

Proof that Christianity is lies for it tells lies to promote an error-ridden Bible as error-free

Excerpts from the Gifford Lectures Brand Blanshard

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QUOTES

The ecumenical Council of Trent decreed with Papal approval that ‘if anyone receive not as sacred and canonical the said books entire and with all their parts as they have been used to be read in the Catholic church, and as they are contained in the Old Latin Vulgate edition... let him be anathema’. Nor is anyone at liberty to take one part as more reliable than another; the Council declared that it ‘accepts and venerates all the books of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is the author of both, with equal piety and reverence’. This position was reaffirmed by the Vatican Council of 1870. Leo XIII committed the church to it in unequivocal terms. ‘All the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and so far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration is not only essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God himself, the supreme truth, can utter that which is not true.’

It is committed by the most solemn Papal pronouncement to the view that passages which on their face are contradictory are still errorless. At least four lines of escape have been employed.

POSSIBLE DEFENCES

Authentic vs quoted statements

(1) One is to draw a distinction between what a writer says himself and what he quotes or reports from someone else. When he says in one place that the daughter of Saul died childless and in another that she had five sons, we may hold that in one place he was saying what he himself believed, which is errorless, while in the other he was reporting what he had heard from someone else, which may be mistaken. Consistency is thus preserved by throwing one statement out.

But this course does not give us what is needed. For

(a) both sides of the contradiction are usually stated in the same straightforward way, with no indication in either case that the writer meant merely to offer an unverified quotation; and to read him as meaning to do so is to take a liberty unwarranted by anything in the text,

(b) Even if he did mean to do so in one case rather than the other, we have no means of judging which, and hence to take either statement in preference to the other as the correct one is likewise unwarranted. To say that a book would be errorless if we had means, which it is admitted that we have not, to dismiss the errors with which it is admitted to be strewn is for practical purposes to abandon the claim to errorlessness.

(c) It is incredible that a writer should be so inspired that what he says in his own person should be preserved from all error, and yet that this inspiration should be unable to protect him against the most palpable errors of others. If he was able to see profound truths and remote facts undisclosed to common

eyes, how could he report as true, in the mouths of others, statements that flatly contradicted what he had seen to be true without alloy? On the other hand, if he was so confused or careless as to report as true the obvious errors of others, how can we repose confidence in him anywhere? Gullibility is not a convincing witness to infallibility.

Literal vs metaphorical statements

(2) Sometimes another tack is taken. It is held that one passage is literal and the conflicting one metaphorical, and that, so read, both may be true. We may still hold, as Aquinas did, that 'there can be no falsehood anywhere in the literal sense of Holy Scripture;' if a passage appears to be false, we can say that the writer was stating a truth, but stating it rhetorically or figuratively.

Such interpretations are, without doubt, often sound. The Psalms and the Song of Solomon are, in the main, poetry, and to take them as chains of literal statements would be impossible for any serious student of literature. But the question is whether the method of metaphor can save the consistency of what appear to be statements of fact. It seems clear on reflection that it cannot.

(a) In the passages we have cited it would involve imposing on one or other of the conflicting texts a meaning to which neither the language nor its tone nor its context gives any support. If a writer says that the Lord is his shepherd, or his shield and buckler, or his high tower, or the shadow of a rock in a weary land, we know at once that he is speaking in metaphor, and may well recall that some of the most exquisite poetry in the language is to be found among these passages. But when the writer is recording historical facts such as the height of temple pillars or the number of years lived by the various patriarchs, it is not very plausible to say, when one of his facts is inaccurate, that he has suddenly abandoned the language of fact and is speaking metaphorically. He gives us no warning of such a change; there is nothing in his matter or manner to suggest it; indeed the suggestion is a purely ad hoc hypothesis with nothing to recommend it except the fact that it cannot be ruled out as a priori impossible.

(b) Furthermore, it has unfortunate consequences. If apparently plain statements of fact do not mean what they say, but something else that is veiled and remote, the Biblical writings in general must be read with uncertainty. In these writings are many thousands of statements, most of them quite incapable of being checked. Some of them we find in conflict with other Biblical statements, and where this happens, we say that one or other of the conflicting statements can at best be metaphorically true. But what of the thousands of other statements for which no check is practicable? Is it not more than likely that an indefinite number of these would similarly turn out to be metaphorical if such a check were open to us? The conclusion seems inevitable. But if accepted, it would spread suspicion over the entire body of the text. If what seems to be offered as the plainest statement of fact may not mean what it says, but something inscrutably different, how can we approach Scripture with any confidence at all? We cannot tell from the text whether what we are offered is fact or poetry.

