

THE DIVINE WISDOM OF OBSCURITY: PASCAL ON THE POSITIVE VALUE OF SCRIPTURAL DIFFICULTIES

Gregory A. Boyd*

I. LETTING GOD'S WORD BE GOD'S WORD

As individuals who, out of obedience to Christ as well as the teaching of Scripture concerning its own authority, find themselves compelled to confess a faith in an inerrant Bible, conservative evangelicals have usually felt some obligation to defend Scripture against the numerous alleged discrepancies that it is accused by its critics of containing. While defending the truth is of course always a laudable endeavor, there is, it seems to me, a potential danger in this enterprise. In a word, it is possible to become so captivated with the concern to harmonize various texts with each other and to reconcile the Biblical accounts with extra-Biblical evidence that we can unwittingly force God's Word into our own version of a rationalistic Procrustean bed. We can easily acquire a defensivistic attitude that fails to see the rich diversity of Scripture, with all the tensions that this richness embodies, as an intended blessing from God, and that instead sees this diversity as a threat, a series of problems that need ingenious solutions. We can, in short, become so apologetically paranoid over the rationalistic attacks upon Scripture that we end up transforming God's often mysterious Word by our own form of rationalism into a word that we are more comfortable with but that is not God's Word in its purity.

While there is, I believe, a place for explaining to whatever limited extent we are able the many difficulties contained in Scripture, this apologetic stance must not characterize our fundamental attitude toward Scripture as a whole or toward any of its parts. If we believe in the plenary inspiration of Scripture, and if we believe that Scripture is completely and infallibly authoritative, then our fundamental attitude toward Scripture in all of its parts, irrespective of how difficult it may be to rationally reconcile them in their diversity, should be controlled by the conviction that every aspect of every passage is as it is divinely intended to be. Our attitude should therefore be one of unconditional positive acceptance: a positive acceptance and appreciation of God's Word just as it is, in the pluralistic form in which God has been pleased to inspire it; a positive acceptance and appreciation of God's Word even when this Word takes the form of an insoluble problem. The affirmation of the plenary inspiration of the Bible, in other words, entails that we view even the apparent contradictions within Scripture not

*Gregory Boyd is a doctoral candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

primarily as "problems" that must receive an explanation but as positive aspects of the total mystery of God's inspired verbal revelation. Because they are inspired by God we must fundamentally view them as intended contributors, precisely in their asperity, to the overall purpose and beauty of the Scriptural revelation.

What many of us evangelicals need, therefore, is an alteration in our basic attitude toward the difficulties in Scripture.¹ So long as we view these difficulties simply in a negative defensivistic manner we will not be able to fully benefit from the inspired diversity of perspectives that give rise to them. We will to some extent close ourselves off to the message God may intend us to hear through the uniqueness of each individual portion of Scripture as well as through the obscure but fully inspired relationship that often exists between these diverse segments of God's Word.

To give one simple illustration, it is difficult to fully hear the pure Word of God in one's devotional reading of Matthew's distinctive account of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus (Matt 19:16-26) if one's reading of this account is tainted by an undue concern over how this account may or may not harmonize with the accounts of Mark and Luke. So long as a reader insists upon imposing upon this account *tour de force* a rationalistic harmonizing grid, the reader will not be completely free to hear the distinct way in which God wishes to speak to him or her through Matthew's unique account. Moreover, when an undue concern for synoptic consistency is at the front of a reader's mind when confronting this particular account, a concern that the Biblical authors and the Holy Spirit who inspired them apparently did not share, the reader shuts himself or herself off from whatever lesson or truth God may intend to communicate to him or her precisely through the tensions that exist between these three accounts.

If, however, a reader can arrive at an attitude that not only tolerates the tensions that obviously exist between this and other such diverse accounts but even views these tensions as something positive, then he or she shall be free to be addressed by God through the contrasting uniqueness of the three accounts. Why else, after all, did God give us the three distinct accounts? The believing reader shall be free to unconditionally let God's Word be God's Word. The "hearer of the Word" shall be free to let God address him or her on his own terms, not on the restricting terms one might try to impose upon this Word through a humanly-constructed scheme of harmonization.

