

Hermeneutics as a Cloak For the Denial of Scripture

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A theological liberal has vigorously criticized E. J. Carnell's *Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: 1959) because of inconsistency toward Scripture. The review states:

Carnell feels that... even though the Old Testament appears to contradict both science and itself, and though much of its content lacks revelatory power... we must believe that in some sense the original writings were free from error. This sense may be that an inspired author correctly copied an inaccurate document! Obviously if such an interpretation of inspiration is accepted, the fact that a statement appears in Scripture is no grounds for believing it to be true. Hence the only value of the doctrine of inspiration appears to lie in being loyal to what is supposed to be the view of Jesus.¹

Carnell, in other words, insists that if we are to take seriously the Lordship of Christ we must accept the divine authority of the Old Testament,² orthodoxy being committed to the concept of the plenary inspiration of Scripture.³ But the criticism goes on to point out that in his *interpretation* of inspiration Carnell tends to vitiate the reality of Biblical authority. Indeed, he openly grants the impossibility of "coaxing into harmony" the data of Scripture.⁴ How then, we ask, can he in the same breath reject the idea of accommodating the doctrine of inspiration to the inductively reasoned difficulties that he recognizes? Carnell replies, "The rules of hermeneutics see to that"; though he does admit that his methodology entails a "strained use" of the principles of interpretation, as these have been employed by historic evangelicalism.⁵ Actually, this neo-evangelicalism is suggestive of Roman Catholicism, when the latter assures us that "Any meaning [of Scripture] not in harmony with... the Church's interpretation cannot be the true sense of Scripture."⁶ It simply substitutes rational induction for the Church, as the source of distinguishing which Biblical passages need to be interpreted away. In both cases, hermeneutics seems to have become a cloak for the practical denial of Scripture.

The following study, therefore, examines three specific areas of this "strained" hermeneutic; for the discipline itself, which may be defined as the science, or art, of Biblical interpretation, is in fact indispensable for proper exegesis and becomes detrimental to Biblical truth only when perverted into what Engelder has called "the hermeneutics of the moderns."⁷ Its value is patent in the three areas under discussion, namely, *usus loquendi*, normativeness, and progressive revelation. *Usus loquendi* signifies for any given word or phrase its socially designated meaning. Fairbairn defines it as "falling in with prevalent modes of thought so as, not to lend countenance to error, but to serve for the better apprehension of the truth."⁸ For example, Daniel in Babylon speaks of Nebuchadrezzar's attack in the third year of Jehoiakim (Dan. 1:1), while Jeremiah in Palestine places it in the fourth year (Jer. 46:2): Daniel appears simply to follow the Babylonian usage of reckoning a king's first year after the year of his accession, Again, relative to the post-resurrection appearances of Christ, Paul refers to the apostle as "the twelve" (I Cor. 15:5), even

¹ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Interpretation* 14:1 (Jan. 1960), 96.

² *The Case for Orthodox Theology* pp. 35-36; cf. pp. 40-41.

³ "The Bible alone is the Word of God written," *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111; cf. his insistence upon the "credibility" of Scripture, p. 43.

⁶ A. J. Mass, Hermeneutics," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII: 272.

⁷ *Scripture Cannot Be Broken* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1944), p. 342.

⁸ *Hermeneutical Manual* (Philadelphia: Smith, English & Co., 1859, p. 113.

though Judas was dead and his successor had not yet been chosen. Of similar import are such phenomenal descriptions as, "The sun rises." *Usus loquendi* thus signifies accommodation, not in the sense of "explaining away," but only of recognizing actual

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contemporary and cultural meanings, as opposed to those less historically valid interpretations that might be dictated by our own 20th century observation.

