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EXAMINING VALIDITY: THE BIBLE AS TEXT OF HISTORY

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EXAMINING VALIDITY: THE BIBLE AS TEXT OF HISTORY

I. INTRODUCTION

Five Points

As a final assignment, students in my Ancient History class write an essay about their initial expectations and their actual experiences in the class. It appears that they benefit most of all from a philosophical exposition which includes, among other things, the following considerations:

- a) The meaning of world view
- b) the relationship between certain key historical perspectives within the field of Biblical studies
- c) the relationship between reigning intellectual notions and the biblical philosophy
- d) the significance of various controversial questions (e.g. the wars of Ancient Israel) for the clarification of a biblical philosophy of history
- e) the role of apparently irrelevant elements (biblical genealogies) in the demonstration of the Bible's historical precision.

It may be important to comment that many scholars do not accept as trustworthy some of the historical data provided in the Bible. Specific evolutionary reasoning provides strong arguments against the historicity of the first eleven chapters of the Bible. These arguments, like those that attempt to demonstrate the mistakenness of the rest of the Biblical text, depend upon particular presuppositions. The following paper therefore proposes an epistemological focus that demonstrates the validity of the historical record of the Bible, with particular reference to the five aforementioned points. Further, it is submitted that any ambiguity on the part of Christian teachers concerning the historicity of the Biblical testimony, will produce, at the very least, confusion, beyond this, disaster, among the students who are victims of our equivocation. Undoubtedly, there is need for a clear definition of the Bible's role in the area of historical information.

Ambiguity or Paradox?

Permit me here to distinguish between ambiguity toward the historicity of the Biblical record, and toward the Bible itself. The Bible itself constitutes history's most paradoxical composition. It is this paradox which lies at the heart of the crisis in Biblical interpretation. Once it is resolved, the question of the validity of the Bible's historical record becomes less problematic. This paper therefore develops in three further stages: It comments first on the nature of the Bible itself, and then on its reportorial credibility. Finally, its summary and conclusions are offered for general academic discussion.

II. EPISTEMOLOGY AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Two Contrasting Points of View

The Biblical View

"Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." Ex 3:6.* The term "hid" is used in the OT both literally and metaphorically. In 2 Kings 11:2 it is used literally to report that they "hid" Joash from the bloodthirsty hand of his grandmother Athaliah. On the other hand, the psalmist's plea (Ps 17:8) calls up the metaphor of hiding under the shadow of divine wings, invoking the image of the hen which hides its chicks under its wings for their protection. (see Mt 23:37, Lc 13:34).

Biblical usage of this verb apparently encompasses real situations, real threats, and real means of protection. Also, assuming the absence of any poetic licence, it is obvious that Moses covered his face out of fear of the consequences of "looking at God." In conclusion, Ex 3:6 records but one of multiple Biblical incidents which disclose a God who communicates with man. As Amos 3:7 testifies: God will do nothing without telling his prophets. But there is more than one point of view on the interaction between God and men.

Another Point of View

"Such a God as Scripture speaks of simply does not exist....In the second place, if such a God did exist he could not manifest Himself in the world that we know....In the third place, even if such a God did reveal Himself....no man could receive such a revelation without falsifying it. In the fourth place, if in spite of these three points a revelation had been received in the past it could not be transmitted to men of the present time without their again falsifying it. In the fifth place, if in spite of everything such a revelation as the Bible speaks of came to man today he in turn could not receive it without falsifying it."1

Comparing the Points of View

The foregoing paragraphs allow for more than one way of viewing the world and interpreting experience. Because of the extent to which such views have been known to diverge, Francis Schaeffer wrote, in the 1960's, that "epistemology is the central problem of our generation."2 In today's world, a wide breach lies open between relativistic contemporaneity and a believing remnant that still subscribes to the authority of absolute truth. It is the very breach identified by Schaeffer, three decades ago, as the real generation gap--the epistemological gap. And it deserves more than philosophical discussion or reflection on philosophical variety. For our attitudes to knowledge and information--those stimuli which reach the human brain through the senses--are what determine the possibilities for creating values systems which will improve human civilization. The question to be discussed is epistemological.

Essential to such a discussion are an individual's presuppositions. The veridicalism of Mark M. Hanna does not gainsay this fact because his universal givens are not universally taken.3 Some mental state antecedent to the rationalization of what Schaeffer calls the particulars, determines how the mind organizes these particulars.4

This mental state, this belief determining function, requires clearer definition than Schaeffer provides in his book *How Should We Then Live?* Schaeffer defines presuppositions as "the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic world view, the grid through which he sees the world."5 Beyond this ultimate mental faculty, as James W. Sire has put it, there is nothing left to do but shout, though what he probably meant was not "shout" but "scream"!6 Elsewhere Schaeffer defines a presupposition as "a belief or theory which is assumed before the next step in logic is developed. Such a prior postulate often consciously or unconsciously affects the way a person subsequently reasons."7

These definitions speak the truth without distinguishing the purposefully logical from the simpleminded, the unreflective, or the irrational. Thomas V. Morris suggests that presuppositions are distinguishable as chosen positions rather than as sometimes deliberate and sometimes accidental. Says Morris, "a presupposition is an idea or concept which is assumed or posited in the manner of the premises of a deductive argument, itself unproven, but the first move toward other proofs which rest upon it."8 Note, in passing, that presuppositions remain unproven.

Howsoever that may be, presuppositions are not simply "initial assumptions,"⁹ but are concepts and propositions.¹⁰ As Hanna himself observes, "presuppositionism emphasizes postulation and coherence,"¹¹ functions of a rational mind. And presuppositions are not to be confused with prejudices. Both may be ubiquitous. But they are distinguishable.

