

## RESPONSE TO G. K. BEALE'S REVIEW ARTICLE OF *INSPIRATION AND INCARNATION*

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I would like to thank *JETS* for inviting me to respond to Prof. Greg Beale's review of my book, *Inspiration and Incarnation*.<sup>1</sup> Although the review is almost entirely critical of the book, I appreciate Prof. Beale's attempt to present its contents in as thorough and objective a manner as possible. Criticism and response are important components of continued progress in evangelical theology, and Beale's review can serve as a basis for such progress. However, the disagreements I have with the review are many and thoroughgoing. I will first address some preliminary but vital issues, and then move to a few areas of substantive disagreement.

I will begin by reiterating the book's aim and target audience. It is important to do this, for Beale does not give these matters due consideration. This persistently yields a reading of my book that is at odds not only with my stated intention but also with the implicit and explicit genre indicators of the book.<sup>2</sup> I appreciate the fact that Beale cites me at length on more than one occasion in an effort to allow me to speak for myself. But if a critique is founded on a faulty reading strategy, citations, no matter how lengthy, will not contribute to bringing clarity to an author's intention. Conversely, real and important differences—or at least areas of needed discussion—might become obscured.

Plainly put, *Inspiration and Incarnation* is neither an academic treatise nor a systematic theology nor an introduction to Scripture. Rather, its aim is to reach a lay evangelical audience for which the human element of Scripture (to use Warfield's term)<sup>3</sup> presents an obstacle to confessing that the Bible is

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<sup>1</sup> Per *JETS* policy in case of review articles, the author of the original book was invited to provide a response.—The editor.

<sup>2</sup> Reviewers bearing these factors in mind have been much more appreciative of my efforts. See, e.g., Tremper Longman III, *Modern Reformation* (Nov./Dec. 2005) 33–34; M. Eschelbach, *JETS* 48 (2005) 811–12; Susan Wise Bauer, "Messy Revelation," *Books and Culture* (May/June 2006) 8–9; M. Daniel Carroll R., *Denver Journal* 9 (2006), <http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2005/0100/0108.php>.

<sup>3</sup> In discussing his notion of "concursum," Warfield writes, "On this conception, therefore, for the first time full justice is done to both elements of Scripture [human and divine]. Neither is denied because the other is recognized. And neither is limited to certain portions of Scripture so that place may be made for the other nor is either allowed to encroach upon the other. As full justice is done to the human element as is done by those who deny that there is any divine element in the Bible, for of every word in the Bible, it is asserted that it has been conceived in a human mind and written

God's Word. Such a scenario is not restricted to graduate students, nor even to college students taking Bible courses in secular and hostile settings. In many popular contexts, whether it be Time, Newsweek, PBS, or the History Channel, the latest "important discovery" is touted as "Exhibit A" for how the Bible is not the Word of God.<sup>4</sup>

My primary audience, therefore, is evangelical (and therefore already exposed to Scripture and shaped by evangelical doctrine) and non-academic (and therefore ill-equipped to handle confidently the data to which they have been exposed). And the book's purpose is specifically apologetic, that is, intended to help the faithful deal with threats to their faith. These factors should guide any evaluation of the book, and they are repeatedly stated (e.g. pp. 9, 13, 168). Furthermore, not only is the book's aim announced explicitly, but its popular focus is implied throughout the book, as indicated by the absence of footnotes, annotated bibliographies at the end of each chapter, and a glossary of terms at the end.

The fact that my aim is evangelical, non-academic, and apologetic accounts for the rhetorical strategy I adopt throughout the book, which is to lay out a few examples of things that are universally accepted as demonstrations of the human situatedness of Scripture—the very thing that is causing readers problems—and to present these examples unapologetically, in as stark and uncompromising a manner as that of hostile commentators, be it in a book, on cable TV, or in a classroom. As part of this apologetic, it is crucial that the non-scholarly reader understand that nothing in principle has been withheld; no data has been covered over as too damaging or problematic for consideration; no special pleading has been employed against the data themselves, because these data have positive value in helping us understand how Scripture—by God's design—bears perfect witness to the wisdom and glory of God.

To present the matter this way is to attempt to pull the rug out from under the perceived strength of the opposing argument, that for the Bible to be God's word it cannot *possibly* look the way it does. Certainly, one can judge whether my book achieves this goal, or whether it could have been achieved better. It could be said that the book's rhetorical strategy could be set up differently, and readers could be reminded of it more often. But such comments would have yielded a very different critique of the book than the one Beale provides.

It is true that, in seeking to help my target audience develop a more robust estimation of Scripture in view of challenges, it was my hope that my peers would join me in that effort, and so it is appropriate for Beale to flag

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by a human hand. As full justice is done to the divine element as is done by those who deny that there is any human element in the Bible, for of every word in the Bible it is asserted that it is inspired by God, and has been written under the direct and immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit" (B. B. Warfield, "The Divine and Human in the Bible," in *Evolution, Scripture, and Science: Selected Writings* [ed. M. A. Noll and D. N. Livingstone; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000] 57 [1894]).

