Uncertainty prevails in certain circles as to whether one who believes in the inspiration of the Scriptures can at the same time be involved in Biblical criticism. For some the answer is a categorical no, while for others a reluctant or qualified yes is forthcoming. Still others insist that an affirmation concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures and work in Biblical criticism are perfectly compatible. In this article I should like to set out some of the contentions so that at minimum a certain clarity will emerge as to what is at stake in these discussions.

Before we start, it might be well to reflect on the term Biblical criticism, since, in the mind of some, any criticism of the Scriptures is a tacit denial of inspiration. The word criticism is widely employed as the discipline in which communications are analyzed, whether oral or written. A speech critic is not committed to being negative toward each speech. In fact, he may be highly complimentary, yet he is still doing speech criticism. The term Biblical criticism likewise does not

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3 Such a view is expressed largely in popular religious journals. It is difficult to locate a Biblical scholar, however fundamentalistic, who expresses such a negative attitude toward Biblical criticism.

imply that the one doing it approaches the Scriptures intent upon denying their inspiration, though some Biblical critics in fact employ criticism to this end. Perhaps more fortunate language for those who find the term criticism too harsh would be the phrase "Biblical Interpretation" which in the mind of most scholars is synonymous with "Biblical Criticism." As a discipline, Biblical criticism is concerned with such matters as the authorship, audience, literary characteristics, and the dates of documents. Alexander Campbell thus presented rules for Biblical criticism in his "Principles of Interpretation," and where such questions are being raised in the churches Biblical criticism is being practiced. One may, of course, ask who wrote Hebrews, to whom it was written, at what time, and whether it is an epistle or a theological treatise with the purpose in mind of denying its inspiration. But this is not necessarily the case unless the inspiration of a document presupposes that it was let down out of heaven and without human authorship or specific audience. It would thus appear that, however unfortunate the terminology, Biblical criticism at certain levels is not incompatible with the affirmation that the Scriptures are the inspired word of God.

While Biblical Criticism qua criticism does not negate the inspiration of the Scriptures, it could be that certain types of criticism are inimical to the affirmation that the Bible is inspired. At the turn of the century scholars spoke of "lower" and "higher" criticism. It was then widely held that, whereas lower criticism was necessary, higher criticism sought to destroy the doctrine of inspiration. In our time these terms are little employed by Biblical scholars who use "textual criticism" in the place of lower criticism, and who recognize

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5 See, for example, Robert M. Grant, "History of the Interpretation of the Bible," *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, 1952), pp. 106-141.


various sorts of higher criticism. J. Coert Rylaarsdam, for example, identifies three kinds: literary criticism, form criticism, and tradition (redaction) criticism.\textsuperscript{8} In the past fifty years Biblical scholars have given their greatest energies to form criticism while redaction criticism has come upon the scene within the last twenty years. Because of the emphasis upon form criticism this approach in Biblical studies has come under attack from certain quarters as incompatible with inspiration.\textsuperscript{9} It would be foolish to deny that form criticism or the other sorts are undertaken by scholars who offer naturalistic explanations for the contents of the Scriptures. The question is whether these three types of criticism are feasible only if one is willing to assume naturalistic origins for the Bible.

It has struck me that one's doctrine of inspiration may determine whether or not he feels threatened by Biblical criticism. Thus it becomes imperative that we take up the major views of inspiration so as to determine which ones, if any or all, rule out the desirability of literary, form, and redaction criticism. Then it will be important to determine which view of inspiration is the correct one. I would argue that the correct view of inspiration is the one which is the most Biblical, that is, the one which takes most seriously the manner in which the Bible actually came into existence. As I see it, a Biblical view of inspiration affirms that in some sense the Scriptures are God-breathed, but that just in what sense must be determined by examining the Scriptures. A denial of inspiration would be the affirmation that the origins of the Scriptures are in part or \textit{in toto} merely human or the result of naturalistic development.


