NOTES ON THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

Robert Preus, Ph. D.

This study is offered as an approach to the problem of the inerrancy of Scripture as it concerns evangelical Protestantism today. The attempt is to present a position which agrees with Scripture's testimony concerning itself and with the historic position of the Christian Church. At the same time the attempt is made to be timely, and to take into account contemporary issues raised by modern Biblical theology.

Here we shall try to delineate and clarify what is meant by the inerrancy of Scripture, what is the basis of this dogma and what are its implications. It is not our purpose to become involved in the technicalities which have often obscured the doctrine or to traverse the labyrinth of intricate discussion which has not infrequently belabored studies of this basic theological truth.

Indeed, a brief treatment such as we are about to give cannot possibly solve the many hermeneutical and isagogical problems which touch upon the inerrancy of Scripture. Yet hermeneutical and isagogical concerns cannot be avoided in a study of this nature. Therefore we have endeavored to lay down general principles concerning these matters which will comport with the inerrancy and sole authority of Scripture.

THESIS

In calling the Sacred Scriptures inerrant we recognize in them (A), as words taught by the Holy Spirit (B), that quality which makes them overwhelmingly (C) reliable witnesses (D-E) to the words and deeds of the God who has in His inspired spokesmen and in His incarnate Son disclosed Himself to men for their salvation (F). [1]

Note: This definition is very general, seeking as it does to fit all the Biblical data (e. g., the bold language of prophecy and of adoration, the promises concerning the world to come for which human experience offers only imperfect and insufficient analogies, the expressive and indispensable anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms used of God, the symbolic use of numbers and other referents in books like Daniel and Revelation, etc.). The definition also agrees, however, with what the Church catholic has believed and confessed through her entire history. We offer a few typical examples to bring out this fact.

Augustine, *Epist.* 82 *to Jerome*: "Only to those books which are called canonical have I learned to give honor so that I believe most firmly that no author in these books made any error in writing. I read other authors not with the thought that what they have thought and written is true just because they have manifested holiness and learning!"

Thomas Aquinas, *In Ioh.* 13, *lect.* 1: "It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture."

---

1.   Majuscule letters A-F refer to the six Ektheses which will shortly be given in support and clarification of the major Thesis.

Luther (W² 15, 1481): "The Scriptures have never erred." (W² 9, 356): "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself; it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites."

Preface to the Book of Concord (Tappert, p. 8): "We have in what follows purposed to commit ourselves exclusively and only, in accordance with the pure, infallible and unalterable Word of God, to that Augsburg Confession which was submitted to Emperor Charles V at the great imperial assembly in Augsburg in the year 1530." *Large Catechism* (Baptism 57. Tappert, p. 444): "My neighbor and I — in short, all men — may err and deceive, but God's Word cannot err." *Formula of Concord* (Epitome, VII, 13. Tappert, p. 483): "God's Word is not false nor does it lie."

Calov, *Systema locorum theologicorum* (Wittenberg, 1655-1677), I, 462: "Because Scripture is God's Word which is absolutely true, Scripture is itself truth (Ps. 119:43; 86.142.160; Jn. 17:17.19; 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 33:4; Gal. 3:1; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:18; 3:8; Tit. 1:1 and Jas. 1:8). Thus, whatever the sacred Scriptures contain is fully true and to be accepted with utmost certainty. Not only must we hold that to be true which is presented in Scripture relative to faith and morals, but we must hold to everything that happens to be included therein. Inasmuch as Scripture has been written by an immediate and divine impulse and all the Scriptures recognize Him as their author who cannot err or be mistaken in any way (Heb. 6:18), no untruth or error or lapse can be ascribed to the God breathed Scriptures, lest God Himself be accused."

Turrettin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Genevae, 1688), I, 79: "We deny that there are any true and real contradictions in Scripture. Our reasons are as follows: namely, that Scripture is God breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), that the Word of God cannot lie or be ignorant of what has happened (Ps. 19:8.9; Heb. 6:18) and cannot be set aside (Matt. 5:18), that it shall remain forever (1 Pet. 1:25), and that it is the Word of truth (John 17:17). Now how could such things be predicated of Scripture if it were not free of contradictions, or if God were to allow the holy writers to err and lose their memory or were to allow hopeless blunders to enter into the Scriptures?"

