ON REVELATION AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY*

DANIEL FULLER AND CLARK PINNOCK

Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology, by Clark H. Pinnock. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971.) 256 pp. $4.95. Reviewed by Daniel P. Fuller, Fuller Theological Seminary.

The best way, I feel, that I can make a review of this book which will contribute to contemporary evangelical dialogue is simply to present a letter I wrote to Clark Pinnock about it:

Dear Clark,

I surely want to continue the discussion on this vital theme with you and other evangelicals. The differences between us are slight in comparison with the differences between us and, say, Barth or Bultmann. But we evangelicals have a basic question we must settle before we can talk very coherently with those farther afield.

My biggest difficulty with your position is that I cannot see how you can make such an emphasis on the validity of the inductive method (a good example is your emphasis on pp. 38-40), and then deny the right of reason and criticism to be sovereign. For example, on pp. 182 f. you reject that methodological procedure in which "the critical attitude is adopted from the outset." Induction, as I understand it, means letting criticism control all aspects of the knowing process from beginning to end. How can anything less than this avoid getting you into the circular argument which you oppose, especially as you criticize Karl Barth (pp. 42, 218)? I delight in your appeal that we all have "simple honesty" (p. 192), and your statement that a mere claim to authority establishes nothing (p. 53). But how then can you say that Scripture can only be approached "from a standpoint within a Christian community of faith" (p. 135)? If faith really has to *begin* the approach to Scripture, then I don't think you can talk very meaningfully about induction. I would argue that really, after all, you are on Van Til's side, not on Warfield's.

In your handling of my view of inspiration (pp. 79 f.), you imply that, unlike Warfield, I am "limiting its [the Bible's] accuracy." Do you not, however, do the same when you say, "The infallibility of Scripture is not, in one sense, absolute. Its field is restricted to intended assertions of Scripture understood by ordinary grammatical-historical exegesis of the text" (p. 71). With me, you also say that "remedial redemptive revelation enjoys centrality in the Bible" (p. 29). But when you say (p. 79), "Fuller

* This review and reply sharpens the dialogue and debate on the nature of revelation and biblical authority. Use by permission from *Christian Scholar's Review* as published in volume II, number 4, 1973.

argues that the doctrinal verses teaching inspiration do not require so broad a view...," your preceding two sentences define "so broad" as meaning "all that Scripture taught," and "all biblical truths." You are thus implying that I do not believe all biblical truths or that what all the Bible teaches is true.

I am enclosing of copy of my Toronto address[1] and have underlined a statement on page 80 of it where I asserted that all that the Bible teaches is infallible and inerrant. The people who read your interpretation of me, however, will come to a different conclusion, and will be encouraged even to class me with Dewey Beegle! I certainly have never said, like Beegle, that parts of the Bible are not inspired. I would argue that you have misconstrued me as being unwilling to regard all that the Bible teaches as inerrant and arbitrarily acceding only to its teachings of what makes a man wise to salvation. But surely II Timothy 3:15 ("...Scriptures make you wise to salvation") is the simplest way to denote in one statement the whole intention of the biblical writings. I do not believe you would want to say they had two or more intentions, only one of which was to make a man wise unto salvation. As for myself, I am in complete agreement with you that our confidence in Scripture would vanish if any Scriptural statement or necessary implication therefrom which involves what makes a man wise to salvation were regarded as untrue. If there is one error anywhere in what Scripture intends to teach, then everything it intends to say is suspect and we have not even one sure word from God.

Your statement farther down on page 79, "Whereever faith and knowledge are opposed like this..." implies that I have a dichotomy between faith and history, that is, that revelational truth is in one compartment and historical knowledge is in another. Now I believe you have read my *Easter Faith and History,*[2] and if there is one thing that book emphasizes, it is that faith is the reflex of what can be known about history. How can you say, then, that I oppose faith and knowledge? Even at the end of my Toronto paper I emphasize that all knowing, including the knowledge which faith claims to have, comes by but one way.

