

EVANGELICAL DEFINITIONS OF INSPIRATION: CRITIQUES AND A SUGGESTED DEFINITION

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The doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture has been described as part of the very essence of Christianity¹ as well as the *sine qua non* of evangelical theology.² It is the major assumption behind the single original doctrinal affirmation of the Evangelical Theological Society. The amount of material that has been published within the last two decades either concerning the doctrine of inspiration, or building upon it (e.g. the field of hermeneutics), evidences that it is a major watershed of contemporary evangelicalism.³

Such strong and consistent emphasis would lead the observer to expect a uniform definition of inspiration. Yet a careful study of formal definitions of inspiration offered by evangelical writers reveals a broad diversity in content, emphasis and expression. A major dissonance becomes apparent between the articulation of the doctrine on the part of evangelicals, who build upon the profound and masterful presentation made by B. B. Warfield,⁴ and its formal definition. The reflective reader begins to suspect the presence of theological obscurity, literary imprecision, or imprudent carelessness surrounding the formal statement of this crucial doctrine.

The purpose of the present paper is to provide suggestions for overcoming this inconsistency. First there will be a brief discussion of the importance and nature of definitions. Second, several important definitions of inspiration selected from those collected (see Appendix) will be scrutinized for ambiguities, weaknesses, and boundaries that are inadequate for protecting the doctrine from nonevangelical invasion. Third, a definition will be proposed—not as the final word, but hopefully as an advancement toward greater clarity of thinking and precision of expression. The intention

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¹ G Bromiley, "The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," *Eternity* (August 1970) 12, cited in C F H Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco Word, 1976-1983) 4 161

² J F Walvoord, "The Pragmatic Confirmation of Scriptural Authority," *The Bible The Living Word of Revelation* (ed M C Tenney, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1968) 180

³ See the authors cited on this point in K R Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration A Review and Proposal* (New York Oxford University, 1987) 74 n 5

⁴ "Inspiration," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1915) The article is reprinted in B B Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (ed S G Craig, Philadelphia Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967) 131-166

is not to fire heavy artillery at fellow evangelicals but to suggest that some in-house tidying-up is in order.

I. DEFINITIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

While definitions play a crucial role in every serious field of inquiry, they are of particular importance in technical discourse.⁵ Even those thinkers who consider definitions to be theoretically superfluous have to admit that meaning equations often convey more important information than is contained in the propositions in which they are employed.⁶ The alternatives to the use of well-crafted definitions are the semantic sectionalism illustrated at the tower of Babel,⁷ the verbal anarchism represented by Humpty Dumpty who declares, "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—nothing more nor less,"⁸ and the obscurantism that makes precise communication impossible.⁹

In addition to aiding in clarity of thinking (including the elimination of ambiguity and the reduction of vagueness) and precision in communication, definitions also serve other important purposes. They increase vocabulary, help to formulate a theoretically adequate or scientifically useful characterization of particular objects, and influence the mind or stir the emotions of one's audience.¹⁰ Furthermore they are instrumental in safeguarding the truth. It is reported that when Jonathan Edwards was asked how he managed to win all of his debates he responded that at the outset he forced his opponent to define his terms and then, throughout the remainder of the contest, to operate in a manner consistent with those definitions. In fact Perry Miller claims that Edwards' true genius was his defining of issues.¹¹ James Oliver Buswell, Jr., saw so much at stake in the definition of inspiration that he wrote the editors of the then-current edition of Webster's dictionary to criticize and suggest modification of their entry under that term.

In his interpretative treatment of definitions Ralph Borsodi suggests a helpful distinction between a dictionary and a vocabulary. A dictionary demonstrates the designations attached to various words in a language by common usage. A vocabulary mandates which word should be used to communicate a specific idea. Unlike the lexicographer compiling a dictionary, the lexicographer preparing a vocabulary must encourage the substitution of recommended definitions for those in common parlance. Borsodi concludes: "What we need are vocabularies in which the best possible judgment—a con-

⁵ "Definition," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967)

⁶ B Russell and A N Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica* (Cambridge Cambridge University, 1910) 1 12

⁷ R Borsodi, *The Definition of Definition A New Linguistic Approach to the Integration of Knowledge* (Boston Porter Sargent, 1967) 1

⁸ L Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), cited in Borsodi, *Definition* 40

⁹ Borsodi, *Definition* 75

¹⁰ I M Copi, *Introduction to Logic* (4th ed., New York Macmillan, 1972) 108–112

¹¹ P Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York Meridian, 1959 [1949]) 72–73, 189

sensus of authorities—is used to recommend a single designator and a single definition for each concept or idea.”¹²

