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The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture, by William J. Abraham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, 126 pp., \$27.95.

This book, by a 1973 graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary, has a number of features to its credit. Above all of these is its seriousness of purpose. Dr. Abraham wishes to restore evangelical theology to a place of importance in Christian thought which he believes its current theories of inspiration prevent it from taking. Along with this he wishes to make it possible for those who are convinced of the results of higher critical studies to retain a high view of the Scripture's authority in matters of faith and practice. To do these, the author has applied his considerable intellect and training to breaking new ground. He has not been willing merely to defend or criticize the old, but has sought to discover new paths which will lead beyond what he considers to be the present impasse. In all this, he seeks to be very honest about his origins and his concerns; there is no hidden agenda in the book. For all these he deserves warm praise.

The thesis of the book is rather simple and may be covered in four points: 1) all present theories of inerrancy or verbal inspiration are, despite their formulators' earnest claims to the contrary, only another version of the now-repudiated dictation theory; 2) attempts to state a theory of inspiration which will be more reflective of current understandings of the Bible are inadequate because they continue to consider inspiration as a facet of divine speaking; 3) the solution is to consider inspiration as a relational term on the analogy of its most common current usage: the student was inspired by the teacher. Thus the Scriptures are the result of divine inspiration, but that inspiration is not a guarantee of the accuracy of their content. To be sure, it favors that accuracy, especially in regard to the spirit of what is said, but it does not guarantee it; 4) the Scriptures' statements concerning their origin more nearly point to this view of inspiration than to verbal or plenary inspiration.

I approached the book with considerable anticipation. I was hoping for something which would make the orthodox understanding of the

Scriptures' origin clearer and more communicable. Unfortunately that is not the case. The author has abandoned that understanding, while claiming that that abandonment does not significantly alter the understanding that the Bible is (is the result of?) special revelation.¹ Whether he understands the radical nature of his proposal is not clear. However, as he admits, orthodoxy has for 20 centuries directly linked divine speaking and inspiration, largely in an understood, but undeveloped, theory of dictation. While on one hand he claims the fundamentalists could not support their claim of unity with the early church because they departed from dictation, on the other hand he claims they really did not depart! Surely both cannot be correct. But in either case the understanding that inspiration relates to divine speaking is clear. Thus Dr. Abraham, in saying that there is no such relation, has not merely modified the orthodox view, but abandoned it. This raises the question about the hallmarks of evangelicalism to which we will return at the end of this essay.

While many of the individual elements of the book are helpful, it seems to me that there is room for considerable doubt concerning each point in his argument. First of all, as noted above, the fundamentalists cannot have both departed and not departed from the early church's point of view. In fact, I think it may be argued that they remained in essential agreement with the early church while clarifying and correcting its point of view. At the same time it may be admitted that their attempt to lodge infallibility in the autographs becomes a self-defeating step. Understood in their own milieu and in the light of their own purposes, the Scriptures are as infallible today as they ever were.

Second, modern attempts to modify the view of inspiration have not failed because they continue to link inspiration and divine speaking, but because they separate inspiration and revelation, just as Dr. Abraham seems to be doing.² Unless God has disclosed himself in ways which are accessible to the cognitive mind (and how else than through language?), it becomes meaningless to speak of inspiration. A sunset may be inspiring, but it is not profitable for reproof, correction, or instruction in righteousness. There must be reliable cognitive communication. But if it is granted that no reliable, cognitive communication took place in the origination of Scripture, inspiration is very quickly drained of any significance.

That leads directly into the third point: can inspiration be limited to mere relational impact with accuracy of content only a likely

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corollary? Frankly, this is the weakest part of the book. The analyses of the various attempts to frame acceptable theories of inspiration are penetrating and well-argued, although those of the fundamentalists seem to be marked by an often condescending tone. By contrast, Dr. Abraham's presentation of his own theory is much less incisive. He seems content to present and explain his teacher-student analogy, but without the intense kind of argumentation such a radically new theory would seem to require. He does not seem to anticipate his opponents' arguments nor defend his idea against them.³

In fact, to suggest that inspiration can be separated from divine speaking is a radically new idea which needs a great deal of defense. As Barr has pointed out, if the Bible is about anything, it is about divine speaking. Not that alone to be sure, but it *is* about that. If that is so, the first issue is: did He speak? The second issue is: do we know what He said? The third issue is: do we have an accurate record of what He said? The orthodox church has answered all of these with a firm yes. And when it was asked why it affirmed these, its answer was that God had breathed the Scriptures. Whatever "inspire" may mean today is of little relevance to the way it was used in the biblical context.⁴ We are not told that the biblical writers were so inspired by their encounters with God that they wrote their perceptions of His nature. The Bible says God breathed the Scriptures. That does not reduce us to dictation, but it does tell us that God *spoke through* the prophets.

