the Scripture's own witness. The first of these is the category of *accommodation*. In communicating with us by means of the Scriptures God chooses to accommodate himself to our creatureliness, clothing his revelation in the dress of human language. In so doing, human language becomes the servant of revelation. The second of these is *incarnation*; as the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so God, in accommodating himself to his human audience, "enletters" his Word in the script of the Bible (97). Though the "union" between the divine and human is not of the same kind in each instance, there is an "analogy" between what takes place in the incarnation and what occurs in the authorship of the Bible.[14] Just as Jesus' deity was "hidden" and "veiled," so the divine authorship of the Bible is often masked by the human letter in which it is given to us. The Bible does not bear an obvious and unmistakable divine face which compels the reader apart from faith to acknowledge its perfection. The third category Pinnock isolates is *human weakness*. Inscripturated revelation does not come to us with patent and unmistakable evidences of its divine origin, but in the form of human weakness. The quest for an errorless Bible, one which shows no marks of such weakness and that partakes of a divine perfection, is a fruitless and misguided quest. The human language of the Bible is simply not self-evidently flawless in its rhetoric and grammar, but evinces many signs of this weakness (99).[15] Though we may be confident that it reliably presents Jesus Christ to us, we may not ground this functional reliability upon a perfect text which escapes all human fragility and historical relativity.

According to Pinnock, it is this interplay between the divine origin of Scripture and the human language in which it is given to us, that has been misconstrued in traditional treatments of inspiration which "suggest total divine control" (100). Any doctrine of inspiration which treats every word of the text as "what God wanted in the first place might as well have been dictated, for all the room it leaves for human agency" (101). The "militant inerrancy" position fails to deal frankly with the phenomena of the text of Scripture and improperly "stakes the entire truth of

Christianity upon not finding any slips in the whole Bible" (101). It further depends upon a Calvinistic doctrine of absolute divine sovereignty which denies the freedom of the biblical authors in the production of the Scriptural witness (101-102).[16] Even though some would defend the human authorship and agency so indispensable to the production of the Bible by means of the notion of "organic inspiration," this defense fails because of its "deterministic" world view. It would be better to compare the relation between God and man in the production of Scripture to that of a master chess player who achieves victory in accomplishing his purpose by "simple skill," rather than by over-ruling and controlling the moves of his opponent (103).

Contrary to these docetic tendencies in the traditional doctrine of biblical inerrancy, Pinnock suggests that we think in terms of a "dynamic interplay" between the divine and the human in the production of the Scripture. The product of this interplay is not the perfectly errorless Bible of orthodox defenders of biblical inerrancy, but "an adequate and sufficient testimony to God's saving revelation, which culminated in Christ" (104). This Bible is "reliable enough in terms of its soteric purpose," so that the "perplexing features on its margins will not strike fear into our hearts and minds" (104-105). Because it is functionally adequate and serviceable from the perspective of its testimony to Jesus Christ, it serves, despite its obvious human weakness, as a reliable medium for the purpose of disclosing God's will to the church.

Recognizing the humanity of the Bible also has the benefit of contributing to a resolution of the knotty problem of biblical criticism. Too often conservative defenders of biblical inerrancy have resisted the employment of methods of "positive criticism" in their approach to the text of Scripture. They have been unwilling to deal with the cultural and historical conditioning of the Bible (historical criticism); they have not acknowledged the creativity and contribution of the biblical writers as genuine authors in the production of the biblical writings (redaction criticism); and they have neglected the context within which certain portions of the

Scriptures were transmitted and shaped (form criticism). None of these forms of positive biblical criticism is inherently inconsistent with an affirmation of the authority and reliability of the Bible or a grammatical-historical approach to its texts. Undoubtedly, this resistance to a positive criticism expresses a genuine fear of "negative" criticism with its repudiation of the reliability and authority of the biblical texts. Such negative criticism, Pinnock freely admits, must be resisted and its unbiblical presuppositions exposed as inimical to a faithful subjection to the Bible as the Word of God. Nonetheless, when the genuine humanity of the biblical texts is properly acknowledged, we are free to approach them as the Word of God in human language, employing whatever legitimate critical means are at our disposal for discovering the message that they communicate.

Sword of the Spirit

Having addressed the two dimensions of the Bible as the Word of God in human language, Pinnock takes up in the last and in some respects most revealing part of his study, the subject of the role of the Spirit in authenticating and bearing witness to the Word. Both conservative and liberal theologians alike have tended to focus all of their attention upon the "objective side of revelation," the phenomenon of the Bible as such, and have neglected the "complementary subjective aspect" (155).[17] It is this complementary and subjective side of the subject of revelation which is addressed when the Bible is confessed to be the "sword of the Spirit," that inscripturated medium the Spirit is pleased to sanctify and use in communicating the gospel. The real authority of the Bible as the Word of God lies not simply in the text as such but in the text as the Spirit renders it "the living voice of the Lord" (156).

In approaching the role of the Spirit in relation to the Word, Pinnock endeavors to avoid two extremes, "subjective irrationalism or objective rationalism" (157). We must avoid any position which denies that the Bible as it is given to us "is" the Word of God but only "becomes" the Word in the act of revelation--this is subjective irrationalism.[18] We must also avoid any position which excludes the operation of the

Spirit through the written Word--this is objective rationalism. Contrary to both of these views, God works "in a double way--he makes himself present to us and he opens our eyes to help us to receive revelation" (161).

> First God gave us the Scriptures by inspiration, loading them with revelational potential for all generations, and second God gives us the Scriptures in order to activate and actualize this potential in our hearts and minds. The Bible is a deposit of propositions that we should receive as from God, but it is also the living Word when it functions as the sword of the Spirit. (161).

In terms of the Spirit's work in opening our eyes to receive the Word, we may even speak of the Bible as a "sacrament," as an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, a vehicle by which the Spirit preaches Christ to us" (164). In doing so the Bible becomes the occasion for "fresh events of revelation" (164).[19]

To articulate the significance of the work of the Spirit in this connection, Pinnock describes three specific operations in which the Spirit bears witness to the Word. In the first place, the Spirit enables us to *recognize* the Scriptures as the Word of God (165). Though there is a great deal of external and internal "evidence" which counts for the Bible's claim to be the Word of God,[20] this evidence cannot incline us with personal certainty to appropriate the Bible's own claim for ourselves. Only the Spirit is able to attest and confirm to us the reality of the Bible's speaking on God's behalf. In the second place the Spirit enables the reader to *interpret* the Word of God properly. This does not mean that the Spirit "mystically" imparts the meaning of the text to the reader apart from the simple procedures of grammatical-historical exegesis; it only means that understanding the text requires obedient submission to the text, receptivity to its message and content. Such receptivity and readiness to obey comes about only through the operation of the Spirit in the heart and mind of the believer as he reads the biblical texts. And in the third place the Spirit operates to *apply* the meaning of the text of Scripture to the situation of the reader. Though we may speak of the "objective authority of the text" in

terms of its original meaning, a meaning which is "canonical and universal," we must also speak of the "subjective" significance of the text in its applicability to new circumstances and situations, a meaning which is relatively "local and corrigible" (172).[21]

It is particularly this last aspect of the Spirit's role in relation to the Word which captures Pinnock's attention. Though it is true in one respect that the Bible is an "objective given," it is equally true that it becomes by the Spirit an inexhaustible fountain of insight and the occasion for a "fecundity of possible interpretations" (175). Already in the Old Testament, but emphatically so in the new, we witness a "hermeneutic" of progressive unfolding of the riches and wealth of revelation. Texts which once appeared frozen in their original setting, whose meaning appeared univocal and limited to the intention of their human authors, are taken up into the history of revelation and given fuller interpretation by subsequent biblical authors. The greatest instance of such unfolding of revelation is given to us in the New Testament's appropriation of the Old. Given the new and unprecedented act of God in Jesus Christ, the New Testament writers were free from any "Judaistic" restraints in their use of the Old Testament texts. They provide, therefore, an illustration of "dynamic updating in the canon of Scripture" (179) and provide a paradigm for the renewed application of the Scriptural text today.

This phenomenon of the dynamic unfolding and updating of the meaning of Scriptural texts, sometimes in ways that surpass the original meaning of the text, becomes the basis for Pinnock's argument that a fresh appropriation of the text is to be preferred to a "flat reading" which assumes that there is only one possible way of using the text. There must be a "continual dialogue between the text and the reader's situation," one in which the text reveals its potential for fresh application in new situations (185). The text leaves room for the Spirit to lead the reader in new paths and to provide different interpretations. The Spirit is able to lead the reader into a new understanding of the text, contemporary and applicable within changed circumstances. "The

Spirit," he writes, "gives the text a dynamic pointedness so that the text can be resituated and become fresh revelation for us" (214).[22] In so doing the Spirit works "alongside" the Word, applying it in a dynamically equivalent manner to its original meaning (201,216). By virtue of this working of the Spirit with the Word in the context of fresh interpretation, it is even possible that Christ may speak "beyond" what is written in the text, drawing out that which is only implicit in the written Word (213).[23]

Summary

With this synopsis of Pinnock's argument, the main lines of his view of Scriptural inerrancy are clear to see. Pinnock aims to develop a systematic doctrine of Scripture as the Word of God given to us in the form of human language. It is given to us by God and comes with the authority of its divine Author. We are therefore to receive in humble faith and with a readiness to believe all that it communicates and teaches. However, because it is indeed a human word, accommodated to our capacity and a participant in the human weakness of its authors and the limitations of their language and culture, it is not to be construed as exhaustively or perfectly errorless in every respect. Such a doctrine is tantamount to a docetic denial of the humanity of the Bible and to an adoption of a view that the Scriptures were given by divine dictation. Rather than hinging everything upon such an inflexible and defensive view of biblical inerrancy, it is enough to say that God has been and is pleased to use these writings to communicate effectively a saving knowledge of himself and his Christ and to teach his people what they need to know in order to serve him. The Scripture is inerrant in respect to its saving function, not its every historical, geographical, cosmological and other detail.

Furthermore, we do not need to rely upon rationalistic arguments in defense of a strict doctrine of inerrancy, for such reliance bypasses in an "objectivistic" fashion the work of the Spirit in employing the written Word to communicate a true knowledge of God. The Spirit works together with the Word, authenticating it as indeed the Word of God, interpreting the Word to us and applying its truth in fresh

ways within our present circumstances. In this way the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy may be salvaged for the church and delivered from its attachment to an "unpleasant and ill-conceived dispute" among evangelicals (224). Inerrancy is an acceptable, even necessary, postulate, provided it is defined in terms of the intent and function of Scripture. Then it only means to say that the Bible "can be trusted to teach the truth in all it affirms," and not that it requires the kind of "technical" accuracy suggested by some of its contemporary defenders to serve as a reliable medium of God's Word.

B. Douglas Farrow's
The Word of Truth and Disputes About Words

This second contribution to the development of a neo-evangelical doctrine of "functional inerrancy" is not nearly as well known as that of Pinnock. In many respects, however, Douglas Farrow's *The Word of Truth and Disputes About Words* parallels the argument of Pinnock and displays a greater interest in the methodological issues relating to our approach to Scripture. Farrow concurs with Pinnock's judgment that the "battle for the Bible" has become a "dispute about words" which overshadows the confidence and comfort that the community of faith should have in the Scriptures. He detects a growing polarity between a "conservationist" defense of the Bible as a "sacred preserve of words" and a "libertarian" championing of the rights of the free-thinking individual to stand in judgment over the Bible (xii).[24] In his judgment neither of these extremes is viable. We need a mature statement of the doctrine of Scripture which upholds the authority and reliability of the Word of God without linking them to an unnecessarily rigid view of inerrancy. What is required is a view of Scripture which makes plain the "unique and authoritative function of Scripture in God's self-revelation and churchly rule" (4), but which does so within the broader framework of epistemological, exegetical, and hermeneutical perspectives.

For this reason, Farrow develops his argument for a "functional inerrancy" position along three general lines. He begins with a lengthy discussion of the epistemological and

methodological issues in the debate about Scripture in a section entitled "The Word of Truth." He then considers the Bible's own testimony to its inspiration and veracity in a section entitled "Disputing about Words." Finally, he concludes with a discussion of the hermeneutical challenge to the doctrine of inerrancy in a section entitled "A Faithful Confession."

The Word of Truth

According to Farrow, most discussions of biblical inerrancy miss the mark by virtue of their failure to recognize the essential function of Scripture in Christian thinking. The question concerning the reliability of the Word of God is abstracted from the reality of the church's confession and practice of "working under the Word." In this way the Word of truth is itself subjected to scrutiny and judged true or false by criteria alien to the Word itself. The scholar theologian assumes the position of one who may "establish" or "prove" the truth or untruth of the Word of God by canons which are not themselves derived from the Word. Consequently, the inerrancy issue is addressed on both sides as though it could be resolved independently and without a humble readiness to be subject to the Word and the Lordship of Christ who speaks with authority through the Word to his church.

Whether on the "right" or the "left," therefore, the question of biblical inerrancy is asked as though it were finally to be resolved by means of an "independent human judgment, a judgment hypothetically free from the active personal knowledge of (and unconditional commitment to) the divine Lordship" (18). This is frequently the case in conservative circles where the inerrancy of Scripture is defended by deductive procedures which draw conclusions from isolated proof texts and impose these upon the phenomena of Scripture. Or, contrariwise, the doctrine of inerrancy is defended on empirical-inductive grounds by an appeal to the "evidence" of the texts themselves to vindicate their reliability (11ff.).[25] In either procedure the reality of Christ's living Lordship and speaking through the Word is treated as though it were the conclusion of an argument. The argument for

biblical inerrancy, including the deductive and/or inductive procedures employed in its development, takes precedence epistemologically over the believing confession of God's own lordly presence and authority in his Word. As Farrow asserts,

> The christological fact of God's own lordly Presence exposes to the Church the error of any partnership in what amounts to a specifically secular and lordless epistemological principle: the pre-commitment to think out reality from the standpoint of one's own resources, to conduct an independent examination, even of the divine Word, according to the self-sufficient determinations of an autonomous mind. (21)

The only resolution of the epistemological problems here is a "Christian confessionalism" which operates upon the basis of the presupposed reality and primacy of the Word. Any attempt to approach the issue of biblical inerrancy with a "we argue that. . . " or "we are satisfied that. . . " virtually denies the ultimacy of God's speaking through his Word and expresses, epistemologically, the stance of unbelief. There is no "detached, uninvolved perspective" whence to evaluate and to determine the truth of the revealed knowledge of God (29). The knowledge of faith is the knowledge of *faith*, a "derivative" knowledge which is born out of an obedient listening to the Word of God. Such knowledge is radically different from "a hypothesis suggested by a complex body of data" or a theoretical postulate which is in principle subject to continued review and even suspension of conviction until all the necessary evidence is in (30). In short--we must recognize that God's Word is a "uniquely compelling and self-verifying Word" (32).[26]

This "confessional" approach leads Farrow to take up the subject of the Scripture as *canon*. The Scripture has been given and sanctioned by the Spirit of Christ to "serve as the articulate channel of God's living revelation in Christ" (45). The Word of God spoken by Christ has been given scriptural form in the witness of the human words of the prophets and apostles. Our submission to the lordship of Christ is accordingly one which entails submission to the Scripture in which he chooses to reveal himself. The Scripture serves as the

canon and "staff" of the Good Shepherd by which he sets the boundaries and rules the thought and life of the church (45). Because it is the instrument employed by Christ to reveal himself to the church, it is not properly liable to debate and proof; we may only "confess" its authority just as we may only confess the living lordship of Christ himself who is pleased to use it to communicate himself to us. There may be no separation here between faith in Christ and faith in Scripture.[27]

This integral relation between Christ's lordship and the authority of the canon of Scripture also contributes to a resolution of the problem of a merely "formal" authority. The authority and veracity of the Scripture relate to their service to Christ. Even the "testimony of the Spirit" to the Word is not a testimony to Scripture as such, but a testimony to the Christ who speaks and is communicated through the Scripture (48).[28] The authority of Scripture relates directly to the "matter" of Christ whose Word is spoken by means of this written word; it is a material and not a formal authority. It is in this sense also that the long-standing confession *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*, has to be understood. Scripture is the Word of God in its service to Christ, as the Word of Christ. It is not the Word of God abstracted from this function and service as Christ's chosen instrument for disclosing himself to the community of faith.