Though the matter of definitions and their importance is much discussed, neither philosophers nor semanticists have come to unanimity concerning the definition of a definition.¹³ Two suggestions, however, are helpful. Hugh R. Walpole states: “‘Definition’ is nothing more nor less than the use of a certain road to take your hearer from a common referent to one which is new to him.”¹⁴ In a similar fashion Borsodi states that definition is “the process (and the end-product of the process) of distinguishing what is sought to be conveyed by a particular word from that conveyed by others, and of making clear and explicit the meaning to be attached to the word being used.”¹⁵

A number of canons or rules for the formulation of definitions has been proposed. These rules are certainly not absolute, and they do not make possible the production of perfect definitions in human language. They are helpful, however, in achieving a greater precision in both thought and communication and evaluating definitions that have been proposed.¹⁶ It is of course assumed that each statement will avoid self-contradiction (it will be consistent and congruent with each of the propositions implicit in the premises on which it is based) and ambiguity (it will be clear and not confusing).¹⁷ (1) A definition should present the essential nature of what is being described rather than its accidental properties. (2) It should give the genus and differentia of the thing defined so that it is not confused with other entities. (3) A definition should avoid the circularity that results from the mere use of synonyms. (4) A definition should not be expressed in language that is ambiguous, obscure, or figurative. (5) A definition should not be attempted by negative terms or the articulation of antitheses.¹⁸ (6) The statement should be impartial in that “no part or aspect of the referent of the word being defined should be enumerated or described so as to give a partial and therefore a false, a biased, or a distorted conception of

¹² Borsodi, *Definition* 74–77

¹³ H R Walpole, *Semantics The Nature of Words and Their Meanings* (New York W W Norton, 1941) 121, “Definition,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Few scholars would want to follow A H S Korzybski, *Science and Sanity An Introduction to Non Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (New York Science Press, 1933), to his extreme of advocating the abolition of verbal languages for stating what is scientifically true and substituting for them a mathematical language See Borsodi, *Definition* 13–14

¹⁴ Walpole, *Semantics* 138

¹⁵ Borsodi, *Definition* 17 In a manner roughly parallel to the purposes for a definition, Copi (*Introduction* 117–123) describes five types of definition (1) stipulative, in which a brand-new term is first introduced, (2) lexical, in which an established usage is reported, (3) precisising, a definition which is capable of helping to decide a borderline case (particularly in jurisprudence), (4) theoretical (or analytical), in which an attempt is made at formulating a theoretically adequate characterization of the objects to which it is applied (in effect, a theory is proposed), (5) persuasive, which seeks to influence attitudes

¹⁶ “Definition,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Borsodi, *Definition* 32, Copi, *Introduction* 136

¹⁷ Borsodi, *Definition* 53

¹⁸ These rules were first proposed by Aristotle in his *Topica*, cf “Definition,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Copi, *Introduction* 136–140, Borsodi, *Definition* 32

the referent." (7) The definition must be sufficiently complete to make recognition and cognition of the referent possible.¹⁹

Definitions are also classified in other ways. Although in one sense every definition is unique,²⁰ semanticists have charted at least 25 different routes or methods of definition.²¹ All the views of definition, however, can be subsumed under three general types of positions. First is the essentialist (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant), which insists that knowledge conveyed by definitions is descriptive knowledge of essences. Definitions provide descriptive information about the objects to which they point. Statements are therefore made that can be pronounced either true or false. Second is the prescriptive (Bacon, Hobbes, Pascal, Russell, Whitehead), which transposes definitions from the indicative to the imperative mood and assigns them as the syntactic or semantic referee for linguistic operations. The result is that definitions no longer convey any kind of knowledge. Third is the linguistic (J. S. Mill, R. Robinson), which interprets definitions as descriptive knowledge of language usage. By this standard, definitions serve as historical reports of linguistic behavior. It is possible to combine partial insights of all three positions and to employ definitions as indicators of how words ought to be employed (in distinction from the way they happen to be used). In this way definitions are understood as giving the rules that govern how a word should be used and indicating how words may be employed accurately and effectively.²²

II. EXEGETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF INSPIRATION

The first step in attempting to define a critical concept such as "inspiration" is a careful study of those Biblical texts that speak of the formation of the canonical literature. In this regard several passages are of great significance. These have been noted and studied carefully in evangelical literature. In Exod 34:27 Moses is told to write on tablets the words of the covenant that God had spoken to him. The author of 2 Sam 23:1-2 records David's testimony on his deathbed: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was on my tongue." Jeremiah 36 relates God's command to Jeremiah to write all the words that he had spoken to the prophet in a book, Jeremiah's dictation to Baruch the scribe, and the latter's recording of Jeremiah's words. In 2 Tim 3:15-17 Paul describes the holy writings as *theopneustos*—breathed out by God. They are therefore useful or profitable for correct doctrine, for doctrinal reproof, for moral correction, and for ethical instruction. Another important NT passage is 2 Pet 1:19-21 in which the apostle declares that the Scriptures were not given by private *epilysis*, here meaning "investigation" or "ingenuity." Rather, they originated when holy men of God were borne along