<sup>4</sup> One recent example that comes to mind is the bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code*.

various topics for further, high-level discussion. To that extent he has correctly discerned what sympathetic readers have also discerned, that in addition to the primary purpose, there is a secondary purpose as well: to foster further theological discussion among evangelical scholars regarding the implications of the human element of Scripture for how we think about our Bibles, and for how we are equipping our students to do the same.

This is what I am trying to accomplish in the book. It is not always clear whether Beale misunderstands the purpose of the book<sup>5</sup> or whether he critiques what he considers flaws in my actual arguments. Whatever the case, Beale seems to read the book alternatively as a failed academic treatise, an ambiguous systematic theology, or a dangerous introduction to Scripture. None of these descriptions is valid, but they form Beale's starting point, which leads him to draw unwarranted conclusions. Some of these reveal theological, methodological, and epistemological<sup>6</sup> differences between us, while others are of a more general nature and stem from Beale's mistaken reading of the book.

I will first outline two of the latter concerns and then return to the former. First, what is perhaps the most nettlesome of Beale's charges is his view that I am dismissive of the work of other evangelical scholars. In the light of the book's announced purpose and audience, surely this type of criticism is unfair. Beale apparently expected a very different kind of book, with detailed citations, interaction with alternate proposals, and nuancing the complex ANE, Second Temple, and biblical data. Of course, such a book could have been written, but my failure to meet these expectations is not an indication of sloppy thinking or a dismissive posture toward others but an attempt to write a book that is accessible to a non-scholarly audience. When one popularizes, one necessarily simplifies. Lay readers do not need to be brought up to academic speed; they need to be reassured that, regardless of diverse viewpoints, the Bible is still the word of God.

Hence, my rhetorical approach should not be understood as dismissive of the work of others, nor do I feel that I alone am equipped to lead evangelicalism forward. This point is not only implicit in the annotated bibliographies, but stated plainly in the second paragraph of the book: "Although it is not always made explicit, in working through these issues I lean heavily on the work of many scholars, some of whom are listed in the 'Further Reading' sections at the end of each chapter" (p. 9).<sup>7</sup> In fact, I am advocating that

<sup>5</sup> On a few occasions Beale recognizes my primary aim ("The book is designed more for the lay person than the scholar but is apparently written with the latter secondarily in mind"), but this recognition does not sufficiently enter into his evaluation. A brief response should also be made to Beale's reference to the fact that Baker Academic gave a copy of my book to the attendees of the IBR meeting in Philadelphia last November. Rather than indicate a primary academic audience, Baker's IBR give-away was done in the hope that IBR members would consider adopting the book for classroom use.

<sup>6</sup> As I reflect on Beale's objections to my book, at least some of our differences can be attributed to my Reformed, specifically presuppositional, theological and epistemological starting point. This issue cannot be engaged here, but it will be reflected in my comments throughout.

<sup>7</sup> With respect to specific charges of dismissiveness, two examples will suffice. First is the matter of the "moveable well" tradition in 1 Cor 10:4. It is certainly my scholarly opinion that

evangelical scholars continue their excellent work in studying Scripture in its varying historical contexts, and bringing to the foreground the vitality—indeed, the theological and practical payoff—of reading the Bible in context. But I also believe that evangelical biblical scholars need to work harder at presenting the grand picture of what God has done in and through the Bible for the benefit of the thinking lay reader. Providing persuasive comprehensive models for explaining why the Bible looks the way it does, and then drawing implications from that model for how we should think about Scripture, is precisely what unbelieving scholarship has done so effectively, and why it can present such challenges for evangelical readers. For the benefit of the church, we should endeavor to be very intentional in carrying further such a theological project.

By advocating new models, I do not mean to imply that previous evangelical articulations of the doctrine of Scripture are somehow unaware of the divine-human elements, nor that my book is a clarion call to abandon our evangelical heritage. I want us to build on that heritage. Yet because of developments in our understanding of the historical setting of Scripture, the stakes have been raised for evangelicals since the nineteenth century, and these developments continue to pose challenges to evangelical doctrine. This is the case not because of the divine-human elements in Scripture in principle, but because of specific historical issues surfacing in the study of Scripture.

