

## INERRANCY: A PLACE TO LIVE

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For purposes of this paper, I define “inerrancy” simply as “propositional truth.” To say that a sentence is inerrant is simply to say that it is true, as opposed to false. To say that the Bible is inerrant is simply to say that it contains no false assertions.

Forty or fifty years ago, it was common for theologians to speak of biblical inerrancy as a “new” or “recent” doctrine. Their thesis was that although the church had always held to the authority of Scripture in a broad and general way, inerrancy was, as we like to say today, a product of modernity. Enlightenment rationalists had challenged the historicity and reliability of Scripture, and in reaction, according to this theory, orthodox Christians of the last two centuries or so insisted that Scripture was completely historical and reliable on all subjects it treats. That more pedantic and precise doctrine of biblical authority they called “inerrancy.” In this lecture I will not be discussing this issue, however, because I believe that the thesis that inerrancy is recent was thoroughly demolished by John D. Woodbridge in his book *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*.<sup>1</sup>

Now members of ETS have subscribed to inerrancy in the form, “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.” So I assume that most of you here today believe the doctrine of inerrancy. You do not believe it to be a recent theory, a speculation or overreaction to criticism, but to constitute one of the doctrines of orthodox Christianity. Further, since you believe that the doctrines of our faith are based on Scripture, you believe that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is itself a biblical doctrine.

But of course God’s word is our life. Biblical doctrines are not just propositions that we occasionally sign our names to, or that we recite on demand. Rather, they constitute the environment in which we live. The doctrine of the deity of Christ, for example, is not just a test of orthodoxy, but a place to stand against temptation. When Satan tells us he intends to rule our lives, we reply no, you may not. For we do not trust in ourselves to stand against you in our own strength. We trust only in Christ, and Christ is God.

So, similarly, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy provides us a place to stand, a way to live. The doctrine of inerrancy is often used among us as a reply to scientific, historical, or philosophical claims that seem to oppose the Bible, but that’s not its

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982). “Rogers/McKim Proposal” refers to Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

most important use, for mature Christians. When we read the first chapter of Genesis, our deepest impulse (not necessarily the first, but the deepest) is not to wonder how its descriptions can be reconciled with scientific ideas, but, like the deepest impulses of the Psalmists, to praise God for doing something incredibly greater than we can comprehend, bringing all the universe into being, from nothing. When we read of Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea or Sea of Reeds, we have a slight interest in how the wind blew the water away. But our larger and more consuming interest is that we have a God so great that he can time the movements of the wind and water to deliver his people and judge his enemies.

This is to say that for us the accounts in Scripture of the mighty acts of God are not primarily problems to be solved, or stories that may have to be retold to make sense to some group of modern people. They are news, true accounts of what God has *done*, testifying also to what a great God he *is*. Of course the stories do now need to be retold to modern people, but what modern people most need to hear is what a great God our Lord is.

Some have complained that the doctrine of inerrancy is a distraction, taking us away from the great themes of creation and redemption, getting us tied up in minor details, like how God could have made light before making the heavenly bodies that bear light, or where Cain got his wife, or the botanical properties of the mustard seed. It is true that inerrancy pertains to the details of Scripture. As we've always said, you can't draw a principled distinction between what is small in the Bible and what is large. And if God doesn't speak truly in earthly matters, how can we trust him in heavenly things?

But those within the community who confess inerrancy know that this doctrine encourages us most in the big themes. The inerrancy of the word of God enables us to state with confidence the most extraordinary fact—that the whole world is God's, and displays his glory. It enables us to say that Jesus is really Lord, that he really saved us from sin and its consequences, and that he is coming again to restore the whole universe to something pure and even more beautiful. And inerrancy assures us that we have a God who speaks to us in our own experience—the Lord of language who knows how to use symbols to talk to human beings.

Modern secularism, for its part, is not primarily interested in niggling over details, however much it annoys Christians with these controversies. Unbelief is as skeptical of blood atonement as it is of whether water can become wine. The attack on inerrancy does not limit itself to details. It will not be satisfied until it has set to rest the idea that a man can be God, that he can die for the sins of others, that he can rise from the dead, that he can communicate clearly with us. But if we have settled the question of inerrancy, we can dispatch such questions in short order. Yes, a man is God, he died for our sins, he rose again, and he is coming again—because God told us that this story is true.

