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DO 501 Basic Christian Doctrine

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DO 501

**BASIC CHRISTIAN
THEOLOGY**

Fall 2003

Dr. Allan Coppedge

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I. PURPOSE

The design of this course is to provide an introduction to basic Christian theology. This initial presentation of doctrine will focus upon the categories Asbury shares in common with Evangelical Orthodoxy, the areas in which Asbury Theological Seminary represents a distinctive doctrinal position, and an introduction to the major themes in systematic theology. The course is structured to demonstrate the place of Christian truth in the life of discipleship and its relevance for the tasks of Christian ministry.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the uniqueness of the supernatural Triune character of God, with special reference to His relation to the creation. To understand the implications of this doctrine for all systematic theology.
2. To understand the means a supernatural God uses to communicate with those who are a part of the natural world and the implications for the question of authority.
3. To understand the significance of the holiness of God as an organizing concept for systematic theology and its relation to each of the several doctrines of Christian thought. Special attention is given to the unique commitment of A.T.S. to the Wesleyan understanding of Christian holiness.
4. To understand the significance of the whole moral character of God for the doctrines related to predestination. To appreciate the distinctions between the Arminian and Calvinistic interpretations and the implications of each for the Christian life. Special attention is given to the relationship of each position to Christian holiness and discipleship.
5. To understand and be able to use the basic vocabulary and concepts of every major area of systematic theology.
6. To recognize the practical implications of systematic theology for the daily life of individual disciples of Christ as well as the collective body of believers.

III. REQUIREMENTS

1. **Study assignments:** Reading with outlines and notes of assigned material. A collateral chart (attached) should be kept which would include a record of the number of hours per week spent reading, out-lining and taken notes. The number of hours studied will determine the grade options available to the student for the entire course. To be eligible to earn any grade up through an
 - “A” a total of at least 78 hours per semester or about 6 hours per week.
 - “B” at least 72 hours per semester or about 5 1/2 hours per week.
 - “C” at least 65 hours per semester or about 5 hours per week.At least 58 hours per term is required for a passing grade.
2. A **notebook** should be kept of all outlines and study notes taken (but not classnotes), plus a record of the student’s reading and hours. The notebook should be organized by subject (e.g. Doctrine of God, anthropology, sin, etc.) A grade will be given the notebook based on the

quality of the outlines and notes taken, the number of hours spent on assignment, and the completion of assignments on time. It will constitute 33.3% of the final grade.

3. **Two essay examinations** will be given, each constituting 33.3% of the final grade. One will be a mid-term, Thursday, October 16; and the final will be Thursday, December 11, 1:00- 3:00 p.m. Each exam will constitute 33.3% of the final grade.

IV. TEXTBOOKS

1. **Required:**

Thomas Oden, The Living God.
_____, The Word Of Life.
_____, Life In The Spirit.
John Oswalt, Call To Be Holy.
Mildred Wynkoop, Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology.
Allan Coppedge, Portraits of God.

2. **Recommended:**

Allan Coppedge, The Promise of Something More.
Allan Coppedge, When the Holy Spirit Comes.
Allan Coppedge, "Trinitarian Theism" (in mss. Form). Copies available through
The Barnabas Foundation.

3. **Requested in class:**

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version

V. CLASS ATTENDANCE

Class attendance and participation is assumed. A record of absences from class should be kept on the collateral sheet. More than three unexcused absences could adversely effect the student's final grade.

Out of courtesy to other members of the class it is requested that no food or beverage be brought into the classroom.

VI. READING SCHEDULE

After the first two weeks of class, all required assignments are to be completed before class on Tuesday evenings.

