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Does Inerrancy Allow the Possibility of Evolution?¹

by Kevin Twain Lowery

Introduction

In October 1978, the International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) gathered together over 300 scholars, pastors, and lay persons for the purpose of solidifying a stance on biblical inerrancy.² Fourteen scholarly papers were presented which detailed the historical, theological, and practical considerations to be made. When all was said and done, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy was formulated, complete with an introduction, a short statement, nineteen formal articles, and an exposition of its key doctrines.

With regards to its attitude toward science, Article XII is most specific:

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.³

The position seems to be rather clear. Science is portrayed as being at odds with Christianity. This distrust may be a suspicion of anti-religious bias within the scientific community, or it may be a distrust of science in general. Hopefully, it is not the latter.

The papers presented at the Chicago conference were collected and published in one volume, along with the official statement on inerrancy. It is simply entitled *Inerrancy*, being edited by Norman L. Geisler. Of all the historical figures referenced in the papers, one stands out among many: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. Not only is

one of the essays focused entirely on his positions over and against those of G. C. Berkouwer, he is referenced in 7 of the other 13 essays, more than any other figure. In fact, he is referenced more times than any other figure throughout the volume.⁴ One might call Warfield the champion of the inerrantist cause.

David N. Livingstone has authored *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders*, in which he documents early evangelical reactions to evolution. Surprisingly, he discovers that even at the advent of fundamentalism, many well-known evangelical scholars were very open to evolution as a teleological schema for creation. Among those enumerated we find none other than Benjamin Warfield.⁵

Could the Chicago group be mistaken? Can one in good conscience be an inerrantist without a natural hostility toward evolution? The first task will be to take a closer look at the reconciliation obviously made in Warfield's mind. To add some breadth to the investigation, I will likewise explore the position of conservative Wesleyan scholar, William Burt Pope, whose views were rather comparable to those of Warfield. Following these expositions will be a précis of the emergence of fundamentalism in the twentieth century and of the new shape that inerrancy began to take, namely, an association with biblical literalism. Finally, an attempt will be made to derive from the data an inerrantist hermeneutic that will benefit from dialogue with science.

Case One: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield

Benjamin B. Warfield was a notable scholar among the "Princeton divines," as they were sometimes called. He rose to prominence in the first decade of the twentieth

century. To this very day, his well-developed theological views on revelation and inspiration are widely respected. Henry Krabbendam characterizes his influence as such:

Warfield, undoubtedly the most distinguished representative of the Old Princeton position of Scripture, never grew weary in his extensive writings on the subject to defend the plenary, verbal inspiration, and therefore the inerrancy, of the Bible. His repeated and thorough preoccupation with the inspiration of Scripture has not only placed a stamp on American Reformed and Presbyterian thought but has even gained him the accolade of being the greatest contributor ever to this theme.⁶

The Doctrine of Inerrancy

A fully developed exposition of Warfield's position would begin with revelation, then it would continue through inspiration and the scriptures, concluding with hermeneutics (i.e. interpretation of the text). Warfield wrote at least one volume and numerous papers to construct the process from beginning to end. Such is why his work is so valuable to those who resonate with this conclusions. For the purposes of this paper, it will not be necessary to outline the entire process. I believe that the gist of his openness to evolution can be attained through a synopsis that takes inspiration as its starting point.

Warfield forthwith dismisses the notion of mechanical inspiration, which asserts that the Holy Spirit dictated the precise words of the text to the biblical authors. He believes such a view to be theologically and philosophically shallow, characterizing it as "a man of straw."⁷ He also does not feel the force of tradition compelling him to embrace it, pointing out that "the Reformed Churches have never held such a theory."⁸ This allows room for not only the words of the authors, but for their personalities as well. Scripture thus is "co-authored."

[The church] has always recognized that this conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit's superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship -- thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy).⁹

Scripture is in essence a divine notion expressed through human understanding. It is simultaneously "the consciously self-chosen word of the writer and the divinely-inspired word of the Spirit . . . It is all human -- every word, and all divine. The human characteristics are to be noted and exhibited; the divine perfection and infallibility, no less."¹⁰ This duality of scripture is crucial for hermeneutics, for if the words of scripture were fully divine, and not human, then the weight of interpretation would tend toward literalism. If the words were fully human, they would bear no authority.

This construal of inspiration provides the basis to regard scripture as inerrant and infallible. Albeit, Warfield seems to stress infallibility more than inerrancy, perhaps due to pragmatic concerns. Whereas inerrancy maintains the quality of the text itself, infallibility bespeaks the teleology behind the revelation. He asserts, "Revelation is but half revelation unless it be infallibly communicated; it but half communicated unless it be infallibly recorded."¹¹ Warfield's main concern is that Christians be able to trust in scripture as true revelation from God. He reminds us that "this attitude of entire trust in every word of the Scriptures has been characteristic of the people of God from the very foundation of the church."¹²

The following quotation expresses more fully the precedence of trustworthiness over inerrancy.