¹⁹ Borsodi, *Definition* 33

²⁰ Walpole, *Semantics* 127

²¹ Cf *ibid* 128-136, Borsodi, *Definition* 18-32

²² "Definition," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

(*pheromenoi*) by the Holy Spirit.²³ Also in 1 Cor 2:6–16 Paul writes of the Spirit's taking possession of the personality and processes of the human authors so that the otherwise impenetrable wisdom of God is made known through that which is written.²⁴

The evangelical understanding of inspiration involves several important caveats. (1) Evangelicals do not worship the Bible. Rather, it is the authoritative instrument, inerrant in the original manuscripts, that God uses to make known his truth to his people in the present age.²⁵ (2) Divine inspiration is limited to a small company of messengers whom God specifically chose to use in the communication of his Word to mankind. It is not a universally shared experience but one that is phenomenologically distinctive.²⁶ Therefore inspiration does not continue in the present day, even on a sporadic basis. The canon was completed with the appearance of the final book written within the apostolic circle.²⁷ (3) The uniqueness of inspiration rules out the possibility of either a partial inspiration of Scripture or degrees of inspiration. All of Scripture is equally inspired by the Holy Spirit.²⁸ (4) Differences in Biblical genre, which must be recognized,²⁹ mean that the relation between the divine and human participation is not always the same.³⁰ For this reason a distinction has been suggested between the prophetic mode (e.g. Jeremiah) and the scribal mode (e.g. Luke) that is similar to the distinction made by Aquinas between the speculative judgment and the practical judgment exercised by the authors of Scripture.³¹ Behind many texts there is the possibility of a complex contributory process,³² which includes the relating of historical incidents (Job, Ruth), the selection and collection of hymns and words of

²³ Warfield, "Inspiration"

²⁴ See W C Kaiser, Jr., "A Neglected Text in Bibliology Discussions I Corinthians 2 6–16," *WTJ* 43 (Spring 1981) 301–319. Biblical texts focus on the result of inspiration, not the process. See W A Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," *Scripture and Truth* (ed D A Carson and J D Woodbridge, Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1983) 39–40, 58.

²⁵ Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 139

²⁶ *Ibid* 4 152. J Goldingay is certainly wrong when he writes "But it is doubtful whether within the Bible itself the Spirit's involvement with its authors is seen as phenomenologically distinctive, it is not the inspiration of Scripture which is the grounds for its unique authority" ("Models for Scripture," *SJT* 44/1 [1991] 34).

²⁷ Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 154, B M Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford Clarendon, 1987) 271, 274, S T Kistemaker, "The Canon of the New Testament," *JETS* 20 (March 1977) 12–13.

²⁸ Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 145–160

²⁹ Goldingay, "Models" 34–35, V S Poythress, "What Does God Say Through Human Authors?", *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* (ed H M Conn, Grand Rapids Baker, 1988) 85.

³⁰ Poythress, "What Does God Say" 85

³¹ R M Price, *The Crisis of Biblical Authority The Setting and Range of the Current Evangelical Crisis* (dissertation, Drew University, 1981) 172. Particularly within the scribal mode there is the possibility of drafts and revisions in the production of the final product. See E J Young, *Thy Word Is Truth Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1957) 80.

³² Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 147

wisdom (Psalms, Proverbs), observation and reflection (Ecclesiastes), or the critical study and use of many sources (Luke). (5) The mode of inspiration involves a great mystery. Scripture does not provide a full explanation of the way in which the divine and human authors interact in the production of the sacred books. Therefore no theologian can pen the absolute and final word on the subject.³³

III. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED DEFINITIONS

In the light of these factors, particularly the mystery involved, there have been three types of response to the matter of defining inspiration among those who classify themselves as evangelical. (1) A few scholars have argued against any attempt at a formal definition of inspiration.³⁴ (2) Others avoid the issue by leaving the doctrine undefined in their discussion. (3) A good many writers, however, do include a definition in their treatment of the doctrine, although a clear-cut distinction between definition and description is not always maintained. From this category several recent suggestions have been selected for careful scrutiny.

