

Wednesday, June 11, 2014

The Truth about a Few Key Questions on the History of the Doctrine of Inerrancy

More sermons will be posted at our church website. There are about 15-20 new ones here right now, and we will let you know when there are more. This is a summer project. Enjoy.

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<http://kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/2014/06/the-truth-about-few-key-questions-on.html>

Last week I wrote a post about the idea of inerrancy, indicating that the idea is changing from what Christians have professed through most of recorded Christian history. Today we have the idea promoted by Daniel Wallace differing than what is considered by more conservative evangelicals and some fundamentalists to be the historic view, the position of B. B. Warfield, compared then to the position held between 1500 and 1881, pre-Warfield, by Christians, whom we will represent with John Owen, Francis Turretin, Samuel Rutherford, the Wesminster Confession and the London Baptist Confession. Did you know that historical Christian doctrine goes back to 1881? Wow, how did that happen?

Enter revisionists. I mentioned that John MacArthur is having an inerrancy summit early next year. There is a promotional website that is regularly posting inerrancy articles, and one of these is saying that inerrancy is a historical Christian doctrine. The author writes:

Despite the widespread influence of Sandeen, Rogers and McKim, their claim was historically inaccurate. In 1982 John Woodbridge (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) wrote, Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal, to give abundant evidence that the doctrine of inerrancy was the dominant view of the Church before Hodge and Warfield. . . . Following the example of Woodbridge, it is the goal of this article to give evidence that the doctrine of inerrancy was not the creation of the Princetonians or American fundamentalists. Rather, the original resource material will show that the inerrantist view has been nearly unanimously accepted throughout church history by the Eastern and Western churches.

I don't want to say that Jonathan Moorhead is being dishonest, so I'll go with mistaken. He's mistaken here. It's tough to say mistaken, because it is a whopper of a mistake if it isn't a lie, but I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Liberals have attacked inerrancy. They don't accept it and can't have it to be true, if they are going to accept what they do accept. So liberals and their sympathizers have latched on to this idea that Warfield invented inerrancy, but Christians haven't believed it, that you can't find the concept in

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history. In one sense, they are right, which shows what kind of damage Warfield did. In another sense they are wrong, because inerrancy is a biblical and historical Christian doctrine, depending on how you define it. Warfield sort of coined the word "inerrancy," but he was coming up with a word that would be distinct from what Christians did already believe, to bridge the gap between liberalism and the actual biblical and historical view.

So now when Moorhead and others contradict the idea that Warfield was presenting something new with inerrancy, they are ignoring that Warfield was changing what Christians believed about the idea of inerrancy. It's just that it doesn't work for the liberals and their sympathizers either. Sure, Warfield kind of coined the term, but the biblical and historical view was an even stronger view that one could easily call "inerrancy." There is a conservative criticism of Warfield, mine and others, that says that Warfield kowtowed to liberalism with a new understanding of inerrancy. There is a liberal criticism of Warfield that says that he came up with the word "inerrancy" and that his view wasn't historical. It wasn't, but the view that is historical is a worse problem for liberals than even Warfield's, so liberals and their sympathizers should get zero mileage out of their critique of Warfield.

What's tough here is that we're dealing with three different definitions of inerrancy, which causes this to be confusing. It looks like people like having the confusion and ambiguity, because it helps their cause. This is not reflective of a biblical cause, the cause of Christ, which goes for certainty and clarity. God is not the author of confusion. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. A faithless view, even if it is more faithful than an even more faithless view, shouldn't be chosen as superior or advocated.

In the line of the title of this post, there are two key questions I want to explore in this post, if I can finish it. One, is "inerrancy" really just modernizing, renovating, the old term "infallibility," the former term of choice? And two, when we look at Warfield's "inerrancy," are we looking at historical and biblical inerrancy? Is what was before Warfield and what was Warfield identical, so that this is an accurate assessment? If the answer is "no" to these questions, then the purveyors need to stop saying them. I'm contending that the answer is "no," and it is easy to see, and I'll tell you why. Perhaps with some kind of noble motive, Warfield was just pulling one on everyone. And now people bite down on his position, hook, line, and sinker.

My own opinion is that Warfield's view is a craze inducing one. It is hardly even practical compared to what Christians did believe in contradiction to his new view. It's looney. My assessment is well represented by the following from *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the nineteenth century* by James C. Livingston and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza. I don't endorse what these guys believe themselves, but their historical evaluation of Warfield is spot on (p. 319).