Fourth, Dr. Abraham's treatment of the Scriptures regularly adduced to support verbal inspiration is more satisfying, but somewhat flawed in that whenever the texts would seem to say more than he wishes them to, he concludes that the speaker is merely appealing to the traditional Jewish understanding. It is one thing to say this of an off-handed statement like "Moses says." It is quite another when the very basis of a given appeal is that every part of the Scripture is from God.

Finally, we must address the question of the meaning of "evangelical." It is hardly merely "non-Roman Catholic" as the author suggests it meant in Reformation times. What it meant then, it also meant in the Evangelical Revival in England and to the early fundamentalists. Evangelicalism is about the evangel, the good news of salvation by grace through faith in the atoning efficacy of Christ's death as taught by the Scriptures. Thus, it is no accident that Luther and Wesley were both so committed to the authority of the text as it

stands. They saw what the fundamentalists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw — unless the Scriptures can be taken at face value, there is no evangel. The view that Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection make possible fellowship with God in this life and the next is wholly dependent for its survival upon a Bible whose content stems ultimately from God. Dr. Abraham says this is the counsel of fear. That is not so. It is the counsel of the history of the last century. However devout and godly such men as Robertson Smith and Charles Briggs may have been, it is not their descendants who now people even our liberal pulpits and seminaries. It is those who at least began their pilgrimage as the descendants of Warfield, Steele, Machen, and Orr.

Footnotes

¹I predict that non-evangelicals as well as evangelicals will have a difficult time agreeing to this.

²He indicates he is working on a book on revelation, so we must wait for that before making a final judgment on his view of the relationship.

³At various points, he does argue that opposition to the idea will be the result of inbred conservatism, but he does not argue for the idea as opposed to others sufficiently.

⁴So, that many people today define “love” solely as the emotions associated with biological attraction is no warrant to interpret “love” in that way in the Bible.

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The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire, by L. Wm. Countryman. New York: Mellen Press, 1980, 239 pp.

Dr. Countryman is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School. This paperback volume is part of his doctoral dissertation and is published in the group known as *The Text and Studies in Religion*, this being Volume VII of that series.

The matter of stewardship of time and treasures has always been important in the Christian Church, as indeed in the Israel of the OT. Countryman’s research deals with the problem of wealth on the part

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of Christians. To what extent is it a hindrance or a benefit? After an introductory chapter dealing with wealth and poverty in the Christian communities of Judea he moves to the thought of one who was first to address himself seriously to this subject, Clement of Alexandria. The author then moves to early Christians' attitude toward wealth, the matter of almsgiving and the danger of riches both to the possessor and to the church of which he's a member. The study concludes with a case study of Cyprian of Carthage, who gave away his wealth and became a bishop of the important church at a crucial time in its history.

The author gives careful attention to the NT with its frequent warnings against temptations experienced by the rich and the consolation given to the poor. Jesus' words comforting the poor and warning the rich and urging the rich young ruler to give all that he had to the poor is followed by a survey of the epistles in which almsgiving and the sharing of one's wealth is given high priority. The most problematic is Jesus' statement that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven — a statement that so startled the disciples. Writing about 200 A.D., Clement of Alexandria published a homily entitled "Who Is the Rich Man That Is Saved?" Clement's conclusion is that it is not mandatory for every Christian to divest himself of wealth. The important thing is not how much money he has but the use he makes of it and his attitude toward it. Clement insisted on the importance of relative detachment from wealth and the cultivation of simplicity in lifestyle. This must be coupled with generosity. It was not money itself, but the love of money that was the root of all evil. In spite of the example of the believers in Jerusalem, very few of the early Christian authors advocated a community of goods, nor did they insist that the rich give up their wealth as did Barnabas.