Tromp, *De Sacrae Scripturae Inspiratione* (Romae, 1953), p. 121: "Everything which is contained in sacred Scripture, as attested by the author and in the sense intended by him, is infallibly true."

J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1958), p. 95: "Scripture is termed infallible and inerrant to express the conviction that all its teaching is the utterance of God 'who cannot lie,' whose word, once spoken, abides for ever, and that therefore it may be trusted implicitly."

Such statements written under different circumstances and at different times evince the remarkable unanimity on this matter which obtained in the Church throughout her history. The statements also indicate or infer the following six ektheses which will serve to delineate and further explain our definition.

EKTHESIS A

This "recognition" of the truthfulness of the written Word of God is not primarily intellectual: it takes place in the obedience of faith. The truthfulness and reliability of the Scriptures is an article of faith.

EKTHESIS B

The basis of inerrancy rests on the nature of Scripture as God's Word. Inerrancy is an inextricable concomitant of inspiration. Our conviction is that since Scripture is truly and properly speaking God's Word, it will not deceive nor err.[2] Admittedly this is an inference (as in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity or the two natures of Christ), but it is a necessary inference, because God is faithful and His Word (Scripture) is truth — and no Christian theologian until the period of Rationalism ever shrank from this inference. It is to be noted that both Christ and the Apostles drew the same inference (cf. not only John 10:34; Mark 12:24; Matt. 5:18.19, but also Christ's and the apostles' use of the OT: they simply cite it as unconditionally true and unassailable).

EKTHESIS C

Our recognition of the reliability of the witness of Scripture is graciously *imposed* upon us by the Spirit of God, and this through the power of Scripture itself.

EKTHESIS D

The nature of inerrancy is essentially twofold: Scripture does not lie or deceive, and Scripture does not err or make mistakes in any affirmation it makes (*falsum formale and falsum materiale*). In other words, the holy writers, moved by the Spirit of God, infallibly achieve the intent of their writing (cf. the statement of Tromp above). This is what is meant when we say that Scripture is a *reliable witness* to the words and deeds of God. Of his people God demands in the second and eighth commandments that they tell the truth, of his prophets and apostles that they do not lie: God will not countenance lying and prevarication (Prov. 14:5; 19:22; Ps. 63:11; Jer. 23:25ff. Zeph. 3:13; Acts 5:3; I Jn. 2:21.27). And God Himself will not lie nor deceive (Prov. 30:6-7; Num. 23:19; Ps. 89:35; Heb. 6:18): in His written Word He will not break or suspend that standard of truth which He demands of His children. Thus, we hear frequently from God's inspired witnesses the claim that they do not deceive, that they are not mistaken, that they tell the truth (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:7). The whole impact of entire books of the Bible depends upon the authoritative and truthful witness of the writer (John 21:24; 1 John 1:1-5a; 2 Pet. 1:15-18). Pertinent to what was just said, we must add the following: the truth of the sacred Scriptures must be determined from the sense which is intended (in verse, pericope, book) by the author. This sense in turn must be determined according to sound hermeneutical rules.

It is obvious that such a position on the nature of Biblical inerrancy is predicated on a correspondence idea of truth which in part means this: declarative statements (at least in those Biblical genres, or literary forms, which purport

2.   (Cf. M. Nicolau et I. Salaverri, S. J. *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* (Madrid, 1958), I, 1095: "Inerrantiam Scripturae non derivari praecise ex fine scriptoris, ad illa tantum quae ipse docere intendit, sed derivari ex natura inspirationis, ad illa omnis quae vi huius influxus asseruntur." The alluding to many contemporary Roman Catholic sources in notes does not necessarily imply full agreement with these statements or that we should use these statements in any final study on inerrancy. The statements are, for the most part, quite sound and useful. The fact is that Roman Catholics are the majority of those who write on inerrancy today from a point of view similar to ours.

to be dealing with fact or history) of Scripture are, according to their intention, true in that they correspond to what has taken place (e.g., historical statements), to what obtains (e. g., theological affirmations and other affirmations concerning fact), or to what will take place (e. g., prophecy). It really ought to go without saying that Scripture, like all cognitive discourse, operates under the rubrics of a correspondence idea of truth (see John 8:46; Eph. 4:25; 1 Ki. 8:26; 22:16.22ff.; Gen. 42:16.20; Deut. 18:22; Ps. 119:163; Dan. 2:9; Prov. 14:25; Zech. 8:16; John 5:31.32ff.; Acts 24:8.11; 1Tim. 1:15; cf. also the forensic picture which haunts all of Scripture - e. g., such concepts as witness, testimony, judge, the eighth commandment, etc., John 21:24).

