A RESPONSE TO AN ATTACK ON INNERANCY

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More than ever before, the foundational basis for Christianity is under attack. God's inspired word - the Bible, though tested and proved to be genuine by men throughout history, is today under critical scrutiny by many supposed "evangelicals". One such man is Donald A. Hagner, Associate professor of N.T. at Fuller Theological Seminary. In the TSF Bulletin (Jan.-Feb.1984) he wrote on the subject - "Evangelical Scholarship" and described this phrase as it related specifically to the doctrine of inerrancy.

Hagner in defining what he considers a "high view" of Scripture said that it is that which ranges from inerrancy (on the right) to a general trustworthiness of Scripture (on the left). Is this really a high view? If Scripture is only "generally" trustworthy it is not truly trustworthy at all. Hagner's hermeneutic is seen in the statement: "the truth of Scripture, God's revealed truth, is correctly understood only through historical study." Such a statement implies: 1) that the Bible is not a self-interpreting book and 2) that Scripture is not sufficient truth (but like the deceptive teaching of the Roman Catholic Church one must go outside of Scripture to another authority to validate the Bible's authority).

Hagner holds to what he calls a "unified world view" whereby he places other "historical data" on a plain equal to scripture and in doing so he surrenders the one authority (the Bible) to what amounts to no authority, since according to him all "findings" have truth and must be considered together. In this regards Hagner errs in his assumption that the "evangelical scholar" should work towarda "synthesis" or merging of researched data to find "real truth". Did God ever command this method of interpretation? Is it even recommended in Scripture? The answer to both questions is an obvious - NO! By tieing Scripture to the mercy of "secular historical data," anything miraculous in the Bible is viewed with suspicion. Hagner states that "the evangelical scholar does not appeal to the miraculous to solve a problem that is capable of other solutions."

Hagner states that a "true evangelical scholar" could not only hold to a "general trustworthiness" of Scripture but also to a mere openness to transcendence (ex. miracles). By the statement "openness to the supernatural does not entail automatic acceptance of every claim of a miracle in the Bible", Hagner downplays the miraculous as well as the inerrancy of Scripture. Hagner admits a willingness to contradict Scripture

where "faith" (Bible) and "scholarship" conflict, implying that errors do exist in the Bible. Such "inaccuracies" says Hagner, "do not assail the basic trustworthiness of Scripture." Is this true? This assumption is false, because any errors in the Bible (that is, as given in the original autographs), would destroy the Bible's dependability. If it is not trustworthy at one point, how can one be expected to trust it at others? Who could differentiate between that which is true (accurate) and that which is false (inaccurate)?

One of Hagner's descriptions of "true scholarship" is an "unprejudiced or impartial investigation of the data." He calls on scholars to remove any presuppositions (a-priory) which they might have in order to be truly honest with the facts. In response tothis plea, the questions that must be asked are: "Can anyone (Christian or non-Christian) truly be unprejudiced or impartial?"; "Can one step outside of his presuppositions?"; "Can anyone really see with "neutral" eyes?" The answer is NO! Just as Christ said that a man is either for or against Him, leaving no middle ground, it follows that no one is truly neutral toward His Word. Everyone argues from presuppositions. The evolutionist does, assuming that creation evolved over a period of billions of years; the agnostic does, presupposing that one cannot know anything for sure; the liberal "theologian" does, in viewing the Scripture under the premise that it was not inspired; and even Donald Hagner, who denies being a presuppositionalist, presupposes that "truth" is in more places than Scripture. He also works based on the presupposition that secular historical data should be considered on a plain equal with Scripture. No one is nor can be neutral about the Scripture. For example, when an apparent discrepancy is noticed in the Scriptures, the errantist and the inerrantist do not come to those problems with the same basic outlook. The errantist's outlook includes not only the possibility but also the reality of errors in the Bible. Therefore, when he studies problems, one of his possible conclusions is that one or another of them is actually an error. The inerrantist, on the other hand, has concluded that the Bible contains no errors. Therefore, he exercises no option to conclude that any of those some problems is an example of a genuine error in the Bible. His research may lead him to conclude that some problem is yet unexplainable. Nevertheless, the inerrantist believes it is not an error and that either further research will demonstrate that or he will understand the solution in Heaven.

Consider this illustration: "If a happily married man comes home unexpectedly one day to find his wife waving good-bye to a handsome man about to get into a car, what will he think? If his confidence and trust is his wife is total and unwavering

because of their years of satisfying experiences together, he will assume she had a good reason for seeing that man. Though he may be curious, the husband will not doubt his wife's loyalty. Perhaps it will not be until christmas or their anniversary that he learns that the man he saw was delivering a special present his wife had ordered for him. But if his confidence in his relationship with his wife is even a bit shaky, his thoughts will wander into all kinds of paths including suspicion of unfaithfulness on her part. Because of his insecurity, his wife might be branded an adulteress in his eyes" (Ryrie, inerrancy, p.82).