There are three legitimate senses in which this confession of Scripture as the Word of God may be elucidated. First, it is a human testimony "to and about God," that is, a written word that bears witness to God's words and works. Second, it is a word which God himself chooses to speak through these particular texts which comprise Holy Scripture. Thus, Scripture is to be received as human witness or testimony which God himself has "authored" and through which God himself speaks. And third, it is a word through which God himself continues to speak and in which he continues to choose to confront us with a knowledge of himself (53). The Scripture therefore is fully human and bears all the marks of human authorship. But it is also that human word which God sanctifies and employs by his Spirit to communicate the

message of salvation in Christ. Scripture belongs to revelation, as a given testimony whose human shape and form cannot be altered or escaped, and at the same time "becomes revelation" as it is sanctified and indwelt by the living Word who is pleased to speak "here and now" by means of this testimony (63).[29]

For Farrow this approach to the confession of Scripture as canon has great signifiance for the debate over inerrancy. Not only are we prevented from approaching biblical inerrancy from the standpoint of a secular epistemology which does not "work under the Word" but places itself over and in judgment upon the Word, but we are also warned against an overly formal and narrow view of inerrancy. Our whole approach to the question of inerrancy must be governed by the *a priori* of faith, the settled conviction that the Scriptures are God's chosen means to address and confront us and therefore deserve our allegiance and submission. Every attempt to answer this question apart from a believing response to the living Word who speaks in Scripture is illegitimate. Any understanding of the authority and inerrancy of the Bible must be developed from within the context of a believing confession that God is pleased to speak through this human word. When the autonomy of human thought which presumes to stand over the Word is rejected, and we willingly operate "under the Word," "the practical infallibility of the Bible cannot be an open question" (74).

However, this approach also liberates us from a "narrow" inerrancy view. Though it is essential to insist that the Scriptures reliably serve to communicate Christ, it is not nearly so clear that we must insist that this requires the "total perfection of the biblical texts" or the "*total* absence of factual error" (78). Judged by their "actual purpose and function" to reveal Christ to us, the Scriptures are a reliable "spectacles"; they unfailingly enable us to hear the living Word of God who speaks through them. Christ is the *scopus* of Scripture and, considered in terms of this scopus and not in merely formal categories, he is reliably communicated to us through the Scripture (78). We may define biblical inerrancy, accordingly, in terms of the Scripture's ability to

direct us in relation to Christ, without having to join this ability with the assertion that Scripture is devoid throughout of factual error or "innocuous inaccuracies" (79).[30]

According to Farrow, these are the two benefits of approaching the question of biblical inerrancy from the epistemological standpoint of the self-verifying reality and truth of the Word of God given to us through the Scriptures. We may be fully confident that the self-evidencing Lordship of Christ will be expressed though this scriptural word. We need not fear that this Lordship rests upon our vindication or defense of the truth of Scripture—Christ will secure this confession of faith by means of his own testimony through the Word. Thus, we do not have to fear grudging retreat from an affirmation of the full authority of his Word whenever contrary arguments or evidence are brought forward. Furthermore, we are no longer compelled to take offense at the obvious marks of Scripture's humanness. The reality of Christ and his gracious communication of himself through the inscripturated Word does not depend upon an exhaustively inerrant Bible (80).[31] We are able to affirm the full authority of Scripture without allowing that affirmation to become sidetracked by a narrow and fear-ridden dispute about words.

Disputing About Words

In the section of his study following this discussion of the epistemological perspective with which to approach the question of biblical inerrancy, Farrow addresses the exegetical perspective. Do we find any exegetical reasons to adopt a strict view of "exhaustive inerrancy"? Or are some of the traditional interpretations of various biblical passages that are addressed to the authority and reliability of the written word the product of forced exegesis and false inferences? Since many who defend a strict doctrine of inerrancy claim that their position is demanded by Scripture itself, Farrow acknowledges that a consideration of several of these scriptural passages is necessary in order to determine whether this claim is warranted.[32]

The first and perhaps most important text to which strict inerrantists have appealed is II Timothy 3:16 ("All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. . ."; NIV).[33] Following the argument of Warfield, they have maintained that *theopneustos* refers primarily to the *origination* of "all scripture." It is not so much a description of the nature or the effects of Scripture as it is an expression which teaches that Scripture was "produced by the creative breath of the Almighty."[34] Farrow, however, argues that, even were we to grant that this is the word's primary signification, it does not address itself clearly to the "way," the "extent," or the "purpose" of its being produced by God. It is possible to translate the word with such equivalents as "God-provided," or "God-pervaded" (90). Furthermore, due to Warfield's orientation to a "Philonian" view of inspiration, one which virtually treats the human word of Scripture as the express utterance or oracle of God, Warfield mistakenly regards this characterization of Scripture as a clear endorsement of a view of inspiration developed on the analogy of prophetic inspiration in which God places his words directly in the mouth of his spokesmen. (91).[35]

For his part, Farrow argues that an alternative interpretation is preferable. Appealing to Job 32:8 and 33:4, where the Septuagint employs similar terminology (*pnoee de pantokratoros estin hee didaskousa*; "the breath of the Almighty is that which teaches"), he suggests that the idea of "God-breathed" is one of being taught the wisdom of God by the Spirit of God. Men taught by the Spirit in this sense are able in turn to teach that which accords with the wisdom of God to others. Rather than focusing our attention, therefore, upon the "inspiration of words as such," this text directs us to the underlying "teaching ministry of the Spirit that accounts for the actual content and wisdom of these documents, and for their ability to lead us into a right relationship with God" (95).[36] Such an interpretation fits the context better, since it provides the occasion for the further designation of "all Scripture" as "profitable." The "God-breathed" character of Scripture serves to buttress the claim concerning its "profitability," which is the real point of emphasis in this

verse. The apostle Paul is not so much interested in the divine origin of the Bible in abstraction as he is in its effective function. Though he does not tell us in what way or to what extent the Scripture is "God-breathed," he does emphatically assert that they are "God-breathed" for the purpose of serving profitably in teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

A second passage to which strict inerrantists often appeal is II Peter 1:21 ("For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"). Though this passage does not describe the "psychology of inspiration," it does address something of the nature of inspiration by its description of men speaking "from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Farrow concurs with Warfield's understanding of this text as a description of the Spirit's activity in "carrying along" those who spoke such that their speaking achieved the goal of its divine Author. Nonetheless, this text does not permit any further emphasis as to "how" the Spirit "carried along" the prophets who spoke under inspiration and from God. It certainly does not require a "mechanistic" view of inspiration or the idea of the "direct spiration of every word of the text" (100). Not only does this text bear only upon the speaking of the prophets and not upon the origin of any and all Scripture, but it also refers more particularly to their speaking in relation to Christ and his coming. It displays a "firm but simple concern for the genuineness of the biblical word," but it does not warrant "any fanciful application to the interests of exhaustive inerrancy" (100).

The same basic conclusion may be drawn, according to Farrow, in relation to a number of other passages cited by exhaustive inerrantists. Whether these passages affirm the sanctity of all the commandments in the Mosaic covenant (e.g., Matt. 5:18), the authority of the testimony of Scripture as the teaching of the Spirit,[37] or the inviolability and binding nature of Scripture's testimony (e.g., John 10:35), they do not warrant a doctrine of inerrancy that is extended abstractly and atomistically to all the individual textual phenomena that comprise Holy Scripture. These passages,

and many others often cited by those who endeavor to develop an exhaustive inerrancy position, are focused upon the functional reliability of the Bible to communicate the mind and will of God. They teach no more nor less than that the Spirit of God has given and sanctified this human word as a trustworthy vehicle for the disclosure of the truth.

Thus, Farrow argues in his consideration of these passages that we need to "adjust our focus" in keeping with the paradigmatic signifiance of a passage like II Timothy 3:16. Our understanding of inspiration must be determined with a view to the *purpose and function* of the biblical writings:

> The *purpose* of inspiration is expressed in terms of reliable direction for the sake of righteousness, and nothing more specific is offered; the *means* of inspiration is left largely to the realm of mystery, and that is where it must be left; the *extent* of inspiration is clearly indicated as co-extensive with the canonical text, but is not specifically related to the words as such but to the messages they contain and to the purposes with which they are bound up (115).[38]

This does not mean, of course, that we may separate between the biblical content and form; this would permit a "dichotomy" between form and function (114). It only means that the words themselves are to be approached in terms of their "contribution to the message constructed" and not in terms of their every individual detail (115).[39]

At this point Farrow introduces his own understanding of what he calls "functional inerrancy" in contrast to "exhaustive inerrancy." When viewed from the perspective of the purpose and function of Scripture, inerrancy does not relate directly to the individual words of Scripture but to the message or content of Scripture. More precisely, it refers to the "communicative design" of every passage of Scripture, the content which the text expresses in terms of its purpose to communicate the truth of God. It is this communicative design which is the product of the operation of the Spirit of God, not the individual words taken in isolation and treated apart from their contribution to the passage's message. It is

in these terms that inerrancy must be understood. No more is demanded by the Scripture's own description of itself, and no more is required for the Scripture to serve as an "unfailingly profitable" medium for the disclosure of God's Word (117).

The virtue of this understanding of inerrancy lies in its emphasis upon the reliability of Scripture to bear its message. No more rigorous a doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy is required or justified, and we are thus liberated from the necessity of defending a doctrine of exhaustive inerrancy. This is confirmed by studies in linguistics and translation theory which indicate that meaning in verbal communication is tied closely to semantic units whose meanings do not hinge on every single word or detail. Exhaustive inerrancy, the position which insists that every word and detail be correct in order to preserve the integrity of verbal communication, fails to do justice to the importance of the communicative design of the text. Judged by this design it may be that some of the words or details are relatively incidental and insignificant, and the function of the semantic unit is unimpaired whether they are in the strictest sense "correct" or not (123).[40] Translation theory likewise indicates that "dynamic equivalence" is the best procedure in seeking to communicate in a receptor language the same message as was communicated in the original. Those who hold to a strict concept of inerrancy overlook the significance this has for the question whether we have in our present translations Bibles that may properly be called the "Word of God."

Farrow concludes his consideration of the exegetical basis for a doctrine of biblical inerrancy by maintaining that an "honest" evaluation of the evidence does not warrant a stronger view of inerrancy than this. We cannot escape the evidence that God chose to use the earthen vessel of human authorship in the writing of Scripture; the Scripture shows many signs of "obvious and undisputed imperfections" (130).[41] Such imperfections should not trouble us, since they do not adversely affect Scripture's ability to communicate their message nor do they "mislead" the trusting reader who works under the Word. Nor can we deny the corruption and

uncertainties that entered into the text during the course of its transmission. Since these do not render the Scripture ineffectual in serving their purpose to communicate God's message and truth, it is manifest that the kind of inerrancy posited by strict inerrantists is not required. The function of the text as a dynamic message bearer is not compromised by the admission that it is given to us with these tell-tale signs of its humanity (131).[42]

A Faithful Confession

In the concluding portion of his study, Farrow addresses himself to the subject of a revised doctrine of inspiration which corresponds to the notion of functional inerrancy and recognizes the humanity of the Scriptural witness. He further addresses the hermeneutical perspective and its significance for our understanding of inerrancy. How are we to define the inspiration of the Bible so as to preserve its functional inerrancy and human character? And what contribution does the issue of Scriptural interpretation or hermeneutics make to our doctrine of inerrancy?

The first thing that must be said with respect to the doctrine of inspiration is that the whole of Scripture comes to us as the written Word of God. We are not permitted the independence to "pick and choose" within the text of Scripture what is relevant theopneustic instruction and what is not (145). We may not discriminate between Scriptural passages, receiving those which bear directly upon salvation and Christ and rejecting others which are only tangentially related to our salvation. This would allow the reader the authority to determine what in the text is "peripheral" and what is "central," an authority which, if seized and utilized, would effectively deny the authority and infallibility of the biblical word. It would permit a return to a kind of "form-content dualism and a denial of the objective and identifiable verbal form taken by the divine Speech-Acts of the Lord of the Church" (147).

This understanding of inspiration does not require us to suppose, however, that the Scripture is given to us in "oracular" fashion or according to a "prophetic" mode of

inspiration (160,162). This would be a denial of the human-
ity of Scripture and an unnecessarily strict doctrine of infal-
libility. Christ's ability to employ the human word of Scrip-
ture to communicate his truth does not depend upon the use
of a prophetic mode of inspiration. Though we may legiti-
mately speak of "verbal" and "plenary" inspiration, these
terms should not entail the view that "every word or detail
owes its presence to the Spirit of God and bears the divine
imprimatur, or that inspiration is something which does not
admit of process or variation" (163).[43] The Scripture is a
canonical book, a verbal communication of God's truth; it is
in this sense that it is verbally inspired. It is also one whose
every passage is given to us by the Spirit for our instruction;
it is in this sense that it is plenarily inspired. But we may not
link this inspiration to the view which treats every word and
detail on the same level of significance and inspiration. This
would lead to the exchanging of an emphasis upon the
Spirit's use of the text to instruct the people of God for an
emphasis upon "the static mystery of a sacred text" (164).

