

The “Big Book” Fallacy
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The “Big Book” fallacy is the notion that anything that is said in a big book, especially a multi-volume series of big books, must be, at a minimum, *factually* correct, and at a maximum, correct in its judgment. This is fallacious, because error is error, regardless of its domicile. Peer-reviewed error may be less common than non-peer-reviewed error, but it still exists. No editor checks the factual accuracy of every sentence he edits, and therefore, even in big books, multi-volume big books, and/or multi-volume big books with good reputations, error still exists, and we should not repeat the error without either citing the source or checking the source. Here’s a doozy from the article on ἀκολουθεῖν from Kittel’s significant *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. I, pp. 213-214). Read first without checking the footnotes; then again with.

The distinctive statistical evidence shows that the special use of ἀκολουθεῖν is strictly limited to discipleship of Christ; apart from a single reference in Revelation¹ it is found exclusively in the four Gospels.² ...This implies, however, that ἀκολουθεῖν signifies self-commitment³ in a sense which breaks all other ties...⁴

ἀκολουθεῖν means participation in the salvation⁵ offered in Jesus...

...All the more remarkable is the third distinctive feature of the tradition, that that the connection of the word with the concrete processes of the history of Jesus is so strongly felt and

¹ There are, in fact, six uses of the term in Revelation: 6:8; 14:4,8,9,13; 19:14.

² The term appears four times in Acts (12:8,9; 13:43; 21:36).

³ Mt. 4:23-24 records Jesus traveling about in Galilee, healing “all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics.” The next verse says “And great crowds followed him from Galilee (καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοὶ).” While one cannot be sure about things, I suspect they followed Jesus either out of curiosity or the desire to be healed, as much as because of their “self-commitment in a sense which breaks all other ties.”

⁴ “Self-commitment in a sense which breaks all other ties” does not appear to be an appropriate way of describing Peter’s following (ἠκολούθει, Matt. 26:58) Jesus “at a distance” after His arrest, particularly since this preceeds Peter’s denial (Matt. 26:69ff.).

⁵ Were all those who “followed” Jesus in Mat. 4 participants in salvation?

retained that no noun ever came into use corresponding to the concept of discipleship.⁶ The NT simply has the active term, because what it is seeking to express is an action and not a concept...

...the Gospels...restrict the relationship signified by it to the historical Jesus.⁷

One would not expect to encounter seven factual errors in such a brief space in what amounts to an encyclopedia. We would assume that people can distinguish one use of a term from six uses of a term as a simple matter of basic counting. But, such factual errors exist, even in large, multi-volume, peer-reviewed resources.

An Old Testament Example

Since I teach New Testament, I consider it only fair to provide an Old Testament example, lest my friends in the other discipline think only we are capable of such manifest error, not only of judgment, but of plain arithmetical fact. This one is from C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch's well-known OT commentary, from volume 10, *Minor Prophets*, by Keil (p. 210), discussing Joel 2:28, in which Joel anticipates the future when God will pour out His Spirit on "all flesh."

"All flesh" signifies all men. The idea that it embraces the irrational animals, even the locusts, is rejected with perfect justice by Hitzig as an inconceivable thought, and one unheard-of in the Bible."

Hmmm. Is it true that it is "inconceivable" that "all flesh" (כָּל־בְּשָׂר׃) could embrace the irrational animals? Is such an idea "unheard-of" in the Bible? Has Hitzig rejected the idea "with perfect justice"?

⁶ Well, μαθητής is commonly employed in the NT, and it would certainly fall into the category of "corresponding to the concept of discipleship."

⁷ Mark 14:13 employs this verb to describe the man who will be carrying water, whom the disciples are to "follow" to the Passover meal.

In Genesis 6:19, 7:15,16,21; 8:1; 9:11,15,16,17 כָּל־בְּשָׂר׃ designates the animals which Noah takes into the ark (e.g. 7:21, “And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man”). Presumably these “animals” were “irrational,” (Maybe Mr. Ed, the talking horse, was there?), so it is neither inconceivable nor “unheard-of in the Bible” to translate כָּל־בְּשָׂר׃ to comprehend irrational animals.

In Leviticus 17, Moses is instructed to relate to Aaron legislation regarding the slaying of various animals “outside the camp,” and the shedding of their blood. He mentions oxen, lambs, goats, and later, “any blood,” presumably a reference to any other animal. The rationale for this legislation, recorded in verse 14, is: “For the life of every creature (כָּל־בְּשָׂר׃) is in the blood.” Evidently, the reference here is not to humans (who are not to be eaten under any circumstances!), but to animals, yes, presumably “irrational animals,” whose blood cannot be eaten.

K-D would have been correct had they merely observed that כָּל־בְּשָׂר׃ *commonly* refers to humans in the OT. And they *might* be right in arguing, contextually, that the expression ought to be understood that way at Joel 2:28. However, it is neither “inconceivable,” nor “unheard-of in the Bible” for כָּל־בְּשָׂר׃ to refer to irrational animals. Such a statement is an error of simple *fact*, not of interpretation.