

INSPIRATION VS. INCARNATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DR. PETER ENNS'S
INCARNATIONAL MODEL OF SCRIPTURE

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It is no secret that certain passages of Scripture can be confusing, difficult to understand, and seemingly contradictory (2 Pt. 3:15-16); how one accounts for this “messiness and diversity”¹ has been the subject of much debate. This debate has often focused on the inerrancy of Scripture, but is symptomatic of a more foundational disagreement over how the divine and human authors are related in the inspiration of the Bible. In an effort to better understand this relationship, Dr. Peter Enns in *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament (I&I)*, appeals to an Incarnational analogy as his foundation for understanding Scripture. While this analogy has been properly outlined by many, Dr. Enns makes the error of using it to bring external evidence to bear on his doctrine of Scripture.² The following analysis will demonstrate that Dr. Enns’s Incarnational analogy presents a view of inspiration that falls short of the standard set by Scripture itself and leads to the rejection of inerrancy, and will then argue that the doctrine of Scripture must be developed from internal evidence alone.

Inspiration: Enns’s vs. Scripture

Before discussing the limitations of using an Incarnational analogy as a foundation for interpreting Scripture, it must be recognized that several theologians, including Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck³ have carefully articulated the analogy such that it upholds both a high

¹ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition. Dr. Enns uses these terms to refer to parts of Scripture that he feels present challenges to traditional views on inerrancy.

² Ibid. Location, 61-66. “The purpose of this book is to bring an evangelical doctrine of Scripture into conversation with the implications generated by some important themes in modern biblical scholarship...what is needed is not simply for evangelicals to work in these areas,, but to engage in the doctrinal implications that work in these areas raises,” emphasis original.

³ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *God’s Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture*, (Jackson: Reformed Academic Press, 2008). Gaffin discusses how Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s use an Incarnational analogy.

view of Scripture and an orthodox Christology.⁴ In these instances, the analogy is not serving as an underlying foundation for understanding what Scripture is, rather it serves as a way of explaining the mystery of the Bible's divine and human authorship, within the context of a clearly defined doctrine of Scripture.⁵ Dr. Enns, however does not follow this approach, instead employing a vague Incarnational analogy as the foundation for forming a doctrine of Scripture;⁶ he says:

Christians confess that Jesus is both God and human at the same time. He is not half-God and half-human. He is not sometimes one and other times the other. He is not essentially one and only apparently the other. Rather, one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, worked out as far back as the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, is that Jesus is 100 percent God and 100 percent human—at the same time.⁷

By using the analogy in this way, Dr. Enns makes significant errors, stretching beyond its limitations.⁸

⁴ Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, "Definition of the Council of Chalcedon," <http://www.reformed.org/documents/chalcedon.html>, (accessed, December 3, 2014). Orthodox Christology is to be understood according to the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon

⁵ Gaffin, 77-80. Here, Gaffin discusses what Bavinck thought of the scholarly study of Scripture in light of the Incarnational analogy.

⁶ Enns, I&I, 165, 68.

⁷ Ibid. 146; Historical and Theological Field Committee, *Inspiration and Incarnation: A Response*, (Westminster Theological Seminary, 2006), <http://files.wts.edu/uploads/images/files/Official%20Theological%20Documents%20for%20Web.pdf> (accessed, December 3, 2014), 19. The HFTC report to the Westminster Board of Trustees explains the problem with his brief treatment of the Incarnation: "This [Enns's description of Christ's Incarnation] is basically true (although the language of '100 percent' can be confusing). But statements of this kind do not even begin to stipulate precisely how the divine and human relate. Therefore, even the statement that Christ is 'both God and human' is insufficiently precise to help us apply such an analogy to Scripture... What is not affirmed in I&I is that the locus of the unity of the divine and human in Christ is the essential divinity of the person of the Logos," emphasis original.