Second, because of the nature of the book there are things I leave unstated. Perhaps most importantly, in view of the necessary corrective focus on the human element of Scripture, I have chosen not to set out a fuller exposition of its divine element. Of course, this is not where the target audience has a problem. My readers are evangelicals, and so I assume they already believe that the Bible is God's Word, a belief I also affirm at the outset of the book.<sup>8</sup> By accenting the human element the way I do, I am in no way

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Paul's comment here speaks "beyond a reasonable doubt" to his participation in a broad Second Temple interpretive tradition of a miraculous, moving supply of water during the forty-year wilderness wandering of the Israelites. But to state one's conclusions decisively is not to be dismissive (especially where I am not the only scholar that holds such a view), nor is it in any tension with my "ethics of hermeneutics," as Beale calls it, by which I conclude my book. My academic and popular writings bear witness to the fact that I find no tension between pointed debate and respect for others' opinions. Rather, the concluding section of the book was a brief attempt to counter a witch-hunt mentality. Second is the matter of the temple cleansing. On p. 65, I state "it is a distortion of the highest order to argue that Jesus *must have* cleansed the temple twice." Beale takes this to mean that anyone who thinks Jesus cleansed the temple twice is, in my opinion, distorting Scripture. I do not say this and I do not mean this. Rather, it is indeed a distortion of Scripture to insist, *in order to protect a high view of Scripture*, that because the temple cleansing is mentioned as having happened at two different junctures in Jesus' ministry, it *must have* happened twice. As the context of that entire chapter should have made clear, I am criticizing cheap harmonization.

<sup>8</sup> "I am very eager to affirm that many evangelical instincts are correct and should be maintained, for example, the conviction that the Bible is ultimately from God and that it is a gift from God to the church. Any theories concerning Scripture that do not arise from these fundamental instincts are unacceptable" (pp. 13–14).

signaling a denial of the foundational, primary role of the divine element,<sup>9</sup> but encouraging readers to see—precisely because the Bible is from God—that every bit of it, no matter how challenging or troublesome, is precisely what God wanted us to have and perfectly formed to do what God has designed it to do. Rather than calling this basic conviction into question, it is this very conviction that forms the book’s foundational theological presupposition. Because the pressure point for some readers is in how the human element of Scripture can co-exist with their own commitment to the Bible’s ultimate and primary divine point of origin, I want them to be able to make the same confession. In retrospect, in view of reactions such as Beale’s, I would make a greater effort to make this point clear so as to obviate misunderstandings, but the reiteration of this fundamental posture at every potentially troublesome portion of the book would have worn thin rather quickly.

There are also a number of areas of disagreement between us that are of a more theological, methodological, and epistemological nature. Although at times heavy rhetoric makes it more difficult to discern the actual substance of these disagreements,<sup>10</sup> the differences are real nonetheless. I will briefly deal with the following three issues: (1) the myth/history problem; (2) inerrancy; and (3) the Incarnational Analogy. These issues are interrelated and deserving, I think, of much further discussion among evangelicals.

First is the issue of myth and history in Genesis. In retrospect, I would have liked to have been clearer in this section in my affirmation of the basic historical referential nature of the opening chapters of Genesis. After reading Beale’s review I can see how some, reading the book from a particular angle, could arrive at conclusions similar to his, despite the declaration of my evangelical convictions at the outset of the book. In any case, Beale’s own handling of the myth/history problem will hardly shed more light on a topic that desperately needs it.

For one thing, Beale’s assessment of my discussion leaves readers of his review with potentially misleading impressions. For example, he claims that my concern is that “conservatives have not sufficiently recognized ANE parallels with the Bible,” when in fact the entire chapter is based on the opposite assumption, that these things have been duly recognized by

<sup>9</sup> See again Warfield cited in n. 3: “On this conception, therefore, for the first time full justice is done to both elements of Scripture [human and divine]. Neither is denied because the other is recognized. And neither is limited to certain portions of Scripture so that place may be made for the other” (Warfield, *Divine and Human in the Bible* 57).

<sup>10</sup> For example, Beale states repeatedly that I have postmodern agenda for evangelicalism. This is a loaded, emotive term, which I nowhere use in the book and I do not recognize as valid. Beale also asserts that my attempt to think incarnationally about the OT in context is a “novel” attempt to “produce a synthesis of the findings of mainline liberal scholarship and an evangelical view of Scripture.” I do not see the data discussed in the book as the property of liberalism. In fact, all evangelical biblical scholars, including Beale, are engaged in such a synthesis at some level. More importantly, my effort to produce a synthesis does not make me a liberal. Rather, we make liberals out of evangelicals by failing to produce a proper synthesis.

evangelicals. But recognition is not enough. My concern is to bring what is widely recognized to bear on how my target audience thinks about Scripture, that is, to bring to the forefront the implications of these parallels for how evangelicals can think of Genesis as historical, authoritative, and inspired. To move in this direction is not to attack or undermine evangelicalism but to support it.

Concerning the overlap between the OT and the ANE, Beale implies that the rhetorical question I ask on page 31, “[I]n what sense can we speak of it [the OT] as revelation?” is a real question *I* have rather than a question *readers* have. The same holds for Beale’s citation later in his review of my rhetorical question from page 45, “If the Bible does not tell us what actually happened, how can we trust it about anything?” What is particularly frustrating here is that this second citation is followed by Beale’s own observation that there is a “rhetorical tone” to the question, but nevertheless, “the words are Enns’s own and they appear to express his skeptical view. . . .” Yes, the words are my own *and* they are also rhetorical. I do not understand why Beale’s acknowledgment of my rhetorical tone did not affect his assessment of my point.

