REPLY TO N. L. GEISLER

My paper on "Ordinary Language Analysis and Theological Method" published in the last issue of this Bulletin was not about the doctrine of Scripture but part of a symposium on theological method. Had it been about Scripture I would have given the subject more than one paragraph! But it was about methodology: I suggested that the logic of models and constructs is neither strictly inductive nor strictly deductive, and that inductio nand deduction are not the only logics available to theologians. How we formulate our theological concepts is a complex question: we do not derive all of them by direct exegesis. I used the concept of inerrancy (*not* inspiration *nor* revelation *nor* authority) as an example. I could as well have used the Chalcedonian formula or the congregational concept of church government: both of which I accept but neither of which in its technical detail is, I think, derived either by inductive generalization or by strict deduction from Biblical statements alone. In the Chalcedonian formula the language of Greek metaphysics provides a model, but the resultant formula is still "true to" Scripture. In the congregational concept of the church, I suspect 17th century political concepts suggested how the church might be regarded. The problem in each case is to distinguish the resultant construct from what Scripture plainly teaches. The construct is a second-order doctrine; what Scripture itself says is first-order. The same distinction must be made with regards to inerrancy, for we affirm an inerrant Scripture, not an inerrant logic nor an inerrant theological method nor inerrant theological constructs.

It seems to me that Professor Geisler's response fails to understand this use of "first-order" and "second-order" doctrines, and to imply that all Christian theology is of the first order. In popular doctrinal teaching it may seem this way but not, I submit, in historical theology and the technicalities of systematics. He also overlooks two other crucial points in my paper:

1. I affirm that it is the doctrine of inerrancy *as technically formulated and qualified by careful theologians* that is not the result simply of pure induction of strict deduction. Geisler comes to this point only in his concluding paragraph and does not consider the possibility that extra-Biblical concepts of truth and error and accuracy have been adduced by theologians. A recent writer in this Bulletin claimed, for instance, that the correspondence theory of truth is essential for evangelicals; maybe or maybe not; but correspondence is an extra-Biblical philosophical theory, whatever its merits, rather than an exegetically derived doctrine. The truthfulness or inerrancy of Scripture defined on the correspondence model, or a scientific model, or a rationalistic model, is the sort of thing I have in mind. It is no use affirming truthfulness after all without a theory of truth. We have to use models of some sort.

2. I affirm that theological concepts that use models, concepts like inerrancy or the Chalcedonian formula *are* testable. Geisler implies I have no *objective truth criteria,* but on p. 137 I explicity discuss empirical adequacy and rational coherence as tests for our constructs. When I prefer a doctrinal formulation for systematic reasons, I do so because it coheres rationally in the whole body of theological understanding, and because it adequately covers the Biblical data. My proposal, then, does not leave evangelicals up in the air. It serves rather to remind us that as Protestants we must reject an inerrant theology. We may be confidence of what we believe, and with good and sufficient reasons, but we cannot claim inerrancy for ourselves, not even an inerrant theology of inerrancy. *Scriptura sola* is our rule.

A. F. Holmes