*Defining Prejudices, Predispositions
and Presuppositions*
Prejudices

Prejudices are pre-judgments, notions held before the evidence is provided. They may be defined as unconscious biases, unintellectualized, pre-rational beliefs, assumptions, or allowances. They are not the result of analysis or active choice. They abound. Even among academic communities: This because of the highly compartmentalized nature of modern learning and current higher education. As Huston Smith argues, modern science has made available exceptional 'power-to-control'. This power leads to a craving and striving after the knowledge which brings such power. At the same time it leads to the neglect of any other knowledge.¹² "This utilitarian epistemology has constricted our view of the way things are."¹³ Thus men and women are full of knowledge and full of ignorance. The increase in knowledge affords a corresponding increase in ignorance and simultaneously in prejudice, uninformed judgment on the rest of the world outside the pale of one's own research. And all in pursuit of truth. None of this is the active choice of the man who finds himself learning less rapidly than knowledge becomes available. Prejudice, among lettered and unlettered, is often no more than a dysfunction of multifaceted, multicultural society. There is too much about too much to learn.¹⁴ In the end it would be senseless to deny one's own prejudices since this would merely expose one's own prejudice against prejudice which prevents admission of personal prejudice.¹⁵

Predispositions

Morris also distinguishes between predispositions and presuppositions.¹⁶ Predispositions, unlike prejudices and presuppositions, may be physical as well as social, emotional, or intellectual. Physically, I may be born with a predisposition toward bronchitis—a bodily state which makes me more subject than others to that disease. Predispositions are in the realm of heredity as prejudices are in the realm of environment.

Presuppositions Redefined

We still must find a definition of presuppositions which is suitable for epistemological purposes. For a set of presuppositions should be properly distinguishable from the mores and folkways of environing society, and from the strengths and liabilities of genetic code. This does not deny that parents and neighbors influence presuppositions. But presuppositions find their own definition as *the columns which support the chosen platform from which the individual launches his independent interpretation of data*. They are *the foundation of his "philosophy of fact," the support for the world view which governs his values and, for him, determines possibility*. Presuppositions are *the components of the framework of convictions which establishes and expresses a way of thinking at the point that that framework represents the acceptance of individual responsibility*.¹⁷ The framework or set of elements is called "world view."

The elements form after woman has asked herself the cosmic question, "What is life about?" and has come to conclude "I know." The three day old child does not believe in God.

She is not for this an atheist. The immature mind, before the age of personal accountability, may apprehend stimuli and have experiences, may entertain thoughts and cherish ideas. Such a mind may not be fairly said to have a world view, a set of presuppositions which renders it liable for wrong answers given because of responsible election to think and interpret that way; particularly with regard to the questions of consequence: "Who am I?" "Am I?" "Why am I, if there is a reason?" "How shall I become, if I am not, and may, or ought to?"

Presuppositions are dynamic. They affirm and develop a particular world view. It is here that we may call upon Schaeffer's definition of 'presupposition' as the "grid" through which we see the world, a term he uses as synonymous with "world view."¹⁸ Thus the world view is comprised of a set of presuppositions, which Schaeffer undoubtedly refers to as his "grid." Not everything is visible through a grid. It is not usually designed to improve vision. The sense of the image functions in its similarity to a filter. Everything does not pass through a filter. The dregs are caught while the valued "stuff" passes through--underlining precisely how presuppositions affirm and develop a given world view. In turn, they are affirmed and developed as the mind continues to acquire and organize data. They represent the basic power of choice possessed by every responsible human being. Every intelligence, in the exercise of this power, develops its own character, and determines its own destiny.¹⁹

The fact that the natural world is humanity's common possession points up the truth that individual destiny depends upon individual choice of mind-set.²⁰ It is this same freedom to interpret the data of common fund which yields such divergent views on experience and God as the first paragraphs of this article indicate.

Presuppositions and Biblical Scholarship

Famous NT scholar Rudolf Bultmann has spoken definitively on the question of presuppositions. He maintains that "the one presupposition that cannot be dismissed is the historical method of interrogating the text."²¹ But what does the historical method consist of?

In the first place we must note the difference between Bultmann's use of the term "presupposition" and this study's definition. The historical method is not so much a presupposition as a system of investigation. It is certainly founded upon an entire set of presuppositions, and characterized by its own principles of interpretation. Among its presuppositions that which draws our major focus must be its insistence that "history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect."²² For most of this century this method, better known as the historical-critical method, has included at least three principles:

- 1) *correlation*, in which events are seen to be so inter-related that a change in one phenomenon necessitates a change in its causes and effects;
- 2) *analogy*, in which all events are seen in principle to be similar; and
- 3) *criticism*, the art of interrogating and evaluating.²³

The world view which this system undergirds is clearly naturalistic. Note that not all naturalistic thinkers exclude the possibility of the supernatural. It is simply not allowed to interfere, relegated to the status of the irrelevant. We differ here in some small measure from Sire's definition which portrays naturalism as a belief in the eternity of the cosmos, the cosmos as the prime reality.²⁴ We adjust here to accommodate theistic evolution in which the deity began the evolutionary process but does not interrupt or tamper with its functioning.