(3) Another obvious way to save the inerrancy of Scripture is to say of passages found erroneous that they are not parts of Scripture at all, but insertions by an unauthorised hand. It is clear that in some of the books that have come down to us as the work of certain authors there are parts done by others: Moses did not write the account of his own death; the book of Isaiah is plainly the product of at least two Isaiahs; the last twelve verses of Mark, by the almost universal admission of scholars, are not by Mark, even supposing Mark to have written the gospel attributed to him. Is there any possibility of preserving a consistent and inerrant Scripture by saying, where error appears, that it has been insinuated into the text by some uninspired and anonymous hand?

Unfortunately there is none. The effect of the church's ruling is that even if insertions have been made by foreign hands these insertions too must be held inerrant. All the books with all their parts as recognised at Trent must be accepted as true without defect. In the early manuscripts of most reliable texts, the familiar

ending of Mark does not occur at all; in some others it is reduced to a few lines; in one, there is a second long ending widely differing from the first. It happened that Jerome, in making his Vulgate translation, had before him a manuscript with the first long ending, now rejected by free scholars. It therefore appears in the Vulgate Bible, and since the content of that Bible was formally pronounced inerrant by a succession of popes, this extraneous appendage was itself inerrant. Whoever wrote it, and even if his appearance in the text was that of an interloper, he possessed, during that brief appearance, the privilege of speaking unqualified truth.

To modern Biblical scholars, eager to reach the fact behind the words and above all the towering, mist-enshrouded figure behind the New Testament, the dangers of being misled are not, of course, confined to interpolations in the text. There is a question in many cases whether the books themselves, either of the Old Testament or of the New, have been written by the authors whose names have been traditionally attached to them. It is certain, indeed, that Moses did not write the Pentateuch; there are too many recorded facts in it that belong to the period after his death. Scholars have found in it the work of at least four main authors, none of whom can be safely identified with Moses, since all alike record post-Mosaic events. Yet the church has never rescinded its official teaching that Moses was the author. Not only does the decree of an ecumenical council refer explicitly to the five books as those of Moses; the twentieth-century Biblical Commission appointed by the Pope also supported the view. It conceded that Moses may have used secretaries to whom he dictated thoughts rather than words, but insisted that he was the 'principal and inspired author' of the Pentateuch and that it was 'conceived by him under the influence of Divine inspiration'. Catholic scholars became so restive under such direction that in a letter of 1948 to Cardinal Suhard of Paris the Commission wrote that it would not oppose 'further and truly scientific examination of these problems'. The New Catholic Encyclopedia of 1967 reports that current conclusions on these matters 'show few differences from those of respected non-Catholic scholars', adding the reassurance that 'most of the differences would not be on the confessional level'. What these 'confessional' differences are it does not say.

As for the New Testament, there is perhaps no better attested result of scholarly work upon it than that the gospels of Matthew and Luke have drawn largely for their material on two prior sources, one of them the gospel of Mark, and the other a book that in its original form has disappeared. Mark, therefore, must have preceded Matthew. The Commission, conscious that such criticism violated tradition, rejected both this theory of dependence and the implied sequence of authors. It held that the synoptic gospels were all written by the apostles whose names they bear, and in the familiar order. As for the Gospel of John, in spite of the controversies that have raged over it for a century, the Commission held that the apostle John was certainly its author and that the events and speeches it recorded, however different in content and tone from those of the synoptic gospels, were nevertheless all true. There is happily little doubt that the life and teaching of Jesus can at least in broad outline be discerned by the comparative study of the gospels, though we may never know with certainty who wrote them, or what degree of credence to attach to their occasionally conflicting accounts. The Catholic can ride through these difficulties on a 'high priori road'. Once the church has officially spoken on a problem of this kind, no historical scholarship on the other side has any standing. As Cardinal Manning wrote:

'The appeal from the living voice of the Church to any tribunal whatsoever, human history included, is an act of private judgment and a treason, because that living voice is supreme; and to appeal from that supreme voice is also a heresy, because that voice, by divine assistance, is infallible.'

