



# SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

## THE BIBLE

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*Southwestern Journal of Theology* (ISSN 0038-4828) is published at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas 76122. Printed by Branch-Smith Printing Inc., Fort Worth, Texas 76101. For the contents of back issues and ordering information please see [www.BaptistTheology.org/journal.cfm](http://www.BaptistTheology.org/journal.cfm).

## *Editorial*

### *The Bible: A Southwestern Seminary Distinctive*

Before and during the Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas was generally reputed a conservative school. Testing such assumptions regarding the theological balance within the six seminaries, the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee in 1987 cited Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky for not employing biblical inerrantists,<sup>1</sup> thus indicating their departure from the common theology of the churches. However, in agreement with its reputation amongst the same churches, the Peace Committee apparently exonerated Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

One faculty member at Southwestern Seminary during that critical period preceding the triumph of the conservatives in the SBC, and one reason for such an apparent exoneration, was Luther Russell Bush III, a professor of philosophy who received two graduate-level degrees from the school. Bush, soon after the Peace Committee Report, left Southwestern Seminary so as to help lead Southeastern Seminary's faculty into the inerrantist fold. Bush, who once offered this editor—at the time a fellow academic dean—friendly and useful counsel for serving a faculty, recently departed us to be with the Lord. This journal issue is dedicated to Dean Bush and to what may be regarded his most critical theological legacy, convictional affirmation of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God.

In this first issue of the fiftieth volume of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, please take a moment to peruse the memories of one of Bush's doctoral students, Mark Leeds, now the Registrar at Bush's alma mater. Leeds provides firsthand testimony regarding Bush's commitment to students, a commitment that fostered a passion for biblical faith. Jason G. Duesing, who studied with Bush at Southeastern Seminary and is now Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Southwestern Seminary, provides a biographical sketch that should aid further research into the

<sup>1</sup>“Report of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee,” II Findings, On Theology, in *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention: 1987 SBC Annual* (Nashville: Executive Committee, 1987), 56, 232–42.

background and impact of Bush's life as well as further research into his theology and philosophy.

The bulk of this issue consists of three theological essays focused upon the Bible and its authority for the Christian theologian. First, with the permission of his widow, Mrs. Cynthia Ellen McGraw Bush, we have reprinted a lesser-known work by Bush entitled, "Understanding Biblical Inerrancy." This essay was self-published by Bush in 1988, under the trademark of Columbia Publications in Fort Worth, at a time when conservatives in the churches still wondered whether they could win the minds of scholars back to complete trust in the Bible's inerrant authority. Bush's essay, a fairly comprehensive yet concise and irenic defense of biblical inerrancy, was an early indicator that not only is inerrancy a respectable Christian intellectual position it is the most faithful Christian intellectual position. Our hope is that Bush's essay will energize the academy once again but this time with a wider audience.

Second, we also reprint here another difficult-to-find essay, an essay that was instrumental in the resurgence of conservative theology. In 1979, soon after the first and tenuous presidential victory of the Conservative Resurgence, Paige Patterson penned "The Issue Is Truth," which appeared under the mark of the Shophar Papers in Dallas, Texas. Patterson, who once served as President of Criswell College and as Bush's President at Southeastern Seminary, and who is now President of Bush's alma mater, possesses an uncanny ability to disseminate his theological ruminations in the ecclesiastical realm in spite of less than enthusiastic responses by official ecclesiastical publishers. Patterson's essay is as theologically relevant today as it was thirty years ago, and alongside Bush's essay it provides a reminder as to why the Southern Baptist Convention must maintain the doctrine of biblical inerrancy in its academies as well as the churches.

Finally, a younger scholar formerly at Criswell College, Denny R. Burk, suggests the theological conservation of the Southern Baptist Convention should go one step further. Burk fully embraces the doctrine of inerrancy, but opines that inerrancy, on its own, is not enough. Inerrancy is necessary, but so is the doctrine of Scripture's sufficiency. Burk's plea for scholars to embrace biblical sufficiency is addressed specifically for the growing difficulties being experienced in the Evangelical Theological Society, over which Bush once presided. The thesis of Burk, now the Dean at the Boyce College of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, should be examined, however, not only in the academy. The churches should also consider Burk's warning, because the implications of holding to biblical inerrancy without concurrently maintaining the Bible's sufficient authority for Christian faith and practice are profound and disturbing, to say the least.

## *In Memoriam*

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In the fall of 1997 a ragtag group of two dozen seminary students gathered in an upper room of Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. We had everything from pastoral veterans in their fifties to theological neophytes in their early twenties. I was one of the latter. We were all students enrolled in Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's extension program and awaiting the arrival of our professor for "Introduction to Christian Philosophy."

Like most first semester students I had great hopes that I would be profoundly impacted by my seminary professors, but I had no idea just how strongly I would be affected by the teaching ministry of this particular professor. I do not remember the details of Dr. Bush's arrival that day, but I can remember being immediately exposed to new ways of thinking. Under his guidance we spent the rest of that semester dwelling in Platonic caves, being relocated by the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover, sleeping on Procrustean beds, taste testing Cartesian half-baked bread, calling for Humean eight balls to find their way to the corner pocket, wondering how Lessing lost his moorings, enduring Darwinian cold shudders, and taking bread (and carrots) to feed the Wittgensteinian duck-rabbits. I found myself in a new world where I knew not just what I believed, but why I believed it. The best part of it all was that I found myself more effective in my witness to those around me.

It was only after arriving on the main campus a year later that I realized that Dr. Bush was the dean of the seminary. I was amazed that even though he had great responsibility and large classes at the main campus, he was pleased to serve little groups like the one in Charlotte. Although I had no other classes with Dr. Bush at the master's level, I continued to be affected by his ministry. The faculty he led and the curriculum he oversaw challenged me to grow intellectually and spiritually throughout the rest of my Master of Divinity. I was also deeply impacted by the work he crafted with Tom Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*. I was impressed by the way this

work so clearly documented the thinking of our Baptist forefathers on the Bible.

*Baptists and the Bible* also very unexpectedly planted a seed that would come to fruition in my doctoral work on the imagination. It is amazing how just a few paragraphs can spark an interest that lasts a lifetime. For me this paradigm shift occurred as I read and re-read the two paragraphs in chapter eight on Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It had never occurred to me before this point that *Frankenstein* in particular and all great art in general were communicating philosophical and theological worldviews. Before, they seemed to be mere frivolities, but now they became powerful means of Christian expression. Dr. Bush continued to influence my thinking on the arts and imagination as I moved into doctoral work.

My decision to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy was due in large part to my desire to learn everything I could from Dr. Bush. Over the next three years I took every seminar I could with him. The topics included philosophy, apologetics, science, and culture. In these classes we discussed issues like the pillars of western thought, Intelligent Design, the artwork of the great masters, and the power of modern cinema. Dr. Bush encouraged us to present research papers in our area of interest. I was able to explore and critique quantum physics and the incarnation, imagination and philosophy, and the fantasy realms of Middle-Earth and Narnia.

I continued to feel the influence of Dr. Bush even after my seminars were completed as he agreed to serve on the committees for my comprehensive examination and doctoral dissertation defense. I knew that no matter how much I prepared for these events I would have to stay on my intellectual toes with Dr. Bush in the room, yet I wanted him to be there. He would inevitably have in store several questions that could not be anticipated. Still I knew he would ask them in love with an eye toward molding me right to the very end. I can remember being asked about everything from the viability of Superman as a hero for Christian children to the use of magic in the Harry Potter books. I will never forget his words to me at the end of my dissertation defense. He said, "I really think you have accomplished what you set out to do when you started working on the imagination five years ago." To hear this from a beloved professor is encouraging beyond words.

My seminary story is just one small piece of the legacy left behind by Dr. Bush. All hyperbole aside, his teaching truly lives on in the ministries of his students. I can tell you with certainty it lives on here at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in my own teaching ministry. Whether I am explaining the impact of philosophy on theology in "Systematic Theology" or presenting a biblical basis for the arts in "Fine Arts Perspectives on Life," I can hear the echoes of his voice in mine as I see what he saw for so

many years of seminary ministry, hope for the future as God raises up the next generation of leaders.

It is to the memory of Dr. L. Russ Bush that we dedicate this volume of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*.

***Luther Russell Bush III***  
***25 December 1944–22 January 2008***  
***Southwestern MDiv 1970, PhD 1975***

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On top of a small hill in the middle of what used to be the large forest of Wake County, North Carolina resides a simple cemetery. Home to a variety of scholars, administrators, and others affiliated with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, the cemetery contains a handful of nondescript headstones. On 27 January 2008, L. Russ Bush III, former Academic Vice President and Dean of the Faculty joined these colleagues of yesteryear and an understated yet profound headstone marks his grave. The epitaph describes in brief Bush's positions of service at Southeastern Seminary and also denotes his far more significant titles of "Friend, Husband, Father, Teacher." Through the final words referenced on the headstone Bush still speaks today, reminding all of his students and colleagues of this command from I Peter 3:15–16:

[I]n your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

The command serves as a fitting summary of both Bush's life-calling and temperament, and also his desire to replicate such in those over whom he had influence. Bush was a throwback to our nineteenth-century Baptist forefathers, the type often classified as the "Gentlemen Theologians."<sup>1</sup> He was an Apologist-Philosopher, known around the world for how he treated all those with whom he agreed and disagreed with gentleness and respect.

