

# Making Sense of Inspiration: Some Notes for the Nervous

by WRF member Paige Britton

First, a quiz:

1. True or False: The Gospel of John was written by John son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve.
2. True or False: A section of the Book of Proverbs was previously published in Egypt.
3. True or False: Studying the human origins of the Christian Scriptures threatens the doctrines of inerrancy and divine inspiration, and should be avoided by believers.

If you find yourself feeling certain of the first statement, startled by the second, and ambivalent about the third, you are not alone. And if my raising these issues at all puts you on your guard, you are in good company. Most of us in the church operate with long-held assumptions about biblical authorship, gained from who knows what sources in our past, and we do not readily welcome the suggestion that we (or our sources) might be mistaken. Even to consider that a different John may have penned the Gospel that bears his name disrupts our confidence in the knowledge we thought we had about the Scriptures. If we are wrong on this count, we wonder, what other shaky assumptions have we been harboring? Perhaps we would rather not find out. And what is this about the Proverbs apparently borrowing material from Egyptian sources? Doesn't such an admission threaten the confession that the Bible is divinely inspired, in part and in whole?

With questions like these, we are teetering at the edge of the discipline of biblical textual (or "critical") studies, the scholarly pursuit of the human origins of the Scriptures. Driven at times by a concern for orthodoxy, and at other seasons by a desire to deny any supernatural involvement whatsoever in the production of the biblical texts, the search for human "fingerprints" on these writings has occupied Christians and others since the beginning of the church. For devout believers, this search can seem a mixed blessing. On the one hand, for example, we are grateful to those in the ancient church who weeded out the non-apostolic contenders to the New Testament canon; on the other, we face the ever-present reality of intellectual powerhouses who feel no need for the biblical God and who delight in exposing the ordinariness of our sacred texts. The verbal assaults of the latter group can make us wonder whether it is quite safe to venture into the investigation of the human origins of the Scriptures at all.

The threats of secular scholarship notwithstanding, most of us do recognize, if only implicitly, the value of knowing at least something about the people who wrote the books of our Bible. For one thing, we are frankly curious about what life was like "back then," and for another, we would like to feel able to trust our sources and recommend them as trustworthy to others outside the church. Yet we may not realize how dependent we are, even for this basic information, on the work of scholars in the fields of archaeology and biblical studies; nor how much of our "knowledge" about biblical authors comes from church traditions, both ancient and medieval, or the theories and conjectures of more contemporary academics. At our historical distance from the original texts, it is often the case that we must finally rely

on the opinions of those who most persuasively fit together the jigsaw pieces of the biblical text and its world.

For this reason, believers who are called to these fields of study and who write and teach with integrity are a boon to the church. Not only can they speak with expertise about texts, artifacts, and time periods, but they offer their observations and analyses in the context of submission to God and his Word. Two contemporary scholars who have recently attempted to do justice to the biblical jigsaw puzzle, within the context of biblical faith, are Peter Enns and Richard Bauckham, whose books form the backbone of this survey of the implications of biblical textual studies for ordinary believers.

### Incarnation and Eyewitnesses

Richard Bauckham, professor of New Testament at the University of St. Andrews in the UK, is the author of ***Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*** (Eerdmans, 2006). WRF member Peter Enns wrote ***Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problems of the Old Testament*** (Baker Academic, 2005) while an associate professor of the Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Some of the ideas expressed in this book proved controversial enough for the board of Westminster Seminary to dismiss Dr. Enns from his position in 2008, after an extensive two-year discussion of the issues. As of the date of this article, Dr. Enns is engaged in various speaking, writing, and teaching opportunities, continuing the conversation he began in his book.

Both of these books treat the subject of how biblical texts came to be, at the human end of things, though the authors approach the topic from very different angles and for different purposes. Among the chief differences between the books, we can note the following: Enns' book is primarily concerned with the Old Testament, although he also treats New Testament writers' use of the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple period interpretive traditions. Bauckham concentrates his attention on the four Gospels, defending the possibility that each is based on eyewitness accounts.

Enns assumes an evangelical readership that is sufficiently aware of the scholarly issues to be perplexed by them, and writes with the friendly tone of a professor walking his students through these things for the first time. Bauckham's book, a daunting but rewarding 500-page read, will likely best appeal to academics and other readers dogged enough to persevere through dense (but fascinating) presentations across a variety of disciplines.

At times Enns' arguments do seem to challenge traditional Protestant doctrines of the inspiration of Scripture, as well as some conservative conclusions about Old Testament authorship. On the other hand, Enns also commendably wishes to correct many unnecessary evangelical fears regarding issues in biblical textual studies, openly intending to encourage in his readers a robust faith that deals reasonably with the realities of the text and its historical context. Less immediately concerned to nurture such faith in his readers, Bauckham makes thorough use of secular and extrabiblical studies and sources to support his points. However, rather than also challenging any evangelical understandings about the inspiration of the Gospels by way of these resources, Bauckham's work ultimately offers a further strong defense of the believing confession that these texts are reliable witnesses to the claims of Jesus.

Because Peter Enns' ***Inspiration and Incarnation*** has recently been at the center of theological tension at a Reformed seminary, it will likely be more familiar to WRF readers, and so of the two we will treat it in more detail. Richard Bauckham's book, though too dense to describe thoroughly in this venue, will

provide us with a framework for understanding the task of the critical scholar, which we can then apply to Enns' work. Interacting with both of these books should give us a sense of the work that believing scholars are called to do, in light of the demands of academic discourse, the unavoidable facts of new archaeological discoveries, the needs and mission of the church, and the Bible's own claims about itself. At the same time, wrestling a bit with these issues may well prompt us to reflect more carefully on our sources of information and our own prior assumptions about the human components of biblical inspiration.

I will supply a note to the nervous at this point: For many of us who hold to a high view of Scripture, there is something that seems almost indecent about delving into the details behind the texts that we have received. We worry that if we look too closely at the human end of the process of inspiration, we will lose our grip on the already incredible-sounding claim that this text, unlike all others, comes to us from God himself. We know that if confidence in divine authorship is lost, so, too, is any sense of divine authority. We fear that if the Bible looks "too human," too much like any other ancient text, we will be forced to admit to our scholarly accusers that our emperor has no clothes; so we would rather not look. Part of us very much wants to "pay no attention to that man behind the curtain."

But the biblical God is not disconcerted by new archeological discoveries or scholarly theories, and neither should we be. Both Bauckham and Enns invite the church to draw back the curtain, as best we are able, and look.