The present controversy concerns something much more vital than the bare "inerrancy" of the Scriptures, whether in the copies or in the

"autographs." It concerns the trustworthiness of the Bible in its express declarations, and in the fundamental conceptions of its writers as to the course of the history of God's dealings with his people. It concerns, in a word, the authority of the Biblical representations concerning the nature of revealed religion, and the mode and course of its revelation. The issue raised is whether we are to look upon the Bible as containing a divinely guaranteed and trustworthy account of God's redemptive revelation, and the course of his gracious dealings with his people; or as merely a mass of more or less trustworthy materials, out of which we are to sift the facts in order to put together a trustworthy account of God's redemptive revelation and the course of his dealings with his people.¹³

To support his view, Warfield appeals to creedal affirmations. He understands the traditional doctrine of the Reformed Churches to support both his understanding of co-authorship and his emphasis on infallibility.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he maintains that the Westminster Confession contains "the most complete, the most admirable, the most perfect statement of the essential Christian doctrine of Holy Scripture which has ever been formed by man." Once again, the divine inspiration of the scriptures gives them "infallible truth and divine authority," such that they can be wholly trusted and believed.¹⁵

Warfield does make two important qualifications to his doctrine. First, he limits inerrancy to the autographa. The superintendency of the Holy Spirit preserved the originals from error, yet the transmission of the text (i.e. copying, interpreting, etc.) is subject to human mistakes and corruption. Hence, apparent "errors" in scripture are to be attributed to the process of transmission and not to the originals.¹⁶ Warfield credits the Holy Spirit in preserving the text from substantive errors, thus maintaining its infallibility.

Second, he acknowledges that the scriptures can only achieve their purpose when they are "ascertained and interpreted in their natural and intended sense."¹⁷ Once again,

the Holy Spirit has the vital role from beginning to end, for the Spirit superintends the entire process. At the same time, the entire process is one that is altogether human, yet one in which the divine purpose is achieved.

Views on Evolution

Livingstone surmises that Warfield's fascination with evolution stems from the interest that he and his father shared in cattle breeding. Obviously, such an enterprise would well acquaint him with natural selection. This is why Warfield, early in his career, could classify himself as a pure Darwinian. Livingstone proposes that as Warfield's career progressed, his views on evolution became more tempered.¹⁸

Warfield draws much from Calvin, whom he considered to hold a very evolutionary view of creation, with the exception of the infusion of souls. Calvin would allow the evolution of matter, but considered spirit to be a separate entity.¹⁹ Therefore, under such a conception human beings would evolve from lower creatures but not be fully human until souls were infused into them. This would be a special creative act.²⁰

Calvin portrays the divine process of creation as one of primary and secondary causes. God oversees the process, but the changes are effected by lesser causes found within the system itself.²¹ Nevertheless, the secondary causes are derived from and ultimately attributed to God. Commenting on the similarities between Calvin's depiction and evolution, Warfield states:

Calvin doubtless had no theory of evolution; but he teaches a doctrine of evolution. He has no object in so teaching except to preserve to [sic.] the creative act, properly so called, its purity as an immediate production out of nothing. All that is not immediately produced out of nothing is therefore not created -- but evolved. Accordingly his doctrine of evolution is entirely unfruitful. The whole process takes place within the limits of

six natural days. That the doctrine should be of use as an explanation of the mode of production of the ordered world, it was requisite that these six days should be lengthened out into six periods, -- six ages of the growth of the world. Had that been done Calvin would have been a precursor of the modern evolutionary theorists.²²

The issue that Calvin did not resolve, namely, the duration of the creation periods, is the only scientific issue that bears directly upon the question of the antiquity of humanity, otherwise, it "has of itself no theological significance."²³ The periods of creation are best left undetermined, since there is no way to derive their length other than through sheer speculation. Indeed, Bishop Ussher's chronology, which used genealogical tables in the Bible to calculate 4004 B.C. as the date of creation, is not valid, since the use of genealogical tables is "precarious in the highest degree."²⁴ Genealogies do not have a chronological purpose and should not be used in that regard.²⁵ Such efforts of calculation only limit our ability to understand the workings of the Creator.

Several key theological issues for Warfield are worth mention. The first is the unity of the human race, a matter which he considers to be of more importance than the antiquity of humanity. The unity of the human race bears directly upon the doctrines of sin and redemption. It matters not so much when the fall of humanity occurred as does the belief that sin effected a universal curse on all human beings.²⁶ Ironically, Warfield sees evolution as a possible solution to the problem. Although the evolutionary hypothesis allows for the evolution of more than one pair of humans, it "rendered it natural to look upon the differences which exist among the various types of man as differentiations of a common stock."²⁷

The unity of the human race is central to the Biblical narrative, represented by the original pair, Adam and Eve.

[They] constituted humanity in its germ and [they are the two] from whose fruitfulness and multiplication all the earth has been replenished . . . The absolute restriction of the human race within the descendants of this single pair is emphasized by the history of the Flood in which all flesh is destroyed, and the race given a new beginning in its second father, Noah . . . Throughout the Scriptures therefore all mankind is treated as, from the divine point of view, a unit, and shares not only in a common need but in a common redemption.²⁸

Albeit, Warfield's view of Adam and Eve may not be as literal as it would first appear. James Orr, in his work, *God's Image in Man, and Its Defacement, in the Light of Modern Denials*, claims that evolution cannot be reconciled with the Biblical account of creation because the emergence of only a single pair of humans is impossible to conceive. Warfield responds, "We do not feel this difficulty as strongly as Dr. Orr appears to feel it. Why should there be a pair? Nothing is more common in the experience of breeders than the origination of a new type through an individual sport. And what is the difficulty of obtaining a pair or more of the same fundamental type?"²⁹

The second theological issue for Warfield is that of divine guidance. Following the thought of Calvin, Warfield will not entertain evolution as a self-contained process; God must inject spirit to complete the human being as both body and soul.