<sup>1</sup>E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978).



Luther Russell Bush III was born in Alexandria, Louisiana on 25 December 1944, a Christmas gift, his father would later recount.<sup>2</sup> His family would soon move to Columbia, Mississippi, where his father started a dental practice. Columbia became the town that Bush would call home the remainder of his life, and Bush appeared to have affection for small towns as later he would state,

A small town is a great place to grow up. Formative years form the years. Our roots make us who we are, and small town roots are strong, life-sustaining roots. Bible believing mothers who mold us and then never leave us even when we move away from home are also a blessing from God.<sup>3</sup>

Bush's "Bible-believing" mother, Sara Frances, owned a Christian bookstore and instilled in Bush a love for books and learning, two affections that grew exponentially the remainder of his life.

The Bushes joined the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Mississippi and were very active in the ministry of both the church and the church's denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention. At the age of twelve, Bush was leaving church when a long-time friend of his father's stopped him and asked him if he had ever been saved. The man had seen Bush "under conviction" for several weeks and felt led to meet with him to pray and read Scripture. Later that night, Bush would make his confession of faith in Jesus Christ public and would soon be baptized into the membership of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Mississippi.<sup>4</sup>

Bush ventured to the Mississippi College for his undergraduate education setting out, at first, in the pursuit of a degree in chemistry. However, after a summer of service at the Southern Baptist Convention's Ridgecrest Conference Center, Bush surrendered to the gospel ministry.<sup>5</sup> Bush's father would recount a conversation he had later that year when he asked the younger Bush what he planned to do with his life and encouraged him simply to follow his heart. After a moment, a great sign of relief came across Bush's face, and he replied, "Well, I believe I will be a preacher."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III* (Wake Forest, NC, 27 January 2008), DVD.

<sup>3</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "John Paul Newport: A Man for A Seasons," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* [SWJT] 29 (1987): 5.

<sup>4</sup>See L. Russ Bush III to Richard Daniels, 4 February 2002, in "L. Russ Bush III: A Biography," *Faith & Mission* 19 (2002): 57, and L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

<sup>5</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Curriculum Vitae," L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

<sup>6</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

In 1967, Bush was ordained by the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Mississippi. Bush's father was asked to present Bush with a Bible and having done so said, "Russ, I am going to present this Bible to you. And if there ever comes a time in your life that you lose confidence in what it says, I want you to promise your Daddy that you will quit preaching."<sup>7</sup> And, as Bush Jr. said, "He never quit preaching." So, from his early exposure to the Christian faith through his parents, his home church, and his exposure to the denomination, Bush received a rich heritage, a commitment to the Southern Baptist Convention, and a complete confidence in the Word of God.

Prior to receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1967, Bush met Cynthia Ellen McGraw, and they married on 2 June 1968. Cynthia Bush was reared in Louisville, Mississippi, the daughter of the pastor's secretary at the First Baptist Church of Louisville. Cynthia's father was also active in the church, and this led to her involvement in various Southern Baptist student ministries in Glorietta, New Mexico; Gary, Indiana; and Estes Park, Colorado prior to her graduation from Mississippi College in 1968.<sup>8</sup> After graduation, the Bushes moved to Fort Worth, Texas for Russ to enroll at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Bush chose the Texas seminary simply because "it offered more philosophy courses than any other school," attending this school during the days when Robert E. Naylor served as president.<sup>9</sup> Naylor had a famous practice in those days of pronouncing the name "Southwesterner" on all incoming students. During Bush's first semester, likely he received the charge from Naylor,

I now pronounce you "Southwesterners." It is a worthy and honorable name; not by what you have done but by a long line that has preceded you. . . . It says something about what you believe about this Book—that it is the Word of God. . . . You will not wear a better name in life than "Southwesterner."<sup>10</sup>

The young Southwesterner's love for the study of philosophy grew to the degree that after completing the Master of Divinity in 1970, Bush applied for further studies in the research doctoral program.

<sup>7</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

<sup>8</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Curriculum Vitae."

<sup>9</sup>L. Russ Bush III to Richard Daniels, in "L. Russ Bush III: A Biography," *Faith & Mission* 19 (2002): 58.

<sup>10</sup>Robert E. Naylor, "I now pronounce you 'Southwesterners,'" Document on file, Office of the President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Bush's father stated that Bush's interest in philosophy grew from a deep foundation and advocacy for the classical truths of historic Christianity rooted in Scripture. Bush Jr. explained that his son would often say,

“But there are a lot of people who do not believe the Bible, you have got to tell them another way.” . . . And he would give me some philosophical treatise on how you are supposed to tell somebody about the Bible. I would say, “I declare the gospel, and you defend the gospel, and I think we need a little of both.” But he was one who believed in defending the gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Southwestern Professor of the Philosophy of Religion, Milton Ferguson, enlisted Bush as his teaching assistant during Bush's doctoral studies, but when Ferguson was elected as President at the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bush transferred his studies under the supervision of John Newport.<sup>12</sup> In Ferguson's absence, the seminary appointed Bush as Instructor from 1973–1975, teaching full-time until the completion of his degree. Upon graduation in 1975, Bush received the first doctor of philosophy degree awarded at Southwestern, since prior equivalent degrees were awarded as the doctor of theology.<sup>13</sup> He continued to teach although now as an elected member of the faculty, and Bush's experience at the seminary both as a student and as a faculty member would instill a love and devotion to the school through the remainder of his life.

During the early years in Fort Worth, Russ and Cynthia Bush saw the birth of their two children, Joshua Russell and Bethany Charis. Bush also served in various ministry assignments at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, the Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, the First Baptist Church in Godley, and the Mother Neff Baptist Church in Moody, Texas.<sup>14</sup> Bush would teach at the seminary for the next fourteen years while remaining active in local church ministry as well as various positions within the Southern Baptist Convention.

In 1980, Bush and fellow Southwestern professor, Tom J. Nettles (MDiv 1971, PhD 1976), authored what would become perhaps their most famous and significant literary contribution to the Southern Baptist

<sup>11</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

<sup>12</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Curriculum Vitae,” and Daniels, “L. Russ Bush III: A Biography,” 58. For Bush's evaluation of the work of John Newport, see L. Russ Bush III, “John Paul Newport: A Man for All Seasons.”

<sup>13</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Curriculum Vitae.” Bush's dissertation was entitled, “An Inquiry into the Relationship Between the Critical Problems of Historical Knowledge and Historical Explanation and the Methodological Formulation of a Christian Philosophy of History.”

<sup>14</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Curriculum Vitae.”

Convention. *Baptists and the Bible* (Moody Press, 1980) served to remind the denomination that Baptists throughout their history had affirmed a belief in the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. The appearance of the volume came just as the convention was undergoing a significant internal debate over the question of the veracity of Scripture. This thorough work virtually completed the historical perspective of the question at hand.<sup>15</sup> Upon the occasion of the publication of a revised and expanded edition of *Baptists and the Bible* in 1999, Bush reflected on the significance of the volume,

*Baptists and the Bible* has never been far from my mind these past twenty years. The SBC continued to struggle over the doctrine of Scripture. I found myself in the middle of a significant portion of that struggle. The knowledge that the worldwide Baptist heritage supported the stance I so strongly defended was one of the most important factors in my assurance that God would bless our efforts if we maintained our commitments with a humble spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Bush's ready defense of the faith in these early years found a regular companion in the Christ-like spirit that characterized both Bush's writing and teaching ministry.

In the 1980s, Bush participated in two sabbatical leaves from the seminary for the purposes of writing and further study. He first studied at the Divinity School and Tyndale House Library at Cambridge University in 1981–1982.<sup>17</sup> During his absence Tom Nettles left Southwestern for a position at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, a move that altered Bush's view of the seminary. He stated,

In my mind, Southwestern was never the same after that, though I still had every intention of living near the Seminary in south Fort Worth and teaching there until retirement.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>For favorable reviews, see David S. Dockery, book review, *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982): 150–51; R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Legacy of Conviction and Courage," *Blog by R. Albert Mohler Jr.*, 23 January 2008; [http://www.albertmohler.com/blog\\_read.php?id=1086](http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=1086) (Accessed 8 September 2008); J.I. Packer, book review, *SWJT* 24 (1981): 104–105; Paige Patterson, "Foreword to the Revised Edition (1999)," in L. Russ Bush III and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), xiii–xiv. For critical reviews, see Fisher Humphreys, book review, *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (1981): 43–45; Dale Moody, book review, *Review and Expositor* 77 (1980): 565–66; and Robison James, *The Unfettered Word* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987).

<sup>16</sup>L. Russ Bush III and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xx.

<sup>17</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Curriculum Vitae."

<sup>18</sup>L. Russ Bush III and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xix.

During Bush's second sabbatical leave from Southwestern, he and his family resided in Washington, D.C. where Bush served as Interim Pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church. During his stay, he made the final revisions on his second book, *A Handbook of Christian Philosophy* (B&H, 1991).<sup>19</sup> Bush's *Handbook* existed originally as a short document he would provide to students taking his class for the first time who needed some background and introductory material. Over time the document evolved into a publishable piece, and the occasion gave Bush the opportunity to add a few appendices on key topics. Naturally, Bush included an appendix on the authority of Scripture stating in his even-handed way that,

Throughout the history of the church, Christian believers have assumed that Christ was the Son of God, that salvation was provided for us by Christ's death on the cross, and that the Bible was the authoritative Word of God. Today, all three of these assumptions have been challenged . . . .

