

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSING THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE TODAY

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There are no errors in the Bible. If there were errors, they are not errors of the Bible itself, but errors made by men. Either they are errors in translation, or errors in interpretation.

Wang Mingdao, "Chong sheng zhen yi" (The true meaning of regeneration), 58-59.

Our attitude concerning our faith is: we receive and hold to all truths taught in Scripture; we totally reject anything which is not in Scripture.

Wang Mingdao, "Women shi wei liao xinyang" (we do this for the sake of the faith), *The Works of Wang Mingdao*, vol. 7, 320.

... Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof (i.e., of the Scriptures), is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:5.

The Importance of the Doctrine of the Inerrancy of Scripture:

A Word to Opponents

Is it anachronistic to bring up the subject of "the inerrancy of Scripture" in the 21st century? Are we turning back the clock? The

term “inerrancy” seems to give an impression of being a “double negative.” Is there theological warrant for this belief?

Do people who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible blindly do so? Do they force a literal meaning on the text, regardless of the genre? Furthermore, is the concept of “the inerrancy of Scripture” a product of western culture, loaded with Graeco-Roman baggage? Is it a product of Protestant scholasticism, an obstacle to the healthy development of an indigenous theology in China and Asia?

These are serious questions which we must not ignore. Why, indeed, do we bring up the subject of inerrancy again, the 21st century? There are several important considerations.

First. The church must articulate a Bible-based view of God and the universe in every generation; as she does so, she will inevitably stand apart from secular views of God and the universe. Throughout history all Bible-believing churches believe that God is truth. God is an eternal, infinite, unchangeable God; thus God’s revelation must be without defect, fault, error, or confusion. In today’s world, we detect a tendency to relativize God in both Asian and western thought. At least, there is a tendency to regard God’s revelation as limited and errant. Therefore, a belief in the Bible’s absolute truthfulness, dependability, infallibility and inerrancy, is a part of, or a natural conclusion of, the belief that God is truth.

God, who is absolutely truthful, inerrant, holy and faithful, has concretely revealed himself in the history of the universe. Because of this, men can understand, know about, and come to know him. This is the orthodox Christian view of revelation; it is an integral part of the Christian faith. Modern philosophy and theology have attempted to deny this; these attempts have been built on various secular views of history, truth and knowledge (i.e., epistemology). A denial of the inerrancy of Scripture may be related to the relativization of God.

Second. God’s revelation is an act which he planned in his absolutely free and sovereign eternal decree. God has freely, auto-

nomously (sovereignly) chosen to use language (as well as other media, such as dreams, visions, angels and miracles) as the medium of his revelation. The church today must confess that: the language and the words which God used in the process of inspiration, inasmuch as they were selected by God, result in an absolutely trustworthy, true, infallible and inerrant Scripture (truthfulness and inerrancy refer to the original manuscripts, not copies, of Scripture). Contemporary theologians want to tell us that language is not dependable; it is slippery. Therefore we have lost a firm foundation for thought and communication. This is a serious trend which is detrimental to the building of global culture. To reaffirm and defend the adequacy of human language in divine revelation is an urgent task for evangelicals today.

Third. Some people think that, since God has planned to reveal himself to mankind, and to give truth and life to men and women, he must be able to use finite “vessels” to reveal to men. Whether these be prophets, apostles, the Bible (especially copies which contain errors), and even pastors and individual Christians, they are all finite, or even by nature sinful. God can use them all. We do not have to worry about the “vessel,” or to emphasize its inerrancy. The vessel must be errant; the importance is the essence, the content, the power to change lives.

There are several considerations in regard to this view. Yes, God can indeed, and God did indeed use finite, created, and even sinful “vessels” to be instruments of his revelation. However, whether the Bible is inspired, or whether it is inerrant, depends on the self-attestation by and in Scripture. Furthermore, the Bible is the “vessel” which God has specially chosen to use. The Bible was written through the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the original manuscripts of the Bible are infallible and inerrant. God can use – and God did use – languages in the finite (and fallen world) as the vehicle for his supernatural, inerrant communication. The prophets and apostles who were inspired by God were not sinless; they were not

infallible. However God can inspire them in such a way so that the Scriptures which were put into writing are inerrant. God can do this; God actually did this.

On what basis do we separate “vessel” and “meaning,” the “message” and the “medium” (i.e., language)? We cannot ignore the Bible’s self-attestation, the Bible’s own testimony to both its content and to its medium of revelation. Another point to be made is: We cannot argue back from the impact which the Bible makes on people’s lives, to prove whether the Bible is inerrant or inspired by God.

Fourth. Chinese theology and Chinese theological education faces a tremendous crisis today. If we do not build a firm, strong theological foundation on the Bible, in 10-20 years the evangelical Chinese church today (with her seminaries) will become the liberal church (and seminaries) of tomorrow. Let us learn from history! He who has ears, let him hear.¹

Therefore, confessing our faith in the inerrancy of Scripture is not some outdated doctrine. Rather it is the very truth which the church needs to hear, as she faces a crisis of confidence today.

The inspiration and the inerrancy of the Bible are truths to which the Bible itself testifies. These are unchanging truths which the church has confessed throughout history, and a message which the 21st century desperately needs to hear. Perhaps the term “inerrancy” sounds like a “double negative;” however throughout history the church has expounded on the attributes of God by using the negative way (*via negativa*). For example, God is un-limited, un-changing, his

1. Cf. articles on “Liberal Evangelicalism” and “Liberalism and Conservatism in theology” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer, eds., (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1988) (Chinese translation available). Also cf. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church before a Watching World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1971) (Chinese translation available), which narrates the crisis in the theology of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the 20th century.

wisdom is infinite, his glory is unlike that of any other. God's love is un-changing; nothing can separate us from his love! If we open the Book of Job, the Psalms, or Isaiah 40-66, we will find that in numerous places, the *via negativa* – what God is not – is the very way in which the Bible depicts and proclaims the living true God.