To speak of inerrancy of purpose (that God achieves His purpose in Scripture) or of Christological inerrancy of Scripture is indeed relevant to the general question of inerrancy but may at the same time be misleading if such a construct is understood as constituting the nature of inerrancy — for then we might speak of the inerrancy of Luther's Little Catechism or of a hymn by Paul Gerhardt, since they successfully achieve their purpose.

The first purpose of Scripture is to bring us to faith in Christ (John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:15). Involved with this prime purpose of Scripture is Luther's doctrine of the Christocentricity of Scripture (OT as well as NT). Such Christocentricity has a soteriological purpose. Only when I understand that Scripture and Christ are *pro me* will I understand the Scriptures (or the inerrancy thereof). But to say that Scripture is inerrant only to the extent that it achieves its soteriological purpose is a misleading position if it is made to be identical with inerrancy or confused with it. How does Scripture achieve this soteriological purpose? By cognitive language. By presenting *facts*, by telling a history (OT as well as NT). To say that there is a purpose in Scripture but no intentionality (i. e. intent to give meaning) in the individual books or sections or verses, or to maintain that Scripture is inerrant in its eschatological purpose but not in the intentionality of its individual parts and pericopes, would not only be nonsense (mysticism), reducing all Scripture to the level of some sort of mystical utterances, but would be quite un-Scriptural (Lk. 1:1-4 etc.). The eschatological purpose of Scripture does not cancel or vitiate or render trivial and unimportant the cognitive and factual content of assertions (and the truth of assertions) throughout Scripture, but requires all this (Rom. 15:4). And on the other hand, formal and material inerrancy does not threaten or eclipse the Christological purpose of Scripture, but supports it. Nor does such a position (formal and material inerrancy) become tantamount to reading Scripture atomistically. Language is a primary structure of lived experience and cannot be studied in isolation from it. Because the language of imagery in Scripture may not always be adequately analyzed or ever completely exhausted implies neither that it is meaningless (positivism) nor that it is errant ("Christian" positivism). Not orthodoxy but Neo-orthodoxy has a positivistic, wooden theory of language.[3]

EKTHESIS E

Inerrancy, is plenary or absolute. 1) It not only pertains to the substance

3.   Hoepfl insists that inerrancy is made irrelevant when it is said that historical errors do not affect the intent of Scripture. Cf. *Introductio Generalis in Sacram Scripturam* (Romae, 1958), p. 123: "Pro ipsis Protestantibus liberalibus magis 'conservatoribus', qui inspirationis notionem saltem valde deprimunt, quaestio inerrantiae omnino non exsistit, cum errores historici fini S. Scripturae non noceant."

of the doctrines and narratives in Scripture, but pertains also to those things which are non-essential, adjunct or *obiter dicta* (Quenstedt, *Systema*, I, 77: "doctrine, ethics, history, chronology, topography or onamastics". 2) It covers not only the primary intent of the various pericopes and verses, but also the secondary intent (e. g., a passing historical reference within the framework of narrative, e. g., that Christ was crucified between two thieves, that wise men visited Him at His birth, that Joshua led the children of Israel into Canaan, that Ruth was a Moabitess, Nimrod a hunter, etc., etc.), not only soteriological, eschatological and religious intent and content of Scripture, but also all declarative statements touching history and the realm of nature.