⁸ Peter Enns, "Response to G. K. Beale's Review of *Inspiration and Incarnation*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 49/2 (2006): 323, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials; EBSCOhost, (accessed December 3, 2014). In his response to Beale's review of I&I, Enns recognizes the limitations of his analogy, "What is ambiguous about the analogy (inescapably so) is how it applies to the details of the text. There is enough flexibility in the analogy to argue for very different, even opposite, opinions." It is interesting that he then proceeds to help his readers understand the details of the text by appealing to the very analogy that he says is incapable of doing so.

The primary concern is with Enns's view of the Divine inspiration of Scripture, which is rarely discussed, although it can be implicitly seen in his overemphasis on the human aspect of Scripture. Dr. John Frame rightly points out the confusion and frustration one feels, reading a book so closely related to inspiration, yet lacking in any clear explanation its meaning:

It is curious that in a book entitled *Inspiration and Incarnation* there is not even a summary treatment of the concept of biblical inspiration... One asks again and again throughout the book, "How is this idea compatible with the doctrine of biblical inspiration?" Enns never deals with this kind of issue.⁹

Enns seems to argue that biblical authors unconsciously accommodated themselves to their cultural surroundings, and that these teachings, such as ancient Near Eastern myth, are reflected in Scripture as historical.¹⁰ He never once mentions the fact that although Scripture is truly human it is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ The absence of this affirmation is seen in Enns's attempt to explain the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament, claiming that Jesus and the apostles applied faulty hermeneutics to the Bible when they quoted OT texts.¹² Based on his argument, it seems that Enns rejects the idea, that the divine and human 'natures' are not equally ultimate.¹³

⁹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010), 515 n20, emphasis original

¹⁰ Enns, I&I, 900, 917, 942, 2081. There are several references to this accommodation in the book. It is discussed in more detail below.

¹¹ Ibid. 74. Although he does acknowledge at the outset of this book that "the Bible is ultimately from God and that it is God's gift to the church," he never explains what he means by this and certainly gives no indication that he sees the Holy Spirit as the primary author of Scripture with human acting as the, very real, yet secondary authors.

¹² Ibid. I&I, 2541-2548, 2556

¹³ Lane Tipton, "The Presence of the Divine Persons: Extending the Incarnational Analogy to Impeccability and Inerrancy," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Vol. 6 (January 1, 2010), 198, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed December 3, 2014). Tipton explains the proper understanding of the relationship between the human and divine natures in light of an Incarnational analogy, saying "Just as the primary theological category for classifying the incarnate Word is the divinity of the Son in his person, work and words, so also the primary theological category for classifying the inscripturated Word is the divinity of the Spirit in his person, work and words."

Scripture, in contrast, presents a clear argument for its own inspiration. Of the several passages that recognize God as the author (Mt. 15:1-9; Mt. 19:4-5; Mt. 22:31-32; Mk. 12:36; Ga. 1:11-17; etc.), perhaps none are as clear as 2 Timothy 3:16, where Paul writes that, “All Scripture¹⁴ is breathed out by God.” The Greek term Paul uses, *θεόπνευστος* (*theópneustos*), translates not to “inspiration” which would connote God breathing into the human authors, but to “God-breathed;” Scripture, as the very breath of God, is breathed out by him.¹⁵ B.B. Warfield indicates the force with which Paul asserts that Scripture is a fully Divine product:

No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted the Divine production of Scripture than that which is here employed... When Paul declares, then, that “every scripture,” or “all scripture” is the product of the Divine breath, “is God-breathed,” he asserts with as much energy as he could employ that Scripture is the product of a specifically Divine operation.¹⁶

There has been some disagreement about the interpretation of *πᾶσα γραφή* (*pasa graphē*) as “all Scripture.” Some have argued for an interpretation of “every Scripture,” such that the passage would read, “Every Scripture inspired by God is also...”¹⁷ On this interpretation, Edwin Blum notes, “even the reader without a knowledge of Greek can quickly see the exegetical problems and possibilities,”¹⁸ pointing out that this rendering of the text can give the impression

¹⁴ While it is certainly the case that this is a reference to the Old Testament, it is clear from such texts as 1 Tim. 5:18, where Paul quotes Luke 10:7 as Scripture, and 2 Peter 3:15-16, where Peter refers to Paul’s writings as Scripture, that the apostles viewed their own writing in the same way. For a more complete treatment of the apostles’ view of the New Testament, see Frame, 129-132.