The last and in many ways most difficult question posed
for a doctrine of inerrancy is the question of interpretation
or hermeneutics. Though biblical inerrancy is often treated
as a kind of exegetical shortcut, enabling its adherents to
avoid the knotty issues related to the understanding of the
biblical texts, it can only have significance in relation to set-
ting forth what these texts are saying. It is this hermeneutical
perspective that is so often lacking in discussions of iner-
rancy and which Farrow believes his doctrine of functional
inerrancy illuminates. If we understand inerrancy to pertain
to the function of the biblical text in communicating that
which it is designed to communicate, then we may draw the
following   important   hermeneutical   conclusion--"the
immediate scope of inerrancy is a fluctuating matter tailored
to each individual passage, and its parameters are deter-
mined in appropriate exegesis of a passage in light of its
greater context" (190).

One of the key problems of the strict or exhaustive iner-
rancy position is its tendency not only to encumber the faith
with an unnecessary doctrinal accretion but also to orient

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exegesis "toward an unnatural, word-study oriented exegesis" (191). Due to its exaggerated attention to the strict accuracy of every word and detail in the biblical text, it tends to favor a hermeneutic which neglects the broader context of a passage, as well as its literary features and communicative design, while focusing inordinately upon relatively insignificant features which bear little semantic relation to the meaning of the text. Frequently, defenders of strict inerrancy do not take the hermeneutical task seriously.

When we adopt the functional inerrancy view, however, the hermeneutical task is acknowledged to be legitimate and indispensable to the determination of the message borne by the biblical text. Because the biblical text only infallibly and unfailingly communicates its message, any believing understanding of the text must carefully attend to its literary (and not simply its verbal) features in order to ascertain the message intended. In so doing the reader of the biblical text will recognize the primacy of its context for determining its meaning and communicative design. He will also be able to determine *textually* (and not prematurely because of a strict inerrantist presupposition) which of its own statements and details are integral to achieving that communicative design. The understanding of the text will not be diverted by attention to details and words which are not relevant to its semantic design. As Farrow expresses it, "We are therefore certainly responsible to every aspect of the text, yet only as determined by the communicative design displayed therein" (201).

This also allows us a resolution of the knotty problem of apparent "errors" in the biblical text. With this approach we may affirm that the biblical text is not "in" error, even though it may "contain" errors (202). Judged by its communicative design and profitability in bearing its message, the biblical text, properly interpreted according to its context, canonical function and literary genre, is errorless. Nevertheless, it may contain details or elements which are irrelevant to this communicative design and message and which might fairly be termed "inconsequential error" (202). For example, the differences in detail between Stephen's

account of the patriarchs in Acts 7 and that of the Genesis records are "trivial," since they do not adversely affect the biblical text's function or communicative design (203). When we carefully consider the canonical and kerygmatic function of specific texts in their general context, including texts which record historical events and occurrences, we should not apply "inerrancy criteria" which are alien to the text and which make demands upon it that it cannot possibly, nor need it, meet (204).

Most so-called "errors" in the biblical text are easily reducible, Farrow maintains, to four categories: first, theological inconsistencies which are only apparent and which are capable of resolution at a deeper level of reflection; second, misconceptions which arise from a failure to attend closely to the context of a statement or an author's use of "stylistic devices"; third, minor modifications of an author's source materials made in the interest of a more cogent presentation of specific points; and fourth, matters of incidental "scenery" or "color" which do not relate directly to the concern of the author to convey his message (207-208).[44]

The challenge this poses for the interpreter of biblical texts is the determination of the communicative design of a text, including the related recognition of those elements "intrinsic" to or "extrinsic" to the accomplishment of this design (208). This will require ascertaining the "message" of a given text, understood as "that which one person wishes another to know and, to some degree, reflect upon" (209). When this is done, the reader of the biblical text will be able to determine what significance the particular details or words may have in contributing to this message. He will also be able to forego an undue concern for the accuracy and errorlessness of every aspect of the text when this does not bear any meaningful relation to its "service" in contributing to the text's communication of its message.[45] In summary, Farrow asks,

can we not confidently say that the hermeneutical factor does indeed allow us to uphold biblical infallibility while accepting the presence of certain errors in the text--and

to do so without subjecting Scripture to canons of our own determination, but rather within our very attempt to submit ourselves to Scripture's desire to determine us.(215)

Summary

To summarize Farrow's argument, he maintains that the question of biblical inerrancy can only be resolved when it is approached from three broad perspectives--the epistemological, the exegetical, and the hermeneutical.

First, he maintains that a true resolution of the debate over the inerrancy of the Bible will only be reached when all sides to the dispute place themselves under the Word, recognizing that we cannot even ask the question about inerrancy without confessing our willingness to submit believingly to the lordship of Christ who speaks through the written Word. This posture will prevent any self-determined approaches to Scripture which either affirm or reject its authority and infallibility according to criteria which are not themselves derived from working under the Word. It will also free our discussion of biblical inerrancy from the paralyzing fear that the ability of Christ to speak through the Scripture depends upon our defense of its exhaustive inerrancy.

Second, he argues that we are not exegetically authorized to teach anything more than a "functional inerrancy" doctrine--the Scripture unfailingly and invariably functions to communicate the message it was designed to communicate to the church. We are not permitted to draw the conclusion that exhaustive inerrancy is necessary to the profitable fulfillment of this function. This conclusion only misdirects the discussion toward an unprofitable and distracting "dispute over words." This does not mean that we may adopt a "limited inerrancy" view which speaks of the inerrancy of Scripture only in those matters which focus upon faith and practice. It only means that the message of every passage of Scripture is what matters when it comes to the function of Scripture in communicating God's Word.

Third, he concludes that this "functional inerrancy" position is best able to deal with the hermeneutical dimension of

the doctrine of Scripture. It allows us the freedom and flexibility to judge the profitability of Scripture in communicating its message in careful conformity to the *kinds of texts* of which it is comprised.

The best resolution of the inerrancy debate, therefore, is one which affirms the profitability and success of the biblical text in communicating its message. This view guards that which is essential to any doctrine of Scripture, namely, the full divine authority and inspiration of the biblical Word. But it does not do so at the price of denying the humanity of the written word which the Spirit is pleased to use in disclosing God's will.

II. *A Critical Examination of the "Functional Inerrancy" Position*

Having summarized the position of "functional inerrancy" as it has been comprehensively set forth by Pinnock and Farrow, we must now address the question posed in our introduction. Is this position an unwise and unwarranted attenuation of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy or does it provide a helpful resolution of the "battle for the Bible?" Do we find in the notion of "functional inerrancy" a helpful way out of the alleged problems which attend any doctrine of biblical inerrancy?

A. *The Contribution of this Position*

My answer to this question will be largely negative; the doctrine of "functional inerrancy" is indeed an unwise and unwarranted attentuation of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. But before indicating the reasons for rejecting this position, it is only fair that some of its laudable features be acknowledged. If our overall judgment of the inadequacy of this position is to be properly balanced, these features deserve recognition.

The first laudable feature of the "functional inerrancy" position is its polemic against a certain *rationalism* that sometimes characterizes discussions of biblical inerrancy. Some defenders of biblical inerrancy have tended to establish the reliability of the Bible upon the basis of "evidences"

that are considered rationally compelling. Once these "evidences" for Scriptural inerrancy and reliability have been set forth, and the authority of the Bible as the true Word of God vindicated, then it is possible to argue upon the basis of an assured Scripture to equally assured conclusions for the church's confession and theology. However, if the inerrancy of the Bible has not been vindicated according to this procedure, we have no sure basis for claiming to know anything true in respect to the knowledge of God and ourselves.

Now it is undoubtedly true that our confessional or theological affirmations, based as they must be upon biblical teaching, do depend for their validity and truth upon a reliable Bible. Anyone who denies the infallibility of the Bible will have to reckon with the inescapable consequences of that denial for any claims made with an appeal to biblical texts. Nonetheless, were the recognition of the Bible's reliability and authority to rest finally upon an appeal to extrabiblical or even biblical "evidences," it would be inherently tenuous. As Pinnock to some extent and Farrow more emphatically argue, this would be a virtual denial of the *final* authority of the Bible, since it would posit extrabiblical canons or criteria as fundamental arbiters of all truth, including biblical truth. Then, the ostensible affirmation made of the reliability and authority of the Bible would be "suspended" upon another foundation, more basic and secure, and one would forever withhold from the Word spoken through the text of Scripture the unconditional and absolute obedience of faith.[46]

To put the matter a bit differently, many defenders of biblical inerrancy have tied this doctrine closely to an apologetic like that propounded by Warfield. For Warfield an inerrant Bible, inerrant at least in the autographa, was an indispensable starting point for all theological work and affirmation. The Bible was--and in this Warfield was certainly correct--the epistemological key to any orthodox theology; without a reliable and true text to which to appeal, the theologian was building his theological house upon sand. And yet, for Warfield, the reliability and certainty of the Bible did not rest simply upon an appeal to Scripture's own

self-testimony, but also upon rational proofs and evidences. In his apologetics, Scripture as the norm for all theological affirmation, was itself subject to rational vindication.[47] This approach, as Farrow properly avers, is self-defeating, for it denies the uniquely compelling and self-authenticating character of the Bible as the Word of God. If, as the believer confesses, it is God who speaks by means of the written Word, there is no standpoint outside of the circle of faith and this confession from which to determine whether it is indeed his Word that is being spoken in Scripture.

Farrow in particular points out the fallacy of this approach to the defense of biblical inerrancy. It is an approach which permits the "believer" the option of working apart from the Word in order to establish a solid basis for "working under the Word." This involves, however, the unacceptable posture of neutrality toward the Word until and to the extent that it has been demonstrated to be worthy of our trust and submission. It posits the ultimacy of an "independent human judgment" which is hypothetically free of an active personal commitment to the Lord who speaks through the Word. Both Farrow and Pinnock have rightly identified this rationalist apologetics that has often accompanied defenses of the inerrancy of the Bible.[48] They correctly argue that such apologetics virtually places the Word under the scrutiny of objective scholarship and rational considerations. And in so doing the Bible itself is stripped of its ultimacy and authority as the written revelation of God.

A second and related feature of the position of "functional inerrancy" is its insistence that the reliability and inerrancy of the Bible are integrally linked to its function in addressing us with the Word of God. The doctrine of "functional inerrancy" constitutes a broadside attack upon *formalism* in the doctrine of Scripture, the view which brackets off the question of Scripture's usefulness in revealing God's Word to his people until it has first established its reliability.

It cannot be denied that the written Word is the Word of and concerning Christ and that a believing acknowledgment of its authority must be correlated with a recognition and

submission to Christ's lordship through this Word. Any failure to reckon with the fact that these Scriptures were given to make the believer wise unto salvation through Christ, and that only in their fulfillment of this function are they properly acknowledged to be the Word of God, threatens to divorce the written Word from the living Word who is Christ. In this respect the Christian confession of the Bible as the Word of God is not to be identified with a formal affirmation of biblical authority apart from a believing and obedient submission to Christ who is the true *scopus Scripturae*.

To the extent that the position of "functional inerrancy" warns us against a formalism in the affirmation of biblical authority, it is to be welcomed and deserves a hearing. The Christian confession concerning the Bible is not to be identified with a formal subscription to the authority of the canonical writings, identical in form but not in content to a "Judaistic" affirmation of the authority of writings which do not serve to communicate the knowledge of Christ. The Christian confidence in the reliability and truth of the written Word is integrally joined to its confidence in Him who is the way, the truth and the life. Only in this way does the Christian confession of the Bible preserve itself from bibliolatry and fixture upon the words of Scripture apart from their serviceability to their purpose.

Certainly, Pinnock and Farrow underestimate the extent to which this has been recognized in traditional defences of biblical inerrancy. Those who affirm the trustworthiness and infalliblity of the Bible have done so out of a genuine regard for the knowledge of Christ; they have recognized that the only Christ knowable to us or needing to be known is the "Christ of the Scriptures." And yet, in the attempt to safeguard and to defend the text of Scripture against unbelieving criticism and rationalistic attack, some adherents of the doctrine of inerrancy have not made this sufficiently clear. Sometimes the impression has been given that it is enough to affirm biblical inerrancy, and that the confession born out of faithful reading of Scripture is a matter of secondary importance or one which will take care of itself, provided

the veracity of the Scriptural Word is secured.

A third and closely related feature of the position of "functional inerrancy" is the emphasis given to the *Holy Spirit* as the one who bears witness to the Word and illumines the mind of the reader to understand what is written. Though, as we shall see, this position does an injustice to the Spirit's operation in the inspiration of Scripture, it does introduce into the forefront of the discussion of biblical inerrancy a neglected aspect of the doctrine of Scripture-- the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Without wholly endorsing Pinnock's development of this testimony, particularly his suggestion that the Spirit may lead the reader of Scriptural texts "beyond" what is given in the text or that the Spirit works "alongside" the written Word, he has called attention to the neglect of the Spirit's operation in many evangelical discussions of biblical inerrancy. It is absolutely vital to a proper affirmation of the authority of Scripture to recognize that it was given through the Spirit's work in the original writing of the Bible by its human authors. But it is equally vital that the Spirit's work in authenticating this inspired Word as the true Word of God be developed. Only in this way is there a proper and substantial basis for the believing acceptance of these canonical writings as the veritable Word of God. Only the Spirit of God can confirm the things of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:6-13); and only in the context of the "internal testimony of the Spirit" are we able to maintain the self-verifying and compelling authority of the written Word. Though the Spirit's work in illumining the mind of the present reader is also of great importance, it is based upon and derives its significance from this (logically) prior work of testifying through the Word that it is "from God."[49]

And lastly, the *hermeneutical* dimension which must play a part in any understanding of biblical inerrancy is properly emphasized in the writings of Pinnock and Farrow. It is not necessary to endorse the whole of their argument with respect to the "humanity" of Scripture in order to appreciate their proper emphasis upon what I would term the *creatureliness* of the written Word. God does

"accommodate" himself to our capacity in addressing his people; he does employ the medium of human language with all of its peculiarities and real limitations. Any recognition of this creatureliness, that God has been pleased to use the medium of human language in historical circumstances to communicate his Word to us, will require careful attention to the kind of language employed and to those methods of exegesis consistent with that language.