See Separate Sheets

**DO 501
READING SCHEDULE**

September 2 –6	Oden, <u>The Living God</u> , IX-XV, 1-14, 17-52. (Read and take notes) Coppedge, Allan, “The Multiple Intent of Scripture.” Coppedge, Allan, <u>Trinitarian Theism</u> , chapters 1-3.
To Be Read By Class September 9	Oden, <u>The Living God</u> , 227-234, 240-269. Coppedge, <u>Portraits of God</u> , chapter 1; pp, 1-15. Coppedge, <u>Triune Theism</u> , chapter 4, Personhood. <i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Harry Blamires, <u>The Christian Mind</u> , chapter 3, “It’s Supernatural Orientation.”
To Be Read By Class September 16	Coppedge, <u>Portraits of God</u> , chapter 2, pp. 17-28; chapter 3, pp. 30-62. Coppedge, <u>Triune Theism</u> , chapter 5, Providence. <i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Francis Shaeffer, <u>Genesis In Space And Time</u> , 13-66. Oden, <u>The Living God</u> , 270-315.
To Be Read By Class September 22	Oden, <u>The Living God</u> , 319-374: outline 319-332 and 366-370 A. Coppedge, “How Wesleyans Do Theology,” <u>Doing Theology In Today’s World</u> , ed. Woodbridge & McComiskey, 267-286. <i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Oden, <u>The Living God</u> , 375-406. Blamires, <u>The Christian Mind</u> , chapter 5, “Conceptions of Truth.”
To Be Read By Class September 30	H. N. Ridderbos, <u>The Authority Of The N.T. Scriptures</u> , 13-51. J. I. Packer, “ <u>Fundamentalism” And The Word Of God</u> , 41-74. “Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy.” (in syllabus) <i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Blamires, <u>The Christian Mind</u> , chapter 6, “It’s Acceptance of Authority.”
To Be Read By Class October 7	Oden, <u>The Word Of Life</u> , IX-XVII, 1-7, 13-92. <i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Oden, <u>The Word Of Life</u> , 197-228.

<p>To Be Read By Class</p> <p>October 14</p>	<p>Oden, <u>The Word Of Life</u>, 93-144, 164-194, 279-314. Delbert Rose, “The Wesleyan Understanding of Sin,” <u>The Doctrinal Distinctives of ATS</u>, 7-30.</p> <p><i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Oden, <u>The Word Of Life</u>, 229-278.</p>
<p>To Be Read By Class</p> <p>October 21</p>	<p>Oden, <u>The Word Of Life</u>, 344-414, 429-450, 502-525.</p> <p><i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Oden, <u>The Word Of Life</u>, 317-343. Torrence, Thomas G., <u>The Mediation of Christ</u>, pp. 1-126.</p>
<p>To Be Read By Class</p> <p>October 28</p>	<p>Oden, <u>Life In The Spirit</u>, 1-8, 15-108. Oswalt, John, <u>Call To Be Holy</u>, Part One, chapters 1-2.</p> <p><i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Harold Kuhn, <u>Doctrinal Distinctions of ATS</u>, “The Witness of the Spirit,” 55-77.</p>
<p>To Be Read By Class</p> <p>November 4</p>	<p>Oden, <u>Life In The Spirit</u>, 108-119, 128-170. Coppedge, <u>The Promise of Something More</u> Oswalt, John, <u>Call To Be Holy</u>, Part One, chapters 3-7; Part Two, chapter 1.</p> <p><i>Recommended (as time permits)</i> Oden, <u>Life In The Spirit</u>, 177-193.</p>
<p>To Be Read By Class</p> <p>November 11</p>	<p>Oden, <u>Life In The Spirit</u>, 193-246, 246-257. Coppedge, <u>When The Holy Spirit Comes</u> Oswalt, John, <u>Call To Be Holy</u>, Part Two, chapters 2-5, and Part Three.</p>
<p>To Be Read By Class</p> <p>November 18</p>	<p>Oden, <u>Life In The Spirit</u>, 261-274, 279-310, 315-327, 337-343, 349-355. Wynkoop, <u>Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology</u>, chapters 1-2.</p>
<p>To Be Read By Class</p> <p>December 2</p>	<p>Oden, <u>Life In The Spirit</u>, 369-386, 390-468. Wynkoop, <u>Foundations</u>, chapters 3-5.</p>

DIVISIONS OR DEPARTMENTS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

I. **BIBLIOLOGY (Bibliou Logos)** includes those subjects that relate to the Bible.

- A. Revelation and Inspiration.
- B. The Authenticity of the Scriptures.
- C. The Authority of the Scriptures.
- D. The Canonicity of the Scriptures

II. THEOLOGY or THEISM (theou logos) or the Doctrine of God.

- A. The Trinity.
- B. The Personhood of God.
- C. The Being and Roles Attributes of God.
- D. The Arguments for His Existence.
- E. His Works of Creation and Providence.