There is a place for detailed apologetics, but that is not where we live. Inerrancy is not primarily a doctrine about the little details, even though it embraces those. It is a place for us to live. It enables us to look at everything, in the Bible and outside, with a supernaturalistic worldview. So when we are alone together, without skeptics looking over our shoulders, the inerrant Bible is, ironically, the most natu-

ral thing in the world. We argue about why in his miraculous healings Jesus used spittle in some cases, but not in others. But we don't argue about whether Jesus healed miraculously. We exchange perplexity about the line between temptation and sin; but we don't debate that Jesus was tempted as we are but did not sin. What the Bible clearly teaches must be true. God said it, we believe it, and that settles it.

If a skeptic questions whether 5,000 people can be fed with five loaves and two fish, the answer is simple, however unpersuasive it may be to the inquirer: of course this is possible, because God exists. This is God's world. So the highest laws of physics are his intentions. He therefore establishes the laws of nutrition as well, and if he wants to feed 5,000 people miraculously for his own purposes he is perfectly able to do that. And, for that matter, if someone asks how a book written by human beings can be inerrant, the answer is the same: If God wants such a book, he can arrange to provide one. We live in a supernaturalistic world; God's world.

This kind of thinking enters into our more technical conversations as well. Say that a liberal scholar looks at the Mosaic Law and asks, isn't it peculiar that this law, supposedly revealed by God, looks a lot like the law of Hammurabi? We reply, yes, that's interesting. He says, no, you miss the point. If the Mosaic Law was revealed by God, then it should be unique, very different. It shouldn't look like the laws of the nations around Israel. So the similarity between Moses and Hammurabi indicates that the Mosaic Law was not divinely inspired after all. If the law of Hammurabi can be explained without resorting to inspiration, the same can be done with the law of Moses.

Now we should take this argument respectfully, because we should treat all human beings with respect and honor. Perhaps we may even take the argument with some level of academic seriousness. But in our heart of hearts, we cannot take it seriously. The fact is that this is God's world. If God wants to give his people laws that are in some ways like other laws, why should he not do that? He has not said that the mark of divine inspiration is some kind of striking uniqueness. Rather, he reveals what he reveals for his own purposes and in his own way. Typically he reveals truth in the language of human writers, writers who are both subjects of inspiration and human beings like us responding to their environment in their own way. In this case, of course, the Israelite law is similar in some ways to the Babylonian laws, because the Israelites and the Babylonians lived in the same world and faced many of the same social problems. But of course the Israelite law is unique in one respect that is repeated over and over again in Leviticus 19: its basis is "I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD."

Or take the so-called criterion of dissimilarity, used among some liberal NT scholars. A scholar might say that a statement attributed to Jesus in the Gospels cannot really be his, because it is not sufficiently dissimilar to things said by later Christians. It is more likely, some would say, that the later Christians made it up than that Jesus originally said it. In other words, we should always assume the words are a fabrication unless there is very strong evidence to the contrary. Again, we should greet this argument with politeness, but not with inner respect. We know Scripture is God's word. And when he speaks to us, he can choose to be as similar or dissimilar to other voices as he chooses. Given that worldview, dare I say pre-

supposition, the criterion of dissimilarity carries no intellectual weight whatsoever. Indeed, it is bewildering that anyone ever advanced it. *Of course* Jesus' sayings are like those of later Christians; because Jesus intended his teachings to guide the church after his ascension, and because many of the later Christians, at least, were faithful followers of his.

When you *believe* the Bible and read it with a believing heart, you find that it really makes sense as it is. It doesn't need to be deconstructed or demythologized or verified. There is no need to posit a chronology different from what the Bible itself presents (though I grant that sometimes there are legitimate disagreements among faithful readers about what chronology the Bible does present). There is no need to multiply speculations about the supposed sources of the Pentateuch. There is no need to find naturalistic explanations for prophecies that are almost too accurate. There is no need to posit settings for the sayings of Jesus other than those presented in the Gospels.