There are various reasons for this strict position. 1) The NT cites what might often be considered to be passing statements or negligible items from the OT, accepting them as true and authoritative (Matt. 6:29; Matt. 12:42; John 10:35). Jesus accepts the basic framework of the OT history, even those aspects of that history which seem unimportant to many today, e. g., Sodom and Gomorrah (Lk. 17:27), Lot's wife turning to salt, the murder of Abel (Lk. 11:51), Naaman (Lk. 4:27). The NT does not recognize levicula in the OT (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16). 2) The primary intent of a passage or pericope is often dependent upon the secondary intent(s). This is so in the nature of the case. For instance, the Exodus as a deliverance of God depends on the miraculous events connected with it. 3) The most common argument for the full inerrancy of Scripture as advanced by the older theologians was as follows: if errors are admitted in minor matters recorded in Scripture (matters that do not matter [?]), by what right may one then assume that there is no error in important or doctrinal concerns? How does one determine what matters are important? And does not, after all, everything pertain at least indirectly to doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16)? In other words, to maintain that "things which matter" in Scripture (doctrinal matters) are inerrant and "things which do not matter" (non-doctrinal matters) are errant is both arbitrary and impossible to apply (cf. Calov, *Systema*, I, 606ff.).

EKTHESIS F

The practical importance of the doctrine must always be recognized: it consists in this, that, as God is true and faithful, the reader of Scripture can have the assurance that he will not be deceived or led astray by anything he reads in God's Word, holy Scripture. In no discussion of inerrancy do we find merely an academic interest in maintaining purely a traditional position or in hewing to a party line. Such a practical concern must also be emphasized in our day. Any approach to Scripture or method of interpretation which would make of Scripture something less than trustworthy is sub-Christian and does not take Scripture at its own terms. It must also be borne in mind that the truthfulness of Scripture is never an end in itself, but serves the soteriological purpose of Scripture.

ADJUNCTS TO THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

1. Inerrancy does not imply verbal exactness of quotations (e. g., the words of institution, the words on Jesus' cross). The NT ordinarily quotes the OT according to its sense only, sometimes it only alludes to a pericope or verse in the OT, sometimes there are conflations, etc. In the case of extra-Biblical citations we ought to assume that the holy writer stands behind and accepts the

truth of his quotation unless the context would indicate otherwise (cf. 2 Chron. 5:9; 8:8 where there are citations from documents which say that a situation obtains "to this day", i. e., when the original document was written). It is helpful to distinguish between the *veritas citationis* (lies, statements of evil men, or, e. g, the statements of Job's friends, etc.) and the *veritas rei citatae* (Acts 17:28; Num.21:14 and possibly 2 Ki. 1:18).

2. Inerrancy does not imply verbal or intentional agreement in parallel accounts of the same event. For instance, the portrayal of creation in Gen. 1 and in Job 38 are radically different because of a radical difference in the aim of the author. Again, the different evangelists write about our Lord from different vantage points and out of different concerns: therefore their accounts will differ not only in details (as in the case of any two or three witnesses of the same event) but in aim. We must exercise caution here lest we impose a point of view upon an author which cannot be drawn inductively from the Scripture itself. For instance, there is no certain evidence that Matthew is writing for Jews, tying up Christ's life with OT prophecy (John also cites the OT often: 22 times); this is merely a rather safe conjecture. The same may be said concerning John writing on Christ's divinity against Cerinthus. We have no right or good reason to assume that the holy writer tampers with or distorts facts to maintain a point of view; the evangelists claim to be faithful and careful witnesses (John 21:24; Lk. 1:1ff.). However, it must be clearly recognized that incomplete history or an incomplete presentation of doctrine in a given pericope is not false history or a false presentation.

3. Scripture is replete with figures of speech, e. g., metonymy (Lk. 16:29), metaphor (Ps. 18:20), personification (Matt. 6:4), synedoche (Lk. 2:1), apostrophe, hyperbole (Matt. 2:3), etc. It should go without saying that figurative language is not errant language. To assert that Scripture, by rounding numbers and employing hyperbole, metaphors, etc., is not concerned about precision of fact (and therefore subject to error) is to misunderstand the intention of Biblical language. Figurative language (and not modern scientifically *"precise"* language) is *precisely* the mode of expression which the sacred writers' purposes demand. To imply that figurative language is *ex hypothesi* meaningless *or* that it cannot convey information — truthful and, from its own point of view, *precise* information — is the position of positivism, not the result of sensitive exegesis (e. g., "Yanks slaughter Indians" is a meaningful and precise statement). How else does one speak of a transcendent God, of His epiphanies and revelations than in metaphors and figures of speech? Demetaphorize, deanthropomorphize, and you are not getting closer to the meaning of such expressions, but losing their meaning. Figurative language, then, meets all the canons necessary: (1) that statements perfectly represent the author's meaning, (2) that statements do not mislead the reader or lead him into error of any kind, and (3) that statements correspond to fact when they purport to deal with fact, and this in the case of poetry as well as in the case of straight narrative.