Countryman analyzes the distinction between the Christian concept of wealth and that of the Greeks in the pagan environment. Greco-Roman philanthropy was directed to relatives, fellow citizens, or clients, and the donor expected some compensation in return for his generosity. In contrast the Jewish Christian donor expected to receive his reward from God and in the next life. This distinction is very important in the study of the early Christian stewardship. Studies show that often the rich were a problem in the early church because they tended to dominate the church or they would be nominal Christians without much real discipleship or self-

denial. There often resulted a rivalry between the clergy and the rich people of their congregations. At the same time many churches were dependent on the generosity of its wealthy members. In summary, it was learned that wealth was good if the owner was generous in giving to the poor and to the church without demanding a leadership role. No one was denied membership because he was wealthy, but he was constantly being warned of the hazards of wealth.

The author is very thorough in his study. The book is amply documented and reflects a thorough acquaintance with his sources. Many readers may find repetition and may wonder why the thought could not have been expressed in shorter compass. The relevance of the volume is seen in the affluence of Christian churches, especially in the West. The problem of being affluent and preserving a Christian lifestyle is a problem in every generation and never more so than in recent years. So the book is good both for the antiquarian and also for the earnest Christian of today who wants to be a good steward.

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The NIV Interlinear Hebrew — English Old Testament, edited by John R. Kohlenberger III.

The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament, edited by J.R. Kohlenberger III in four volumes, offers student and scholar a new reference work with a number of interesting features. These finely bound, handsomely printed volumes contain a number of distinctive characteristics which interlinears of the past have not offered. The most important of these include a grammatically literal rendering of each Hebrew word which will aid the reader in discerning not only general meaning but also such matters as pronominal suffixes and verbal inflections. Of lesser importance, but equally helpful to the uninitiated, is an arrangement which allows reading from left to right and thus one does not have to read “backwards.”

Kohlenberger’s *Interlinear* opens with a helpful introduction which, to this writer, may prove as valuable as what follows. He discusses what an interlinear is, what it can do, and what it cannot do. According to the editor, an interlinear does not attempt to make a sensible translation but serves as “a source book for word studies and for the study of Hebrew” (p. ix). Given a knowledge of the Hebrew

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alphabet, students may engage in basic word studies. For those who have had some Hebrew, the grammatically literal text facilitates learning by allowing them to read the text without constant reference to lexicons and grammars. Kohlenberger is quick to point out, however, that his interlinear cannot correct translations, give full expression of the meaning of Hebrew words, nor serve as an independent source of exegesis or interpretation. It would be well for everyone making use of an interlinear (Hebrew or Greek) to read these introductory remarks.

The editor is to be commended for a fair appraisal of the advantages and limitations of an interlinear. There are, however, at least two concerns raised by his remarks in particular and the volumes in general. Even with the disclaimers a word of caution should be voiced in regard to what may be gained from an interlinear in terms of word study. If, for example, words derive their specific nuance from context, then a word for word grammatically literal rendering of words — a major “strength” of these volumes — may prove a hindrance to significant word study. As well, a question is raised in regard to the practicality of these volumes — particularly for the novice in Hebrew. If students must first consult an analytical before a standard lexicon, one wonders if typical readers will be inclined “to go the distance” on the quest for meaning. As Kohlenberger himself suggests, the new interlinear is most helpful to those who already know a fair amount of Hebrew and wish to bolster their ability to read.

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The Book of Joshua (New International Commentary on the Old Testament) by M.H. Woudstra. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 396 pp., \$16.95.

This series of full-length commentaries on the Old Testament, edited by R.K. Harrison, is being produced to match the already published series on the New Testament. Woudstra is Professor of Old Testament Studies at Calvin Theological Seminary and author of several books on the Old Testament.

In the volume an Introduction of fifty pages precedes an exegetical section of over three hundred pages. The four indices deal with subjects, proper names, authors and biblical references. Seven

outline maps are included. Fortunately, for the reader, the publisher placed the footnotes at the bottom of the relevant pages rather than at the end of chapters or at the end of the book.

The volume reflects the author's wide acquaintance with biblical scholarship, especially European sources (Dutch and German). His excellent analytical outline of the book of Joshua is inserted in the text of the commentary. Each section is preceded by a printing of the biblical text and the author's rather liberal translation of the Massoretic Hebrew text.