Therefore, I am not saying that the Bible cannot err in revelational matters while it can where historical control is possible, as you affirm that I do. All I am saying is that if it errs where historical control is possible in matters germane to "the whole counsel of God" which "makes a man wise to salvation," then all the Bible becomes questionable. I sincerely

1. Given at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Toronto, December 27, 1967. Cf. Daniel P. Fuller, "Benjamin B. Warfield's View of Faith and History," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society,* XI, 2 (Spring, 1968), pp. 75-83. The quote on p. 80 reads, "These doctrinal verses unmistakably teach that the Bible gives men infallible, inerrant teaching about God, about man's lost condition, and how he comes to full salvation in Christ. Paul said that the Scriptures are able to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ (II Tim. 3:15), and this can only mean that all the biblical assertions which teach or rightly imply knowledge that makes men wise unto salvation are absolutely inerrant, for how could falliable statements yield wisdom?"
2. Daniel P. Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 279 pp.

hope that as I continue my historical-grammatical exegesis of Scripture, I shall find no error in its teachings. But I can only affirm inerrancy with high probability, as you do on page 46, not with the absolute certainty that so many of your other statements in the book imply.

My problem with *Biblical Revelation* is the same as I recall it was with *Set Forth Your Case.* There is a part of you that wants to be inductive, to let critical thinking prevail. But you can't go all the way. Down deep in your heart, you feel that faith has to start the knowing process. For you, belief in revelation and inspiration rests only "in part" (p. 47) on evidence. I am trying to do as Warfield and let induction control from beginning to end. You say on page 185 that following Christ's view of Scripture "will always prove safe" and that "it will be forever impossible for unbelief to destroy faith in our high view of inspiration" (p. 230). This is the language of having an unassailable starting point—the language of deductive thinking—of Van Til. But see my quote from Warfield.[3] He left the possibility open that the Bible could be wrong. I am trying to follow Warfield, and I see in you someone who would like very much to follow him too. You yourself have made all that is involved in the "slight corrective"[4] I suggested at Toronto that Warfield needed. But are you willing to be as consistently inductive as he was? Critical thinking and basing faith on evidences (Carnell) is like pregnancy. You can't have it just "in part." You either have it or you don't.

Let's keep discussing this all-important question. You, Montgomery, and Kantzer are about the only ones I know who make noises about resisting "the thunderous veto" (p. 39) against induction. Are you willing to go all the way in resisting this veto?

Sincerely yours,
Dan

3. "...The evidence for [the] truth [of the plenary inspiration of Scripture] is... precisely that evidence in weight and amount, which vindicates for us the truthworthiness of Christ and His apostles as teachers of doctrine. Of course, this evidence is not in the strict logical sense 'demonstrative'; it is 'probable' evidence. It therefore leaves open the metaphysical possibility of its being mistaken." Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Real Problem of Inspiration," *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible.* Samuel G. Craig (ed.); (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), p. 218.
4. Note 1, p. 82.

IN RESPONSE TO DR. DANIEL FULLER

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Dr. Fuller's review letter focuses in on three particular points in my book in which he has a stake. The readers of this journal who have not yet encountered my book will not be able to gain from his remarks any impression at all of the scope of the total argument. But perhaps our dialogue on these relatively narrow concerns will stimulate an interest in the book as a whole. I am pleased for the opportunity of discussion with Dr. Fuller on the question of biblical authority, because he himself is projecting a fresh theological proposal in this area which is certain to have considerable effect in the evangelical community and beyond.

1. It is surely a delightful experience to come under the criticism of an evangelical theologian for not being sufficiently empirical in my approach. Because Dr. Fuller and I share a view of the constructive relation between faith and history, he will understand how I feel. It is more common to be criticized by our fideistic evangelical colleagues for being *too* concerned about questions of factual verification. Dr. Fuller recognizes that I wish to follow the epistemology of the Princeton apologetic as it was developed by B. B. Warfield, but he believes that I am inconsistent in this and tend to lapse into presuppositional modes of expression, if not thought. He would even place me on Van Til's side! *Mirabile dictu.*