When I first started reading the Bible seriously as a young Christian, of course I came very early to God's creative word, "Let there be light." It never occurred to me that there was a problem in reconciling the biblical account of the first creation day with that of the fourth. For his own purposes, God chose to create the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. But he created light on the first. As a young Christian, that seemed perfectly normal to me. God is the author of light; indeed, he *is* light. Evidently he had the power to distribute light and darkness without planting it in material bodies. Why not? One more reason to praise his sovereign power.

But evidently when you read the Bible without a believing heart, without a worldview centered on an absolute tri-personal God, problems appear and multiply. Virtually nothing seems plausible. Everything needs to be explained or explained away.

So the rift between evangelicals and liberals is not only about the facts. It is also about the questions we ask, the projects we undertake, the methods we follow.

Which brings me to what is my favorite philosophical article in the last fifty years, no, rather, my favorite academic article on any subject, Alvin Plantinga's 1984 article "Advice to Christian Philosophers."<sup>2</sup> In the 2002 version of the Preface, Plantinga indicates that his advice to Christian philosophers has applications to Christians working in other academic fields: "history, literary and artistic criticism, musicology, and the sciences, both social and natural."<sup>3</sup> In all these disciplines, there are, he says,

ways of proceeding, pervasive assumptions about the nature of the discipline ... assumptions about how the discipline should be carried on and what a valuable or worthwhile contribution is like, and so on; we imbibe these assumptions, if not with our mother's milk, at any rate in learning how to pursue our disciplines.

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<sup>2</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984) 253–71, updated July 14, 2002. Accessed December 3, 2012 at <http://www.leaderu.com/truth/1truth10.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 1.

In all these areas we learn how to pursue our disciplines under the direction and influence of our peers.

But in many cases these assumptions and presumptions do not easily mesh with a Christian or theistic way of looking at the world. This is obvious in many areas.<sup>4</sup>

Later, he says,

For the intellectual culture of our day is for the most part profoundly non-theistic and hence non-Christian—more than that, it is anti-theistic ... animated by a spirit wholly foreign to that of Christian theism.<sup>5</sup>

Here he mentions literary criticism, film theory, social sciences and history, and, at greater length, the natural sciences. But hidden in this list of disciplines where non-Christian assumptions prevail he mentions “a good deal of contemporary (liberal) theology.”<sup>6</sup> Some readers might find that jarring.

Of course I don’t, Plantinga doesn’t, and probably most of you don’t either. To notice that liberals do theology from non-Christian assumptions even though they are professing Christians is old hat to most of us as evangelical theologians. But just take a moment to think about this; let it strike you: it is possible to be deceived by a non-Christian worldview even when one is seeking to do Christian theology. It came as a huge shock to me when I came of age in the ‘50s and ‘60s to learn that some of the most famous and respected minds in the theological field rejected fundamental truths of Scripture. Many of these even rejected the fundamental supernatural worldview that Scripture presupposes: that the world is made and ruled by an absolute tri-personal God, who enters history whenever he wishes, to accomplish his purposes.

This is why certain ideas that seem eminently reasonable to us seem quite unreasonable to our academic colleagues. This is why for some scholars the story of Yahweh drying up the Sea is an obvious alert to a need for historical reconstruction. To them, there must be something mythological or legendary here, and the only controversy concerns the genesis of that myth, whether linguistic misunderstanding, factual misunderstanding, borrowing from another culture, an attempt to join diverse tribes into a national identity, or something else. We ask, why should there even be a question here? If the absolute tri-personal God wants to give a great deliverance to his people in answer to prayer, why shouldn’t he do it? The liberal replies: sorry, but that explanation is the one explanation that we cannot permit. So what is obvious to us is foolishness to them, and vice versa.

Although they usually try to be courteous to us, they really have very little respect for our worldview. They have become more courteous to us in the last fifty years or so than they were in the bad old days of the nineteenth century, but the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 1. On p. 3, he says, “even a good bit of allegedly Christian theology is animated by a spirit wholly foreign to that of Christian theism. I don’t have the space here to elaborate and develop the point; but I don’t have to, for it is familiar to you all.”

basic antithesis is still there. For them, we are not guilty of an oversight here or a wrong emphasis there, the sorts of critique most common in the academic world. We are outrageously wrong, laughably wrong—so wrong that our distinctive views are not even worth consideration. And what is outrageously wrong is not a specific thesis that we hold, but our whole worldview, as it impacts all the many specific theses.