If under the hand of God a human body is formed at a leap by propagation from brutish parents, it would be quite consonant with the fitness of things that it should be provided by His creative energy with a truly human soul . . . Let man have arisen through the Divine guidance of the evolutionary process, there is no creative act of God, but only a providential activity of God, concerned in his production, unless there has been intruded into the process the action of a cause not intrinsic in the evolving stuff, causing the complex product to be something more than can find its account in the intrinsic forces, however divinely manipulated.³⁰

Warfield's third issue is biblical interpretation. He simply does not conform to a literalistic interpretation of the narratives. On the contrary, he believes that Moses,

"writing to meet the needs of men at large, accommodated himself to their grade of intellectual preparation, and confined himself to what meets their eyes."³¹

It should be apparent that although Warfield did not remain "a Darwinian of the purist water," he did remain open to its possibility throughout his career. "We raise no question as to the compatibility of the Darwinian form of the hypothesis of evolution with Christianity."³² His openness was in any event cautious. Hart quotes him as follows:

"The whole upshot of the matter is that there is no *necessary* antagonism of [Christianity] to evolution, *provided that* we do not hold to too extreme a form of evolution." If the constant supervision of divine providence and the "occasional supernatural interference" of God were retained, then, he concluded, "we may hold to the modified theory of evolution & and be [Christ]ians in the ordinary orthodox sense. I say we may do this. Whether we ought to accept it, even in this modified sense is another matter, & I leave it purposely an open question."³³

Case Two: William Burt Pope

William Burt Pope, though a native Canadian, spent most of his life in England. During the latter part of his career, he lectured in theology at Didsbury College, Manchester.³⁴ From that day until the present, his work has received great acclaim throughout conservative Wesleyan circles, most notably as an expositor of Wesley's theology.

Scriptural Hermeneutic

For the sake of clarity, I likewise begin my discussion of Pope with his views on the inspiration of Scripture. As with Warfield, Pope also rejects the notion of mechanical inspiration, referring to it as "verbal inspiration." However, he will allow that God may

have, under certain exceptions, dictated specific verbiage for the text, but as a general rule, such did not take place. The need to maintain the precision of the terms within the text is superfluous. Indeed, "the fact that the autographs of the Bible have disappeared proves that the Holy Ghost has allowed nothing vital to depend on such a distinction."³⁵ Moreover, if scripture had been inspired verbally: 1) the actual words would have been protected and 2) there would be no discrepancies within the gospels.³⁶

Pope prefers the use of the word "plenary" in his description of inspiration. This denotes the fullness of inspiration inasmuch scripture contains everything that is necessary to salvation.³⁷ Understanding inspiration to be something other than verbal transmission places the responsibility of superintendency upon the Holy Spirit.

He likewise asserts the co-authorship of scripture, both human and divine. "It does not profess to be Divine in any such sense as should remove it from human literature . . . It is, after all, a Divine-human collection of documents."³⁸ At this point, though, Pope begins to make his departure from Warfield. Whereas Warfield allows the possibility of non-substantial errors in the text, Pope goes further, claiming that much of our scripture may not match what the authors actually wrote.³⁹ This presence of error is his basis for rejecting literalistic interpretations of scripture. Albeit, Pope will still maintain the integrity of the text in that it adequately communicates the concepts it was intended to transmit. As with other divine mysteries, "the Bible is a book adapted to man's probationary estate. Our probation is conducted in a world of the mysteries of which we know but little."⁴⁰ It is thus our duty to investigate the scriptures in order to unearth their hidden treasures.

For Pope the authority of scripture originates in its divine authorship, but "its plenary inspiration makes Holy Scripture the absolute and final authority, all-sufficient as the supreme Standard of Faith."⁴¹ With Warfield, Pope declares scripture to be infallible. This property of scripture "is by itself especially connected with religious truth," making it comprehensible.⁴² Pope identifies the purpose of scripture to be "the establishment of holiness in man."⁴³ The Bible is hence concerned with spiritual matters, and its texts are to be interpreted in that light. "It is comparatively silent as to human science."⁴⁴ This implies that scientific advancement has little, if any, ability to undermine scripture.

Interestingly, evolution for Pope is not only an account of creation, he formulates his doctrine of revelation around it. He begins by describing inspiration as both "plenary and dynamical."⁴⁵ He thus views it more as a process than as an event, paralleling the process of creation. "Throughout the works of God -- granted that the creation is a work of God -- we perceive the universal sway of a law of evolution, qualified however by a subordinate law of occasional interventions that seem to break the former. Precisely what we find in nature and in providence we find in the gradual construction of Scripture."⁴⁶ This statement reveals his view of evolution as a process with "occasional interruptions." What it does not tell us we will see later, specifically, that the process has a point of culmination, which brings it to a close.

Relationship Between Christianity and Science

As stated above, the primary purpose of scripture is spiritual; it does not generally involve itself in matters of science. Thus, the two spheres of knowledge, though they are

not disjointed, are not in any conflict with one another. Pope affirms his faith in Christianity:

Meanwhile, it is one of the evidences of the truth of our religion that it has survived the attack of many systems of false science. It has in every past age received the homage of the best intellects and most earnest cultivators of both physical and metaphysical truth. This is true of the present age also. And it may be safely said that true Christianity is accepted by a far larger number of rigorous and sound thinkers than is to be found in the service in any one particular department of scientific opposition or perhaps in all departments of scientific opposition put together.⁴⁷

Pope believes that "science has absolutely nothing to say about creation proper." It deals with the processes of nature, which Pope refers to as "secondary creation."⁴⁸ Science should take religion into account, not only for the reasons given above, but in deference to its major role in the development of human culture. On the other hand, science often proves to be helpful in hermeneutics, providing external data that can be considered in the interpretation process.