The second hermeneutical area, that of normativeness, asks the question whether a given event or statement constitutes a divinely intended norm, or standard, for Christian life. Both intrinsic and universal normativeness are involved. Intrinsic normativeness, as Ramm has well stated, must be determined upon the basis of Biblical endorsement.⁹ The conduct of Peter at Antioch (Gal. 2:11) or the words of Satan in Job lack such contextual approval. Similarly; those passages in which the "three friends" condemn Job, such as Eliphaz's words in 22:5-9, are clearly at fault (*cf.* Job 1:1, 32:3), even though accurately recorded. On the other hand, the words of this same Eliphaz concerning the power of God (in 5:13) are expressly approved in I Cor. 5:13); and, as a result, one must avoid such an indiscriminate denial of inspired normativeness to his speeches as is suggested by Carnell.¹⁰ Most expressly, Scripture assigns intrinsic normativeness to the human composers of the books of the Bible,¹¹ men who "spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21). Critics such as C. H. Dodd may indeed question, "When the reader has discovered what the writer actually said and meant, he wants to ask further, Is this what I am to believe about God? Is it *true*?"¹² But Paul Woolley has rightly opposed these attempts to limit the words of Scripture to "nothing more than a personal pious wish of the apostle".¹³ and Augustine, 1500 years ago, declared, "I firmly believe that no one of their authors erred in anything in writing."¹⁴ *Universal* normativeness, moreover; must also be present before a given passage can be applied to Christian life. A number of Biblical commands, for example, are directed to particular situations; and Carnell correctly criticized Seventh-day Adventism for its attempts to transplant into the church those pre-Christian, Jewish ceremonies¹⁵ which the New Testament has long since abrogated as "a shadow of things to come, but the body is Christ's" (Col. 2:17).

A final area of interpretation concerns progressive revelation. For Scripture describes a developing faith: "God, having of old time spoken in the prophets in diverse manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, who [is] the very image of His substance" (Heb. 1:1-3). Our first parents, for example, possessed only a vague hope of deliverance through the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15); David foresaw God's anointed (= Messiah) as begotten of the Father (Ps. 2:2, 7); and we preach Christ crucified, the power of God (I Cor. 1:23-24). Simultaneously, however, we observe, with Ramm; that "The immature or preliminary does not exist in a state of contradiction with the mature and final."¹⁶ The Bible, accordingly, nowhere abrogates the moral standard of the Old Testament; rather, as Carnell observes, today "we owe His holy law more

⁹ *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Rev. ed.; Boston: Wilde, 1956), p. 172.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 102, though on p. 109 he does (inconsistently) grant the possibility of his uttering divine truth. *Cf.* Woolley's more careful observation that he was "not always speaking absolute truth," Westminster Theological Seminary Faculty, *The infallible Word* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Guardian Pub. Co., 1946), p. 205.

¹¹ Unless, of course, their own context condemn their former words, *cf.* Jer. 12:1-5.

¹² *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Nisbet, 1928), p. 297.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁴ *Epistulae* (ad Hier.), lxxxii 1, 3.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 186.

than ever"¹⁷ (cf. Mt. 5:17, 20-22). For God cannot lie or contradict Himself (Num. 23:19, Titus 1:2); and, as Warfield so conclusively demonstrates, "Scripture says" means "God says."¹⁸ Thus, while progress and clarification may be assumed, correction or replacement, may not.

In recent conservatively-oriented publications, however; these principles of *uses loquendi*, normativeness, and progressive revelation seem to have shifted in function from that of an X-ray for exposing the meaning of Scripture to that of a cloak for avoiding it. In reference, for example, to the extent of the flood, Bernard Ramm has concluded that when interpreted "phenomenally" and according to the cultural usage of the narrator, the deluge need be understood as covering only that part of the earth's surface as lay within the observation of the man who recorded it.¹⁹ But that the principle of *usus loquendi* is not the real basis for this interpretation is shown by Ramm's own summarization, as follows, "The flood is local, though spoken of in universal terms, and so the destruction of man is local though spoken of in universal

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terms."²⁰ The account; in other words, conveys the thought of a universal catastrophe; but rational induction discountenances the possibility of a world-wide flood. It is therefore left to the rules of hermeneutics to gloss over the unacceptable words. Carnell's admission is more to the point; when he says, "The prima-facie meaning of the Flood is that the entire earth was submerged. But geological evidence fails to verify a universal flood. Orthodoxy has no decisive resolution to offer."²¹ On the other hand, the latter then turns about and makes the following appeal to the force of language, to legitimize the possibility of a theory of man's theistic evolution:

