

Inspiration & Inerrancy

The issue of divine inspiration is closely related to the question of the "inerrancy" of the Bible. The textbook answer to "What is divine inspiration?" is: "Inspiration" means that God so superintended the writers of Scripture that they wrote what God wanted them to write. How God did this "superintending" is a matter of debate. How one views God's involvement in the writing of Scripture often influences his understanding of inerrancy.

This issue is important for Christians and non-Christians alike, because of the ongoing discussion of "contradictions" and "errors" in Scripture. Certain views of inspiration find no problem with the possibility of contradictions, whereas other views hinge on whether or not the Bible contains any errors.

Theories of Inspiration

Summary

Liberal	<p>The Bible contains the Word of God</p> <p>Left Wing - The writers were inspired from time to time when their natural insight and instinct were "deepened and heightened" to discover divine truths in their day.</p> <p>Right wing - The Illumination View holds that God allowed pious men of old deep religious insight. They recorded as religious lore their insight or inspiration. Revelation can be found from place to place in the Bible.</p>
Neo-orthodox	<p>The Bible becomes the word of God</p> <p>Left Wing - The real truth in the Bible can be separated from the mythology in the Bible by the principle of "demythology." "The Bible must be stripped of culture in order to get to the real message." They look beyond the historical to the "super-historical/"</p> <p>Right Wing - The Bible, even the autographs, contain many human errors and imperfections. "The Bible becomes the Word of God when He chooses to use this imperfect channel to confront man with His perfect word." God communicates through this "personal encounter" between the Bible and the Word of God.</p>
Conservative	<p>The Bible is the Word of God.</p> <p>Left Wing - In order to explain the varies grammar, vocabulary and literary techniques seen it the Bible, the Left Wing Conservative believes that God gave the thoughts or ideas to the writer and they were "free" to record it "in his own words." Sometimes called "dynamic inspiration."</p> <p>Right Wing - Verbal Dictation View or Mechanical Dictation. Leaves out any human aspects. The author, writer, prophet was only a "typewriter."</p>

Natural Inspiration/Intuition

The view of Rationalism and Liberalism that the Bible is "inspired" in the same sense that other great works such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the writings of Shakespeare are. The Bible is not considered uniquely inspired. According to this theory, the writers of Scripture had "special insight," but God did not play a part in the creation of these writings. The insight of the writers is a natural endowment. The Bible, then, is entirely the work of man (someone who adheres to this view would not place a very strong emphasis on "inerrancy," for even the most enlightened thinkers make mistakes).

Spiritual Illumination

According to this theory, there was an influence of God on the writers of Scripture, but his influence involved only a heightening of their normal abilities, and an increased sensitivity to spiritual matters. The Bible, then, is still only a human product (which means that this view also allows for the possibility of errors in the Bible).

Partial Inspiration

The Bible is inspired as it relates to faith and practice, but not necessarily in the areas of history or science.

Conceptual Inspiration

God inspired the concepts that the Biblical authors (fallibly) interpreted and recorded. Only the ideas and religious concepts in the Bible are "inspired," but the individual words are not.

Uneven Inspiration

The Neo-Evangelical view that various books of the Bible are more inspired than others (Psalms more than Ecclesiastes, the Gospel of John more than Jude). This in contrast to a plenary view of inspiration where all the words are equally inspired ("All Scripture," 2 Tim. 3:16).

Dynamic Inspiration

According to this theory, the combination of both divine and human elements were at work in the process of inspiration and of the writing of the Bible. God gave the writers the thoughts and concepts, but allowed for the writer's own distinctive personality and choice of words and expressions. Thus, the concepts of Scripture are from God, but they are conveyed through a human instrument (Many who say the Bible is only "spiritually" infallible would agree with this theory. The spiritual concepts are from God, but there is no guarantee that the historical or scientific facts given by the writers are accurate).

Verbal/Plenary

According to this theory, God gave not only the concepts and thoughts to the writers, he also guided the writers in such a way that the words and expressions used were precisely what God wanted them to write (Biblical "inerrancy" according to many who adhere to this theory must mean that all the facts, historical, scientific, philosophical, theological, moral, etc., are correct and not in error).

Divine Dictation

According to this theory, God actually dictated the Bible to the writers. The writers, in a sense, are "human typewriters" on whom God "typed out" his message. Thus, there is very little or no human element in Scripture (the implications of this theory concerning "inerrancy" are the same as those of the Verbal theory).

Neo-Orthodox

According to this theory, the Bible words of the bible are not inspired as such, but the bible becomes the word of God to the individual reading it in a moment of spiritual illumination--an existential encounter when h/she meets God in the pages of Scripture.

Conservative Evangelical View—Verbal, Plenary Inspiration

- Verbal - the words which are written are God-breathed (inspired).
- Plenary - God gave full expression to His thoughts in the words of the biblical record

In conservative Evangelical thinking, inspiration covers God's guidance and direction in the writing of the Scriptures. It is God working through man ("God's superintending of the human authors"). He does not directly dictate the words, but uses each of their individual personalities and writing styles to produce unique books with a variety of perspectives ("using their own personalities, they composed"). He did not inspire only the ideas, but the individual words are exactly what God intended ("recorded") and "the words" are "without error." Inspiration, though, only covers the initial writings ("the words of the original manuscripts"), not copies.

Key Passages on Inspiration

2 Timothy 3:16

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

- *All Scripture* – Inspiration is plenary – that is, all the words are equally inspired in every book.
- *Inspired* – lit. "God-breathed out." The Scripture is not in-spired by God, but ex-spired by Him.

II Peter 1:20-21

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

- Roman Catholicism interprets this verse to mean that no person should interpret Scripture by apart from the guidance of the church. But, given the context of the apostolic message, the passage means that no prophecy originated from the prophet's own interpretation or understanding, but from God himself.
- "Moved along" can also be translated "carried along" or used to describe a leaf or sail being blown by the wind. This describes the Spirit's guidance of the original writers.

1 Corinthians 2:12

"not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."

- The Scripture is not the best of human wisdom, but it is Word of God Himself.
- The second chapter of 1 Corinthians is about God's revelation through the Holy Spirit.

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