### That Man behind the Curtain

What no one denies is that at some time, somewhere, someone or perhaps it was many someones? wrote the Gospel of Matthew. For the ancient and medieval church, the author was unquestionably Matthew the tax collector, although nowhere in the text itself is this claim asserted. This early tradition met no significant challenge until the nineteenth century, when German theologians began toying with the theory that the material in the Gospels represented the gradual accretion of layers of oral retellings by the Christian community.

According to this theory, the very early church collectively added details to the traditional stories about its hero, Jesus, motivated by a need to make him larger than life so as to justify their own existence. By peeling away layers of later tradition, accomplished by identifying certain key ideas in the texts, one could finally arrive at the original stories on which the Gospel accounts were based and meet the "historical Jesus."

Needless to say, this is not an orthodox reading of the Gospels. How, though, is one to argue that it is not a necessary reading? With what weapons does one come against what has become the entrenched liberal approach to these biblical texts? The stories told in Matthew and the other Gospels sound quite incredible. On what grounds should we argue that readers may trust them?

Enter Richard Bauckham, with a veritable arsenal of reasons that one may have confidence that the Gospels bear reliable testimony to the Son of God. Seemingly from every possible angle, he counters the assertion that the Gospels are many stages removed from the eyewitnesses of the events they record. Ultimately, Bauckham places the burden of proof on those who doubt that these accounts are trustworthy, advocating an approach to the texts that exercises a fundamental, but not uncritical, trust as summed up in the words of Paul Ricoeur: "First, trust the word of others, then doubt if there are good

reasons for doing so." By supplying firm evidence that the Gospels are based on eyewitness testimony, a form of communication that assumes and requires trust, Bauckham challenges readers to grapple with the possibility that these texts are reliable examples of "documented memory," on which our knowledge of any remote historical event depends.

Below, I have listed some (!) of the weapons in Bauckham's arsenal of argument, along with a brief, highly simplified summary of each. Note the breadth of these topics, and their wide temporal range, too, as Bauckham engages sources both ancient and modern:

1. Genre redefinition. Bauckham begins by asserting that the Gospels should be read as testimony, rather than (as some would have it) as early Christian constructions that effectively obscure the "historical Jesus." If his ensuing case for such a redefinition of the Gospels' genre is sound, then biblical scholars of all stripes must take seriously the reasonableness of reading the Gospels "as precisely the kind of text we need in order to recognize the disclosure of God in the history of Jesus."

2. Ancient expectations for historiography. Using material from the Christian writer Papias (early 2nd century) and the historian Josephus, Bauckham establishes what would have been considered "best practice" for the historian at the time the Gospels were composed. This included an expectation that the historian be either an eyewitness himself or have access to individual witnesses of the events being described. (Of the four Evangelists, Luke is the most explicit in his affirmation of this expectation in his prologue; see Luke 1:1-4.)

3. Models of oral tradition. Since the 19th century, it has been assumed by many influential biblical scholars that the Gospels were the products of anonymous, corporate retellings of basic traditions about Jesus that grew more fanciful with each subsequent performance. Recent studies of societies in which oral tradition plays a significant part have shown, however, that both fictional and historical material is passed along with only a limited degree of flexibility, the essential elements being preserved rather than changed by those in the community who are in a position to judge the retellings authoritatively. Additionally, Bauckham emphasizes that the short span of time between the events of Jesus' ministry and the written records of the Gospels places these writings in the category of oral history, which is transmitted within the lifetime of the participants, rather than the distant-past category of oral tradition, which has moved beyond contact with eyewitnesses (who could have verified or corrected a retelling).

4. Names in the Gospels. Bauckham's study of the unexpected occurrence of named figures in the Gospels is worth the price of the book. Why do we know Bartimaeus' name, or Jairus', or the name of the high priest's servant (Malchus)? Contra those who would explain these names as later additions made by the church in order to personalize the narratives, Bauckham demonstrates that later Gospels often dropped names that had been included in earlier accounts suggesting that these specific individuals would no longer be recognized by readers. During the earliest days of the church, on the other hand, believers would have recognized the names of these figures, and may even have heard some of their testimonies firsthand.

5. Names in Palestine. Relying on a recently published lexicon of the Palestinian Jewish names in use around the time of Christ, Bauckham presents compelling evidence that the names mentioned in the Gospels are authentic products of their time and place. In other words, they could not have been invented and inserted by later believers (who would, Jew and Gentile alike, have been products of their time and place, the Hellenistic world of the early church outside Palestine).

6. Literary structure. Bauckham carefully notes the use of literary devices in the Gospels that point to the identification of probable eyewitness sources. For example, there are the inclusions of Peter's appearance at the beginning and end of Mark and Luke, and also of the anonymous / "beloved" disciple in John. Other literary sources from the same general time period are examined to support the idea that this deliberate structuring of the narrative has the purpose of focusing attention on a particular source of information.

7. Word choice. A careful study of Mark's text reveals a pattern in the verbs used when characters are moving from place to place. In many cases, first a plural "they" verb is given; then a singular "he" verb is used for Jesus' actions (e.g., "They came to the other side of the sea And when he had stepped out of the boat," Mk. 5:1- 2). This verbal pattern "gives readers or hearers a perspective on events from within the group of disciples," strongly suggesting that Mark has merely changed an eyewitness's "we" verb to the third person "they" form when transcribing the events. Other evidence internal to the Gospel is used to build the case that this eyewitness source was Peter.

8. Memorization in the ancient world, and modern studies in the psychology of memory. Both ancient and modern sources support the understanding that the verbal retelling of past experiences is characterized by both inflexible and flexible elements, as well as by the teller's interpretation of the events being recalled. In other words, while the ancients did have effective methods of ensuring that disciples memorized a teacher's words verbatim, such strict controls were not considered necessary when narrating historical events. This degree of legitimate flexibility in retelling narratives (while yet preserving the essentials) serves to explain variations in Gospel accounts of the same event. Further, modern studies confirm that while specific details (such as dates) typically fade from eyewitness memory, the "gist" of a salient event generally remains unchanged. Bauckham appeals to extrabiblical and modern sources to make the additional point that the witness's interpretation of an event has always been both an expectation of historiography and a feature of eyewitness recall, thus countering the argument that any theological interpretations in the Gospels are necessarily later additions.