1. *K. R. Trembath*. In his study of inspiration Trembath writes: "Biblical inspiration' refers to the enhancement of one's understanding of God brought about instrumentally through the Bible, rather than to the mysterious and nonrepeatable process by which 'God got written what He wanted' in the Bible. In others words, 'the inspiration of the Bible' refers to the enhancement which the Bible instrumentally causes in persons and not to the Bible itself as the terminus or locus of that enhancement."³⁵ This definition is proposed after the author's critical analysis of both what he calls the deductivist theories of inspiration (C. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, J. W. Montgomery, E. J. Carnell) and the inductivist theories (A. H. Strong, B. Ramm, W. J. Abraham) and his admission that he is defining the doctrine in a way that calls to task "nearly every theologian, evangelical or not, who has thought and written about biblical inspiration in the last several thousand years."³⁶ Though Trembath pays tribute to the influence of Roman Catholic theologian K. Rahner, it is difficult not to discern the ghosts of neo-orthodox Protestant writers such as K. Barth and E. Brunner walking through Trembath's pages.

³³ Young, *Word* 71, S B Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?," *Inerrancy* (ed Conn) 56, T C Van Kooten, *The Bible God's Word* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1972) 45, H R Boer, *Above the Battle? The Bible and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1977) 109, Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority* 420

³⁴ B Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1961) 117, 147, T F Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia Westminster, 1982) 162-163 J Urquhart also cautions against trying to speak of how the Spirit operates to give mankind the Scriptures (*The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures* [London Marshall Brothers, 1895] 15)

³⁵ Trembath, *Evangelical* 103

³⁶ *Ibid* 70-71

According to this construction inspiration belongs to a hermeneutical rather than a revelational category.³⁷ A particular work becomes "inspired" when, subsequent to its composition, God mysteriously breathes into it in such a way that it affects the reader subjectively for supposed holy purposes. Under the pressure of modern philosophical and linguistic theories the Biblical representation of God's original breathing out the words that form divine revelation (with Scripture viewed objectively), so that they are the product of his unique creative activity, is changed into an internal working within the reader's consciousness (with Scripture viewed subjectively).³⁸ The personal encounter experienced by the reader is substituted for the objective textual authority that issues from an exegetically-based understanding of propositional revelation. In the place of the normative written record are "cognitively ambivalent historical disclosure-situations."³⁹ Since neo-orthodox theologians assume that the nature of language—human language necessarily distorts divine truth as light is refracted when it passes through a stained-glass window—makes it impossible for divine truth to be communicated through human instruments without error, there is also no place for inerrancy.⁴⁰ Any possibility of a middle ground between a fallible Bible and a doctrine of mechanical dictation is summarily dismissed on these supposed lingu-philosophical grounds.⁴¹ As a result what Trembath defines is de facto "illumination," not "inspiration."⁴²

2. *Robert Preus.* The conservative evangelical understanding of inspiration is more evident in the definition suggested by Preus when he writes that inspiration "is the act by which God conveyed to men both the content of that which He wished to be written for man's sake and the very words expressing that content."⁴³ On the positive side this statement correctly attempts to describe that objective divine disclosure that is at the heart of the evangelical doctrine. It also emphasizes the divine initiative put forth and speaks of both divinely-conveyed content (thought) and words. On the negative side, however, this definition could easily be interpreted as describing mechanical dictation, a charge that is often made against evangelical formulations.⁴⁴ While it must be conceded that certain statements

³⁷ Cf Goldingay, "Models" 32

³⁸ Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 148–149, 162

³⁹ *Ibid* 4 155

⁴⁰ *Ibid* 4 149, see also Trembath, *Evangelical* 90–91

⁴¹ Cf e.g. Trembath, *Evangelical* 91

⁴² See M J Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1983) 1 252 "Illumination" has been defined as "the supernatural help granted by the Spirit of God to the reader of holy Scripture, to enable him to lay hold on the divine message" (R Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* [Chicago Moody, 1969] 199) It has also been defined as "the ministry of the Spirit by which the meaning of Scripture is made clear to the believer" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [ed W Elwell, 1984]) Cf Henry, *God, Revelation* 2 14–15

⁴³ R Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture A Study of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (London Olver and Boyd, 1955) 27

⁴⁴ Price, *Crisis* 54–55, R L Evans and I M Berent, *Fundamentalism Hazards and Heartbreaks* (LaSalle Open Court, 1988) 25, Trembath, *Evangelical* 45, 51, 91

made by conservatives do lend themselves to being interpreted as denying the conscious participation of the human writers, evangelicals emphatically do not teach such a doctrine.⁴⁵ It is, rather, a straw man.⁴⁶ In the statement of Preus the word "convey" is not sufficiently unambiguous to guard against such an interpretation. In fact the whole definition fails both in that the essential nature of inspiration is not presented and in that it contains only a partial statement of the reality that should be indicated, on Biblical grounds, by the term.