If God was pleased to breathe his image into a creature that had previously come from the dust, so be it. Scripture only requires us to say that the physical antecedent of man was not denoted man until God performed the inbreathing.²²

But does an objective *usus loquendi* permit a view that what commenced in Eden was no more than a new denotation for an already existent creature? Following standard Hebrew usage for the word *nephesh*, "Soul;" modern scholars translate Genesis 2:7 as follows, "Yahweh God molded man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Only by a "strained" hermeneutic, therefore, may direct creationism be removed from this verse. A final example appears in Ramm's treatment of Joshua's "long day." The command of Joshua is marked by poetic balance and reads (literally):

Sun be silent upon Gibeon;
And thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon.
And the sun was silent, and the moon stood,
Until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁸ *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 299-348.

¹⁹ *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 239-241.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 95. Preference must be given to Carnell's subsequent explanation of cave "men" as a pre-Adamic race, similar to, but distinct from and inferior to *Homo sapiens*, p. 96.

The prose narrative then adds, "And the sun stood in the midst of heaven and hasted not to go down about a whole day" (Josh. 10:12-13). Liberalism has concluded that the original poem taught the "silent" clouding over of the sun and that the later comment in prose misunderstood the poetry and introduced the idea of a miraculously prolonged day.²³ Ramm to (while noting the possibility of a long day) expresses his preference for the "clouding over" hypothesis; but he seeks to maintain the authenticity of the prose section as well, following the interpretation of E. Walter Maunder.²⁴ Maunder's proposal was that the words, "The sun hasted not to go down," should be understood as meaning that because of the refreshing cloudiness "That afternoon seemed to be double the ordinary length."²⁵ Elsewhere, however, he admitted that the words, if taken in their cultural usage, did teach a retarded movement of the sun.²⁶ Accordingly, A. Lincoln Shute, another advocate of the cloudiness theory, and also quoted by Ramm, has confessed that Maunder's interpretation is "very far from satisfactory."²⁷ He too, moreover, concedes that the Hebrew verb *bo'*, as used with the sun means, consistently, "To go in, to set or go down"; but at this point he would substitute, "to go, to resume its shining and the pouring of its heat down upon the heads of Joshua's soldiers," though he admits this to be a "doubtful, difficult element" within his interpretation.²⁸ It appears that Ramm is employing a questionable *uses loquendi*, as a shield for a more deep-seated conviction that the Scripture must not be allowed to teach facts of which science might be skeptical. Carnell even lays it down as a principle of interpretation that "Theology is beyond its tether when it repudiates uniformity in the name of Providence."²⁹ But such a position seems painfully to resemble that of Romanist hermeneutics, which states, "It would be wrong to make Scripture the criterion of Science."³⁰ Little wonder that Hordern, in his *Case* for neo-orthodox theology, characterizes such a procedure by saying,

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Genesis is an inerrant picture of creation, but the Christian cannot know what it means until the "assured results" of science come in. This means that the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy has become a purely emotive reaction to the Bible; it can give no practical knowledge.... Worse still, it would seem that the words of the Bible can be stretched to mean anything that, in view of science, they "should" mean.³¹

Objective interpretation requires that we assert with Paul Woolley, "A great many statements in the realm of natural science are to be found in the Bible, and [even though of a limited, phenomenal nature] they are true statements."³² Some may indeed suggest that this "trueness" need not embrace so-called peripheral matters; but F.A.O. Pieper, with a clearer understanding of consistent faith has countered, "When Scripture incidentally treats a scientific subject, it is always right."³³ For, once we have determined the *usus loquendi* of a given expression, the fact

²³ Cf. Theodore H. Robinson, *A History of Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 1: 126.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 161; cf. Maunder, "Beth-Horon, the Battle of," in *ISBE*, rev. ed., 1:446-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:448.

²⁶ "Joshua's Long Day," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 3:3 (Sept., 1951), 17.