Evangelicals have sometimes imagined naïvely that if only we could think a little more sharply and argue more cogently we could convince the prominent liberal theologians that the word of God is inerrant. But that kind of conversion almost never happens.<sup>7</sup> For the difference between the two positions is not the difference of an argument here or there, or this passage or that passage. It is a difference of presupposition, a difference of faith, a difference in heart orientation, accessible only to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is, of course, an interesting question why the Holy Spirit does not work more often to regenerate professional academics, but I won't digress to discuss it.

And so, although again we usually try to be courteous to our liberal colleagues, and we should be, in the end we think the same way about them that they think about us. They are not just wrong about this or that. They are holding and articulating a worldview that is impossible for us to countenance for even a moment. From our point of view, they are far out in left field; from their point of view, we are far out in right field.

From this stark, and certainly somewhat oversimplified, perspective, we can see that evangelical scholarship faces a dilemma. In the rebuilding of evangelicalism following World War II, associated with names like Carl F. H. Henry, Gordon H. Clark, Harold J. Ockenga, and Billy Graham, there were two great emphases: a renewed social conscience and an intellectual renewal. I shall focus on the second of these, the intellectual renewal. That renewal can in turn be divided into two elements: first, a recommitment to the doctrinal standards of Christian orthodoxy; and second, a commitment to high academic standards. The recommitment to orthodoxy can be summarized in the affirmation of inerrancy. So in its early years the ETS used a simple doctrinal basis: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs."<sup>8</sup> Later the Society added, "God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory."<sup>6</sup>

The second element in the evangelical intellectual renewal was to high academic standards. It was felt that this had been a weakness in fundamentalism between the world wars. To restore academic integrity in the movement, it was hoped, would return evangelicalism to the respect that it enjoyed in the nineteenth century when great scholars like Ernst Hengstenberg, J. B. Lightfoot, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield defended the fundamentals of

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<sup>7</sup> I do have in mind the case of Eta Linnemann, the student of Bultmann and Fuchs, who became an ardent evangelical and opponent of liberal theology. See her *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.etsjets.org/about>, accessed December 10, 2012.

the faith, perhaps even to the status orthodox Christianity enjoyed in the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the post-Reformation period.

But where could evangelicals go to challenge and elevate their academic standards? Colleges and universities, of course ... and, to some extent, theological seminaries. In the postwar period there were a number of colleges and seminaries, even a few universities, committed to Christian orthodoxy. But many of the postwar reformers thought these were not sufficient. Christian institutions did not have as high an academic reputation as those that were non-Christian, liberal, or secularist. It didn't make much sense for a young evangelical scholar to go to a Christian institution only to reinforce his existing academic standards. To give these a challenge and a lift, he needed to look liberalism and secularism in the eye, to get the experience of being with *real* scholars. For many evangelicals thought that however wrong liberalism was, its scholarship was nevertheless far superior to that in evangelicalism.

But what happened all too often was that the young scholar would return from his broadening experience with doubts about inerrancy and some sympathy for those who denied it. But as we have seen, that entailed sympathy for the naturalistic worldview that generated this rejection of inerrancy, even worse an embracing of that worldview, or some kind of inconsistent halfway house between orthodoxy and naturalism. Stories like this, I think, provide an explanation for the growing doubts about inerrancy that developed in evangelical circles during the 1960s and following years.

For these young scholars, alas, inerrancy was no longer a place to live. Naturalism was another place, and it had its attractions, among them greater academic respectability. Questions about the truth of the Bible are not hard to resolve for the supernaturalist, or for the naturalist, but they are terribly difficult, emotionally agonizing, for people who are torn between worldviews. They cannot take anything as obvious. Everything is problematic. Perhaps they were taught as young people that Jesus made the lame to walk; but Professor B. doubts it. For the young scholar, then, the Bible's teaching has an attraction, but we should respect Professor B.'s doubts, possibly try to come to some sort of middle position. There may be some attractive arguments for a middle position, but it will never be home. It will never be a text for confident preaching, reassuring the people in the pews that Christ is our only comfort in life or in death.

