

The president has asked those members of the Historical and Theological Field Committee who last spring [April 2006] presented to the faculty a document analyzing Pete Enns' *Inspiration and Incarnation* (I&I) to provide a précis or somewhat briefer statement of our concerns. This statement is not a summary of everything said in that document but highlights and, at points, expands on some of our primary concerns. We have chosen the format of an open letter as an appropriate and, we hope, constructive way of communicating these concerns.

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An Open Letter to Pete Enns  
(for the Board and Faculty of Westminster Seminary)  
[December 2006]

Dear Pete,

In a mid-September you spoke in chapel based on Proverbs 3:5-6:

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

This message was most helpful and thoroughly edifying. We don't want anything we go on to say here to obscure or diminish that.

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It strikes us that your text for that chapel provides a window on our deepest and most elemental difficulties with I&I. These verses are not only a basic directive for every-day living in covenant with God, as your talk elaborated so well, but as such, we take it, they also express an absolutely requisite, first order theological and hermeneutical guideline. I&I, in its design and execution, we've been forced to conclude, is in tension with this guideline. Perhaps inadvertently, its effect nonetheless is to undercut the truth of verses 5a and 6a ("trust in the Lord with all your heart"; "in all your ways acknowledge him") and so to leave its readers tending toward the position that verse 5b warns against ("do not lean on your own understanding"). Why are we brought to this conclusion, the gravity of which, especially concerning a colleague and friend, we are well aware and continue to be burdened?

1. I&I is occupied, almost in its entirety, with three areas of perceived problems in the Bible. But, as it expresses clearly at the outset, its concern is larger than just these particular problems. In addressing them, a primary and ulterior goal of the book is "reassessment" of the doctrine of Scripture (14). I&I seeks to "engage the *doctrinal implications*" (13, emphasis original) that follow from working at resolving the problems considered and to "adjust our doctrine accordingly" (14). It seeks "a better model for the inspiration of Scripture" (167). The nature of this doctrinal objective seems particularly clear and programmatic in the following statement, "... my aim is to allow the collective evidence to affect *not* just how we understand a biblical passage or story here and there *within the parameters of earlier doctrinal formulations* [emphasis added]. Rather, I want to *move beyond that* [emphasis added] by allowing the evidence to affect how we think

about what Scripture *is*" (15, emphasis original). I&I pursues this overall objective of doctrinal reassessment, of finding "a better model for the inspiration of Scripture," by utilizing, as the title of the book reflects, the incarnational analogy (or parallel), understood as affirming that the Bible is fully divine and fully human.

How are we to assess this explicit proposal for reconfiguring the doctrine of Scripture? (Even if the terms "doctrine" and "doctrinal" had not been used in the statements cited above, the proposal would still be unmistakable.) Here, with this question in view, is where we have our deepest problem with I&I. Both in what it says and by what it does not say I&I is misleading at best. In particular, in terms of the incarnational analogy, said to be controlling in the book's approach, Scripture's divinity, its divine side or character, is virtually absent and certainly nonfunctional.

It will not do to say, as we've heard you say, that the purpose of I&I was not to deal with Scripture's divine side and its significance but rather to focus on its human side – problems bound up with its human authors and the historical situatedness of what they wrote. Precisely because of that focus it was all the more essential for you to have said more and to have been more forthcoming than you are about the Bible's divinity. This did not have to be done in an extensive way. And we are certainly not saying that you should have given equal or greater attention to the divine side. However, what is requisite, but lacking, is a forthright affirmation, however brief, of what the divinity of Scripture is and, no less importantly, how it controls your focus on its humanity.

A book like I&I is not written in a vacuum. It has its own historical situatedness. Globally considered, it is within the context of scholarly study of the Bible, which especially in the West since the Enlightenment has been dominated by the historical-critical method, a method that denies the Bible's self-witness to its origin and consequent authority – the Bible's doctrine of the Bible – as that doctrine has found brief confessional expression, for instance, in chapter one of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Further, along with that denial and consistent with it, the historical-critical method demands that the biblical documents be treated as any other written documents from the past – of purely human origin, however sublime and even Spirit-prompted may have been the impulse that prompted their writing, and of no more than human and therefore relative authority.

In such a setting, it is incumbent on those who do not share this method and its presuppositions to make that clear, however briefly, as well as to indicate, however briefly, how the approach they take differs – all the more so when the humanness of Scripture is the primary focus and the doctrine of Scripture itself is said to be at stake. I&I does not do that.

In this regard, the passing references there are throughout the book to the Bible as God's word are inadequate. This is true as well of the reference to "the divine author" (153, 160) because of its vagueness. Even less helpful is the nod to the divine factor in Scripture in chapter one in terms of the readers' "instinct" that the Bible is God's word (at least three times) and the assertion, "... we know instinctively that the Bible is God's word, ...." (15). Why is such an instinct at all warranted? If it is, on what basis? These are questions that beg for answers, however brief, that I&I does not provide.