¹⁵ Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1948), 132-133. Warfield says, “For the Greek word in this passage — *θεόπνευστος*, *theópneustos* — very distinctly does not mean ‘inspired of God’... [It has] nothing to say of inspiring or inspiration... What it says of Scripture is, not that it is ‘breathed into by God’ or is the product of the Divine ‘inbreathing’ into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, ‘God-breathed,’ the product of the creative breath of God. In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 132-133

¹⁷ This is how the American Standard Version 2 Tim. 3:16.

¹⁸ Edwin Blum, “The Apostles’ View of Scripture” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 45.

that Paul is implying there are some parts of Scripture which are not inspired by God. Of this, Blum says:

Based on the Greek text alone—without consideration of the context, the usage of *graphē* in the New Testament, or the Jewish ideas of inspiration—such an interpretation is possible. But if one takes these other important factors into consideration, the rendering of ‘All Scripture’ is preferable.¹⁹

Another significant discussion of the inspiration of Scripture is found in 2 Peter 1:20-21, teaching that “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” This text not only teaches the Divine origin of Scripture, but explains how it was created. Men were “carried along,” or “borne” by the Holy Spirit.²⁰ Warfield explains the use of this language:

The term here used is a very specific one. It is not to be confounded with guiding, or directing, or controlling, or even leading in the full sense of that word. It goes beyond all such terms, in assigning the effect produced specifically to the active agent. What is “borne” is taken up by the “bearer,” and conveyed by the “bearer’s” power, not its own, to the “bearer’s” goal, not its own. The men who spoke from God are here declared, therefore, to have been taken up by the Holy Spirit and brought by His power to the goal of His choosing. The things which they spoke under this operation of the Spirit were therefore His things, not theirs.²¹

Contrary to the emphasis Dr. Enns places on the human authorship to explain “diversity,” Dr. Frame notes, “The passage actually tells us that the Scriptures do not originate from men who interpret reality out of their own experience, like modern-day pundits.”²²

¹⁹ Ibid. 46.

²⁰ Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 136-137. Warfield also demonstrates here that “prophecy of Scripture” is to be understood in the same way as “All Scripture” in 2 Tim. 3:16. According to Warfield, both statements apply “to the whole of Scripture in all its parts,” p. 136.

²¹ Ibid. 137

²² Frame, 127.

That Dr. Enns struggles to explain what he considers to be “theological diversity” and apparent misuse of the Old Testament by Christ and the Apostles should be of no surprise based on his view of inspiration. Calvin, in his commentary on 2 Peter 1:20-21, rightly points out that Scripture cannot be properly understood outside of the context of its Divine authorship, saying “thou wilt never come well prepared to read it, except thou bringest reverence, obedience, and docility; but a just reverence then only exists when we are convinced that God speaks to us and not mortal men.”²³

How, then, should the relationship of the Divine and human authors in Scripture be understood? Although Scripture is clearly a Divine product, the mechanical view of inspiration—that the Holy Spirit merely dictated to the human authors—does not accurately represent the view of either the Bible or the early Church.²⁴ Scripture’s teaching of its Divine authorship is not meant “to deny that human writers were involved, but only to say that those writers were not the source of biblical authority.”²⁵ Instead, as Dr. Scott Swain points out, the Holy Spirit’s sovereign role in authoring Scripture does not diminish the role of the human authors, rather it enables them to freely and fully participate.²⁶ The Holy Spirit organically

²³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005): 2 Peter 1:19-21, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom45.i.html> (accessed, December 3, 2014).

²⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 151-152. “According to the mechanical view of inspiration God dictated what the *auctores secundarii* wrote, so that the latter were mere amanuenses, mere channels through which the words of the Holy Spirit flowed.”

²⁵ Frame, 127.

