DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

I. The Question of Authority

II. The Concept of Revelation

    A. Definition of "Revelation"

    B. General Revelation

        1. Two Senses of "General"

            a.

            b.

        2. Types of General Revelation

            a.

            b.

        3. Functions of General Revelation

            a.

            b.

            c.

           d.

    4. Relation of General Revelation to Arguments for the Existence of God

C. Special Revelation

    1. Sense of "Special"

    2. Types of Special Revelation

        a.

        b.

    3. Scripture

        a. Inspiration

            (1) Extent of Inspiration

                (a)

                (b)

                (c)

            (2) Theories of Inspiration

                (a)

                (b)

            (3) The Apparent Incoherence of Plenary, Verbal, Confluent Inspiration

(a) The Problem: How can inspiration be verbal and plenary and still be confluent?

"In what way inspiration is compatible with that personal agency on the part of its instruments, which the composition of the Bible evidences, we know not; but if any thing is certain, it is this,--that, though the Bible is inspired, and therefore, in one sense, written by God, yet very large portions of it, if not far the greater part of it, are written in as free and unconstrained a manner, and (apparently) with as little consciousness of a supernatural dictation or restraint, on the part of His earthly instruments, as if He had had no share in the work. As God rules the will, yet the will is free,--as He rules the course of the world, yet men conduct it,--so He has inspired the Bible, yet men have written it. Whatever else is true about it, this is true,--that we may speak of the history, or mode of its composition, as truly as of that of other books; we may speak of its writers having an object in view, being influenced by circumstances, being anxious, taking pains, purposely omitting or introducing things, supplying what others had left, or leaving things incomplete. Though the bible be inspired, it has all such characteristics as might attach to a book uninspired,--the characteristics of dialect and style, the distinct effects of times and places, youth and age, or moral and intellectual character; and I insist on this, lest in what I am going to say, I seem to forget (what I do not forget), that in spite of its human form, it has in it the spirit and the mind of God." (John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Scripture proofs of the Doctrines of the Church*, Tracts for the Times 85 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1838), p. 30.)

"The Lutheran doctrine of inspiration presents a paradox. On the one hand it was taught that God is the *auctor primaries* of Scripture, that He determined and provided the thoughts and actual words of Scripture and that no human cooperation concurred *efficienter* in producing Scripture. On the other hand it was maintained that the temperaments (*ingenia*), the research and feelings (*studia*), and the differences in background (*Nationes*) of the inspired writers are all clearly reflected in the Scriptures; that there is nothing docetic about Scripture; that God's spokesmen wrote willingly, consciously, spontaneously, and from the deepest personal spiritual conviction and experience; that psychologically and subjectively (*materialiter et subjective*) they were totally involved in the writing of Scripture. These two salient features of the doctrine of inspiration must be held in tension ....

Now it may seem utterly inconsistent that the Spirit of God could in one and the same action provide the very words of Scripture and accommodate Himself to the linguistic peculiarities and total personality of the individual writer so that these men wrote freely and spontaneously. But this is precisely what took place according to the Biblical evidence and data. And if Scripture does not inform us how both of these facts can be true, we must not do violence to either or try to probe the mystery of inspiration beyond what has been revealed. The Lutheran teachers are well aware that there is a lacuna in their

theology at this point ...; and they are content to retain this logical gap and accept the paradox." (Robert D. Preuss, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. [St. Louis; Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1970]*,* 1: 290-291.)

The classical doctrine of inspiration "purposely declares nothing as to the mode of inspiration. The Reformed Churches admit that this is inscrutable. They content themselves with defining carefully and holding fast the effects of the divine influence, leaving the mode of divine action by which it is brought about draped in mystery."(Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (Oxford University Press, 1931; rep. ed.: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), p. 62).

<center>(b) Biblical Inerrancy and the Problem of Evil</center>

Randall Basinger and David Basinger, "Inerrancy, Dictation and The Free Will Defence," *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 177-180 present the following argument for biblical inerrancy:

1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.