The suggestion, then, that errors in an inerrant text may be removed by showing certain books or passages to be unauthentic is not adequate to its end. The church has cut off its own recourse to such an explanation by pronouncements which limit beforehand the results that it can accept. Indeed, drawn in two directions at once, it has manoeuvred itself into an untenable position. If it continues to maintain that all the books of the Old and New Testament, 'with all their parts,' are inerrant, it has on its hands a mass of

inconsistencies both sides of which it is committed to accept. If it seeks to explain the inconsistencies away by admitting into the text unauthoritative books or passages, it has given up its main thesis, namely that the whole text is inspired, and inspired equally. The policy it has actually followed is one of unhappy compromise. It has presented itself to the world as at once the guardian of a body of revealed, consistent, and unchanging truth and also the patron of disinterested scholarship. The compromise will not bear examination. The inconsistencies can be removed only by an exegesis so violent as to throw the whole canon into uncertainty. And having committed itself before modern scholarship began to the acceptance of the entire Bible, Rome can grant its inquirers only a freedom so cramped and hedged that many of its ablest scholars have withdrawn or been excommunicated.

The confinement of inerrancy to faith and morals

(4) Sometimes a fourth method is proposed for dealing with apparent errors. It is suggested that the inerrancy of Scripture is limited in the same way as the church's infallibility, that it does not extend to the geology of Genesis or the precarious history of Chronicles, but invests only those statements that pronounce on faith or morals. There are many persons who would accept unperturbed an exposure of inconsistencies in reports about the height of pillars or in genealogical tables; they would say that they do not read the Bible for information on secular matters, but to gain instruction in the spiritual life. The book is not a textbook of science or history; it is primarily a revelation of the divine mind and will, and secondarily a treasury of suggestions on how to live. So long as its guidance on these vital matters is unimpeached, one may cavil about its science or history to one's heart's content.

Now, however appealing this view may be, it is not open to Catholics. The three great councils of modern times, one at Trent and two at Rome, all insisted on the acceptance of the Biblical books in toto, 'with all their parts'. Pope after modern Pope has taken the same line, even more urgently and explicitly. When Leo XIII said, 'it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow inspiration to certain parts of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred,' he did not say 'erred in faith or morals'; he said 'erred' without qualification. Benedict XV, in *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920), affirmed as 'common to all the sacred writers, that they in writing followed the Spirit of God, so that God is to be considered the principal cause of the whole sense and of all the judgments of Scripture'. Pius X in *Lamentabili Sane Exitu* (1907) condemned as false the statement that 'since in the deposit of faith only revealed truths are contained, under no respect does it appertain to the Church to pass judgement concerning the assertions of human sciences'. These popes were writing as heads of the church and specifying what the faithful were to believe, and they were trying to write unambiguously. Catholics who hesitate before the vast mass of statements which the church compels them to take as errorless have often attempted to wrest themselves free, but it is difficult to see any valid line of escape. They may say that even if such pronouncements, since formally made on matters of faith, should be accepted as inerrant, it is only the pronouncements themselves that are inerrant, not the books that they pronounce inerrant. But this is incoherent. If the statement that the books are inerrant is itself infallibly true, then the books are inerrant; to admit that they were not would be to impugn as false the statement that has just been offered as true and infallibly true. Troubled Catholics may hold, again, that the Papal pronouncements, though they concern matters of faith and appear in official decrees, are not infallible in the full and technical sense. Indeed this might be argued about any decree ever issued; the Papacy is not accustomed to adding footnotes to its decrees saying 'here infallibility begins' and 'here it ceases'. But I do not suppose there is a bishop in the Catholic world who would not take such encyclicals as those just cited as binding on all the faithful. And in the light of them, the Catholic is not at liberty to believe that Biblical inerrancy extends to faith and morals only.

My comment: He wrote, "Liberal scholars would agree that we have in the Bible the record of a long, slow advance, both religious and moral, from something like primitive savagery to the Sermon on the Mount, an advance which gives colour to Feuerbach's thesis that man has created and re-created God in

his own evolving image." This is total nonsense for Jesus and his apostles used words as weapons to hurt sinners and punish them. Hell was introduced. Jesus used language far more vengeful than the Old Testament. Liberals are liars or cannot read.

Efforts to make the Bible look error-free are manipulative for the layperson is not likely to see through them. Also, experts see those who "reconcile" the errors as driven by wishful thinking more than faith. As the Bible story is more concerned with nasty stuff and brutal commands than inspiring us this wishful thinking is morally reprehensible.