²⁶ Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 67. “The presence and operation of the Spirit’s sovereign lordship in the production of Holy Scripture does not lead to the suppression or overruling of God’s human emissaries in their exercise of authorial rationality and freedom. Rather, his sovereign lordship leads to their enlivening and sanctified enablement. The Spirit who created the human mind and personality does not destroy the human mind and personality when he summons them to his service. Far from it. The Spirit sets the mind and personality free from its blindness and slavery to sin so that it may become a truly free, thoughtful, and self-conscious witness to all that God is for us in Christ. He bears his lively witness and therefore prophets and apostles also bear their lively witness (Jn 15.26-27). The Spirit creates a divine-and-human fellowship—a common possession and partnership—in communication the truth of the gospel (Jn 16.13-15).”

inspired the human authors without changing who they were; allowing their distinct voices and personalities to be reflected in the text, yet restraining the effects of sin on their writing.²⁷ This organic inspiration extends to the very words of Scripture.²⁸ Paul expresses this view in 1 Corinthians 2:13, saying “we impart this [wisdom from the Holy Spirit] in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those that are spiritual.” Here Paul states that the very words he teaches are given to him by the Holy Spirit, not merely the ideas.

In contrast, Dr. Enns uses the incarnational analogy to explain the “odd uses of the Old Testament by New Testament authors,”²⁹ saying “we must begin our understanding of apostolic hermeneutics by first understanding, as best we can, the interpretive world in which the New Testament was written.”³⁰ Enns argues that one must understand the interpretive world of the New Testament authors in order to explain what is written in the New Testament. Scripture, on the other hand, teaches that one must understand the nature and extent of inspiration in order to explain how the Holy Spirit can use men from different times and cultures to produce the very words of God.

When Paul makes an argument, such as he does in Galatians 3:15-29; arguing that the true descendants of Abraham are those who are heirs by faith in Christ, not by keeping the law,

²⁷ Berkhof, 153. Berkhof defines organic inspiration, saying God “acted upon them [the human authors] in an organic way, in harmony with the laws of their own inner being. He used them just as they were, with their character and temperament, their gifts and talents, their education and culture, their vocabulary, diction, and style. He illumined their minds, prompted them to write, repressed the influence of sin on their literary activity, and guided them in an organic way in the choice of their words and in the expression of their thoughts.”

²⁸ Ibid. 155-156. Here Berkhof gives several examples of Scripture attributing its very words to be the words of God.

²⁹ Enns, I&I, 2208

³⁰ Ibid. 2215, emphasis original.

he bases his argument on a single word (seed/offspring) in Genesis 22:18,³¹ saying in verse 16, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.” It is only because inspiration extends to the very words of Scripture that Paul can make such an argument. As Berkhof points out, by making arguments based on a single word, New Testament authors “give clear evidence of the fact that they regard the separate words as inspired and infallible, and that the readers share their conviction. If this were not the case, they would not have been able to consider their arguments conclusive.”³² Moreover, by recognizing the organic nature of inspiration, it becomes clear that not only, is Paul’s argument valid, it is an argument that the Spirit led him to make. Hypothetically, Paul could have made the same argument by appealing to a “more suitable” text, but he didn’t, specifically because he was led (borne along) by the Spirit to make the argument in the exact way he did (2 Pt. 1:20-21). By holding to a biblical view of inspiration, Enns would have been protected from concluding about this passage, that “Paul is using the Old Testament in a way that has nothing to do with how the Old Testament is to be understood in its original context....how Paul got there can be troubling.”³³

Denial of Inerrancy

By arguing for his Incarnational analogy from a weak and ambiguous view of inspiration, Dr. Enns is eventually led to deny the inerrancy of Scripture. The most obvious reason for this is that the analogy links Christology to one’s doctrine of Scripture; the Historical and Theological

³¹ C. John Collins, “Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?,” Tyndale Bulletin 54/1 (2003): 75-86, http://www.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/library/TynBull_2003_54_1_05_Collins_Gal3_16PaulExegete.pdf (accessed, December 3, 2014). There is some disagreement about what passage in Genesis Paul is quoting. C. John Collins makes a convincing argument for Gn. 22:18 in his essay.

³² Berkhof, 156.