The problem here is that such language about the Bible (perhaps with the exception of divine authorship) is widely current among those with historical-critical commitments. Especially since the emergence within the historical-critical tradition of Barth's widely influential doctrine of Scripture as a form of the word of God, for fidelity to the Bible as God's written word it is inadequate at best simply to affirm that the Bible is God's word. Particularly within the context of the academic study of the Bible in which we find ourselves, that fidelity demands, for the sake of clarity, that we affirm, however briefly, the divine authorship and consequent divine authority of Scripture as articulated, for one, in the *Westminster Confession*, chapter 1. More importantly, fidelity to Proverbs 3:5a and 6, it seems to us, demands that affirmation, and the effect of withholding it is to default toward the position of verse 5b.

On a couple of occasions that some of us recall you have said, if we have understood you correctly, that you did not make such an affirmation in I&I deliberately, because to do so would have "lost your audience" (or words to that effect). We must say that we find this tactic and the reasoning that led to it troubling and your continuing to defend this approach doubly so. Especially if your primary audience is, as we understand, college-age students, seminarians and other Christians whose faith has been unsettled by what you perceive to be the superficial and intellectually dishonest or evasive answers they have been given concerning difficulties in the Bible like those that, in contrast, you undertake to treat honestly in I&I.

It should be apparent that it is just such troubled readers who, in keeping with Proverbs 3:5-6, are most in need of the clear affirmation indicated above. Such an affirmation assures us of at least three things *in advance of* whatever problems we encounter in the Bible. Because "God (who is truth itself) [is] the author thereof" (WCF, 1:4): 1) the Bible is reliable and, appropriate to the genre involved, will not mislead us in what it reports as having transpired; 2) the Bible does not contradict itself, and what it teaches as a whole, in all its parts, is unified and harmonious in a doctrinal or didactic sense; 3) problems that may remain insoluble for us are not ultimately unsolvable; they have their resolution with God.

This three-fold assurance is essential for dealing constructively with the problems there undoubtedly are for us in Scripture. It is especially essential to provide that assurance for those whose faith in Scripture is being shaken by these problems. Such assurance stems from the way of Proverbs 3:5a and 6 in studying the Bible. Otherwise, we are left ultimately dependent upon our own or others efforts at mastering these problems. That is the way of Proverbs 3:5b.

Before going any further we want to make absolutely clear that our concerns with I&I are *not* that it raises problems in Scripture and seeks to resolve them. To do so is in the best tradition of WTS from its beginning, particularly its Old Testament faculty (e.g., R. D. Wilson, "I have not shirked the difficult questions"). If that were all I&I undertakes to do, our deepest concerns would be considerably alleviated (though in some instances we do have reservations about how a problem is presented or about a proposed solution). However, though unclearly and obliquely expressed, I&I clearly intends something more, as the quotes above from its opening and closing chapters show.

In this regard I&I invites comparison with its predecessor in the Old Testament department at WTS, E. J. Young's, *Thy Word Is Truth* (1957). It will not do to dismiss this comparison by saying that I&I has a quite different purpose. Certainly, the emphasis of each differs. But both have in common that they deal with problems in Scripture as they relate to the doctrine of Scripture (how satisfactorily Young has dealt with the various problems he poses is not the issue here). Seen in that light – how the self-witness of Scripture controls the treatment of problems in it – the contrast is glaring: Young is crystal clear, I&I lacks even minimal clarity. This brings us to our next point.

2. Over a century ago Warfield, in various writings and with exceptional incisiveness, permanently identified the basic issue we must confront in formulating a doctrine of Scripture, especially since the Enlightenment. Two mutually exclusive approaches are in conflict. The one approach, faithful to the Bible, begins with its explicit self-witness and develops the doctrine of Scripture from that self-witness. In the light of that doctrine, *a doctrine that is intact and impervious to change other than by reconsideration of that self-witness*, it then deals with the so-called phenomena of Scripture, including whatever problems are encountered. The other approach adopts the reverse procedure. It begins with the phenomena/problems and develops a doctrine of Scripture in which its self-witness is discounted and usually marginalized in various ways.

In terms of the incarnational analogy, we may generalize, the one approach begins with the divinity (the divine authorship) of Scripture and considers its humanity in that light; the other begins with its humanness and that becomes controlling for whatever divine aspects may be attributed to Scripture. The former approach is the way of Proverbs 3:5a and 6, the latter the way of Proverbs 3:5b.

In light of considerations we have already noted we are forced to conclude that I&I, perhaps inadvertently, but in effect, opts for the latter approach just noted. Unless the “better model for the inspiration of Scripture” it has in view somehow intends a third option. But what that option would be is not all clear to say the least.

A further consideration reinforces this conclusion for us, one that we also continue to find somewhat puzzling. In the “Further Reading” section at the end of chapter 1, one of the four items listed is J. Patterson Smyth, *How God Inspired the Bible: Thoughts for the Present Disquiet*. What is puzzling is that this book, last reprinted in 1918, has long been out of print (except for a limited offprint edition that you made available briefly in the late '90s through our Campus Bookstore). Why would you commend a book that is virtually inaccessible to your readers (apart from extensive searching by most)?

