

**P Jensen (2002) The Revelation of God IVP****Outline and evaluate Jensen's view of the authority of Scripture.**

## Jensen's The Revelation of God, Overview

The Revelation of God argues that the original Bible manuscripts are alone the infallible revelation of God and essential for a true relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Authority and human freedom in Jensen

I often wonder how we can honour human freedom while believing that God has authority over us.

Jensen says that freedom is not "the capacity for complete self-determination. Human beings are never free from other powers that determine their lives" [1]. He points out that the "problem of freedom is not the choice between having a master and being masterless; it is the problem of which master we will have" [2]. The scripture solution is that the master must be God.

Christians say that acceptance of God's authority expressed in the Bible, when correctly understood, invites us to free ourselves from sin and death by trusting in divine deliverance. The authority of God must not be seen as oppressive but as love. It is to be welcomed.

All of that is nonsense especially when the penalty for sin is everlasting justice in Hell. Jensen has the nerve to say we do not completely control ourselves and yet would declare we deserve to suffer for our sins in Hell forever. We cannot deserve such an extreme penalty if we are not fully in control. Logically, the sinner should be punished less than his sin might warrant for we have to assume he was not completely free when he did it. Why worry much about God if you cannot fully sin?

## Verbal Inspiration and Inerrancy

Jensen teaches that the Bible is verbally inspired - that the biblical authors wrote only what God wanted them to write - "the very words of God" [3].

God is all-powerful and well able to arrange this. The Bible is covenantal - God rules his people through it [4] and so it is also infallible.

Inspiration does not require that we think the authors of the Bible were just like typewriters used by God. That is not inspiration but dictation. Mechanics aside, inspiration merely asserts that the Bible is authored by God [5]. However parts do claim to be dictated [6] implying scripture can be trusted to give the very words of God. Christians who claim to be anti-fundamentalist must worry...

"The word [Bible] has God's authority, though it is not identical with him" [7]. God's revelation is God disclosing what kind of God he is to us but it does not follow that he is his revelation.

If the Bible is not inspired by God then it can have no more authority than any other book. Inspiration indicates that God is the ultimate origin of the words of the Bible and its teachings obligate us to obedience.

Jensen's teaching on the verbal inspiration of the Bible is accurate. The useful thing about it is that if you find errors in the Bible then either God makes mistakes or the Bible is wholly human.

## Scripture as the Covenant Book

Jensen states that "love is slavery to the other".[8] I think the word slavery has negative connotations so I would put it as, "love is commitment to the other without looking for any benefit in it." Sadly Jesus tells us to be God's slaves - he was being a turn-off as usual. The Bible tells us to unite ourselves in love for one another and for God. If God is love [9] and the Bible is his word, it follows that the Bible is about forming a love relationship with God, a covenant.

Benjamin Myers, correctly assessed Jensen's understanding, "the content of Scripture is essentially covenantal ....in the gospel we see that God discloses himself not merely by speaking, but by making promises. God reveals his character to us by making and keeping promises"[10].

Jensen states that the “Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are ‘covenantal’” [11]. The covenant is in essence the mutual agreement between God and his people that he will be their God and they will be his obedient people [12]. It binds God and his people together. Scripture sees it as analogous to marriage [13] as Jensen notes [14].

I agree because scripture has no religious or spiritual value unless it is about union between God and his people.

Jensen is clear that to say the scriptures are covenantal is to say that they express the will and authority of God who is their origin. I perceive that God must communicate something of his own nature and goodness before he can set up a covenant. And Christians would say he does that when we read the Bible, his word, while being open to the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 1 tells us that God's sufficient and final communication with us was in his Son Jesus. Jesus is seen as the final and definitive revelation of God. Thus when things were made so clear in Jesus, how could the covenant with the Jews made before Jesus came be fair and valid? They did not have Jesus to show them the flawless beauty and goodness of God. And if it is so clear those Christians who want gay marriage in Church and women bishops need to stop the self-deception and stop pretending they believe Jesus's revelation was perfect and clear.

The importance of the covenant teachings is that Christians are shown to have no right to pick and choose what they want out of Christianity and then call it Christianity. It is quite malicious of that religion to call the disobedient covenant breakers for that is a serious accusation.

Is scripture wholly inspired?

Jensen says the Bible is ultimately authored by God and is the only source of divine revelation that God obligates us to believe.