Note: When we interpret or read Scripture we identify ourselves with the writers, not only with their *Sitz im Leben* and their use of language, but with their entire spirit and their faith (which is more important, 1 Cor. 2:14-16). We not only understand them, but feel and live and experience with them; we become totally involved. To stand back dispassionately and assess and cri-

ticize as a modern man would Shelley or Shakespeare or Homer is to fail to interpret Scripture.

4. Scripture uses popular phrases and expressions of its day, e. g., bowels of mercy, four corners of the earth. Joseph is called the father of Christ, etc. No error is involved in the use of such popular expressions. Cf. Ps. 7:9; Ps. 22:10.

5. In decribing the things of nature Scripture does not employ scientifically precise language, but describes and alludes to things phenomenally as they appear to our senses: e. g., the fixity of stellar constellations and the magnitude of the stars (Is. 13:10; Jud. 5:20; Job 38:31; Amos 5:8; Job 9:9); the sun and moon are called lights and the implication that the moon is larger than the stars (Gen. 1:16) [it *is* larger from our vantage point]; the earth as motionless in a fixed position (Eccl. 1:4; Ps. 93:1); the sun goes around the fixed earth (Eccl. 1:5; Matt. 13:6; Eph. 4:26; note that in the Hebrew there is even a phrase for the rising of the sun: *mizrah shemesh,* which means "east", Num. 34: 15). Phenomenal language also explains why the bat is classified with birds (Lev. 19:11; cf. Lev. 11:6; Ps. 135:6). Such a classification offers no attempt to be scientific. Many things in the realm of nature are spoken of in poetic language: the spreading out of the heavens (Is. 40; Job 9:8), the foundations of the earth (Job 38:6), the pillars of the earth (Job 9:6) and of heaven (Job 26:11), the ends of the earth (Ps. 67:7; 72:8). Note that there is much apostrophe and hyperbole (Mk. 4:31) when Scripture speaks of the things of nature. In none of the above instances is inerrancy threatened or vitiated. The intention of the passages cited above is not to establish or vouch for a particular world view or scientific explanation of things. Because the language is not scientific does not imply that it is not true descriptively.

6. The various literary forms used by Scripture.

a. Certain alleged forms are not compatible either with the purpose of Scripture or with its inerrancy. Specifically: any literary genre which would in itself be immoral or involve deceit or error is not compatible with Biblical inerrancy, and is not to be found in Scripture, e. g., myth, etiological tale, midrash, legend or saga according to the usual designation of these forms. None of these genres fits the serious theological purpose of Scripture. Thus, we do not find Scripture presenting material as factual or historical when in truth it is only mythical. (2 Pet. 1:16ff.: 1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4). [4]

4.   Cf. A. Bea, *De Inspiratione et Inerrantia Sacrae Scripturae* (Rome, 1954), p. 44: "Myth is the expression of some religious or cultic idea through personifications which are regarded as divine entities (e. g., the fertility of the earth and of animals — Astarte). Such myths must be distinguished from mythic literary elements (metaphors, personifications) employed from selected mythology for illustrative purposes Cf. Is. 27:1 (=Ugarit A + I, 1-2?); Ps. 74:12-17; 89:10-14; 48:3; Job 26:7; Ez. 32:20. Myth, properly so-called, cannot be found in the sacred Scriptures (cf. *EB* n. 60.333); however, that literary elements could be used to adorn or illustrate was already granted by the holy Fathers; cf. S. Greg. Nyss. *PG* 44, 973. On individual passages, see *Biblica* 19 (1938), 444-448; F. Porporato, *Miti e inspirazione biblica,* 1944; id. in *Civ. Catt.* 94 (1943/I), 329-340.