Belief in the inerrancy of Scripture does not imply an insistence on literal interpretation of every text in Scripture, regardless of its genre. Although there are Christians within the inerrantist community who hold this view, this does not represent an essential part of the doctrine of inerrancy. We would also like to point out that, those who criticize the doctrine of inerrancy as Protestant scholastic baggage, also need to realize that there are different genres in Scripture. There are didactic portions of Scripture which directly teach doctrines (truths); they are not to be ignored. To be sure, much of Chinese and Asian literature is sensitive to the mystical and aesthetic dimensions of the universe, e.g. poetry, proverbs. However the Chinese tradition is not devoid of systematic, cognitive analysis (Zhu Xi is a good example). We must face the fact that, within the soul of man, there is a cognitive-intellectual dimension, and also an aesthetic-emotive dimension. God gave man his inspired Scripture; Scripture contains didactic portions, e.g. Romans, Ephesians; and also more aesthetic portions, e.g. the Psalms, Jesus' parables. We must not pitch one against the other. The maturing of Chinese theology requires careful study of both kinds of texts. Let us forge a new path in theology by first learning from Scripture and history, rather than hastily and impulsively critique portions of what God has revealed to us. A mature Chinese theology must be an all-comprehensive theology, speaking all of Scripture to all of man.

Contemporary Views of the Bible: A Mini Tour

Let us briefly survey what various schools of theology think of the Bible.

“Literal Interpretation Only” Fundamentalists

They believe that the Bible is inerrant, and that the Bible is verbally inspired. They have done a lot of work to expound and to promote the doctrine of Scripture. We identify with them, and appreciate them for all these. However, some individuals in this group hold views which are rejected by other evangelicals, e.g.: only the King James Version (1611) is the true Bible; and every word in the Bible should be interpreted using the rules of literal interpretation, regardless of the genre (form of literature). These views do not represent the entire inerrantist Christian community.

The Traditional Teaching of the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church also teaches the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible. However, at the same time they declare that the church (the ecumenical councils) and the official declarations by the Pope are inerrant and authoritative as well. J. I. Packer rightly reminds us that: “Protestants see Catholics and Orthodox as imposing misinterpretations on the text at key points.”² This is a much needed reminder, because this misunderstanding is built on an erroneous view of authority, i.e.: the Bible and the church has the same measure of “power to bind the conscience.” In recent years some evangelical leaders have begun to openly cooperate with Roman Catholics. However the basic teachings of the Bible (as understood by evangelicals) and those of the Catholic Church are very different. Cooperation with the Roman Catholics must be limited to areas of social ethics and a prophetic confrontation with evil (e.g. opposition to abortion). We must not engage in communion (fellowship) in preaching, doctrine and the sacraments. On at least one occasion, Promise Keepers invited a Catholic cardinal to speak from the podium

2. J.I. Packer, “Infallibility and Inerrancy of the Bible” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1988), 337.

in one of their stadium events. This represents a type of alarming compromise which evangelicals can no longer ignore.

Liberal Theology and Neo-orthodox Theology

Once Immanuel Kant divided the universe into the phenomenal realm and the noumenal realm, the knowledge of absolute truth is no longer possible, according to western philosophy. Friedrich Schleiermacher thus began the 19th century liberal theological tradition; for him, the essence of the Christian religion is not objective revelation from God, but the subjective religious experience of man. The essence of religion is man's feeling of his absolute dependence on "the infinite" in the universe. Many theologians after Schleiermacher doubted the truthfulness of the Bible, including accounts of supernatural events (miracles), such as the Virgin Birth and the physical resurrection of Christ. Many doubted that a historic Adam existed. Very unfortunately, a number of Chinese theologians today are highly appreciative of Schleiermacher, and directly or indirectly promote his approach to culture. Schleiermacher's intent was to speak to the "cultured despisers" of religion of his day; the same is true of some Chinese theologians today. However Schleiermacher's understanding of Christianity is based on his pantheistic view of the universe – God is the same as nature; "the infinite" can be either God or nature. What will Chinese Schleiermachians do to the church of tomorrow?

Neo-orthodox theology, represented by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, was deeply influenced by Soren Kierkegaard (despite denials by some followers of Barth, both British and Chinese). Truth and religion are subjective. Barth makes a distinction between the Bible and the Word of God; the Word of God is an existential encounter between God and man. This encounter cannot be reduced to words or doctrines. The Bible is a mere witness to, or record of, this "Word of God," but not the Word of God itself. The Bible is written by men, and contains errors. Barth accepts the critical approach to the Bible. However, when a person reads the Bible, he may experience a new

encounter with God; at that moment, and only at that moment, the Bible becomes the Word of God for him.³

It sounds very pious to separate the Bible as different from the transcendent “Word of God” (the latter transcends human reason and experience). In fact, however, this method deals a great blow to the traditional doctrine of Scripture. The Barthian approach to Scripture has been incorporated into the creed of one major denomination in the United States. I hereby translate one portion of their Confession of 1967 as follows:

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.⁴

This paragraph states certain historic facts: that Jesus Christ became incarnate; the Holy Spirit witnessed to Christ; Scripture was put into writing; and the church submits to Scripture. The church hears God’s Word in Scripture. But the careful reader will notice that while the paragraph is entitled “The Bible”, it never states that the Bible is the Word of God. Of course, the idea of the inerrancy of Scripture is absent! This paragraph is a rehearsing of facts, not a statement of faith! It has not declared anything to be the truth. This

3. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947), collected in *The Works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1997* (Labels Army Co.) CD Rom. Also cf. J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1996), 115-118.

4. “Confession of 1967” I. C. 2, *Book of Confessions* (Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1999), 257, Section 9.27.

kind of statement of faith can be endorsed by liberals, neo-orthodox and radical Christians and others who do not believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, as well as by well-meaning, optimistic, unthinking evangelicals. The words sound orthodox enough; however they are acceptable to people who are far from the orthodox position, both within and outside the church.

In other words, the problem with neo-orthodox theologians (as well as neo-evangelicals who admire neo-orthodoxy) consists not only of what they do say, but what they do not say – what they are no longer willing to affirm, what they have no courage to, or have no resolve to, reaffirm. And what they fail to affirm, are often the basic doctrines of the historic, orthodox, biblical faith.