If it can be shown (and it can) that Jesus spoke and taught as if every part of Scripture were true and if it can be shown (and it can) that the apostles everywhere assume the full authenticity and authority of Scripture; and if it can be shown (and it can) that the New Testament bears the same marks of authenticity as the Old, then it seems that veracious biblical authority is not an issue to be taken lightly, nor is it to be discussed superficially, nor is it to be denied by one who calls Christ Lord and Master (Teacher).<sup>20</sup>

During his time in Washington, D.C., Bush was contacted first by the new president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Lewis Drummond, a professor of evangelism from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, had taken over at Southeastern in the aftermath of a great battle between the Board of Trustees and

<sup>19</sup>Carl F.H. Henry, book review, *Faith & Mission* 9 (1991): 82–3, stated, “*A Handbook for Christian Philosophy* is a resource for beginning philosophy of religion students . . . [and] an initial exposure to many of the relevant concerns that face the beginning collegian or seminarian venturing into this sphere of study. . . . The beginning student in philosophy of religion will find this book a relevant sourcebook.” This is high praise from someone Bush considered the “greatest living Baptist theologian.” See Bush, book review of *Carl F.H. Henry* by Bob E. Patterson, *SWJT* 27 (1985): 71.

<sup>20</sup>L. Russ Bush III, *A Handbook for Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 194. While at Southwestern, Bush also authored *Understanding Biblical Inerrancy* (Fort Worth: Columbia Publications, 1988) and *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

the administration and faculty over whether the seminary would remain accountable to the denomination and the school's confession of faith. In urgent need of a supportive academic advisor, Drummond sought Bush. After a time of consideration, Bush stated, "In what was probably the hardest decision of my life, certainly for my family, we decided to accept President Drummond's invitation to be his new dean of the faculty."<sup>21</sup>

Much has been written to describe the situation into which Bush walked.<sup>22</sup> A former president had vowed upon his resignation in 1987 to exert every ounce of his energy toward the future demise of the school. A faculty had sought the aid of an outside organization complete with press-kit and union-type aura. A student body had been alternatively stirred and acquiesced to act in an undisciplined manner. After unanimous opposition from the faculty and the rumors of certain accreditation intervention, all Bush possessed was the support of seventy-three percent of the Board of Trustees. While the faculty and supporters of the old administration likely considered this the same unacceptable situation of a pastor accepting a call to a church with a divided deacon board and full congregational opposition, Bush saw it completely different.

Like the unseen horses and chariots residing on the mountains around Dothan when Elisha assured his servant "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them," (2 Kings 6:16), Russ Bush went in faith to Southeastern trusting that he would have all the assistance, seen and unseen, that he would need. In one of the great acts of courage in contemporary Southern Baptist history, Bush and his family began their ministry in Wake Forest not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit (Zech 4:6) along with gentleness and kindness. Paige Patterson would later recount,

[Bush's early tenure] was one of the most incredibly difficult times anyone could have ever gone through. He was cursed . . . and accosted. . . . But in the final analysis, he overcame by his sheer Christlikeness. . . . By the time I arrived at Southeastern some years later, I discovered that he had won over the hearts even of those who were his bitterest enemies.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>L. Russ Bush III and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xix.

<sup>22</sup>For a concise timeline see James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis*, vol. 4. (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1989), 144–68.

<sup>23</sup>Keith Collier, "Southwestern Seminary mourns the passing of Baptist professor, author and statesman," *Southwestern Seminary*, January 2008; <http://www.swbts.edu/pressreleases/story.cfm?id=A7888A1C-15C5-E47C-F98A80C2E0964372> (Accessed 2 November 2008). Bush would later reflect in *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xix, "Nevertheless, with some exceptions, I grew to love the Southeastern faculty. For a mixed set of reasons I knew it was best (for the school and for them) for most of them to retire

Drummond and Bush set forth by resolving to keep the seminary accountable both to the denomination and its original confession of faith. Bush stated in his address to the Board of Trustees on 11 March 1991,

Southern Baptist seminaries are covenant communities. We collectively work within the framework and guidelines of confessional documents, something that we do not normally ask of pastors, church staff, or lay people. But we do this as a testimony to our supporting community. We ask for their financial support, and we ask for the minds of their children. We have been given a role of teaching authority in the body of Christ, and thus we must give account of the trust placed in us.

Our confessional affirmation at Southeastern is the Abstract of Principles, framed and adopted first by the original faculty of Southern Seminary in the last century. It is a historic confession of substance and depth. It is a testimony to our Convention that the faith once delivered to the saints is maintained and defended in our classes today. . . .

But if there are those who do not believe the doctrines taught by our Articles of Faith, if they publically deny those doctrines or if they teach contrary to them, then I think we all can agree that such a one should not be teaching here. Those who do believe, affirm, and teach in accordance with this confession should be themselves affirmed by the administration, the trustees, and the churches of the SBC. We cannot go on forever in suspicion and confusion. It is not right to accuse people unjustly. Neither is it right to overlook a serious lapse in the faith. We have been under fire for years, not only at Southeastern but in all of our SBC schools. We cannot expect every person to agree on issues not specifically addressed in our documents. We must allow intelligent minds to expand our understanding of doctrinal statements. But we also must secure the theological integrity of this institution for future generations.<sup>24</sup>

or to move on to other ministry opportunities. Nevertheless, I saw in some of them a true sense of their calling, and in most cases I felt the courage of their convictions. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy was not their doctrine, however, and they were, for the most part, very forcefully opposed to it.”

<sup>24</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Statement to the Board of Trustees, March 11, 1991,” in Keith Harper and Steve McKinion, eds., *Then and Now: A Compilation and Celebration of Fifty Years at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), 101–103.



Bush's perseverance prevailed. The seminary would not only adhere faithfully to its confession, *Abstract of Principles*, but would later add concurrently *The Baptist Faith and Message* of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>25</sup> In future years, Bush would famously recount for the student body and those who would gather for the seminary's convocation exercises the importance of confessional accountability. He would state,

I hold before you today two books. The first one contains the Abstract of Principles. The second one the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. . . . The Abstract is engraved on a plaque that hangs on a wall near the Dean's Office in Stealey Hall. The Abstract of Principles is the oldest doctrinal confession approved by Southern Baptists. It was composed by Basil Manly, Jr. in 1858. The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 is the most recent confession adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention.

So Southeastern is rooted doctrinally in Baptist history. We stand where Baptists have stood in the past and we stand where they now stand. These words express our common faith.

Now these confessions are not a substitute for the Bible. The Bible alone is infallible, inerrant as the word of God written. But nevertheless we believe these Confessions, though they are not the Bible, they are faithful summaries of the key biblical doctrines as most Baptist theologians have understood them in the past, and as Baptist church leaders understand them today.

We sign these documents as a testimony to each other and the world. Here we stand. This we believe. This we defend.<sup>26</sup>

After Lewis Drummond resigned due to illness, Paige Patterson of Dallas, Texas and a leader in the conservative movement was elected as the next president at Southeastern. As Patterson was making preparations to begin his new assignment in Wake Forest, Bush wrote him and eagerly explained,

We must keep in mind that we are doing the unprecedented here. We are taking a school founded in one tradition and

<sup>25</sup>See Melissa King, "SEBTS trustees require new faculty to sign BFM; increase budget by \$2M," *Baptist Press*, 17 April 2001; <http://www.bpnews.org/bpnews.asp?id=10694> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

<sup>26</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Convocation Remarks at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary," replayed during the *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.



changing it to another tradition that is contrary to the desires of the alumni and of the support base that was built up over the past generation. . . . The difficulties that we have faced, and have now overcome, are so formidable that in every other case it has been found impossible. . . . The victory is won, even if the treaty is not yet signed and even if some islands are still in the possession of the former empire.<sup>27</sup>

This prophetic statement would signal years of exponential growth and revitalization during the Patterson-Bush administration.<sup>28</sup>

While Bush was working to reestablish Southeastern internally, Bush's peers outside the seminary recognized his academic achievements and leadership and selected him as National President of the Evangelical Theological Society.<sup>29</sup> In his 1994 presidential address to the society entitled, "The History of the Future," Bush reminded his fellow scholars,

We are living and making the history of the future. What we teach and do today will be what future Christians consider to be their heritage. The principles we adopt, the critical methods and assumptions we accept, the hermeneutical methods we follow, and the selections of data we highlight will be considered as the foundations by those who follow us. Be not so ready to innovate, to seek the new merely for the sake of newness.<sup>30</sup>

Bush's rare combination of prophetic meekness would serve the society well and Bush would remain active throughout his ministry.<sup>31</sup>

Bush would serve the Southern Baptist Convention in a variety of capacities during the years of the Conservative Resurgence, and in

<sup>27</sup>L. Russ Bush III to Paige Patterson, 22 May 1992, Paige Patterson Papers, Closed Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. Used with permission.

<sup>28</sup>See Paige Patterson, "What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem: How to Tighten Greek and Hebrew Requirements and Triple your M.Div. Enrollment at the Same Time," *Faith & Mission* 17 (1999): 56.

<sup>29</sup>Bush was the first Southern Baptist to serve in this position.