Pascal's *Pensees* help us to relinquish the captivating primacy of our own construed apologetic stance. This work, I believe, can assist us in acquiring a more accepting, appreciative and submissive attitude toward the whole of Scripture, especially as it concerns its tense-ridden richness. Pascal does this by offering us

¹While the recently proposed thesis of Rogers and McKim (following Sandeen and many others) that argues that the scholastic period of Protestantism altered the content of the traditional Church's belief in Biblical infallibility is certainly erroneous (as Woodbridge has demonstrated), their work does, I believe, show that the theologians of this period represent an altered, more rationalistic attitude toward the Church's doctrine of Scripture. American evangelicalism has to a significant extent suffered (precisely in the manner I am explicating in this essay) from this inherited rationalistic posture toward Scripture. Cf. J. Rogers and D. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper, 1979); J. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

a way of perceiving and reflecting upon God's revelation that includes a very positive attitude toward the rational difficulties that this revelation contains. As our faith seeks understanding with the help of Pascal, we can begin to make sense as to why the infinite and sovereign wisdom of God saw fit to inspire a revelation that contains difficulties within it. Seeing this divine rationale (as always, "through a darkened glass") we can begin to appreciate not only the perspicuity of Scripture but also its obscurity. We can begin to develop a genuine love and appreciation for the difficulties of Scripture and thereby begin to open ourselves up to hearing God's voice in the midst of them, because of them, and not as is so often the case simply in spite of them. In all of this we shall be moving closer to a more consistent and vital belief in the plenary inspiration of the Bible. And we hopefully shall be learning a little better the difficult but essential discipline of letting God's Word be God's Word.

II. PASCAL ON THE HUMAN SITUATION

We cannot fully appreciate Pascal's thoughts on revelation and the value of its obscurities unless we first briefly take notice of his anthropology. Pascal, standing in the Augustinian tradition, was extremely impressed by the enormous gulf that separated humans as they were intended to be and as they hypothetically could be from humans as they actually were in their fallen state. There was, Pascal observed, a "strange disorder" in human nature (632).² Humans possessed, on the one hand, supreme dignity, yet they inevitably made themselves ignoble; they were capable of supreme good, yet helplessly prone toward diabolical evil; they yearned for happiness, yet brought misery upon themselves; they were profound in their constitution, yet infinitely trite in their actual life and thought. Humanity is thus in Pascal's eyes a "sort of freak," "monstrous," "paradoxical," the "glory" as well as the "refuse of the universe" (131). People are "a nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing, a middle point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from an understanding of these extremes" (199).

Human beings, then, live amidst a universe full of paradoxes. They exist amidst a "double infinity" on every side, and they are in fact an "infinite paradox" unto themselves. They exist, as it were, at the crossroad of every conceivable antithesis: between good and evil, God and Satan, heaven and hell, eternal happiness and eternal misery, eternal glory and eternal shame (cf. 122, 127, 129, 130, 131, 199, 744). This, for Pascal, means that the most fundamental characteristic and ultimate significance of human existence consists in the exercise of the will, in decision—a decision as to how the antitheses of this crossroad experience will be resolved, a decision as to which road one will travel and "wager" one's eternal destiny upon (cf. 418).

God's revelation in Christ, Scripture and nature is addressed to human beings in this pendulous state and is, so to speak, conditioned by the existential dialectic

²Pascal, *Pensees* (translated by A. J. Krailsheimer; New York: Penguin, 1976). All references are to Pascal's entry numbers as given in this edition of his collection. Unless otherwise indicated I shall follow Krailsheimer's translation.

that this state embodies. Revelation addresses humans as they stand in a perpetual moment of decision. It addresses them in order to awaken them to the gravity of this decision and in order to provoke them to make the decision consciously and authentically. As we shall see, both the "clarity" as well as the "obscurity" of this revelation is in Pascal's view a result of God's wisdom in addressing humans lovingly and effectively as they stand in this momentous crossroad situation.

III. PASCAL ON THE VALUE OF THE OBSCURITIES OF REVELATION

Having briefly explicated Pascal's view of the human situation to which revelation is addressed we may now consider his view concerning the nature of this revelation, especially as it concerns the divinely intended obscurities that the revelation contains.

(1) There are, in Pascal's apologetic writings, three closely related reasons that he discerns as to why God intentionally includes rational obscurities in his revelation and does not therefore reveal himself "as obviously as He might" (444). The first of these reasons concerns the nature of genuine religious faith. For Pascal the act of faith involves both the mind and the heart (110). But the heart plays a far more crucial and determinative role in this act than does the mind. A faith in which the mind plays the determinative role, a faith that is therefore primarily a rational conclusion at the end of an argument, is in Pascal's view an inauthentic faith and can never render the certainty the heart longs for (121, 131, 190, 199, 530, 588, 781). It is inauthentic because true religious faith consists in a loving relationship of the heart with the Creator, not a logical relationship between various premises and a conclusion. And it is uncertain because the evidence for religious propositions is never indisputable and thus can only render a probable and tentative conclusion.