9. Holocaust narratives. The most startling and powerful approach in Bauckham's book is saved for the final chapter, in which the oral retellings of Holocaust survivors are presented as examples of testimony about a "uniquely unique event," something so "other" in this case, so horrific that "we could scarcely begin to imagine [it] if we had not the testimonies of survivors." Admitting that "the comparison is hazardous," Bauckham nevertheless offers the suggestion that the history of Jesus is likewise "at the limits" in fact, it is the inverse of the evil perpetrated during the Holocaust; and that at both extremes, we are dependent on eyewitness testimony to know anything about these events at all. Bauckham explains:

The Holocaust discloses what we could not otherwise know about the nature of evil and atrocity and the human situation in the modern world, but only to those who attend to the testimony of the witnesses. The history of Jesus discloses God's definitive action for human salvation, but only to those who attend to the testimony of the witnesses.

In summary, although we still do not know with certainty whether a Jewish tax collector is the man behind the first Gospel, Richard Bauckham's careful research and analysis offer the persuasive argument that it is reasonable to trust what the writers of all four Gospels have reported. In fact, it is only by "[taking] the Gospels seriously as they are" that is, as the testimony of eyewitnesses that we can know anything true about the life of Jesus. Delving into the enigma of the men behind the "curtain" of history, the eyewitness sources of our Gospels, can thus be a valuable and instructive endeavor.

## Making Sense of *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*

But wait a minute. Isn't there something missing from this discussion? In all of the above, was the Holy Spirit ever mentioned? Isn't divine inspiration more significant than the prevalence of names in first century Palestine? And why do we need to appeal to secular research on eyewitness memory to validate our Gospels? Isn't it clear from the text of John's Gospel that the Spirit would bring to the disciples' memories the things they would need to recall? Does a failure to mention God's sovereign, intimate involvement in the production of these Gospels suggest that the memories of these eyewitnesses were just as shaky as anybody else's?

To answer such questions reasonably, we need to consider two things that should concern us whenever we read (or hear) material about the text of the Bible: First, what are the author's implicit or explicit doctrines of Scripture and inspiration? That is, what does the author believe about the nature of Scripture (is it God's authoritative Word, or just another human project?) and how it came to be (to what extent did God superintend its production?). Second, we wish to know with what purpose or intentions the author has written. In this section we will explore the range of possibilities for both of these important factors with regard to Bauckham's book, before turning to a related discussion of Peter Enns' *Inspiration and Incarnation*.

Everyone who speaks or writes about the Bible does so with certain presuppositions in mind about what the Bible is. These presuppositions may be as general as vague impressions, or as specific as studied convictions; they may never be articulated, or they may find formal expression in established confessions or personal statements. That there exists a range of points of view about the Bible is clear from the traditional distinction between "high" and "low" views of Scripture, in which a "high" view indicates a belief in God's sovereign involvement as the origin and superintendent of the writing of the Scriptures, and a "low" view holds that the Bible is a merely human document. Obviously, holding a "low" view is hardly compatible with an attitude of submission to the Bible as God's authoritative Word, whereas a "high" view reflects a believing humility before the God who claims to reveal himself, his Son, and his will in Scripture.

Even among those who tend toward a "high" view of Scripture, all of whom would affirm that this text is ultimately inspired by God, disagreement exists regarding the extent of this inspiration and the form that it takes. Many evangelicals will be familiar with the debates over the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible debates which do not always necessarily pit conservatives against liberals. In some cases, believers who share generally conservative convictions may disagree about whether the Bible does or does not intend to speak on historical or scientific topics with precision and accuracy (or with what degree of precision and accuracy it addresses these topics). On a popular level these discussions generally arise with regard to creation and the flood, harkening back to the challenges introduced into evangelicalism by *The Origin of Species* and the dawn of paleontology in the 1800's.

Of course, the century that brought us Darwin and the dinosaurs also ushered in the age of "higher criticism" in the study of Scripture, fueled by the atheistic intellectual climate of the time and some tantalizing new archeological discoveries (most notably, examples of ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Genesis creation and flood accounts). This brings us back around to the theme of our inquiry: what shall we make of the study of the human origins of Scripture?

Richard Bauckham certainly found an investigation of the human element useful for his arguments, both in terms of identifying the actual sources of the Gospel accounts and as a means of contextualizing and

comprehending the role of the eyewitnesses. In what spirit, though, did Bauckham apply this information, and for what purposes?

Regarding Bauckham's personal convictions as to the nature and inspiration of Scripture, we must frankly admit that we are not directly enlightened by the text of this book. Short of inquiring of the author directly, or perusing his other works for clear statements, we will have to be content to make an educated guess here. So, what should we expect of a Christian scholar's book about the Bible, and what do we find in Bauckham's work?

At the risk of sounding reductionistic, here is a brief list of expectations compatible with a conservative evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Such a doctrine will uphold a) God as the source of the written material; b) the authority, inerrancy, and infallibility of the written material; and c) the significance of the written Scriptures for knowing God through Jesus his Son.

Additionally, a historically orthodox understanding of inspiration will defend the idea of God's intimate involvement in the process of inscripturation, so that we may confess that every word of the Bible is God-breathed, even while we acknowledge (with wonder!) the diverse voices and contexts of the human authors who were carried along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote, and the diverse ways in which the inspiration probably took shape. If we cannot make this confession of plenary verbal inspiration, we are left with the dubious task of judging which parts are truly of God, and which parts are merely the contribution of the human writers.

If we were to judge the worth of Jesus and the Eyewitnesses based on the explicit presence of the above criteria, Bauckham's book would receive a failing grade. He makes no mention at all of a divine superintendence of the Gospel writers, let alone of God's interest in conveying his thoughts to us in specific words. He makes much, of course, of the human context, form, and strategies behind and within the Gospel projects. Does this mean that Bauckham presents to us a Bible that is merely a human product? Not at all. In point of fact, Bauckham's book simply is not concerned to articulate a doctrine of Scripture at all. Rather, it is relentless in its confrontation of the reader with the Jesus of testimony, as opposed to the "Jesus-of-Church-fabrication." Even further, it is part of the brilliance of the book that it leaves aside questions of the inspiration and authority of the Gospels. Instead, the reader is brought face to face at every turn with refutations of the human arguments that might be used as excuses for dismissing the Jesus of the Gospels. That human arguments are employed to devastate those human arguments that set themselves up against God's truth should be for us a matter of celebration, not censure! In exposing to view the "Jesus of testimony," Bauckham uses the world's own weapons to expose the flimsiness of the world's reasons to avoid him.

That Bauckham may do this successfully without, by the way, contradicting any of the above elements of an orthodox understanding of Scripture's nature or inspiration reflects well on his strategic pursuit of different authorial priorities. Before leaving this discussion, I would like to name these priorities, roughly in the order in which they apparently factored into the writing of this book.

1. Polemical Concerns: Refuting the arguments of secular or non-orthodox biblical scholars. (While these scholars may not have been in Bauckham's mind as his primary audience, it is their conclusions about the Gospels that he primarily intended to challenge in his work.)