²⁷ "The Battle of Beth-Horon," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 84:4, (1927), 428.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 429-430.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

³⁰ A. J. Mass, "Hermeneutics," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, 275.

³¹ *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 60.

³² *Op. cit.* in *The Infallible Word*, p. 190.

³³ *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 1:317. Ramm, however, suggests that the truth lies somewhere between Pieper and the liberals, *op. cit.*, p. 78, though this compromise would appear to be justifiable, in the light of inerrancy, only by the sacrifice of sound hermeneutics.

of Biblical inerrancy requires our loyalty to the truths signified. To avoid such a commitment through the abuse of hermeneutics can bring little but ridicule upon evangelicalism.

In the second area under consideration, recent writers have accused fundamentalism of imposing upon Scripture an undue uniformity, treating *all* of its passages as if they were normative for faith and practice.³⁴ Such excessive belief Carnell defines as "cultic";³⁵ and, as he says elsewhere, Biblical hermeneutics "is easily corrupted by the cultic mind."³⁶ But while some may wrongfully have ascribed universal normativeness to certain of Paul's particular directives (for example, to the Corinthian church, with the result that bobbed hair becomes a capital offence), other modern conservatives seem to have erred in the opposite direction by their unwise denials of intrinsic normativeness, for the purpose of avoiding Biblical difficulties. Thus even Keil and Delitzsch were willing to dismiss Paul's declaration of King Saul's 40 yr. reign (Acts 13:21) as no more than a "traditional opinion current in the Jewish schools,"³⁷ apparently having failed to weigh the implications of their solution upon the authority of Paul as an approved speaker within Scripture. Carnell, moreover, has felt free to ask whether the whole gamut of Biblical poetry need necessarily express the divine mind,³⁸ even though this question concerns the normativeness of the very composers of the books of the Bible. A hermeneutical theory that would justify such a "picking and choosing" can hardly be considered congruous with the plenary inspiration of the Word.

In the category of prophecy, the British exegete H. L. Ellison has sought to escape certain problems of non-fulfillment by adducing the following principle:

Except where a promise is confirmed by God's oath we are safe in concluding that every statement of God about the future has some element of the conditional in it... If we could grasp this clearly... no difficulty will be found in recognizing minor contradictions in the message of any particular prophet.³⁹

But again it is the normativeness of the inspired writers of Scripture that is at stake; and when Paul affirms that he believed "all things which are written in the prophets" (Acts 24:14) he gives no indication that his confidence was restricted to such matters as God saw fit to confirm by an oath! Hermeneutics does recognize conditional prophecies, such as Jonah's threat to Nineveh (Jonah 3:4, cf. Jer. 18:7-10); but, as Berkhof has stated,

This conditional character can only be ascribed to those prophecies that referred to the near future, and that could; therefore, be made conditional on the free actions of the prophets' contemporaries.⁴⁰

This rule provides no blanket coverage for the difficulties that may appear in prophecy.

³⁴ Carnell, *op cit.*, p. 53.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁷ *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1865), 283.