Jensen observes that to pick and choose what parts of the Bible you think are inspired is actually to base faith on what you want to be true. I agree that such an attitude is incompatible with one declaring that Jesus is Lord. It is not faith. The parts that one claims to believe are in the category of, "I will feel they are true until I get tired of them or until they get out of fashion. I don't really think they are true."

Jensen sees that some parts of the Bible claim to be quoting God directly. He takes this as evidence that the Bible endorses the dictation theory of inspiration. God gives the word and man merely records it.

Jensen says that the Bible claims to be wholly inspired by God but does not claim to be wholly dictated.

I think it is unnecessary to hold that the texts that seem to quote God directly are claiming dictation. The texts can still be the word of God without being dictated word for word. The teachings that Jesus gave at the Mount are worded differently in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke even though both could give the impression that they record the exact words.

Jensen deals with the assertion of some that the Bible does not attribute everything in it directly to God. They overlook the fact that God can inspire writing without it being cast in the form of direct speech from him.

The danger with the dictation theory is that it seems to imply that God's direct words are more important than anything else he inspired. It is as if he were being more assertive when he dictated.

Jensen mentions 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where we read that all scripture is breathed out by God. He sees the text as saying the scripture is sufficient [15]. It uses our breathing out words to picture what God has done, to convey that the Bible is verbally inspired. There is no room for holding that there is anything of human as opposed to divine authority in it. Jensen, regrettably, never explored that meaning.

To me, if the Bible is verbally inspired, then the Roman Catholic Church has no right to say that its tradition is equal in authority to the Bible. Tradition does not claim to be verbally inspired and the Bible does. Protestantism then with its Bible only doctrine could be taken as Catholicism that tries to be consistent with itself. Jensen then has shown that Roman Catholicism is not the correct branch of Christianity.

Our need for divine revelation

Jensen wrote, “In matters to do with God...we cannot think straight” [16]. Jensen observes that through the Bible God's Spirit helps us deal with this and find all the light we need.

My evaluation of that is based on observing myself, the attitudes of people I know and those who have the most influence

in the world. We do not obey the great commandment of Jesus to be in love with God with all our hearts and soul and selves.

I see that even those who do not accept the story that we are a fallen race because of how Adam and Eve sinned and fell from grace must notice that we want to approach God on our terms not his. We certainly behave "fallen".

Thus Christians say we need the authority of God to declare what is true and what is moral - otherwise we will be slaves to fashion.

But is it really better to be the slave of some god who is in fashion?

### Accusations against Bible Believers

It is argued that to say a book alone is God's infallible word, is reductionist. It is looking at God one way to the exclusion of other ways. But Christians say they do not think that truth subsists in the Bible only and argue that if we have God's word we will approach science and philosophy and other disciplines in the light of the word. They say it helps us understand them better just as Jensen says.

Believers in the centrality and inerrancy of the Bible are accused of forgetting about a relationship with God in order to focus on a book. Here is my illustration: it is like refusing to engage with your friend in order to focus on his letters and not him.

Even if we tend towards reductionism and the idolatry of honouring doctrines of God rather than God himself, he can help us rise above those weaknesses and align ourselves under his authority properly.

Sometimes believers in the Bible are accused of treating scripture like an idol. They do not worship the Bible as a book but they limit their vision of God to what the Bible says. They act as if there is no truth but in the Bible. Those believers to be fair do not exist. Everybody in real life holds things to be true independently of what their scriptures say. For example, the Bible doesn't tell you when your annual vaccination is due. If the accusation is true, then believers are not handing themselves over to divine authority at all and scripture is being used by them to block God out. Christians say this contradicts our experience of believers who glow and are filled with ardour for the God they love more than existence itself. Many say that the awesome sovereign power of God can act so that the disciple is not making an idol of the words of scripture but finding God through the scripture. God as the creator of all is able to ensure that his word will not be in vain.

### Scripture and Tradition

"Tradition is that which is passed on" [17]. I find this definition too general. We are not told if tradition is written, oral and/or describes handed down practices.

Jensen considers the argument made by some that as the Church put the Bible together that the Church rules the Bible and the Bible is not the only infallible source of divine revelation [18]. He says this overlooks the Bible statement that the Church owes its existence to the word of God [19].

The Bible speaks of traditions being the word of God but as scripture never mentions anything having authority outside of scripture we must perceive that these infallible traditions are preserved for us in the Bible. "The fathers agreed that the content of the rule of faith ... is identical with that of Scripture" [20]. Tradition itself says we must trust the Bible only.