Christendom has had much to unlearn and much to learn through its contact with scientific criticism and research. It may have something yet both to unlearn and learn: many most important helps for the solution of difficulties, the removal of obstacles, and the reconciliation of apparent contradictions in the exegesis of Scripture, may and indeed certainly will be afforded by the investigations of scholars and physicists.⁴⁹

There are no real conflicts between science and religion, only virtual ones. "Generally speaking, there has never been any opposition between Christianity and true science. For Christianity professes to be, and is, a scientific presentation of the largest and broadest philosophy ever expounded to mankind. Hence St. Paul speaks of *oppositions of science falsely so called*."⁵⁰ Science is limited to examining the material realm, whereas religion explores the spiritual realm, the realm of ideals and ultimate

reality. In this way, science informs religion and religion interprets science on a broader philosophical scale.

There have been instances of apparent conflict between science and scripture. For instance, the Middle Ages saw the church building up false interpretations of scripture, based mainly on speculation. Fortunately, "science came to the aid of the simplicity of truth."⁵¹ What often happens is that interpreters of scripture frame "miraculous" and speculative theories, then they are offended when their theories do not accord with the facts.⁵² In any case, scripture cannot be faulted when its interpreters add to its truths. Scripture must be judged on its own grounds, not on the grounds that its defenders often seek to establish for it. Only genuine Christianity can be defended, that which is free from the "additions of men."⁵³

Pope cedes the perception that modern anthropology conflicts with the biblical account in many points.⁵⁴ This should not cause alarm. Consequently, the apparent clashes between science and scripture are not real, but dissipate.

If it should seem in any case that a clear result of inductive science clashes with Scripture or the Christian religion, it will be found, as it has been found in times past, that the contradiction is not real: either the Scripture and the particular truth concerned has been misunderstood, or the scientific induction may itself have to be corrected, or some yet unknown mediatorial fact must be waited for.⁵⁵

Pope is optimistic about the future contributions that science promises to make. "Science furnished the key to open some of the dark chambers of cosmogony. And as the origin of things is better understood since modern geology sprang up, so also the origin of man is and will be better understood when the chaos of modern anthropology is reduced to shape."⁵⁶

Evolutionary View of Creation

Pope sees evolution as completely compatible with the biblical account of creation. First, he feels that the Bible harmonizes perfectly with the antiquity of the human race, provided that it is not pushed back too far. His argument is that while the Old Testament is relatively obscure on the matter, the New Testament speaks of "long past ages."⁵⁷ Second, in a manner reminiscent of Warfield, he states that the intent of scripture is to determine humanity's place within the divine purpose.⁵⁸ Thus, the Bible does not concern itself with scientific matters and is not obligated to be scientifically accurate.

Third, Pope views the biblical narrative as a hymn of praise to the Creator, not a scientific account of creation. The narrative is "simply above and beyond scientific criticism."⁵⁹ Fourth, interpreting science and scripture in new ways will not ultimately change their relationship. Only certain rudimentary concepts cannot be re-interpreted, for instance, our understanding of God. As a result, Pope names pantheism and materialism as the two real dangers to reconciling creation.⁶⁰ On one hand, pantheism describes a God that is entirely immanent, enmeshed in creation itself. Such a God is not personal and cannot act. On the other hand, materialism may deny God altogether or it may portray God as entirely transcendent, not involved in creation at all. Pope does not see evolution as compelling either of these faulty theistic views.

In agreement with Warfield, Pope interprets the days of creation as periods of time, "each day representing to us a period of undefined extent."⁶¹ These periods of time,

being "enormous cycles of creative activity, the epochs of God whose periods are not as ours, are presented to us in our history as human epochs."⁶²

However, Pope gives his interpretation a slightly different slant. He sees the days as spanning all of created time. "However the days are interpreted they embrace the sum of things."⁶³ In fact, we are now in the seventh day, the one in which God rests from creative activity. "The sabbath of His rest from creative activity is now running on; and is weekly commemorated . . . in the seventh age . . . creative interventions have ceased."⁶⁴ This not only allows Pope to affirm the antiquity that science would ascribe to the earth and to humanity, but it also interprets Christ's appearance on earth to be rather late in earth's history. The two thousand years that we have waited for Christ to return again are but a brief moment in the long history of earth.

When divine creation ended, divine providence began. We are thus currently under the providence of God.⁶⁵ This period of providence, and consequently of rest from creative activity, will continue until the new creation, consummated at Christ's return.⁶⁶ Pope's understanding of the seventh day is based on the belief that creation culminated with the creation of human beings.⁶⁷ Having completed creation, God rested.

