



Enns, Peter.

Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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It's always interesting to read a book after you've heard a lot about it. In the case of Peter Enns' *Inspiration and Incarnation* (hereafter *I&I*) I've heard quite a bit from seemingly every position along the theological spectrum. I've heard skeptics sing its praises for pointing out flaws and discrepancies in the Bible. I've heard liberal Christians give a hesitant nod of approval with the caveat that Enns doesn't go far enough. I've heard moderate Christians say that this is what they've always believed, and finally I've heard super-conservative Christians decry it as a work of heresy for denying the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy and undermining the doctrine of inspiration (which in the minds of many is equated with inerrancy). More times than not hearing a lot about a book before reading it engenders deep biases, either good or bad, before ever picking it up, but in this case the situation hasn't been so cut and dry given the broad range of opinions I've read. I honestly had no idea what to expect so I wasn't really predisposed to love or hate this book. In all honesty I just wanted to find out what all the fuss was about.

Having finally read *I&I* I can say that my opinion is probably most closely aligned with what I've described as the "moderate Christian" take on the book. Enns' main objective is for evangelicals to take the Bible seriously but doing so requires that we accept it for what it is and on its own terms. He uses what he calls the "incarnational analogy" to make this point. Just as Christ is fully divine and fully human, so is Scripture. Scripture has both a divine author and many human authors. And since Scripture was given through men at specific moments throughout history we

have to learn to accept the culturally conditioned aspects of it and not be shocked or surprised when we discover that it's not quite as unique as we once might have thought.

The first chapter just basically introduces the reader to the so-called "problem" of the OT and sketches out the "incarnational analogy" before moving onto chapter 2 which addresses the comparative Ancient Near Eastern literature. Many portions of the OT resemble other ANE texts that came before it, yet this shouldn't disturb us, it should just remind us that the Bible has a human element to it. This is also a reminder that we need to situate the text in its historical setting while we interpret it. This will save us from charging the OT with error because it doesn't comport with modern standards and sensibilities. The third chapter discusses theological diversity in the OT and highlights how different authors crafted texts based on the same information to make different theological points. But not to worry, this isn't cause for calls of contradiction, rather it's accepting the OT on its own terms and allowing each respective author to speak to their particular audience and situation. The fourth chapter covers the NT use of the OT where Enns makes his case for what he calls the "christotelic" view, that is, Christ is the end or fulfillment of all the OT says so the NT authors read the OT in light of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. His point here is once again that the NT authors are operating in a certain time and place and using certain interpretive techniques that might seem foreign to our modern sensibilities but are quite natural in the historical context in which the NT is set. The fifth and final chapter is a recap of the previous chapters and a reminder that this conversation should be carried out with humility, love, and patience. We all won't agree with one another but we should at least be gracious in our disagreement and display a Christ-like character.

At the end of the day I think that the skeptic who finds support for their understanding of the Bible as riddled with errors and contradictions has misread *I&I*. Likewise, so has the super-conservative Christian who sees *I&I* as doing away with inspiration and inerrancy. Funnily enough, these two extremes along the theological spectrum are operating with the same presuppositions and standards, but Enns is actually suggesting a way to allow Scripture to be what it is while also being inerrant. His suggestion isn't doing away with inerrancy, but rather understanding inerrancy according to the text rather than an imposed modern standard that the text knows nothing of. The liberal Christian respects the data that Enns presents and realizes that it's not quite the problem that the skeptic and super-conservative thinks it is, but would prefer to see the conclusion that inerrancy simply isn't important and doesn't need to be maintained on any level. And finally the moderate Christian just thinks that Enns makes a lot of sense and should be applauded for his honesty and the effort he put into keeping this discussion moving along.

Are there things to quibble with? Of course there are but that's true of every book. For example, in a book where Enns repeatedly urges against anachronism he employs an anachronistic definition of monotheism (what some [e.g., Nathan McDonald; Richard Bauckham] have called

'Enlightenment monotheism') when discussing "One God or many Gods?" on pp. 97-102. There's also the lack of necessity for Enns to make the "incarnational analogy" at all. Every one of his points could have been made with equal clarity and force without reference to the Incarnation of Christ or his hypostatic union. At various points Enns acknowledges the inadequacy of the analogy and at the end he prefers to speak of it as the "incarnational *parallel*" (p. 168). And if I was to offer a final criticism it would be that Enns asserts that the Biblical text may have "multiple layers of meaning" because "no one person, school, or tradition can exhaust the depth of God's word" (p. 161), but this runs contrary to his acknowledgment of the importance of discerning the author's intent, and it also leaves the door wide open to accepting the legitimacy of literally any interpretation of a text. I much prefer to speak of a single meaning with multiple applications which is what I see the NT authors doing with the OT, i.e., applying their texts to a new situation without proposing that this is what the text initially meant.

These criticisms aside, *I&I* is a well written and thought provoking book that should stir up more than a bit of debate between the various audiences that will read it. It also has a number of features that I'd be remiss not to mention like the end of chapter reading lists, the glossary of terms in the back, and of course the Scripture and subject indexes. Surprisingly there isn't a footnote or end note to be found but this in no way detracts from the overall appeal of the book. I'd recommend *I&I* to one and all without reservation.