Jensen says that we may use tradition to help us interpret the Bible but must be careful to remember that it is the Bible that has authority not tradition [21]. This seems to acknowledge that we must be careful not to interpret the Bible in a way it was never intended to be interpreted.

### Reason

God's authority as allegedly revealed in scripture informs our reason: "We need the gospel in order to be able to think" [22]. "The Bible is the most reasonable of all books, for it conforms with reality" [23] For Christians, God as creator is the source of scripture and the source of reason as well. We all use logic - often incorrectly but we recognise the need for it. God as understood by the Christians has authority but they allege that he is not an unreasonable authoritarian.

Some defenders of the faith say that there is no scripture bluntly stating that there is one God only and three persons in that God. We have to use our heads to discern that teaching. Scripture is said to be God's gift to us to help us honour our own experience and rationality.

The Bible points to God as having done miracles to show his revelation to man in the Bible is true. Without miracles, the Bible would deserve no more reverence than the Oxford English Dictionary.

All that really leads to us working out the truth and then using God to fill the gaps in our knowledge. Instead of going to God for truth, God is shoved in like an afterthought. Miracle claims force Christians to have a God of the Gaps. For example, if it is true that we know Jesus was alive after he was put to death, Christians instead of saying they don't know how he came to be alive reply, "God did it. He miraculously raised him to life". The God of the gaps is not a God for we don't know if he really belongs in the gaps. Not knowing what to plug the hole with does not mean that anything will do.

Science does its work assuming that magic or non-natural or supernatural power does not tamper with the way nature works. For example, if a new virus is found you don't suggest that it could be that the virus is not real but a mere magical vision. Religion says the assumption contradicts Science's claim to be sure that its discoveries and truths are right. This is unfair. The alternative is to assume that magic is possible which would only lead to chaos. What is the point of taking experiments seriously if magic could be tampering with them? The assumption is part of our nature. It is less biased to make the assumption than to deny it. It wouldn't even be natural.

Is Jensen's Theology Helpful?

Jensen says of reason that it "aims to conform us to the truth, and the truth is there to be known" page 175.

At least he honours thinking for yourself.

Jensen sees the Bible as the book that binds the Church together in a covenant that it makes with God [24]. This helps us see that like in a marriage, there will be times of trouble and we have to face the trouble together as a Church and in union with God.

Pity this vision has to be limited to the Church community and not the wider community!

If we are married to God then sin is adultery. It is bigotry to infer that sinners are adulterers for disobeying this God they are wed to.

Jensen says that reason cannot be "divorced from experience, culture and personality" [25]. He states that those who reject Bible Christianity in the name of reason are forgetting this. His position reminds us of Augustine's declaration that we need reason informed by faith. He thinks reason must be informed by faith in God through scripture. Again this is really the God of the Gaps fiasco.

Jensen sees the Bible as God's revelation that's intended to implement the setting up of the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ as king. Thus it gives Christians a vision for the future. But a Jesus who wants to be King is arrogant - why is there no vision of a divine democracy among Christians?

Jensen thinks God inspires people with his grace. When Christians have barely any impulse even to read the book it is clear that God is not trying too hard!

Conclusion

Jensen has failed to demonstrate the reasonableness and the desirability of accepting the divine authorship of the Bible. His God does not succeed in asserting his infallible authority through it.

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[1] Jensen, P., *The Revelation of God, Contours of Christian Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2002),

p. 149

[2] *ibid*, p. 149

[3] *ibid*, p. 186

[4] *ibid*, p. 193

[5] *ibid*, p. 156

[6] *ibid*, p. 158

[7] *ibid*, p. 148

[8] *ibid*, p. 152

[9] 1 Jn 4:16

[10] Myers, B., *Theologia Evangelii: Peter Jensen's Theological Method* (Churchman, 2004) p. 30

[11] Jensen, P., *The Revelation of God, Contours of Christian Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), p. 154

[12] *ibid*, p. 155, Exodus 24:7 has Israel promising to obey the Lord completely indicating that God has authority and the proper response is obedience - the ingredients of the covenant

[13] Eph 5:23-33

[14] Jensen, P., *The Revelation of God, Contours of Christian Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), p. 152

[15] *ibid*, p. 265

[16] *ibid*, p. 175

[17] *ibid*, p. 166

[18] *ibid*, p. 167

[19] Eph 2:20

[20] Jensen, P., *The Revelation of God, Contours of Christian Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), p. 169

[21] *ibid*, p. 171

[22] *ibid*, p. 175

[23] *ibid*, p. 177

[24] *ibid*, p. 193

[25] *ibid*, p. 173