In the past 25 years, a number of Chinese theologians (hitherto regarded as evangelicals) have been promoting Karl Barth's theology (including his view of Scripture and the "Word of God"), and integrating it into their own thinking. The following is a final paragraph in an article encouraging Christians to read books, in this age of the visual image. It posits a subtle, "dialectic" relationship between the "Word" and words:

The Word was made incarnate, God left his imprint on earth, in human history. Witnesses saw it, heard it, touched it, argued about it, denied it. All these became past. With the flesh, it returned to dust and disappeared. All the contacts of sense have passed. What is left? Traces are left, and remain in human history in the form of words. Words carry the Word (*wen yi zai dao*). The Word appears between the lines of language; it remains to be searched out, made out, imagined, constructed. It is a process, definitely not a matter of a moment. Until that day, until that hour. For now, it is still words!⁵

As Barth's neo-orthodox theology become more accepted and popular among Chinese theologians, the faith of the church will

5. Deng Shao-guang, "Hai shi wen zi?" (Still words?), *Logos In Text* (*Ji dao yue du*), trial issue, (June 1997), 3. (Translated by the present writer).

become more and more subjective. Objective truth, propositional revelation, verbal inspiration, systematic doctrine, will all be critiqued and rejected. The future is bleak indeed.

The So-called Neo-“Evangelicalism”

The “Neo-evangelical” movement emerged in the 1970s. Fuller Theological Seminary was established in the late 1940s; its doctrinal stance was quite solid in the beginning. However, by the 1970s, under the leadership of the new president, some of the professors began to reject the concept of “inerrancy.” They wanted to stress the importance of understanding the historical and cultural background of Scripture; they also affirmed that the Bible is the highest authority in matters of faith (salvation) and life (sanctification). However in the realms of history (e.g. miracles) and science, portions in Scripture are not accurate or truthfulness according to modern academic standards.

How do they understand the truthfulness of Scripture? Some say that the entire Bible is inspired and inerrant, with the exception of certain portions. Others say that certain portions of Scripture are inspired and inerrant, but not the whole of it. There is, in other words, “a canon within the canon.”⁶ In the 1970s, Jack Rogers and other Fuller professors faced the criticism of other evangelicals. The two sides met at Wenham, Massachusetts in 1975, but could not reach an accord. Soon thereafter, the orthodox believers in the inerrancy of Scripture organized the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. In ten years they held several conferences, and published the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Application. Then, according to plan, they closed down the organiza-

6. Cf. the views of Clifton J. Allen, in Richard P. Belcher, Sheng jing wuwu bian, *Argument for Inerrancy* (Hong Kong: China Alliance Pressw, 1984), 38-45. Bernard Ramm’s views were summarized in pp. 62-3; Ramm does not believe in inerrancy.

tion after ten years.⁷ The issue of the inerrancy of Scripture also deeply affected developments in the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest denomination in the United States. After years of struggle, some conservatives managed to hold on to the presidencies of certain seminaries.

These “neo-evangelicals” have sought to usurp the term “evangelical,” and expel believers who believe in inerrancy from the ranks of evangelicalism. For example, Dr. Roberta Hestenes, renowned pastor, seminary professor and college president, made this assertion in *Christianity Today*: “I want to belabor the language a bit. Evangelical is a label that applies to millions of Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans. I don’t want to use the word for those outside of mainline churches.”⁸

This is a new definition indeed! How should we understand it? According to Hestenes’ definition, thousands of conservative believers in churches such as the Evangelical Free Church, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Conservative Baptist Association, Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, Lutherans, Free Methodists and Holiness Churches (to name a few), plus independent churches (including Gospel Halls and Brethren assemblies) would not be evangelicals! Who are they, then?

If we “belabor the point” made by Dr. Hestenes, those who still believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, who are outside the “mainline Protestant denominations,” should be regarded as “fundamentalists” (to use a term which has been used in our not-so-distant past).⁹

Well, that is not the worst thing which can happen. As early as the 1950s, J. I. Packer wrote a book, *“Fundamentalism” and the*

7. J. I. Packer summarizes this history in his *Truth and Power*, 104-105.

8. Roberta Hestenes, “The Spirit Hasn’t Left the Mainline” moderated by Tony Campolo, *Christianity Today*, August 11, 1997, 19.

9. J. I. Packer, *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1958).

Word of God, in response to liberal attacks on the historic orthodox faith. Packer made some important clarifications. If “fundamentalism” refers to the belief in the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of Scripture, then we should stand and own up to the term: Yes, we are fundamentalists indeed! However, we do not identify with other connotations associated with the term “fundamentalism,” such as: low level of education, a narrow vision, bias and prejudice toward those who hold different views, apathy toward global and cultural affairs, and ignorance! Forty-some years after its initial publication, “Fundamentalism” and the Word of God is such a fresh and refreshing read!

Postmodern Hermeneutics

The most influential philosophy in the 21st century is the postmodern theory of “deconstructionism.” Postmodern philosophy seeks to complete divorce itself from the traditional belief in and quest for absolute truth in western thought; postmoderns critique the latter as “logocentrism.” Following Nietzsche and others, postmoderns believe that there is no meaning in the universe, and words (texts) have no meaning either. Words are tools of political power and oppression. Language is merely ideology. Words are only signs. What are words signs of? They are signs of the acoustic image which emerges in the mind, when one thinks of an object. These signs (words) are arbitrarily assigned to these acoustic images. Words have no intrinsic meaning; meaning lies in the conventional language-structure in a given society at a given moment in time.

Postmodern hermeneutic (interpretation) denies that the interpreter can or should seek to grasp the originally intended meaning of the author. Once a text is finished, the author is absent from the text; he is “dead.” Does the text itself have a stable, unchanging meaning? No, because there is a mutual relationship between the text and the reader; the reader or interpreter gives

meaning to the text. This is how the text is born. Therefore the text – a text with one, stable meaning – does not exist.