2. Professorial Concerns: Instructing and equipping students (and others) to deal knowledgeably with the material in the Bible, its historical context, and rival attempts to explain its texts.
3. Apologetic Concerns: Providing non-believers with sound reasons to take the biblical texts seriously. (Rather than advancing evidentialist arguments for theological topics, Bauckham's scholarly work potentially removes obstacles so that non-believers may give the Gospels a chance to speak for themselves.)
4. In-house Apologetic Concerns: Challenging believers in general to consider new ways of thinking about the biblical texts in their contexts. (I see this concern especially in Bauckham's work on the authorship of the Gospel of John. See "Coda for the Curious" at the end of this essay.)
5. Pastoral Concerns: Writing to bolster the faith of readers. (I see this as the overall concern of a work that holds up the integrity and the claims of the Gospels.)
6. In-house Polemical Concerns: Engaging and challenging the scholarly work of other believers. (Although not a strong component of *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, when necessary Bauckham outlines and critiques the work of other Christians. In this setting, such critiques do not have a very "polemical" feel, but have the goal of giving the theological or philosophical background for Bauckham's own further proposals.)

These categories will hopefully help us now to make sense of Inspiration and Incarnation.

### Making Sense of *Inspiration and Incarnation*

Interacting with Peter Enns' slim volume three years after its publication also entails wading through a quickly growing body of literature about the book and its ideas. Most of this paper (and electronic) trail has been produced by past and present Westminster students, WTS faculty and administration, Enns' scholarly peers at other institutions, and Enns himself.

Ranging in form from blogs to reviews to chapters in books, much of this commentary betrays the writers' intense emotional engagement with the issues, or at least a suggestion of the strain of keeping such emotions in check. The most dispassionate and the most devastating scholarly critique that I encountered comes from D. A. Carson, and the most complimentary reaction from WTS alumna Susan Wise Bauer, currently a professor of Ancient Literature at the College of William and Mary. Dr. Enns is certainly realizing his wish to continue the conversation he began in his book, though it would be understandable if he felt rather dismayed by the tone that some of the discussion has taken.

Whence all the emotional heat? Undoubtedly, there is more than one source, though these could all be summed up in the biblical concept of the "overflow of the heart." Strong love for a troubled treasure of a seminary; strong affection for an admired professor; strong feelings about Enns' ideas, one way or another; a strong desire to protect the flock or liberate it from benighted thinking; and a strong calling to defend the Scriptures from what one perceives to be heterodox or inadequate teaching all these sentiments are stirred up by Enns' book, and then again by its reviews.

Realizing in advance that no attempt to do justice to *I&I* will quite please everybody, I would like to use the observations gathered from a reading of Richard Bauckham's work to try to make sense of Peter



Enns' offering. Perhaps organizing a review of Enns' ideas within a framework of possible authorial priorities will serve to highlight the very real strengths of the book, as well as those areas that are of concern to many of Enns' academic peers.

Additionally, a curious feature of readers' reactions to *I&I* should be noted at the outset of this discussion: different groups of people seem to react to the book along different but rather predictable lines of thought and emotion. Whether this is a phenomenon that points to weakness of presentation on Enns' part or to the obtuseness of some of his readers may be a matter of opinion; or it may be helpfully explained in part by a close look at Enns' strategies for communicating his ideas with different groups of readers in mind.

Before beginning, let me briefly describe the contents of *Inspiration & Incarnation* for readers who are as yet unfamiliar with it. (For those who desire a more thorough sketch, a helpful comprehensive summary is found in D. A. Carson's review.) In *I&I*, Enns targets three areas of biblical studies that tend to trouble the minds of students of the Bible: the degree of resemblance between Old Testament accounts and ancient Near Eastern (ANE) mythological and political writings; the appearance of theological contradiction between different Old Testament passages; and the New Testament writers' remarkable interpretations of OT selections, coupled with their use of Second Temple period exegetical methods and oral traditions. Enns' message throughout the book is that we should not fear (or try to avoid seeing) the "earthly garb" of our sacred text, but embrace it as evidence of God's accommodating love for his people even as he condescended to become clothed with humanity in order to save his own. In *I&I* Enns also calls for something of a "Copernican revolution" in our thinking about "what the Bible is," a challenge which, as we shall see below, raises more questions than it answers.

Four authorial priorities seem especially to have guided Enns' writing: first pastoral and professorial concerns, and then both apologetic and polemical concerns directed toward a Christian audience. The first two of these priorities are so closely intertwined that we will consider them together.

1. Professorial and Pastoral Concerns: (Instructing and equipping students (and others) to deal knowledgeably with the material in the Bible, its historical context, and rival attempts to explain its texts; bolstering the faith of readers.)

In contrast to Richard Bauckham, Enns very openly identifies his intended audience in *I&I*, so that it is not difficult to see where he has made various authorial decisions regarding the structure and tone of his book in order to accommodate these readers. His main concerns are both pastoral and professorial: he writes for "people who know instinctively that the Bible is God's word, but for whom reading the Bible has already become a serious theological problem, perhaps even a crisis [*I&I* is written for] Christians who love and want to hold on to their Bibles, but who also feel the weight of certain kinds of evidence." Enns clearly takes seriously the task of welcoming non-academic newcomers into his field of study, and he tries to do so without placing any stylistic or overly academic stumbling blocks in their way. He avoids freighted theological jargon, footnotes, and extended interaction with alternate scholarly theories, and he speaks sympathetically of the theological angst believers can experience when confronted with the results of archaeological and critical textual studies. As a bonus, a fine glossary at the end of the book introduces theological, ANE, and Second Temple terms and documents in an accessible manner.

True to form, this professor not only tries to meet his students where they are, but he also works to bring them along to a new place of understanding. His burden is that they would appreciate rather than fear the humanness of God's inspired Scripture, and that they would see it as something akin to (but not exactly like) the Incarnation of the Son. In other words, when the cultural embeddedness of our Scriptures is pointed out by non-believers, we need not stick our heads in the sand so as to avoid seeing it, but instead we may rejoice that our God came so close to a fallen world that he would cause something to be written that "fits" its cultural environment.

To give his readers an idea of what he means by the "incarnation" of inspiration, Enns briefly sketches a broad sampling of typically nervous-making examples, including the creation and flood myths of the ancient Near East, political writings from the time of Israel's kings, and the NT writers' use of OT passages and their appropriation of Jewish oral traditions into their texts. Always he is intent to call attention to the way the similarities between the extrabiblical data and the biblical texts, or the tensions within the texts, resonate with this theme of incarnation, so that the very "ordinariness" that others have despised may become for his readers something to celebrate. Enns is thus offering what he sees as a corrective focus on what theologians sometimes call the phenomena of Scripture, or, in Enns' words, "how the Bible behaves," over against our personal or formally summarized (doctrinal) expectations for its behavior.