Here defenders of biblical inerrancy have fallen prey at times to an approach to Scripture which "flattens" the biblical texts, treating them all as of one piece and downplaying the significance of the Bible's language and *literature*. Fearing the denial of any propositional content to the biblical texts and message, and recognizing the fatal consequences of biblical criticism for the reality and truth of the biblical accounts, these defenders have sometimes developed a doctrine of inerrancy that bypasses the important differences between historical, poetic, wisdom, parabolic and epistolary genre in the biblical writings. Any understanding of inerrancy must be comprehensive enough in its formulation and nuances to cover the way in which all the biblical texts, whatever their particular literary style or form, are "inerrant" in all that they teach and affirm. One reason why Pinnock and Farrow reject what they term a doctrine of "strict" inerrancy and opt for a "functional" inerrancy position is their discontent with definitions of inerrancy which do not display sufficient regard for the *kind* of writings which comprise Holy Scripture and the corresponding *kind of reliability* consistent with these writings.[50]

B. *The Inadequacy of this Position*

Despite these helpful and in some respects praiseworthy features of the doctrine of "functional inerrancy," there are a number of important considerations which indicate that it does not provide a resolution to the "battle for the Bible."

Inspiration and Inerrancy

A key problem in the discussions of Pinnock and Farrow is their failure to develop a doctrine of inspiration and to consider adequately its significance for biblical inerrancy.

This is a striking lacuna in view of the historic discussions of biblical inerrancy, most of which appeal to the doctrine of inspiration as the basis for an affirmation of Scriptural reliability. In these discussions biblical inerrancy has been judged a necessary and inescapable inference from the reality of Scripture's divine authorship. But Pinnock and Farrow, though they deal with the subject of inspiration, fail to reckon with the consequences of such inspiration for biblical infallibility.

It is interesting to note, for example, that Pinnock and Farrow treat the traditional view of verbal inspiration as equivalent in most of its formulations to a dictation view. They find such a view, which Farrow in particular terms a "Philonian" view of inspiration and Pinnock a "prophetic" view, to be inconsistent with the obvious human authorship of the Scriptural writings with all that such authorship entails. But this hardly does justice to the development of the doctrine of "organic inspiration," which sought simultaneously to affirm the divine authorship of the Bible and the full-orbed contribution of its human authors. This notion of an inspiration in which the Spirit of God sovereignly superintended the writing of Scripture, without suppressing or bypassing all the elements which pertain to its human authorship, is given short-shrift by both of these writers. Pinnock contends that it depends upon a faulty Calvinistic view of the divine sovereignty and human instrumentality, one which minimizes and delimits the freedom of the human authors.[51] Farrow maintains that it is inconsistent with the full humanity of the written Word of God and goes further in its understanding of the divine authorship of Scripture than Scripture itself requires in its own self-testimony.[52]

Unfortunately, though Farrow does deal with some of the biblical evidence for the doctrine of inspiration, Pinnock hardly considers those passages which speak directly or indirectly to this question. This is especially striking, since so much depends upon the understanding of these passages when it comes to evaluating the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. As it is, neither Pinnock nor Farrow appears willing to go beyond what traditionally has been termed a

"dynamic" view of inspiration. In this view the inspiration of Scripture does not pertain to its writing but to the authors who wrote and the teaching communicated in the fallible form of their writing. But this is a position which is not compatible with those Scriptural passages which ascribe a divine Authorship to *that which is written*.[53]

Form and Content

Similarly, Pinnock and Farrow, despite their protestations to the contrary, permit a dichotomy or dualism between the *form* and *content* of Scripture. Because in their view of the inspiration of Scripture, this inspiration extends only to the message communicated and to the usefulness of the Scriptural texts to communicate that message, they are quite open to a position which contends that this message may be unfailingly and inerrantly communicated in the form of texts which themselves are "errant." They are careful to limit the range of such "error," terming it "inconsequential" in matters of detail that do not prevent the "communicative design," to employ Farrow's terminology, from being effectively transmitted. Nevertheless, they have opened the door rather widely to a view which separates the "errant" form of the biblical texts from the "inerrant content" or message. In this way, they argue, we can affirm the Word of truth in Scripture without falling prey to the temptation to be diverted by a "dispute over words."

This proposed solution of the "battle for the Bible" is no solution at all, however. For how are we to understand this kind of distinction between the Word of truth in Scripture and the words of the texts of Scripture which are at some points errant and unreliable? This posits an untenable dualism between a *suggestio verborum* and a *suggestio rerum*. Not only does it depend upon the fallacy that "to err is human," assuming that the employment of human authors and the sanctification of human, creaturely langauge to the purpose of divine revelation *requires* human weakness and error, but it also separates the Word of truth in Scripture from the words of Scripture. This is quite unacceptable in at least two respects.

First, it ignores again the rather patent fact that inspiration has to do with the *writing* of Scripture and with the *product* of that writing, the biblical texts. Though it may seem too obvious to require emphasis, it is the biblical text or texts to which the biblical authors refer when they speak of Scripture's inspiration.[54] The texts are God-breathed and what we say about them we say about their divine Author. To respond that any employment of human authors in the production of Scripture will inescapably involve some error, because it involves an "accommodation" on God's part to the capacity of those whom he uses in communicating his Word, attributes to the notion of accommodation something which it does not necessarily entail--an accommodation to and employment of human error. The reason biblical inerrantists have insisted upon the errorlessness of the biblical texts and words is that these are the only media of the divine communication in Scripture. We cannot arbitrarily distinguish between form and content; these interpenetrate or are mutually dependent. Though it is true that the Word of truth is not simply to be identified with these words, taken atomistically and apart from their relation to their context, to the history of revelation, to their grammatical and literary features and the like, it is essential to acknowledge that the Word of truth is given to us in no other wise than in these words or divinely inspired texts.

Second, this kind of dichotomy between form and content grants to the interpreter of Scripture an authority and task that are not rightfully his. Rather than yielding the posture of humble submission and standing under the texts of Scripture, this position requires the impossible of the reader of Scripture--he must determine the point of separation between the text's message and its fallible form. The interpreter must wield the knife of exegesis in such a way as to determine "inconsequential error" where it exists and to detect which elements of the text are indispensable and which are not to the communication of its message.

In this connection, there is a striking resemblance between the position of "functional inerrancy" and the "instrumentalism" of a neo-orthodox view of Scripture.

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Though neither Pinnock nor Farrow want to permit the kind of separation between the Word of revelation and the words of Scripture which characterized neo-orthodoxy's view of Scripture, they leave themselves vulnerable to this kind of understanding. Their polemic against a "sacred preserve of words" and a view of inspiration which applies to the texts of Scripture, is reminiscent of Barth's polemic against Protestantism's "paper pope" and "formalistic" view of Scriptural authority.

Defining Inerrancy

A further problem in the position of "functional inerrancy" is its equivocation on the nature of inerrancy. The impression is given that Pinnock and Farrow have a view of inerrancy in mind, which they term somewhat pejoratively a "strict" or "exhaustive" view, which is so conceived that no fair interpreter could possibly commend it. It is alleged that those who adhere to a doctrine of biblical inerrancy ignore the "creatureliness" of the biblical text; that they hold to a literal dictation view of Scriptural inspiration; that they ignore the significance of the grammatical, literary and historical characteristics of the biblical text; and that they are fixed upon a view of "inerrancy" borrowed from the textbooks of natural science or critical, historical scholarship. But this is not the case and, though sometimes there is a begrudging acknowledgment of this fact on Pinnock's and Farrow's part, one has the suspicion that the argument is built upon the assumption of a view of inerrancy that is a "straw man."

It is remarkable, therefore, that Pinnock and Farrow still do want to retain some notion of inerrancy, since they correctly perceive that it is integrally joined to the issues of Scriptural authority and inspiration. Pinnock, for example, argues frequently that we must approach every text of Scripture with humility and reverence, with the presumption that it is true and will not mislead in any way. As he remarks in a characteristic passage, "If inerrancy means that the Bible can be trusted to teach the truth in all it affirms, then inerrancy is what we must hold to" (225). He even affirms the "careful and responsible" statement of the International Council on

Biblical Inerrancy. Similarly, Farrow is anxious to avoid a separation between the inerrant message of Scripture and its textual form, arguing as well for a humble submission to the text and a readiness to receive whatever it teaches or affirms.

Why, then, do they reject so emphatically a doctrine of inerrancy that applies to the whole of Scripture and every part? Why are they so ready to speak of "technical" or "inconsequential" errors in the biblical texts? Why do they insist, for example, that phenomena such as observational language, a "common" or even coarse literary style and language, the recounting of historical events in a non-scientific, "preachy" form (the gospels, for example), involve the biblical writers in "errors" of various kinds? Perhaps the likeliest answer, paradoxical though it may seem, is that they operate with a definition of errorlessness that is borrowed from some of those "strict" inerrantists whose views they are opposing. But this is to bypass one of the key questions in the whole discussion of inerrancy--can we not define biblical inerrancy on biblical terms in such a way that these phenomena are not properly speaking "errors" at all? This is, *inter alia*, precisely what the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy's statement on hermeneutics has sought to do.

III. *Some Aspects of a Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy*

It is not enough, however, to point out the contribution as well as the inadequacy of the position of "functional inerrancy" in respect to the "battle for the Bible." We must also consider what shape an affirmation of biblical inerrancy ought to take in the light of our criticism of this view.

A. *Method of Approach*

Certainly, one of the most contested and important aspects of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is focused upon the method of approach taken to this issue. We have already indicated that no approach is acceptable which does not begin with a confession of Scriptural authority and which does not endeavor to provide a biblically based account of the reliability and infallibility of the Bible. We must operate

self-consciously within the "circle of faith," allowing the Scripture's own testimony to determine our viewpoint.[55]

But having said this, it must also be admitted that this is one of the most controverted areas of discussion in respect to biblical inerrancy. Does the Bible teach a view of itself that requires the idea of inerrancy? Is the doctrine of inerrancy an unwarranted inference from the inspiration of Scripture, one which is then deductivistically and improperly applied to the whole of Scripture? And does this allegedly deductivisitic procedure involve forcing the textual phenomena of Scripture to fit the procrustean bed of a theoretically precise notion of inerrancy? May we even speak of a unified Scriptural view of itself or a doctrine of Scripture that covers all the biblical texts without exception? These questions have been much disputed in discussions of biblical inerrancy, some arguing for the legitimacy of developing a doctrine of Scripture and applying it to all the biblical texts, others arguing that we have to deal with the texts inductively without preconceived notions concerning their reliability.

There are several points that need to be made in order to clarify this issue of our method of approach to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

The first point is an observation based upon the Scripture's own witness. There are passages in the Scripture which not only authorize but require an understanding of the inspiration and reliability of the whole of Scripture. The historic doctrine of the "plenary" and "verbal" inspiration of the canonical writings is not an illegitimate inference from these passages, but one which these passages demand. Frequently, when it is argued that defenders of biblical inerrancy operate in an illicitly deductivistic fashion when they develop a doctrine which covers all the biblical phenomena, it is not recognized that these Scriptural passages themselves authorize the "deduction" that all Scripture is the inspired, authoritative Word of God.

This does not mean that a doctrine of Scripture based upon such comprehensive biblical affirmations may ignore the particulars of the biblical writings. Any biblically

authorized doctrine of Scripture must attend not only to those passages which speak comprehensively of the Bible as a whole, but also those which pertain more particularly to specific biblical texts. This is in fact the procedure followed by defenders of biblical inerrancy like Warfield; their argument is based not simply upon an appeal to certain *loci classici* like II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:19-21, but also upon the frequent references in the Scriptures which treat the biblical texts as God's reliable Word and countenance no suggestion that elements in these texts are "errant."

Furthermore, it is quite correct to argue that any definition of biblical inerrancy, based upon proper procedures of deduction or induction, must comport with the kind of texts which comprise the Scriptures. We are quite prepared to grant that some definitions of inerrancy have been insufficiently attentive to the hermeneutical issues of text types, grammatical and historical features of the biblical writings, and the obvious creatureliness of the biblical writings. But this is not a sufficient basis for maintaining that no doctrine of biblical inerrancy which applies to all the phenomena of the biblical writings is authorized by Scripture itself.[56]

Thus, our method of approach to the question of biblical inerrancy must be one that submits itself to Scripture's own testimony, whether that testimony is addressed comprehensively to all of the Scriptural writings or particularly to individual texts. It must also be submissive to the testimony of Scripture to other more limited portions of the canon, as well as to the specific significance of inerrancy in respect to the literary features of the diverse writings which together comprise canonical Scripture.

Any doctrine of biblical inerrancy, therefore, must be based upon the entirety of the biblical witness. It must attend to those passages which speak comprehensively of the canonical Scriptures as well as those which speak of specific portions of the canon. It must also be sensitive to the diversity of literary genre which comprise the Scriptures and which bear upon our understanding of biblical reliability. Furthermore, it must be consistent with the Scripture's own use of and appeal to Scripture. Only in this fashion are we

able to test the church's historic confession of the infallibility and trustworthiness of the written Word.

B. *Inspiration and Inerrancy*

Since our view of Scripture must itself be Scriptural, we cannot avoid dealing with those texts which address in a comprehensive way the nature of Scriptural inspiration and authority. Though this is not the place to engage in the kind of extensive exegesis of these passages that characterizes the work of scholars like Warfield and Young, we do need to make some observations and draw some conclusions here. What does the Scripture say about its inspiration and what consequences does this have for the doctrine of inerrancy?

To deal with this question we will begin with a brief consideration of several key texts which relate to the doctrine of inspiration and then consider some additional features of Scripture's testimony concerning itself.

II Timothy 3:16,17: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (NASB)

This passage is a *locus classicus* for understanding the doctrine of inspiration. There are several relevant points which it authorizes us to make.

1. Whatever we are to understand by the descriptive term, "inspired" or "God-breathed," it applies to "all" or "every" Scripture.[57] The apostle Paul clearly wishes to affirm something that obtains in respect to *all* of those "holy writings" (*hiera grammata*, vs. 12) which are able to make one wise unto salvation in Christ. Though he does not delimit or specify which writings he has in mind in the sense of listing the Old Testament canonical books, it is apparent that he means to include all Scripture, all the writings which together comprise the canon, in this designation. Furthermore, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the terms employed in verses 12 and 13 refer to the *writings themselves and not to their authors*. It is the *product* of inspiration, the canonical Scriptures, and not the *process* of

authorship, which is here described as "inspired." Any doctrine of inspiration which does not acknowledge this clear feature of this text does not do it justice.[58]

2. Though it is true that the designation "inspired" or "God-breathed" does not provide us with a theoretically precise and transparent explanation of the *how* or the *manner* of God's working in the authorship of Scripture, it does say that the writings themselves are to be received and honored as "God-breathed" writings. Warfield's thorough and masterful analysis of the meaning of this *hapax legomenon* continues to stand the test of time.[59] In those rare, extra-biblical occurrences of the term, it expresses the idea of production by God. As a compound verbal form ending in *-tos* with *theos*, it is analogous to other such compounds which, with few exceptions, express an effect produced by God's activity. Furthermore, as Warfield rightly argued, there is nothing more native to the biblical understanding of God's works than the idea of something being the product of the sovereign and creative breath of the Almighty.

