

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

INERRANCY AS AN ISSUE IN THE FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT:
1900 TO THE PRESENT

RESEARCH PAPER:
SUBMITTED TO HOMER O. MASSEY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE
HISTORY OF FUNDAMENTALISM
CHHI 686

BY
BRIAN WAGNER
MADISON, VA
DECEMBER 19, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
FRIENDS AND FOES OF INERRANCY.....	2
1. BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD.....	2
2. HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK.....	4
3. HAROLD LINDSELL.....	5
4. CLARK PINNOCK.....	7
CONCLUSION.....	9
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	11

INERRANCY AS AN ISSUE IN THE FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT:
1900 TO THE PRESENT

INTRODUCTION:

Ever since Satan, disguised as serpent in the Garden of Eden, said to Eve, “Has God indeed said . . .” (Gen. 3:1)¹ man has begun to question God’s Word and to his own peril. Satan not only questioned the giving of the Word, but he also flatly denied its veracity by contradicting God’s warning, which was given earlier, that death would surely follow eating from the tree of knowledge. Satan said, “You will not surely die.” (vs. 4) Even today, man, like Satan, is still all too willing to profess that some direct statements in God’s Word are errant, whether they are in regard history and science, or social and spiritual issues.

The Lord Jesus Christ prayed to His Father on the night before his crucifixion, “Sanctify them [the disciples] by Your truth, Your word is truth.” (John 17:17). It would be hard for any unbiased reader of these words, or of any words from the full corpus of Christ’s teaching in the Gospels, to come away with the notion that Jesus Christ believed or taught that God’s Word may have some errors in it. The apostles of Christ continued this high view of God’s Word. The apostle Paul declared, “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God . . .” (i.e., Gk. *θεοπνευστος* – “God breathed”, 2Tim. 3:16). Elsewhere, Paul affirmed that God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). God never breathed even one lie in His Scripture.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss how God’s Word may include divine revelation that was not written down or made a part of the canon of Scripture. But this evidence just given above adequately demonstrates that Scriptures can confidently be called the inerrant Word of God by today’s followers of the teachings of Christ and of His apostles without fearing some misrepresentation of their words. It is also beyond the scope of this

paper to discuss the various views that have developed surrounding the term – “inerrancy.”² The inerrancy view adopted for this paper is the same as quoted from the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy – “that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. . . . [not] limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. . . . [and not] negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision. . . .”³ This is presumably the most widely excepted definition by those who call themselves “inerrantists.”

The main purpose of this paper is to trace the issue of inerrancy through the last century of American history, noting how it affected the movement of fundamentalism in Christianity. It will become clear from such a survey, that inerrancy is, as Harold Lindsell said in *The Battle for the Bible*, “the most important theological topic of this age.”⁴ Inerrancy is vital to trustworthiness and authority. An authority that errs cannot be completely trusted. If the Bible has any number of errors, then followers of Christ and his teachings must seek elsewhere for a flawless authority. History, however, especially within the U.S.A. since 1900, has shown that a significant number of Christians have defended their stance that the Scriptures are not only authoritative and trustworthy, but they are supremely so, because they are without error.

FRIENDS AND FOES OF INERRANCY

1. BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD

The last quarter of the nineteenth century had seen an escalation in the battle over the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The influence of modernism in society and theological liberalism from the Tübingen School in Germany earlier in the century had resulted in “heresy” trials in most major denominations in America. The conservatives for

the most part held onto their control of denominational leadership, though almost all major denominational schools and seminaries were being infiltrated by liberal professors trained in Europe.

