

BOOK REVIEWS

Achtemeier, Paul J. *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980. 182 pp. Paperback, \$8.95.

In his "Introduction" the author states that this book is intended to help those who are not persuaded by the "conservative" position of total inerrancy to: (1) formulate a view of inspiration that will allow Scripture "to continue to play a meaningful role in their lives"; (2) think through the problems of inspiration, weighing the evidence on both sides of the issue; and (3) help those who already acknowledge the authority of the Bible, yet reject inerrancy, to find a "suitable intellectual explanation" for the problems posed by inspiration and that will make sense of the conviction of Scriptural authority (pp. 17-18). The author is aware that in making a definitive statement on the inspiration of Scripture, he must be prepared to face the heat of emotions that envelopes this subject.

Although the believer in the inerrancy of Scripture will no doubt feel his passions stirred, the believer in the inspiration and authority of Scripture who does not accept inerrancy will be led to admit that Achtemeier has done a commendable job, although he does not lay all problems to rest. While identifying the problems faced by liberals who wish to deny inspiration, Achtemeier isolates the impossible position in which the inerrantist finds himself. In presenting his own proposals to solve the problems involved with inspiration, the author has clearly produced a book that is a polemic against inerrancy.

Chap. 1 deals with the locus and mode of inspiration. "The prophetic model" of inspiration is defined early, and it is rejected later as simply "no longer capable of bearing the weight it once carried" (p. 99). By "prophetic model" is meant that each book in the Bible has *an author* who was inspired to record, or have recorded, what we now possess as Scripture. The reasons for the rejection of "the prophetic model" are rooted in: (1) the idea that the person who wrote the final product is only one of a series of inspired people through whom the biblical material passed before it reached its written form, and (2) the belief that many of the final compilers can no longer be identified (pp. 131-134). This first chapter also examines the Hebrew concept of inspiration, where the prophet is seen as God's spokesman, but is not devoid of his own reason and emotion. Achtemeier contrasts this concept with the Hellenistic one, where an inspired person was thought to be controlled by the nine Muses, relieved of his rational powers, and no longer in control of himself. The historic shift from an inspired person to inspired words is also briefly traced.

Chap. 2 deals with the liberal and conservative views of inspiration. The strengths and weaknesses of each position are identified. Chap. 3 investigates the process by which Scripture was formed. Chap. 4 addresses

problems, both old and new, that arise from the liberal and conservative viewpoints.

It is in chap. 5 that Achtemeier presents his proposed solution to the problems raised by the issue of inspiration. In chap. 6 he investigates some of the implications that arise out of his proposals.

At the heart of Achtemeier's proposal on inspiration stand three key components: (1) "the traditions" of the faithful community, (2) "the situation" facing the community, and (3) "the respondent" or author. Biblical "tradition" denotes a historical occurrence. However, a past event is not of conclusive importance. What is important is the significance of past events for the present and the promise they hold for the future. Therefore, traditions can err in factual matter without compromising their truth as tradition. Factual accuracy does not make traditions inspired, but rather inspiration rests in their witness to God's presence with a community. It is upon these traditions that the new generation builds.

By "situation" facing the community, Achtemeier means that each new generation takes the traditions and reinterprets them to fit the needs of a new age. So it is that we see OT material being reinterpreted by NT writers in such a way that new meaning is derived from the material. The NT writers did not see OT tradition as "archives of historical interest," but rather as living traditions "which could be shaped to speak God's new word to the new times."

The "respondent," or author, reformulates the tradition to new and specific situations. It is not necessary to know who the respondent is, so long as we have the result of his work. Biblical books may have several respondents behind them. To say that inspiration works only at the point when the final individual puts down the results of a long process of formulation and reformulation, as is the case with the "prophetic model," "is to make a mockery of the intimate relationship between Scripture and community and to deny to key individuals—Jesus, the prophets, apostles—their true role in the production of inspired Scripture" (p. 133).

Chap. 6 deals with some implications raised by Achtemeier's proposal. One is the activity of the Spirit through the whole process of inspiration. He is active in the tradition, in the situation, and in the respondent. He is also active to inspire the readers and the hearers of the message of Scripture. If the Scriptures are inerrant because of inspiration and the Spirit ceases its work there, the reading of Scripture will produce errant exposition. Because this is not so, the situation out of which Scripture grew is the situation confronted in interpretation. The interpreter becomes respondent. The interpretation of Scripture thus follows along the same line as its creation. "The fundamental concept of truth in the Bible is not conformity between statement and 'objective reality', but rather reliability, dependability" (p. 148).