Thus, we are on firm ground when we understand this designation to refer to the Scriptural writings as the product of divine Authorship, the effect of God's creative breath. They are given to us through the creative operation of their divine Author and are to be received and acknowledged as such. It simply will not do, as Farrow argues, to reduce this primary signification of "God-breathed" to an operation which enables the Scriptural writers to be adequate teachers of divine wisdom.[60] Though Farrow is undoubtedly correct--and this Warfield, for example, was quick to affirm--that this is not to be understood as a kind of divine "dictation," he fails to recognize that this designation refers to the writings themselves and is confirmed by the way the biblical writers appeal to such writings as the Word of God.

3. It is the reality of Scripture's "God-breathedness" which underlies its "profitability" "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." It is proper to emphasize this practical function of "all Scripture" in order to avoid the formalism we addressed earlier in the

doctrine of Scriptural inspiration and authority. What is worthy of special note here, however, is the way in which these verses express the *sufficiency* of all "God-breathed" Scripture; such Scripture serves a variety of functions in communicating the knowledge of the truth and comprises a sufficient standard for the equipment of the man of God for *every* good work. There is, consequently, no legitimacy to any reading of this text which would arbitrarily limit those matters on which the Scripture speaks with divine authority. This text states that it speaks with divine authority on all matters on which it chooses to speak, whether these matters pertain to God's will, his acts in history, his promises and covenants, and the like. And however true it may be that the Scripture does not choose to speak of some matters or speaks of them only so far as is consistent with its nature, no one may prematurely proscribe the limits of its utterances by restricting its authority to its "redemptive center" in distinction from its "periphery."[61]

II Peter 1:19-21: And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

1. What Paul positively affirms in the statement, "all Scripture is God-breathed," the apostle Peter here affirms in a negative affirmation, "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." At the very least, this passage teaches that the prophetic utterances were not finally the product of their human authors but were the product of their divine Author, the Holy Spirit. Here again the emphasis is upon the divine origin and consequent surety of the Word of God through the prophets.[62]

2. No more than in II Timothy 3:16 does this text give us a theoretically defined doctrine of inspiration. It does not tell us how exactly the Spirit "moved" (*pheromenoi*) those whose

speaking was "from God." However, it is noteworthy that terms such as "leading" (*agomenoi*, used of all believers in Rom. 8:14) or "teaching" (*didaskoo*) are not employed, but a term is used which suggests a special and intermittent work of the Holy Spirit. This term denotes a "being borne along" by the Spirit, a being driven to speak and to utter the message of the Spirit. At the very least it describes a special work of the Spirit in the production of the prophetic writings, such that these writings bear the authority and reliability of the divine Author. It is also interesting to note that the language used of "men speaking" indicates that this "being borne along" by the Spirit was no mechanical process but incorporated the full humanity and agency of the prophetic authors as well. Their words, the words they spoke, were by virtue of the Spirit's operation words "from God."

3. A disputed question in the understanding of this passage relates to its applicability to all Scriptural writings. It is frequently argued, as does Farrow, that the reference is simply to those Old Testament prophecies which speak directly of Christ and the hope of his coming. In defense of this view, it is noted that the direct reference in vss. 19-21 is to "prophecy." It is also noted that the preceding context for these verses deals with the history of salvation described by the prophets. However, there is nothing to prevent taking this passage in a distributive sense, as *pars pro toto*. Peter's designation of the "word of prophecy" here relates to the context concerning the coming of Christ, a coming which was particularly emphasized by the prophets in the Old Testament. Nonetheless, there are other places in the Old Testament which refer rather directly to Christ's coming, for example the Psalms, and Peter himself appeals to one of these in I Peter 2:7. It is also consistent with the exhortation in this passage to "pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place," that the reader pay attention to the whole of the Old Testament Scripture. There is nothing in Peter's writings which would suggest that he drew any sharp line of demarcation between the prophetic word and other portions of the Old Testament (or New Testament) writings.[63]

Matthew 5:18: For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

In his brief review of a number of key passages which relate to the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy, Farrow brushes this passage aside as having little to contribute to the discussion. Pressed literally, he maintains, it would place the matter of Scriptural reliability on the level of textual criticism and this would be absurd.[64] This is too easy a dismissal of this passage and its contribution to our understanding of Scripture.

1. Contrary to Farrow's suggestion that Jesus is simply affirming the divine ordination of all the commandments in the Mosaic covenant, the reference to "the Law" in this context is far more likely a comprehensive reference to the Old Testament Scripture. This is most consistent with his introductory declaration in the preceding verse, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." It is also consistent with the concluding statement of verse 18, "until all is accomplished." Jesus is affirming the inviolability of the whole of the Law, that it cannot fail in any particular and will surely be accomplished or fulfilled in all that it taught and promised.

2. Though it would be an error to press the reference to "the smallest letter or stroke" in a way which focused upon the issue of textual transmission, the emphasis upon the inviolability of the whole and of every, even the least, part of the Law cannot be separated from the text and inscripturation of the Law. Granting the "figurative" force of this expression does not authorize a disregard for the clear implication of this passage. For certainly the text requires us to say that the inviolability and unfailingness of the Law is integrally tied to the fact that in its whole extent and in all of its parts-- including the smallest "letter or stroke"--it is accurately expressed in the sacred writings. It is unwarranted to separate Jesus' affirmation here concerning the Law from the reliability of the text of the Law, down to its smallest part. In fact Jesus illustrates and confirms his affirmation concerning the Law by means of an unmistakable expression of confidence in respect to the writings and text which communicate the Law.

3. It is also worthy of note that the respect which Jesus here shows toward the whole of the Old Testament Scripture, as well as to its smallest part, is consistent with his usual approach to the inviolability and divine trustworthiness of the Scriptures. In his own appeal to Scripture (cf. Matt. 22:29,31-32; Mark 12:24,27; Matt. 26:53-54, etc.), there is no suggestion of any other approach to the authority of the canonical Scripture.

John 10:35: If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?

1. It cannot be denied that the general force of this passage relates to the indefectible authority of Scripture. In the context of a dispute with the Jews over Jesus' claim to be the "Son" of God, he appeals to Scripture itself in order to settle the dispute. The Scripture stands, then, as an unbroken and unbreakable authority whose teaching cannot be contravened.

2. There is some dispute, however, as to how the term commonly translated "broken," *lutheenai*, is to be understood. It may variously be rendered "to destroy, to abolish, to do away with, to repeal."[65] In its context here it would appear to mean that the authority and teaching of Scripture cannot be annulled or withstood; Scripture is inviolable in the sense that it cannot be denied or put aside. What is written in Scripture may not be "broken" for it is binding upon us and is secure against every attack or criticism.

3. It should also be noted that the dispute between Jesus and the Jews, in the context of which the appeal is made to the use of "gods" in Psalm 82:6, hinges upon the Psalmist's use of a particular descriptive term. It is this use of the term "gods" in Scripture which clinches the argument from Scripture. Without concluding that every word or textual feature is to be "flattened" out and treated as of equal weight in the communication of the Scriptural text's meaning, we may conclude that, as a rule, any particular textual feature is an integral part of that which comprises "Scripture" and carries

this inviolable and unbroken divine authority.[66] The unbreakable authority of Scripture, which requires the obedience and submission of faith, pertains not simply to the message or communicative design but to the Scriptural text itself with all its particulars.

"Scripture Says"; "God Says"

One element of Scripture's self-testimony that has figured prominently in historical articulations of biblical inerrancy has been the *use* or *appeal* which Scripture makes to Scripture. In addition to the testimony of key passages which refer to the whole of the Scripture in their description of its authority and reliability, the way Scriptural texts are cited bears significantly upon the question of how Scripture understands itself.

It is noteworthy, in this respect, that neither Pinnock nor Farrow address this appeal to the text of Scripture by Scripture itself. This is striking in view of the prominence of this line of evidence in Warfield's treatment of the doctrine of Scripture.

Though this subject is worthy of independent study, we only wish to observe here that this use and appeal to Scriptural texts by Scripture itself confirms that view of Scripture which receives it in the whole and in the part as the written Word of God. That is to say, the Scripture itself repeatedly and consistently treats the text as "God-breathed" Scripture, the product of God's creative breath, the Word given by the Spirit through human authors, the word "from God." Furthermore, the Scripture nowhere countenances a critical or suspicious attitude toward the texts which comprise the canon, one which might differentiate between divine message and fallible form. There is no place given to the exercise of an independent critical judgment which distinguishes between the "center" and the "periphery," the "message" and the "form," the "soteric design" and the "verbal packaging."

Without endeavoring to be exhaustive, the following biblical phenomena are noteworthy in this respect. First, the New Testament's appeal to Scripture indicates that what the "Scripture says," "God says," and therefore the Scriptural Word is

accepted as inviolate and altogether trustworthy (e.g., Gal 3:8; Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:22; Acts 13:32-35; Matt. 19:4-5; Heb. 3:7; Acts 4:24-25; Heb. 1:6). There is in this appeal the conviction of an *identification* between the Scriptural text and the speaking of God which has profound implication for the manner in which the text is received and honored. This accounts for the appeal that can be made to features of the text that might otherwise appear incidental and yet which are of decisive significance for determining the will and purpose of God (e.g., John 10:35; Gal. 3:16). Second, the manner in which Scriptural texts are cited, particularly in predicative formulae such as *legei* or *pheesi* without an expressed subject, confirms the idea that the biblical text is recognized as God's written Word (e.g., Rom. 9:15; Rom. 15:10; Gal. 3:16; Eph. 4:8,14; I Cor. 6:16; I Cor. 15:27; II Cor. 6:2; Heb. 8:5; James 4:6). This comports perfectly with the teaching that the text itself, not the authors in some dynamical way, is the object of inspiration and comes, however true it may be that it is given to us by means of human instrumentality, with the authority of its divine Author. It reflects *the common* Scriptural treatment of Scripture as the Word of God. Third, this Scriptural respect for the text as the written Word of God manifests itself in the occasional designation of Scripture as the *logia* or "oracles" of God (Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12). Though this term (no more than the term "God-breathed,") does not provide a theoretical accounting of the relation between the divine and human authorship of the Scriptural Word, it acknowledges that the biblical texts are divinely authoritative utterances which must be received with that humility and obedience of faith which is due them. One can scarcely imagine a stronger way of expressing the divine authority and veracity of the biblical texts than to ascribe to them the status of "oracles" or utterances authored by God himself.

What is striking in this use of and appeal to Scripture by Scripture is that it *permits no suggestion of error of any kind at any point in the text of Scripture.*[67] Nor does it permit the identification of elements in the text of Scripture which are "insignificant" or "trivial" when judged by some criterion such as the "communicative design" of the text. Those who describe this view pejoratively as a "technical" or "strict"

view of inerrancy fail to recognize that Scripture itself testifies to a view which, by most standards, would appear to be quite strict and even exhaustive. This should shape our construal or understanding of biblical inerrancy, not the fact that some alleged defenders of biblical inerrancy have developed unwarranted and overly "scientific" definitions of inerrancy which cannot and need not be defended. Those who insist, therefore, that *any* doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy necessarily entails ascribing features to the biblical texts that are anachronistic and inconsistent with their creatureliness arbitrarily and improperly preclude the development of a Scripturally defined doctrine of inerrancy.

C. *Defining Infallibility and Inerrancy*

One of the problems that has plagued discussions of biblical inerrancy, and as we have already suggested plagues the discussions of Pinnock and Farrow, is the precise meaning and definition of terms like "infallibility" and "inerrancy." Ambiguity and imprecision at this juncture have confused the debate about biblical authority rather seriously. This is evident when Pinnock distinguishes between "soteric" and "technical" inerrancy or Farrow between "functional" and "strict" inerrancy. It is also evident in the attempts that have been made to employ the term "infallibility," while rejecting the term "inerrancy."[68]

What we have seen thus far is that the Scriptures themselves do authorize a doctrine of inspiration which demands an affirmation of their reliability and trustworthiness. The Bible is the written Word of God in the whole and in the part and it is to be received as the "utterance" of its divine Author at every point. There is not the slightest hint in the Scriptures themselves that it is only the message that is inspired and reliable, not the texts themselves. Nor is there any justification for distinguishing between that which is infallibly true and the fallible form in which that truth is transmitted. It remains, however, for us to provide a general and precise definition of what we mean by this reliability and trustworthiness of Scripture.

Before setting forth such a definition, it should be noted that a study of these terms indicates that the stronger term is "infallible," and that "inerrant" is but one feature of what it means for something to be "infallible." This is especially important to observe, since some have argued for the term "infallible" and against the term "inerrant," on the basis of the claim that the latter term is more precise and exacting than the former.[69] It is argued that we should speak only of the "infallibility" of the Bible in matters of faith and practice, and drop the term "inerrancy" altogether, since it is so easily misconstrued and taken in a direction inconsistent with the biblical texts themselves. The problem with this suggestion is that the term "infallible" is not only a stronger term but also a more general term than is "inerrant." Another way of putting this would be to say that infallibility entails inerrancy, but inerrancy, being the weaker or more specific designation, does not entail infallibility. For Scripture to be "infallible" means that it is "not capable of error," "not liable to fail," or "reliable." For Scripture to be "inerrant," however, simply means that it "does not err."[70]

Those who propose, therefore, that we continue to speak of the "infallibility" of the Bible, but not of its "inerrancy," fail to reckon with the meaning of the former term. It is not possible to say of the Bible that it is "infallible," at least not in any normal sense of the word, without also saying that it is "inerrant." Unless the term is qualified with the phrase, "in those matters which pertain to redemption or faith," an affirmation of infallibility requires an affirmation of inerrancy. Furthermore, though it has been argued that "inerrant" is a term that is not always applicable to the biblical texts which are parabolic or hortative (how can a parable or a command be said to be "inerrant"?), this argument misses the mark.[71] To say that the Scriptures are in their entirety inerrant is only to say that they nowhere assert or teach anything "errant"; it is not to say that this is necessarily the most appropriate category with which to describe every biblical text.

Another difficulty arises when the terms "infallible" or "inerrant" are applied to Scripture or the biblical texts, but with the qualifying phrases, "entirely trustworthy for the

purposes for which it was given,"[72] or "when correctly interpreted in terms of their meaning in their cultural setting and the purpose for which they were written."[73] These phrases do not sufficiently guard against an arbitrary delimitation of the scope of infallibility. Though it is quite correct to insist that the inerrancy or reliability of the biblical text is related to the kind of text that it is and the way in which it must be understood, this kind of qualifying statement may be used to limit the reliability of Scripture to its "redemptive content" or some other more narrowly defined focus *before* the text itself is heard or allowed to determine the range of matters on which it speaks. The affirmation of biblical reliability and infallibility applies to the biblical texts in respect to all that they teach and affirm; the scope of this teaching may only be determined by means of a careful and faithful exegesis of the biblical texts, not by means of a presupposed and narrow "purpose" which is said to be exclusively the interest of these texts.