2. Human activities (such as penning a book) can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.

3. God totally controlled what human authors did in fact write.

4. Therefore, the words of the Bible are God's utterances.

5. Whatever God utters is errorless.

6. Therefore, the words of the Bible are errorless.

Basinger and Basinger then argue that the defender of classical inspiration cannot, in view of his endorsement of (2), utilize the Free Will Defense with respect to the problem of evil. Given the reality of human evil and the fact that God cannot be the author of evil, (2) must be false. But then one can argue:

1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.

2'. Human activities (and their products) cannot be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.

7. The doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible entails God's total control of the words of the Bible.

8. Therefore, the doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible is false.

If one persists in affirming the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration, then, since (7) is true virtually by definition, one must deny (1); that is to say, verbal, plenary inspiration implies a dictation theory of inspiration, which is to deny confluence.

<div align="center">(c) Geisler's Response</div>

Norman L. Geisler, "Inerrancy and Free Will: A Reply to the Brothers Basinger," *Evangelical Quarterly* 57 (1985): 347-353 thinks there is a hidden assumption in Basinger and Basinger's reasoning, namely,

> 9. If God can infallibly guarantee what some men will do, then He can do the same for all.

Geisler writes:

> It may have been because only some men freely chose to co-operate with the Spirit so that he could guide them in an errorless way. Or it may have been that the Holy Spirit simply chose to use those men and occasions which he infallibly knew would not produce error. (Geisler, "Inerrancy and Free Will," p.352).

(d) A Middle Knowledge Perspective: God knew which persons under what circumstances would freely write what He intended to be His Word to us.

> "So soon, however, as we seriously endeavor to form for ourselves a clear conception of the precise nature of the Divine action in this "breathing out" of the Scriptures--this "bearing" of the writers of the Scriptures to their appointed goal of the production of a book of Divine trustworthiness and indefectible authority-- we become acutely aware of a more deeply lying and much wider problem, apart from which this one of inspiration, technically so called, cannot be profitably considered. This is the general problem of the origin of the Scriptures and the part of God in all that complex of processes by the interaction of which these books, which we call the sacred Scriptures, with all their peculiarities, and all their qualities of whatever sort, have been brought into being. For, of course, these books were not produced suddenly, by some miraculous act--handed down complete out of heaven, as the phrase goes; but, like all other products of time, are the ultimate effect of many processes cooperating through long periods. There is to be considered, for instance, the preparation of the material which forms the subject-matter of these books: in a sacred history, say, for example, to be narrated; or in a religious experience which may serve as a norm for record; or in a logical elaboration of the contents of revelation which may be placed at the service of God's people; or in the progressive revelation of Divine truth itself, supplying their culminating contents. And there is the preparation of the men to write these books to be considered, a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives, and, indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to

bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them. When "inspiration," technically so called, is superinduced on lines of preparation like these, it takes on quite a different aspect from that which it bears when it is thought of as an isolated action of the Divine Spirit operating out of all relation to historical processes. Representations are sometimes made as if, when God wished to produce sacred books which would incorporate His will-- a series of letters like those of Paul, for example--He was reduced to the necessity of going down to earth and painfully scrutinizing the men He found there, seeking anxiously for the one who, on the whole, promised best for His purpose; and then violently forcing the material He wished expressed through him, against his natural bent, and with as little loss from his recalcitrant characteristics as possible. Of course, nothing of the sort took place. If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters." (Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig with an Intro. by Cornelius Van Til [Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970], pp. 154-155.)

    b. Authority
        (1) Biblical Inerrancy Defined

        (2) Difficulties with Biblical Inerrancy

           (a)

           (b)

        (3) Defense of Biblical Inerrancy

           (a) First Part
             (i)

             (ii)

             (iii)

(b) Second Part

    (i)

    (ii)

    (iii)

(4) Approach to Biblical Difficulties

    (a)

    (b)

(c) Canonicity

    (1) Definition

    (2) Old Testament

    (3) New Testament