3. *Harold Lindsell*. A statement similar in many respects is the one made by Lindsell when he writes: "Inspiration may be defined as the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of chosen men who then wrote the Scriptures so that God got written what He wanted."⁴⁷ Certainly the divine purpose is highlighted, but there are significant drawbacks. In addition to the clumsy grammatical effect, divine initiative is stressed to the near exclusion of human activity, thus leaving vulnerability to dictation charges. The criteria demanding freedom from ambiguity and partiality are not satisfied. Furthermore exegetical data allow a greater precision than is attained in this definition.

4. *Herman R. Ridderbos*. Another serious attempt at defining the term is made by Ridderbos when he states: "Inspiration consists in this, that God makes the words of men the instrument of his word, that he uses human words for his divine purposes. As such the human words stand in the service of God and participate in the authority and infallibility of the Word of God, answer perfectly God's purpose, in short, function as the Word of God and therefore can be so called."⁴⁸ In its favor are the stress on the divine initiative, the authority of the final product, and the attempt to recognize the role of the human agents. But the expression "function as the Word of God" has Barthian overtones. The conservative neo-orthodox theologians allow Scripture to be called the Word of God as it affects the individual subjectively but refuse to equate Scripture with the Word of God (consistently and universally). This statement also does not present the distinctive genus and differentia of inspiration. It would not strain the definition considerably to apply the description to a particular hymn or sermon of a godly person that God sovereignly uses to bring conviction, encouragement, or edification to a given audience. The sermon that is crafted carefully with sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles and is properly applied could be said "to participate in the authority and infallibility of the Word of God," to function as the Word of God, and could in a

⁴⁵ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority* 422, Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 128, H Jones, *The Doctrine of Scripture Today* (London British Evangelical Council, 1969) 9, Grudem, "Self-Attestation" 53 n 76

⁴⁶ Young, *Thy Word* 65

⁴⁷ H Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1976) 30

⁴⁸ H Ridderbos, *Studies in Scripture and Its Authority* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1978) 25

sense be called the Word of God (Lutherans in particular stress the power of the preached Word). While Ridderbos no doubt did not intend for his statement to be read in this light, it is not articulated in a manner that prevents such an interpretation.

5. *Millard J. Erickson* in his recent systematics asserts: "By inspiration of the Scripture we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God."⁴⁹ In this affirmation the second part qualifies the first but the synthesis is not clear. The statement could be taken to mean that part of Scripture is an accurate record of the revelation and part is actually the Word of God. Furthermore the words "influence" and "record" are sufficiently polysemous to permit endorsement by extremes as widespread as Barthianism and dictationism. While conservatives can well sympathize with the intent of the statement, it neither expresses precisely nor adequately safeguards the evangelical doctrine.

6. *Carl F. H. Henry*, the highly respected and in some ways the leading evangelical theologian, writes similarly: "Inspiration is a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of their oral and written proclamation."⁵⁰ This statement emphasizes the truthfulness and the integrity of that content which was communicated through the specially chosen prophets and apostles. Both oral and written proclamation is specified. But at least three weaknesses become evident under careful examination. (1) The terms "influence" and "assures" both fail the test of nonambiguity. The latter could be interpreted as indicating either dictation or that the Spirit served as the proofreader after a particular book was composed—that is, he placed his imprimatur on a previously written document. It is probably loose enough not to cause the conservative neo-orthodox great difficulty. (2) In referring specifically to prophets and apostles, the statement fails to provide the latitude that has traditionally been exercised in including writers like Mark, Luke and Jude, who were within the apostolic circle though not apostles in the strictest sense. (3) The statement could be taken as implying that everything uttered or written by a Biblical author was inspired. The evangelical position, however, is that while the Holy Spirit preserved the human authors from all error in their official teaching (the times when they were borne of the Spirit), outside of this realm they remained mortal, nonomniscient and fallible, having personal opinions and prone to mistakes.⁵¹ Examples of the fallibility of the human authors are David's letter ordering that Uriah be killed (1 Sam 11:14–15) and

⁴⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology* 1 199

⁵⁰ Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 129

⁵¹ Young, *Thy Word* 80–81, M Silva, "Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy," *Inerrancy* (ed Conn) 70–71, cf Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 151–152, 408

Peter's having to be rebuked by Paul (Gal 2:11–14). Therefore the genus and the differentia of inspiration are not set apart in such a way as to avoid confusion by this attempt.