The historical-critical method has experienced and survived its fair share of assaults.²⁵ Generally critics seek to refine it instead of abandon its principles and presuppositions. A fourth presupposition, added to the previous three by Peter Stuhlmacher, that of *contingency*, or "consent and hearing", allows that the language of transcendence may have a place in the proper understanding of the message of the text.²⁶

The method's insistence that history is closed to irregular variety, to unique, unrepeatable event, constitutes a negation of the possibility that history might involve the miraculous, supernatural intervention, or the humanly inexplicable. Stuhlmacher's allusions to the relevance of the language of transcendence seek only to understand the text's message. Which differs critically from the recovery of the historical data relating to a given event.

Ernest Troeltsch (1865-1923), father of the historical-critical method, would explain that in modern culture autonomy and rationality hold sway, not ecclesiastical authority with its "norms direct from the deity, and purely exterior Instead of divine infallibility and ecclesiastical intolerance we have, of necessity, human relativism and tolerance."²⁷ Even the acceptance of religious concepts by protestants is based, in the first instance, "upon exclusively personal conviction."²⁸ Thus the Bible, vestige of an ancient world, may no longer enjoy privileged status. It must be dealt with like any other document in the history of human ideas since its existence is analogous to that of any other ancient book.

The Bible, for its part, claims that its existence is due to exceptional, unique, out of the ordinary activity, that in its entirety it is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16). From its first words its narration presumes both the reality and involvement of the supernatural, as well as its authority in world affairs. There would be no world without God (Gen 1:1; Jn 1:3). So that acceptance of the Bible on its own terms remains impossible for those who reject any possibility of supernatural intervention in world affairs, and insist besides upon the similarity of all historical event, such as, for example, the production of ancient books, of which the Bible is but one more. Similarly, acceptance of the historical-critical method, its presuppositions of correlation, analogy, and criticism, its definition of history, and therefore, its own account of same, present considerable difficulty for anyone who attempts to credit the biblical library on its own terms.

Indeed, regardless of the dispersion of claims to supernatural origins, the basic presupposition of the alternative to the historical-critical method is simply that the Bible is unique. Its uniqueness resides in the fact that while a product of human effort and activity, developed, utilized, preserved and transmitted from age to age, from locality to globality by human hand and means, it remains the Word of God, communicated by him, compiled and developed, transmitted and preserved by him, supernaturally, and laid upon the heart of every human being with eternal consequences, whether positive or negative, according to each one's response and application. Thus the paradox of sacred Scripture.

We observe that the critical difference between such belief and the historical-critical method is the all-encompassing transcendence of the Bible. It is neither the admiration of its literature, nor its shared belief in a supreme being. It is respect for the Bible, an ancient compilation of works by some forty different mostly Jewish men, as the voice of God to the universe.

The intrigue of the paradox, and the clarity and solidity of this interpretative position are exposed in the following comments, four of a host of principles which might be drawn from a study of the book *The Great Controversy*, on biblical inspiration:

1) *The Bible is a human work*: ". . . those to whom the truth was . . . revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language." And another complementary principle:

2) *The comparison of biblical authors and works is legitimate*: John is called "the recorder of the most sublime truths of the gospel." Other writers provide less sublime expositions in this area. "Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded." "One writer is more strongly impressed with one phase of the subject; he grasps those points that harmonize with his experience or with his power of perception and appreciation." Nevertheless,

3) *God is the author of the Bible*: "The Bible points to God as its author. . . . The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants." This same mysterious union of divine and human represented by the Bible is seen in Christ--the miracle of the God-man. So that

4) *The Bible's uniqueness is similar to that of Christ*: "The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14).²⁹

The Bible is unique. The position may be paradoxical. But this conviction must be the irreducible ground of all interpretative activity by exponents of the method which functions in contrast to the historical-critical. It has been called the "grammatical-historical method,"³⁰ with Gerhard Hasel once recommending the term "theological-historical method."³¹ Its underlying world view takes into consideration "the totality of experience, even elements like the probability of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or at least honest testimony regarding it, as part of its coherent whole."³²

This intellectual system believes in the supernatural instead of the purely rational because "rational certainty is an impossibility."³³ Since "We perceive things . . . , not as they are, but as we are,"³⁴ the naturalistic perspective requires reality to conform to its expectations that all things be humanly, rationally explicable. Two scholars who, in the same year and from opposing camps, have commented upon the presumption of such an attitude are Brevard Childs and Jack Provonsha. The latter declares it "an almost perverse arrogance,"³⁵ and Childs calls "naive" and "arrogant" the distinction between pre-critical and critical biblical scholarship.³⁶ On the other hand the theistic world view subscribes to a healthy openness as the only appropriate posture.³⁷ It affirms that "prime reality is an infinite-personal God. He alone exists forever. All that is not this God is the creation of this God."³⁸ It no longer surprises, given this mentality, that practitioners of the theological-historical method feel free to accept the paradox of the Bible.

The position of such scholars is that God has testified in history, a testimony incarnate in Jesus of first century AD Nazareth, and reported in the thirty-nine books of OT canon, and the twenty-seven of the NT. This canon this very God has defined from among the revelations of himself which he led men to record. This high view of Scripture admits no demonstrable contradiction either between the life of Christ and the testimony of Scripture, or between the records of Old and New Testaments. Moreover, no contradiction can be conclusively demonstrated between the human authors of the Bible, whether among the varied writings of the various authors, or within any given literary unit of any given author. The method affirms the thoroughgoing consistency of the whole of Scripture with itself and with the witness of the life of

Jesus Christ of Nazareth, for it considers all this to be the production of the eternal and infinite intelligence of the holy three in one God.