The Presbyterian denomination continued its conservative view of Scriptures through the influence of Charles A. Hodge at Princeton, but had seen the loss of Union Seminary in 1892 after confronting formally the liberalism of its professors, Charles A. Briggs, Henry Preserved Smith, and Arthur Cushman McGiffert.⁵ Hodge was a great influence on, and was joined in their battles for the Bible by, Benjamin B. Warfield. Warfield had first taught in the Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He joined Hodge on the faculty of Princeton in 1887 and succeeded him there as professor of theology. Together Warfield and Hodge had “fought a running battle with C.A. Briggs and H.P. Smith over biblical inerrancy.”⁶

Noted historian on fundamentalism in America, George M. Marsden, says that Warfield “a formidable intellect, was the inventor of the term ‘inerrancy’ and a leading proponent of that key fundamentalist doctrine that Scripture did not err in any of its assertions.”⁷ Henry Krabbendam, contributor to the esteemed work, *Inerrancy*, edited by Norman Geisler, said that Warfield’s defense of inerrancy “not only placed a stamp on American Reformed and Presbyterian thought but has even gained him the accolade of being the greatest contributor ever to this theme.”⁸ Warfield wrote –

The Church, then, has held from the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will. It has always recognized that this conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit’s superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything

inconsistent with a divine authorship — thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy).⁹

It would not be a farfetched conclusion to see Warfield's influence as preeminent in leading the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1910 to clarify "inerrancy" as the first of the five fundamentals which they called "essential" doctrines.¹⁰

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK

However, the war was not over in any respect. The lines were perhaps only more clearly drawn. A liberal Baptist minister working in a Presbyterian church threw down the gauntlet. Harry Emerson Fosdick was ordained a Baptist minister in 1903 and was a liberal professor at Union Seminary from 1904 to 1915.¹¹ He preached often at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City. On May 21, 1922 Fosdick preached a sermon called, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win," where he called for tolerance towards any who would hold modernist views of Christianity like his. He also attempted to paint fundamentalists as too intolerant.

Concerning inerrancy and the other fundamentals of the faith he said –

It is interesting to note where the Fundamentalists are driving in their stakes to mark out the deadline of doctrine around the church, across which no one is to pass except on terms of agreement. They insist that we must all believe in the historicity of certain special miracles, preeminently the virgin birth of our Lord; that we must believe in a special theory of inspiration—that the original documents of the scripture, which of course we no longer possess, were inerrantly dictated to men a good deal as a man might dictate to a stenographer; that we must believe in a special theory of the atonement—that the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, placates an alienated Deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner; and that we must believe in the second coming of our Lord upon the clouds of heaven to set up a millennium here, as the only way in which God can bring history to a worthy denouement. Such are some of the stakes which are being driven, to mark a deadline of doctrine around the church.¹²

Fosdick felt that anyone had the right to reject this fundamentalist “deadline of doctrine,” as he called it, and still have the right to be called a “Christian.”

This sermon created a firestorm of response, and eventually led to Fosdick having to resign his post at First Presbyterian. However, Marsden says that Fosdick’s sermon had “so exactly captured the liberal sentiments of the moment that it received wide publicity.”¹³

Fosdick became pastor of the influential Riverside Church where he remained until 1946 when he retired.

HAROLD LINDSELL

The same year, 1925, in which Fosdick was forced to resign from First Presbyterian, the fundamentalists suffered public humiliation and defeat by modernism at the infamous Scopes Trial. William Jennings Bryan, who was seen as a prominent spokesman for fundamentalism, was unprepared to publicly answer defense attorney Clarence Darrow’s questioning concerning apparent contradictions in the Scriptures, (e.g., where Cain got his wife and the creation of the sun after plant life).¹⁴ Public opinion shifted against fundamentalists, and modernism began gaining a strong foothold in public education as well as in mainline denominational seminaries in the decades that followed.

The fundamentalists continued growing in number in their own newly formed local congregations, and were able to organize, in the thirties and forties, into their own associations, such as the G.A.R.B.C.(General Association of Regular Baptists), the I.F.C.A. (Independent Fundamental Churches of America), the A.C.C.C. (American Council of Christian Churches), and even the N.A.E. (National Association of Evangelicals) in its beginning years. But the influence from modernistic Europe was continuing. It was even tolerated by evangelist Billy Graham who began cooperating in evangelism with those who

denied inerrancy after his campaign in England in 1954. He welcomed theological liberals to his platform from that point on. And historically fundamental denominations, (e.g., Southern Baptist and Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod), were still losing the control of their seminaries to faculty and administrations that had bought into the liberal theology spawned in Europe.