Without complicating matters further, a biblically warranted doctrine of infallibility claims that *the biblical texts are unfailingly and invariably true in all that they teach and affirm about all those matters on which they choose to speak, whether doctrinal, ethical, historical, etc.* They are texts concerning which we may confess that we "believe without a doubt all things contained therein" (Belgic Confession). Stated more precisely in terms of their inerrancy, they are texts that do not "err" in any way whatever in all that they teach and affirm. There is no biblically authorized sense in which we may speak of their unreliability or "errancy," even when such "errancy" is allegedly of an "inconsequential" or "trivial" sort. Correctly understood--and this is always a matter of paying careful heed to the text or texts themselves-the biblical texts are altogether trustworthy and will not mislead or prove violable in any way.

D. *Further Observations*

It is often argued that defenders of biblical inerrancy are guilty of the fallacy of equivocation. They begin with a strong statement of biblical inerrancy, but qualify this statement in the face of contrary evidence. In so doing the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, at least in its original and strong

formulation, "dies the death of a thousand qualifications" and proves itself inadequate when confronted with the phenomena of the biblical texts.

However, this is in most instances an evaluation that unfairly ignores the way in which many defenders of biblical inerrancy have been very attentive to the biblical phenomena and have endeavored carefully to qualify what they mean by their affirmation of biblical inerrancy. Consistent with our argument and definition so far, we will also in what follows make several qualifying observations about biblical inerrancy that are consistent with Scripture's own witness concerning itself.

1. The inerrancy of the biblical text applies to its teaching or "doctrine," comprehensively considered as whatever the text affirms or teaches. In the older dogmatics, for example, a distinction was often drawn between the "normative" and the "historical" authority of Scripture (*autoritas historica et autoritas normative*). This distinction was drawn in order to acknowledge that not all that is set forth in the biblical texts is of one piece. There are reports of false statements or sinful actions made by godless persons, for example, that are constitutive of the biblical texts; these texts, though "historically true" in their accounting or record, are not "normatively true." They do not commend what they report. The infallibility and inerrancy of the biblical texts apply to these and all other biblical texts in respect to their teaching, and not to all that these texts recount irrespective of the context and meaning of the various elements of the biblical writings.

It is, of course, essential that any determination of what the biblical texts "affirm" or "teach" be resolved exegetically, according to the rules of historical-grammatical exegesis, and not according to some presupposed limitation of the content of all Scriptural texts. Many affirmations of biblical infallibility and inerrancy are attenuated by the qualification that this refers only to those matters on which Scripture focuses, namely, the redemptive relation between the Lord and his people. The "saving content," for example, of the biblical texts is said to be infallibly communicated through the Scripture; the "non-saving content," however, of the biblical texts

does not necessarily participate in the infallibility and reliability which only pertains to this *scopus Scripturae*. This manner of defining biblical inerrancy employs a narrow definition of Scripture's "purpose" to permit the conclusion that in many areas which may be unrelated or only indirectly related to this purpose the biblical texts may well be errant.

2. The inerrancy of the biblical text should not be "anachronistically" or "a-historically" defined. It is frequently argued that the term "inerrancy" suggests a kind of exactness, correctness, and specificity in the biblical texts that might meet the requirements of modern scientific accounting or historical records, but which are not characteristic of the biblical record. Because this is the case, it is further argued that the term should simply be dropped altogether. But this is a *non sequitur*. For something to be "inerrant," as we have seen, means that it "does not err." What it means for a text to "err" depends upon the kind of text it is and the kind of criteria which are legitimate in judging its reliability or correctness. When this is applied to the biblical texts, it means that we should not, indeed we may not, apply to these texts standards of scientific accuracy that are not properly applicable. Neither may we speak of an "errant" text because it does not meet a standard or employ a form of writing which is commonly employed today in historical or scientific texts.

3. The inerrancy of the biblical text is integrally related to its purpose and function. Though, as we have already argued at several points, this purpose and function may not be prematurely or arbitrarily limited, it is essential in addressing the issue of biblical inerrancy to bear in mind the importance of a text's purpose and function when affirming its reliability. The inerrancy of the biblical texts means that they are fully reliable when judged consistent with the purpose for which they were written. The biblical history exhibits careful and purposeful selection; it employs approximations when reporting numbers; it also displays a sometimes greater, and sometimes lesser, interest in chronological ordering of the material. It is simply illegitimate to deny the accuracy of the biblical texts on the basis of standards of historiography that ignore the purpose and function of the biblical writings.

4. The inerrancy of the biblical text is not adversely afffected by the employment of observational and phenomenological language in the biblical texts. There is no reason to be disturbed by this. It would be utterly inconsonant with the historical circumstances within which the biblical texts were written and the purpose for which they were written, that they should employ the language of scientific description and observation. Such language would hamper and even prevent the effectiveness of the biblical texts in their communication of the Word of God. The biblical texts no more err in their employment of common idiom and observational language than does the modern writer or speaker in his employment of the same.

Similarly, the inerrancy of the biblical texts does not entail a leveling of those literary features which clearly reflect the human author's peculiarities and circumstance. The language of the biblical texts varies in style, literary polish and sophistication. This is integral to the humanity or creatureliness of the written Word; the human writers are not automatons or amanuenses of the Spirit, but "writers" in the proper sense of the word whose abilities and limitations are expressed in what is written. The reliability and trustworthiness of the biblical texts, therefore, is not adversely affected by the range of style and language (in grammar, syntax or vocabulary) of their human authors.

5. It is absolutely essential that an affirmation of biblical infallibility and inerrancy not become an occasion for ignoring the issue of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. The doctrine of inerrancy does not tell us beforehand what kind of text or texts comprise the Scriptures. Neither does it tell us how to exegete these texts and what it means, respectively and variously, to describe an historical, poetic, parabolic, figurative, or epistolary text as "infallible" and "inerrant." Different kinds of biblical texts are infallible and reliable in their own way and in accord with standards germane to them. The inerrancy of the biblical text means that it is without error, true and altogether trustworthy in all that it teaches and affirms. This errorlessness and reliability, however, is always to be understood consistent with the applicable standards

which vary with the different kinds of texts that constitute Scripture. The biblical texts cannot be faulted for their failure to meet standards applicable to quite different literary genre.

This is also relevant to the charge often registered against the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, that it treats the Scriptures as a "sacred preserve of errorless words" and permits a kind of atomistic approach to every word in the biblical text as a "word of God." That inspiration is plenary and verbal, extending to the whole and to every part of the biblical text, does not mean, however, that it extends to the words of the text *in isolation*. Neither does it mean that the inerrancy of the biblical texts extends to the words apart from their syntactical and contextual relations which together constitute them meaningful human language.[74] The reliability and inerrancy of the biblical texts applies to the texts in their context, with their peculiar literary features, and in terms of their particular purpose and function (whether to inform, to inspire, to exhort, to admonish etc.).

6. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy does not mean that there are no problem passages in the Scriptures for which there is at present no solution. We have already argued that an affirmation of biblical inerrancy does not have to await an inductive investigation of all biblical texts. But it is equally true that it does not have to await the provision of a satisfactory resolution of every problem passage and alleged error that might be pointed out in these texts. What it requires is the rejection of any claim that the biblical texts err, whether in their account of historical events, their normative directives for the life of obedience, or their doctrinal affirmations, and that no solution which would resolve this error is possible. When such "errors" are alleged, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy requires that a solution be sought or an honest admission be made that no solution been found *thus far*.

This is itself a subject worthy of independent study. But several observations are in order. First, when the qualifying remarks we have made are borne in mind, many of the alleged "errors" in the biblical texts are not, properly speaking, errors at all. Second, the number of problems or difficulties in the

biblical texts is often exaggerated and it is not recognized that plausible solutions have already been suggested that remove the allegation of error or falsehood.[75] Third, lacking a plausible resolution of a difficulty or problem in the text, we should not endeavor to find a solution too hastily or resort to one which is implausible. It is a better policy to acknowledge as yet unresolved difficulties, without despairing ultimately of their resolution, than to attempt a resolution that has little to commend it. For a variety of reasons, there will never be a complete resolution of all the difficulties that have been identified in the biblical texts.[76] But this need not deter us from affirming the complete reliability and trustworthiness of the biblical texts; no such affirmation would be possible, were it required that an exhaustive induction of all biblical texts be accomplished as its precondition.

E. *Authority and Inerrancy*

One of the theses that is frequently set forth by Pinnock and Farrow in their development of the doctrine of "functional inerrancy" is that the authority of the written Word does not require, indeed is even impaired, by a strict view of biblical inerrancy. This is an important thesis that cannot go unchallenged, since the authority and inerrancy of Scripture are integrally related.

The problem with this thesis lies partly in its formulation. What Pinnock and Farrow seem to have in mind is a doctrine of biblical inerrancy that is based upon a *vindication* of the technical and verbal accuracy of all biblical texts. Since this allegedly "technical" and "exhaustive" doctrine of biblical inerrancy requires this kind of apologetical defense and vindication at every turn, the slightest breach in the dam threatens to unleash a flood of attacks upon biblical authority. Any demonstrable instance of a less than exhaustive inerrancy in the biblical texts would undermine the authority of Scripture. The problem with this formulation of the issue is twofold. First, it is not evident that a doctrine of "strict" inerrancy, to employ their terminology, requires the kind of apologetic that they presume. Surely, as Farrow himself argues, one could proceed from within the "circle" of faith and begin with the presupposition of a strict biblical inerrancy. This

presupposition could be defended simply by appealing to the Scriptures themselves. Second, it is again not clear what is meant by "strict" or "exhaustive" inerrancy. Since it is not evident that defenders of biblical inerrancy are committed to the kind of "strict" or "exhaustive" inerrancy that Pinnock and Farrow have in view, it is no more evident that the defense of this position is requisite to any continued affirmation of biblical inerrancy.

More disturbing, however, is the consequence of a limited view of biblical inerrancy, one which is restricted to the "function" or "soteric design" of the biblical testimony, for the authority of the Bible. Those who adopt a "functional" inerrancy position, like that espoused by Pinnock and Farrow, ascribe this authority to the divinely intended message which is given *through the biblical text*, but not to the texts themselves. It is the Word, to employ Farrow's formulation, that comes with divine authority, and not the words. Because this position presupposes a doctrine of inspiration which bears a striking resemblance to the "dynamic" view, it permits a separation between the authority of the Word and that of the words or texts themselves. This is an extremely problematic separation, since it is incompatible with the biblical doctrine of verbal inspiration which we have already elucidated and it ascribes authority, not to the words of the biblical texts which is customary in the Scriptures, but to the message conveyed by means of these texts. But this compromises the heart of any biblical affirmation of the reliability and authority of the words of Scripture--they become simply the all-too-human *vehicle* for the transmission of an authoritative message.

Furthermore, it becomes extremely difficult to retain a proper emphasis upon what Farrow terms "working under the Word." The reader of Scripture, whether believing scholar or ordinary believer, is placed in a position of having to arbitrate between the divinely authoritative message of Scripture and its oftentimes fallible form. It is impossible to see how this kind of arbitration could be conducted without the adoption of extra-biblical or non-textual criteria which would then be employed to "take the measure" of what is written. The interpreter of Scripture no longer in this situation "works under

the Word" but rather assumes the posture of standing over and apart from the written Word; he is ascribed the final authority to determine what the written text means to communicate by wielding the critical knife which separates between divine Word and human words. However, this is tantamount to a denial of the divine authority of the Word as it is given to us in the words of the biblical text. It cannot be correlated with a continued affirmation of *Sola Scriptura*, since it posits extra-biblical criteria as the final measure whereby to ascertain the divine content of the written Word.

It is only upon the basis of an ascription of reliability and infallibility to the texts themselves that the properly divine authority of the written Word can be retained. In this respect the position of "functional inerrancy" leaves itself unguarded against the development of a *scholarly priesthood* whose task and prerogative it is to ferret out the divine Word from the human words in which it is given to us. Thus, despite Farrow's and Pinnock's protestations to the contrary, the doctrine of "functional inerrancy" proves itself an inadequate basis upon which to affirm the church's historic confidence in the full reliability and trustworthiness, and correlative authority, of the biblical texts.

F. *Form and Content*

The most significant reason why "functional inerrancy" is, therefore, an unacceptable attenuation of biblical authority is its failure to see the integral relation between and inseparability of Scriptural form and content. Though we have touched upon this issue at several points in the preceding, it is necessary that we consider it now more directly.

One of the assumptions of those like Pinnock and Farrow who defend a "functional inerrancy" position, is that the employment of human language in the revelation of God's grace and will requires an accommodation to a creaturely form which must be, per definition, "errant." Accommodation entails error, even if only of the most inconsequential sort. Pinnock argues this most emphatically when he maintains that the true freedom and involvement of the human authors in the production of Scripture precludes any divine superintendence

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or concursive operation which would secure an infallible and inerrant text.[77] Farrow, however, also argues that the employment of human agency and language in the imparting of revelation requires the accommodation to those inevitable features of human weakness that manifest themselves in the biblical texts.

This assumption must be challenged on two fronts and its unhappy consequence for the affirmation of biblical authority recognized.

First, the assumption that accommodation requires the employment of a fallible medium for the transmission of revelation arbitrarily limits God's freedom to provide for the writing of a biblical text that is infallible and inerrant. This assumption conflicts with the biblical teaching, for example, that the Creator was able and in fact did infallibly communicate his purpose and will to his image-bearers, Adam and Eve, in their pre-Fall condition. It does so by virtually adopting the thesis that all special revelation by accommodation is necessarily, at least in the strict sense, fallible or errant, since it involves the employment of the medium of human language. But this is to treat human language as incorrigibly and invariably unable infallibly to reveal what God intends to reveal to his covenant creature. It also, provided the limitations of this analogy be recognized, militates against the biblical teaching of the sinlessness of the incarnate Mediator. It does so by postulating the inherent and inevitable involvement of all God's communication and dealings with his human covenant partner in the circumstances of sin. However, there is no biblical reason whatever to suggest that God could not provide for the revelation of his Word and Truth through the written text of Scripture without any admixture of error or fallibility.