III. COSMOLOGY (kosmou logos) or the Doctrine of God.

- A. The origin and Nature of the universe as an orderly system, or cosmos.
- B. In Theology the term is usually limited to a consideration of nature apart from man, and is considered a part of Theology proper.
- C. The Providence of God.
- D. Supranatural and natural world views.

IV. ANTHROPOLOGY (anthropou logos) or the Doctrine of Man/Woman.

- A. The Origin and Nature of Man.
- B. Image of God
- C. His Probation and Apostasy or Fall.
- D. Original Sin: its nature, transmission, and effects.
- E. Actual Transgression.
- F. General Depravity.
- G. Prevenient Grace.

V. HAMARTIOLOGY (Hamartia) or the Doctrine of Sin, is frequently treated as a branch of Anthropology, the science of man/woman.

- A. The Origin of Sin and its Consequences, individually and racial.
- B. The Nature, Transmission, effects of Original Sin.
- C. The Nature and Character of The Effects of Sin.

VI. CHRISTOLOGY (christou logos) or The Doctrine of the Person of Christ.

- A. Christ's Theanthropic Person.
- B. His Deity or Divinity.
- C. His Humanity.
- D. The Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ.
- E. Historical Views of the Person of Christ.

VII. SOTERIOLOGY (Soterias logos) or The Work of Christ.

- A. Objective Soteriology, or the Work of Christ in atoning for Sin.
 - 1. The Mediatorial Offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.
 - 2. Vicarious Atonement: Its Nature and Extent. The doctrine of atonement is central in soteriology.

3. Various Theories of the Atonement.
- B. Subjective Soteriology, or the Application of the Work of Christ to the individual by the Holy Spirit.
 1. Vocation or Call.
 2. Repentance and Saving Faith.
 3. Justification and Regeneration.
 4. Sanctification and Christian Perfection.

VIII. PNEUMATOLOGY (Pneuma logos) or The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

- A. As Divine Personality.
- B. His Soteriological functions.

IX. ECCLESIOLOGY (ekklesia logos)

- A. The Idea, or nature of the Church.
- B. Its Characteristics and Attributes.
- C. The Organization of the Church.
- D. Sacraments
 1. Baptism.
 2. The Lord's Supper.
- E. The Mission of the Church.

X. ESCHATOLOGY (eschaton logos) or The Doctrine of Last Things.

- A. The Intermediate State.
- B. The Second Advent of Christ.
- C. The Resurrection.
- D. The Final Judgment.
- E. Heaven.
- F. Hell.

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY

Preface

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.

Articles of Affirmation and Denial

- Article I. We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.
- We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.
- Article II. We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.
- We Deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.
- Article III. We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.
- We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.
- Article IV. We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.
- We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.
- Article V. We affirm that God's revelation within the Holy Scriptures was progressive.
- We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.
- Article VI. We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.
- We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.
- Article VII. We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.
- We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.
- Article VIII. We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.
- We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.
- Article IX. We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak

and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or other wise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X. We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of irrelevant.

Article XI. We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII. We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII. We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar of spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Article XIV. We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

Article XV. We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Article XVI. We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith

throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a Reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Article XVII. We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

Article XVIII. We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

Article XIX. We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

A Short Statement

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, its divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understanding and its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation and the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, that in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

Exposition

Our understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy must be set in the context of the broader teachings of the Scripture concerning itself. This exposition gives an account of the outline of doctrine from which our summary statement and articles are drawn.

Creation, Revelation and Inspiration

The Triune God, who formed all things by his creative utterances and governs all things by His Word of decree, made mankind in His own image for a life of communion with Himself, on the model of the eternal

fellowship of loving communication within the Godhead. As God's imagebearer, man was to hear God's Word addressed to him and to respond in the joy of adoring obedience. Over and above God's self-disclosure in the created order and the sequence of events within it, human beings from Adam on have received verbal messages from Him, either directly, as stated in Scripture, or indirectly in the form of part of all of Scripture itself.