Not only is the author dead, and the text is dead; postmodern interpretation tells us that even the reader – I myself – does not exist. I am dead! This is because when a reader reads the text, it is not the reader himself who is doing the reading, but his contemporary hermeneutic community. The reader merely represents his contemporary language-structure. As a result, postmodern hermeneutic gives us these conclusions: the author (intended meaning) is dead; the text (stable meaning) is dead; the reader is dead. The only thing which exists is the conventions of the language structure of a society. And of course, language-structures changes with time.¹⁰

This kind of nihilistic thinking is presently influencing and controlling the hermeneutics and theology of many Chinese church leaders. Most of the articles which have appeared in Hong Kong's seminary journals, which deal with postmodernism, have been affirmative and appreciative,¹¹ thus encouraging Chinese Christians to

10. For an introduction to, and an evangelical response to postmodern hermeneutic, cf. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There A Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

11. More obvious examples include the following: 邵樟平, <初采“語言做事理論”對聖經研究的貢獻>, 《建道學刊》, 第十期 (1998年7月), 23-42; 謝品然, 《衝突的詮釋》(香港, 建道神學院, 1997); 曾慶豹, <現代與後現代之爭的神學反思>, 《道風》, 第一期 (1994年夏); 謝品然, <文本, 本土詮釋與釋經學轉向>, 《道風》, 第3期 (1995), 收在《衝突的詮釋》, 頁23-51。

Few are articles which take a critical stance toward postmodern deconstructionism. One such is Dr. Wai-Yee Ng's work, "'Text and Interpretation' under the Influence of Postmodernism," *CGST Journal*, Issue 22 (January 1997), 97-119. In it she introduced the view of E. D. Hirsch. The English abstract states: "As postmodern hermeneutics swamps biblical scholarship with various reader-response and text-centred theories, many

follow this global trend. This is a serious development. May the Chinese church wake up.

It is reasonable to critique the modernist exaltation of reason (as postmodernists have done). However, in the past 300 years, a good number of evangelical Protestant theologians have offered thoroughgoing critique of the Enlightenment's blind confidence in reason. Not all Protestants have blindly believed in the human mind! Critics of the autonomous human mind include Abraham Kuyper, theologian, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, and Prime Minister of the Netherlands at the turn of the 20th century; and Cornelius Van Til,¹² the late professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary. Carl Henry has also critiqued modern theology in his *God, Revelation and Authority*.¹³ It is unfortunate that contemporary evangelicals are following the lead of postmodern thinkers to critique the so-called "logocentrism" (building theological systems on blind faith in the existence of absolutes) in Christian theology. In fact, evangelical theologians can learn a lot by emulating Kuyper, Van Til and Carl Henry, because years ago, they have warned that building one's philosophy or theology on the foundation of the autonomous reason (i.e, the way of modernity) is a dead-end street. What is so difficult to understand is, when the nihilist deconstructionists have critiqued modernity, evangelicals then follow the post-

evangelicals embrace the view of E. D. Hirsch on "the validity of interpretation." Hirsch argues that meaning does not exist outside human consciousness, and so a text cannot have meaning unless it is used or interpreted by men, and validity resides in the author's use, not the reader's interpretation. Much of Hirsch's theory has to do with the delimitation of this valid meaning, which he claims to be determinable and reproducible" (118). Such bold critiques of postmodern hermeneutics, as Dr. Ng has done, are rare in the Chinese church.

12. Van Til's writings have been collected in *The Works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1997* (CD Rom), Eric Sigward, editor; Labels Army Co. Visit: www.wts.edu.

13. 6 vols. (Wheaton, Il.: Crossway Books, 1999)

modernists! (I would like to bring up a different, but related point here: There are theologians who call themselves “evangelical” but have been immersed in existentialist philosophy and Barth’s neo-orthodox theology; they are having a very difficult time critiquing postmodern hermeneutics, even though they know that there is something evil in postmodern deconstructionism. This is because one kind of humanism cannot critique another effectively! When one has succumbed to the autonomy of man, one cannot accuse someone else of doing the same thing. (See various Chinese theological journals.)

It is an urgent task for the evangelical church to declare and defend the adequacy of language in God’s revelation. There are some theologians who are working in this direction.

The 500-year “modern” period has ended. We are in the postmodern period in history. There was one the “Dark Ages” in Europe; during that time, monks in Ireland’s monasteries copied, preserved, and transmitted the Bible, so that Europe could learn how to read, how to farm, and how to read the Bible. Today in the new Dark Ages, we need the monks and nuns of the 21st century, who would defend the adequacy of language in revelation; the clarity of God’s revelation; biblical use of the (sanctified) mind; the biblical idea of truth; and a Bible-based epistemology. It is high time that the church return to the orthodox, historic biblical faith!

The Meaning of the Inerrancy of Scripture

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy published the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* in 1978. Rev. and Mrs. Ting Wu Lee and Dr. Luke Lu retranslated this document into Chinese; it merits our careful study. For some Christians who are not used to reading creedal statements, it would take 3-4 readings before we can grasp the meaning of this document. We will briefly outline the orthodox doctrine of Scripture, and then point out some implications of confessing inerrancy today.

General Revelation

Scripture declares that all men know God, because God has revealed through the things that are made, and in the human heart. However man, in his ungodliness and unrighteousness has suppressed the truth, and turned to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Thus, man's hearts have been blinded.

Concrete (Special) Revelation in History

God has decreed in eternity, that he would reveal himself and his way to eternal life to mankind. God concretely, objectively, directly entered into time and space (history), and revealed himself through dreams, visions, miracles, angels, etc., and through his spokesmen, prophets and apostles. Thus God revealed himself through events and through words. Some non-evangelical scholars believe that God revealed himself only through events, not through words. However, we clearly see in the Bible, that God's "acts" and God's "words" work together, and interpret each other.

Inscripturation (Inspiration)

God decreed that he would put his revelation (including both events and words) into writing, through inspiration. The result of this act of inscripturation is the Bible, which is God's Word itself. All Scripture is inspired (God-breathed); every word, every part is inspired by God. This does not mean that every time when God inspires Scripture, he uses the human authors like secretaries, in something like giving dictation. It is not necessary for us to believe that. The Holy Spirit sovereignly guides not only the very words which were put into writing; under his rule and guidance, he also superintended the birth, upbringing, background, education, experiences, temperament, writing style and even the mood and immediate context of every author. It is not just the words which were the work of the Holy Spirit! We believe that the process of inspiration itself is mostly a mystery (that is, exactly how did the Holy Spirit caused the

words to be written down by the human author). However we believe that, the process of writing, and every factor surrounding the writing of Scripture, is under the sovereign rule of the Holy Spirit. Nothing happened by chance!