Second, this disjunction between form and content that comes to expression in the position of "functional inerrancy" postulates, as noted earlier, an illegitimate disjunction between a *suggestio verborum* and a *suggestio rerum*. The "matter" or "content" of the written Word is said to be infallibly and inerrantly communicated through a "form of words" that is fallible and errant, at least in some respects. But this kind of position is untenable. Without adhering to or implying

a "dictation" view of biblical inspiration, it is essential to recognize that the *message* of Scripture is clear and infallibly true *because and in so far as the words, understood correctly and in their relation to their context etc., are clear and infallibly true*. The form of the biblical texts and their content, though distinguishable, are wedded to one another and cannot be separated.[78] This is an obvious implication not only of the doctrine of verbal inspiration but also of the correlation between the biblical message and the biblical texts. It is, in fact, the pillar upon which all biblical exegesis rests, at least all exegesis which takes seriously a grammatical-historical reading of the text with attention to context, syntax, the semantics of biblical words, and the like. Revelation itself, though not restricted to the inscripturated special revelation found in the biblical canon, depends upon the adequacy and usefulness of human language to convey the truth of God. Unwittingly, those, like Pinnock and Farrow, who posit an infallible revelation by means of a fallible form of words undermine the very possibility of revelation.

The consequence of this separation between form and content is a doctrine of revelation that threatens to become vacuous and indefinite. Revelation occurs finally in a sphere which is not identical with the written text. Though the believer encounters God through the written Word, this word is not, strictly speaking, the revelation itself or the focus of revelation. We may then speak, as does Pinnock, of going "beyond" the written text or of the Spirit who works "alongside" the canonical Scripture. Or we may speak, as does Farrow, of the Word of revelation which is not identical with the words of the text of Scripture but which "become" serviceable to Christ and the Spirit to disclose the saving knowledge of God. It is not surprising that Farrow, therefore, finds himself especially receptive to the doctrine of Scripture espoused by Thomas Torrance and Karl Barth. Nor is it surprising to find him speak disparagingly of those who adhere to the "static mystery of a sacred text" rather than focusing upon the instruction of God's people by the Spirit of Christ.

Conclusion

For these reasons we must conclude that the position of "functional inerrancy" constitutes a serious compromise of the affirmation of the infallibility and reliability of the Scriptures. It does not meet the test of Scripture itself, nor does it safeguard the historic confession of the church that the Scriptures are an "infallible rule for faith and practice," which are to be received by the community of faith, "believing without any doubt all things contained therein."

Contrary to the position of "functional inerrancy," we must continue to insist that the infallibility of the Bible refers to the written texts themselves as the inspired Word of God, not to the "communicative design" of these texts. Concerning these texts, we must continue in our confession and theology to affirm that *they are unfailingly and invariably true in all that they teach and affirm about all those matters on which they choose to speak, whether doctrinal, ethical, historical, cosmological, etc.* Furthermore, we must affirm that they do not "err" in any way whatever in all that they teach and affirm. There simply is no biblically authorized sense in which we may speak of their unreliability or "errancy," even when such errancy is allegedly of an "inconsequential" or "trivial" sort.

We must continue to echo in our confession and reflect in our theology the profound trust of the Psalmist in his celebration of the Word of the Lord:

May Thy lovingkindnesses also come to me, O Lord,
    Thy salvation according to Thy word;
So I shall have an answer for him who reproaches me,
    For I trust in Thy word. . . .

And I will walk at liberty,
    For I seek Thy precepts.
I will also speak of Thy testimonies before kings,
    And shall not be ashamed.

Psalm 119:41-42,45-46

ENDNOTES

1. This position has been especially emphasized at Fuller Theological Seminary and by evangelical theologians influenced by the writings of G.C. Berkouwer. See: Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); Jack Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1977); G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

2. Cf. Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 323-379; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 102-118.

3. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) was formed in 1978, chiefly to combat the position espoused by Rogers and McKim. The ICBI, though no longer in existence, sponsored the publication of a number of important volumes on the subject of biblical infallibility and inerrancy. Among them are: Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); Geisler, ed., *Biblical Errancy: Its Philosophical Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, eds., *Challenges to Inerrancy* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); John Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); and Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

4. In addition to those mentioned above and the two figures I will be considering in this study, this "neo-evangelical" revision of the doctrine of biblical infallibility is also represented by: I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); and Paul H. Seely, *Inerrant Wisdom: Science and Inerrancy in Biblical Perspective* (Portland: Evangelical Reformed, Inc., 1989).

5. Douglas Farrow, *The Word of Truth and Disputes about Words* (Winona Lake, Indianna: Carpenter Books, 1987).

6. Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984).

7. *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985). This work was first published in 1971 by the Moody Bible Institute.

8. *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967).

9. Hereafter pay references to Pinnock's *The Scripture Principle* will be cited in the text in parentheses.

10. Though obviously influenced by "dialectical" or "neo-orthodox" theology in his development of the doctrine of Scripture, Pinnock continues to insist upon revelation as the disclosure of an "objective" doctrinal content which may be formulated in propositional form. In this he shows a measure of indebtedness to the argument of Carl F. H. Henry in his *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. III, Thesis 10: "Revelation as Rational-Verbal Communication" (Waco, Texas: Word, 1979) 248-488.

11. It is one of the striking features of Pinnock's study that he nowhere gives sustained attention to the biblical testimony concerning its own inspiration or "God-breathed" character. Nor does he provide an adequate treatment of the traditional manner in which inspiration has been related to inerrancy. Despite his criticism of a strict view of inerrancy at this point, he does develop his own view of inerrancy in his conclusion. See *The Scripture Principle*, 222ff.

12. Remarkably, Pinnock simultaneously endorses the use of the term "inerrancy" to express this policy of approaching the biblical texts with a trusting attitude and rejects it to the extent it "connotes in many people's minds a modern, scientific precision that the Bible does not display" (78). There is an equivocation here with respect to the meaning of inerrancy that pervades his discussion. It is noteworthy that he quotes with approval Millard Erickson's definition of inerrancy (*Christian Theology*,

[Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983] 233-234): "The Bible, when correctly interpreted in the light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms."

13. This stress upon the humanity of Scripture and its implication for an anti-docetic view of the authorship and production of the biblical writings is reminiscent of Berkouwer's discussion in his *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 195-212, of "the servant-form of Holy Scripture." Though in itself a legitimate emphasis, it becomes the occasion in Berkouwer and Pinnock for a view of God's accomodation to creaturely means in his self-revelation which entails an accomodation to an human errancy.

14. Pinnock's use of this analogy does not display adequate attention to its limitations. There are several differences between the hypostatic union of the divine and the human natures in the one Person of the Mediator and the relation of the divine and human "factors" in the provision of inspired Scripture: first, the incarnation is in the strictest sense *sui generis* and without analogy; second, the incarnation means that our Lord is integrally divine and integrally human, but we may not say the same of Scripture which is *wholly* divine, though given *wholly* through the instrumentality of men; and third, the incarnation is a permanent fact whereas inspiration is a transitory endowment. Moreover, the one possible use of this analogy which might be employed--that there is no necessary obstacle to God's revealing himself infallibly through creaturely media--is rejected by Pinnock. For Pinnock the humanity of Scripture requires its (limited) errancy!

15. Pinnock cites a number of instances in the biblical texts where there are historical inaccuracies and "deviations from a modern standard of truth" (e.g., Mark 2:26 and I Sam. 21:1-6; Matt. 27:9 and Zech. 11:12). He does not, however, expend any effort to provide a plausible

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explanation of these alleged inaccuracies or to consider the consequences of this admission for his own view of Scriptural authority.

16. It is remarkable how clearly Pinnock acknowledges his own Arminian inclinations here and their consequence for a rejection of the doctrine of inspiration which affirms both God's superintendence of the production of the biblical texts and their wholly human authorship. His treatment of this highly important factor in the discussion is disappointingly superficial and prejudicial. He summarizes the Reformed position, for example, with the statement, "It is sometimes called divine monergism, which means God's actions are the only ones that really count" (102)!

17. This use of the distinction between "objective" and "subjective" is infelicitous, since the Spirit's operation through the Word is inextricably joined to the Word and is equally "objective" in respect to the believer's response as is the Word itself.

18. Pinnock rightly criticizes this neo-orthodox view of Scripture but he subsequently develops the relation between the written text and the Spirit's testimony in a way that permits and even advocates this view. Any view which disassociates the Spirit's testimony from the written text or which speaks of the Spirit revealing something "alongside of" or "in addition to" that which is written, reflects this neo-orthodox separation of the written text and the divine Word.

19. With this formulation Pinnock virtually allows that the text functions as the Word of God only when it "becomes" serviceable by the Spirit to this purpose.

20. It is interesting that Pinnock speaks of such "evidence" which authenticates the biblical Word. This is consistent with his commitment to an "evidentialist" apologetics, but it is not consistent with his claim that the Spirit enables us to "recognize" the Scriptures as the Word of God. This is a point on which equivocation is impossible; either the Spirit authenticates the Word as God's or

we have to posit another, more basic authority (evidence?), by which it is authenticated. Cf. Pinnock's *Reason Enough* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980), where he develops his evidentialist approach to the defense of the Christian faith.

21. Here the problem referred to in our earlier note (see note 18) comes to obvious expression. When Pinnock speaks of the "surplus of meaning" in a text or of its "corrigibility," he introduces an elusive distinction between the written text and its meaning through the illuminating work of the Spirit. Stated differently, he permits the Spirit's work in "illuminating" the text's meaning to take precedence over the Spirit's work in "inspiring" the text.

22. This formulation again is reminiscent of a neo-orthodox doctrine of revelation in which the written words or texts are separated from the divine Word revealed through them when by the Spirit they "become" an occasion for "fresh revelation."

23. The whole of Pinnock's discussion in this context is similar to that of Karl Barth in his treatment of the inspiration of Scripture. Cf. the following statement, characteristic of Barth's view: "Yet the presence of the Word of God itself, the real and present speaking and hearing of it, is not identical with the existence of the book as such. But in this presence something takes place in and with the book, for which the book as such does indeed give the possibility, but the reality of which cannot be anticipated or replaced by the existence of the book. A free divine decision is made" (*Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/2. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956] 530).

24. Hereafter references to Farrow's *The Word of Truth and Disputes About Words* will be cited in the text with parentheses.

25. Farrow provides an excellent and concise summary of the debate over methodology in the development of a doctrine of Scripture. He shows how many defenders of inerrancy have joined this defense to an apologetics

which undermines the authority of the Word defended! Because these defenders rest their case for biblical authority upon some form of rational demonstration or evidentialist argument, they treat our subscription to the Word of God as an hypothesis which is in principle always open to refutation by those same standards that are thought to authenticate it. Unfortunately, Farrow falls prey to a *non sequitur* when he suggests that *all* defenders of biblical inerrancy are committed to inerrancy as a key component in such a rationalistic defense of the faith.

26. Farrow appeals in his discussion of this epistemological issue to the writings of Michael Polanyi and Thomas Torrance. See Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967); Thomas Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University, 1969). Both of these writers emphasize that "basic beliefs" are such that they are held without any explicit appeal to some more foundational standpoint.

27. Cf. the following characteristic statement: "The right of verification from a stance outside, and therefore over, the Word, of verification from the standpoint of one's own resources, is not common ground but fallen ground. It belongs to man's fanciful independence and futile attempt to serve as his own reference point" (37). Interestingly, Farrow appeals at this juncture to the writing of Cornelius Van Til, especially his *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969).

28. Farrow distinguishes between a testimony of the Spirit "to" the Word and "through" the Word. He maintains that it is only in the latter sense that we may speak of the Spirit's testimony. However, this is an unnecessary and inappropriate distinction. Contrary to Farrow's argument, Calvin spoke of a testimony "to" the Word precisely to affirm the reliability of the Word's testimony concerning Christ. This distinction breathes the spirit of a neo-orthodox juxtaposition of the written and the "revealed" Word.

29. Here and elsewhere Farrow, like Pinnock before him, succumbs to an actualistic doctrine of revelation which refuses to identify the written Word with God's revelation and insists that it only becomes revelation in the event of its being-used-to-communicate-Christ. This doctrine has far-reaching and disastrous consequences for an affirmation of the reliability and authority of Scripture.

30. Farrow appeals to Kuyper as the source for this expression, "innocuous inaccuracies." He cites for this expression a reference in Berkouwer (*Holy Scripture*, 245). But Berkouwer uses the expression "innocent inaccuracies," citing Kuyper's *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1898 [457]). Furthermore, Berkouwer cites this expression as though it were an admission on Kuyper's part of the existence of such "innocent inaccuracies." But Kuyper's use of this expression is in the context of a defense of the *accuracy* of the Scriptural record, the denial of which is virtually a denial of the authority of Christ! Cf. the following comments of Kuyper in this context: "In history entirely innocent inaccuracies are certainly possible, which, so far from doing harm, rather bring to light the free utterance of life above notarial mannerism. But of this character, Jesus' error could have been least of all; If the Holy Scripture *qua talis* falls, then Jesus was a man and nothing more, who was mistaken in the centrum of what was holy, and who consequently can neither escape from the fellowship of sin, nor yet in what is holiest and tenderest be your absolute guide" (457). This misquotation of Kuyper is symptomatic of a general tendency among revisionist historians (including Farrow here) who seek to argue that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is of recent vintage and not the historic position of the church. However, neither Kuyper nor Bavinck, his contemporary, can be appealed to in defense of a denial of biblical inerrancy.

31. Cf. the following characteristic comment: "For, in any event, we are not concerned so much with the

statements or words themselves, but with the realities to which they are intended to direct us" (80-81).

32. Farrow's discussion of the doctrine of inspiration and its relation to biblical inerrancy is an improvement upon that of Pinnock in that he does consider these key passages in the development of his argument. As we have already noted, Pinnock strangely neglects to give them any sustained attention.

33. Farrow prefers to use the New International Version in his citations of the biblical texts in translation. This corresponds to his endorsement of a "dynamic equivalence" theory of translation and communication of meaning through written texts, an endorsement that parallels his theory of "functional inerrancy."

34. In his translation of *theopneustos* Farrow is willing to follow the lead of Warfield. Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948) 296.

35. Unfortunately, Farrow does not fairly represent Warfield's doctrine of inspiration, when he terms it a "Philonian" view. Warfield elaborately and carefully distinguished his understanding of inspiration from the idea of "dictation" or the direct placing of divine words in the mouth of a spokesman.

36. As I shall point out in more detail at a later juncture, Farrow wrongly shifts the reference of *theopneustos* from "all Scripture" to the authors of Scripture. This text, however, speaks of a "God-breathed" Scripture, and not of "God-breathed" authors!

37. Farrow chooses to regard even the strongest Scriptural identifications of the speaking of the Spirit of God with the written text as expressing a confidence in the "message" communicated and not the texts themselves: "It is plain, then, that one can be altogether true to the strongest of language identifying Scripture with the speaking of the Holy Spirit without going beyond the idea of the Spirit's power to teach and to guide the biblical authors

into accurate communication of his own messages to men" (103).

38. Though Farrow does accept the legitimacy of speaking of "verbal inspiration," it is evident from this and other statements that he denies what this doctrine historically taught, namely, that the written texts *are* the written Word of God. His is a view of "content inspiration," if we may coin this expression.