"Midrashim technically speaking are rabbinic literary efforts — writings from that era — which are not strictly exegetical but composed for establishing rules for living (*halachah*). 2 Chron. 13:22 and 24:27 do not use the term in this technical sense, but signify merely 'study' or 'work' (cf. Eissfeldt, *Einl.,* p. 605). Since it arbitrarily confuses true and false things, midrash *per se* is excluded by the holy Scriptures (cf. *EB* n. 474). It can be admitted only if the holy writer clearly indicated that he is writing only for the sake of edification and not for setting forth properly history (cf. *EB* n. 154).'"

b. Apart from the above strictures any form of ancient literature is hypothetically compatible with Biblical inerrancy, e. g., allegory (Gal. 4), fable (Jud. 9:8-15), etc., provided the genre is indicated directly or indirectly. At the same time it does no violence to inerrancy if the language of folklore or mythical elements serve as a means to clothe a Biblical author's presentation of doctrine (e. g., "helpers of Rahab" in Job 9:13; "Leviathan" in Job 3:8 and in Ps. 74:12-15; Idumea as inhabited by centaurs, satyrs, etc.[Is. 34:14], meaning that Idumea will be devastated so that only such animals can live there). We do the same today if in a sermon a pastor refers to a "dog in the manger." As for the midrash, there is no reason to maintain that Scripture cannot employ midrashim any more than other literary forms. In many cases midrash approaches parable in form and purpose. However, the fanciful examples of midrash with the indiscriminate admixture of truth and error and the production of pure fiction to stress a certain lesson is not compatible with the historical character and the inerrancy of Scripture; cf. J. M. Lehrmann, *The World of the Midrash* (London, 1961). [5]

7. Biblical historiography

a. Some Biblical writers use and cite sources for their history. We must assume that the Biblical author by the way in which he cites sources believes that these sources speak the truth, that they are reliable sources; and therefore he follows them. The contrary contention is certainly possible, but it must be proved in individual cases (implicit citations, cf. 2 Sam.). In the case of explicit citations (the words of a character in a history) we assume the truth of the matter cited, but this again depends upon the intention of the hagiographer. We can assume the truth of the matter cited only if the holy writer formally or implicitly asserts that he approved it and judges to be true what he asserts in the citation (cf. Acts 17:29).

b. Historical events are not described phenomenally as are the data of nature. [6]

---

5.   Cf. *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, I, 1097: "All literary genres are quite compatible with inspiration, if they are not by their very nature immoral (as in the case of certain classical poetry) or if they do not tend to lead into error. Thus myths considered as false religious fables (e. g., the personification of natural things such as the fertility of the earth as divine beings is a literary form not consonant with inspiration). But a myth merely cited in Scripture or used as a mere literary adornment may be admitted, but as something merely cited, or as something purely metaphorical. . . .We can even allow that fictitious narratives (are present) in the Scriptures, provided that they are recognized as such and that of necessity the truth related by the words of the story is in the proper sense not historical. Thus, there is the allegorical mode of speaking in Scripture, such as we find in the Song of Songs which is an allegorical song describing the love and mystical union between Jahveh and His people. And it is true that in the different literary forms of Scripture, whether poetical or doctrinal or narrative, (fables) are interspersed."

6.   Cf. Bea, *op cit.*, p. 45: " 'History according to appearance' is based upon a false foundation, namely this, that principles which obtain relative to matters of nature can be transferred to historical concerns. Historical sources or general opinion are not 'appearances of happenings'; the telling of a certain happening *per se* does not amount to announcing that something appeared to the senses, as in the realm of nature, nor is it tantamount to say what the common people think about a happening; rather it is the announcing of the happening itself." Cf. also *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, I, 1097: "On the other hand, history is not concerned with phenomena which are continuously apparent and with things which men describe according to appearance, but history concerns itself with *things that have happened, just as they have happened*" (underlining theirs).

c. The historical genre employed by Scripture is apparently a unique form. As it cannot be judged according to the canons of modern scientific historiography, it cannot be judged by the mythological and legendary or even historical forms of ancient contemporary civilizations; e. g., we take the ancient Babylonian and Ugaritic accounts of creation as pure myth, but quite clearly the Biblical cannot be taken as such. [7]

d. Chronology and genealogies are not presented in Scripture in the full and orderly manner in which we might present a chronicle or family tree today. Scripture often spreads out time for the sake of symmetry or harmony, hysteron proteron is often employed, and also prolepsis (John 17:4; 13:31). Again, genealogies often omit many generations (cf. I Ch. 26:24, where Moses, Gershom, Shebuel are given, covering a period of perhaps more than 400 years; or cf. Heb. 7:9-10, where Levi is said to be in the loins of Abraham, his father,

---

7.   Cf. Bea, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-48: "In its own characteristics Israelite writing of history far surpasses all other Semitic historiography. . . . G. Albright, *The Archaeology of Pal.* (1932), 128. . . . In a certain sense Hebrew historiography can be compared with the Hittite (cf. *Annales Mursilis* II, ca. 1353-1325; *Apologia Hattusil.*, ca. 1295-1260), but the Israelitish writing of history surpasses this in liveliness, in its simple manner, and sincere way of narrating, in psychological depth and breadth; in particular it is not a 'courtly' or 'official' manner of narrating. . . . .