As the *SDA Church Manual* declares, "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim 3:16, 17; Ps 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thes 2:13; Heb 4:12).³⁹

Reconciling Estranged Brothers

The incompatibility of the historical-critical and theological-historical methods flows directly from their presuppositions. The Bible, apart from a demythologization which would entirely alter its testimony, is often not accepted as a scientific document. Explanations of this fact rooted in the eighteenth century Enlightenment may give a mistaken impression. For it may then appear that the philosophical problems over the scientific validity of the Bible arose at that time. But the biblical record anticipates by millenniums its own Enlightenment inspired rejection. Whether Athenian on his Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34), or Ephesian clamoring for his Diana (Acts 19:23-41), so long as men repudiate the Bible's uniqueness as God's infallible revelation there will be philosophical difficulties of this nature.

The Ephesians and Athenians represent ancient reactions which illustrate the sure consequences of the rejection of the Bible's unique authority. On the other hand, the critical modern scientist has sometimes found justification for his rejection of the Bible's uniqueness among the very ranks of those who make such a claim for it. When these invoke extraterrestrial evidence to cover inadequate research, then it appears fair to throw out both their inferior work and the fantastic claims of its authors.⁴⁰

The logic works as follows:

Lael Caesar tells lies

Lael Caesar says the Bible is a supernatural book.

That the Bible is a supernatural book is false.

The patent error of such logic leaps to view. But we shall return to discuss it later.

In any case, we may demonstrate that the current breach between acceptance and rejection of the Bible as trustworthy record is linked to certain critical moments in history. It is precisely at this point that we invite the reader's judgment on the contribution of this essay to the body of knowledge on the intersection of epistemological questions and biblical study. Various authors here cited recognize the existence of an epistemological breach between Bible believers and non-believers. The writings of Raúl Kerbs and John V. G. Matthews show awareness of it but no attempt to close it. Schaeffer, on the other hand, seeks some way to seal it up for the benefit of the sceptic.

He bases his effort on the philosophical tension with which the agnostic or atheistic intellectual constantly lives. It is a tension between his theory and practice. Whereas his presuppositions tell modern man that life is a senseless accident, the application of reason to life's activities is inconsistent. The task of the believer in dialogue with such individuals is to expose them to the disjunction between their theory and practice. This forces conscientious sceptics to modify their intellectual position.⁴¹

This essay's approach to secular mentality is founded on imprecisions which its own writings reveal about how biblical historians, scholars of the historical-critical method, came to believe what they believe today. Their convictions are linked, as mentioned before, to certain critical moments in Western world history.

One such moment occurred when Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) argued persuasively for human intellectual autonomy.⁴² Today, after Skinner's behaviorism, this point of view enjoys much lower popular regard, but, ironically, human independence and individualism today identify as a megatrend of the future.⁴³ Interestingly, this independence represents more than anything else the strength of human will, that very element which, according to Aquinas, was corrupted by the fall of Gen 3, while the mind remained uncorrupted.

Two centuries after Aquinas, Lorenzo Valla (1406-57) established the usefulness of documentary criticism as a scientific tool. This he accomplished through his convincing denunciation of a major papal fraud. The papacy having employed the Donation of Constantine to claim secular power, Valla, in 1439, provided a mountain of philological, grammatical, logical, geographical, chronological, historical, and legal evidence to prove the document's fraudulence. John H. Hayes, of the handful of today's most respected biblical historians, cites Valla's accomplishment as one of three Renaissance events of special significance for biblical studies.⁴⁴

Valla's identification of Christian history's principal ecclesiastical power with fraud, laid the foundations which Julius Wellhausen so successfully used in the nineteenth century, to construct his own house against fraud, known since then as the documentary theory. Using the very kinds of arguments, he demonstrated, for the satisfaction of many, that the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, were comprised of four distinct sources known as the Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly, which arose in Judah and Israel in that very order approximately between the eleventh and fifth centuries BC.

The hostility of some biblical historians is clearly linked, and in large part, to their rejection of aberrations of the Christian church during the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, the will of these scholars to distinguish between a powerful but mistaken church, and the separate reality of the biblical documents, remains too often hidden, even trampled by other scholarly commitment. Hayes, commenting on Reformation iconoclasm vis-à-vis tradition, notes that a commitment to the restoration of ecclesiastical purity "created . . . hostility toward the traditions of the church which included the church's attitude toward Scripture."⁴⁵ Among these thinkers, exposure of the flaws of a church which claimed divinely revealed norms, and divinely granted infallibility, constituted exposure of the fraud of divine authority.⁴⁶

The mindset of many a modern biblical historian is therefore characterized more by flaw in critical analysis than by superior perspicacity: The very error exposed in the syllogism upon Lael Caesar's falsifying, an error which, once exposed to light, is demonstrably unacceptable. Not that this was the only misleading avenue some thinkers followed. The disgraceful inconsistency of such greats as Martin Luther surely assisted their cause. Luther, the David who vanquished the giants of his day with a slingful of smooth stones, such as "By Faith Alone," and "Sola Scriptura," at the same denigrated certain portions of the very Scriptures which he was hurling against the enemy. Luther did not believe that the books of James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation, deserved equal treatment with the rest of the NT. According to him, they did not exalt Christ as the others did.

It might be said that the inconsistencies of its own ancient champions, along with that of incompetent modern supporters, has caused problems for the Bible. Ecclesiastical abuses by

Christian authorities has provoked rejection of both the book and its validity. The mistake of not distinguishing between the Bible and the church whose abuses it has always condemned also continues to be problematic. But for those willing to recognize this historical fault, the possibility of a fuller philosophical perspective is still available, as well as a more precise orientation toward history--an orientation which accepts unprejudicially the historically responsible presupposition that the Bible is unique.