Infallibility and Inerrancy

Scripture, thus inspired (breathed out) by the Holy Spirit, is infallible (it cannot contain mistakes) and inerrant (it does not contain mistakes). The Bible is inerrant in all that it affirms, not only in matters of doctrine (e.g. salvation) and life (e.g. ethics or sanctification), but also in matters of history and science. The inerrancy of Scripture refers to the original copies (autographs); however, to the extent that translations and versions of the Bible faithfully renders the meaning of the original, they should be regarded as the Word of God.

The Witness of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit does not stop working with inspiration. He witnesses with and by the Bible; this is the inward testimony of the Spirit of which the Westminster Confession speaks.

God is Canon

The Holy Spirit kept the church, so that each New Testament book was, upon completion, read and recognized as Scripture (God is canon: the basis of canon is in the work of the Spirit).

Preservation by the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is sovereign over history; under his supervision, Scripture has been preserved, and translated into many languages of the world.

Illumination by the Spirit

According to God's pleasure, the Holy Spirit enlightens a sinner's mind, and opens his heart, so that he understands the truths

in Scripture, and surrenders himself under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

On the basis of this “doctrine of Scripture,” we can see that the inerrancy of Scripture is based on the fact that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus, inerrancy is an integral, indispensable part of an orthodox doctrine of Scripture. (See *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.)

The Implications of the Inerrancy of Scripture

Now let us see what are the implications for believing in the inerrancy of Scripture.

A Responsibility for Confessing Our Faith

Confessing in the inspiration, inerrancy, clarity and authority of Scripture is the responsibility of every pastor, teacher and Christian (I Timothy 6:12). All theological research should begin with faith in the content of faith (Scripture). Evangelical scholarship is not for scholarship’s sake; we must not follow secular trends, adoring and importing the latest fads in western scholarship (including both western and anti-western trends from the west). Theologians and theological educators must be highly conscious that they are churchmen first, academics second; they are responsible to, and accountable before God and before the church.¹⁴

13.Cf. Norman Shepherd, “Scripture and Confession,” *Scripture and Confession: A Book About Confessions Old And New*, ed. John H. Skilton, Nutley, (NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 1973), 1-30. In his book *Truth and Power* J. I. Packer reminds us, “...the critical approach is nowadays an accepted convention of professional biblical scholarship...Whereas biblical infallibility was once a paradigm for Christian scholars in all fields, biblical fallibility is the accepted paradigm today. (*Truth and Power*, original edition, 47; [Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1999], 38).

A Renewed Emphasis on Propositional Revelation

Today the Chinese theological world has been deeply impacted by the ideas of Soren Kierkegaard (existentialism) and Karl Barth (neo-orthodoxy). Over against this secularizing and humanizing trend, the Chinese church must re-assert her belief in “propositional revelation.” Some Chinese authors and thinkers today, who became Christians in mid-life after a career immersed in Confucianist and Taoist philosophy (some grew up in Hong Kong, others in mainland China) are arguing, in agreement with the liberals of an earlier generation (e.g. N. Z. Zia, T. C. Chao), that the Bible should not be systematized into doctrines. They say that the Christian faith is not a matter of propositions, but rather relationships in life, or a matter of mysteries which can only be grasped through faith and intuition, not through reason. Even Professor Kevin Vanhoozer, who has done a thorough study of postmodernism and provided a gracious, positive evangelical response, does not believe that the word “inerrancy” is helpful. In an interview with *Christianity Today* magazine, he said that the word “inerrancy” is not big enough:

In many ways, he says, evangelical theology with its emphasis on propositional truth and law is a step-child of the Enlightenment. “I’m not denying inerrancy, but it’s not big enough.” It offers only a partial rendering of the whole picture of biblical truth, compared to the wideness of Scripture’s narrative, song, poetry, and aphorism. ‘We are trying to get away from an idea of language simply picturing the world. A promise, for example, has a much more complicated relationship to the self and others. You can become a positivist, but why?’¹⁵

Vanhoozer uses music as an analogy to suggest that we need a larger concept of “truth.” His interviewer quotes him:

14. Tim Stafford’s interview, “Kevin Vanhoozer: Creating a Theological Symphony,” *Christianity Today*, February 8, 1999, 38-40.

'Brahms says a lot, but if you try to sum it up in a proposition, the way we often try to sum up the Bible in a proposition, you lose so much. My early work with music and mission has helped me to see the same problem in other areas of theology.' Vanhoozer's hope: to capture the fullness of truth, not losing something in the translation. In an academic world skeptical of any truth, he wants to show that the true, the good, and the beautiful still have meaning in Christ. To do that means expanding beyond the categories recognized by Enlightenment rationalism. Vanhoozer thinks, in musical terms, of "polyphony" – many voices creating one music. He hopes for something 'akin to the Reformation, in which the church recovers the literature of the Bible, and has what Lewis calls a baptism of our imaginations.¹⁶

Vanhoozer's agenda is to respond to postmodernism (especially to Jacques Derrida). He gave up his teaching position to return to teach and do research at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; this is indeed good news for evangelicalism. However, his antagonism toward inerrancy, and toward propositional revelation, is a great loss to evangelical theology. As we said above, the Bible itself contains propositions as well as non-propositional (poetic, etc.) revelation. We need not, we should not choose between the two.

To be sure, there are portions of poetry, proverbs, parables and prayers in Scripture. However Scripture also contains historical accounts, epistles, sermons and doctrinal (didactic) teaching. Some leaders in the Chinese church who are engaged in cultural dialogue want to appear less offensive to non-Christian (Confucianist) intellectuals; they attempt to dialogue with Chinese people who think in the "Chinese way" (a "circular way to think," according to one Christian leader). This "Chinese way to think" means that the search for truth is part of the knowledge of truth. According to such thinkers, the entire Bible is made to be non-propositional. This amounts to a great disrespect or irreverence toward the Bible. These thinkers' intention is to lessen the resistance of traditional Chinese to the Gospel; we can

15. Tim Stafford, "Kevin Vanhoozer," 40.

understand this intention. However, the strategy adopted may be futile from the start.¹⁷

God has revealed himself in propositions in Scripture, using spiritual words (words inspired by the Holy Spirit) to convey spiritual truths (I Corinthians 2:13)!

