
Pro Rege

Volume 5 | Number 4

Article 11

June 1977

Battle for the Bible (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Kobes, Wayne A. (1977) "Battle for the Bible (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*:

Vol. 5: No. 4, 28 - 29.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol5/iss4/11

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Rosalind Franklin and DNA by Anne Sayre, W. W. Norton & Co., 1975, 221 pages, \$6.95. Reviewed by Delmar Vander Zee, Associate Professor of Biology.

The molecular structure of DNA, the heredity-encoding molecule, was discovered in 1953. But the record crediting the discovery to the proper scientists has been somewhat distorted. Anne Sayre wrote this book as a defense, an attempt to set the record straight on behalf of her friend Rosalind Franklin, a European scientist who had worked on DNA in the early 1950's before she died of cancer in 1958 at age 37. This is not the first attempt to straighten the record, but probably the most definitive to this time.

The record that Sayre attempts to straighten was written in 1968 by J. D. Watson in The Double Helix (Signet Books). (Before one can appreciate Sayre's book, one should read Watson's.) The Double Helix is a kind of memoir and a sometimes gossipy account of how the molecular structure of DNA was discovered. It is not a technical book but, rather, describes how some science was done. Watson made a point of caricaturing Rosalind Franklin as "Rosy . . . an unattractive, dowdy, rigid, aggressive, overbearing, steely, unfeminine bluestocking, the female grotesque we have all been taught either to fear or to despise" (Sayre p. 19). Watson did not have a very high regard for women in science, and after R. Franklin died, he "stomped on her grave" with his distorted account of her in his book. F. H. Crick, co-discoverer of the DNA structure, called Watson's book a novel!

The reason for this effort to vindicate a friend and fellow scientist was that Rosalind Franklin had determined on her own by 1951 many important facts of DNA structure. DNA was helical; it contained two or more nucleotide strands with the phosphates on the outside. The technical data from R. Franklin's X-ray crystallography got into Watson's hands surreptitiously and thereby enabled Watson and Crick to design a molecular model and win the race in publishing the discovery without giving proper credit (Nature, April 25, 1953). For this discovery, J. D. Watson, F. H. Crick, and M. Wilkins received the Nobel Prize in 1962.

Watson not only maligned the character of a very competent scientist but in stereotyping

her may have been trying to excuse the "theft" of her data—without which Watson and Crick could not have made their discovery as early as they did.

To straighten this record, Anne Sayre does a masterful job. Her book goes to great lengths to describe Rosalind Franklin's personal and family life and her character. She apparently was not what Watson suggested! She was very diligent and persistent in pursuit of the truth. She was also a very competent scientist, beginning with the crystallography of carbon compounds, briefly working with DNA, and then working on virus structure. Rosalind Franklin published several papers per year until her death. Sayre's book is well documented; she has researched many sources, interviewed many people. She documents especially well the details of the DNA work. Twenty-one pages at the end of the book are references and notes to the main text.

Sayre's book is important for many reasons. It gives due credit (posthumously) to an important scientist. It points out that scientists are human and subject to err, shattering the modern TV image of the cold, competent, and completely honest scientist. It also points out an important ethic that must be maintained in the sciences, that is, openness and honesty. The breaching of this ethic came to light no doubt because of the fame of the DNA discovery and in part because of the diligence of those who wanted to set the record straight.

Sayre's book (and Watson's) should provide interesting and informative reading to people in many fields.

The Battle for the Bible, by Harold Lindsell, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976, 218 pages, \$6.95. Reviewed by Wayne Kobes, Instructor in Theology.

Dr. Harold Lindsell is an evangelical Christian with a deep, pressing concern. His concern has to do with changing views of an infallible and inerrant Scripture within the evangelical community. Dr. Lindsell writes:

Fundamentalists and evangelicals (both of whom have been traditionally committed to an infallible or inerrant Scripture) have long been

noted for their propagation and defense of an infallible Bible. But more recently, among those who call themselves evangelicals, there has been a marked departure from the viewpoint held by them for so long. More and more organizations and individuals historically committed to an infallible Scripture have been embracing and propagating the view that the Bible has errors in it.

According to Dr. Lindsell, a battle is being fought over the Bible today. Is the Bible fully or partially reliable? The question is not a peripheral theological issue, but a watershed question which must be recognized as such (p. 20).

In order to clarify the contours of the question facing evangelical Christians today, Dr. Lindsell begins by discussing the meaning of the term "inerrant" as it applies to Scripture. In this connection, he briefly discusses various related terms: revelation, inspiration, illumination, authority, and interpretation. Care is also taken to link the evangelical view to that presented in the Bible itself.

Dr. Lindsell's third chapter, "Infallibility in the Church," is especially interesting and helpful. In broad survey he traces the historic Christian understanding of the Bible as infallible. Beginning with the New Testament witness to infallibility, he continues by presenting the views held by the early Church fathers, medieval Roman Catholicism, the Reformers, and recent Protestant statements on Scripture. It is clear from Dr. Lindsell's survey that the belief in an infallible Bible has been the position of the church through the ages.

However, the last two hundred years has seen a change from the stand of historic Christianity. This is true in the Christian church as a whole, observes Dr. Lindsell, but, sadly, evangelical Christianity too is now following a similar pattern. How can this happen, asks Dr. Lindsell? In answer, he presents the reader with his assessment of concessions and departures from the truth that have led evangelical denominations and parachurch groups away from the stand of historic Christianity. Focusing on the struggles in the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, problems within the Southern Baptist Convention, developments in the history of Fuller Theological Seminary, and many other "cases in point," Dr. Lindsell finds the underlying

cause in each case to be a movement away from an infallible Scripture. Throughout, the author is careful to point out that he is not attacking individuals, denominations or groups, but exposing the battle which is presently taking place, the battle for the Bible. In the words of Dr. Lindsell, "The signs are there for all to read."

That The Battle for the Bible has caused much discussion and even controversy within the evangelical community is understandable. The issue raised is crucial and the specific cases of controversy presented in the book still evoke strong sentiment. Yet evangelical and Reformed Christians will sense that Dr. Lindsell writes in order to defend Scripture as the authority in all of life. He writes out of conviction and concern, and the questions he raises demand serious consideration and careful response.

But while reading The Battle for the Bible, one wonders if the issues facing evangelical and Reformed Christians today in regard to Scripture and its interpretation are not oversimplified. Although Dr. Lindsell sets about explaining his understanding of "inerrant" and "infallible," a more complete treatment could be helpful. One asks, What is meant by "error" in the Bible? What is meant by "true"? Are all those examined individuals and groups working and talking with the same understanding of the terms? Have their comments been understood in the proper context? Perhaps the issues and discussions are more complex than first appearances would indicate.

Another important issue in a consideration of one's view of the Bible is the function of the Bible in relationship to what is commonly called "natural revelation" and the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Dr. Lindsell briefly mentions natural revelation early in the book, but his view of the relationships is not clearly defined. One wonders where this fits into the Christian life. Different views of these relationships certainly result in different views of the Bible.

The Battle for the Bible has already had a significant impact on the evangelical community. It is an important book for evangelicals to read. There is much with which the Reformed Christian will find himself in agreement, yet questions and reservations may arise as well. Certainly all evangelical and Reformed Christians will find themselves in agreement with Dr. Lindsell's concern for maintaining in the Christian community the proper view of the Bible as the inspired, infallible Word of God.