In my section “One God or Many Gods” (pp. 97–102), I discuss the commonly recognized dilemma that there are biblical texts that assume a polytheistic context and others that declare that there is no other God but Yahweh. I argue that this should be understood as God leading Israel from partial to fuller knowledge of himself. Beale concludes from this discussion that I am working from a developmental model of Israelite religion, adding parenthetically, “some would call it ‘evolutionary.’” But evolutionary models are naturalistic, whereas my explanation is clearly founded on God’s direction and involvement: “When God called Israel, he *began* leading them into a full knowledge of who he is, but he started where they were” (p. 98).<sup>11</sup> I do not think it is too much to expect of an evangelical reviewer of an evangelical author to be more circumspect than to use visceral terms such as “evolutionary” when another, well-known, description presents itself that is well within the pale of evangelicalism and supported by the immediate context and overall aim of the book. I am working from a progressive-revelational model where God is leading Israel to a fuller knowledge of who he is.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, I am as concerned with what appears to be Beale’s lack of appreciation for just how difficult the myth-history issue is for many evangelical readers. His whole discussion here left me wondering whether he

<sup>11</sup> Emphasis original. See also the last two paragraphs of p. 102, where I refer to God showing, speaking, and revealing.

<sup>12</sup> The same model is evident in my discussion of Abraham’s movement from mythic polytheism to belief in Yahweh: “As God entered into a relationship with Abraham, he ‘met’ him where he was—an ancient Mesopotamian man who breathed the air of the ancient Near East. . . . God adopted Abraham as the forefather of a new people, and in doing so he also adopted the mythic categories within which Abraham—and everyone else—thought. But God did not simply leave Abraham in his mythic world. Rather, God *transformed* the ancient myths so that Israel’s story would come to focus on God, the real one” (pp. 53–54; emphasis original). God is directing the entire process.

sees a problem at all. In my experience, however, it is the historical nature of Genesis 1–11 that continues to be among the most pressing challenges to non-scholarly evangelical readers, particularly for those who have had exposure to the ANE context of Genesis.

It is fine, for example, to assert, as Beale does, that Genesis “appears to be a historical genre” and therefore is “true history” and records “real events of the past.” This is something evangelicals would generally affirm (including me), but Beale must certainly understand that these types of assertions *begin* the discussion rather than *end* it. Rather than serving as a place of refuge for troubled evangelicals, these phrases require much clearer definition, and this is precisely where evangelicals have often stumbled. What type of historical genre does Genesis “appear” to be, and how does the ANE evidence affect how we formulate such a definition? What constitutes “true” history or “real” events? These types of questions are central to any further discussion.<sup>13</sup>

A phrase Beale uses to capture this problem is “essential history.” I certainly understand that Beale would have liked a positive articulation of the “essentially historical” nature of Genesis 1–11, but the problem readers of Scripture face, and that this section of the book is trying to address, is how the “essentially historical” nature of Genesis can so approximate other ancient texts, which neither Beale nor any other evangelical would likely call “essentially historical.” True, as Beale affirms, the relationship between Genesis and its ANE analogs is highly polemical. I fully agree, but as I try to point out in the book, the polemic only works because of the shared worldview. And it is precisely here that the tensions begin to mount. Our recognition of the fact that Genesis shares the cosmology of its ancient analogs, even while it contests their theology, cannot help but affect how we think about the “essentially historical” nature of Genesis.

Evangelical biblical scholars are well aware of this, but we could do evangelical lay readers a great service by laying out more clearly the issues and their implications. By chiding me for not employing the familiar terminology of “essential history,” Beale errs in thinking that such an affirmation is crucial to addressing the very difficult but real myth-history problem in Genesis. Rather, the phrase amounts to little more than a slogan that obscures the issue when further explanation is not given as to how, in what way, and to what extent Genesis is essentially historical. What, for example, is “essentially historical” about Genesis 1? Is it the bare affirmation that God did “something” in space/time history? Or, at the other end of the spectrum, is it the affirmation that Genesis 1 describes creation in literalistic terms (literal 24-hour days, canopy of water, etc.)? If the former, are the specific form and content of Genesis 1 just decorative flourishes (which leaves one wondering why God put them there in the first place)? If the latter, are we to say that Genesis 1 can be safely understood at arm’s length from the ancient world

<sup>13</sup> I address similar issues to a slighter greater extent, but likewise for a popular audience, in a forthcoming article in *Act 3 Review* titled “Exodus, Historiography, and Some Theological Reflections.”

in which the texts were intended—by God—to speak? What precisely about Genesis 1 needs to be affirmed as “accurate, true, real” (to use Beale’s terms), and how does one even begin to make these judgments, given the antiquity and foreignness of Genesis vis-à-vis modern historical standards? These are the kinds of things that can and do trouble lay readers.<sup>14</sup>