7. *Charles Ryrie* puts forth a more carefully worded definition when he maintains that inspiration refers to that which happened when "God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings."⁵² This attempt is certainly strong in its assertion of inerrancy, which is wisely restricted to the original documents. Evangelicals do not assert that the copies of the originals were spoken by the Spirit.⁵³ It also is praiseworthy in its affirmation of the use of human personalities by the Spirit. But the extent of human participation is not clarified. The word "superintended" could imply more than evangelicals intend (dictation) or less in that it is God's message that is recorded in the original manuscripts. It is not specified that the revelation is coterminous with the Biblical documents. According to the neo-Protestant assessment, divine revelation comes through the words of Scripture but is not identical to those words.

8. *Kenneth Kantzer* formulates one of the most studied definitions in the literature when he writes: "Biblical inspiration may be defined, therefore, as that work of the Holy Spirit by which, without setting aside their personalities and literary or human faculties, God so guided the authors of Scripture as to enable them to write exactly the words which convey His truth to men, and in doing so preserved their judgments from error in the original manuscripts. Or, inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit by which He employed the instrumentality of the whole personality, literary talents, and various faculties of their human authors to constitute the words of the Biblical autographs as His written Word to men and, therefore, of divine authority and without error in faith (what we ought to believe) and practice (what we ought to do)."⁵⁴ The author's careful attempt at articulating the specific genus and differentia and avoiding a statement that is partial or distorted is obvious. The affirmation is strong in its assertion of both the authority and inerrancy of Scripture and in the effort expended to take into account the reality of human involvement in the production of Scripture. Inspiration is restricted to the Biblical authors and to the autographs. Furthermore the words of Scripture are identified as the Word of God. Nevertheless a number of improvements is possible. (1) The presence of two statements that are not synthesized allows for some degree of confusion: It is not clear whether the author is describing

⁵² C C Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton Victor, 1987) 71 In an earlier work Ryrie states that inspiration is "God's superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs" (*A Survey of Bible Doctrine* [Chicago Moody, 1972] 38)

⁵³ Young, *Thy Word* 56

⁵⁴ K S Kantzer, "The Communication of Revelation," *Bible* (ed Tenney) 75

two aspects of inspiration, two different ways of viewing the doctrine, or two different processes involved. (2) Words like "guided" and "employed" are ambiguous. (3) In the second sentence the connection between "employed" and "constitute" is not specified. A wide range of interpretations could be seen in the establishing of that connection. (4) Inerrancy is circumscribed to faith, practice, and judgments, allowing the inference that outside these areas, errors might be present.

IV. A SUGGESTED DEFINITION

The examination of these particular definitions illustrates the difficulty involved in formulating a definition of inspiration that meets all of the established criteria, expresses the evangelical understanding of the doctrine, and necessarily disallows nonevangelical interpretations. Though the task is not easy, it is one that needs to be undertaken if the whole counsel of God is to be taught (Acts 20:27) and the faith is to be properly defended (Jude 3).

A definition that is worthy of consideration and hopefully an advance in striving after greater precision and clarity is the following formulation: Graphic (written) inspiration is the activity by which that portion intended by God of his special revelation was put into permanent, authoritative, written form by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, who normally worked concurrently and confluent through the spontaneous thought processes, literary styles, and personalities of certain divinely-selected men in such a way that the product of their special labors (in its entirety) is the very Word of God (both the ideas and the specific vocabulary), complete, infallible, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.

Framing the doctrine in this way has a number of advantages. (1) It focuses on the inspiration of the written words of inspired men rather than their spoken words, to which there is no remaining access apart from what is recorded. (2) It ties inspiration to revelation as its primary source. Though the use of human knowledge and reasoning is often involved to some degree, the authority of Scripture is necessarily harnessed to the reality of divine revelation, which is preserved within Scripture.⁵⁵ God revealed information beyond the grasp of the natural resources of all the human agents.⁵⁶ (3) This articulation recognizes that not everything that God revealed was inscripturated. We have only a fraction of the words actually spoken by Jesus during his earthly life (John 20:31), and most of these are Greek translations (and probably summaries) of what were most likely Aramaic words. It is possible that one or more of Paul's epistles was not preserved. Furthermore Biblical authors were sometimes commanded not to record what had been revealed to them (1 Cor 12:1-14; Rev 10:4).⁵⁷ (4) "Normally" takes into account the occasional, but not regular, use of

⁵⁵ See Young, *Thy Word* 80, B K Waltke, "Oral Tradition," *Inerrancy* (ed Conn) 134-135