\textsuperscript{9} See the response by F. F. Bruce, "Biblical Criticism," \textit{The New Bible Dictionary} (Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 153. The word employed by the Germans is \textit{formgeschichte}, which might more properly be translated \textit{form history} than \textit{form criticism}. 
VIEWS OF INSPIRATION

Views of inspiration are legion. Perhaps the presentation of four views along a spectrum will show how doctrines of inspiration influence attitudes toward Biblical criticism. (1) An extreme view of the divine influence in Scriptures holds that the thoughts and words in the manuscripts are completely given by God so that no human effort, except for wielding the pen, is required.¹⁰ (2) A more modified position declares that the thought patterns and words are those of the specific Biblical author, but that God himself determined which thought patterns and words were employed.¹¹ (3) Another view declares that, whereas certain materials in the Scriptures are direct from God, other writings (for example, descriptions of historic events) require no divine action except that God intervenes whenever an author verges on inaccurate history.¹² (4) A final view declares that God in various ways inspires the Scriptures. In some cases he may give the words. In others, when so declared in the Scriptures themselves, the manuscript results from human research. In these cases it is not always clear just how a document is God-inspired, but in some manner God has made it his word.¹³ All four views hold that in some manner God is at


¹¹ See in Banowsky the view of Hall L. Calhoun, p. 109.

¹² This is the view of Alexander Campbell, Christian Baptist, 6 (1828), pp. 499ff. Cf. Harry Rimmer, Inspiration Plus Revelation Equals the Bible (Grand Rapids, 1946), pp. 17f.

¹³ George DeHoff writes, "We do not claim to know the mode of divine influence in inspiration... I do not know how the revelation or inspiration. I do not know how the Holy Spirit dwelt within or influenced the apostles. Indeed, I do not know how my own spirit dwells within me, but I do not question the fact that he does," p. 27. For recent books on inspiration see Dewey M. Beegle, The Inspiration of Scripture (Philadelphia, 1963), The Bible—The Living Word of Revelation, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, 1968), and Rene Pache, The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture (Chicago, 1969).
work in Biblical literature. The person who declares that parts or all of the Bible is merely human may declare some concept of inspiration, but he denies that it is inspired of God.

It is clear that proponents can be found for each of these views of inspiration. Is it possible to ascertain whether one of these views is more correct than the others? I would argue that no a priori ground—one in which it stands to reason that one theory of inspiration is better than another—exists upon which this problem may be resolved. If the question is to be resolved, it can be done from one basis, that is, whether the view is compatible with the manner in which Bible came into existence from examining the Bible itself. In other words, the most correct view of Biblical inspiration is that which is most Biblical in respect to accounting for internal evidence as to the Bible's origin.

It is difficult to see how the first view—that no human effort is required—can be the singular view of inspiration. It is true that some statements in the Scriptures are declared to be direct from God, for example, Jeremiah's declaration, "Then the word of the Lord came to me . . . " (Jer. 18:5). But in various places the resultant materials are declared to be through human effort. The author of I and II Chronicles makes it clear that he is not simply receiving God's word from heaven but is weaving into his account materials drawn from various ancient sources. He mentions the chronicles of King David (I Chron. 27:24), the chronicles of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer (II Chron. 12:14), and the Commentary on the Book of the Kings (II Chron. 24:27). Luke likewise, in the introduction to his Gospel, which also serves as an introduction to Acts, indicates that he has listened to eye-witness accounts of the story of Jesus and the church and has read various written accounts (Luke 1:1-4). From these sources, which he has carefully evaluated, he has compiled his own account. A doctrine of inspiration therefore which denies human activity in the production of the Scriptures, whatever else it may be, is not a Biblical doctrine.