A mere glance at the first chapter dispels any such notion. Dr. Fuller is concerned because I do not allow "criticism to be sovereign." The context of my book to which he has reference is dealing with negative criticism, *i.e.*, that species of criticism which is beset by the naturalistic presupposition, a condition which prevents it from being truly empirical. Certainly I do not let criticism of that type control my thought. Neither does Dr. Fuller. If we did, we would not be talking as biblical supernaturalists. His allusion to page 135 is irrelevant to the point he wishes to make. There I am contending that because every interpreter of Scripture operates out of some historical tradition which influences his work, it is imperative that he be scrupulous in allowing Scripture to correct him. Nor has Dr. Fuller read his reference to page 230 very carefully, where I maintain that the authority of the Bible is secure precisely because the credentials which authenticate it are so excellent, a thought right in keep-

1. "Benjamin B. Warfield's View of Faith and History," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11 (1968) pp. 75-83 and "The Nature of Biblical Inerrancy," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, June, 1972, pp. 47-51.

ing with his own emphasis. If I said our belief in inspiration rests on empirical evidences only "in part," it was because, as the context will show, I did not wish to rule out the role of the Spirit in creating that spiritual conviction in our hearts. Perhaps he would still object, because I have seen as yet no place in Dr. Fuller's doctrine of revelation which requires anything of the Holy Spirit.

2. Dr. Fuller then takes me to task for characterizing his position as one of limited inerrancy. And well he might, for the phrase is about as meaningful as a "square circle." Nevertheless, in two published articles[1] Dr. Fuller plainly distinguishes between revelational matters which he considers inerrant and an undefined area of non-revelational statements which are not. Though convenient for sidestepping certain biblical difficulties, this dichotomy is unworkable and unscriptural. It is unworkable simply because there is no way to determine which biblical material is revelational and which is not. It will not do to keep referring, as he does, to the mustard seed, a rather trivial case of *usus loquendi.* Are such matters as belief in the fall of man and such entire books as the book of Proverbs, which do not tell us how to be saved, revelational or not? His theory has set up a stategy for retreat from almost any problem the negative critics may raise, even if it strikes Scripture broadside. More important, the proposal is subscriptural. The attitude of Jesus and the Apostles toward Scripture was one of *total* trust. It cannot be shown that they performed a revelational calculus on the text, believing what came down on the one side and not the rest. What Scripture said, without *a priori* qualification, God said, was their view. The whole *graphe* is God-breathed and fully trustworthy. Certainly its chief purpose is to lead men to Christ, but this it performs by means of its entire teaching authority. Fuller is less empirical at this point than Warfield and I, because if he were more careful in his induction, he would see at once that the dichotomy he has proposed in untenable is the light of what he calls "the doctrinal verses."

Therefore, I cannot permit him to classify my position with his on this issue. Infallibility is indeed relative to the intended purpose of the writer. And this is why I am compelled to reject his suggestion that we make it relative to some dubious *a priori* standard, inaccurately derived from the doctrinal verses.

3. Finally, Dr. Fuller is sensitive to my suggestion that he is less than fully consistent in the way he relates faith and history. Yet it is undeniable that, in his article on Warfield, most of the material which in his view would belong to the "revelational" category lies outside the reach of science and history, safe from their critical control. To say this is a "dichotomy" may be too strong. Nonetheless, there is a marked tendency to equate the non-revelational material with the testable and possibly errant and to reserve inerrancy for the theological truth which cannot be falsified. In any case, the two sorts of biblical teaching are so inextricably united in the text that the theological truth is discredited to the extent that the factual material is erroneous. Furthermore, it looks as if the area of "revelational"

material shrinks before the advance of the latest critical charges. A convenient apologetic device, no doubt, but one which places the whole scriptural teaching in jeopardy.

My concern with Dr. Fuller's position is that the limited errancy stance can slide easily into an unlimited errancy stance. Just because the "revelational/nonrevelational" distinction is so fuzzy, he gives us a slope, not a platform. Until now he has confined his "biblical errors" to the marginalia. May it always be so.