When Adam fell, the Creator did not abandon mankind to final judgment but promised salvation and began to reveal Himself as Redeemer in a sequence of historical events centering on Abraham's family and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, present heavenly ministry, and promised return of Jesus Christ. Within this frame God has from time to time spoken specific words of judgment and mercy, promise and command, to sinful human beings so drawing them into a covenant relation of mutual commitment between Him and them in which He blesses them with gifts of grace and they bless Him in responsive adoration. Moses, whom God used as mediator to carry His words to His people at the time of the Exodus, stands at the head of a long line of prophets in whose mouths and writings God put His words for delivery to Israel. God's purpose in this succession of messages was to maintain His covenant by causing His people to know His Name--that is, His nature--and His will both of precept and purpose in the present and for the future. This line of prophetic spokesmen from God came to completion in Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Word, who was Himself a prophet--more than a prophet, but not less--and in the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation. When God's final and climactic message, His word to the world concerning Jesus Christ, had been spoken and elucidated by those in the apostolic circle, the sequence of revealed messages ceased. Henceforth the Church was to live and know God by what He had already said, and said for all time.

At Sinai God wrote the terms of His covenant on tables of stone, as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility, and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation He prompted men to write the messages given to and through them, along with celebratory records of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy. The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: although the human writers' personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. Thus, what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author, having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in freedom and faithfulness "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin.

Authority: Christ and the Bible

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is the Word made flesh, our Prophet, Priest, and King, is the ultimate Mediator of God's communication to man, as He is of all God's gifts of grace. The revelation He gave was more than verbal; He revealed the Father by His presence and His deeds as well. Yet His words were crucially important; for He was God, He spoke from the Father, and His words will judge all men at the last day.

As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture. The Old Testament looked ahead to Him; the New Testament looks back to His first coming and on to His second. Canonical Scripture is the divinely inspired and therefore normative witness to Christ. No hermeneutic, therefore, or which the historical Christ is not the focal point is acceptable. Holy Scripture must be treated as what it essentially is--the witness of the Father to the incarnate Son.

It appears that the Old Testament canon had been fixed by the time of Jesus. The New Testament canon is likewise now closed inasmuch as no new apostolic witness to the historical Christ can now be borne.

No new revelation (as distinct from Spirit-given understanding of existing revelation) will be given until Christ comes again. The canon was created in principle by divine inspiration. The church's part was to discern the canon which God had created, not to devise one of its own. The relevant criteria were and are: authorship (or attestation), content, and the authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit.

The word "canon," signifying a rule or standard, is a pointer to authority, which means the right to rule and control. Authority in Christianity belongs to God in His revelation, which means, on the one hand, Jesus Christ, the living Word, and, on the other hand, Holy Scripture, the written Word. But the authority of Christ and that of Scripture are one. As our Prophet, Christ testified that Scripture cannot be broken. As our Priest and King, He devoted His earthly life to fulfilling the law and the prophets, even dying in obedience to the words of Messianic prophecy. Thus, as He saw Scripture attesting Him and His authority, so by His own submission to Scripture He attested its authority. As He bowed to His Father's instruction given in His Bible (our Old Testament), so He requires His disciples to do--not, however, in isolation but in conjunction with the apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit. So Christians show themselves faithful servants of their Lord by bowing to the divine instruction given in the prophetic and apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit. So Christians show themselves faithful servants of their Lord by bowing to the divine instruction given in the prophetic and apostolic writings which together make up our Bible.

By authenticating each other's authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority. The Biblically-interpreted Christ and the Christ-centered, Christ-proclaiming Bible are from this standpoint one. As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says, so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.

Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called infallible and inerrant. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths.

Infallible signified the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

Similarly, inerrant signified the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.

We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of his penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, nonchronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.

The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (e.g., the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called "phenomena" of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions.

Inasmuch as all Scripture is the product of a single divine mind, interpretation must stay within the bounds of the analogy of Scripture and eschew hypotheses that would correct one Biblical passage by another, whether in the name of progressive revelation or of the imperfect enlightenment of the inspired writer's mind.

Although Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional views of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action (e.g., in the matter of women's headgear/coiffure, cf. 1 Cor. 11).

Skepticism and Criticism

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world-views have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism which denies that God is knowable, the rationalism which denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism which denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism which denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-biblical principles seep into men's theologies at presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.

Transmission and Translation

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autographa. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Inerrancy and Authority

In our affirmation of the authority of Scripture as involving its total truth, we are consciously standing with Christ and His apostles, indeed with the whole Bible and with the main stream of Church history from