14 See also II Chron. 13:22; 24:30; 26:22; 32:32; 33:19.
from the standpoint of the Bible’s own witness.

The second view, holding that God identifies for the author which words and thought patterns in his repertoire are to be employed, could account for the way in which information from sundry accounts and documents become God’s word. It could be that God himself was involved in the selection of pertinent information, though I am not aware that such is affirmed at any place in the Scriptures. Most of those who have proposed this view have not in fact taken into account the professed use by certain Biblical authors of contemporary and historical materials. They rather have in mind the view that all the words and thoughts are God-identified as a document is being written. The end result is that as they conceive their doctrine of inspiration the literary features of a Biblical book are God-determined continuously as the book is being produced. This would apparently leave no room for later editorial comments on earlier materials (e.g., Gen. 14:17; 35:20; 36:31; Mark 7:3, 4, 19). Since this is the case and since later editorial comments can be clearly identified in the Bible, this is an a priori rather than a Biblical doctrine of inspiration.

The third views holds that in certain Biblical materials the work is totally human, though God anxiously watches over the production and heads off any miscues. While this view may be a good explanation for the manner in which some Biblical statements are fully human, yet at the same time God attested, it is difficult to pinpoint any place in the Scriptures themselves affirming the divine veto as God’s modus operandi. The divine overseeing view could in principle admit to a Biblical author employing non-inspired documents, adding editorial comments, and using materials which have gone through various stages of development, but such possibilities are not clearly recognized by those who see

\[15\] See the chapter in Pache “Limits of Biblical Criticism and Opposition to Plenary Inspiration,” which fails to confront seriously the question of the origins and nature of Biblical documents.
inspiration in this manner. They apparently envision Biblical documents as an author presenting his own views rather than on occasion utilizing materials from others and preserved over long periods of time.

The fourth view, seeing God as inspiring Biblical materials in various ways, seems the most compatible with what is said in them and obvious ways in which they have come about. The Hebrews writer declares, "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1, 2). Sometimes the word of God was something the prophet saw rather than heard (see Amos 1:1), for example, the holiness of God as revealed to Isaiah (Isa. 6). Sometimes the word of God came to a prophet through concrete life experiences, as the case of Hosea’s wife, who became a harlot, and Jeremiah’s trip to the potter’s house (Jer. 18). Then sometimes the word to the prophet was direct (Jer. 21:12-14). In historical materials, both Old and New Testament, the manner of inspiration seems different in further ways. These documents resemble human presentations of the past in which whatever sources are available are employed. The exact manner in which these documents are God-breathed is not clear. Not having an answer should not force us to a hypothesis which is a priori for example, the Divine veto or, in the other direction, to a denial of inspiration. The ways in which God does his work are not always fully explicable, as Jesus indicated to Nicodemus in regard to the one “born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). This fourth view of inspiration is, I believe, the most Biblical because it does not force upon the Scriptures a position concerning their origins. Rather it remains open to

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16 It is clear from reading through both Pache and the articles in Revelation and the Bible (ed. Carl F. H. Henry) that little attention has been given to what possible explanations for the origins of the Scripture are compatible with the expressed affirmations concerning inspiration. In works of this sort the authors hasten to condemn naturalistic presuppositions of Biblical critics without identifying aspects of contemporary criticism compatible with their announced view of inspiration.

17 For example, Rimmer, Inspiration Plus Revelation.
whatever literary features and developments are obvious from a close scrutiny of the documents themselves.

INSPIRATION AND THE LIMITS OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Within the view of inspiration claimed here as the Biblical one, all forms of Biblical criticism are within limits insofar as the energies are directed toward accurate description of Biblical documents. Obviously, certain naturalistic presuppositions employed by radical Biblical critics would be outside the peripheries declared by the one who believes the Bible is inspired of God. These presuppositions will be more obvious in taking up individually each form of criticism. The observations here make no pretense of being exhaustive, but hopefully provide some perspective on the ostensible problems.

Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is the effort to determine as far as possible what manuscript reading is the most primitive. Both conservative and radical scholars recognize variant reading for even the best of the text traditions. No doctrine of inspiration can successfully deny textual differences and hence the need for textual criticism. A textual critic who lacks commitment to some manner of Divine influence in the making and preserving of the Scriptures feels quite at liberty to reconstruct texts which make no sense to him. The critic committed to inspiration has more confidence in the text and is predisposed at reconstruction only when evidence clearly supports such a move.