Although for some readers an affirmation of essential historicity can have a calming influence, it would be at least as calming, if not more so, for many other readers to reassure them that they should *expect* Genesis to approximate its ANE analogs, rather than giving the impression, however unintentional, that the Bible and its environment need to be kept at some distance—which is not only counterproductive but also dishonoring of Scripture itself. The precise nature of the relationship between Genesis and ANE mythic texts is far from a settled issue, but, at least for the readers I target in this book, the proper starting point is to affirm the roots of the biblical creation account in its ANE setting.<sup>15</sup>

A second and related issue is inerrancy, a concern that arises for Beale in both my handling of myth and theological diversity. Regarding the former, I do appreciate Beale’s reminder that ancient and modern categories of “truth” are not to be distinguished too sharply. I do not think I have done this, however, as my concern in chapter 2 is to encourage lay readers to appreciate genre distinctions between modern and ancient historiography so as not to fall into the trap of judging unreflectively ancient literature by modern standards. Beale reminds us (correctly) that there was more of a “scientific” (i.e. modern-like) dimension to ancient thought than is sometimes appreciated. My only concern here is that the matter Beale raises is not particularly relevant to the topic at hand. As helpful as a general reminder as this is, I do not see how such things as ancient mathematics and astronomy address, even indirectly, the question of the nature of the relationship between Genesis 1 and *Enuma Elish*, or any other ANE analog.

Even though there are certainly categories of thought that are universally and timelessly part of the human condition, the Bible, precisely because it

<sup>14</sup> These types of questions are addressed, for example, in V. Philips Long’s *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994; republished in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* [ed. Moisés Silva; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996]). According to Long, what is needed to address questions like this is the attainment of “ancient literary competence” (p. 33), which is to say proper genre recognition. The question regarding Genesis, then, is, “What is its genre?” The related question is what role ANE literature should play in “calibrating” our genre discussions. Long’s treatment is in my estimation an excellent and accessible starting point, and I include him in the annotated bibliography at the end of chapter 2.

<sup>15</sup> I might add at this juncture Beale’s curious citation of Provan *et al.* (*A Biblical History of Israel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003] 50) regarding the biblical writers’ ability to record history in ways that are in keeping with modern equivalents, i.e., in their ability to differentiate truth from a falsehood. It is not helpful to collapse the complex issue of the relationship of biblical historiography and ANE genres into one of truth vs. falsehood. Further, it is worth pointing out that Provan *et al.* begin their *history* of Israel with Abraham, not with the Genesis 1–11. I understand this decision of the authors to reflect not a subtle denial of “essential historicity,” but the reality of the difficulties in handling the opening chapters of Genesis, particularly in a book whose target audience and purpose concern minimalist attacks on biblical accounts of Israel’s history.

is a product of God's self-revelation *in history*, has, by God's design, a local, timely dimension to it. Hence, the specific way in which Scripture is inerrant must invariably be articulated, not simply by an appeal to the universality of rational thought, but in connection with the very text we say God inspired, in the very form in which we say he gave it. As much as we are humanly able—and with the understanding that more light is being shed on God's word (an assumption Beale certainly shares as a biblical scholar himself)—we must be ever vigilant to allow the Bible, understood as a product of its times, to help us understand, not *whether* the Bible is inerrant, but how we can articulate its divinity and perfection in view of the shape that the divine and perfect Author gave it. Inerrancy, in other words, must be understood in ways that are respectful and conversant with the parameters set by Scripture's own witness understood in its varying historical contexts. Otherwise, we run the risk of basing our doctrine of inerrancy on a foundation outside of Scripture, and then expecting Scripture to behave in ways that we presume it should (in this case, comporting with familiar notions of rationality), rather than trying to define such categories as best we can from within Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

I am not accusing Beale of deliberately committing this error. In fact, I am certain that he would say he agrees with me in principle. Still, in his argument regarding diversity, he seems to be operating with some outside standard by which to define inerrancy, perhaps the law of non-contradiction, which he mentions later on in his review. But neither the law of non-contradiction nor any other extrabiblical starting point is the basis for our doctrine of inerrancy. Rather, this role belongs to Scripture's own attestation of its character, and that attestation is one that comes to us fully clothed in the humility of its human element and diverse theologies. I take issue, therefore, with what appears to be the implication of Beale's comments that recognition of theological diversity in Scripture can bring us close to a denial of inerrancy and turns "the Reformers' notion of the perspicuity of Scripture on its head." It is not clear whether Beale has any particular Reformation tradition in mind, but the Calvinist tradition of which I am a part would nuance things differently.