In 1976 Harold Lindsell sounded a clarion call to the Evangelical community to wake up to the liberal infection of its educational leadership. At its inception in 1947, Lindsell was a part of the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and then became the editor of *Christianity Today* magazine in 1968, where he “successfully revived inerrancy as a primary issue in transdenominational evangelicalism.”¹⁵ But it was his book, *The Battle for the Bible*, published in 1976, which ignited a firestorm of controversy by its exposé of major denominational battlefields where the stand for inerrancy was being lost.

Lindsell revealed through careful documentation how the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptists had both left their fundamentalist moorings. He recorded how the Missouri synod had specifically adopted the doctrinal position of inerrancy in its *Brief Statement*, of 1932, which says – “Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.”¹⁶ Lindsell reported, using a survey taken within the Missouri Synod, that by 1970 almost half of the leadership of the denomination had come to reject the Bible “as the inspired and inerrant Word of God.”¹⁷

Lindsell made citations also of the evidence proving that the Southern Baptist Convention had drifted from its original faithfulness the Scriptures. Their 1925 confession of

faith had stated, “The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired . . . without any mixture of error, for its matter.”¹⁸ Providing compelling examples, Lindsell concluded that by the seventies if “anyone begins to examine the literary productions of Bible department professors in institutions normally aligned with Southern Baptists, he will find that numbers of these teachers have already scrapped biblical inerrancy.”¹⁹ Fortunately, a number of dedicated pastors, including Adrian Rodgers and Paige Patterson, and a dedicated layman, Paul Pressler, moved to regain control of the denominational reins, to steer it back towards an inerrancy stance. Baptist historian H. Leon McBeth recorded the results of their endeavor, saying, “Targeting the SBC presidency as the key office, since the president appoints the committees which, in turn, name the groups which nominate trustees of SBC boards and institutions, the inerrancy group has been able to elect one of its number [to the presidency of the denomination] since 1979.”²⁰ In the 2000 Convention, the Confessional Statement concerning the Scriptures was strengthened, continuing the description from 1925, i.e. “without any mixture of error, for its matter,” and adding, “Therefore all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.”²¹

CLARK PINNOCK

Spurred into action by Lindsell’s initiative, in 1978, James M. Boice, Carl F. H. Henry, Norman Geisler, J. I. Packer, Francis Schaeffer and other evangelical leaders formed the ICBI (International Council for Biblical Inerrancy). The council established a ten year plan to promote inerrancy through a number of seminars, books and other efforts.²² The Council produced what is commonly called “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” which became up until the present time the standard for discussion of

this vital biblical doctrine. It stands as a measure against which all influential theologians in evangelicalism and fundamentalism can be measured.

One influential writer concerning the doctrine of Scripture during the last three decades is Clark Pinnock, professor of theology at McMaster Divinity School. His position on inerrancy was almost identical with the Chicago Statement in the beginning of his teaching career. In his 1971 book, *Biblical Revelation – The Foundation of Christian Theology*, Pinnock said, “Inerrancy is ... urgent for Protestants because the *sola scriptura* principle cannot be maintained without it. An erring authority cannot serve as the only source and judge of Christian theology.”²³

However, Pinnock later refined his position to the extent that many came to doubt whether he holds to inerrancy at all, as commonly understood and described above in the Chicago Statement. He said in *The Scripture Principle*, which he wrote in 1984, “In the last analysis, the inerrancy theory is a logical deduction not well supported exegetically.... The deductive tendency that would see inerrancy as a necessary corollary of inspiration works against honestly facing up to the data, both in the case of the claims themselves and in respect of many of the phenomena of the text.”²⁴