<sup>30</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "The History of the Future—Or What Should We Do Now?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 4.

<sup>31</sup>In 2001–2006, when the society engaged in a debate over the theological position, "Open Theism," Bush served to provide steady leadership and lead the society to reaffirm its historic position on inerrancy. See Jason Hall, "Prof's motion aimed at refining ETS statement, avoiding split," *Baptist Press*, 8 December 2003; <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=17227> (Accessed 8 September 2008); and Jeff Robinson, "Inerrancy statement bodes well for ETS, former president says," *Baptist Press*, 12 December 2006; <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=24585> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

recognition of this service as well as his specific investment at Southeastern, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary honored Bush with their Distinguished Alumni Award on 14 June 2006. Southwestern's president was now Paige Patterson, who had returned to Texas after serving with Bush for eleven years in North Carolina. Patterson explained,

Few will ever know the extent of the difficulties through which he walked during the first few years of his assignment in Wake Forest. One can safely say, however, that much of what has been accomplished in the dramatic reversal and return to the faith of our fathers at Southeastern Seminary, as well as to the phenomenal growth of the institution, can be laid directly at his feet.<sup>32</sup>

Earlier that month, Southeastern Seminary, now led by Bush's third president, Daniel Akin, opened the newly formed L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture in honor of Bush's contribution to the school, her faculty, and her students. Serving as the Center's first director, Bush explained his vision,

It is my desire, and that of my colleagues at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, that the new L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture will provide a platform from which the Christian message will be able to engage every aspect of non-Christian thought . . . and counter the false spirits of the age . . . by proposing Christian faith as the only true way. . . .

As God gives us grace, we pledge ourselves to present biblical truth in the brightest light we can. Engaging the culture: Defending the faith. That is the ultimate purpose of the new Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. May God give us the grace to see His truth shine ever brighter until Jesus comes to lead us home.<sup>33</sup>

Presenting biblical truth in the brightest light articulates again the unique spirit of Bush's calling and ministry. It came as no surprise that the text of Scripture Bush selected for the theme of the Bush Center was 1 Peter 3:15–16.

<sup>32</sup>Paige Patterson, "Distinguished Alumnus L. Russ Bush—Baptists and the Bible," in *Southwestern News* 64 (2006): 50.

<sup>33</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "FIRST PERSON: Engaging the culture," *Baptist Press*, 25 May 2006; <http://www.bpnews.org/bpnews.asp?id=23334> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

Bush's contribution to the seminary, the denomination, and other areas of ministry were many, but the testimony of his students reveals his ultimate effectiveness. Bush enjoyed working with students, and they—although not always immediately—enjoyed and honored him. In 2003, Bush recounted,

One of the joys of my life has been the opportunity to work for almost thirty years in an academic environment. Seminary students come in all flavors, but each one makes their mark somewhere in the world; and a student's mark is an expression of the impression a Faculty makes on him or her. Being only one member of a large Faculty sufficiently dilutes one self-promoting ego, and yet the classroom remains a most satisfying place to work.<sup>34</sup>

Alvin Reid, a student of Bush and eventually one of his colleagues at Southeastern, said in a tribute to Bush,

We live in a day when . . . [h]eroes are actually hard to find. Russ Bush is my hero. He epitomizes a love for culture, for knowledge, and for the gospel I so hope to emulate. He demonstrates how one does not have to compartmentalize life. One can be a thinker and a spiritual person, a lover of the Great Commission and a lover of great ideas, a scholar and a practitioner. He in many ways reveals the goal of education at Southeastern, in the words of [P]resident Akin, to use our head, our heart, and our hands for the glory of God and the sake of the gospel.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas White, another one of Bush's students and now vice president for student services and communications at Southwestern Seminary, spoke of Bush's personal investment in the lives of his students,

I will never forget the classes held in his home hosted by his lovely wife Cindy. I will never forget the president of the Evangelical Theological Society taking time to talk with me, a student, in the halls of an ETS meeting. . . . I will never forget his insistence on holding my daughter immediately after he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Southwestern Seminary. On January 22, 2008, our sorrow was Bush's gain

<sup>34</sup>L. Russ Bush III, *The Advancement* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), xi–xii.

<sup>35</sup>Alvin Reid, "A Tribute to L. Russ Bush, III (1944–2008)," *Blog by Alvin Reid*, 27 January 2008; <http://alvinreid.com/archives/306>; (Accessed 8 September 2008).

as a brilliant man of godly humility went home to be with his heavenly Father. Southern Baptists lost a great theological educator, and I lost a mentor and a friend.<sup>36</sup>

In 2005, Bush learned that he had cancer and began to receive treatment and persevere yet again through one final battle. Of this experience, he took the opportunity to proclaim his belief in the sovereignty of God,

Open theism is not true. . . . God knew about this. My job is to learn what God wants to teach me from this as fast as possible. God already knew about this cancer. God has obviously chosen me to endure this. It's a surprise to me. It's not a surprise to God.<sup>37</sup>

Bush maintained his optimistic spirit, continued to labor in his studies, attended denominational and theological society meetings, and spent time with his family until he went home to be with the Lord Jesus on 22 January 2008.

At a memorial service held in the chapel at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on 27 January 2008, many spoke and offered reflections on the life and ministry of L. Russ Bush III. Tom J. Nettles was asked to read a letter he had sent to Bush only a few weeks before Bush's passing. Nettles' profound statements portray the eschatological hope that believers in Jesus Christ share and Russ Bush spent his life defending. Therefore, the following excerpt from Nettles' letter serves as a fitting end to this memorial treatment of Southwestern's son, Southeastern's dean, and his family's "Friend, Husband, Father, Teacher."

Russ, you have built your life around defending the truthfulness of the book about Jesus, showing people the land where Jesus walked, and multiplying the evidences of Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the grave. Your heavenly Father is now saying, "Come up here and see the place where Jesus is seated, yet uttering infallible words of intercession for the people he has loved and redeemed."

You have seen the empty tomb, you will see the living Lord;  
You have seen Jerusalem, the home of David's earthly throne,

<sup>36</sup>Thomas White, "My Remembrance of L. Russ Bush: A Personal Perspective," *SBC Today*, 23 January 2008; <http://sbctoday.com/2008/01/23/my-remembrance-of-l-russ-bush-a-personal-perspective/> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

<sup>37</sup>Lauren Crane, "L. Russ Bush dies following cancer battle," *Baptist Press*, 23 January 2008; <http://www.bpnews.org/bpnews.asp?id=27242> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

you will see the eternal throne of David's greater Son; You have cherished the written word, you will soon hear the voice like the sound of many waters saying, "Enter thou into the joy of your Lord."

. . . You have fought the fight, you have kept the faith, and by God's providence you have finished the course. Now there is the crown of righteousness.<sup>38</sup>

With Appreciation For  
L. Russ Bush III (1944–2008)  
One who faithfully made a defense for the hope that was within him,  
always with gentleness and respect (I Peter 3:15–16).  
Defending the Faith, Engaging the Culture

<sup>38</sup>Tom J. Nettles to L. Russ Bush III, 17 January 2008, Used with permission.

## *Understanding Biblical Inerrancy*

*L. Russ Bush*

A major element of historic Christian belief about Scripture has been the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.<sup>1</sup> Many theologians and Bible teachers today, however, seem to be uncomfortable with the concept of biblical inerrancy. The term is subject to misunderstanding, of course, but even the term “Christian” is subject to misunderstanding;<sup>2</sup> nevertheless, we continue to use the term “Christian” without hesitation. We simply define the term properly and then use it correctly. Many important theological terms (such as election, depravity, or mission) continue to be used despite semantic controversy that may and does arise. Semantic problems relating to “inerrancy” may also be overcome if misunderstanding concerning definitions or word usage is really all the problem is.

I have spent one-third of my life teaching in the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the largest evangelical Christian theological school in the world. (The other two-thirds, I was myself a student, with about one-third of all my student days being given to theological studies.) I have talked about the Bible with literally thousands of students, colleagues, and Christian friends, and I have read many expositions of the doctrines of our Christian faith by careful theological writers. I have no illusions about being able to do it better than they have already done it. Nevertheless, my dialogs with students and others have encouraged me to try to write out some of my own views on this rather controversial subject.

Therefore, in these pages I want to set forth my understanding of

<sup>1</sup>Biblical inerrancy, for some people in Baptist life, is a new and relatively unknown term. It is quite well known in evangelical circles generally, however, and its meaning is fairly straightforward. “Inerrancy” refers to the non-errancy, the lack of errors, the complete and full truthfulness of the Bible. Recently some Baptist leaders have spoken of Scripture as being “not errant in any area of reality.” That is a good definition of “inerrancy.” Better and more complete definitions and explanations are given in the chapters that follow. It is quite clear, however, that authentic Christianity has never affirmed the errancy of Scripture.

<sup>2</sup>In some parts of the Middle East, for example, “Christian” may designate a socio-political religious group distinct from the Muslims or the Jews. In theological academic life “Christian” may be a broad designation of Catholics and Protestants. In the secular West it may mean “patriotic and morally honest.” To evangelicals, the term “Christian” refers only to a “born-again believer.” (The term “born-again” is another term that has been subject to a great deal of misunderstanding over the years.)

the “Scripture principle” that undergirds orthodox Christian beliefs. I offer these thoughts in the hope that those who seek the truth may find common ground with me in a common commitment to Christ as He is made known to us through God’s truthful Word, the Holy Scripture.