³³ Enns, I&I, 2665-2672

Field Committee (HTFC) of Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) highlights this limitation in its report on I&I:

To the extent that one's understanding of the Incarnation is orthodox/unorthodox, to that extent will the analogy with respect to Scripture be orthodox/unorthodox...That is, as go Christological errors, so (analogically) go errors with respect to Scripture.³⁴ Sadly, the clearest example of the destructive effects of Christological errors within an

Incarnational analogy can be seen in the development of Enns's own views. Although one would never know this by reading I&I,³⁵ Enns, following publication of the book, still affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture. In his response to G.K. Beale's review, Enns states:

As there is no sin in the God-man Jesus, so too there is no error in Scripture. The human situatedness and diverse nature of Scripture, then, are not to be understood as errors corresponding to some putative sin on Christ's part, but rather as the condescension of God corresponding to Christ's humanity.³⁶

Enns rightly uses his analogy to speak of God accommodating himself, condescending to speak in ways that humans can understand.³⁷ John Calvin expresses this accommodation to explain God's use anthropomorphic language:

For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to "lisp" in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.³⁸

³⁴ Historical and Theological Field Committee, 21.

³⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 40. Beale discusses apparent use of "diversity" in the place of "error."

³⁶ Enns, *Response to G. K. Beale*, 323.

³⁷ Enns, *I&I*, 935.

³⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 121; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005): John 3:7-12, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.i.html> (accessed, December 3, 2014). Calvin elaborates on this in his commentary on John, condemning those who use this doctrine as an excuse to reject the authority of Scripture, saying "many hold the Gospel in less estimation, because they do not find in it high-sounding words to fill their ears, and on this account do not deign to bestow their attention on a doctrine so low and mean. But it shows an extraordinary degree of wickedness, that we yield less reverence to God speaking to us, because he condescends to our ignorance; and, therefore, when God prattles to us in Scripture in a rough and popular style, let us know that this

But Enns draws the conclusion that, “to be understood, [God] condescends to the conventions and conditions of those to whom he is revealing himself,”³⁹ and is “willing and ready to adopt an ancient way of thinking.”⁴⁰ Although Enns does not explicitly state this, what he is implying is that “God adopts certain of the erroneous views of those to whom he speaks.”⁴¹ This becomes clear when Enns states that God, entering into relationship with Abraham, “also adopted the mythic categories within which Abraham—and everyone else—thought,”⁴² adding, “the opening chapters of Genesis participate in a worldview that the earliest Israelites shared with their Mesopotamian neighbors.”⁴³

The impact of the Incarnational analogy is seen in Enns’s view of Christ’s incarnate human nature; he argues that Jesus and the New Testament authors frequently employed Second Temple interpretive techniques, making no attempt to provide an interpretation consistent with that of the original author.⁴⁴ He implies that Jesus unconsciously applied flawed interpretive methods to Scripture, saying “it will not do to argue that Jesus and the apostles adopted such tainted exegetical techniques simply as an accommodation to the faulty thinking of their

is done on account of the love which he bears to us. Whoever exclaims that he is offended by such meanness of language, or pleads it as an excuse for not subjecting himself to the word of God, speaks falsely.”

³⁹ Enns, I&I, 2081, emphasis mine.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 942, emphasis mine.

⁴¹ James W. Scott, "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns: Part I: Inspiration and Its Implications," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 1 (2009), 161, *New Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 3, 2014).

⁴² Enns, I&I, 900.

⁴³ Ibid. 917.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 2541-2548.

contemporaries.”⁴⁵ This seems to indicate that Dr. Enns believes Jesus, in his humanity, could err. G.K. Beale expresses this concern in his review of I&I:

Some evangelical theologians speculate that while the human Jesus was perfect morally, he was still imperfect in such things as mathematical computation or historical recollection... On analogy with this conception of Jesus’ incarnation, Scripture is God’s absolutely faithful word about morals and theology (e.g., the way to salvation) but not about minute points of history or scientific facts. Does Enns hold a view like this?⁴⁶