Pinnock and others have created an intense debate on inerrancy in recent years around the theological position concerning omniscience which he had been touting, called “Open Theism.” In his chapter, “Systematic Theology,” in the book “The Openness of God,” Pinnock says, “Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively known [i.e. by God].”²⁵ According to Baptist theologian Millard Erickson’s critique of Open Theism, “At points open theists seem to teach that some statements by God may not be accurate or may not prove true

when the time referred to becomes current.”²⁶ Pinnock almost lost his membership in the E.T.S. (Evangelical Theological Society) in 2003 because of statements made in his book, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness*, which sounded as if Pinnock was denying inerrancy as seen in the way some prophecies of Scripture were not exactly fulfilled as predicted. Pinnock admitted his statements about such examples were imprecise, and promised editing them for future publication.²⁷ Before Society members cast their vote, which retained his membership, Pinnock affirmed in their presence – “I am in agreement with the Chicago Declaration.”²⁸

CONCLUSION

Each generation faces anew the claims of the Scriptures concerning itself. Put another way, believers have the responsibility to accept that the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles believed that the very words they were writing were given to them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, and that they did not err in any of those words. Perhaps more importantly, though ultimately a matter of faith, it is reasonable to be convinced that the words of Jesus Christ have been accurately preserved in the New Testament Gospel accounts. In the gospels He said that the Old Testament Scriptures were believable (John 5:47), unbreakable (John 10:35), and enduring (Luke 16:17), and He promised divine guidance to His apostles into “all truth” (John 16:13), of which his apostles confidently wrote and recognized as the inspired New Testament Scriptures.

Someone can certainly be converted to a saving trust in the Lord Jesus Christ without a full understanding, or even any knowledge of the doctrinal position of biblical inerrancy. However, biblical inerrancy is a matter of “sound doctrine,”²⁹ and as such,

must be held fast by those in positions of leadership in Christ's church. (Titus 1:9). The soundness, the health and growth, of the body of Christ in each generation depends on winning the battle for this fundamental of the faith – the inerrancy of Scripture.

¹ Scriptural quotations will all be from the *New King James Version* of the *Holy Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992.

² See "Inerrancy: Definitions and Qualifications" by Dr. James C. Denison, [www.txbc.org/1994Journals/ July%201994/Jul94InerrancyDefinitions.htm](http://www.txbc.org/1994Journals/July%201994/Jul94InerrancyDefinitions.htm), where he lists eight different definitions for inerrancy with twelve assorted qualifications as used by various evangelicals.

³ "The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy," www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/chicago.stm.txt, 1978.

⁴ Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), Preface.

⁵ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 117.

⁶ Harold Lindsell, "Warfield, B(enjamin) B(reckinridge)," *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J.D. Douglas, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 1030.

⁷ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 156.

⁸ Henry Krabbendam, "B. B. Warfield vs. G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture," *Inerrancy*, Norman L. Geisler, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 413.

⁹ B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration, Vol. 1* (Dallas: Digital Publications, 2003) 117.

¹⁰ Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 117.

¹¹ "Fosdick, Harry Emerson," *The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church*, Elgin Moyer ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 147.

¹² Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win," *The Riverside Preachers*, Paul H. Sherry, ed. (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1978), pp. 27-38, http://www.hyattcarter.com/shall_the_fundamentalists_win.htm

¹³ Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 171.

¹⁴ Ed Dobson, et. al., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 54-58.

¹⁵ Marsden, *Understanding*, 76.

¹⁶ Harold Lindsell, *Battle*, 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁰ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 681.

²¹ Derek Gentle, "The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message Revisions," in http://www.baptiststart.com/print/2000_revisions.html.