The Basis for Confessing the Inerrancy of Scripture

We believe that Scripture is inerrant, because the Lord Jesus Christ confessed his full confidence in the Old Testament Scriptures. This is certainly true. John Stott and J. I. Packer (as well as many other British Inter-Varsity authors) have appealed to the authority of Christ himself, to establish the authority of Scripture. We certainly would not discount the significance (or centrality!) of Christ's testimony and obedience to the Old Testament. However, Christ's witness to Scripture is not the entire foundation for the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. The Westminster Assembly declares in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647): "...our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof (i.e., the Scriptures), is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."¹⁸

The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible; he inspired its authors. He continues to witness in, with and through the Bible (Isaiah 55:8-11). Therefore our belief in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is built on the prior assurance given by the Holy Spirit.

16. Concerning the rejection of "propositional" way of thinking on the part of contemporary Chinese Christian thinkers with a Confucianist-Taoist background, cf. Thomas In-seng Leung, "Theological Reflection on the Chinese Context" (zhong guo chu jing di shenxue fanxing), in *Ji du jiao yu zhong guo wen hua geng xin yan tao hui hui bao* (A Compendium of the Conference on Christianity and the Renewal of Chinese Culture) Sharon Wai-man Chan, ed., (Argyle, TX: Great Commission Center, 2000), 151-158. Also see the response by Ka-lun Leung, "A Response to the Theological Reflection on the Chinese Context," 159-162.

17. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:5.

The witness of the Holy Spirit is both invisible and visible (historical). The latter dimension includes the following:

1. The Old Testament's witness to the Old Testament
2. The Old Testament's witness to the New Testament
3. Christ's witness to the Old Testament
4. Christ commissions the witnesses for the New Testament (the apostles)
5. The New Testament's witness to the Old Testament
6. The New Testament's witness to the New Testament (the apostles to each other)

In light of this, the testimony and obedience of Christ to Scripture is a most important and central part of the Holy Spirit's witness to Scripture, but it is not its entirety. As we seek to build our doctrine of Scripture on Scripture, let us not fall into a kind of Christomonism.¹⁹

Receiving All Forms of Scriptural Language

The types of language used by the Holy Spirit in Scripture, being tools in the hands of the Spirit of God, are not options for human choice. If we pick and choose which forms of language to prefer, we rob Scripture of God's own authority. Some Chinese theologians (in Hong Kong as well as overseas), having received advanced training in Britain or Europe, are highly resistant of what we have traditionally called the "forensic language" and "commercial language" used in Scripture; they regard these (e.g. propitiation, ransom, satisfaction, etc.) as western cultural baggage. They feel that these are impediments toward the development of an authentic Chinese theology. They are leading the Chinese church to alter the

18. For the self-witness of Scripture, see John Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1946), 1-54.

content of the gospel message, emphasizing themes such as reconciliation relationship (*qing*) between heaven and mankind, a sense of being accepted, and inner healing.²⁰

I am not opposed to emphasizing such themes as found in the Bible. Whatever the Bible emphasizes, we should emphasize. However, themes such as justification, substitutionary atonement, propitiation (appeasing the Father's wrath), ransom, God's wrath and judgment are not western cultural baggage! These are part of God's revelation in Scripture! What right do we have to arbitrarily discard them?²¹ If we say that, in the past the church did not emphasize grace and "qing" (feeling), the resurrection, and "healing," and that contemporary men and women are in great need of grace, this is quite reasonable. However, it is unconscionable to take what is clearly taught in Scripture, and call it western cultural baggage!

Thus, to believe in the inerrancy of Scripture involves accepting all the forms of language used, and all concepts taught in Scripture.

The Unity of Progressive Revelation

Belief in the inerrancy of Scripture must involve a firm belief in both progressive revelation and the unity of revelation. Biblical scholars and theologians who compromise the inerrancy of Scripture, very often divide Scripture into mutually contradictory parts. We give some examples:

19. Enoch Wan provides a summary view from this standpoint: cf. his article, "Practical Contextualization: A Case study of Evangelizing Contemporary Chinese," *Chinese Around the World* (March 2000), 18-24.

20. Cf. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Chinese translation: Hong Kong, Tien Dao, 1993). Murray offers succinct definitions of some of the great terms used in Scripture to describe God's work of salvation. The Chinese edition of the New Bible Dictionary was based on the 2nd edition of the English; in both the 1st edition (1962, preferred by the present writer) and the 2nd, there are many solid articles on God, his revelation and his work of redemption.

1. One evangelical feminist theologian, in her defense of women's ordination, pitched the teaching of Jesus against the teaching of Paul.²² This is in fact quite common among biblical scholars today.
2. Other scholars pitch the four gospels against each other. In a very appreciative tone, *Christianity Today* magazine interviewed several "new theologians" in 1999. In addition to Kevin Vanhoozer (whom we discussed above), also featured was Dr. Richard Hays (Professor of New Testament, The Divinity School, Duke University). Hays was very brave to critique Yale professor, John Boswell; he said that the latter's interpretation of Romans is a "textbook example of bad exegesis."

While still young and relatively unknown, Hays took on Yale University's John Boswell, famous for his scholarly vindication of homosexuality in Scripture. Hays politely demolished Boswell's pro-gay interpretation of Romans 1 as a textbook example of bad

21.Cf. Alvira Mickelson's chapter in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, eds. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1989). She articulates the following hermeneutic principle:

...identify the highest norms or standards taught in the Bible. (177)...Old and New Testament commands that, if applied today, would be contrary to these basic "highest standards" so clearly taught by Jesus and Paul, must be carefully examined to see whether they are "regulations for people where they were" because of some local or temporary situation" (179).