Enns responded by posing the following question: “Does Genesis 1, bearing strong similarities to ANE myth, correspond to Jesus ‘sinning’ or to the fact that he had olive skin, wore leather sandals, and spoke Aramaic?’ I am of the latter opinion.”⁴⁷ In response, Beale further pressed his argument that the diversity, or error in historical accounts would find its Christological parallel, not in Christ’s sinlessness, but in his being free from all error:

Enns wants to see that myth can be naturally though unconsciously woven into God’s revelation in its human situatedness... To get more at the heart of the issue for Enns’s proposals, it would seem that his above question should be reformulated as follows: ‘Does [the Gen. 1-ANE relationship], correspond to Jesus unconsciously in his human nature accommodating himself to the mythical or non-historical traditions of Jewish culture, which would not be moral sin, or does the Genesis 1-ANE relationship correspond more to the fact that Jesus had olive skin, wore leather sandals, and spoke Aramaic?’⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid, loc.2556.

⁴⁶ Beale, 39-40.

⁴⁷ Enns, Response to Greg Beale, 323

⁴⁸ Beal, 81-82.

Does Jesus' true humanity mean that he was fallen and could make statements regarding history and science, for example, which were factually incorrect?⁴⁹ If so, then the Incarnational analogy Enns provides implies that Scripture contains errors.⁵⁰

In more recent publications, one can see how Enns has adjusted his view of Scripture to reflect his view of the incarnate Christ. In *The Bible Tells Me So*, Enns asks the question, "How could God order the Israelites to [exterminate the Canaanites]?" answering, "He didn't. The Israelites just said he did."⁵¹ He goes on to write that the Bible contains stories that are not historically accurate and teach things about God that are untrue, because "The Bible—from back to front—is the story of God told from the limited point of view of real people living at a certain place and time."⁵² Enns summarizes his view of inerrancy, saying, "I do not think inerrancy can be effectively nuanced to account for the Bible's own behavior as a text produced in ancient

⁴⁹ Gaffin, 81. Although it appears that Enns would say "yes," Richard Gaffin explains that Bavinck and Kuyper rejected this conclusion: "in discussing the infallibility of Jesus, he [Bavinck] comments... 'Not only is Jesus holy and without sin in an ethical sense... but he is also without error, falsehood, or deception intellectually.' Apparently, then, Bavinck's view, similar to that of Kuyper... is that all error, not just deception, is the result of sin. To affirm the sinlessness of Christ is to affirm his absolute infallibility. Consequently, to affirm, as an essential correlate of Christ's sinlessness, that Scripture is 'without blemish,' is to affirm, correspondingly, that it is without error. In any sense."

⁵⁰ Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 285, 298, 315-320, 325-329. Sparks draws the same conclusion: "Jesus was both finite and fallen, in all respects like us, 'sin excepted' (Heb. 4:15)... Orthodoxy only demands that Jesus was sinless, not that his teachings were wholly insulated from the human condition... A good case can be made for the idea that Jesus expressed his theology using imagery (sometimes violent imagery) that was shaped and bounded by perspectives prevalent in his own day. So the Christological analogy does not necessarily support this particular view of biblical inerrancy because the biblical authors would have been limited in their perspectives, just as Jesus was... the Christological analogy does not really apply directly to a doctrine of Scripture, and even if it did, it would not support but would more likely weaken arguments in support of [conservative's] view of Scripture and inerrancy... the human beings who wrote Scripture erred as all humans do." Interestingly, Sparks is reacting to the use of an Incarnational analogy by conservative theologians who use the analogy to argue in favor of inerrancy. He does not find the analogy to an accurate description of Scripture, but feels even if it was applicable, it could not be used as an argument for inerrancy.

⁵¹ Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It*, (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 61.

⁵² *Ibid.* 61-62.

cultures.”⁵³ Dr. Enns has been led by a fundamental misunderstanding of the Incarnation to a rejection of Scripture’s inerrancy.