²² John Perry, "Dissolving the Inerrancy Debate: How Modern Philosophy Shaped the Evangelical View of Scripture," *Quodlibet Journal*, Vol. 3 No. 4, <http://www.Quodlibet.net>. Fall 2001

²³ Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation – The Foundation of Christian Theology*, (Chicago: Moody, 1971), p. 74, quoted in "Biblical Inerrancy," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*, 8:1, Jan. 2002, in *The Theological Journal, Version 6* (Garland TX: Galaxie Software, 2003), 9.

²⁴ Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 58-59, quoted in "Biblical Inerrancy," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*, 8:1, Jan. 2002, in *The Theological Journal, Version 6* (Garland TX: Galaxie Software, 2003), 15-16.

²⁵ Clark Pinnock, "The Systematic Theology," *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), p. 158, in *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, by (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 158.

²⁶ Millard Erickson, *What does God Know*, 229.

²⁷ Gregory K. Beale, et. al., "ETS Executive Committee Report on Clark H. Pinnock, October 22, 2003," <http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/execcomm/A-Pinnock-ExecComm-10-22-03.html>.

²⁸ Clark Pinnock, "Remarks by Clark Pinnock, ETS Special Business Meeting, Atlanta, GA, 2003," <http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/2003-vote-pinnock.html>

²⁹ See Titus 1:9 and the connection between sound doctrine and the faithful word. The quality of faithfulness when ascribed to the word can reasonably be seen to point towards a word that is inerrant.

Bibliography

- Beale, Gregory K. et. al. "ETS Executive Committee Report on Clark H. Pinnock, October 22, 2003." <http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/execcomm/A-Pinnock-ExecComm-10-22-03.html>.
- Denison, James C. "Inerrancy: Definitions and Qualifications" by [www.txbc.org/1994Journals/ July%201994/Jul94InerrancyDefinitions.htm](http://www.txbc.org/1994Journals/July%201994/Jul94InerrancyDefinitions.htm)
- Dobson, Ed, et. al. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986.
- Erickson, Millard *What does God Know and When Does He Know It*, by Millard Erickson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson. "Shall the Fundamentalists Win." in *The Riverside Preachers*. Paul H. Sherry, ed. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1978. in http://www.hyattcarter.com/shall_the_fundamentalists_win.htm.
- Gentle, Derek "The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message Revisions," in http://www.baptiststart.com/print/2000_revisions.html.
- Krabbendam, Henry. "B. B. Warfield vs. G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture." in *Inerrancy*. Norman L. Geisler, ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980.
- Lindsell, Harold. *The Battle for the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
- _____. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1991.
- McBeth, H. Leon *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987.
- New King James Version of the Holy Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992.
- Perry, John "Dissolving the Inerrancy Debate: How Modern Philosophy Shaped the Evangelical View of Scripture," *Quodlibet Journal*, Vol. 3 No. 4, <http://www.Quodlibet.net>. Fall 2001.

Pinnock, Clark. *Biblical Revelation – The Foundation of Christian Theolog.* Chicago: Moody, 1971. in “Biblical Inerrancy.” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*. 8:1, Jan. 2002. in *The Theological Journal, Version 6*. Garland TX: Galaxie Software, 2003.

_____. “Remarks by Clark Pinnock, ETS Special Business Meeting, Atlanta, GA, 2003.” <http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/2003-vote-pinnock.html>.

_____. *The Scripture Principle*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984. in “Biblical Inerrancy.” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*. 8:1, Jan. 2002. in *The Theological Journal, Version 6*. Garland TX: Galaxie Software, 2003.

_____. “The Systematic Theology.” *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994. in *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, by Millard Erickson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

“The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy.”

www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/chicago.stm.txt, 1978.

The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church. J.D. Douglas, ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978. c.v. “Warfield, B(enjamin) B(reckinridge).” by Harold Lindsell.

The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church, Elgin Moyer ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1982. cv. “Fosdick, Harry Emerson.”

Warfield, B. B. *Revelation and Inspiration. Vol. 1*. Dallas: Digital Publications, 2003.