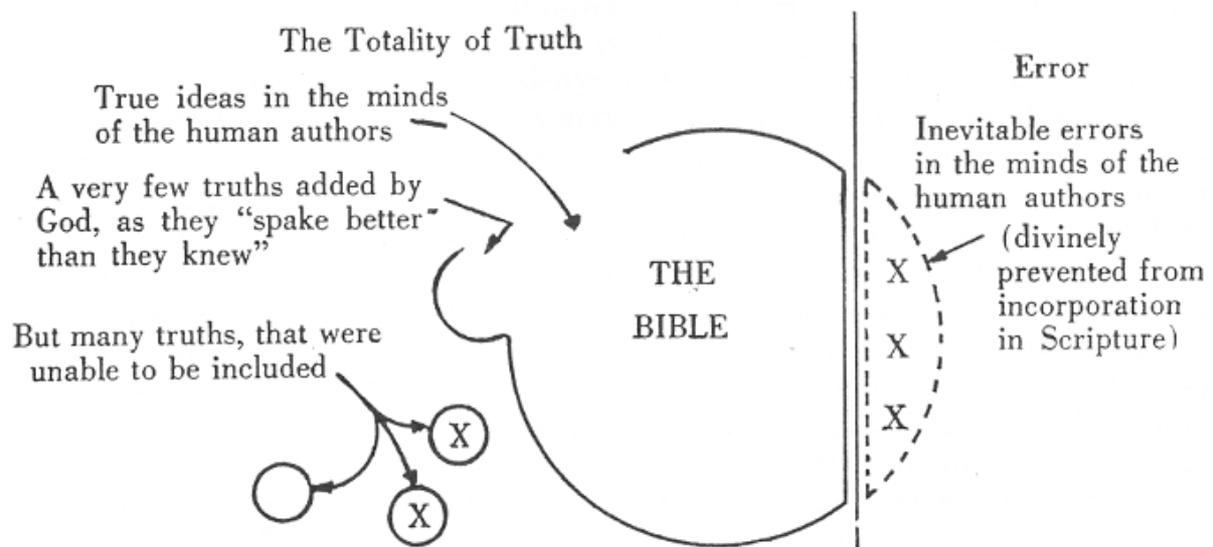
³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 110; cf. his subsequent unhappy attempt to distinguish between the normativeness of the "feeling" of the poetry and its "truth," p. 111. As Abraham Kuyper well points out, the Biblical epistles, poetry, and much of the prophets are, by their very nature, direct compositions; so that the concept of uninspired sources (subsequently corrected by the "graphic inspiration" of the Biblical writer) is foreign to these kinds of writings, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1898, pp. 546-547).

³⁹ *Ezekiel, the Man and his Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 103-104. His only stated exception is that of the prophecies of God's blessings to mankind, and even these are suggested to be conditional in time and manner.

⁴⁰ *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), p. 150.

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An equally serious abuse of the principle of normativeness concerns its application to the historical books of Scripture. Years ago, writers such as James Orr sought to account for Scripture's apparently erroneous statements of history by referring them, not to the inspired Biblical writer, but to the non-normative sources that these men happened to incorporate within their books. It was this very subterfuge, however,⁴¹ that provoked the scornful criticism quoted at the outset of this paper,⁴² Rather, as Abraham Kuyper has pointed out, "All Scripture [which includes even the books of the historians] is the theopneustic (II Tim. 3:16)... and thereby their product obtained Divine authority."⁴³ This does not mean, as James Orr and his disciples unfairly imply, that graphic inspiration necessarily lifts the Biblical writers above the need for written sources, or that supernatural information supplies such lacks as might have existed in these documents.⁴⁴ Indeed, the one negative effect of human meditation upon the finished product of Scripture is that its truth remains incomplete:⁴⁵ the very existence of our four Gospels indicates how no one evangelist was capable of gaining "the full impression."⁴⁶ Yet on the other hand, graphic inspiration does mean that "the Holy Spirit worked effectively as a determining power⁴⁷ upon the Biblical writers and that His influence "extended to their selecting activity, in choosing the material to be incorporated."⁴⁸ The inclusion of *erroneous* impressions, so inevitable in human experience, is thus checked as well:



Quotations such as Paul's taken from Menander and Epimenides (Acts 17:28, I Cor. 15:33, Titus 1:12) or Jude's taken from I Enoch (Jude 14-15) show that it is not the author of the original source, but the Biblical editor, who possesses God's "inspiration," which means simply "divinely guaranteed truthfulness." It follows, however, that the reliability of such materials as do become

⁴¹ As applied by Carnell, *op cit.*, p. 107; cf. George Stob's quotation as reported in *Torch and Trumpet* IX :8 (Jan. 1960), 6-7.

⁴² Cobb, *loc. cit.* Cf. Carnell's own designation of this principle as an "ironic admission," *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁴³ *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, p. 550.

⁴⁴ *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Scribner's, 1910), pp. 164-165, and quoted at length by Carnell, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-103, and Stob, *op. cit.*, p. 6, Kuyper was thus willing to grant a total lack of direct revelation to the secondary authors of Scriptural history, except in a few such matters as the record of creation, *op. cit.*, p. 547.