### Audience & Assumptions

Unfortunately, affirming these ANE similarities, as well as the "ordinariness" of Scripture and the "human" phenomena of the Bible, can be theologically and psychologically problematic for readers, especially if these elements are not balanced by thoughtful descriptions of God's intimate involvement in the production of the Bible. Since the publication of his book, Enns has been criticized by some reviewers for failing to address adequately the role of God in inspiration. In response, Enns has appealed to his explicitly stated intention to write for a particular audience, explaining that:

Because of the nature of the book there are things I leave unstated. Perhaps most importantly, in view of the necessary corrective focus on the human element of Scripture, I have chosen not to set out a fuller exposition of its divine element. Of course, this is not where the target audience has a problem. My readers are evangelicals, and so I assume they already believe that the Bible is God's Word, a belief I also affirm at the outset of the book.

This clarification of Enns' assumptions about the beliefs of his audience is helpful, but unfortunately it also begs the question of just how much readers may fill in the blanks regarding Enns' unstated views. Do his assumptions also extend to evangelical understandings of authority, inerrancy, and the direct, divine inspiration of every word of Scripture? Let's examine each of these possibilities in turn.

a. Authority. Despite the publisher's unfortunate inference to the contrary, Enns is not challenging (or "reconsidering") Scripture's authority in I&J. If anything, Enns strongly affirms an evangelical sense of Scripture's authoritative role in the life of the church, while yet wishing to retool a traditional doctrine of inspiration until it better accommodates the phenomena of Scripture. One could and one should question whether a traditional doctrine of Scripture's authority will withstand much of an adjustment to a traditional understanding of its inspiration; but one need not doubt Enns' sincerity when he writes affirmatively of holding "a high and healthy view of Scripture as God's word," or when he explains that "the Bible really does have authority if we let it speak."

b. Inerrancy. Out of sensitivity to his intended audience, many of whom have felt disillusioned by what they perceive to be pat answers given by the church in response to their questions about the Scriptures, Enns avoids using the term "inerrancy" in *I&I* apart from a brief mention near the end of the book. (For the same reason, he makes no mention in *I&I* of formal doctrinal statements such as the Westminster Standards.) But his forays into ANE mythology and Second Temple interpretive traditions in particular coupled with his repeated insistence that Christian doctrine is "provisional" and should regularly face scrutiny and revision if necessary leave open in *I&I* the question of the historicity of certain parts of the Bible, and raise concerns in the minds of some readers.

For example, despite his reconfiguring of the term "myth" to lessen its impact on readers accustomed to thinking of "myths" as "religious fictions," Enns offers no forthright assertion that, say, Adam and Eve were real historical figures. Even if the genre of the initial chapters of Genesis (1-11) is something like myth, are these chapters still conveying information about real events? Enns leaves this an open question. Additionally, while Enns seems reticent here to offer an opinion on who authored the book of Genesis, his analysis of the Israelites' situation after the Exodus casts doubts on the conservative affirmation of Mosaic authorship (and, by implication, any Scriptural references that assume Moses was the penman).

Later, in his discussion of the Second Temple interpretive approaches that likely influenced the NT writers, Enns highlights instances where Jewish oral tradition appears in the text (such as the statement that angels mediated the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai). Here, Enns explains that such interpretations were commonly- assumed understandings of biblical passages that would have already been familiar to the writer's intended audiences. While he celebrates how God condescended to use this element of the writers' historical context in the production of the Scriptures, Enns is content in this setting to leave the question of the historical veracity of these statements to one side.

Because of these open questions in *I&I* about whether the Bible can be trusted to tell us what really occurred in the far-distant past, and because of some ambiguity in the book as to which evangelical doctrines Enns thinks ought to be renovated (and in what directions), Enns has received many queries and challenges from readers and reviewers. Regarding the issue of inerrancy, he writes on his website:

Yes, *I&I* "denies" an inerrancy that says, for example, historical background information should play a marginal role, if any role, in coming to grips with what Scripture is; or that says that theological tension and diversity are unbecoming [to] a text authored by God; or that the NT authors would never have used the OT in such oddly Jewish ways, since God is the author.

In other words, Enns believes the term "inerrancy," as it is typically defined by evangelical believers today, is much too narrow (or as Enns puts it, "severely overqualified"). Enns' definition leaves room for what he dubs the "messiness" of Scripture, an epithet he has adopted to refer to all the ways the Bible doesn't behave quite the way contemporary readers might expect it to. Why should all the tensions in the Scriptures be "harmonized" away? Why not let them stand, and see what this tells us about God and his Book? Why should we adopt contemporary expectations for the historicity of narratives, when ancient expectations were so different? Why should we continue to judge the Bible's "inerrancy" "in a manner that is comfortable and familiar with particular cultural conventions (i.e., western, logical, philosophical, etc.)"?

One might well ask, however, whether we have not entered foggy epistemological territory if we cannot trust that certain straightforward statements included in our Bibles refer to actual events and figures in

history. For how can we confidently know anything at all from Scripture, if we cannot be certain that the words we read in historical narratives are meant to convey reality? In that case, perhaps all the historical events and figures in the Bible are up for grabs. With regard to the NT alone, as we saw in our discussion of Richard Bauckham's book, there are plenty of biblical critics who gladly identify the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke, the miracles reported in the Gospels and Acts, and the resurrection itself as being in exactly the same general category that Enns uses to explain (for example) the inclusion of the names "Jannes and Jambres" in the text of 2 Timothy: these are simply the fruit of a religious community's tradition of oral speculation and addition, and thus they do not necessarily refer to historical reality.