In my opinion, the reconciliation here proposed overcomes a multitude of difficulties, resolving thus a series of problems, among them the following:

1) The exclusion of the supernatural from intellectual activity out of need to reasonably delimit the range of possibilities: This suggests, at the very least, a certain mental laziness or recalcitrance which fears lest the search for truth become too long or difficult were we to expand the range of investigation. It may even bear the label of intentional blindness for refusing to admit the admissible simply because it might at first have seemed the unexpected. The scholar, as W. David Beck has said of the university, "must be open to all truth."⁴⁷

2) Insistence upon majority acceptance of a given theory: In the first place, this insistence is impractical, despite its presence in the rhetoric of the Academy. Beyond this, such insistence does not refer to a majority of the planet's inhabitants, but to a group, frequently arbitrarily defined on the basis of some degree acquired. Intellectual conception does not require graduation. Nor does the latter guarantee superior progeny. Nor is acceptance clearly linked to truth once it must be linked to the Academy. Nor can truth easily remain the goal once the satisfaction of the Academy is simultaneously sought. Who can say how much light has been lost to the world by disregard for uncelebrated sources?

3) The perception of ecclesiastical transcendence: Critics who reject the Bible on account of the church's errors continue to serve the dogma that the church is mother of the Bible. They still need liberation from the church which they denounce as tyrannical and abusive. The teaching of biblical uniqueness presumes for the Bible supernatural origins and definition. It does not subscribe to the dogma that human councils or a series of human decisions determined what would be the book's final content. Attempts to criticize biblical uniqueness need, for the very least, to be separate and distinguishable from attempts to expose ecclesiastical abuse.

And, contrary to the fear of some, the acceptance of biblical uniqueness obliges no one to distort reality. The Bible as we know it is not without problems. But these difficulties may be admitted without compromising reason or attacking the sacred book. They may be problems of translation, transcription, transmission, or personal interpretation. The carefulness of scribes, or the physical condition of available manuscripts, or the precision of a given translation, the distance between the authors and their peoples and the translators of today, or our own intellectual limitations, any or all of these may be justifiably invoked as an explanation of the difficulties without undermining the Bible's claim to uniqueness. It is more responsible to criticize these areas than to say that the Bible was wrong.

Besides, a recognition of the Bible's uniqueness does not require us to read it as a twentieth century text. Belief in its accuracy should not obligate the book to conform to some modern pattern of expression, choice of themes, organization of data, or source documentation. Stating that the Bible is not a scientific text or historical treatise might well reflect the presupposition that all texts of history or science, through all the ages and variations of human culture have required a format which the scholarship of the Western world of the twentieth century is authorized to define. Such monumental responsibility, such patent absurdity attracts no

one, and, in the best of providence or good fortune, is not required of anyone. Far better to let the Bible speak so that its own testimony may confirm or confound its affirmations and declarations.

III. HISTORICAL AUTHORITY

The Bible as Ancient History Text

Accepting the Bible as true in its account of history involves of course the acceptance of the Bible's philosophy of what and how is history. The data is presented in accordance with authorial philosophy. And the Bible makes clear distinction between the intentions which inform its writing and those of the rejectors of its authority. The biblical intention is to declare the greatness and wonder of the omnipotent God, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and all they contain, loving Sustainer of the universe, "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Ex 34:6). It calls man to accept his exalted origins (Gen 1:26, 27), admit his sinfulness (Ro 3:23), accept the free gift of eternal salvation from the curse of sin, (Ro 6:23; Mt 1:21; Jn 3:16), and glory in God for all that he is (Jer 9:23, 24; Rev 14:6, 7).

The contrasting philosophy, with its exaltation of human autonomy, receives fierce denunciation in the Bible's pages, which expose the awful consequences of pursuing such an option (Ro 1:18-32; Rev 21:8). The grand impediment to acceptance of the Bible's philosophy may well be the challenge of its affirmation that man is by nature more corrupt than he himself knows (Jer 17:9), and that except he surrenders to divinely provided salvation which originates outside of and beyond himself, his proud independence will take him to disaster. Thus the observation that many a practitioner of the naturalistic philosophy does not accept God, because doing this discredits their theories and separates them from their earthly idols.⁴⁸

Teaching the Biblical Philosophy

The significance of the preceding paragraphs lies in their implication that the use of the Bible as history textbook, and its philosophy as guide, provide instruction quite distinct from that which is imparted by naturalistic philosophy. Providence takes the place of luck, vices are not overlooked as the idiosyncracies of the great, and all glory goes to God. Instead of portraits of ambitious men, kind and generous in public, and implacably vicious in private, students contemplate "the noble actions of noble men, examples of private virtue and public honor, lessons of godliness and purity."⁴⁹

Biblical Philosophy and War: A Modern Example

In her account of the American Civil War Elen G. White provides dramatic illustration of what is meant by the biblical philosophy of history: To God be the glory! She details how the God of justice intervened to prolong the war between the North and South so that it might become the fulcrum for release of the slaves. On one occasion (the battle of Manassas, Virginia), the Northern army was rushing forward in anticipation of a great victory when "just then an angel descended and waved his hand backward. Instantly there was confusion in the ranks. It appeared to the Northern men as if their troops were retreating, when it was not so in reality, and a precipitate retreat commenced. This seemed wonderful to me."⁵⁰

Applied to the Ancient Past

Divine intervention for the sake of the slaves well exemplifies the grand biblical fact that underlies all discussion based upon the Bible's uniqueness. The Bible insists that the first thing knowable about God, without which it is obvious that one does not know him, is that God is love (1 Jn 4:8). A literal reading of the Greek of 1 Jn 4:19 informs us that "we love because he loved us first." Our entire capacity to love comes from the outpouring of divine love upon us. It is this recognition that must inform all study of the question of ancient Israel's wars, authorized by God, particularly during the period of the theocracy before their open rejection of his sovereignty (1 Sam 8:7, 8; 10:17-19, etc.). The love which punished America with war is the same which punished the pagans with war, for their refusal of the offer of pardon and peace.