Mickelson is also opposed to what she calls "propositional exegesis:"

Propositional exegesis (asserting a proposition and then searching for support by selective literalism and "reading into the text") has used the Bible to prove almost anything the interpret has chosen" (181).

With such principles of interpretation, Mickelson can choose her "basic principles" according to her own preference.

exegesis. The late Doctor Boswell huffily refused to respond, refused even to speak to Hays.²³

Hays may be considered conservative as he critiqued the “hermeneutics of suspicion.”

Hays was perhaps even more audacious in a paper he presented at the 1996 conference of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in New Orleans, for it took on one of the darlings of modern academia, the “hermeneutic of suspicion.” The hermeneutic of suspicion is the cornerstone of much modern scholarship in that it suggests that nothing can be taken at face value. It follows the “masters of suspicion” – Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and more recent French postmodernists like Foucault – in seeking to unmask the strategy of power that allegedly lies behind every text. The Bible, for example, offers itself as a divine message of liberating love, but a suspicious reading might discover that the Bible’s talk of a supernatural realm actually masks a desire to pacify or distract people so that they can be more easily oppressed. In his paper, later published in the *Christian Century*, Hays admitted that suspicion is a useful tool. He wondered, however, why scholars had come to be endlessly suspicious of the text and not at all suspicious of themselves. Why were they so “remarkably credo-lous about the claims of (their own) experience”? He cited feminist critic Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who seeks to use “women’s own experience and vision of liberation” as a norm for assessing the Bible. What use, Hays asked, was a critique that never seemed to actually listen to the Bible and allow it to critique us? His paper called for a “hermeneutic of trust” like that which Paul used as he read the Old Testament Scriptures. Taking his argument to its ultimate, provoca-

22. Tim Stafford, “The New Theologians: These Top Scholars Are Believers Who Want to Speak To the Church,” *Christianity Today*, February 8, 1999, 30-31.

tive extreme, Hays asked scholars to approach Scripture as sinners – as those who “have filth in their souls.”²⁴

Hays received a standing ovation from over two hundred scholars at the *Society for Biblical Literature*. “The response was stunning to me,” Hays remembers, “a standing ovation from a crowd of two or three hundred people. I don’t think it was because it was such a brilliant paper. I think it was that I had articulated a deep longing of a lot of people in the guild to recover the capacity to hear the word of God in the text.”²⁵

However, *Christianity Today* tells us that Hays believes that there are conflicts between the gospels: He resists, however, any attempt to harmonize the divergent views of New Testament authors. That sometimes means he sets one Gospel at odds with another, even concluding that one is historically inaccurate when it seems to run contrary to another.

The interviewer also tells us that Hays does not like to use the term “inerrancy:”

He is not in tune with an understanding of Scripture as inerrant, not because he has trouble believing in miracles or obeying scriptural commands, but because he thinks inerrancy as a theory tends to blind one to the realities of the texts themselves.²⁶

Failure to believe in the unity of revelation in Scripture is a tremendous deviance in the evangelical faith!

Recent books on how to study the Bible often only contains chapters which deal with the various genres of Scripture. Gradually, general principles of interpretation (such as the inspiration of

23. Tim Stafford, “Richard Hays: Recovering the Bible for the Church,” *Christianity Today*, February 8, 1999, 33.

24. Tim Stafford, “The New Theologians,” 30.

25. Tim Stafford, “Richard Hays.”

Scripture and the necessary guidance by the Holy Spirit) are disappearing (sections such as in Norton Sterrett, *How to Understand Your Bible*, or A. M. Stibbs, *Understanding the Word of God*). This contemporary phenomenon gives the possible impression that there is great divergence (and possibly contradiction) between the various genres of Scripture. Where are the 21st century authors who would proclaim and teach the unity of revelation?

A Warning against Exaggerating the Text-Context Relationship

We must resist an excessive and erroneous overemphasis on the dialectical relationship between text and context. To be sure, an adequate understanding of a portion of Scripture must involve knowledge of the historical and cultural background of the text. However we must not follow the lead of church leaders such as Shoki Coe, of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches, who taught as early as 1972, that the context is the social reality of the “oppression of the poor.”

Coe, who virtually coined the term “contextualization,” used a Marxian epistemology to build his interpretation of Scripture; if we do not understand that the poor are oppressed, we cannot truly understand the Bible. Is the hermeneutic of the Chinese evangelical church today guilty of Marxian epistemology also?

An overemphasis on the “context” can also be seen in the paperback, *Leading Bible Discussions* by J. Nyquist (Chinese translation: *ni ye neng dai ling cha jing*). This was “required reading” for all who would learn how to lead small group Bible study in the 1960s and 1970s. All who have gone through this kind of training knows that there are three steps to inductive study: observe, interpret, and apply. In the early 1990s, I bought copies of the book for a training class, and was shocked to discover that the “Interpret” section had been totally rewritten!

The older version leads the reader to identify the key words in the passage; are there any words which are repeated? These words

are to be written out, and any order or sequence in the author's argument should be detected. Is there a progression of thought? Are there any contrasts or comparisons in the passage? However, the newer version leads the reader to study the historical and cultural context of the passage, and to read the entire book (epistle, gospel, etc.) as a whole! Detailed analysis of the words and arguments of a passage is no longer emphasized.

This book is published by the major Anglo-American publisher, Inter Varsity Press. What happened? Could it be that Inter Varsity no longer believes that a detailed study of the words of each passage is necessary in Bible study? Or could it be, that IVP no longer believes that college students today have this ability to read, analyze and synthesize? Or could it be, that IVP editors have accepted contemporary theories of interpretation, and adopted the view that the meaning of Scripture can only be ascertained by the larger historical, cultural and textual context, but not from the individual words of the text themselves?

Leading New Testament scholar Gordon Fee is a co-author of the popular book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. He believes that the meaning of the text is the meaning which it had for the original hearers and readers of Scripture, in the generation when Scripture was written. If we push such concepts to their logical conclusion, would the church, in the not so distant future, reject the belief that every passage of Scripture contains timeless, eternal teaching? Context must not usurp the authority of Scripture itself!