Whereas Enns holds these instances of Jewish oral tradition up to us as evidence of God's delight in involving humanity in the production of his Word, others are just as happy to confront us with what they see as the Christian community's production of a farce. The difference between these readings seems simply to be the prior commitments of those who make them, Enns' to an "instinct" that the Bible is God's Word (so this usage of ahistorical tradition by NT authors is acceptable), and the non-conservative critics' to the opposite. Regardless of Enns' appeals to God's sovereignty over the inclusion of Jewish oral traditions in the NT, if these straightforward statements refer to nothing more substantial than rabbinic imagination, then readers (both past and present) are seemingly being invited (by God!) to trust in falsehoods. An exploration of the specific doctrinal implications of Jewish oral traditions appearing in the NT is obviously needed, and is one of the open questions regarding inerrancy in I&I. (Interested readers are directed to the End Notes at this point for some further discussion. )

c. Plenary Verbal Inspiration. I do not wish to read into I&I something that is not there, as I would do if I were to construct an argument from silence, along the lines that I&I does not seem to support the notion of plenary verbal inspiration. (Yet if this conclusion were, in fact, true, in all fairness I would not wish to read into I&I the opposite.) As it is, in the absence of a clear revelation of Enns' thoughts on the matter, I can only note that the lack of reassurance in this area will leave some readers with a vague feeling of disquiet as they finish the book.

Whether or not it was intended to do so, Enns' presentation can convey the impression that, while the Bible is "ultimately" from God, and its marvelous diversity was entirely according to his plan, the divine superintendence stopped short at the level of general ideas, and then the human writers did the best they could to communicate these concepts in the verbal clothing of their time and place. One might say that the language of divine agency is almost entirely absent from passages that speak of the verbal composition of the texts, and that (with two brief exceptions) only human agents are depicted choosing the actual words that were recorded.

At one level, it is not wrong to speak of human agency when we talk about the specific words and materials chosen for the biblical text. The Bible was produced via "dual authorship," and Enns rightly contends that we ignore the reality of the human writers and their contexts to our detriment. Certainly we saw that an exclusive concentration on the human authors' contribution served Richard Bauckham's purposes in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. But in light of Enns' openness about his target audience, as well as his pastoral concerns and expressions of faith in Christ, readers of I&I may well wonder at the distance the Primary Author of the Bible seems to have kept between himself and the final product, as implied by Enns' presentation. Granted, I&I is a book about the "what" of the Bible, not the "how" of inspiration; but this is nevertheless an area of ambiguity that unfortunately invites more than one possible theological reading. (Some specific examples of Enns' preference for speaking of human agency over divine superintendence are provided at this point in the End Notes.)

## Ambiguity & Audience

Other reviewers have also commented that *I&I* seems "ambiguous" or unclear about various topics such as those explored above, though, interestingly enough, these reviewers' responses to perceived ambiguity in the book range in tone from aggrieved to approving! Evidently it is not always considered wrong to leave blanks to be filled in. This is apparently the conclusion of Michael Eschelbach, who writes in a short review in JETS:

Finally, this book raises some very significant questions which Enns presses the reader to resolve. Does a biblical scholar need to accept (not just be familiar with) the conclusions of modern critical research in order to be taken seriously as a scholar in the academic world? Are we reasonably compelled to accept that the Bible is dependent in some way on the materials of surrounding nations that preceded it?...May we consider things to be true that are related only conceptually through "myth" (pp.49- 53) and story, or is it necessary that truth at all times correspond with reality?...The reader must decide.

Eschelbach concludes with the recommendation that *I&I* be used to facilitate "important discussions about inspiration and Scripture within the church and within the classroom." Here the blanks left in Enns' book resonate with potential for Christian education, certainly one of Enns' own professorial concerns.

One wonders, however, just how this discussion would go down in some of our less cosmopolitan churches. (When was the last time your adult Sunday school program offered a comparative studies class on Ancient Near Eastern Literature, or explored Second Temple Era rabbinic writings?) Even if we agree these are worthwhile topics to discuss in the church setting, *I&I* actually may not be the best jumping-off point for many of the non-academic evangelicals for whom Enns writes, simply because of the ambiguities in its presentation. Since every reader of *I&I* will need to "fill in the blanks" in various ways, some amount of previous knowledge is necessary and many believers do not yet have this.

In fact, I would suggest that what we might call the reader's "epistemological moment" that is, the reader's position of prior knowledge and experience plays a striking and significant role in his or her reading of *I&I*. Further, I would suggest that Enns' intended audience of non-academics is really made up of two subgroups, each characterized by a fairly predictable sort of reaction to the book. On the one hand, there are those who will become intellectually engaged in the conversation Enns has started, and on the other, there are those who will react by becoming emotionally wrought and intellectually paralyzed. In either case, I believe the reader's reaction corresponds to the degree to which he or she has been exposed to academic discourse (especially from Christian writers) prior to reading Enns' book.

Among those in the first group (those who are motivated to intellectually engage with *I&I*), different individuals may respond to Enns' ideas with approval, caution, or dismay. But these readers already possess the understanding that evangelical Christian scholars do not hold a uniform opinion about all things; so they reach for another book, or find a review, and begin the thoughtful exercise of analyzing, comparing, and evaluating. These readers may also have enough familiarity with theological issues to recognize the conceptual gaps left in *I&I* and begin to fill them in or, if not, they at least have an idea where to begin digging for possible answers.

Those in the second group, the emotionally wrought/intellectually paralyzed readers, are ill-prepared to handle Enns' challenges to their preconceived notions about the Scriptures, let alone his frequent suggestions that evangelical doctrines (as currently articulated) are inadequate for the tasks and data at hand. They lack a sense of perspective that would remind them that Enns is writing within a tradition that reflects many ways of putting together the "jigsaw puzzle" of the Bible and its world. They may have a vague awareness that something is absent from the presentation in *I&I*, but they probably cannot name it, and almost certainly they cannot supply out of their previous knowledge what is missing. These readers may well find *Enuma Elish* a startling new piece of data to absorb; they will likely experience the pervasive ambiguities of Enns' book as something far more troubling.

What to make of this speculation about reader reactions? For starters, I do not think that Enns needs to be held responsible for the immature reactions of some of his readers. Certainly the ideal would be that the "weaker" brethren would gain the intellectual sturdiness needed to deal reasonably both with extrabiblical evidence and with professors who would like them to engage it (and to reconsider an evangelical doctrine of Scripture to boot!). Of course, helping readers to deal reasonably with these things is one of the intentions of Enns' book. But given the epistemological situation of some of his potential readership, it is too much to expect *I&I* to deliver this sturdiness particularly when such sturdiness is really a prerequisite for reading *I&I* to begin with.

Perhaps a medical metaphor would be helpful here: *I&I* is strong stuff, and should not be taken on an empty stomach. Though it is intended for non-academic newcomers to the fields of theology and biblical studies, true beginners (no shame to them) would benefit by reading this book in concert with a couple of others, if only to help themselves develop a sense of perspective about the work of believing scholars in these areas of study. Two titles that would neatly complement Enns' offering are Tremper Longman's *How to Read Genesis* and the recently published *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.