Woudstra insists that the canonicity of any Bible book is inherent, and self-authenticizing; little account is taken of the historical process in its canonicity (p. 41). The author's central concern is to call attention to the avowed purpose of the book of Joshua which he defines as showing how God's promises to the Patriarchs were fulfilled in the conquest of Canaan; thus the book records the culmination of the Abrahamic covenant.

The reader of the volume will likely be interested to learn not only the contents of the book of Joshua, but also the perspective this commentator brings to his task. This he takes pains to divulge. He is modest about his major assignment, aware of the book's complexities and of the difficulty of solving problems. He is convinced of the Bible's trustworthiness and of its relevance to readers today. He faces the moral problems, such as the genocide of Canaanites, yet is unwilling to characterize this as unchristian or subchristian. In this he seems more cautious than Jesus who contrasted his own gospel with certain elements in the Old Testament (e.g., Matt. 5:12-45; Luke 9:52-56).

Since God is the author of the entire Bible, he affirms, one should not say God changes in his methods. The author appears not to accept the view that some portions of the Old Testament are more revelatory than others (cf. Mark 10:2-9). One senses that when reason and faith are in tension, as with the paradox of divine sovereignty (in miracles) and human responsibility, reason must yield to faith (p. 42). Of interest also is the author's preference of the "German school" and textual studies over the English-American "archaeological schools" with new-found archaeological data. Archaeology makes but little influence on this commentary, despite the author's professed appreciation of its contribution. He finds, for example, little evidence of the influence of Hittite covenants on the covenant-theme in the Bible. He is noncommittal concerning the

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date of the Exodus and conquest but seems to prefer an early date. There seems little evidence that the author has visited these biblical sites — pictorial descriptions might have enhanced the exposition.

Woudstra minimizes the contrast between the books of Joshua and Judges with reference to the completion of the conquest by pointing out passages in the former which indicate some Canaanites still unconquered. The author discounts Bible stories featuring heroes and heroines: instead he stresses the theological message conveyed, as if the two do not harmonize. In this he may be reacting against some contemporary scholarship. The author, as a Calvinist, also stresses monergism and minimizes synergism.

The overall result is a volume distinguished by its commitment to the trustworthiness of this Bible book, its relevance to Christian living, and which succeeds in its attempt to deal responsibly with some in contemporary scholarship.

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An Index to the Revised Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon, Second Edition by F. Wilbur Gingrich & Frederick W. Danker, John R. Alsop (ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981. 525 pp., \$10.95 paperback.

Indexes to All Editions of Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon and Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Maurice A. Robinson (compiler). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981. 89 pp., \$5.95. paperback.

These excellent tools enable students to locate words in three of the classic biblical language lexicons, no matter what the person's knowledge of Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic may be. Alsop's *Index* gives entrance to the revised *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon* based on Bauer's fifth edition. It is a revision and correction of his earlier index to the previous *Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon* (Bauer's fourth revised and augmented edition). Because the index is arranged by biblical text references, the student can easily move from any word in any New Testament text to its treatment in the lexicon. Every Greek word from a given text that is listed in the BAG *Lexicon* is given in Greek type along with a translation, so that the work can be used not only by persons skilled in Greek but also by those with little or no knowledge of the language.

Robinson's work provides the same service for the Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary of the Old Testament as it is treated in the classic Brown-Driver-Briggs *Lexicon* and for the New Testament Greek vocabulary listed in Thayer's *Lexicon*. Both indexes of Robinson are arranged according to the reference number in Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance*, making them also valuable tools for persons with little or no acquaintance with the biblical languages.

Each of these lexicons is a gold-mine of exegetical and bibliographic information. Robinson is to be thanked for drawing attention again to Thayer's excellent work. Persons without the advantage of a familiarity with the biblical languages will find these works especially useful for word study. Students who do know the biblical languages may find the time involved in locating words reduced by these tools. Often a student wishes to know how the lexicographers have treated not just a word in general, but the nuance of the word in a specific reference. The Alsop *Index*, arranged by text, can save an immense amount of time on such a search, since the user is led to the specific quadrant of the page where the citation is found in BAG.

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