Before undertaking campaigns, the invading Israelites were advised: "When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. And . . . if it agrees to make peace with you . . . all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. However, if it does not make peace . . . then you shall besiege it" (Deut 20:10-12). Thus death was not necessarily the predetermined destiny of Palestine's pre-Israelite inhabitants. God, who is love, finds no pleasure in the death of even his enemies. He offers peace and makes himself responsible for the consequences of rebellion. He takes the death which we deserve as sinners so that we might live with him the more abundant life.

Biblical Precision: An Example

The Bible's trustworthiness is no less certain in the field of data than it is in general principles and spiritual analysis. The example of supernatural intervention which functioned to reprove the greed and corruption both of North and South may be repeated dozens of times in the biblical record. The Exodus, the history of Gideon, the destruction of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in Hezekiah's day, are three of many examples. And supernatural intervention not only served for protection of God's ancient people, but also in the preservation of the ancient record, so that its reliability might bear witness today. Both individual events and biblical record are objects of divine care.

The best way of demonstrating the historical precision of the Bible may well be through a study of one of the many genealogies which form part of the book. This is so because genealogies have been the object of much mockery, taken as classic proof of the fictitious nature of the Bible in the area of history. We choose a case from the Pentateuch: Ex 6:14-27. This list of names offers systematic but not equal information on Jacob's first three sons. Verse 14 is dedicated to Reuben, and v. 15 to Simeon, but vv. 16-27 focus on the lineage of the various sons of Levi. Apart from this disequilibrium between Levi and the rest we may note other irregularities:

- 1) Despite the well known fact that Hebrew genealogies have little regard for woman's existence Ex 6, exceptionally, mentions four within fourteen verses, the first of these a nameless Canaanite, mother of Saul, Simeon's last son. Why the reference?
- 2) Reuben's and Simeon's grandchildren remain unnamed. Why name Levi's?
- 3) Why mention the people Amram, Aaron, and Eleazar get married to, but not other spouses?
- 4) Of Izhar's three sons (Korah, Nepheg, Zichri, v.21), only Korah's sons are mentioned (v. 24). Why?
- 5) And why is there further commentary on only one, the third, of the four men identified as Aaron's sons (v. 25)?

The responses to these five questions reveal that far from being a matter of scissors and paste, as some scholars have claimed, the Pentateuch is an inseparably interwoven unit, displaying a consciousness of cultural practice across long spans of the time it encompasses; more than this, Israel's subsequent history supplies ample reflection of Pentateuchal consistency.

Answer 1) In Gen 24:1-4 Abraham instructs his servant to go seek a wife for his son Isaac. "I will make you swear by the Lord," Abraham warns, ". . . that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live . . ." Later, in Gen 26:34, 35, Esau's marriage to Canaanite wives embitters the soul of his parents Isaac and Rebekah. His action facilitates Rebekah's ruse to save Jacob from his brother's rage when Esau swears murderous revenge for Jacob's trickery which deprives him of the birthright. Rebekah simply asks Isaac to ensure that Jacob does not marry a Canaanite. Whereupon Isaac blesses and charges him to travel to Paddan-aram to seek his spouse (Gen 27:46-28:2). The first of these incidents which takes place during the second half of the nineteenth century B.C., antedates the times of the Exodus by four hundred years. The brief reference in Ex 6:15, written in the second half of the fifteenth century B.C., with its apparently uncomplimentary tone, seems to reflect the consistency of practice among Abraham's descendants through the centuries with regard to Canaanite intermarriage. It also suggests the faithfulness with which divine instructions on this point were communicated from generation to generation.

Answer 2) Levi's privileged sons: In Num 3:22-26 and 4:22-28, the author outlines the duties of the descendants of Gershon, Levi's first son, in the Israelite cult. So also with the sons of Kohath (Num 3:27-32; 4:4-15), and Merari (3:33-37; 4:29-33). These three sons of Levi came to occupy a position of such significance in national history as ancestors of cultic orders, that their mention in the genealogy of Ex 6 is hardly surprising. They are, besides, first cousins of Moses. The genealogy is, after all, the genealogy of Moses and Aaron (vv. 26, 27). For their public significance, therefore, as also for their familial closeness to the book's author, these men receive more special treatment than other cousins. Genealogies may even provide clues to the text's authorship.

Answer 3) We have already hinted at a reason for the mention of Amram's, Aaron's, and Eleazar's wives. They are the mother, sister-in-law, and niece-in-law of Moses, the book's author. But there is more. Jochebed, his mother, attracts attention for being her husband's aunt, a type of union noteworthy for being later forbidden (Lev 18:13). As for Aaron's wife, we are given her name--Elizabeth, her father's name--Amminadab, and her brother's name--Nahshon (v. 23). Why all the fuss? Why? Because genealogies, as with Gershon and his brothers, highlight social category. The Aaron--Elizabeth connection constituted one of the most dramatic concentrations of power in Israelite society of its time. For Aaron, named high priest, joined himself in marriage with the prince of the most powerful of Israel's tribes. Num 1:1-4, 7; 2:1-3, 9, show us that Nahshon, son of Amminadab, prince of Judah, tribe of the political birthright, directed the mightiest division of Israel's army. When the nation sallied forth in military rank from the foot of Mt. Sinai after a year's encampment, it was Nahshon, son of Amminadab, brother of Elizabeth, and brother-in-law of Aaron, who headed the march of millions (Num 10:14). For no less a reason do all these find mention.