"The manner of writing among the ancients definitely differs from the modern. Firstly, the ancients considered the writing of history to be an art (cf. Cicero). Thus it was adorned greatly, for instance, with fictitious speeches to express certain ideas. Such historiography pays more attention to giving the sense of a speech than to bringing out the exact words; it employs numerical schemata (30, 40, 70); it uses mnemonic techniques (such as etymologies); it is careless concerning exact chronology; it uses genealogies as shortcuts to history; it narrates in 'concentric circles' rather than in straight continuous exposition, etc. Now all of these devices, provided that they are properly considered, in no way conflict with the integrity of the narratives. . . .

"'Ancient history is not a genre of its own peculiar type which is less interested in telling the truth than modern history. Rather it has different aims, different ways of exposition from modern history. Therefore it is necessary in the case of all the individual authors to investigate accurately what sources they use, how they make judgments from these sources, what style they employ, what purpose they intend. Only then are we able to assess rightly and judiciously concerning their historical merit. . . .

"The intention of the inspired historiographers is to write *true* history. When they made use of the narrative genre, this presupposes per se that they desire to tell of things that *have happened*. . . .

"That these stories have a religious aim does not imply that the *facts* which they refer to are any less true. 'Religious history' is not necessarily fictional narrative. Thus, for instance, the evangelists, although they write with a religious aim in mind, are very careful about the truth of the facts (cf. Lk. 1:1; Jn. 19:35; 1 Jn. 1:1). . . . .

"That the facts connected with revelation are sometimes (e. g., in the first eleven chapters of Genesis) presented in a simple manner, a manner accommodated to the comprehension of less cultured men, that they are presented figuratively and anthropomorphically, does not imply that we can call these narratives any less truly historical although they are not history in our modern technical meaning of the term; cf. *EB* 581, and *Verb. Dom.* 25 (1946), 354-56.

"The Judaic as well as the Christian tradition understood the Biblical narratives in the strictly historical sense; cf. the sayings of Christ (Lk. 4:25; 6:3ff.; 17:32; Matt. 12:40) and the sayings of the apostles (Heb. 11:17-40; 2 Pet. 2:5-8), in which facts of minor or secondary importance are set forth as history. . . . That Christ and the apostles simply 'accommodated' themselves to their own contemporaries cannot be asserted a priori, but must be proved in each individual case where there might seem to be some special reason for granting this."

when Melchisedec met him; thus any ancestor is the father of all his descendants).

8. We must grant that there is often a *sensus plenior* in Scripture pericopes in the sense of 1 Pet. 1:10-12. That is to say, the writer of Scripture is not in every respect a child of his time, conditioned by his own cultural milieu, but he often writes for a later age. However, we cannot countenance a *sensus diversus et disperatus relate ad sensus litteralem obvium hagiographi*, which would conflict with Biblical inerrancy and turn Scripture into a waxen nose. We hold only to a profounder and sometimes more distinct sense than the writer may have perceived as he expressed himself. This has serious implications relative to the NT use and interpretation of the OT; the NT does not misinterpret or do violence to the OT when it interprets. *Sensus litteralis Scripturae unicus est* does not imply that the sacred writer understands the full divine implication of all his words.

9. Pseudepigrapha. Pseudonymity in the sense of one writer pretending to be another in order to secure acceptance of his own work is illicit and not compatible with inerrancy. That the motives for such action may be construed as good does not alter the fact that fraud or forgery has been perpetrated. The fact that such a practice was carried on in ancient times does not justify it nor indicate that the practice was considered moral. When in ancient times a pious fraud was found out and the authenticity of a work disproved, the work itself was suspect (cf. *Fragmentum Muratorianum*, 5, where the *finctae* letters of Paul to the Laodiceans and the Alexandrians were not accepted by the Church for that very reason).