I hope that you will keep your Bible open as you read these pages, so that you can look up the many references that are cited in the text. Reading those verses will clarify much of what is written here, and it will help you to evaluate what I have written. After all, it is what Scripture says, not my views and opinions, that finally matters. In every case, I am making a point by citing a biblical reference assuming that my readers will in fact look up the verse and think about the context and the full meaning of the cited references.

As Baptists have so often confessed: The Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore the Bible is, and will remain until the end of the world, the true center of Christian union.

### Scripture and Truth

Having set out to write an essay on the subject of *biblical inerrancy*, I will try to concentrate on that one subject. Thus I will not in this essay give much attention to other important aspects of the doctrine of religious authority, the doctrine of God, or even the doctrine of Scripture itself. Inerrancy is, however, only one part of my belief about Scripture.

Among other things, to express my views more fully, I would at least want to affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, its clarity, its authority, its Christological center, its soteriological purpose (to teach us about salvation), its theological comprehensiveness, its historical character, its canonical form, its marvelous preservation, its moral and cognitive value, its relevance to the contemporary world, and its personal relevance for my life and yours. Had I the space to do so, I would want to discuss the evidence Scripture offers for the truth of Christianity, and the philosophical strength of its theistic world-view over against contemporary naturalism and idealism.

To discuss inerrancy, however, is not really to ignore these (and many other) issues, for in a very important sense, the significance of these other matters hangs (at least partially) on the conclusion one reaches about inerrancy. The truthfulness of Scripture is, after all, an axiomatic concept of historic Christianity.

The truth of Christian doctrine does not depend upon an inerrant Scripture, of course. Christ is Lord even if Scripture is at some point proven wrong. Many devout Christians doubt the doctrine of inerrancy. But the ability to show that Christianity is true (as opposed to the Spirit-

granted ability to know that it is true) would be severely compromised by the presence of biblical error.

### What Is An Error?

“Inerrant” means “not errant” or “without error.” To affirm the inerrancy of something is to affirm in very strong terms its correctness or its truthfulness. A telephone number may be inerrantly recorded in the “phone book.” Fortunately, most of them are. The term itself simply denies the presence of error.<sup>3</sup> In a math text, an error is the wrong answer or a calculation incorrectly made or misexplained. A dictionary error would occur if a word were misspelled or incorrectly defined.

In a history text (where we assume the intent is to tell the truth about history), error would be the misrepresentation of a fact or perhaps a misleading interpretation. Under some circumstances, the omission of a significant fact could lead to a misrepresentation of the truth and would thus be called a historical error. No historical account is absolutely comprehensive, however, and normally omissions of details are not considered errors. Historical errors occur when the historical truth is not told. Historical accounts written from different viewpoints or for different purposes may contain varying amounts of detail and may reflect different schematic arrangements of the facts without sacrificing truth itself since truth is often complex and richly personal.

Error, then, is a concept that varies with the context in which it is used. An error in social grace is something quite different from a grammatical error, which again is altogether different from a factual error. Inerrancy, then, could have various meanings depending on the situation.

Inerrancy would not properly describe anything that misrepresents the truth. Biblical Christianity clearly presents itself as the truth of God. Therefore inerrancy does have a special theological usage.<sup>4</sup> It is that special theological usage to which we must now turn our attention.

<sup>3</sup>When evangelical theologians use the term “inerrancy” to describe Scripture they mean to affirm the full truthfulness of the Bible. Their reason for making such a claim is their belief that the Bible is God’s Word. What Scripture says (teaches, affirms), God says.

<sup>4</sup>As a preliminary note, it should be pointed out that social customs and grammatical forms are thought by most evangelicals to be culturally conditioned and thus the truth of the Bible is not located in these things. Facts, however, are philosophically interpreted and the biblical “world-view” is considered to be an essential element of the divine revelation. Thus inerrancy as a theological concept does apply to factual affirmations of all kinds in Scripture. Paul Feinberg says, “Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.” See “The Meaning of Inerrancy” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 294.



### What Is Biblical Inerrancy?

The Bible is the inerrant Word of God. When we properly understand what the Bible teaches, we are understanding what a truthful God has said and is saying to us. To understand the proper denotation of inerrancy when it is applied to the Bible, one must understand the nature of the Bible and its literary genre.

**The Bible and Science.** The Bible is not a textbook on math or science. When it speaks of the physical world it most often uses popular, visually descriptive terms, or it may use commonly understood figures of speech. Precise numbers are not always given (Luke 2:13; or 1 Cor 10:8 cf. Num 25:9). Many things are counted or measured in the Bible, but sometimes the mathematical descriptions are estimates, general references, or symbolic numbers. Some of the numbers seem to be quite precise when things are counted, and yet at other times they are not so precise.<sup>5</sup>

It is not an error in the Bible to find popular descriptions of nature or to find imprecise numerical references unless the truth being expressed in the passage somehow hangs on a specific detail. In such a case as that, the doctrine of inerrancy would expect that the biblical text would be sufficiently precise to tell or convey the truth (and it is and it does). The reason for discussing the “scientific” truthfulness of the Bible, however, is not really to dwell on whether or not certain numbers in the Bible are estimates or precise numbers. Nor is the purpose primarily one of harmonizing discrepant numbers.<sup>6</sup>

The concern about the Bible’s truthfulness in the area of “science” has to do with the desire to affirm the reality of creation, the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis, and the historical reality of the miraculous (especially the virgin birth and the historical, bodily resurrection of Christ). Those who believe the doctrine of biblical inerrancy believe that God protected His written Word from “scientific” error by leading His prophets to use the ordinary figures of speech and the common language

<sup>5</sup>If we are told in Matthew 14:17, Mark 6:38, Luke 9:13, and John 6:9 that the lad had only five loaves and two fish when in fact there were many loaves and many fish, we would have a misrepresentation of the truth. On the other hand, the truthfulness of the reference to the five thousand who were fed is in no way compromised if we learn that the text gives a round number or a fair estimate rather than a precise head-count. It would be a rare case where the careful interpreter could not recognize by context or genre the degree of precision intended by the author in a specific passage. Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 185–89. See also Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, 295–302.

<sup>6</sup>Numerals pose well known problems for scribal copyists, and context seldom helps to catch a transcriptional error. These problems exist, but they are relatively minor, and most of them have been explained reasonably, without denying the truthfulness of the authentic text of Scripture.

of simple visual description (the language of appearance) when they spoke about nature. When interpreted in light of the kind of language being used we find the Bible to be wholly true.

In most cases the debate about the “scientific” truthfulness of Scripture is really a debate about the essential unity of general and special revelation. So-called “spiritual” truths cannot be separated from the “scientific” things taught in the Bible. Jesus asked how we would believe the heavenly things he taught if we did not believe him when he spoke about earthly things (cf. John 3:12). Since all Scripture is inspired by God, this principle of the unity of truth applies to everything actually taught in the Bible.

**The Bible and History.** Scripture is not a textbook on ancient history any more than it is a textbook on science. Yet the content of the Bible is expressed, for the most part, historically. This is a special feature of biblical faith. Christianity (and Old Testament Judaism) is not Platonic, abstract, or strictly spiritualistic (as opposed to being materialistic). Biblical faith is incarnational throughout.

God has worked through physical reality and historical events from the beginning. God created a real, material universe and pronounced it good (Gen 1). He made us flesh and bone (Gen 2), and pronounced that act to be “very good.” God led Abraham to a geographical place and promised it to him and to his physical descendants (Gen 12:1–7). The ten commandments were written physically on ordinary, earthly stone (Exod 31:18). The divinely promised land was “given” only as it was “taken” in divinely aided but nonetheless real battle (Josh 24). The messianic line (cf. Matt 1) includes Perez (the son of Tamar and Judah), Ruth (a descendent of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter), Boaz (whose mother was Rahab), and Solomon (whose mother had been Uriah’s wife). Christ was miraculously conceived and thus was virgin born, but He was no less physical and made of flesh than any other Adamic descendent (Luke 1–3).

Biblical theology is never isolated from fact and history. God has spoken to and through His servants the prophets (2 Kings 17:13). God Incarnate dwelled for awhile with mankind. He walked among His apostles, who knew Him personally and beheld His glory (John 1:14). Our Lord’s empty tomb was hewn in literal, physical stone (Luke 23:53). His resurrected body still bore tangible marks of His suffering on the cross (John 20:27). Misrepresentation of this historical, factual reality would be a misrepresentation of truth.

Narrative style, however, does not necessarily imply an exhaustive account, and narrative descriptions are not always used. Details sometimes vary (cf. Matt 9:18, Luke 8:41–42). The song of Moses (Exod 15) gives a poetic description of the same events described in narrative style in the

preceding chapters. Thus, use of the term “inerrancy” to describe Scripture does not imply that narrative or didactic style, or exhaustive historical detail will characterize every passage. It does imply that I do not expect to be wrong, deceived, or misled if I properly understand and accept the biblical affirmations as being what they are: truthful statements about reality. My interpretive skills enable me to know what it is that is being taught or what it is that is being affirmed as true. That is the truth “inerrancy” is concerned to defend.