Longman's book was published in the same year as *I&I* and covers similar biblical territory for a similar audience; the "three views" in the other book are presented by Walter Kaiser, Darrell Bock, and Peter Enns himself, affording an opportunity to hear Enns' voice alongside others in his field of study. (Pastors, teachers, and professors may want to keep these titles in mind as they encounter those readers of *I&I* who have found themselves bereft, bothered, and bewildered by it.)

2. In-house Polemical Concerns (Engaging and challenging the scholarly work of other believers.) If too little knowledge is problematic for some readers of *I&I*, others who bring to their reading very much knowledge about this field of study face another kind of challenge. Enns' secondary audience, his fellow academics, also must fill in blanks where *I&I* has left open questions. Many (though not all) of these readers have recognized in the book traces of the theological systems that they have spent their lives refuting, and have reacted strongly the more so because they recognize *I&I's* potential influence on its primary intended audience. Interestingly, there is not really a uniform set of criticisms leveled against the book by its scholarly readers, aside from a general dissatisfaction with the incarnational metaphor as it is employed by Enns, as well as with the dearth of assurance in *I&I* about God's involvement in the process of inspiration. Otherwise, these reviewers offer a veritable laundry list of criticisms that range from charges of heterodoxy to complaints about tone and style, in addition to their scholarly engagement of specific passages in *I&I*. The "slippery slope" idea is sometimes present in these reviews, in the sense that the implications of the book's teaching might lead a reader into theological liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, postmodernism, or some combination of the above. Because certain things are not spelled out in the book, it is argued, Enns' readers may well come away with their doctrine of Scripture

revised in a dangerous direction that is, away from traditional orthodox formulations and confessions, and toward human-centered explanations.

However on a more hopeful view it is possible that where things seem to be ambiguously or inadequately stated in a fellow believer's writing, a "charitable" or generous reader might legitimately supply the missing orthodox teaching and overlook the lack. This is the approach taken at one point by Tremper Longman in his brief review of *I&I* for *Modern Reformation*. Noting that he "got confused in [Enns'] discussion of whether or not the church should read the Old Testament in a similar way" (i.e., following the apostles' example), he offers the possible interpretation:

That Enns means we do not live in the Second Temple period (and I would add are not writing literature which, in his terms, is fully divine as well as fully human) so that we can make similar connections to those that the New Testament authors make. At least I hope that's his final position, because I think that is the correct one.

Longman's guess as to Enns' position offers an orthodox interpretation of this issue, but it is still, as he admits, only a guess. Perhaps one could objectively call this a more "charitable" read than the decidedly troubling conclusions mentioned above, but I would once again question how far a reader may take the assumption that all blanks in *I&I's* presentation should be filled with traditional evangelical interpretations. If Enns truly holds alternate convictions on some issues, it would hardly be "charitable" to read into *I&I* what he does not mean, any more than it would be "charitable" to assume an alternate interpretation where his unexpressed convictions are actually quite traditional!

I do wish to tread with deference here, because I recognize that these issues must still be a sensitive area in the hearts of the WTS community (and perhaps the general Reformed community as well). But if I may use the term without its pejorative sense, I wonder whether many of the responses from Enns' scholarly peers might not be characterized as reactionary in that these readers are reacting not only to the troubling ideas or problematic theological implications that they perceive in *I&I*, but also to the tone with which these ideas are conveyed.

At least one reviewer has remarked on the way Enns takes to task in *I&I* not only fundamentalist biblicists who ignore the human dimension of Scripture and the relevant historical data, but also an anonymous group of evangelical scholars who have done a poor job of allowing the phenomena of the Bible to influence their doctrine of Scripture. At various points in his book, Enns characterizes these thinkers as being motivated by a desire to protect "older doctrinal commitments" by giving selective attention only to favorable extrabiblical evidence, as well as exercising "special pleading" in their commentaries and even "intellectual dishonesty" in their arguments. Allusions to those who seek to control "what can or cannot come into the conversation" and who "rule over private kingdoms already well established, who in their arrogance have closed their hearts and minds to the continued work of God's Spirit" are as startling as they are puzzling. Elsewhere Enns defends his lack of specific identifying citations by appealing once again to his intention to write primarily for non-academic laity.

Nevertheless, his comments are "in-house" polemics with a decidedly polemical tone. One can scarcely be surprised if some of these scholars, perceiving that they may be the target of these comments, react almost as strongly as the disciples did to Jesus' cryptic statement about his betrayer. Only, in this setting, the emotions involved are not so much dismay and horror at the thought, as they are indignation at the insult. I find D. A. Carson's review particularly interesting in this regard. Given what I assume to be his personal distance from the tensions at WTS, it is surprising how many indications he gives that *I&I* has

gotten under his skin. It seems that the text alone (rather than the text experienced in its immediate historical context) is sufficient to impress on him that Enns' argument exhibits something of an "'angry young man' syndrome," and that his book "projects itself into the position of correcting everybody."

One wonders, in light of this apparent pattern of tone-and-reaction, whether the necessary theological conversation that has followed I&I might not have accomplished more for good and been less strained had Enns begun from a different stance with regard to his academic peers. It is a delicate thing to balance force of conviction, "prophetic untimeliness" (to borrow Os Guinness' phrase), and "outdoing one another in showing honor" in academic discourse. I would venture the judgment that in I&I, Enns has not got the balance quite right.

3. In-House Apologetic Concerns (Challenging believers in general to consider new ways of thinking about the biblical texts in their contexts.) Little did Copernicus know, way back when he first made public his universe-rocking conclusions, that he would be lending his name to many a paradigm shift in future generations. Enns mentions Copernicus' original "revolution" only in his introductory chapter, but the idea of prompting a significant shift in Christian thought reverberates throughout the book. Arguably, Enns' "in-house apologetic" concerns i.e., challenging Christians to think in new ways about the Bible and a doctrine of Scripture are more important to him as an author than engaging the work of his academic peers, discussed above. But I have chosen to consider this authorial priority last because, as I hope to demonstrate below, the paradigm shift Enns envisions in I&I seems to involve both of the above intended audiences, though in different ways.

Let's begin by noting what the metaphor of a "Copernican revolution" implies, and then we will end by considering what Enns may intend by alluding to the original at the outset of his book. (Note that Enns does not himself use this phrase; I have adopted it here for the sake of discussing I&I's call for a paradigm shift in Christian thinking.)

First, a Copernican revolution suggests that there is a "Copernicus," someone who has done the thinking and can point the way forward. I doubt that Enns has the hubris to identify himself alone as such a figure; while his presentation may have aspects to it that are peculiar to his own way of thinking and labeling things, he acknowledges (in a general way) his indebtedness to other thinkers, and offers to his readers the titles of many of the books that have influenced his ideas. It is much more likely that he sees himself as one spokesman for a loosely associated group of evangelical thinkers, past and present, who share the desire to allow the phenomena of Scripture to have more influence on our conception of what the Bible is.