<sup>16</sup> E. J. Young puts it well: "In what way shall we discover how the terms 'infallible' and 'inerrant' can be applied to the Bible? We might conceivably approach the matter with an a priori idea as to what infallibility should be and then proceed to make the Bible fit into that idea. If we were to proceed in that way, we should not be alone. There are those who do just that. They approach the Bible with a preconceived notion as to what inerrancy and infallibility should be. That is one way of obtaining an answer to our question. Popular as it may be, it is a method that cannot have satisfactory results. There is a much better way to follow, namely, that of turning to the Bible itself to learn what infallibility is. If we follow this latter method we shall obtain the Biblical view of the matter and, since the Bible is the Word of God, that is all-important" (*Thy Word is Truth* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957] 113–14). In referring to Young, I do not mean to imply that my book is simply a reiteration of his argument. I realize that I am moving beyond Young in some respects, mainly the extent and manner in which I feel this theological principle should be applied to specific biblical issues, but I maintain strongly that this type of progress is a continuation of the trajectory set by Old Princeton and Early Westminster. See also Moisés Silva, "Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* (ed. H. Conn; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 67–80; Peter Enns, "Bible in Context: The Continuing Vitality of Reformed Biblical Scholarship," *WTJ* 68 (forthcoming).

In his discussion on diversity, Beale seems to suggest that the choice is between “complementary viewpoints” and “irreconcilable perspectives,” but I see the matter as more complex. For example, take the differences in the Decalogue between Exodus and Deuteronomy.<sup>17</sup> To pose the question as a choice between the two options of “complementary or irreconcilable” blunts the potential theological payoff of addressing the tensions directly. There are clear differences, so much so that any reader can see that these texts do not mirror each other. This very real tension is, on the level of wording, “irreconcilable.” On the other hand—and this is the main point of the chapter on diversity—this tension, precisely because it cannot be reconciled on the surface, forces readers to work out the dynamic between them, and by doing so to begin to see a complementarity on a higher level, that is, one that does not rest on needing to minimize or explain away the tension.

This is more than saying that there is an “apparent” tension that can be “worked out” somehow, and “as long as we are patient we will see that there really is no problem here at all.” Rather, it is to affirm that only through a proper recognition of the surface “irreconcilable perspectives” of the texts in question (there by God’s will) can the deeper “complementary viewpoints” properly surface. We see such a posture with W. H. Green, who accounts for the difference in the Pentateuchal codes by offering a chronological explanation: “[The] Mosaic Code leaves abundant room for all the *modifications* that could be demanded by the *progressive* life of the people”<sup>18</sup> Whether or not one agrees with such an explanation, the point remains that Green respected the biblical tensions and did not try to explain them away. I would add that the codes differ precisely because they are not ultimate, but are steps along the way leading up to Christ. These divergences in the Mosaic Torah have a Christ-centered theological payoff by helping us see that the Law is not meant to be an ultimate and unchanging statement of God’s will but penultimate, awaiting the coming of Christ who, in his life, death, and resurrection, fulfills the Law.

I am suggesting, therefore, that we can be of tremendous help to lay readers by being very intentional in articulating definitions of inerrancy that account positively for the diverse phenomena of Scripture rather than giving the impression, however unintentional, that contrary or non-compliant data should be marginalized in view of preconceived notions of how Scripture ought to behave. The phenomena comprise the very details that God himself put there, but—amazingly—these very phenomena are accented in more hostile settings as evidence to the contrary. It is not a matter, therefore, of “beginning at the wrong end” (as one online review falsely attributes to me),<sup>19</sup> to build a doctrine of Scripture “from the ground up,” so to speak, by focusing on the problems. Rather, it is an attempt to flesh out (as it were) the Incarnational Analogy—which already presumes Scripture’s ultimate divine origin—and moving beyond a theoretical theological commitment to the

<sup>17</sup> See also Ezek 18:19–20, discussed on pp. 85–90 in *Incarnation and Inspiration*.

<sup>18</sup> W. H. Green, *Moses and the Prophets* (New York: Robert Carter, 1883) 69.

<sup>19</sup> P. Helm, [http://www.reformation21.org/Shelf\\_Life/Shelf\\_Life/181/?vobId=2938&pm=434](http://www.reformation21.org/Shelf_Life/Shelf_Life/181/?vobId=2938&pm=434).

divine-human elements of Scripture and focusing, for the purpose of this book, on some specific but representative, well-known issues that create difficulties for the types of readers my book aims to address.

Beale is also concerned that I only use the term “inerrancy” once in the entire book. This is true, but the reason for it is not that I do not hold to it.<sup>20</sup> My concern is that inerrancy can be too quickly raised to stifle discussion rather than to promote it. Saying “inerrancy” to those struggling with biblical and extrabiblical phenomena will not settle the issues with which these readers are struggling. They are seeking ways to articulate a high view of Scripture, and the way to help them do that is by providing sensitive theological models to address the problems they face. Again, such models will help them to see that the issue is not *whether* the Bible is inerrant (which is what Beale seems to think is at stake), but *how* the Bible is inerrant, in view of the form that Scripture takes, by God’s will and providence.

This brings us to the third and final point, the Incarnational Analogy. Beale argues that my use of the Incarnational Analogy is invalid because I do not explain clearly how I understand Christ’s incarnation and how this understanding influences our understanding of Scripture. On one level, this is fair enough. The analogy is not seamless, but neither do I ever suggest that it is (and I state as much on p. 168 where I speak of an incarnational *parallel* rather than analogy). It is the nature of all analogies to break down if pressed to far, but that does not invalidate their use. What I would certainly do now is to lay out more clearly that, as there is no sin in the God-man Jesus, so too there is no error in Scripture. The human situatedness and diverse nature of Scripture, then, are not to be understood as errors corresponding to some putative sin on Christ’s part, but rather as the condescension of God corresponding to Christ’s humanity.