Genuine religious faith, according to Pascal, is not then "*un don de raisonnement*" but "*un don de Dieu*" bestowed upon the hearts of his elect (588). God evokes a loving response to his revelation by "moving the will rather than the mind" (234). "It is," Pascal concludes, "the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason" (424). Such a genuine faith, if it is faith in the God of Christianity, is not in general against reason. But it will include "reasons of the heart" of which the rational mind can know nothing (423), and it is these "reasons of the heart" that constitute most fundamentally the nature, certainty and stability of genuine faith.³

God's revelation, whether we consider it in its Christological, Scriptural, or general form, is divinely designed to address and to stir at the heart his fallen creatures as they stand in the perilous moment of decision that shall decide their eternal destiny. The degree of clarity and the degree of rational obscurity that God causes to exist in his revelation is omnisciently calculated to accomplish this purpose. "Perfect clarity," Pascal admits, "would help the mind," but in so doing

³Calvin holds a view of faith very similar to this; cf. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster, n.d.), 3:2:14; 3:2:33-36.

it would "harm the will" (234). Were revelation perfectly perspicuous at a rational level the inevitable result, in Pascal's view, would be that we in our fallen state would seek to establish and ground our relationship with God through his revelation on a merely rational basis. Our decision at the crossroad would be a merely logical one, demanding no existential transformation and commitment.⁴ Any rational creature, regardless of spiritual disposition, could thereby arrive at a belief in God simply by the right use of reasoning faculties, and even the elect who have the right spiritual disposition would be inclined to forget that the decisive issue in the God-human relationship is not that of the ability of the mind but of the state of the heart. Because a merely rational relationship is easier, not demanding the austere work of an existential task, a perfectly clear rational revelation would open up the continual temptation to our fallen natures to let our heartfelt relationship with God degenerate into a merely cognitive relationship.

God does not therefore "reveal himself as obviously as he might," precisely in order that the decision to follow him, and the work to sustain this relationship, will be an affair of the heart and will, not simply one of the mind. "There is enough light for those who *desire* to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition" (149; italics mine). God presents "obstacles" to the mind in order to check any possible claim on its part to be the arbiter of this relationship.⁵ In his infinite love and wisdom, God in part veils himself at a rational level that he might effectively unveil himself at a spiritual level. Through this perfect combination of light and darkness, God works to evoke in his elect a decision of the will to enter into and sustain a loving relationship of the heart with him through his revelation.⁶

(2) This first aspect of the divine wisdom in allowing rational difficulties to exist in his revelation is inseparably connected with a second reason Pascal discerns in God's revelatory ways: Not only must the relationship between God and his children be a relationship of the heart; it must also be a heart-relationship that is aware of itself as being established and sustained completely by God's grace and that therefore is always characterized on the human side by humility and gratitude. God inspires rational difficulties in the midst of his revelation in order to reveal to those who have the heart to believe that this affair of salvation

⁴Diogenes Allen draws an interesting parallel between Pascal's thought on this point and Kierkegaard's distinction between "the way of objectivity" and "the way of subjectivity" in *Three Outsiders* (Cowley, 1983) 46-51.

⁵Calvin reflects this same insight when he writes that "in our daily reading of Scripture we come upon many obscure passages that convict us of ignorance. With this bridle God keeps us within bounds, assigning to each his 'measure of faith'" (*Institutes* 3:2:4).

⁶It may be helpful by way of illustration to point out the parallel that exists between this method of divine communication and the "indirect communication" used by Kierkegaard in his pseudonymous writings. The communicator here speaks in such a manner that the hearer is turned "inward" and his or her own subjective state is disclosed. The indirectness of the message thus serves as a sort of mirror in which the hearer beholds himself or herself. We might say, then, that God speaks directly in a mode that embodies tensions in order to "indirectly" illuminate hearers as to their own subjective need for a heart relationship to him that is characterized by humility.

is solely his doing and not theirs, in order to render certain that their faith-filled perception of his revelation is strictly a miracle of his unmerited grace and not the result of their own intelligence, and in order to continually manifest to believers their own wretchedness and inability to approach him on any other than the terms he has been pleased to lay before them.