**The Bible and Truth.** Scripture does conform to fact, but its truthfulness is not limited to the factualness of the record. Biblical truthfulness is found in the relationship between the ideas expressed in the text and the ideas in the mind of God.<sup>7</sup> Scripture is factually true whenever and to whatever extent it makes factual affirmations, but at best this is only a means to an end. It is conformity to the mind of God that we seek. Scripture as a whole, in my view, truthfully reveals the mind of God.

Scripture is that divinely revealed message “preached” (proclaimed) by God’s prophets and apostles as they spoke and wrote under the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God (2 Pet 1:20–21). Scripture is therefore useful as a normative source of doctrine (truthful teaching). It is useful for rebuking us because of our erroneous thoughts and ways, for correcting our errors by enabling us to compare our sinful ideas or desires or actions with the revealed mind of God, and for training us in righteousness: that kind of life (thoughts and activities) that does conform to the truth and to the revealed will of God (2 Tim 3:16).

I am trying to say two things at once. We must define biblical inerrancy in light of legitimate biblical concepts of truth and error. So I am urging that we not, on the one hand, apply inappropriate concepts of error in light of what the Bible is (an ancient book, written in common language, in foreign cultures, etc.), and yet, on the other hand, let us not read the Bible as if it were not what it is (a factually truthful presentation of historically manifested divine revelation). We can misunderstand the doctrine of inerrancy as easily by applying or expecting the Bible to conform to inappropriate, modern standards of exhaustive, comprehensive, and technically precise descriptions of everything as we can by trying to immunize Scripture from critical error by mythologizing its significant theological affirmations.

<sup>7</sup>Two very fine discussions of the biblical concept of truth are: E.J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 45–64; and Roger Nicole, “The Biblical Concept of Truth,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 287–98. Cf. Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, “The Truth of Scripture and the Problem of Historical Relativity,” in *ibid.*, 173–94.

Evangelical scholars today are using the term “inerrancy” to affirm that the Bible, properly understood (in light of its ancient cultural form and content), is absolutely truthful in all of its affirmations about God’s will and God’s way. Furthermore, the affirmation is that, due to inspiration, the Bible does not teach or affirm error about any area of reality. Rather, what Scripture says is what God says, and thus Scripture will speak only the truth about reality.

The biblical affirmation itself may be figuratively expressed, or it may be a straightforward affirmation of historical fact, theological doctrine, or ethical norm. In every case, however, to affirm inerrancy is to affirm the truthfulness and thus the inherent, veracious authority of the scriptural passage on its own terms. In the inerrancy debate, the issue is truth.

**The Bible and Modern Criticism.** Modern biblical criticism is built in a significant sense on the philosophical acceptance of biblical errancy. Attempts by evangelicals to harmonize seeming discrepancies in the biblical text are dismissed by modern theologians as if such attempts were incredibly naïve and painfully irrelevant. Moreover, modern critics often see literary discrepancies or variations as primary evidence of earlier (conflicting) sources that supposedly lie behind the canonical form of the text. To harmonize these various accounts is to work exactly at cross purposes with the goals of many modern critics.

Evangelicals do not deny that biblical writers often had normal sources of information, but we do believe that canonical Scripture was written (not just edited) by individuals chosen and directed by God.<sup>8</sup> Evangelicals believe that divine revelation had cognitive content, that it therefore could be and has been propositionally communicated by the prophet to the people, that it was uniquely written under the process of Spirit-guidance

<sup>8</sup>Inerrancy never implies that all of the content of Scripture was verbally whispered into the ear of a prophet by God so that Scripture writing was never anything other than the transcription of a divine conversation. Such is what many who reject inerrancy would want to accuse us of believing. They call this the “mechanical dictation theory.” But this straw-man rhetoric is either simple minded, deliberately deceptive, or lacking in scholarly integrity. I do not know of any recent evangelical literature that would give sufficient grounds for such misrepresentation. Evangelicals oppose those who might hold such a docetic view of Scripture just as they do those who affirm other heresies. Those evangelicals who speak of verbal inspiration (and even those rare few who at times use the word “dictation”) do not speak of plenary verbal revelation or of Scripture being handed down from heaven pre-written on golden tablets! “Mechanical dictation” is an impersonal slur and an unfounded accusation against evangelical scholarship. It is a tactic of intimidation. It is not a fair description of the evangelical view. It tries to link orthodox Christianity with cultic doctrines and thus unfairly proposes a “guilt by association” accusation. In my view, people who continue to link orthodox Christian claims for biblical infallibility to “mechanical dictation” theories of inspiration show either their own superficiality, ignorance, or (worse) unwillingness to speak the truth.

(Divine inspiration), and that we are to read it and understand it and thus come to love God more fervently as we are illumined by that same Holy Spirit; and further, that we are to apply the teachings of the Scripture to our inter-personal relationships, our business lives, our political interests, the whole of life as we are led by that same Divine Spirit.

### Summary

In my mind belief in biblical inerrancy is simply belief in orthodox Christianity. Scripture is the true word of God, preserving in written form that which God has revealed to His people through His prophets and apostles.

### Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility

Biblical prophets often said, “The Word of the Lord came unto me. . . .” Unfortunately they do not always give much of a description of the process by which that happened. Scripture says that God appeared to Moses in a rather explicit way (cf. Exod 33:11). Isaiah had a direct vision of the personal presence of God (Isa 6), as did Daniel (Dan 7:9-14) and a few others (Gen 28:12-13; Ezek 1:26-28; Rev 4-5). But there is no indication that all biblical writers had experiences in which God manifested His personal presence to them. Often we have no description of the manner in which God revealed Himself to the prophets (Joel 1:1).

### Divine Revelation

Communication (in whatever manner by whatever means) between God and His prophets is known as divine revelation.<sup>9</sup> Such communication may be a factual message, an insight, a historical event, an interpretation of that event, a moral standard, a prophecy of future events or of future divine actions, or any number of other matters that the sovereign God may choose to reveal to His prophet (Amos 3:7).

At times this communication was direct and verbal. For example, God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush (Exod 3-4). One night He called young Samuel so distinctly that Samuel thought it was the voice of Eli (1 Sam 3). Apparently God spoke directly to Noah (giving him specific dimensions and instructions for the ark, Gen 6). He spoke to Isaiah about the rejection his preaching would receive (Isa 6:9ff.)

At other times God communicated indirectly through angelic messengers. Abraham spoke with a “man” whom he called “Lord.” Many inter-

<sup>9</sup>The doctrine of divine revelation is very carefully treated by many evangelical theologians. I would urge an interested, beginning student to study Leon Morris, *I Believe In Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

pret this to have been a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, while others think it was an angelic messenger speaking on behalf of God. In either case, the message was delivered verbally because Sarah overheard the conversation and laughed (Gen 18). Scripture is not always ambiguous about the identity of the messenger, however. The angel Gabriel delivered God's message to Daniel (Dan 9:21) and he also delivered a message to Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist, Luke 1:19). The "Angel of the Lord" came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah in order to speak to Gideon (Judg 6:11).

Thus we see that the means of divine revelation is, at times, clearly made known by the writer of the biblical material. Nevertheless we often have no such description and thus no direct knowledge of the process (or processes) involved in divine revelation.<sup>10</sup>

### **Biblical Inspiration**

If revelation is the communication from God to the prophet, inspiration is the work of God's Spirit that guarantees the accurate recording of the content of the divine revelation and the truthful description of the circumstances in which it came. Thus inspiration completes the purpose of divine revelation by getting God's message accurately delivered from the prophet to the people.

Inspiration applies also to the written expressions of worship in the Psalms. Praise in response to the revealed goodness of God's creation or to His revealed providence, songs of repentance or of thanksgiving, or even the collection of proverbial wisdom can be elicited under the inspiration of God's Spirit just as well as the ethical and political preaching of God's prophets can. Inspiration also refers to the teaching ministry of the Spirit (John 16:13–15). Inspiration is a personal relationship between the Holy Spirit and the biblical writer. It functions in a multitude of intimately spiritual ways. It is never impersonal or mechanical even in cases when the focus is primarily fact gathering.

<sup>10</sup>Based on the references we do have (a few of which are mentioned in the preceding paragraphs), we can surely assume that God could and did use whatever means were necessary in order to guarantee that His message was adequately communicated to these prophetic spokesmen. This communication, as even our brief survey shows, was not necessarily done through ecstatic experiences or even through mystical or meditative procedures. In 1 Samuel 3, little Samuel assumed that Eli was calling him. He did not discover God through ecstasy. God simply initiated a relationship unexpectedly (though Samuel's circumstances had undoubtedly prepared him for such a relationship). Samuel experienced what at first he took to be an ordinary communication from an ordinary man. However, we have no other example exactly like that (though cf. Gen 32:24–30; John 9:35–38; Acts 9:3–5; and other places where apparently the truth was not fully realized at first). The means of divine revelation, then, seem to have varied from case to case.



Inspiration is as mysterious and as multi-faceted as is divine revelation itself. In every case, however, inspiration refers to the spiritually-guided process of writing out the message God wanted communicated to His people through the Bible. Inspiration produced Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

### **Human Authors**

Those who wrote the biblical text were not supernatural beings. They spoke normal language. They had normal knowledge. They worked, loved, lived, sinned, worshiped, failed, and made mistakes as do all humans. They lived in particular cultures, in certain geographical locations, had friends, went to visit their grandchildren and did all the other things that normal people do. They spoke (and wrote) with figures of speech and idioms just as their original hearers did. Their writing style was uniquely theirs.