Of much greater concern, however, is your brief assessment of the book, “What is perhaps most striking about Smyth's book, besides the honesty and spiritual sensitivity of the author (he was both a professor and a pastor), is the reminder that an incarnational approach to Scripture was employed generations ago to address the problems introduced by the modern study of the Bible” (22). Contrast this with Warfield's assessment, in reviewing the book soon after it first appeared in 1892 (*The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 4 (1893): 202-03; 5 (1894): 169-71, 178-79). His searching and, in our judgment, devastating analysis of the book – as an instance of trying to develop a doctrine of inspiration based on scholarly consideration of the

phenomena of Scripture rather than its explicit self-witness – begins with this bottom-line assessment, “Mr. Smyth's little book, well meaning no doubt, but scarcely well conceived, ....”

Also, as far as we can see, Smyth's incarnational approach functions primarily as an effort to oppose and discredit the view of the Bible's inerrancy held by Warfield and others.

We are bound to ask, then, why, out of all of the items you could have recommended, is there no mention of Kuyper and Bavinck and the considerable and quite sound use they have made of the incarnational analogy in discussing the doctrine of Scripture? Why no mention, in particular, of volume one of Bavinck's *Dogmatics* in this regard?

In a review of your book, to which you referred one of us, we are struck that, mirror-image like, the reviewer (C. Heard) and we have basically the same analysis of the book, but from opposing viewpoints. His take, it seems fair to say and with which we agree substantially, is that your basic stance on Scripture is in flux or at least somewhere in between two views. He sees you being moved away from a view of inspiration fundamentally determined by the notion of divine authorship toward a view of inspiration ultimately determined by the biblical phenomena to which you give attention.

But where we disagree is in our basic assessment of your book. What he approves and sees to be hopeful is for us a source of great concern. His concluding paragraph reads:

In sum, I would characterize *Inspiration and Incarnation* as a very helpful first step toward a more biblical doctrine of inspiration for evangelicals, but I think that Enns' principles need to be carried through more fully. In the end, the "incarnational" model remains too tied to *a priori* notions of God's authorship of scripture for me to sign on fully."

As has been mentioned to you previously, expressed in the terms of this paragraph we would have to rewrite it as follows:

In sum, we would characterize *Inspiration and Incarnation* as a very unhelpful first step away from the biblical doctrine of inspiration, and we think that Enns' principles, if carried through more fully and consistently, will lead to his eventual abandonment of that doctrine. In the end, we fear, as time passes his "incarnational" model will have less and less place for notions of God's authorship of scripture and eventually no place at all for these notions, at least as taught in Scripture. Enns needs to show us positively, from Scripture, why this fear is groundless and will not prove to be true.

3. What is most disconcerting – and now this letter is not only addressed to you – is that when, privately and informally in small groups, some of us have voiced the concerns expressed above to you and some others among our colleagues, as far as we can tell they have simply been dismissed as baseless and without any merit. In talks with you and some others on the faculty we have heard mostly a defense of I&I and positive things said about it. Certainly there appears to be no recognition of any substantial problems with it.

In this regard it seems anything but irrelevant to mention the in-depth evaluations of I&I by D. A. Carson and Greg Beale, the observations of Paul Helm, the report of the special committee to the Mid-Atlantic Presbytery of the OPC concerning I&I and

discussions with you, the lecture of Richard Pratt at a pre-assembly conference for this year's (2006) PCA GA, which implicitly but evidently has I&I in view among other works. All of these make criticisms along the lines of ours above, but, so far as we can see, you (and perhaps others in the faculty?) have rejected these criticisms, certainly those most substantial. This is deeply troubling.

In this regard we should also comment on the endorsements and positive reviews I&I has received, which, as far as we have seen, are for the most part brief and summary. It seems fair to us to say that, in a number of instances at least, you have been given the benefit of doubt on the issue of the divinity/divine origin of Scripture or certain assumptions have been made about its role in your thinking about Scripture – a benefit we have not been able to grant and assumptions we are unable to make, we deeply regret to say, in light of what we have pointed out above.

4. You and some others on faculty continue to plead for dialogue among us. With all that has transpired since the publication of I&I, it seems to us that by now the terms of such dialogue in our midst should be clear. As we continue to wait for the response to the document we presented last spring and now to this précis, it is our hope that you and others will acknowledge, in light of Proverbs 3:5-6, the validity and gravity of our concerns, however better or more adequately they could no doubt have been expressed, and then we begin together to address that acknowledgment. Or, alternatively, we must be brought to acknowledge that these concerns are not only groundless but have led to unnecessary division among us, and then we begin together to address that acknowledgment. Other options may be available to us, nevertheless we are convinced that our concerns must be addressed directly for the integrity and well being of our faculty and so, more importantly, for the good of our students, present and future, and for WTS as an institution.

Yours for our common good and the Lord's continual blessing on WTS,

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|-------------|----------------|
| Bill Edgar  | Scott Oliphint |
| Dick Gaffin | Lane Tipton    |
| Jeff Jue    |                |