In connection with this aspect of the divine wisdom in revelation, Pascal writes:

If there were no obscurity man would not feel his corruption: if there was no light man could not hope for a cure. Thus, it is not only right but useful for us that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed, since it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness as to know his wretchedness without knowing God (446).

There is in revelation, then, "enough light to enlighten the elect and enough obscurity to humble them" (236; my translation). Were there no difficulties, the elect would be in danger of transforming this relationship from the heart to the head and from the realm of grace to the realm of intellectual achievement. The obscurities that accompany divine revelation are therefore an essential aspect of revelation itself in that it is by means of these that God mercifully instructs his elect concerning their absolute dependency upon him and their own need to remain humble (438).⁷ By confronting these difficulties we are reminded that "we shall never believe . . . unless God inclines our hearts" (380). Their presence in the divine revelation, far from being as they so often are a reason for "complaining," should be—for the elect who discern God's intention in them—but one more reason for them to be thankful.

(3) The third and final aspect of the divine wisdom that gives rise to a revelation that contains rational difficulties, the aspect Pascal wrote most frequently on, concerns God's intention to blind the reprobate. While the elect are enlightened by God's light and humbled by his hiddenness in the obscurities that accompany this light, the reprobate who choose not to see God's light are condemned by this light and blinded by the obscurities that accompany it insofar as they use these obscurities as an excuse not to believe (236).⁸ "Those who do not love the truth excuse themselves on the grounds that it is disputed and that many people deny it" (176). God therefore gives the reprobate enough obscurity to manifest their evil hearts, which refuse to believe, but enough light to condemn them in their unbelief.

⁷Cf. 298, where Pascal relates this fundamental intention of God in Scripture to an understanding of its "order" or coherence. Against those who object that there is no order to Scripture, Pascal replies that, because its primary goal is to humble the heart and not instruct the mind, its "order" is "*l'ordre de la charite, non de l'esprit*." One only perceives its coherence, therefore, when one has a heart that is in a position to do so. The regenerate heart of the elect opens their minds to see a divine "order" or "rationale" even in the obscurities of Scripture precisely because their heart is open to Scripture's fundamental purpose.

⁸Pascal even states that "the prophecies quoted in the Gospels were put there . . . to discourage you from believing," apparently referring to the problematic manner in which many of the prophecies were quoted and reported to have been fulfilled in the gospels (736).

To recall what has been said earlier, the determinative factor in a human life is not on Pascal's view the mind but the will and heart. It will be helpful here to further state that, in keeping with the Augustinian tradition he located himself within, Pascal viewed the functioning of the mind as being wholly determined by the disposition of the will. Thus for example Pascal writes:

The will is one of the chief organs of belief, not because it creates belief, but because things are true or false according to the aspect by which we judge them. When the will likes one aspect more than another, it deflects (*detourne*) the mind from considering the qualities of the one it does not care to see (539; cf. 820).

As we saw earlier, what determines how the conflicting antitheses of the crossroad will be resolved, what determines whether one will be raised up to the supreme good that is by grace potentially within him or her or sink down into the evil that is within him or her, is the activity of the will. The mind, on Pascal's view, simply follows and attempts to justify the decision of the will. The fundamental difference between the elect and the reprobate, then, lies not in the elect's ability to think more cogently but in what their regenerate wills allow them to openly think about. The transformed will of the elect loves God's truth, and their mind is therefore naturally inclined toward considering it. They view the obscure aspects of revelation in the light of the clarity of revelation that their heart loves, and thus, far from complaining over its difficulties, they are led to honor and revere them (218, 566). Even these difficulties thereby become for them an advantage and a blessing in that they contribute to their spiritual growth in the manner specified above. The unrepentant will of the reprobate, in contrast, does not love and seek God's truth but rather seeks to avoid it. Their minds are therefore deflected from honestly considering it by their prejudiced will and turned toward that aspect of revelation that their will prefers: "*les obscures.*"

The very same light of revelation that enlightens the elect serves to condemn the reprobate, and the very same obscurities that serve to humble the elect serve to make the reprobate arrogant and blind (236). This is all precisely as the omnipotent Lord of creation intends it to be. Thus in writing with regard to the central revelation of God in Jesus Christ, Pascal writes:

Let us not then be criticized for lack of clarity, since we openly profess it. "But," they say, "there are obscurities, and but for that Jesus would not have caused anyone to stumble." And this is one of the formal intentions of the prophets. *Shut their eyes* (Isa. 6:10) (228).⁹

We see that, according to Pascal, God intentionally conceals his revelatory truth in a certain amount of rational ambiguity in order to "keep it from being recognized by those who do not hear his voice" (840). The obscurities guarantee that only those who love the truth can recognize it (739; cf. 427). God supplies

⁹Cf. 232, where Pascal notes that "Jesus does not deny he is from Nazareth, nor that he is Joseph's son, so as to leave the wicked in their blindness." In 237 Pascal notes that Jesus' behavior, from the standpoint of a hypothetically neutral position, "proves nothing either way" (for or against belief in him). Though he performed many convincing miracles and miraculously fulfilled many prophecies, there is always enough ambiguity so that faith in him is always a miracle of God's grace. The same relationship between evidence and ambiguity may be seen in Scripture (and for the same reason).

enough reason to believe for those who want to believe, but not enough to convince those who do not (835). He renders his revelation rational enough so that those who are inclined in their hearts to obey and follow him are not irrational for doing so (482) and those who do not so will can be judged for not doing so (461, 236). But he presents enough intellectual obstacles in his revelation so that those who do wish to believe are constantly reminded that they "are prompted to do so by grace and not by reason," while those who do not wish to believe can be blinded by presumptuously seeing these obstacles as excuses (835).¹⁰

IV. APPLYING PASCAL'S PRINCIPLES TO AN EVANGELICAL VIEW OF THE BIBLE

While most of what Pascal wrote concerning the interrelationship between the clarity and the obscurity of revelation concerned revelation in general, the three principles by which he sought to understand the divine purpose in causing this interrelationship can be applied, as Pascal himself occasionally applied them, to the Scriptural revelation in particular.¹¹

The belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is certainly not an irrational belief. Most of us who hold this view of Scripture believe that there are sound and sufficient reasons for doing so. But it is clear that none of the arguments that one could give in support of this position are in themselves sufficient to convince any who are not predisposed to believe it. To my recollection, no recognized apologist has ever claimed that an argument for the authority of Scripture held the status of a proof. To be sure, we must in scholarly honesty be willing to grant that at the present time there exists some evidence that counts against this high view of Scripture.

If we adopt Pascal's model for interpreting the phenomenon of Scriptural revelation, however, the inconclusive and ambiguous nature of the evidence for the inerrantist view of Scripture need not, and should not, disturb us greatly. While we must with academic candor respond to the best of our ability to the many positions that in various ways oppose our position, we need not, if Pascal is correct, allow this academic dialogue to compromise our unconditional openness

¹⁰There is in Pascal a parallel between the mystery of God's Word and the mystery embodied in so many of the doctrines that this Word reveals. To those who desire to believe, the mystery contained in such doctrines as the Trinity, the incarnation, election or (to cite Pascal's favorite) original sin is not something abhorrent (as it is to unbelievers) but is something that is both beautiful in showing God's transcendence and illuminating with regard to our understanding of our existence (cf. e.g. 131). So it is with the mystery of Scripture's inspiration. Not only the mystery of the relationship between God's activity and the authors' freedom but also the mystery of the relationship between Christ's teaching regarding its infallible nature and the many tensions it contains is something that believers must learn not only to tolerate but also to revere (218) in the same manner and for the same reasons that they love and revere the other "mysteries of the faith."

¹¹218, 261, 298, 566, 841 are the clearest applications of the principles explicated in this essay. These principles are indirectly applied to Scripture in a number of other passages, especially where Pascal believes one must be enlightened as to the "spiritual" (viz., allegorical) meaning of a passage that is "obscure" in its literal meaning (cf. e.g. 253, 255, 257, 259, 260, 265, 270, 272, 501-503).

to the Word of God in all of its diversity and strangeness. The many unanswered questions that we have, and probably shall always have, regarding Scripture are not something that should in any way hinder our own devotional use of Scripture by closing us off to the Word that God would address to us precisely in the paradox of such problematic portions of Scripture. To the contrary, if we follow Pascal the difficulties of Scripture that we continually run into can and should be seen as blessings in disguise.