Answer 4) This case provides a most persuasive illustration of the carefulness of biblical history. Of the sons of Izhar (v. 21), only Korah receives later attention. Undoubtedly, this man Korah made a significant impression upon Moses. He was a man of outstanding gifts. This is the witness of the rebellion he helped to stir up against Moses and Aaron, a rebellion headed by 250

princes of the congregation, men of renown (Num 16:1, 2). Over these 250 were four intellectual authors of the crime, with Korah named first among them. He was a man of impact. God's rage against him did not stop the congregation from crying out against Moses, after his destruction, "You . . . have caused the death of the Lord's people!" (Num 16:41).

But what of his sons? Korah's sons apparently inherited much of his intellectual powers and his strength of will. These powers they chose to dedicate to the service of God rather than of human pride. So that when the earth open its bowels to swallow Dathan, Abiram, their wives, children, little ones, Korah their father, and all his men and the belongings of all of these (Num 16:27, 32, 33), Korah's sons stayed clear of the disgraceful scandal. The record is specific. It mentions the sons of Dathan and Abiram, but not of Korah. Elsewhere it clears all possibility of doubt on the matter as it affirms "but the sons of Korah did not die" (Num 26:11).

Subsequent history reveals that 500 years later, the descendants of these sons of Korah established a line of musicians in the temple of the Lord (1 Cron 6:31, 32, 37); they became composers of renown whose contributions are identified and immortalized in the hymnody of the second part of the third book of the Psalms, as attested by the headings of these poems (Pss. 84, 85, 87, 88, 89). Striking it is that from Moses' day, these sons of Korah should have been distinguishable from the rest.

Answer 5) Our fifth response is perhaps the simplest. The genealogy only comments further on Aaron's third son because the first two squandered their right to the priesthood, making Eleazar inheritor of a position which would have been Nadab's, and Abihu's in his absence (Lev 10:1, 2; Num 20:23-28; 26:1; 27:1, 2, etc.). We did not formulate a question about Eleazar's son Phineas. But it is worth our while to reflect on his presence in the list and relate it to an act of holy indignation against open immorality of which Moses was eyewitness. For his zeal God established with him a permanent covenant of peace and a perpetual priesthood, "because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the sons of Israel" (Num 25:12, 13).

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this essay we set ourselves several tasks, among them 1) to describe an epistemological focus which would demonstrate the validity of the biblical historical record; 2) to explain the meaning of "world view"; and 3) to clarify the relationship between naturalistic thought and the Word of God.

In summary we have seen that the antipathy between the naturalistic thinker and the believer in biblical uniqueness is founded on the former's unwillingness to employ the supernatural as an explanation of historical events. We have also offered certain reasons why this is so. We suggest that it is so because it promises an intellectual independence for which the human being longs; because earthly sovereigns of spiritual kingdoms have set a bad example by abuse of power; because of the intellectually flawed support we sometimes offer the Bible; because of inconsistency in the positions of some champions of biblical authority; but more than all else, because the dogma of the church's transcendence indicates that once the church is found to be wrong, the Bible, its servant, is automatically condemned.

Instead of accepting as irreconcilable the believing and the critical mind, we have sought to demonstrate how inappropriate circumscription of the field of the search for truth, a form of intellectual cowardice or stagnation, might be avoided. We exposed the error in the syllogism which rejects everything that comes from a mistaken source. More than this, we have insisted that the church as source of the Bible is an unacceptable premise. And we have provided

examples of the ethical benefits of a biblical philosophy of history by applying it to the question of war. Finally, we commented on the detailed precision of one Israelite genealogy, to thus support claims to the trustworthiness of the book that selection represents.

The scope which the biblical text permits those who delve into it in their search for truth, the ethical superiority of the philosophy it propounds, and its ability to withstand the most painstaking tests of the accuracy of its data, these and more inspire my personal confidence. If I were asked the question, "Should the Bible Be Used as a Textbook of History?" my reply, emphatic, salvific, and assured, would resound: "There is none better!"

NOTES

* Except otherwise indicated, Bible texts quoted are from the NASB.

1 Cornelius van Til, The Defense of the Faith (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1955), p. 160. See also Mark M. Hanna's seven point outline in Crucial Questions in Apologetics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 21.

2 Francis Schaeffer, He is There and He Is not Silent (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1972), p. 37.

3 Hanna, *ibid.*, p. 103, considers God as a universal given, and the Christian corpus as a special given, along with universal epistemological and ontological givens. Nicholas Wolterstorff, Reason Within the Bounds of Religion, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 66, has pointed out that personal *decision*, (emphasis his) rather than obviosity, is what defines even one's principal beliefs.

4 Francis A Schaeffer, Escape from Reason (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968), p. 17, employs the term "particulars" to identify the elements of nature as distinct from "universals" or elements of grace, the two dimensions of Neoplatonism.

5 Idem., How Should We Then Live? (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), p. 19.

6 James W. Sire, Discipleship of the Mind (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), pp. 36, 37.

7 Francis A. Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968), p. 179.

8 Thomas V. Morris, Frank Schaeffer's Apologetics: A Critique (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 17-18.