Although it is less appealing now than it was a century ago, Pope, like Warfield, constructs a schema of evolution that is dependent on divine interventions at various points. In one respect, this interprets the gaps in the fossil record as special creative acts (i.e. "God of the Gaps"). From a different standpoint, interventions allow a more natural interpretation of the biblical narratives, since within them God is portrayed, at the very least, as initiating the creative process in each successive period of time.⁶⁸

Pope does not seem to emphasize the dualism of human nature, that is, an evolved body infused with a spirit. Most likely, this can be attributed to the fact that he is not dependent on Calvin as Warfield is. Anyhow, he does hold the same view of human nature: a body taken from the earth and a spirit breathed by God.⁶⁹

Finally, it is interesting to note Pope's response to Laplace and Hegel, whom he did not believe to see the necessity of God in an evolutionary process. He lists four products of evolution which tend to point toward a higher purpose and power. They are: 1) forces associated with matter (e.g. gravity, electricity, magnetism, nuclear forces, etc.), 2) order, which comes from chaos, 3) the variety of natural elements, each with its own characteristics yet composed of the same raw materials, and 4) the human mind.⁷⁰

Inerrancy and Fundamentalism

How can it be that, from the time of Warfield and Pope to the present, inerrancy became redefined so as to change the evangelical response to evolution from openness to utter antagonism? The answer is largely traceable through the rise of fundamentalism in the twentieth century.

Emergence of Fundamentalism

The early nineteenth century saw evangelicalism gain prominence in America, to a great extent propelled by the great awakenings engendered through George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Finney. This evangelical presence became solidified not only in churches, but in academic institutions as well, many of the oldest universities in

the country being founded for the purpose of theological training. The theology, of course, was dominantly evangelical.

Mark Noll believes that a crucial turning point for evangelicalism came later in the nineteenth century with the secularization of the American universities, in which many institutions of higher learning abandoned their evangelical roots.⁷¹ "In 1839, fifty-one of the fifty-four presidents of America's colleges were clergymen, most evangelicals. By the end of the century, the number was greatly reduced."⁷² Not only were evangelicals hoisted from the driver's seat, they were being increasingly marginalized. Fundamentalism and the science that would accompany it "arose in response to the rapid secularization of the modern academy."⁷³

George M. Marsden suggests the following factors in the rise of fundamentalism between 1870 and 1925: 1) the cultural crisis after World War I, 2) rural-urban differences, 3) increasing ethnic diversity, 4) migration, 5) alienation, 6) a desire for roots, and 7) generational factors. This was the basic backdrop and the Scopes trial of 1925 was a main catalyst.⁷⁴ As can be seen, the rise of fundamentalism is rather complex and cannot be summarized in a paragraph or two. In fact, there is still much about it we are still trying to understand. However, it is readily apparent that fundamentalism was a reaction by certain evangelicals who felt displaced by an increasingly secularized society.

Fundamentalism, although spread throughout numerous splinter groups, arose through three basic movements: 1) dispensationalism, 2) the holiness movement, and 3) pentecostalism. Dispensationalism teaches that God has acted in human history according to different "dispensations" of grace, which represent epochs of divine activity. From this framework grew much eschatological speculation and anticipation of Christ's

immanent return. This motivated fundamentalists to remain separate from the world. Hence, many of them will not engage with "the world" except to preserve the church from evil and the coming of the antichrist.

The holiness movement stressed the need to be cleansed from the inner inclination toward willful sin. This is effected supernaturally through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and is lived through pious obedience to God's will, at times guided by rigid standards of conduct and lifestyle. These standards were likewise aimed at separation from "worldly" influences.

Pentecostalism has its roots within the holiness movement. At the turn of the twentieth century, the baptism of the Holy Spirit became associated with the reception of spiritual gifts, in particular, the gift of tongues. Supernatural healings and miracles were "signs" used to confirm the highly emotional, subjective experience sought by its constituents.

Fundamentalism's Characteristics

If one common trait could be identified within all the various forms of fundamentalism, it would be its defensive posture. Even the groups which brought novel beliefs and practices to the forefront, such as the holiness movement, still notably defined themselves by their polemics. They not only stood *for* something, they stood *against* many things as well.

One sensitive area was the Bible. Timothy Weber observes, "From one angle, then, fundamentalism may be seen as an organized and often militant movement to protect the Bible from all its enemies."⁷⁵ The most notable of these enemies were higher

criticism and evolution. Nels Ferré believes that the fundamentalists in a broader sense protected supernaturalism, to their credit.⁷⁶ He feels that even though the fundamentalists have over-reacted to contemporary challenges, someday others will look back and thank them for keeping their opponents in check.

Being comprised of so many diverse groups, fundamentalism is not always easy to characterize. Albeit, evangelical scholar John Stott lists what he sees to be eight general tendencies of fundamentalists. The first four are pertinent to our discussion:

(1) A general suspicion of scholarship and science, which sometimes degenerates into a thoroughgoing anti-intellectualism;

(2) a mechanical view or "dictation theory" of biblical inspiration, with a consequent denial of the human, cultural element in Scripture and therefore of the need for "biblical criticism" and careful hermeneutics;

(3) a naive, almost superstitious, reverence for the Authorized (King James') Version of the Bible, warts and all, as if it were quasi-inspired, which leads to a neglect of textual criticism; and

(4) a literalistic interpretation of all Scripture ("the interpretation of every word of the Bible as literal truth" - *Collins English Dictionary*), leading to an insufficient recognition of the place of poetry, metaphor and symbol.⁷⁷

New Approach to Scripture

Thus, the fears of the fundamentalists transformed their approach to interpreting and understanding the Bible. Higher criticism and evolution threatened the Bible's authority, so they believed, and they defended it with a literalist hermeneutic, one that could not be altered. Consequently, their attitude toward science took a corresponding negative turn. Whereas in the nineteenth century evangelicals mainly sought to integrate science and the Bible, twentieth century evangelicals were basically interested in

defending particular interpretations of biblical passages. If science challenged these interpretations, it was deemed to be the enemy of truth.⁷⁸