All this and more, but because they were willing servants or because of certain qualifications they had, or perhaps for reasons known only to God, reasons of His sovereign will, God chose to give them a message and a commission to communicate that message to others. God's Holy Spirit then guided them and enabled them to accomplish God's purpose.

### **Biblical Infallibility**

There is no evidence that God accomplishes His revelational purpose through error or accident. Revelation comes through truth and providence. Truth is an essential element of God's nature, for He is the only ultimate by which truth could ever be measured.

His Scripture-writing prophets and apostles were not inherently infallible nor always truthful in their personal lives. They were sinful people in need of redemption, just like we are. But as they wrote holy Scripture, delivering the message God had placed in their hearts and minds to be delivered, God spiritually guarded them from both deliberate lies and un-

<sup>11</sup>We know even less of the actual process involved in inspiration than we do of the process of revelation. God once wrote the ten commandments Himself (Exod 31:18), but that was hardly typical of the Scripture writing process. Normally those who knew God's mind (because God had made His thoughts known to them) wrote down that which God wanted us all to know.

Because God revealed Himself in events and in historical circumstances as well as in direct verbal messages, the writing of biblical history was as important as the writing out of the covenant laws. The same principle applies to the New Testament. What Jesus did was as important as what Jesus said (though even with several accounts we do not have an exhaustive report, cf. John 21:25).

Like all history, biblical history is selective. It is a thematic history in which the relationship between God and man is the main theme. God's kingdom is of central interest. The promise and fulfillment of messianic prophecy is a connecting thread. Sin and salvation, rebellion and redemption, agony and atonement provide the dramatic contrasts that move us toward the heart of reality.

intentional errors. If this were not so, then we who look to God for His guiding word of truth would not be able to find it simply by turning to Scripture as such. We might still look to Scripture as a source of traditional teachings, but we would be left to our own rational abilities to discover the truth itself. However, only the intellectually gifted could ever hope to sift out all of the truth and thereby recognize all of the “human errors” in the Bible. It is naively optimistic to think that even they could do it.

The Bible was written in and comes to us from the ancient middle-eastern world. The masses of ordinary people today surely could never hope to have the academic expertise to recognize in the ancient thought forms all possible human errors that the writers could have made and thus by a process of elimination locate and come to know the sum total of revealed truth. Moreover, the truth we seek is about matters as important as the will of God for our lives or teachings that concern our eternal destiny. Thus if Scripture were not protected from fallibility and error, God would have failed in His basic purpose of revealing these truths to His people generally.

Truth cannot be finally located in the individual human mind. Truth is located in the character of God. Unfortunately even the superior human intelligence standing alone may fail. Only God and His Word may be properly thought of as infallible. Truth may be known by men, but truth is established by God alone. Though weak and liable to err as humans, God’s Spirit bore the biblical writers along as they conveyed the content and the context of God’s revelation. Scripture itself was providentially produced (2 Pet 1:20–21). What Scripture says is what God intended for it to say (cf. 1 Thess 2:13; Ps 119:89). The literary genre, the vocabulary, and the style were as human as the many human authors, but the teaching, the message, the information conveyed ultimately had God as its author and thus truthfulness as an essential quality (cf. 1 John 5:6).

In this way, God’s revelation was not lost or dissipated in the life of the prophet or the apostle (Isa 40:8). Rather it was inscripturated and thus marvelously preserved for us (1 Kings 8:56). It is only God and His Word that is by definition inerrant (Ezek 12:25). God speaks only the truth, for He is true (1 John 5:20).

### **Why Believe The Doctrine of Inerrancy?**

One common objection to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is that it would require omniscience to know that the doctrine is true. In other words, to know for sure that nothing in the Bible is false would require someone to know exhaustively everything about everything that the Bible mentions, and then to know the correct interpretation of everything, and



then to know exactly what it means to say that everything in the Bible is true. Surely we cannot claim to have that kind of knowledge. But if we lack that knowledge, then how could we know that everything in the Bible is true and nothing is false or erroneous?

This seemingly formidable objection, however, would, if it were valid, apply to virtually all our doctrines and to most of the other things we think we know in science, history, or even in ordinary daily life.<sup>12</sup> Do we know that God exists? Yes, but surely not because we possess exhaustive empirical evidence. (We have not seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled God.) We do know that God is real, but our knowledge is based on convincing evidence and reasons that effectively and adequately persuade rather than on rationally inescapable proof (Rom 1:20).<sup>13</sup> Do we believe in the doctrine of the Trinity? Yes, but not because we are omniscient. So it is with virtually all Christian doctrines and with human knowledge generally.<sup>14</sup>

There is something quite significant about this objection, however, because much of our evidence for our other doctrines is drawn from the teachings of Scripture itself. In other words, Scripture is the epistemological foundation for Christian doctrine (Acts 17:11; Rom 15:4). It is the teaching of Scripture that provides the basic data from which we build our doctrinal conceptions (Matt 22:31–32, 36–40).

If Scripture simply claimed its own inerrancy, and if this were the sole basis for belief in the doctrine, the argument for inerrancy would seem to be viciously circular. It would be like saying “I am telling the truth because I say that I am telling the truth, and I can prove that I am telling the truth because I can quote myself making the claim to tell the truth.” Somehow I do not think that would be accepted in a court of law (or even in a congressional hearing).

<sup>12</sup>We believe the law of gravity operates everywhere in the universe exactly as it does in our solar system. We assume that the mental processes of Roman Caesars and of Babylonian peasants were similar to those of modern people. We say we know about atoms and stars, and I agree that we do have real knowledge of these things. But in no case is our knowledge based upon exhaustive information.

<sup>13</sup>Among many fine presentations of theistic evidence by evangelical philosophers, I will mention only these three as representative: R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lidsay, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 24–136; Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 237–59; and William Lane Craig, *The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe*, (San Bernadino: Here's Life Publishers, 1979). See also idem, *Apologetics: An Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 57–95.

<sup>14</sup>We have (should have, can have) a basis for our beliefs (1 John 4:1; Ps 119:140), a strong, persuasive, fully adequate evidential and rational basis (1 Pet 3:15); nevertheless, we unashamedly affirm that we know by faith (Heb 11:1). Biblical faith, however, is not simply “strong wishing.” It is “trusting-obedience” to revealed truth. (Rom 1:17; Heb 11:24).

Modern critics argue that Scripture makes no such claim for inerrancy or infallibility at all. Evangelicals believe that the claim for total truthfulness is a valid inference from other clear biblical teachings. In any case, however, we would surely want more evidence than just a claim. But would not the “other evidence” have to be an independent knowledge of all the facts? Since omniscience is precisely what we do not have, inerrancy is said (by the critics) to collapse as a valid doctrine. We are then left only with “faith” in the modern existentialist sense (that is, commitment without assurance and without a certain basis for knowledge) or else we have no faith at all.

This objection seems persuasive to many modern thinkers, and therefore many have turned away from the church’s historic commitment to biblical infallibility. It is not necessary for us to be bullied by such arguments, however, because by similar reasoning we can show that it could well take something approaching omniscience to know with certainty that actual errors do exist in Scripture.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, I will not ignore the real force of the original objection, because it calls us to focus on the real reason that we speak of biblical inerrancy with such confidence. Evangelicals believe that we have a clear teaching on this subject from an absolutely

<sup>15</sup>There seems to be no valid alternative to this counter-objection. If the objection from omniscience works one way it works the other. As I briefly point out in the next chapter, biblical affirmations have often been denied by the critics with great rationalistic assurance based on the empirical evidence available at that time, but later discoveries proved the critics wrong and Scripture right. Great rationalistic assurance was not enough then, nor is it now.

Supposed evidence for biblical falsity is either obviously ambiguous or it is potentially (and by precedent as well as by logical analysis, we evangelicals are convinced it is) circumstantial. There are possible explanations for supposed contradictions and problem passages. Thus I contend that it would take something like omniscience to know in the absolute sense that modern critics are right and that the Bible is at some points wrong. (Even in the more moderate sense of “knowing” the two objections seem to cancel each other out.)

A critic may reply that one need not know everything in order to know something, and the disproof of inerrancy requires only a single bit of knowledge, namely that bit that shows Scripture to be in error at some point. This reply is quite valid and rather obvious. The claim of inerrancy carries a far greater burden of proof than the claim, for example, of general reliability or trustworthiness. On a case by case basis, however, one would have to have a similar level of knowledge concerning the facts of that specific case to claim falsity as one would to claim truthfulness. Thus the claim of one or many errors in Scripture would, on a case by case basis, be opposed by evidence for biblical truthfulness and the points at times become matters of interpretation.

However, we do not prove something to be true just by showing that there are possible explanations for the problems. Evidence for biblical truthfulness is empirical and practical as well as rational. But the evidence is never exhaustive, and the basis for our faith in the Bible is not simply a large catalog of evidences, even though we do have a very large collection.

trustworthy source who was (and is) in a position to know the whole truth, Jesus Christ our Lord (John 1:1–2, 14; 3:34; 7:16; 8:28, 38, 40; 12:49–50; 14:10; 17:6–8; 18:37).