This is not to suggest that we cannot learn from Prof. B., that his thinking cannot help us to formulate our own position with more biblical accuracy and nuance. Only that an attempt to compromise between his naturalism and biblical orthodoxy will give us no place to speak with biblical confidence. We can learn from Prof. B.'s detailed observations, but not from his worldview.

But as I said, following Plantinga, the antithesis between these two worldviews is not only about facts, but also about methods, research proposals, questions appropriate for debate, indeed the nature of academic theological work, how we proceed as exegetes and theologians. On this subject as well, there is only so much that we can learn from secular colleges and universities. If our goal, like the goal of the postwar neo-evangelicals, is to elevate our academic standards, then

we need to think for ourselves as to what those academic standards should be, given our Christian theistic worldview, not just accept the standards of the secular establishment.

Here again, I think that Plantinga's wisdom should guide us. Plantinga calls Christian philosophers

to display more autonomy—more independence of the rest of the philosophical world. Second, Christian philosophers must display more integrity—integrity in the sense of integral wholeness, or oneness, or unity, being all of one piece. Perhaps 'integrality' would be the better word here. And necessary to these two is a third: Christian courage, or boldness, or strength, or perhaps Christian self-confidence. We Christian philosophers must display more faith, more trust in the Lord; we must put on the whole armor of God.<sup>9</sup>

If Plantinga can preach that way to fellow philosophers in an academic journal, I guess I can do the same to my fellow evangelical theologians in a meeting of the ETS.

He goes on to deal with the matter of method, by the example of a young Christian philosopher who returns from Ph.D. work at a secular institution to begin her own career. She tends, he says, to work on the same topics that were acceptable topics for her graduate seminars. He adds,

And it is natural, furthermore, for her to work on (these topics) in the way she was taught to, thinking about them in the light of the assumptions made by her mentors and in terms of currently accepted ideas as to what a philosopher should start from or take for granted, what requires argument and defense, and what a satisfying philosophical explanation or a proper resolution to a philosophical question is like. She will be uneasy about departing widely from these topics and assumptions, feeling instinctively that any such departures are at best marginally respectable.<sup>10</sup>

Respectability is a major issue here. Our desire to raise the quality of our academic standards is a godly desire. Our desire to be academically respectable usually is not, though it is hard to separate from the good desire to meet higher standards. The apostle Paul does say that a church elder should be "well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim 3:7; cf. 1 Thess 4:12). But the quest for respectability, a frequent quest in the history of Christian thought, is often motivated by an ungodly pride. Avoiding that is where the armor of God comes in, where we need to walk in the Spirit.

Applying these principles to the work of scholarship, Plantinga continues,

So the Christian philosopher has his own topics and projects to think about; and when he thinks about the topics of current concern in the broader philosophical world, he will think about them in his own way, which may be a *different* way. He may have to reject certain currently fashionable assumptions about the philosophic enterprise—he may have to reject widely accepted assumptions as to what are the proper starting points and procedures for philosophical endeavor. And—and this is crucially important—the Christian philosopher has a perfect

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<sup>9</sup> Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers" 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

right to the point of view and prephilosophical assumptions he brings to philosophical work; the fact that these are not widely shared outside the Christian or theistic community is interesting but fundamentally irrelevant.<sup>11</sup>

Plantinga takes up the philosophical controversy over the verifiability criterion of meaning as an example. What happened was that logical positivist philosophers (who had their greatest influence from the 1920s to the 1950s) argued that for any group of words to be “cognitively meaningful” it had to be verifiable by methods akin to those of the natural sciences. They took it that the phrase “God exists” could not be verified in that way, so they declared it to be cognitively meaningless. That is, it was not true, nor even false. It was not even a meaningful sentence. Now as Plantinga points out, many professing Christians were intimidated by this argument and tried various kinds of accommodations and concessions to positivism. But, he says,

... Christian philosophers should have adopted a quite different attitude towards positivism and its verifiability criterion. What they should have said to the positivists is: “Your criterion is mistaken: for such statements as ‘God loves us’ and ‘God created the heavens and the earth’ are clearly meaningful; so if they aren’t verifiable in your sense, then it is false that all and only statements verifiable in that sense are meaningful.” ... Christian theism is true; if Christian theism is true, then the verifiability criterion is false; so the verifiability criterion is false.<sup>12</sup>

Plantinga does concede that if the positivists had offered *arguments* for the verifiability criterion, then Christians and others who disagreed would need to answer them. But he points out that in fact the positivists did not give any serious arguments for their criterion. Christian philosophers should have recognized that this emperor had no clothes.