Necessity Scripture’s Self Witness

Enns mentions several times that his goal in writing I&I was “to engage in the doctrinal *implications*” of external sources on an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.⁵⁴ Yet, this is in direct contrast with the teaching of Scripture itself as God’s word. Scripture is sufficient to “make the man of God complete” (2 Tim. 3:17), precisely because it is God’s word (2 Tim. 3:16).

Furthermore, only God can confirm the power and authority of his word, there is no higher authority to which one can appeal (Heb. 6:13). Berkhof rightly says, “Just as the Bible contains a doctrine of God and man, of Christ and redemption, it also offers us a doctrine concerning itself; and we receive this in faith on the basis of the divine testimony.”⁵⁵ It would simply be inconsistent to derive a doctrine of Scripture from anywhere else.

The common objection to the validity of this argument is that it is a case of circular reasoning, which is true. However, as Dr. Frame explains, such an argument in support of an absolute authority must be circular:

When we are arguing on behalf of an absolute authority, then our final appeal must be to that authority and to no other, A proof of the primacy of reason must appeal to reason; a proof of the necessity of logic must appeal to logic; a proof of the primacy of mammon must itself be part of an attempt to earn more money; and a proof of the existence of God must appeal in the final analysis to God.⁵⁶

⁵³ Peter Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 91.

⁵⁴ Enns, I&I, 66

⁵⁵ Berkhof, 146; Frame, 441. John Frame offers additional insight: “Furthermore, the authority of Scripture is a doctrine of the Christian faith—a doctrine like other doctrines—like the deity of Christ, justification by faith, and sacrificial atonement. To prove such doctrines, Christians go to Scripture. Where else can we find information on God’s redemptive purposes? But what of the doctrine of the authority of Scripture? Must we not, to be consistent, also then prove that doctrine by Scripture? If so, the self-witness of Scripture not only must be the first consideration in the argument, but must also be the final and decisive consideration.”

⁵⁶ Frame, 433.

Christians are not alone in making a circular argument in support of their highest authority, “one cannot abandon one’s basic authority while one is arguing for it. The non-Christian is no more able to do this than the Christian.”⁵⁷ It is not a weakness of the Christian faith, that one must appeal to a circular argument, it is simply a fact that everyone must face when appealing to their own basic commitment. “The controversy is between competing circularities, not between circularity and non-circularity.”⁵⁸ The Christian, however is at an advantage over the unbeliever in this circularity, because all men are made in God’s image and naturally prone to think as He does; all men will, at some level, recognize the credibility of the Christian’s argument.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Scripture is clear where Enns is silent; the primary source behind the production of Scripture is God himself. The human authors certainly played an important role and are authors in the truest sense of the word. Yet, they were speaking from God, writing the very words He wanted them to write. In many ways, this is a mystery,⁶⁰ yet Scripture clearly teaches it is true. Although an Incarnational analogy has a rich tradition in Reformed theology of explaining the relationship of the Divine and human authors, this is not how Enns uses it. He employs the analogy to focus on the human aspect of Scripture and to justify re-forming his doctrine based on external evidence. This is in direct contrast with Scripture’s teaching about its own inspiration and leads, in Enns’s case to rejection of inerrancy along with any meaningful view of inspiration.

⁵⁷ Douglas F. Kelly, “Religious Language and the Canon of Scripture” (paper used as part of course material, 2014), 9.

⁵⁸ Frame, 435n22.

⁵⁹ Kelly, 9. Kelly here is quoting Dr. Frame in John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), 131-132.

⁶⁰ Beale, 271. This citation is from Appendix 2, Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article 7.

Dr. Enns is a leading voice for many progressive Christians, especially in a millennial generation that largely regards Scripture as outdated and irrelevant. His aim of helping Christians who are struggling to reconcile difficult passages of Scripture with a high view of its inspiration is a noble one. However, it appears he has given these Christians more of a reason to reject the Divine authorship and inspiration of Scripture, and maybe even faith all-together.

While Reformed Christians recognize the need to be always reforming (*Semper Reformanda*) this is necessarily done in submission to Scripture's authority. For, "if we turn aside from the Word...though we may strive with strenuous haste, yet, since we have got off track, we shall never reach the goal."⁶¹

⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 73.

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