From Pascal we are made aware that it is precisely in confronting the problematic portions of Scripture that we are reminded of the fact that our faith in God and obedience to Christ (including his teaching on Scripture) is something that our mind could never autonomously produce but that is, rather, a miracle of God's grace through the working of his Spirit in our hearts. Were it not for God's grace, our carnal hearts would deflect our minds from seeing the truth and beauty of the Scriptural revelation, and we would most certainly find and see the so-called "contradictions" of Scripture as an excuse for rejecting Christ's authority. It is only because it is for believers, as Pascal says, *la grace et non la raison qui fait suivre* (835) that the arguments against the complete trustworthiness of Scripture are not for us conclusive as they are for so many others.¹² By God's grace our minds behold *la clarté de l'Écriture*, and this permits us, if we follow it unconditionally, to revere *les obscurités* (218). This is not the result of our own ingenuity but of God's mercy. This is one of the truths God communicates to us as we submissively confront the unresolvable tensions within his Word.

Again, from Pascal we learn that the rational difficulties of Scripture can be an advantage to us by reminding us that our personal relationship with Christ, a relationship largely mediated through Scripture, can never be fundamentally established on the always disputable and tentative arguments of an objective position. We are reminded that the life, certainty and stability of our loving relationship with Christ is principally given by *raisons du coeur*. We are thereby reminded of the central importance of a committed prayer life and the need for a continually revitalized experience with our Lord. And we are made aware of the fact that our reading of Scripture must always be illumined by the Holy Spirit.¹³ Without this divine presence the blessed diversity of Scripture will certainly become for us a blinding collection of contradictions.

¹²Precisely because our faith is a matter of God's grace, one must be careful, with regard to the issue of Scripture's inerrancy, to adhere to Christ's and Paul's teaching that one is never in a position to judge another (Matt 7:1-5; Rom 2:1). While there is a definite relationship between the state of one's heart and the conclusions of one's mind, the relationship is from our vantage point so complex, and we are ourselves in such a fallen state, that no human is in a position to confidently infer from another's conclusions what his or her heart is like (except where Scripture itself requires it). This is strictly God's business (Ps 50:6; Acts 10:42; Heb 10:30). Thus what is said here must not be understood as implying that all noninerrantists have been blinded by the difficulties of Scripture because of a lack of grace in their hearts. There is, one must always assume, room for honest intellectual disagreement, and only God can decide to what extent the motivation of this disagreement (in ourselves and in those who differ with us) is pure.

¹³Calvin was emphatic on the "mutual bond" that existed between the Word (here meaning Scripture) and the Spirit and thus continually emphasized the fact that it is impossible to hear, believe, interpret and obey God's Word rightly unless one is in personal communion with the Holy Spirit as one encounters Scripture; cf. *Institutes* 1:9:3; 3:1:1; 3:2:33-36.

Finally, from Pascal we can learn to see the transcendent wisdom of God effectively calling us and all others to a decision of the heart through the clarity as well as the obscurity that he offers us in his Word. With Pascal we can freely confess that the form of Scripture is frequently paradoxical (228), for we understand that this is a means by which he beckons us to a momentous decision to believe and seek the clarity of his revelation or to disbelieve and see the obscurity as an excuse. The Word of the Lord always accomplishes precisely what he desires (Isa 55:11), whether this desire be to enlighten and humble or to blind and harden a heart (Rom 9:18). We can and indeed must thus come to the place where we love and appreciate the wisdom of God, which employs even relative obscurities to accomplish this end.

If we view the rational difficulties within Scripture rightly, if we submissively let God's Word be God's Word, then we will not become defensive because there are some who are blinded by them. We will rather see them as part of God's providential plan. This is by no means a justification for obscurantism or irrationalism concerning the alleged contradictions in Scripture. This was certainly not Pascal's intent.¹⁴ But it is a means whereby we can view these problems in their proper perspective, thereby allowing us to render greater service to and reap greater benefits from God's Holy Word.

¹⁴Though Pascal admitted that there existed in Scripture "*des obscurites qui soient . . . bizarres*" (218) he nevertheless believed that there could be no ultimate contradictions in Scripture and that the Christian should attempt to render, to the best of his or her ability, a rational account for its discrepancies (cf. e.g. 257). He often went to extreme lengths to explain away, usually allegorically, "the obvious contradictions in the literal meaning" of Scripture (260). For a full treatment of Pascal's view of Scripture see A. Gounelle, *La Bible Selon Pascal* (Montpellier, 1968).