Jesus Christ in his use of the O.T. Scriptures presupposed its accuracy. For example, in Matthew 22:23-33 in a dialogue with the Sadducees over the resurrection, Christ assumed the historicity of God's appearance to Moses; He assumed that God's revelation came in a propositional statement; He assumed that every word of that statement could be trusted to be precisely accurate; and he assumed that doctrinal truth had to be based on historical accuracy (in other words: the Bible cannot be inaccurate in matters of history and accurate in doctrine) (cp.Ryrie, p.70).

Hagner asserts that one should treat Scripture with integrity and honesty, by not forcing or imposing an **alien** framework (presupposition) upon the "data" (Bible), nor **construing** the "data" to support an a-priory conviction. This is correct. But the question needs asking: "Is the Bible's own claim of inerrancy something "alien", or is one "construing" Scripture by accepting the Bible's own presupposition of inerrancy and interpreting in light ofit? Obviously not. Hagner, however, asserts that the typical evangelical scholar arrives at this basic presupposition by wrong logic. He claims that there is an error in the syllogism arrived at by deductive reasoning. Hagner asserts that the inerrantist argues for his presupposition by saying: "What God speaks is true"; "God speaks in the Scriptures"; therefore "the Scriptures are true". Note that the minor premise is not accurate. God does not merely speak "in" the Scriptures, (that is using man's writings to convey His message) rather God speaks the Scriptures (period!). God did not merely use the Scriptures as a means to reveal Himself, rather they are a direct emanation from God Himself. The syllogism held to by the inerrantist should be as follows: Major premise - God is true (Rom. 3:4); Minor premise - God breathed out all Scripture (II Tim.3:16), Conclusion - Therefore, All Scriptures are true (Jn.17:17). The Bible is like God - without defects. Because God is truth itself (without exception), His word is truth (without exception). There is no middle ground. Either Scripture is inerrant or it

is not; and if it is not, it is not from God at all. If Hagner was debating canonicity or the text issue, he would bring up a somewhat legitimate topic for discussion. However the inerrancy of Scripture is indisputable. It must either be accepted or rejected.

Hagner's basic misunderstanding centers on his view of "inspiration". He differentiates between God's Word (singular) and men's words (plural) in the Scripture. By stating that "God's word in the Scriptures is not direct, but is mediated to us through the words of humans", he fails to understand the nature of inspiration. Inspiration is Spirit controlled mediation. The human wills of thewriters were not the originators or the carriers of God's message, rather the Holy Spirit was the source and guiding force (II Pet.1:21). If an inerrantist, (as Hagner implies) believed that God's word was authored by men independent of the Spirit's guiding and controlling of the exact words as originally penned, of course the inerrantist could then admit "an openness to the possibility of error on the part of the Biblical authors." Technically, however, the Biblical understanding of inspiration sees God as the author and men as the writers. This view sees the Spirit as the guiding and guarding superintendent, and men as the cognizant instruments whose personalities were not stifled, but whose proneness to error was, while they were penning God's very words under the Spirit's control. (I Cor.2:13; Mk.12:36; Mt.10:20; Lk.10:16).

Inerrantists are not being dishonest (as accused) by holding to a high standard of "exactitude" in regards to Scripture. This view is the Bible's own claim. On the contrary the real dishonesty lies at the feet of men such as Hagner, who holds a view that leaves a lot open to the **subjectivity** of the "data compiler & researcher". This so called "scholar" is really a sinfully proud individual, who in effect becomes the ultimate authority! In actuality it is the inerrantist who is intellectually honest and humble, since he recognizes an **objective** authority higher than what his own subjective collations of supposed truth might produce and reveal.

Evangelical Christianity does not depend upon secular historical data to "remain credible" or to be considered "first-rate theological scholarship." Contrary to contemporary opinion, "the foolishness of God is (still) wiser than men" (I Cor.1:25), and "thewisdom of this world is foolishness with God"(I Cor.3:19). A Christian is not "sacrificing intellect" by holding to inerrancy. On the contrary he will not waste his intellect on peripheral matters or documents of no eternal value, but will use his mind to plumb the depths of the "unsearchable riches" of God as found in His Book - the Bible.

The Fundamentalist's role in "true scholarship" is to direct his intellectual energies into studying the Bible itself. This involves a knowledge of the Biblical languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic), and to some degree a general knowledge of the historical background of Bible times. The true scholar will not endeavor to re-write Scripture, but to rightly interpret it according to God's original intentions. The true scholar does not (and cannot) create, rather he discovers what has been created.

The ramifications of the errantist's teachings are great. When inerrancy falls, (because it is foundational to true Biblical faith) it will produce a dominoe effect whereby doctrine after doctrine will fall. Errantist professors such as Donald A. Hagner will affect their students who will in turn affect their students, who will affect their churches, who will in turn affect their denominations or people in those circles. Errantist writers plant <u>seeds of doubt</u> in the minds of their readers, assuring them they can have their cake (the authority of the Bible) and eat it too (the errors in the Bible). Such a position is hopeless, futile and wrong!