There was a strong desire among fundamentalists to keep biblical interpretation simplistic. They sought to remove the task of hermeneutics from the scholars and hand it to the common people.⁷⁹ They believed that the Bible is written for average people and is best interpreted by average people. Complicated methods and arguments only corrupt the process and strip scripture of its meaning. Not surprisingly, Scottish Common Sense philosophy was utilized to buttress their arguments.⁸⁰

The natural result of this "simplification" of the interpretive enterprise was the biblical literalism mentioned earlier. Such became the norm. In fact, after World War I, "proof-texting" became a common practice, in which doctrinal points were supported through the sheer force of individual passages which seemed to support the proposition.⁸¹ Unfortunately, this practice often results in scripture being taken out of context and sometimes even parsed in the language of the translation (e.g. relying on dictionary definitions of English words, rather than consulting the original Hebrew or Greek).

To add insult to injury, the pentecostal movements often claimed a special "prophetic" status in which persons were able to supernaturally apprehend truth, including the interpretation of scripture.⁸² This phenomenon was not limited to Pentecostals, however. The selfsame practice, on a grander scale, had already produced and would continue to produce groups such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Worldwide Church of God, Unification Church, and Christian Science. Each of these groups makes exclusive truth claims, as they were "revealed" to their respective founders and leaders, and each

one espouses doctrines which make their claims to Christian orthodoxy highly questionable at best.

The touchstone of biblical literalism is its refusal to be influenced by external sources and authorities. For instance, James M. Gray developed a system for studying the Bible, working this system finally into its published form, *How to Master the English Bible* (1904). Among his five steps is one that insists that the Bible should be studied without outside aid or authority.⁸³ It was believed that such appeals merely question the Bible's strength and veracity.

Biblicists C. I. Scofield and Lewis Sperry Chafer, who both produced dispensationalist study Bibles, initiated the practice of collecting all the verses that referenced a certain word or subject, holding the belief that an exhaustive response to a subject or to the interpretation of a passage of scripture could be found strictly within the Bible itself.⁸⁴ This redefined the conception of "plenary" inspiration. Originally used to limit salvific truth to the Bible, the term now intended to depict a Bible which could not be amplified by external sources.

The simplistic approach became more and more complex. Inductive methods for studying the Bible were developed. Various reference works were produced, including Hebrew and Greek word studies, which allowed lay people to glean the most from Bible study with relatively little education. Rather than produce agreement, these efforts yielded a plethora of disputed doctrines. Settling such disputes required either the tedious scrutiny of scripture texts or the appeal to an accepted authority. Here Weber asserts, "Because of the intricacies of their 'inductive' system, fundamentalist lay people were only slightly less reliant on their Bible teachers than liberal lay people were on their

higher critics."⁸⁵ Some disputes were not settled and led to the formation of various denominations and sects.

Intellectual Impact

Noll identifies three types of intellectual impact that fundamentalism brought, namely: 1) a general spirit of anti-intellectualism, 2) the solidification of problematic, conservative, evangelical commitments of the nineteenth century, and 3) the stymieing of Christian scientific inquiry by their theological emphases.⁸⁶ Their anti-intellectualism led to a general disregard of higher education. F. Lincoln claims that such was evident in the attitude of Chafer, who "personified a populist, almost anti-intellectual approach of American fundamentalism to theology. More than once Chafer expressed his thankfulness that his study of the Bible had not been prejudiced by formal theological training."⁸⁷

Their disdain for science left the fundamentalists very scientifically naive, only exacerbating the existing problem.⁸⁸ The less they knew, the more adamant, defensive, and suspicious they became. Over time, the anti-intellectual climate resulted in the loss of several evangelical scholars to other Christian ranks.⁸⁹

Rise of Creationism

According to Noll, creationism began as an attempt by Seventh-Day Adventists to validate the teachings of their founder, Ellen G. White, who made much ado about a recent earth and flood.⁹⁰ The first string of published creationist works were authored by Adventist George McCready Price. During the World War II era, the evolutionist-

creationist debate died down somewhat. Nevertheless, in 1954, Baptist Bernard Ramm wrote *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, assuming more of the role of an integrationist. This prodded John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris to step to the forefront of the creationist cause.⁹¹ Today, creation scientists Duane Gish and Ken Ham carry on the tradition, supported by many others.

Elements of an Evangelical Integration of Scripture and Science

The figures of Warfield and Pope are, as it were, voices from the past which cast aspersions on the influence that fundamentalism has been permitted to have throughout evangelical ranks. It is high time for evangelicals to shed this anti-intellectualism and begin once again to interact with science and with scholars from the mainline Protestant and Catholic traditions. This can only take place if biblical literalism is abandoned for another hermeneutic. Drawing from the expositions of Warfield and Pope, I wish to propose a few principles I feel are necessary for the integration of science and scripture.