What is less clear in I&I is whether the intended audiences are to be the objects of the revolution, or fellow revolutionaries. A Copernican revolution suggests a radical transformation of something, whether that be popular thought systems or church doctrines. Are the readers of I&I to be purged of untenable fundamentalist conceptions about the Bible, or are they to join with Enns in developing a new doctrine of Scripture that replaces "older formulations," in order to better accommodate the evidence of God's accommodating authorial choices?

In a document produced in early 2007, Enns and his colleagues on the Hermeneutics Field Committee at WTS vigorously defended I&I against a number of criticisms leveled by colleagues from another committee. One point Enns' committee takes pains to make is that the importance of keeping the lay focus of the book before us is again made plain: those for whom the human element of Scripture presents a problem, i.e., those who have a "non-incarnational" notion of Scripture, are in view here. And



yes, these readers as well as anyone else who devalues the humanity of Scripture need their doctrine of Scripture improved.

The same writers also ask whether the critics "really think that what is in view here is an overhaul of Christian doctrine?" Here it seems that the "Copernican revolution" sponsored by I&J may be reduced to reteaching the flock, improving individuals' personal doctrines of Scripture, rather than taking on formal doctrinal statements. If this is the only intention present in I&J, then the amount of negative scholarly response to the book's professorial and "'in-house apologetic" concerns seems out of place.

However, reteaching the flock is a somewhat anticlimactic explanation for what Enns has introduced as a revolutionary idea (along the lines of Copernicus!), and it does not satisfactorily explain certain comments made in I&J and in Enns' further writing on this topic since the book's publication. A sense of dissatisfaction with what is often simply called "doctrine" is pervasive in these sources, several of which are intended principally for academic audiences. I would suggest that even though I&J truly does intend the reteaching described above (in keeping with Enns' professorial concerns), it also presses past this goal to finger, if only obliquely, the larger issue of doctrinal reformulation, thus implicitly involving the evangelical academic community. In doing so, I&J unfortunately adds to an already difficult read the task of determining whether the reader should consider herself under reconstruction, conscripted for battle, or under attack as a defender of an outmoded doctrinal fortress.

Unlike Copernicus, Enns is working and writing within a contemporary evangelical Protestant framework. Strong convictions and stung pride can make for "messy" public discourse; but in this setting we do not literally burn one another at the stake for offering divergent viewpoints. As Enns continues to speak and write and clarify his thinking for his oft- confused readership, perhaps his "Copernican revolution" will take the form of a distinct new school of thought within evangelical scholarship. In the end, it seems that Inspiration and Incarnation is just too small a vessel to hold all that Enns really wants to say, without leaving holes in the deck for many of the rest of us to fall through. This book, then, is not the final answer (either from Enns or from evangelicalism) to the question of how to think about the humanity of the Scriptures; but for now, it is a beginning and, as Chaim Potok acknowledges for all of us, "all beginnings are hard."

### Coda for the Curious

As we close this discussion, here are some answers to the introductory quiz for readers who have been wondering. (These are not the only answers available, but they are a beginning.)

1. True or False: The Gospel of John was written by John son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve.

False perhaps. While not every conservative scholar agrees, many commentators see evidence within the Gospel of John that indicates that the "Beloved Disciple" may have been someone other than John son of Zebedee, and thus was not, in fact, one of the Twelve. Richard Bauckham's extensive argument cannot be repeated here, but it includes the idea that the authorship of this Gospel is carefully concealed until the very end precisely because the writer was less personally well-known in the early church, and therefore had first to establish credibility through his testimony in the text before identifying himself. It is also suggested that during the first centuries after the death of those who knew

the Beloved Disciple personally, the author of John's Gospel and John son of Zebedee became one in the minds of the church.

2. True or False: A section of the Book of Proverbs was previously published in Egypt.

True. The Instruction of Amenemope, which closely corresponds to Proverbs 22:17- 24:22, predates the biblical text. But, as Peter Enns points out, this fact is only threatening to our doctrine of Scripture if we insist that all "revelation" must comprise completely new material. Although the practical wisdom of the Instruction originally had its place in Egyptian life and thought, set within the Hebrew canon its worth changes dramatically: in its new context, it is considered true wisdom in light of the fear of the Lord.

3. True or False: Studying the human origins of the Christian Scriptures threatens the doctrines of inerrancy and divine inspiration, and should be avoided by believers.

False. While Peter Enns' offering on this topic in *Inspiration and Incarnation* has proved problematic and troubling for some readers, we should not conclude that this proves a point about the dangers of biblical scholarship. Rather, an examination of Enns' authorial priorities has hopefully demonstrated that in *I&I* Enns seems to have achieved only mixed success in meeting his goals for his different intended audiences.

Regarding the ideas he puts forth in his book, Enns' emphasis on granting the phenomena of the Bible more influence on an evangelical doctrine of Scripture should be heard in the context of a larger, necessary conversation about how our speaking God communicates in Scripture, interweaving text and context. Enns' challenge to evangelical thought on the matter of the human origins of Scripture should be analyzed, compared with other explanations, and evaluated for its own merits and deficiencies but his challenge should, indeed, be heard. Enns is correct when he says that he is not the only one asking questions about the Bible, and that the church has not always served the questioners well.

The penultimate word goes to Richard Bauckham. In an interview with *Modern Reformation* after the publication of *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Bauckham comments on the different intellectual climates found in Britain and North America:

Scholarship evangelical, conservative, more liberal, whatever terms you use is not so polarized in Britain, where people recognize the scholarly credentials of those with whom they disagree and yet still participate in conversation. My impression of the New Testament scholarly world in America is that people read what is written by those with whom they're going to agree, and that they are often quite contemptuous of others. I don't think that's a climate in which to do good scholarship.

Believers who sincerely desire to make sense of things like inspiration will do well to heed this observation. Do we personally contribute to a climate in which questions can be freely asked and answers can be freely offered, or do we not? Whether we are non-academic laypeople just beginning to venture into theological or biblical studies, or pastors with the responsibility of a flock in mind, or students and professors up to our earlobes in books, we are all, at all times, called to speak carefully, honestly, and irenically about what we learn, notice, and think "speaking the truth in love," as Paul puts it in Ephesians. Why? Because this is part of our participation in God's "incarnational" project. The inspired Word has the last word:

**In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:9-12 (ESV)**