

Response to the essay "The criticism of the inerrancy of Scripture from after the Reformation until present". Essay delivered by pastor Ilars Plume (Latvia) to the regional conference of the CELC on June 2nd 2018 in Pilsen, the Czech Republic.

First I want to thank the essayist for his thorough and outstanding paper on this difficult subject. As the secretary of this conference, and in that position responsible for the subject of the essays, I apologize for the challenges they may have caused this and the other essayists. My opinion is that the essayist has solved the subject in a good way. In taking on the work the essayist defines the aim of his essay as "*a modest attempt to identify the roots of biblical criticism and somewhat explore the process of growth*". (p 2)

In this response I only try to highlight a few of his remarks as a way into discussion.

The essayist starts by formulating the term "criticism": "*In fact, we appreciate textual criticism ...*" "... by the word "*criticism*" in this essay is meant any approach to the Bible which does not come from the Bible itself." He continues by tracing the roots of the Bible and the establishment of the canon, citing Preus on the status of the canon of Scripture for the Lutheran church: "*[it] is not an article of faith but the source and norm of all articles of faith.*" The essayist concludes himself: "*In short, Scripture testifies of itself*". (p 3)

On the inerrancy of Scripture he writes:

What our dogmaticians said was that Scripture is the source of theology "as the infallible norm of faith and life, but never as the source of Christianity itself." The one who denies the inerrancy of the Bible but still believes in Christ as his Savior is saved; the one who defends inerrancy but lacks the faith is not.

Although the term "inerrancy" is not taken directly from the Bible it is biblical; it follows directly from the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture as the logical consequence. (p 4)

For the Lutheran fathers, "Scripture's truthfulness is accepted a priori, as a matter of faith, before any investigation or a posteriori verification, because God who witnesses in Scripture is wholly honest and will never deviate from the truth. (p 5)

*Instead of trying to defend the Bible one should better follow Spuergon's counsel: **Let the lion out of the cage. He will take care for himself.** Contemporary theologians and people in general have forgotten the maxim that truth is not to be proven; it authenticates itself and possesses extreme force of persuasion.* (p 6)

The essayist writes that the idea that God would err in any way is "**biblical criticism reaching the nadir of biblical vandalism**". He then concludes:

*All that was said above about the meaning and purpose of the term "inerrancy" could be collected in one basic principle: "**certainty**," and that certainty is bestowed by the Scriptures themselves, and only by the Scriptures as "**God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word.***

God persuades us through his own Word. Through his Word he makes us certain that the Scripture is truth. It makes its own cause, it is like the lion who takes care of himself. The Scripture authenticates itself. It has that built-in power. And thereby it has the power to change sinners to saints, God's enemies to God's children. It is with this power of certainty that the gospel is at work. It works. The Word works because it is truth! As the essayist remarks in his footnote:

Truth is not something we can pick up by our choice, possess or control or defend. It rather picks up and controls us being ultimately demanding, at the same time it protects us, gives meaning, and the peace of heart.

In tracing the roots of biblical criticism the essayist end up at what is the opposite of certainty, namely uncertainty, in other words **skepticism**. He traces it from the ancient Greek world to "*the age of the*

Renaissance which experienced the rebirth of pagan skepticism". (p 13) One characteristic of ancient pagan skepticism is that "all assertions and judgments has to be suspended". (p 15) He writes that "Besides both theological methods of the Middle Ages' via antiqua and especially via moderna, **Renaissance's humanism** greatly contributed to the rising skepticism." (p 17) A few decades later this led to the age **Enlightenment** which he summarizes like this: "**centuries of doubt**", *Since the Enlightenment, it has increasingly become a religious doubt* (p 16)

The essayist offers this definition of skepticism in a footnote:

"Skepticism, especially since the Enlightenment, has come to mean disbelief—primarily religious disbelief—and the skeptic has often been likened to the village atheist." (p 17)

Then on what happened when Martin Luther enters the picture:

"Clerical morality in Italy under Renaissance influence become byword, and the papal curia a scandal to Christendom." The spirit of skepticism was part and parcel of the Roman church at the turn of 16th century. Friedrich Nietzsche observes that the Renaissance humanism was about to sweep Christianity away, but something happened: "A German monk, Luther, came to Rome ... And Luther restored the church: he attacked . . . the Renaissance." (p 18)

On the Roman church he writes:

From the formulations of the Council of Trent it is difficult to discern how many authorities there really are: Scripture, tradition, or Mother Church? Do they all have the same source of authority or there are several sources? (p 19)

Humanistic skepticism has become part and parcel of the Roman church. (p 20)

Then on what the essayist calls "The monster of uncertainty" (p 22):

Uncertainty was characteristic of Nominalism, Renaissance humanism, mysticism, and the greatest part of the Roman Church since the Medieval Ages. Uncertainty is characteristic also of rationalism, historicism, and even science. The reason for that is obvious: the human mind, historical research, and empirical knowledge can provide us with only a certain degree of probability, never with certainty.

The whole Roman religious system is based on doubt! (p 23)

The certainty of salvation is likewise, therefore, forbidden in the Roman Church.

Uncertainty is the great enemy of the Church's faith and a peril to our society in general. That is a power of Antichrist which we have to face in our pastoral duties and everyday life. **The term "inerrancy" is certainly the warning regarding which ways not to take.**

Since Protestants reject the infallibility of both the Pope and the Church, they use the word 'infallible' increasingly of the Scriptures." The author of this essay believes we should do it even more. (p 24)

In conclusion the essayist quotes Popkin in a footnote:

"The antithesis of skepticism... is 'dogmatism,'

And finally: *our marvelous Lord Jesus Christ will give us courage and strength to continue "to agonize for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).* (p 25)