First, evangelicals must demonstrate *trust*, both in scripture and in science. It seems to me that an affirmation of the Bible's infallibility obviates the need to defend the Bible from its skeptics. There should be no fear that the Bible will remain unfettered and its doctrines preserved, regardless of what science may learn about the world. On the other hand, there must also be a trust in science itself, even if particular scientists appear to be biased from time to time. Science has a way of correcting itself, regardless of how it may be misunderstood or misinterpreted from time to time. Scientists are generally more than willing to disprove the false hypotheses of their colleagues. It must be believed that if the Bible is trustworthy, then science will only confirm and clarify that

fact as it progresses. Scientific hypotheses need not be accepted without evidence, but they must also not be forced to provide and maintain unreasonable degrees of certitude.

Second, evangelicals must be characterized by their *knowledge*. Integration can only take place if the Bible be understood to the point of identifying the key theological issues in a given passage. Once again, a statement affirming the infallibility of Scripture will lead the interpreter to seek the intended meaning contained within a given passage. This requires a deeper, sometimes critical, study of the text itself. For instance, in his wrestling with the creation narrative, John Stott identifies the fall as the key theological issue which must be resolved.⁹² Identifying key issues is the first step in integrating scripture and science. The second is simply to acquire and assimilate a working knowledge of science so that an informed engagement between the two sources can take place.

Third, a *non-literalist, evangelical hermeneutic* must be implemented. This begins with an understanding of *the purpose of scripture*. Warfield and Pope give us two: 1) to reveal to us the divine purpose and our place within it and 2) to establish humanity in a state of holiness. Cosmogony does not seem to be a specific concern of scripture. We are to understand our relation to our Creator, even if the means of creation cannot be ascertained. Next, the hermeneutic must grasp *the authority of scripture*. The Bible is infallible in that it never fails to achieve God's purposes. Its inspiration is plenary, in the sense that everything necessary to salvation is contained therein. Yet, this does not imply that our understanding of the Bible cannot be informed by external sources. The Bible is co-authored, being a project that is both human and divine. As

such, it communicates eternal truths in terms that are accessible to us, yet is wholly trustworthy, being the word of God.

Also, *the scope of scripture* must be determined. As mentioned, the Bible is not intended to be a textbook on science. This conclusion flows from the definition of plenary inspiration that has already been asserted. Knowledge of nature is not considered to be salvific knowledge, therefore, it is not a primary concern of the Bible, since the Bible concerns itself with salvific matters. In contrast, the Bible reveals to us God, human nature, sin, grace, etc.; essentially, matters bearing upon salvation. Understanding the scope of scripture prevents science and the Bible from clashing needlessly.

The scope of scripture is also limited by its context, i.e. it was written within a specific context. Hence, its message must be re-contextualized to its listener. Bernard Ramm sets the following principles in interpreting scripture with regard to science: 1) the Bible used conversational language and not scientific terminology, 2) the language of the Bible is descriptive, not analytic, 3) the Bible does not theorize about the natural realm, and 4) the Bible accommodated the culture to which it was given.⁹³ This final principle is unconscionable to fundamentalists who refuse to see God as "patronizing," yet it is a crucial one which I believe to be supported even within scripture itself. I would raise a few brief points in its defense.

Consider the overall progression and development of the Judeo-Christian understanding of God and ethical matters, especially from Abraham to Christ. Marriage changed from that which occurred between relatives to polygamy, and finally to monogamy. Their view of God evolved from polytheism to henotheism to monotheism to trinitarianism. A similar progression can be charted for war and non-resistance. Christ

spoke in parables to accommodate His audience. In Acts 17:30, Paul asserts that God had accommodated a degree of ignorance in the past but was now requiring a more sophisticated understanding of truth. The idea of God accommodating human ignorance is found throughout scripture. Consequently, we are not obliged to take the creation narratives literally, if there is a compelling reason to interpret them otherwise.

The final element of an evangelical integration is methodology. Obviously, it cannot be literalism. John Stott describes the fundamentalist mind.

The fundamentalist seems to me to resemble a caged bird, which possesses the capacity for flight, but lacks the freedom to use it. For the fundamentalist mind is confined or caged by an overliteral interpretation of Scripture, and by the strictest traditions and conventions into which this has led him. He is not at liberty to question these, or to explore alternative, equally faithful ways of applying Scripture to the modern world, for he cannot escape from his cage.⁹⁴

Biblical interpretation must be dynamic, not only in the sense that it is flexible to various interpretations, but also in the sense that interpretation is an ongoing enterprise. Even though the canon is closed, other fields of knowledge help us to better understand ourselves and our world, thus, our interpretations of Scripture are continuously informed. This does not imply a high degree of relativism, for since other disciplines of knowledge rarely bear directly on spiritual or salvific issues, then it is not likely that doctrines will need to be adjusted all that often or to a great degree.

John Warwick Montgomery states that science and scripture are more easily harmonized when each discipline does not overstep its realm by making non-testable assertions (e.g. the earth was created in 4004 B. C. with millions of years of fossil evidence to make the earth only appear to be old). He considers such assertions as

nonsensical.⁹⁵ This is one of the places that science can enter into dialog and inform the interpretation of scripture.

Conclusions

Will a belief in the inerrancy of scripture allow for the possibility of evolution? Perhaps, but in a limited way. First, the interpretive method seems to be the crux of the issue. More specifically, a literalist approach to scripture essentially precludes the possibility of a Darwinian account of evolution, regardless of one's view of the authority of scripture. Additionally, the word "inerrant" would need to be qualified so as to not force this type of literalism. Perhaps it could be asserted that the Bible is "theologically inerrant," but this presents problems for typical biblical metaphors (e.g. soul, heart, eternity, et. al.) which are limited in what they can convey.

