

-----Original Message-----

From: Bass, Robert W

Sent: Monday, March 12, 2001 10:30 PM

To: William A. Dembski (E-mail)

Subject: your "Problem of Error in Scripture"

Bill,

I enjoyed reading your chapter on "The Problem of Error in Scripture" in *_Unapologetic Apologetics_*, especially your "balanced" viewpoint in the final paragraph of page 91.

You say that your trichotomy doesn't exhaust the space of possible perspectives.

Here are a couple more, regarding which I wonder what you will say.

Do you know why the Angel for whom Daniel prayed arrived 3 weeks late and explained the reason for the "21 days delay"?

Have you read Greg Boyd's trilogy on "Warfare Theology"? Vol. 1, "GOD AT WAR," is already published, Vol. 2, "SATAN & THE PROBLEM OF EVIL," is finished and in press, and Vol. 3, "THE MYTH OF THE BLUEPRINT," is being completed. (Boyd is now distracted by a heresy trial and efforts to remove him from teaching in a Baptist theological seminary.)

God could have all of the classical perfections [which Boyd says are *_demonstrably_* the results of Greek philosophy infecting Christian thought] and yet in perfect sovereignty have DECIDED to create nonmaterial beings with Free Will (and if the Free Will wasn't honored, it was never really Free), and if some rebelled, then there *_are_* free agents not under God's control. Boyd demonstrates that God set up a hierarchical system of angels over territories of decreasing size. The archangel over Persia rebelled and had to be wrestled with by the loyal archangel over Greece [Michael] in order for Daniel's less powerful angel [Gabriel] to get free and to arrive.

So the angels loyal to God at any one spot on earth may be less powerful than those loyal to Satan. Was the guardian angel over Germany a turncoat? The year before the 1917 Miracle of the Sun at Fatima, Portugal (which occurred before a crowd of 70,000 at exactly the time/place predicted by 3 little children 9 months earlier), an angel (NOT the Virgin Mary) had told the 3 little children that he was the "Guardian Angel of Portugal" and (in 1916) that because the Bishops of Portugal had dedicated their land to the Immaculate Heart of Mary then Portugal would be "spared involvement in the next world war" (which happened). Lenin had said that, next to Moscow [in 1917], Lisbon was the most atheist capital in the world, and the then socialist and anti-clerical government was destroying the Catholic Church; however, after God showed his hand, the voters had a big change of heart, the anti-clerical socialists were unexpectedly swept out of office, and Portugal did NOT follow Russia. I have a book printed in 1943 in which the only surviving "seer" (by then a 26-year old nun) said that she had sent a message to the Pope in 1917 that "Russia will spread her errors over the world for a little while" but eventually be reconverted to a great Christian nation (if only the Pope and the Bishops will pray for the consecration of Russia – which they eventually did, though not very explicitly). The reopening of 65,000 churches in Russia and the renaming of Leningrad as St. Petersburg is the most surprising thing in my lifetime and it was predicted in writing by a 10-year-old child in 1917!

If there are bad angels doing things that God can stop only by sending in "stronger" angels to that particular place, then the godly angels will be less dense and weaker somewhere else (if there are only a finite number of angels).

If demons were trying to "jam" the messages that God was sending to the Apostles and earliest Christians, then part of the "message written down" could be STATIC or worse.

As a mathematician, you may already know this, but in any case can readily appreciate it:

Two years ago I had to learn about Reed-Solomon digital Error-Correcting Codes and later about Cyclic Redundancy Coding (CRC) in the general subject of Error Detection And Correction (EDAC).

It seems like magic: I can send a message of 56 bits length, and if there is nowhere in those 56 bits a sequence of errors longer than 24 bits, then I can tell INFALLIBLY whether or not the message was received correctly, and I can INERRANTLY correct the mistaken bits!

The trick is to take a 32-bit message and add a redundant 24 bits computed by advanced group theory. So according to modern Information Theory, the first key to preventing or correcting errors is REDUNDANCY.

In Scripture, then, we can feel most confidence in those propositions that are most often repeated and/or most heavily emphasized.

The next thing I learned from Digital Communications Theory is that the trick to removing Noise and Interference from a received Signal is to know in advance an authentic "Message Space" and then use orthogonal [perpendicular] projection to split the received signal in Signal Space (some kind of a Hilbert space) into the vector sum of a component in message space and a component _perpendicular_ to message space. This latter is "noise" (either Error or Interference). So to characterize "noise" one finds out WHAT is "perpendicular to Message Space" and discards it. What is left is an allowable message.

Why not apply this "communication theology" to the problem of Scripture (in the context of Boyd's "warfare theology")?

It is quite clear from 5 later prophets (who specifically and explicitly contradicted Moses) that God "prefers mercy to sacrifice" and therefore we can conclude that this is in Message Space and it is then obvious that the passages which claim that God told Moses that he enjoys the smell of burning flesh are either culturally-conditioned "human noise" or "diabolic jamming."

You say that it is impossible to discriminate between the correct and incorrect parts of Scripture, and so we must assume that it is _all_ perfect from God's perspective.

But if you take the _biblical_ viewpoint (so well documented by Boyd that a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary proclaimed that he was "ecstatic" over Boyd's Vol. 1 cited above) of "Warfare Theology," then it would be logical to augment it with my own suggestion of "Communication Theology" including a _scientific_ test (from Information Theory) as to how to separate the wheat from the chaff in the Scriptures!

What do you think?

Sincerely,

Bob Bass

Dr. Robert W. Bass, *M.A. Oxon* [Rhodes Scholar], Prof. of Physics & Astronomy, BYU (1971-81, retired)

Adjunct. Prof. of Systems Engineering, F.I.T., Registered Patent Agent 29,130

45960 Indian Way (#612), Lexington Park, MD 20653 RES: (301) 866-9657 FAX: (301) 866-9674

From: William A. Dembski [William_Dembski@baylor.edu] 3/13/01

Subject: Re: your "Problem of Error in Scripture"

Dear Bob,

The problem I have with sifting the wheat from the chaff in Scripture is that Scripture's self-witness and the tradition of the church is against it. In the Psalms one reads about every word of God being pure. The epigraph from John Chrysostom to the chapter you cite says Scripture as such is a great benefit and not after it has been subjected to error correction. I don't want to dismiss what you're saying entirely since there are passages in the NT where Paul refers to his opinion in contrast to the divine intention. But it seems to me that the problem of error needs to focus on interpretation and context of inquiry and not on deciding which portions of Scripture deserve to be in the Canon and which don't -- everyone from Marcion to Thomas Jefferson has tried to get rid of portions of Scripture that they found problematic, and this approach never seems to work.

Best regards,
Bill