9 Hanna, *ibid.*, p. 93.

10 Jacques Macquet, "An African World View," in Culture Shock: A Reader in Modern Cultural Anthropology, Phillip K. Bock, ed.; (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 340.

11 Hanna, *ibid.*, p. 93.

12 Huston Smith, Beyond the Post-Modern Mind (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 83.

13 *Ibid.*

14 See Bock, *ibid.*, p. ix.

15 Hans-Georg Gadamer has said that such a denial would be no more than a new prejudice. See Verdad y método. fundamentos de una hermenéutica filosófica (Salamanca: Sigueme, 1977), pp; 339, 343, quoted in Raúl Kerbs, "Obseervaciones epistemológicas e históricas preliminares sobre la relación fe-razón desde una perspectiva cristiana adventista," in Enfoques 6 (January, 1994), pp. 38-48, p. 40.

16 Morris, *ibid.*, p. 83.

17 This definition owes something to Robert L. Reymond, The Justification of Knowledge: An Introductory Study in Christian Apologetic Methodology (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), p. 71; Reymond notes that the disagreement between believer and unbeliever over "biblical facts" is not a discussion about facts. In fact, the unbeliever is thus identifiable for refusing to believe in the Bible as a reliable source of facts.

18 Schaeffer, How Should We Then Live?, p. 19. Wolterstorff, *ibid.*, p. 70, calls presuppositions "*control* beliefs" (emphasis his).

19 See Ellen G. White, Education (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), pp. 17, 23.

20 Idem, Christ's Object Lessons (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1900), p. 56.

21 Rudolf Bultmann, Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), pp. 290-91.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 291.

- 23 For fuller discussion and definition of these principles, see Gerhard F. Hasel, Biblical Interpretation Today (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), pp. 73-78.
- 24 Sire, *ibid.*, ch. 3: "The Final Reality: The Beginning that Has no Beginning," pp. 35-51, pp. 43, 39.
- 25 See Gerhard Maier, The End of the Historical-Critical Method, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz & Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1977), ; O. C. Edwards, jr., "Historical-Critical Method's Failure of Nerve and a Prescription for a Tonic: A Review of Some Recent Literature, Anglican Theological Review 59 (1977) 115-34; James Robinson, "The Dismantling and Reassembling of the Categories of NT Scholarship," Interpretation 25 (1971) 63-77; Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).
- 26 Hasel, *ibid.*, p. 80.
- 27 Ernst Troeltsch, El protestantismo y el mundo moderno, summaries by Fondo de Cultura Económica, #51 (Mexico, 1967), pp. 16, 17.
- 28 *ibid.*
- 29 Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1971), "Introduction," *passim*. Biblical conservatives, practitioners of this method, hold notably differing views on the significance of White's testimony. That question stands outside the compass of this essay.
- 30 Hasel, *ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.
- 31 Gerhard Hasel, "Method in the Interpretation of the Bible" (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1983), ch. 3.
- 32 Jack W. Provonsha, God Is With Us (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1974), p. 25.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 22
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 36 Childs, *ibid.*, p. x.
- 37 See again Provonsha, *ibid.*
- 38 Sire, *ibid.*, p. 39.
- 39 Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, (General Conference of SDA, rev. 1990), p. 23.
- 40 See John V. G. Matthews, "An Historicist-Prophetic Framework for the Study of Church History in Tertiary Education," in Christ in the Classroom 10, (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Education, General Conference of SDA, 1993), pp. 311-30; p. 314.
- 41 Schaeffer, The God Who Is There, pp. 126-30.
- 42 For analysis of the sinister consequences of this argument, see Schaeffer, Escape from Reason, pp. 11, 12.
- 43 John Naisbitt, & Patricia Aburdeen, Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990's (New York: William Morrow, 1990), ch. 11.
- 44 John H. Hayes, Introduction to OT Study (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), pp. 100-101. The others are 1) "a true sense of anachronism" as a means of understanding ancient texts, by situating them within their appropriate time and space; and 2) an emphasis on grammatical analysis of the Bible (pp. 100-103).
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 46 See again, Troeltsch, *ibid.*

47 W. David Beck, "Introduction: Designing a Christian University," in Opening the American Mind, ed. W. David Beck, foreword by Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), pp. 9-23, pp. 16, 23.

48 See E. M. Cadwallader, Filosofía básica de la educación adventista, trans., ed., Centro de Investigación White (Argentina: Universidad Adventista del Plata, 1993), p. 13, the fifth of ten philosophical principles Cadwallader has extracted from White's writings. It may be worthwhile to mention the other nine: 1) There are false and true philosophies; 2) philosophers produce ignorance, fear, and desperation by seeking to satisfy the soul without appeal to God; 3) false philosophy teaches salvation without Christ, and chance without providence; 4) true philosophy is that of Christ and the Bible; 6) the true must not be replaced by the false philosophy; 7) schools are needed which teach the true philosophy; 8) we ought not to establish colleges dedicated to propagation of the false philosophy; 9) the false philosophy is making sceptics of thousands of youth; 10) the false philosophy fascinates and deceives thousands of youth who see in it the prospect of independence.

49 White, La Educación cristiana (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1975), p. 230. The entire chapter "El Valor del estudio de la Biblia," pp. 222-28, should be studied in this context. Available in English as "The Value of Bible Study," Fundamentals of Christian Education (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923), pp. 123-28.

50 Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:267. Louis B. Reynolds, We Have Tomorrow (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1984), pp. 31-40, also discusses God's intervention in this war. Reynolds concludes that other incomprehensible events of the time become less disconcerting as it is realized that this was no mere human confrontation between Northern and Southern soldiers.