Increasingly at issue was Warfield's appeal to "the inerrancy of the original autographs." In 1893 he sought to defend this doctrine in an essay by that title. The critics had long argued that recourse to the testimony of the original autographs was not only unfalsifiable, since none of these documents presently existed, but also a strain on the belief of the faithful, since it implied that the sources now

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available to us are corrupted. Many of his Presbyterian colleagues, appealing to God's providential transmission of the sacred texts, called upon the Church to accept "the Bible as it is," that is, as it has come down to us in what is called the "received text" To place one's confidence in a "received text" would, in Warfield's estimation, "amount to the strong assertion of the utter untrustworthiness of the Bible." Both parties charged the other with undercutting the confidence of believers in the reliability of Scripture. . . . On his own terms . . . it is clear that Warfield had an airtight argument. If textual critics had demonstrated that they could resolve apparent textual variations, Warfield could claim that, indeed, that additional apparent discrepancies would be solved. But if serious discrepancies persisted (my note, they have), Warfield could take refuge in the infallible autograph copy.

Later these authors assert on p. 320 concerning Warfield's arguments concerning the "original autographs":

Warfield is . . . proposing the impossible, since [his] demands presupposed access to the original autographs of St. Paul or Isaiah. And Warfield himself is free from any proof at all, since his assumptions regarding the internal evidence of Scripture and plenary inspiration are circular; they are compelling only to those who already accept his presumptions.

If inerrancy in the original autographs is inerrancy, then so be it. Is it? Evidence is not there. Evidence says that's a modern invention that was truly concocted by A.A. Hodge and Benjamin Warfield. If that is going to be the technical understanding of inerrancy, I'll use it like that. But you can't revise history then to read "original autographs" into history and then equate the two. Comprehend? If you are going to do that, and know you are doing it, then it is a lie. Lying isn't good, can we agree? Christians shouldn't lie.

The term inerrancy was not used before Warfield. "Infallible" and "infallibility" were terms used and they had a different meaning in that they applied to what believers held in their hand. Samuel Rutherford in writes in 1649 his *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience*, p. 370:

But though Printers and Pens of men may err, it followeth not *that heresies should be tolerated*, except we say, 1 That our faith is ultimately resolved upon characters, and the faith of Printers. 2 We must say, we have not the clear and infallible word of God, because the Scripture comes to our hand, by fallible means, which is a great in consequence, for though Scribes, Translators, Grammarians, Printers, may all err, it followeth not that an erring providence of him that hath seven eyes, hath not delivered to the Church, the Scriptures containing the infallible truth of God.

In *Twenty One Several Books of Mr. William Bridge* from 1657, Bridge writes in a section entitled "Scripture Light, the Most Sure Light" (p. 46):

[F]or Though the Letter of the Scripture be not the Word alone, yet the Letter with the true sense and meaning of it, is the Word.... So if ye destroy the Letter of the Scripture, you do destroy the

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Scripture; and if you do deny the Letter, how is it possible that you should attain to the true sense thereof, when the Sense lies wrapped up in the Letters, and the words thereof?

On p. 433 of Richard A. Muller's *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2, Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, he writes:

By "original and authentic" text, the Protestant orthodox do not mean the *autographa* which no one can possess but the *apographa* in the original tongue which are the source of all versions. . . . It is important to note that the Reformed orthodox insistence on the identification of the Hebrew and Greek texts as alone authentic does not demand direct reference to *autographa* in those languages; the "original and authentic text" of Scripture means, beyond the autograph copies, the legitimate tradition of Hebrew and Greek *apographa*.

At the end of that page he writes:

The case for Scripture as an infallible rule of faith and practice . . . rests on an examination of the *apographa* and does not seek the infinite regress of the lost *autographa* as a prop for textual infallibility.

In that last part of that sentence, which I wanted to draw your attention to, Muller is speaking about what A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield did with the Westminster Confession. They are the ones who use the "lost *autographa* as a prop for textual infallibility." He has a long footnote documenting and commenting on that statement, which reads:

A rather sharp contrast must be drawn, therefore, between the Protestant orthodox arguments concerning the *autographa* and the views of Archibald Alexander Hodge and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. . . . Those who claim an errant text, against the orthodox consensus to the contrary, must prove their case. To claim errors in the scribal copies, the *apographa*, is hardly a proof. The claim must be proven true of the *autographa*. The point made by Hodge and Warfield is a logical leap, a rhetorical flourish, a conundrum designed to confound the critics---who can only prove their case for genuine errancy by recourse to a text they do not (and surely cannot) have.

He writes on p. 435:

Turretin and other high and late orthodox writers argued that the authenticity and infallibility of Scripture must be identified in and of the *apographa*, not in and of lost *autographa*.

On the two main points, infallibility related historically to perfection of the *apographa*, the Bible Christians held in their hands. The biblical and historical view relates to the *apographa* and not the *autographa*. Warfield was creating a new position to head off supposed coming apostasy. The invention would answer what he thought would be a problem, from a contradiction between the Westminster Confession of Faith and text criticism, the variations in manuscripts, and the faithless, academic popularity of critical texts.

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