Literary Criticism

Literary criticism of the Bible is concerned with the literary characteristics of the various documents, the manner in which these documents came to their present literary form, and the historical settings out of which they came. At the turn of the century many American churchmen felt that literary criticism (for example, the affirmation that the
Pentateuch was compiled from four documents: the Jahwist, Eloist, the Priestly code, and the Deuteronomist) violated the Biblical doctrine of inspiration. It is difficult to see how this matter can be settled by a doctrine of inspiration. Rather, two questions are involved, first whether a cogent case can be made for the identification of these documents and second whether a denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is a denial of inspiration. As we have already seen, certain authors in the Bible profess to incorporate insights provided by documents available to them. Literary criticism can and has made radical claims which defy reasonable interpretations of Biblical data, but this fact should call into question irresponsible literary criticism, not literary criticism itself. The literary critic takes up naturalistic presuppositions when he undertakes to reconstruct the background of materials irrespective of clearly affirmed historical data. An example here is Wellhausen’s claim that any reference to the tabernacle follows the construction of the Solomonic temple. He also defies Divine inspiration when he claims irreconcilable contradictions as the means for identifying various documents within a text, as in the flood story.

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19 Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 495-541, has taken up the matters at length. For the opposing view along with a short history of the question see Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, 1965), pp. 103-195. One of the most lucid presentations of the literary characteristics of Genesis is found in Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*, pp. 18-84.


Form Criticism

Form criticism is concerned with the different settings in the life of Biblical man out of which various oral and literary forms may have arisen, such as sagas, psalms and hymns, curses and blessings, prophetic oracles, and legal codes. These communication vehicles obviously are to be found in Scripture as well as in their cultic and other settings. Form criticism is helpful in identifying these forms and in understanding the vehicles in which the ideas appear. Form criticism also is concerned with the history of these oral and literary units and the manner in which additions or deletions may have been made to original sagas or parables. Form criticism has suffered from extreme application and has sometimes been conceived from non-justifiable perspectives. Such misuses, however, do not destroy the contribution of form identification to Biblical studies. Naturalistic presuppositions which sometimes influence the results of the form critics are that the form units never get back to an original event and consist of layers of additions from later stages in a movement. Bultmann, for example, argues that the parables attributed to Jesus do not go back to him but are parables put to use and added to by the church in various stages of its earlier years. In examining the parables in the New Testament one cannot deny that they vary in length and content and that some of this can be attributed to the tradition through which they have gone or to the Gospel author. But to deny any of the parables to the earthly Jesus is to assume a naturalistic attitude toward the contents of the Gospels.


Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism involves identifying the contribution made by a Biblical author to the document he has prepared. Criticism of this sort is limited to documents in which older materials have been utilized, for example, I and II Kings, Matthew, or Luke. In these cases it is possible to identify the theology and the purpose of the author in terms of the materials which he has included as well as that which he has left out and the transitions in which he ties the materials together. It is clear that Luke in telling the gospel story has a particular point of view which he wishes to advance. Redaction criticism is therefore helpful in understanding why Luke writes as he does. Redaction criticism denies inspiration when it presupposes that the contributions of an author are mainly fabrications and unfaithful to the original actual history.

Students of the Scriptures are indebted to all efforts to understand the Word of God. The Bible is a rich repository of thought patterns and literary forms from a wide spectrum of historical settings. Biblical criticism has done much to enrich and enhance an understanding of the manner and message of God’s revelation to ancient man. It is indeed a worthwhile enterprise, even though it has been plagued by critics with a naturalistic bias. Because of the complexity of the Biblical materials it is to be expected that numerous conclusions will be forthcoming and that scholars will disagree. Charity over differences is to be exhibited, and scholars should be wary of dogmatism concerning specific conclusions like the covenant formulas McCarthy points out in a recent study. Nevertheless Biblical criticism is here to stay and is to be welcomed by all who seek a deeper penetration into God’s Word for man, even the one who affirms that the Bible is Divine as well as human.

25 An example would be certain of Marxsen’s reconstructions in his analysis of the Gospel of Mark. Willi Marxsen, Mark the Evangelist (Nashville, 1969).
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