⁵⁶ Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 155

⁵⁷ Cf *ibid* 4 408

dictation by God (Exod 20:1–17; Rev 2:1–3:22). (5) The statement attempts to affirm the full presence and conscious operation both of the omnipotent Spirit and the chosen human instruments. The final product is brought about by virtue of the Spirit's working through the voluntary, internally generated production of the holy men of God. It attempts to do justice to the manifold evidences of human personality found throughout Scripture, not only in style but also in content.⁵⁸ (6) The expression "special labors" implies that not every word written by a Biblical author is necessarily inspired but only that which God intended to be part of Scripture. (7) "Product" also allows for the possibility of drafts and revisions. (8) This same articulation also makes room both for the various types of literary genres within the Biblical corpus and the corresponding kinds of literary activity that were necessary for the composition of those genres. (9) This definition affirms the inspiration of both the concepts and the words of Scripture as well as the authority and complete inerrancy of the Bible in its original manuscripts. (10) Scripture is equated with the Word of God, thus ruling out neo-orthodox assertions and presuppositions. (11) "Complete" and "was put" imply that the canon is closed and that nothing more is admissible within Scripture.

V. CONCLUSION

Since evangelicals are responsible for proclaiming the truth of God before a world in darkness, it is imperative that they speak as accurately and precisely as Scripture permits on major issues. Clear expression will also be in accord with Paul's instructions to Timothy: "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 1:13 NASB). It is vitally important that evangelicals hold to sound patterns when speaking of all important doctrines such as the inspiration of the Word of God.

VI. APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS OF INSPIRATION SUGGESTED BY EVANGELICALS

1. Inspiration is "the energizing power of God in the lives, discourse, and writings of his servants so that from these writings men can see life with God as supreme."⁵⁹

2. "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."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Poythress, "What Does God Say?" 83, Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 142, 159–160, Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority* 422

⁵⁹ A B Mickelsen, *Biblical Authority* (ed J Rogers, Waco Word, 1977) 84

⁶⁰ The "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," *JETS* 21/4 (1978) 291

3. "The inspiration of the Old Testament refers first of all to the divine activity which prevailed when the authors of the Old Testament books committed their thoughts to writing. In the second place it refers to the inspired quality of the Old Testament. Due to the inspiration in the *active* sense, the Old Testament now possesses divine authority and trustworthiness, which amounts to saying that it possesses inspiration in the *qualitative* sense."⁶¹

4. "Inspiration is that influence of the Spirit of God upon the minds of the Scripture writers which made their writings the record of a progressive divine revelation, sufficient, when taken together and interpreted by the same Spirit who inspired them, to lead every honest inquirer to Christ and to salvation."⁶²

5. "Inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, that what they said God said."⁶³

6. "Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence (or, passively, the result of it,) exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and, therefore, perfectly infallible."⁶⁴

7. "Inspiration is to be defined as a supernatural, providential influence of God's Holy Spirit upon the human authors which caused them to write what He wished to be written for the communication of revealed truth to others."⁶⁵

8. "Inspiration is a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of their oral and written proclamation."⁶⁶

9. "By inspiration of the Scripture we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God."⁶⁷

10. Inspiration is "a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the Holy Scriptures so that their words would convey the thought He wished to convey, should bear a proper relationship to the thought of the other inspired books, and would be kept free from all errors of facts, of doctrines, and of judgment."⁶⁸

11. "By *graphic* inspiration we understand that guidance given by the Spirit of God to the minds of the writers, compilers and editors of the Holy

⁶¹ M H Woudstra, "The Inspiration of the Old Testament," *Bible* (ed Tenney) 124

⁶² A H Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge Judson, 1967 [1907]) 196

⁶³ C Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1968 [1871]) 1 154

⁶⁴ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority* 420

⁶⁵ J I Packer, "*Fundamentalism*" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1958) 77

⁶⁶ Henry, *God, Revelation* 4 129

⁶⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology* 1 199

⁶⁸ A MacRae, cited in K Kantzer, "Syllabus for Theology 511," Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1967-1968) 81-82

Scriptures, by which these sacred writings have assumed such a form as was, in the counsel of salvation, predestined by God among the means of grace for His Church."⁶⁹

12. In the narrower sense inspiration is the operation of the Holy Spirit in the various human authors "whereby they wrote in just the way and at such a time and in such a form as was necessary for the delivery of that part of Scripture for which each was responsible, finished and adapted to the canonical linking together of all the parts, to that one harmonious whole which the Lord God had foreseen and foreordained for Holy Scripture."⁷⁰

13. "Divine inspiration is the mysterious power put forth by the Spirit of God on the authors of Holy Writ, to make them write it, to guide them even in the employment of the words they use, and thus to preserve them from all error."⁷¹

14. "*Inspiration* refers to the miracle of *conservation* whereby the Spirit has preserved and conserved divine revelation (cf. Is 30:8)."⁷²