What is ambiguous about the analogy (inescapably so) is how it applies to the details of the text. There is enough flexibility in the analogy to argue for very different, even opposite, opinions. For example, one can argue that the Bible cannot be influenced by ANE mythic creation stories in the Bible, because, as we all know, those things would constitute historical errors, and are therefore unacceptable. Here the Bible’s participation in the common world of ancient Mesopotamia is considered a theological problem analogous to a sinful Christ, and is driven by assumptions of what the Bible can and cannot do, as well as by faulty and unexamined notions of historiography and what constitutes historical error. Others (including me) would say that it is precisely because God has so situated Scripture in specific historical contexts that such culturally laden expressions are what one would expect. The difference between these two options can be illustrated by the following question: “Does Genesis 1, bearing strong similarities to ANE myth, correspond to Jesus ‘sinning’ or to the fact that he had olive skin, wore leather sandals, and spoke Aramaic?” I am of the latter opinion.

<sup>20</sup> I believe that biblical inerrancy is rooted in the nature of God: the Bible does not err because it is God’s Word and God does not err. See “Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving beyond the Modernist Impasse,” *WTJ* 65 (2003) 279–81.

But already in the introduction as well as later on in his review, Beale seems to be of the opinion that the problem with the Incarnational Analogy is more than just a matter of vagueness or how I (mis)handle it. His treatment left me wondering whether he sees it as having any positive theological value. The use of Christ's incarnation as an analogy for understanding biblical inspiration is an honored and ancient theological model, designed to bring the church to a reverent submission to God's Word.<sup>21</sup> Herman Bavinck puts it powerfully:

[T]he theory of organic inspiration alone does justice to Scripture. In the doctrine of Scripture, it is the working out and application of the central fact of revelation: the incarnation of the Word. The Word ( $\Lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ ) has become flesh ( $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\xi}$ ), and the word has become Scripture; these two facts do not only run parallel but are most intimately connected. Christ became flesh, a servant, without form or comeliness, the most despised of human beings; he descended to the nethermost parts of the earth and became obedient even to death on the cross. So also the word, the revelation of God, entered the world of creatureliness, the life and history of humanity, in all the human forms of dream and vision, of investigation and reflection, right down into that which is humanly weak and despised and ignoble. The word became Scripture and as Scripture subjected itself to the fate of all Scripture. All this took place in order that the excellency of the power, also of the power of Scripture, may be God's and not ours. Just as every human thought and action is the fruit of the action of God in whom we live and have our being, and is at the same time the fruit of the activity of human beings, so also Scripture is totally the product of the Spirit of God, who speaks through the prophets and apostles, and at the same time totally the product of the activity of the human authors.<sup>22</sup>

The position laid out here by Bavinck represents my own deep Reformed commitment as to the nature of Scripture, my presuppositional epistemological starting point for how I work out the implications of the relationship between the divine and human elements of Scripture, and the very principle upon which my book is based. The Incarnational Analogy of Scripture, although only an analogy, is a powerful pastoral and persuasive theological model, one that I feel evangelicals could call upon much more intentionally than seems to be the case.

Moreover, the precise nature of this analogy, Beale's protestations notwithstanding, cannot and need not be worked out with the kind of precision he seems to demand before the analogy can be used to benefit lay readers who confess by faith the mystery of the incarnation and who are looking for orthodox ways of making sense of challenging scriptural data. Toward that end, the words of W. H. Green, written over 100 years ago, remain penetrating and instructive for contemporary evangelicalism:

<sup>21</sup> See Telford Work's discussion of the Bible's "Triune ontology," which he traces back at least as far as Athanasius (*Living and Active: Scripture and the Economy of Salvation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] esp. 36–50).

<sup>22</sup> H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1: Prolegomena* (trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 434–35.

No objection can be made to the demand that the sacred writings should be subject to the same critical tests as other literary products of antiquity. When were they written, and by whom? For whom were they intended, and with what end in view? These are questions that may fairly be asked respecting the several books of the Bible, as respecting other books, and the same criteria that are applicable likewise in the other. Every production of any age bears the stamp of that age. It takes its shape from influences then at work. It is part of the life of the period, and can only be properly estimated and understood from being viewed in its original connections. Its language will be the language of the time when it was produced. The subject, the style of thought, the local and personal allusions, will have relation to the circumstances of the period, to which in fact the whole and every part of it must have its adaptation, and which must have their rightful place in determining its true explanation. Inspiration has no tendency to obliterate those distinctive qualities and characteristics which link men to their own age.<sup>23</sup>

What remains for evangelicals today is to accept the challenge of applying this most sound theological principle in the face of our ever-increasing understanding of the “life of the period” of the biblical books—which has developed considerably since Green’s time—and then to do the very hard work of allowing that increased understanding to affect how we talk about Scripture, and to do so for the benefit of those we are training and to whom we are ministering.