A Reaffirmation of the Propriety of "Truth"

We have mentioned how Kevin Vanhoozer opposes the term "inerrancy" because it does not give a large enough picture of truth (see IV2,) In a desire to dialogue with contemporary post-moderns, he expands the concept of truth to include the complex relationship of language with the self and with others. We can understand his intentions. However, an alteration of the traditional concept of truth,

just to please contemporary people, may be too high a price to pay. To be sure, the Bible does not only speak to the human mind; there are narratives, parables, poetry and lyrics in the Bible, which have divine power to speak to the human heart. We can say that: the Bible, the Word of God is God himself speaking. As far as cognitive truth is concerned, the Bible is absolutely infallible and inerrant. As far as moral righteousness is concerned, God's revelation in the Bible is absolutely lofty, holy and upright. As far as the beauty and glory are concerned, the sublime perfection of the Bible comes from God's own character. "Truth" and "inerrancy" are attributes of God, thus attributes of his Word.

The Bible is absolutely holy, righteous and glory. We need to uphold the Bible, and give a renewed emphasis on all its perfections. *The Westminster Confession* describes the perfections of the Bible this way:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof...²⁷

Therefore we do not need to alter or "expand" the concept of "truth" as historically used; this would lead to confused thinking. It is a hindrance to a proper understanding of the very words used in Scripture.

Vanhoozer is representative of many philosophers and theologians today who wish to dialogue with postmoderns and deconstructionists. In so doing, they have adopted postmodern vocabulary. I would like to seriously question this strategy: can we

26. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:5.

adopt all vocabulary from contemporary thought uncritically? Can we ignore the special meanings of words which the Holy Spirit used in the Bible, which he inspired? As we converse with contemporary thinkers, is it not our duty and privilege to show them the Bible's concepts of truth, language, and text?

There are many dimensions to the attributes of God; the glory of Scripture, likewise, is a many-splendored thing. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* teaches:

Q. Who is God?

A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.²⁸

Scripture is inerrant, because it is unchanging truth. An orthodox doctrine of Scripture is not only concerned about its inerrancy. There are several other important declarations, such as:

The necessity for Scripture

The apostolicity of Scripture (New Testament)

The infallibility of Scripture

The perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture

The sufficiency of Scripture

The authority of Scripture

Each of these truths need to be highlighted anew today, so that Christians may truly understand, love, revere, obey, and proclaim the Word of God!

These seven considerations point out the implications of the doctrine of inerrancy of scripture. Today we face a global crisis in civilization; the ideas of proposition, truth, didactic language in

27. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 4.

Scripture, and the unity of Scripture are not something which the church can ignore any more. Theological educators must give renewed emphasis to these, so that pastors and teachers are trained who have convictions – biblical convictions about the Bible!

Applications of the Doctrine of The Inerrancy of Scripture

We face a massive confusion in thinking today. The church must return to a high esteem and consistent use of God’s Word. This article deals with contemporary views of the Bible, and reaffirms the doctrine of inerrancy; it is not within the scope of this article to discuss how to build healthy churches. However we offer a few suggestions for church leaders who are serious about the Bible:

Systematic Expository Preaching

The Lord Jesus Christ established preaching as an ordinance to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Pastors must not abandon systematic, expository preaching of the Bible, in order to adapt to secular trends, or to hope for faster church growth or “the healing of hearts.” Often, stories and topical speaking have taken the place of careful exposition. As we look across the Chinese church, we find many hungry and thirsty souls, eager to be fed with solid food. Where are the shepherds equal to the task?

Systematic Teaching.

Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, cell groups and fellowships should not neglect the book-by-book, as well as topical study of the Bible. I personally recommend that over 50% of programs should be focused on the serious, prayerful study of Scripture.

Theological Education and Theological Reeducation

Pastors, evangelists and seminary professors have issued the call at conferences and conventions, and Christians have responded by dedicating their lives to full time ministry. Three and four years in

seminary are a very precious investment of time; they pass quickly. When Chinese seminary students graduate, have they increased in their confidence in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible? Or rather has their faith in the Bible decreased? Some seminary graduates have begun to doubt the Bible! Seminary administrators and professors need to re-think how to deepen students' convictions concerning Scripture. It is true that convictions aren't everything; a seminary education should build up a student's spiritual disciplines, church experience, and exposition of Scripture (using original language tools). However, a dynamic faith and full confidence in the Bible are also virtues which must be part of the character of a minister of the Word! What is the seminary doing to nurture and develop this? Do seminary professors today have a full confidence in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible? How is this confidence expressed in the instruction? How can we deepen the professors' convictions concerning the Bible? It is high time to re-think and reform Chinese theological education.

A Renewed Understanding of "Spirituality"

Since the Bible is verbally inspired and inerrant, it should rightfully exercise its authority on the believer's heart and lifestyle. Christians today are exposed to various "brands" of spirituality, such as: "opening our hearts" (*chang kai xin ling*), contemplation (*me guan*), or the more traditional "higher life" (*pei ling, ling ming*). Some of the basic concepts in the Bible merits vigorous study and practice by the church today:

The fear of God

Worshipping God

Thankfulness to God

Identifying with God's holiness and holy jealousy toward sin

Contentment in God's abundant fullness

Trust in God

Pursuing God

Submission under God

Words are important; names are not meaningless. We should seek the true meaning of “our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ” from the Bible, not just from the experts. Let us measure our experience by the Bible. Our experience is not the standard for measuring the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives; only the Bible is.

The Pursuit of Reading, Analysis and Meditation

We live in a time of civilization decline. As the church seeks to teach and proclaim the Bible, she must at the same time teach her members how to read and study God’s Word. She must provide instruction in meditating and memorizing Scripture. This is a matter of disciplining the heart, and a discipline in using the mind which is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit!

Since the early 1980s, the ability of young people to read, analysis and synthesize texts has been in steady decline. The responsibility of Christian education (whether in Christian schools or in the church) is tremendous. My plea is: “The goal and task of Christian education is education itself! May God’s Word increase, like it did in the 16th century; may God’s children truly understand God’s Word; may true, biblical education spread, and may society’s morals and manners improve, to the glory of God.