15. "In the composition of the original manuscripts, the Holy Spirit guided the authors even in their choice of expressions—and this throughout all the pages of the Scriptures—still without effacing the personalities of the different men."⁷³

16. "The Bible is the inspired Word of God, the written record of His supernatural revelation of Himself to man, absolute in its authority, complete in its revelation, final in its content and without any error in its teachings."⁷⁴

17. "Inspiration may be defined as the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of chosen men who then wrote the Scriptures so that God got written what He wanted."⁷⁵

18. Inspiration is "the act by which God conveyed to men both the content of that which He wished to be written for man's sake and the very words expressing that content."⁷⁶

19. "We understand the inspiration under which the Scriptures were written to mean that intimate relation between the Holy Spirit and the minds of the sacred writers of which we are justified in saying that the words of Scripture are the words of God."⁷⁷

20. Inspiration is "the work of the Holy Spirit of God in causing the writers of the Scriptures to give forth the Word of God without error. The

⁶⁹ A Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1980 [1898]) 545

⁷⁰ A Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek*, cited in R B Gaffin, Jr., "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?," *WTJ* 44 (1982) 268

⁷¹ S R L Gaussen, "*Theopneustia*" *The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (4th ed., ed B W Carr, Kansas City Gospel Union, 1912) 87

⁷² C H Finnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago Moody, 1971) 35

⁷³ R Pache, *Inspiration* 71

⁷⁴ Columbia Bible College and Seminary, doctrinal statement, paragraph 1

⁷⁵ Lindsell, *Battle* 30

⁷⁶ Preus, *Inspiration* 27

⁷⁷ F Patton, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures* (Philadelphia Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1869) 123-124

writers were inspired in the sense that the Holy Spirit worked through them. The writings are inspired in the sense that they are the product of the work of the Holy Spirit through the writers."⁷⁸

21. Inspiration is used "in the single sense of God's continued work of superintendence, by which his providential, gracious and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, he presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters he designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the word of God to us."⁷⁹

22. "Inspiration is the supernatural act by which without setting aside the personalities and literary faculties of its human authors, God constituted the words of the Bible in its entirety as His divine written word to men, and therefore inerrant in the original manuscripts."⁸⁰

23. "Biblical inspiration may be defined, therefore, as that work of the Holy Spirit by which, without setting aside their personalities and literary or human faculties, God so guided the authors of Scripture as to enable them to write exactly the words which convey His truth to men, and in doing so preserved their judgments from error in the original manuscripts. Or, inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit by which He employed the instrumentality of the whole personality, literary talents, and various faculties of their human authors to constitute the words of the Biblical autographs as His written Word to men and, therefore, of divine authority and without error in faith (what we ought to believe) and practice (what we ought to do)."⁸¹

24. "God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings."⁸²

25. "Inspiration is a superintendence of God the Holy Spirit over the writers of the Scriptures, as a result of which these Scriptures possess Divine authority and trustworthiness and, possessing such Divine authority and trustworthiness, are free from error."⁸³

26. "The inspiration of the Bible is an extraordinary (supernatural) operation of God's Spirit, by which men produced writings that could serve as an authentic self-revelation of God."⁸⁴

27. "Inspiration consists in this, that God makes the words of men the instrument of his word, that he uses human words for his divine purposes. As such the human words stand in the service of God and participate in the authority and infallibility of the Word of God, answer perfectly God's

⁷⁸ J O Boswell, Jr, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1962) 1 184

⁷⁹ A A Hodge, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1979 [1881]) 17-18

⁸⁰ Kantzer, "Syllabus" 82

⁸¹ K Kantzer, "The Communication of Revelation," *Bible* (ed Tenney) 75

⁸² Ryrie, *Basic Theology* 71

⁸³ Young, *Thy Word* 27

⁸⁴ Van Kooten, *Bible* 24

purpose, in short, function as the Word of God and therefore can be so called."⁸⁵

28. Inspiration is a "divine afflatus" or "breathing upon"; it is "an influence exercised by God upon the biblical writers whose effect is to preserve the inerrancy of the Bible in its spiritual prophecies and . . . historical judgments."⁸⁶

29. "'Biblical inspiration' refers to the enhancement of one's understanding of God brought about instrumentally through the Bible, rather than to the mysterious and nonrepeatable process by which 'God got written what He wanted' in the Bible. In other words, 'the inspiration of the Bible' refers to the enhancement which the Bible instrumentally causes in persons and not to the Bible itself as the terminus or locus of that enhancement."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ridderbos, *Studies* 25

⁸⁶ E J Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1948)

110

⁸⁷ Trembath, *Evangelical* 103