There are many more issues worth discussing, but I would like to conclude by making a general, and I hope constructive, observation. I appreciate that

<sup>23</sup> W. H. Green, *Moses and the Prophets* (New York: Robert Carter, 1883) 17–18. Likewise, Warfield: “[T]he whole of Scripture is the product of the divine activities which enter it, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but by working confluently with them, so that the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word and every particular” (Warfield, “Divine and Human,” 57). The same point is echoed once again by Bavinck, Warfield’s Dutch contemporary: “[T]he organic nature of Scripture . . . implies the idea that the Holy Spirit, in the inscriptionation of the word of God, did not spurn anything human to serve as an organ of the divine. The revelation of God is not abstractly supernatural but has entered into the human fabric, into persons and states of beings, into forms and usages, into history and life. It does not fly high above us but descends into our situation; it has become flesh and blood, like us in all things except sin. Divine revelation is now an ineradicable constituent of this cosmos in which we live and, effecting renewal and restoration, continues its operation. The human has become an instrument of the divine; the natural has become a revelation of the supernatural; the visible has become a sign and seal of the invisible. In the process of inspiration, use has been made of all the gifts and forces resident in human nature” (*Reformed Dogmatics* 1.442–43). A detailed discussion of Bavinck’s (and A. Kuypers’) doctrine of Scripture can be found in Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?” *WTJ* 44 (1982) 250–89 and 45 (1983) 219–72. A fair amount of the discussion concerns the relationship between incarnation and inscriptionation in Bavinck and Kuypers. One of Gaffin’s points in summarizing Bavinck’s position is as follows: “Inscriptionation arises necessarily from the incarnation and would not exist apart from it. This reality determines the origin and composition of Scripture from beginning to end. It specifies more concretely the organic nature of inspiration as a whole. It gives Scripture a unique theanthropic character (‘everything divine and everything human’), without, however, involving some sort of hypostatic union between divine and human elements. Scripture has its distinctive servant-form, not because of its ‘humanity,’ generally considered, but because Christ was incarnated, not in a state of glory but of humiliation. The correlate to the sinlessness of Christ is that Scripture is without error” (Gaffin, “Old Amsterdam,” 45 [1983] 268).

Beale allowed his scholarly friends around the country to read his review, and that his reading of my book is not simply his own private evaluation. Beale is certainly correct: others share his opinion. But I have also sought and received input from others, and respected scholars have had some positive things to say about the book at various stages in its development, both formally and informally.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, since the book's publication, I have received communications from others, both from academics and my target audience, expressing varying degrees of appreciation.

It is precisely this state of affairs that I find so intriguing. It is worth pausing for a moment to make the simple observation that varying—apparently in some quarters even polarizing—opinions exist, and then to ask why. Why should such a little book, written in a popular style for a popular audience, attract such strong attention from Beale and others?<sup>25</sup> Why do such diverse and strongly held opinions exist? I will suggest that it is because the controversy supposedly generated by the book is actually not generated by the book.

The reason some readers connect with it positively on a very deep level while others have as deep a negative evaluation—with scholars and pastors representative of both groups—is because the book merely brings to expression problems and issues on which capable, committed, and intelligent people are already reflecting. To put it another way, diverse reactions to the book may tell us at least as much about the current state of evangelical thinking as it does about the book itself. The space and energy—even emotion—Beale and others have devoted to reviewing the book involves more than impressions of my alleged incompetence in scholarship, or writing style, or questionable commitment to evangelical theology. It may tell us something about the reviewers themselves.

It should be clear that I say this not to dismiss Beale. Reviews such as Beale's, even though I disagree with them, are very important for the ongoing clarification of evangelical thinking: where it is, where it is going, and whether movement is good or not. But in the end, this issue will not be settled in a book review or two with responses. Even if my book ceased to exist, the larger issue of evangelicals and Scripture will still be here. The question is how we will address it. Someone recently said to me, "It looks like another inerrancy war is coming." Such polarization needs to be avoided. We must commit ourselves to finding other ways to address what is in fact of central importance for all sides: respect for and submission to God's Word. The question—to summarize the concluding paragraphs of my book—is how we can do this without perpetuating a climate of fear, suspicion, and posturing. Such a climate does not honor the gospel of Christ, and it will certainly be of little help to those to whom my book is addressed.

<sup>24</sup> Beale refers to some scholarly reviews that differ from his own, although his inclusion of the review that appeared in "New Horizons" (October 2005) is puzzling, as it is neither scholarly nor different from Beale's.

<sup>25</sup> Bear in mind that Beale has written two review articles on my book, the second to appear in the Fall 2006 issue of *Themelios* and focused on chapter 4 of my book. I have been invited to respond to this review as well, and that response will appear in a subsequent issue.