Now I don’t know what position Plantinga takes on biblical inerrancy. But I think the situation evangelical theologians face today on that issue is similar to the situation that Christian philosophers faced over cognitive meaning. As I’ve said, the rejection of inerrancy is not a conclusion based on evidence or argument. It is a presupposition, an idea that *governs* liberal theological thought in every discussion of a theological subject. It determines their methodology. It determines where they start, what they take for granted, what they think requires argument and defense, and what they will accept as a satisfying explanation or proper resolution to the question. As with the verifiability criterion, there is no *argument* for the liberal theologians’ presupposition, at least no argument that avoids begging the question.

Similarly, our own acceptance of inerrancy is a presupposition. Some may wince at that, because we like to say that this conclusion is based at least in part on an inductive study of the data of the Bible. I agree that our conclusion is legitimately derived from this data. But not just any inductive study will do, when we’re studying this issue. The inductive study itself must be based on some assumptions. As

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 7.

we engage in it, we must ask whether to assume a theistic worldview or not. Do we assume that miracles are possible, or do we exclude them as a methodological necessity? Do we believe that predictive prophecy is possible? Those are yes or no questions; we cannot straddle them. And so the doctrine of inerrancy functions both as a presupposition and as a conclusion of our study—a kind of circularity, just as the denial of inerrancy functions both as a presupposition and as a conclusion of the liberal argument.

Plantinga later in the paper quotes theologian David Tracy as saying,

For the new scientific morality, one's fundamental loyalty as an analyst of any and all cognitive claims is solely to those methodological procedures which the particular scientific community in question has developed.<sup>13</sup>

Plantinga replies,

I say *caveat lector*. I'm prepared to bet that this "new scientific morality" is like the Holy Roman Empire: it is neither new nor scientific nor morally obligatory... Even if there were a set of methodological procedures held in common by most philosophers, historians and social scientists, or most secular philosophers, historians, and social scientists, why should a Christian theologian give ultimate allegiance to them rather than, say, to God, or to the fundamental truths of Christianity?<sup>14</sup>

Those fundamental truths, I argue, are the necessary presuppositions of our theological work, just as they are, according to Plantinga, of Christian philosophy. If they are the starting point of Christian philosophy, how can they be anything less than the starting point of Christian theology?

To conclude, a few disclaimers:

I'm not saying that we should not have theological conversations with liberals and secularist scholars. I am saying that we should frequently clarify these conversations by telling our conversation partners where we stand, how our disagreements are not only factual but methodological, how they are not only theological, but pretheological.

I'm not saying that liberal and secular theologians have nothing important to say to us. But I no longer look up to them as standards or criteria of intellectual excellence. Bultmann's argument that we cannot believe in angels because we fly in airplanes, one of the worst arguments ever set forth anywhere, settled that for me many years ago.

I'm not saying that we should never study at liberal or secular universities, colleges, or seminaries. But when we do, we need to be far more aware of the depth of their prevalent opposition to what we hold dearest.

And I'm certainly not saying that we should not try to improve our intellectual and academic standards. But I hope you will consider that raising our standards does not necessarily mean emulating those who oppose biblical Christianity. Indeed, the project of raising the intellectual standards of evangelicalism turns out to be far

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<sup>13</sup> David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978) 7.

<sup>14</sup> Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers" 12.

more complicated than we often imagine. It requires us to think for ourselves, not just to seek or cite the approval of others.

And it may turn out that some practices we hoped would raise our academic fortunes are actually counterproductive or irrelevant. Is it a good thing for us to require seminary professors to have doctorates from “first-rate institutions?” I doubt it. Is it good for us to make preparation for the ministry an increasingly academic exercise, in schools accredited by secular agencies? I think not, but that’s another book.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John M. Frame, *The Academic Captivity of Theology* (Lakeland, FL: Whitefield Media Publishers, 2013).