Basically, one could assert either that the biblical text is inerrant or that the message communicated is inerrant. The difficulties of the first I have discussed. The second is likewise problematic in that communication requires a certain quality of the recipient, i.e. inerrancy would have to cover interpretation as well. This would be infeasible. As a result, the term "infallible" is preferable to "inerrant." In any event, I believe Warfield's phrase "perfectly trustworthy" is the best of all, for it asserts the integrity of the text to the point that the recipient can engage with it through faith. Moreover, this phrase allows Biblical passages to be taken literally, when appropriate, without forcing literalism as a norm.

I believe that the material presented here illustrates a common occurrence in intellectual history. Whenever a particular thinker seeks to maintain opposing poles in

tension, in this case a high view of scripture and a respect for science, the movements which follow often emphasize one pole to the exclusion of the other. Evangelicals have a lost heritage to recover, but it will only be regained by putting the two poles back into tension. This will require the repudiation of much of the fundamentalist agenda, if not its philosophy as well. Hopefully, exercises such as this will make this goal more attainable.

NOTES

¹ I am grateful to Matthew Ashley for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

Introduction

² Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1980), ix.

³ *Ibid.*, 496.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 510.

⁵ David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 115-21.

⁶ Krabbendam, "B. B. Warfield vs. G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture," in Geisler, 413.

Case One: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield

⁷ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1948), 202-3 n. 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 173; brackets mine, parentheses Warfield's.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 422.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 442.

¹² *Ibid.*, 107.

¹³ Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," reprinted in John E. Meeter, ed., *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 2 (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 581-82, quoted by Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," in Geisler, 154.

¹⁴ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 420.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁶ Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," 585, quoted by Bahnsen, 157.

¹⁷ Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, "Inspiration," *The Presbyterian Review*, no. 7 (April 1881), 227, 236, 238, quoted by Bahnsen, 156.

¹⁸ Livingstone, "Situating Evangelical Responses to Evolution," in Livingstone, ed., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 208-11.

¹⁹ Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of Creation," *Princeton Theological Review*, 13 (1915), 208.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 253-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 208-9.

²² *Ibid.*, 209.

²³ Warfield, "On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race," *Studies in Theology*, Vol. 9 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1932), 235-6, reprinted from *Princeton Theological Review*, ix (1911).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 236-7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 252.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 256-7.

²⁹ Warfield, review of James Orr, *God's Image in Man, and Its Defacement, in the Light of Modern Denials*, in *Princeton Theological Review*, iv (1906), 558.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 557.

³¹ Hart, 211.

³² Warfield, "Darwin's Religious Life," *Studies in Theology*, 548.

³³ Warfield, "Lectures on Anthropology," (December 1888), Speer Library, Princeton University, quoted by Hart, 210.

Case Two: William Burt Pope

³⁴ Richard S. Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1985), 137.

³⁵ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Hunt and Eaton, c. 1881), 171.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 174-5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 191.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 174.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 191.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 174
- ⁴⁵ Pope, *A Higher Catechism of Theology* (Hunt and Eaton, 1889), 58.
- ⁴⁶ Pope, *Compendium*, 97.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 148.
- ⁴⁸ Pope, *Catechism*, 96.
- ⁴⁹ Pope, *Compendium*, 148.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 147-8.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 148.
- ⁵² Ibid., 98.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 148.
- ⁵⁴ Pope, *Catechism*, 105.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 149.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 148-9.
- ⁵⁷ Pope, *Catechism*, 105.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 98.
- ⁶⁰ Pope, *Compendium*, 366-7.
- ⁶¹ Pope, *Catechism*, 98.
- ⁶² Pope, *Compendium*, 397-8.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 396.
- ⁶⁴ Pope, *Catechism*, 98.
- ⁶⁵ Pope, *Compendium*, 434.
- ⁶⁶ Pope, *Compendium*, 398, and *Catechism*, 98.
- ⁶⁷ Pope, *Compendium*, 397.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 404.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 421-2.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 403.

⁷¹ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 110.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 111-2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 185-6.

⁷⁴ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), esp. cc. 22-25, cited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *The Dynamic Character of Movements*, v. 4 of *Accounting for Fundamentalisms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 21.

⁷⁵ Timothy P. Weber, "The Two-Edged Sword: The Fundamentalist Use of the Bible," in Nathan O. Hatch and Noll, *The Bible in America* (New York: Oxford, 1982), 102.

⁷⁶ Nels F. S. Ferré, "Present Trends in Protestant Thought," *Religion in Life*, 17 (1948), 336, quoted by Knoll, 132.

⁷⁷ David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1980), 90-1.

⁷⁸ Edward B. Davis, "A Whale of a Tale: Fundamentalist Fish Stories," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 43 (Dec. 1991), 234, quoted by Noll, 187.

⁷⁹ Weber, 111.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸² Noll, 122-3.

⁸³ Weber, 112.

⁸⁴ Noll, 134.

⁸⁵ Weber, 116.

⁸⁶ Noll, 115.

⁸⁷ F. Lincoln, "Biographical Sketch," preface to Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 8 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 5-6, quoted by Robert H. Krapohl and Charles H. Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic, and Biographical Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 124.

⁸⁸ Noll, 127.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

Elements of an Evangelical Integration of Scripture and Science

⁹² Edwards and Stott, 97.

⁹³ Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 46-9.

⁹⁴ Edwards and Stott, 105-6.

⁹⁵ John Warwick Montgomery, "Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure," in Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 71-2.