39. There is a common worry among those who defend this "functional" inerrancy position that the traditional doctrine of biblical inerrancy is fixed upon "words," taken in isolation from their context and service in the communication of the divine message. Over against this, it is argued that the message is what matters, not the words. But this is a serious distortion of the biblical inerrancy position. Historically, the inerrancy of the Bible has been defended, not out of a desire to preserve a sacred collection of words, strung together like so many beads on a string, but out of desire to emphasize that God is pleased to speak *through these words in their appropriate context and relationships!*

40. Farrow cites as an example the genealogy recorded in Genesis 5. He suggests that, since it is the function of this genealogy to perpetuate a kind of "hall of fame" of ancestors leading up to Shem, historical inaccuracies in the genealogy would not adversely effect its usefulness in serving this function. Unfortunately, he does not indicate what would constitute in this connection an "historical inaccuracy." Would, for example, the principle of selectivity (the deliberate omission of some names) entail "inaccuracy?" Contrary to Farrow's ready acknowledgment of "inaccuracy" in the genealogy, one could plausibly maintain, employing a standard appropriate to this passage, that the genealogy is simply "incomplete"--without conceding any such thing as "historical inaccuracy" in the record! This again reflects Farrow's equivocation on the meaning of "strict" or "exhaustive" inerrancy. It seriously weakens his argument that he does not identify clearly what he means by

a "strict" inerrantist position. Nor does he prove that someone could not adopt a "biblical" inerrantist position which avoids the pitfalls of what he terms an "exhaustive" in distinction from an "functional" inerrantist position!

41. Farrow is careful to insist that these do not actually "mislead" the reader. Nevertheless, he does not identify in this context what he means by such "imperfections" (grammatical imperfections? the use of a plain or common style of speech?). Nor does he indicate why, even were we to allow the choice of the term "imperfections" here (why should the texts be perfect and by what standard would we ascertain perfection?), this would count against the inerrancy of the biblical texts.

42. Interestingly, Farrow highlights at this point the question, "Do the biblical phenomena, inductively examined, support the idea of exhaustive inerrancy" (132)? There are two objections against the legitimacy of this formulation of the question. First, it begs the question as to what is meant by "exhaustive inerrancy." And second, it betrays some confusion about the nature and limits of induction, including an inductive study of the biblical texts. No inductive procedure could ever yield a *doctrine* of inerrancy, since an exhaustive induction of the biblical texts is a practical impossibility (who is able exhaustively to study all the phenomena?) and the procedure of induction could never authorize the kind of inference needed to permit the application of a doctrine of inerrancy to *all* the biblical texts. It seems that at this juncture Farrow has forgotten his own strictures about induction cited earlier (11ff.).

43. As we noted earlier, Farrow's doctrine of "functional" inerrancy cannot fund a doctrine of "verbal" or "plenary" inspiration.

44. Farrow notes that the alleged "contradictions" between the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 could be accounted for under the second category (208). He also notes that many of the differences between the gospel

accounts could be treated under the third category (208-216).

45. Farrow cites Robert Gundry's contention that Matthew employed a "midrashic" editorial liberty in the writing of the gospel of Matthew as an example at this point. A "functional" inerrancy position permits leeway on this issue, which is primarily a hermeneutical one (having to do with the kind of literary genre which characterizes Matthew's gospel), since it does not link the reliability of the biblical text to an *a priori* notion of historical accuracy. Cf. Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982). Gundry is a revealing example for Farrow to cite, since he was dismissed from the Evangelical Theological Society for his perceived deviation from its inerrancy statement!

46. It is interesting to observe the similarity between Farrow's argument at this point and the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, who unceasingly argued that the only appropriate response to the Word of God is one of unconditional subscription to its self-authenticating authority. Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed) 1955.

47. Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, IX (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932) 3-21.

48. As we noted earlier (see note 20), Pinnock in some measure compromises his rejection of a rationalistic defense of biblical inerrancy by his own commitment to an "evidentialist" defense of the faith, including faith in the trustworthiness of the biblical writings.

49. It is absolutely vital that this testimony of the Spirit be understood as a testimony *through and not apart from or alongside* the written Word. The Spirit's testimony does not add anything to the Word; it only confirms and authenticates it as the Word of God, enabling the believer to respond appropriately to the Word.

50. This is, of course, something which defenders of biblical inerrancy have not neglected to consider in their more recent forumlations of this doctrine. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, for example, adopted the following affirmation as part of its "Articles of Affirmation and Denial" on the subject of hermeneutics: "WE AFFIRM that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study" (Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984] 884).

51. Pinnock adopts a strongly Arminian view of the independent and indeterminate action of the human authors in the production of the biblical texts, one which corresponds fully with his Arminian view of human freedom in the appropriation of the gospel. Note the following characteristic comment: "In terms of our subject, inspiration, it makes nonsense of genuine human authorship to say that God is in total control of the Bible's composition. It leads directly to Docetism, which reduces the human aspect to merely nominal" (103).

52. There is in this argument of Farrow an illegitimate identification of human instrumentality and errancy; it is inconceivable to Farrow that the human authorship of Scripture could be granted its integrity without an acknowledgment of imperfection and error.

53. In my discussion of "inspiration and inerrancy" below, several of these passages will be considered.

54. The view of inspiration espoused by Pinnock and Farrow comes closest to what has been traditionally called a "dynamic" theory of inspiration; the authors are inspired in such a way that they are able to communicate a divine message through errant words and texts.

55. It is sometimes argued that there is no such thing as "a" or "the" biblical view of the Bible. Cf. James Barr,

Fundamentalism (London: SCM, 1977) 78. Barr argues that there are only incidental and occasional statements about the inspiration of the Bible in the biblical writings; there is certainly no developed doctrine of Scripture to be discovered in these writings. Sinclair B. Ferguson, in his article, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" (in Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradtion, A Challenge, A Debate* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 47-66), answers this argument with a concise and persuasive case for speaking of "the Bible's view of itself."

56. Cf. D. A. Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture" (in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986] 20-25). Carson properly notes that many of these appeals to the "phenomena" of the biblical texts are methodogically confused. There are biblical statements that require precedence in the formulation of a doctrine of Scripture precisely because they speak directly and comprehensively to the subject at hand.

57. Though the translation of *pasa* has been much discussed, there is no great difference in meaning between the translations "all" or "every." Whether we take the word to describe "all" or "every" Scripture, it designates the *totality* of Scripture, either generically or distributively. It should also be noted here that some translate *theopneustos* as part of the subject: "every [all] God-breathed Scripture is. . . . " Though this is permissible syntactically, it suggests that some Scripture(s) is/are not God-breathed, an unacceptable suggestion which compromises the point of this text and is inconsistent with Scriptural teaching as a whole. Furthermore, the word order (modifier, subject, verbal modifier) would most naturally be translated as "all/every Scripture *is* God-breathed." This also allows for a more plausible translation of the following *kai* ("all/every Scripture *is* God-breathed *and* profitable. . . ").

58. This is, as I have argued, one of the most significant errors of Farrow's and Pinnock's treatment of the doctrine of inspiration. They gloss over the fact that this text designates Scripture as being "God-breathed," not the authors of Scripture.

59. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 131-166.

60. Farrow, *The Word of Truth*, 93-94. Cf. Seely, *Inerrant Wisdom*, 142-145. Seely draws a conclusion remarkably similar to that of Farrow; "*Pasa graphe theopneustos* means then, every passage of Scripture is an oracle comprising the authoritative wisdom of God because it was originally given by God's breathing on a man and inspiring him to speak and/or write" (145). This conclusion is actually better than that of Farrow in so far as Seely emphasizes the God-breathedness of the *passages themselves*, and not merely their content. He subsequently qualifies this, however, by distinguishing this wisdom and the texts by which it is communicated in a manner similar to that of Farrow and Pinnock.

61. It is ironic that the strictures against the use of deduction in the development of a doctrine of Scripture which covers all the biblical phenomena are often forgotten when the "deduction" is drawn that the Scriptures only address matters which pertain to redemption and not to science, geography, cosmology, and the like. It is interesting to observe that the Scriptures do not draw this kind of distinction between matters which are redemptive and central and those which are non-redemptive and peripheral. For a repudiation of this distinction, see the study committee report of the Christian Reformed Church, *Infallibility and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1961) 11-26.

62. Cf. Calvin's comment on this text (David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds., *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* 12 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963] 343): "Peter is saying that Scripture was not handed down

from man or by human desire. You will never come to read it well prepared unless you bring to it reverence, obedience, and willingness to learn. A proper reverence arises from the conviction that it is God who speaks with us and not mortal men."

63. Cf. I Peter 2:7 where Peter refers to a "prophecy" concerning Christ found in the book of Psalms. It is also interesting to observe that Peter includes the apostle Paul's writings among those "Scriptures" which the "untaught and unstable distort" (II Peter 3:16).

64. Farrow, *The Word of Truth*, 101: "Taken literally, this phrase would place the entire matter on the level of textual criticism, an altogether absurd thought." It is not clear to me why this is so patently absurd; after all, Jesus is emphasizing the *integrity of the text* of the Old Testament Law! Perhaps Farrow finds this absurd due to his *sharp separation* between the "words" of the text and the "message" of the text. It is this separation, however, which is so untenable and destructive of a proper view of inspiration and inerrancy.

65. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) 485.

66. Farrow, *The Word of Truth*, 106, tries to minimize the impact of this verse by arguing that the word "gods" in Psalm 82 is the pivotal word in the entire Psalm. This appeal to the inviolability of Scripture and in particular to the use of this word in one of the Psalms may not be used as a basis for arguing a doctrine of "exhaustive" inerrancy. Though Farrow is correct to cite the importance of this word in Psalm 82, he weakens the force of the John 10:35 text by minimizing the fact that Jesus makes a comprehensive statement here about "the Scripture." The reference in Psalm 82 is simply *illustrative* of that inviolability that characterizes the Scripture as a whole and in every part.

67. Cf. Warfield, *The Inspiration and the Authority of the Bible*, 229-348, for an extensive treatment of this

category of evidence for a doctrine of Scripture. Cf. also the study committee report, *Infallibility and Inspiration*, 7-43, for a comprehensive treatment of the Scriptural witness concerning infallibility and inspiration.

68 Cf. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, 72: "It is worth asking whether 'inerrant' is really the most appropriate word to use to describe Scripture. It needs so much qualification, even by its defenders, that it is in danger of dying the death of a thousand qualification. The term 'infallible' in the sense of 'entirely trustworthy' is undoubtedly preferable." It is interesting to observe the manner in which Marshall weakens the force and subjectivizes the meaning of "infallible" by rendering it "entirely trustworthy."

69. It should be noted that "infallible" derives from the Latin verb, *fallo*, meaning "to deceive" or "to make a mistake." With the prefix "in-" it means "non-deceiving" or "non-erring." It is the more common term in the church's historic confessions. The Belgic Confession, for example, speaks in Article VII of "this infallible rule" (*c'est reigle infallible*).

70. Cf. Jean L. McKechnie, ed., *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (2nd ed.; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979) 936-937, for a standard definition of these terms. Even a cursory examination of the etymology and semantic range of these words will indicate that the term "infallible" is a stronger and more comprehensive term than "inerrant." One cannot meaningfully affirm that something is "infallible" without also affirming that it is "inerrant." Furthermore, there is no reason to think that the term "inerrant" connotes a greater measure of exactness or scientific precision, as has been suggested, than the term "infallible."

71. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, 49-73.

72. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, 53.

73. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 238.

74. Cf. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 425: "No one supposes that the mere grammatical forms separately considered are inspired: the claim concerns words in their ordered sequence—in their living flow in the sentences—and this is just what is expressed by *logoi*." It is unfortunate that some critics (including Pinnock and Farrow on occasion) of the doctrine of inerrancy treat it as though it affirmed a doctrine of verbal inspiration which considered the Bible a "sacred preserve of words."

75. For a sampling of older and more recent studies devoted in part to the resolution of alleged discrepancies, disharmonies or errors in the biblical writings, see: John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Springdale, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, n.d.); Gleason L. Archer, *An Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); E. J. Young, Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Waco: Word, 1982); Douglas J. Moo, "Tradition and Old Testament in Matthew 27:3-10" (in R. T. France and David Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives III: Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1983), 157-175; Gary V. Smith, "Paul's Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1975) 181-189; Klaas Schilder, *Tegenstrijdigheden In Den Bijbel?* (Zutphen, Netherlands: J. B. Van Den Brink & Co., n.d.); Oswald T. Allis, *Bible Numerics* (Chicago: Moody, 1944).

76. One issue that might be addressed at length here is that of textual criticism and the transmission of the biblical texts. Though the affirmation of the inerrancy of the *autographa* has been much maligned as a convenient means of dodging the issue of alleged errors in the biblical texts, it does serve the legitimate function of distinguishing between the original text given through divine inspiration and the subsequent, providential transmission of the text. It also underscores the fact that some

alleged errors in the biblical texts may be due to textual corruptions.

77. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 100-105. Cf. James I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 81: "The twin suppositions which liberal critics make--that, on the one hand, divine control of the writers would exclude the free exercise of their natural powers, while, on the other hand, divine accommodation to the free exercise of their natural powers would exclude complete control of what they wrote--are really two forms of the same mistake. They are two ways of denying that the Bible can be both a fully human and fully divine composition. And this denial rests. . .on a false doctrine of God; here particularly, of His providence." This comment holds *mutatis mutandis* for Pinnock's doctrine of inspiration as well.

78. This distinction may be drawn, provided it does not become a separation or an occasion to repudiate an identification of the Word of God with the written texts comprising Scripture. We speak, for example, of the "Word of God" in several forms: the "Word preached," the "Word summarized" in the church's creed or confession, and the "Word confirmed" in the sacraments. The Word of God is communicated in each of these ways and, therefore, it is not permissible to identify the Word of God exclusively with the written Word. Nonetheless, this is quite a different thing from distinguishing and then separating between the content (the divine "message") and the form (the written texts of Scripture) of the Word of God. The latter is a denial of the doctrine of the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture. Cf. F. W. Buytendach, *Aspekte Van Die Vorm/Inhoud-Problematiek* (Amsterdam: H. A. van Bottenburg, 1972) 455 [*et passim*]): "Niks en niemand kan ongedaan maakt dat die *Theopneustie* op die *Skrif-Inhoud slaan nie*. Die *Theopneustie slaan* op die *perfectum* van die *Skrif-Inhoud* (Deus Locutus) en die *praesens* van dieselfde *Skrif-Inhoud* (Deus loquens)." Buytendach's study is a sustained examination of the development of

the doctrine of inspiration in more recent Reformed theology in the Netherlands. He carefully develops his thesis that in the theology of Berkouwer and others a form-content dualism undermines the affirmation of the divine inspiration and authority of the written text of Scripture.