Pseudonymity must be carefully delimited. Pseudonymity is deliberate fraud (for any reason whatsoever). It has nothing to do with anonymity. Nor would it be pseudonymity if a later writer culled under inspiration all the wisdom sayings of Solomon, gathering them into a volume and presenting them for what they are, Solomon's wisdom. His contemporaries know that Solomon has not written the book, but understand the sayings and the wisdom to be Solomon's (similar to this, that we have the words of Christ in the Gospels). In such a case no deception is involved. In the case of the pastoral epistles this could not be assumed by any stretch of the imagination. The letters are written to give the impression that they come directly from Paul, claiming his authority. If they were not in fact Pauline, a deception has taken place, a successful deception until lately (cf. J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1958], pp. 182ff.).

10. Etymologies in Scripture are often according to sound, and not (obviously) according to modern linguistic analysis. This fact does not affect in-

errancy. The ancients are not thinking of etymologies in the modern sense. [8]

11. The inerrancy and the authority of Scripture are inseparably related. This fact has been consistently recognized by Reformation theologians who have often included inerrancy and authority under the rubric of infallibility. What is meant is that without inerrancy the *sola Scriptura* principle cannot be maintained or practiced. An erring authority for all Christian doctrine (like an erring Word of God) is an impossible and impracticable *contradictio in adjecto*.

12. In approaching the Scripture as children of God who are under the Scriptures it is well to recall and observe two basic principles of our Reformation Fathers: (1) Scripture is *autopistos*, that is to say, we are to believe its utterances simply because Scripture, the Word of God, makes these utterances (inerrancy is always to be accepted on faith!), and believe without the need of any corroborating evidence. This would apply to statements about God, but also to statements about events in history. (2) Scripture is *anapodeiktos*, that is, self-authenticating. It brings its own demonstration, the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Again no corroborating evidence is necessary or sought for. Now *sola Scriptura* means all this; and it means as well that there are no outside criteria for judging the truthfulness or factual content of Scriptural assertions (e. g., neither a modern scientific world view nor modern "scientific historiography"). We accept the assertions of the Scripture on faith. For instance, the fact that the creation story or the flood or the story of Babel has some parallels in other Semitic and ancient lore gives no right to conclude that these accounts in Scripture are mythical (any more than we have the right to conclude that Christ's resurrection is not historical because there are mythical resurrections recorded in history). Such an interpretation would involve a violation of the *sola Scriptura* principle. At the same time it is possible that a changed world

8.   Cf. J. Levie, *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men* (New York, 1962), pp. 220-221: "We know that in all countries the common people very often invent as an afterthought etymological explanations for the name of a given place or given tribe on the basis of quite arbitrary associations of ideas or words. Is it legitimate to admit that here too the sacred writer is content to hand down to us the popular derivations customary in his environment or should we be obliged to believe that, by virtue of inspiration, these derivations are the true linguistic explanations of the words in question, and should therefore be accepted by present-day scholars?

"It is now generally recognized that the inspired writer is only reporting these attempted etymologies as he found them in the folklore of his country. The literary form he adopts, which is that of popular history, clearly shows that he has no intention of offering us scientific derivations of the modern kind, but popular derivations in the style of his own times.

"Here are a few examples taken from ten chapters of Genesis, 16 to 26: — 16.13 (Atta el Roi); 16.14 (Lachai Roi); 17.17; 18. 12-15; 21.6 which give three derivations of the name Isaac (these clearly show by their differences that the writer intended to give a simple report and to make no attempt at criticism); 19.22 (Segor); 21.31 (Bersabee); 22.14 (Yahweh Yireh); 25.25 (Jacob); 25.30-1 (Edom); 26.20 (Eseq); 26.21 (Sitna); 26.22 (Rechoboth); 26.33 (Schibea)."

view (e. g., our modern view as opposed to the Newtonian view of absolute space and time) will open for consideration a new interpretation of a Biblical pericope, although it can never determine our interpretation of Scripture.

It is particularly important to maintain the above principles in our day in view of the tendency to allow extra-biblical data (particularly historical and archaeological data) to encroach on the absolute authority of Scripture.

Concordia Theological Seminary
Saint Louis, Missouri