

Kanto Gakuin University
4834 Mitsuura Machi, Kanazawa-ku
Yokohama, Japan
February 27, 1968

Dr. J. Lester Harnish
President
Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary
City Line and Lancaster Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
U. S. A. 19151

Dear Dr. Harnish:

Your letter of February 22, concerning the need of Eastern Baptist Seminary for a Professor in Old Testament, arrived late today. I have some doubts if this reply will reach you by March 1 in time for the meeting of the Instruction Committee. But since there is a slight possibility, I will send off this brief reply immediately.

You raised three specific questions and in the text of the letter raised two additional questions. I shall comment on all five. Indeed an interview or bull-session would have been somewhat easier since this letter will not permit the detail I feel necessary to adequately answer your questions, and the time factor does not permit me to send you a carefully worded concise statement. But I trust the following will be helpful.

(1) In reference to my preparation and vocational interests, I can state that they are in the area of teaching Old Testament, Hebrew and related subjects. I would be doing this now in Japan if it were not for the fact that there are fully qualified Japanese professors in this area. Consequently, I am now teaching primarily in the area of Semitic languages to theological students, since there are not available at the present qualified Japanese scholars in this more specialized area. My academic studies were deliberately linguistic rather than theological for the reason that I thought there was too much superficial theological discussion which could not stand up under closer philological and critical examination. For me the linguistic and critical disciplines seem essential as a foundation for serious theological discussion. My interest is in theological education with a view of making the Old Testament as meaningful and relevant as possible.

(2) I do feel that I can work well and happily in the context of Eastern's basic philosophy of academic excellence, spiritual relevance and an evangelical theology. My own basic philosophy as pastor and missionary has been that the gospel of Christ is the only hope of man as an individual and of mankind as a family. In response to this personal conviction I have set for myself a certain standard of academic excellence and spiritual relevance as essential for the effective expression of my evangelical faith.

(3) On the question of naturalism and supernaturalism, let me

indicate simply that my own faith stands upon the affirmation of the supernatural, that is, faith in the absolute creative and redeeming God, who stands outside and over his created natural order. While recognizing that God usually works in and through the natural order—indeed, as in the incarnation—I understand this as the supernatural working in the natural, the eternal working in the temporal, the infinite working in the historical. While I appreciate the present theological discussion on the validity of the dichotomy of everything into either the sacred or the secular, my loyalty is with those who recognize the reality of the supernatural. Of course, this does not mean that I feel loyal to every "supernaturalist."

(4) Concerning the first several chapters of Genesis, my views are essentially as follows. The modern Christian who wants to interpret these chapters to answer the questions "how" and "when" (with reference to creation and the origin of sin) is being more modern than biblical. "How" and "when" are modern questions of scientific man. The first chapters of Genesis seem to be directed to the age old questions of "who" and "why". It seems to me that the search for "history" in these chapters is a search for the wrong thing, the search must be the search for truth! And modern man's equation of historical fact with truth is so damaging when applied to these chapters. Consequently, I reject as misguided and fruitless any attempt to use Genesis 1-2 as a counter argument for scientific theories on the origin of man and his universe. Instead of interpreting these chapters in the context of our modern pre-occupation with "how" and "when", these chapters must be read in the context of Israel's world and religious environment, a world of naturalism and polytheism. In this context, Genesis 1-2 is a bold declaration of monotheism and supernaturalism. In a world where men and gods were assumed to all be a part of the natural order, it is proclaimed that God is creator and stands above the created order. This is the theme and truth of these chapters: God is Creator and the Creator is not a part of creation. In a world where men worshiped sun, moon and stars, they were reminded that these are but a part of the created order which would function according to the will of the Creator.

I would like to carry this on, but the above is sufficient to indicate the direction of my thinking of Genesis 1-2. For me the reading of these chapters in the context of the world of the first "hearers" is so exciting and meaningful that I find all attempts to work over these chapters with the aim of proving their historical merit is dry and boring and spiritually sterile. The original impact of these chapters have a message for modern man in his own polytheistic and naturalistic world.

(5) I believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, but by this I do not mean that I subscribe to the "dictation theory" or any of the other "theories." For me the key to the doctrine of inspira-

tion is to be found in the process of Bible transmission and translation. It is inconceivable to me that God would be more concerned with how the Bible was first given in its "autograph" form than he was and is with its transmission and translation, especially since all that is available to his church is the transmitted and translated text. No one knows how God inspired the author of the "autograph" but there is a thrilling record of how God has inspired men throughout the ages to transmit and translate his word. I would assume that the inspiration in each case was similar. The inspiration in transmission and translation was through the agency of dedicated human hands. It was not mechanical nor automatic, but prayerful, painful and labored. The inspired word of God in the Bible is a word that has come to and through human hands and minds. Therefore my own understanding of the "doctrine of inspiration" includes recognition of how God used men: the word was his, the words were theirs.

Thus, while I am very conservative in critical studies in maintaining the received text if at all possible, I do not believe that each word or spelling is "inspired".

If this is to get in the mail, I must stop now. Perhaps these comments have raised more questions than they have answered. But then, perhaps they are just what you are looking for. They are in no way a summary of my faith or an adequate expression of my views. But they do indicate the direction in which I think.

With my very best regards,

Most sincerely,

Thomas F. McDaniel