⁴⁵ Woolley, *op cit.*, p. 198.

⁴⁶ Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 549.

⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁸ Woolley, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

incorporated into Scripture is thereby established. Those therefore who feel that the only teachings that the Holy Spirit wishes to convey through Scripture are such teachings as concern faith and morals, would exhibit greater candor by frankly denying Biblical inerrancy (and plenary inspiration) than by taking refuge behind a spacious hermeneutic that dismisses His other teachings as inerrant compilations of non-normative records. In most cases, however no impelling reason exists for doubting the truthfulness of Scripture in the first place. Each of the so-called discrepancies that Carnell lists between Samuel-Kings and I-II Chronicles is capable of resolution, either by textual criticism or by contextual exegesis. Again, Stephen's statements in Acts 7, for example, that Abraham removed from Haran after his father Terah had died, are not without credibility. Everett F. Harrison has, indeed, criticized these words, as a quotation

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of the LXX which "the Hebrew text of Genesis will not permit... The figures given in Genesis 11:26, 32 and 12:4 demand that Terah continued to live for 60 years after Abraham left Haran."⁴⁹ But while the English of the Authorized Version might have left this impression, the American Standard rendering of Gen. 12:1 confirms Stephen's inspired declaration that Abraham's departure was subsequent to Terah's death, in the previous chapter (11:32).⁵⁰ Carnell, therefore, even while willing to question the normativeness of Stephen, yet concedes that the presence of mistakes in his speech has never been proved.⁵¹

In reference to our third principle, that of progressive revelation, no conflict is involved when Carnell states that "the lower stages [of the Biblical record] have to be read in the light of the higher." But when he adds, "with the correction which the higher affords," and speaks of the "abrogation of whatever was imperfect in the earlier stages,"⁵² one recalls Warfield's words that "To *correct* the teaching of Scripture is to proclaim Scripture untrustworthy."⁵³ In fact, when any lower stage is considered rectifiable, if thereby ceases to be God-breathed; and to speak of revelation's "progress" becomes a misnomer. Yet under the cloak of this principle, Eugene Nida has felt free to assert; "The Old Testament sanctioned polygamy, not only by tacit consent but by declaration... and permitted relatively easy divorce... expressly sanctioned."⁵⁴ To historic evangelicalism, such criticisms seem hardly convincing, in light of the prohibition of polygamy in Lev. 18:18 (*cf.* John Murray's analysis⁵⁵) and of the restriction of divorce to cases where "some unseemly thing be found in her" (Dt. 24:1, which corresponds to the very words of Christ, who restricted divorce to cases of fornication. Mt. 19:9). But Carnell goes even further and, in the name of progressive revelation, depicts the commandments of Jesus as standing in judgment over all "the truncated ethic of the Old Testament"; and, correspondingly, he proceeds to designate the Calvinistic emphasis upon the Ten Commandments as "cultic."⁵⁶ Carrying his

⁴⁹ In Carl F. H. Henry, *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), p. 249.

⁵⁰ Abraham would not, of course, have been born until some time after Nahor and Haran (Gen. 11:26); but the record hardly suggests them to have been triplets!

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

⁵³ *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 204.

⁵⁴ *Customs and Culture* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1954), pp. 50-51. It should be noted that what Moses relaxed "for the hardness of men's hearts" (Mt. 19:8), was not God's standard on the permanence of marriage, but simply the penalty for adultery (compare Deut. 24:1 and 22:22).

⁵⁵ *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 253-256.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 55-56, *Cf.* his rejection of the validity of O.T. teaching against witchcraft, p. 55, and his relegation of laws on slavery to a level no higher than that of Plato and Aristotle, p. 56, though with commendable inconsistency he proceeds to reject only the mode of administration of O.T. ethics, p. 56, and insists that we now owe God's holy law more than ever, p. 70.

principle another step, he states that "the New Testament abrogates *everything* that does not materially advance the Abrahamic covenant"; and then; with logical consistency, he concludes:

Only Romans and Galatians make a didactic effort to connect the blessings of the covenant with the gift of God's Son. Therefore, if the church teaches anything that offends the system of Romans and Galatians, it is cultic.⁵⁷

By this, Carnell is not simply affirming that Romans and Galatians teach truths that are more basic than those found in the rest of the Bible, but that the teachings of these two books are the only ones that require the ultimate allegiance of Christians and "cannot be voided" by applying the principle of progressive revelation.⁵⁸ The *reductio ad absurdum* of such hermeneutics appears in his concern over the command, "Greet one another with a holy kiss"; because, "it falls within the book of Romans" (16:16).⁵⁹ Presumably, its occurrence within I-II Corinthians, I Thessalonians, and I Peter creates no such problem! Neither dispensationalism nor liberalism were ever carried to quite this extreme! Furthermore, there is a fundamental issue involved, namely, the right of Christ to establish the religious standard for His followers. As Kuyper expresses it, "If Christ attributed absolute authority to the Old Covenant... then the matter is settled for everyone who worships Him."⁶⁰ Even when we encounter within the phenomena of Scripture certain statements that offend our rational sensitivities, such experiences can never justify our invoking the principle of progressive revelation, so as to exclude them from the body of Christian truth. The doctrine of Biblical authority was finalized by Christ, when he spoke the words that appear on the seal of the Evangelical Theological Society, "The Scripture [not just Romans and Galatians] cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Imperfect men,

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therefore, simply cannot decide for themselves, by observing the contents of Scripture, what the doctrine of Scripture ought to be. But this recognition by no means restricts us, as often charged, to an unrealistic, preconceived notion of inspiration. As Warfield so well puts it:

Let it not be said that in speaking thus we are refusing the inductive method of establishing doctrine. We follow the inductive method. When we approach the Scriptures to ascertain their doctrine of inspiration, we proceed by collecting the whole body of relevant facts. Every claim they make to inspiration is a relevant fact; every statement they make concerning inspiration is a relevant fact... But the characteristics of their own writing are not facts relevant to the determination of their doctrine.⁶¹

It is Christ then, who accepted Scripture down to the last jot and tittle, who must constitute the ultimate authority on the nature of progressive revelation.

In conclusion, however, it might be asked what the practical value is of criticizing a Christian brother, in respect to the questionable employment of such hermeneutical principles as these of *usus loquendi*, normativeness, and progressive revelation. Has not the very intention of these scholars been to alleviate our concern over certain of the Bible's difficulties, so that we can, with greater assurance, conform ourselves to the mind of Christ in respect to inerrancy of Scripture? But good intentions fail to obviate the following three facts: (1) Our anti-evangelical critics see

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56 and 58-59.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 99.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 429.

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 205-206.

more clearly than can some of us the incongruity of professing to believe in inerrancy while at the same time denying it in reference to the concrete data of Scripture. A consistent orthodoxy will warrant more respect than an obscurantist neoevangelicalism. (2) The propagation of the gospel depends upon a clear witness to its proper interpretation. It is sometimes said that the Bible stands above any need for defense on our part; but, though the Word of our God will indeed stand forever, the men who need its message will not. To condone invalid applications of the principles of its interpretation is to open the gates for views ranging from Romanism to Mormonsim, which, we must recall, accepts the Bible as the word of God, "as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith). (3) The authority of our Bible cannot long survive our disbelief in its contents. The hermeneutics that cloak the denial of Scripture form but a poor cloak, and such pretense must ultimately be discarded in favor of those more forthright theories that explain away the doctrine of inspiration itself. This sober fact does much to justify the situation that Carnell so laments, that, "When a gifted professor tries to interact with the critical difficulties in the text, he is charged with disaffection, if not outright heresy."⁶² But as the same time, it must be admitted that evangelicalism's concern over heretical views of inspiration does lay us open to the most serious of charges; for Carnell has made it clear that "Orthodoxy's intramural debate on inspiration in no way disturbs the truth of the gospel, and to think that it does is cultic"(!).⁶³

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⁶² *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.