Undoubtedly Jesus believed in and taught others to believe in the utter truthfulness and the authority of the Holy Scriptures (Luke 20:37; John 10:35). His Bible was the Old Testament (Luke 4:16–17), and the pattern of divine revelation and inspiration seen in the Old Testament is the same as the pattern seen in the writing of the New Testament (cf. Jer 36:2 and Rev 1:10–11, 19).

Our Lord's disciples, taking their cue no doubt from Him, clearly everywhere assume and teach their own apostolic authority (Acts 4:29; 5:29–32; Gal 1:11–12), and they accept without question the authority and full truthfulness of inspired Scripture (Acts 26:19–23; Rom 1:1–5). The apostles may offer us some unusual (or at least unexpected) interpretations (e.g. 1 Cor 10:1–5), but they never question Scripture's truthfulness (1 Cor 10:6–11; Rom 3:1–4).

The prophets and apostles never approached the canonical biblical texts that they had in the manner of the modern biblical critic (2 Chr 36:16; Hos 4:6; 2 Pet 1:16, 19, 21; 2:1–3, 10–12, 21; 3:2–6, 14–16). Christ and His apostles believed that God's Word was unequivocally true (John 17:17). This was their foundational premise (John 6:68–69).

Scripture is always truthful, because Scripture is the result of divine revelation (1 Cor 2:10, 13). When Christ commissioned His apostles to teach all things whatsoever He had commanded them (Matt 28:18–20), He, in effect, imposed a Scripture writing task on this apostolic band. His promise of the Spirit who would guide them into all truth (John 14:16–17; 16:12–15) simply confirmed their role as the new prophets of the new covenant.

### **Jesus and His Bible**

Jesus Himself obviously knew His Bible well. He had studied it since He was a child (Luke 2:46–47). Jesus placed a high priority on proper interpretation. For example, when Satan quotes Scripture but misinterprets and misapplies it, Jesus responds with a classic illustration of the evangelical principle (drawn directly from the doctrine of inerrancy) that Scripture must be harmonious with itself. The Bible is inerrant (fully truthful) and thus one verse cannot be properly understood to contradict the correct interpretation of another verse. Thus Jesus responds to Satan's misuse of Scripture by quoting another passage that showed why Satan's interpretation and application could not be correct (cf. Luke 4:9–12). Scripture's authentic meaning is that which always stands (1 Pet 1:24–25).

Jesus interpreted Himself and His mission as being a fulfillment of biblical teachings and promises (Luke 4:16–21). He believed that even the “hard parts” of the Bible were true. For example, the idea of particularity in God’s grace is often opposed even by some otherwise conservative Bible students. We simply do not want God to help some and not others. We want no distinctions made in God’s grace. We do not want there to be any who are ultimately lost. Yet Jesus did not hesitate to refer to Old Testament passages that clearly speak of the particularity of God’s grace (Luke 4:24–27).

His audience responded to this teaching, as many do today, with anger (Luke 4:28). Nevertheless, Jesus did not compromise or “explain away” the biblical affirmations. It is Jesus, more than any other, who speaks of final judgment, final divisions, and final punishment (Matt 7:13–27; 25:31–46; John 5:28–29).

Resistance to this kind of biblical teaching may be a major reason why many have self-consciously rejected full biblical authority and thus inerrancy. They seem to think it would be better if God just saved everyone no matter what. Men and women still “fall” for the oldest lie in the world: “Thou shalt not surely die.” By doing so they give up moral responsibility, they view themselves as highly evolved animals, and they exchange the truth of God for a lie, and thus they worship and serve created things rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25).

Jesus also used Scripture to condemn legalism (Luke 6:1–5). Conservatives who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture are constantly told by their critics that they are legalists. Perhaps some are. But rigid, literalistic legalism is not inherent in the doctrine of inerrancy. In fact if inerrancy is a “code word” for the view of Scripture that Jesus held (and that is its proper meaning), then an inerrantist could not be a legalist except in the sense that Jesus was. We must submit to the authentic meaning of the text, but we must also learn from Jesus how to understand what that meaning is (Matt 5:17ff; 22:23ff).

One thing is clear. Jesus always accepted the verbal authority of the Scripture when it came to matters of doctrine (Luke 20:37–38). For example, even in the midst of physical suffering and enormous mental stress, His mind was filled with Scripture. On His way to die He warned of God’s future judgment by referring to the teachings of the prophetic Scripture (Luke 23:26–31). Perhaps the greatest indication of our Lord’s love for Scripture and His thorough mental saturation with Scripture is the discovery that His dying words are words from Scripture (Matt 27:46; cf. Ps 22:1; see also Luke 23:46; cf. Ps 31:5). His resurrection task centered on the explanation of Scripture to His disciples (Luke 24:27), and He com-

missioned the preaching of the Gospel by re-affirming the truth of the message of Scripture (Luke 24:44–48).

The Word of God in person and in print were and are virtually inseparable. To love one is to love the other. To trust one is to trust the other.

### **The Lord's Apostles and Their Bibles**

Jesus believed the Scriptures to be true. He adopted none of the modern critical methods or principles that deny the inerrancy of the text.<sup>16</sup> His apostles clearly agreed with Him. His stance was their stance when it came to the doctrine of Scripture. Everywhere it is assumed implicitly or taught explicitly that Scripture is the Word of God, fully truthful and authoritative.

Twice Paul says "Scripture" when his reference clearly is to "God." In Galatians 3:8 Paul speaks of the Scripture foreseeing what God would do. Then Paul says that the Scripture preached or announced the gospel to Abraham in advance. To illustrate this prior announcement Paul quotes Genesis 12:3, the explicit promise of God Himself to Abraham. Thus Paul has virtually equated the written Scripture with the specific, unequivocal Word of God. Then again in Romans 9:17 it is, for Paul, the Scripture that says to Pharaoh what Exodus 9:16 attributes to God.

Paul does not hesitate to think of Scripture itself as the Word of God (cf. Romans 3:2). In light of this commonly held attitude, it is nothing less than remarkable to read Peter's affirmation of Paul's writings, putting them on a par with the "other" (Old Testament) Scriptures (2 Pet 3:15–16).

The New Testament always treats the Old Testament as if it were the true and decisive expression of God. The chief New Testament proof of Christianity's divine origin (and thus its truthfulness) is the fact that Christianity represents the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures (cf. Acts 2:16ff; 3:18ff; 7:52; 10:43; 13:27ff; 17:2–3; 18:28; 26:22–23; 28:23). Christ clearly proclaimed that He had not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17; 26:52–56; Luke 18:31). It is no wonder, then, that the disciples learned to cite prophetic texts as being utterances of God or of the Holy Spirit of God (Acts 1:16; 3:21; 4:24–26; 13:32–35; 13:47; 28:25ff).

<sup>16</sup>For a more scholarly analysis of our Lord's view of Scripture see John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972). For a readable yet comprehensive study of the whole question of biblical self attestation see Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, 19–59.

### **Permanent Truth and Changing Applications**

Note well: these messages from God cited by the apostles were spoken hundreds of years earlier, but because they are authentically from God they retain their authority. It is not only what God said, but it remains what God says.

God does not change, and truth remains relevant, because God is eternally the source and standard of truth. We must always keep the message in context (and within its stated and its appropriate range of application); but given that, the Word of God remains true and binding (whether the message is a simple statement of fact, a command, or a promise). Isaiah 40:8 (cited in 1 Pet 1:25) proclaims the eternal significance of the Word of God. Jesus tells us that not even a jot nor a tittle will pass away from the Law until the divine intention of and purpose for the Scriptural passage has been accomplished (Matt 5:18). Even then it forever stands accomplished. The plain fact is that God's character and God's ultimate moral and redemptive goals for human life do not change.

Of course the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament have now seen their most significant fulfillment. The promised Christ has come. The sacrificial, substitutionary atonement has been made, once for all. Thus Old Testament teachings concerning ritual sacrifices and the coming Messiah must now be interpreted Christologically, and this is exactly what the New Testament does. We no longer offer animal sacrifices even though Old Testament Scripture commands it, for that command in its contextual application has now been completed and fulfilled. It is still true in its historical setting. God then, now, and always requires a blood sacrifice for the remission of sins. God does not change, but we now interpret God's requirements Christologically (cf. Heb 8–10). Jesus paid it all.

Some culturally conditioned commands in the New Testament are not literally relevant today due to changes in the social and cultural conditions. We probably do well not to greet all other Christians with a kiss in our Western society, though the custom is not out of place in some cultures even today. But the principle of greeting with warmth and appropriate intimacy should still be practiced among Christians. The actual meaning of the teaching of the Bible (cf. 1 Pet 5:14) remains true even when the specific application changes.

### **The Blessing of God upon Biblical Faith**

Our foundational assumption, then, remains. The Scripture is assuredly truthful. We can trust it to reveal God Himself to us. We appropriately build our doctrine from it. We do not deny that some parts are hard to understand (cf. 2 Pet 3:16), and we do not claim to have solved every problem. Evangelicals do not claim omniscience nor infallibility for them-



selves or for their own interpretations. Only God has those characteristics, and thus we expect God's Word to manifest nothing else but truthfulness.

Church history records the common faith in the utter truthfulness of the Bible by almost every theologian of note until relatively modern times.<sup>17</sup> I have done extensive research in the writings of our own Baptist theologians, pastors, and missionaries.<sup>18</sup> Their defense of biblical truthfulness has been pervasive and persuasive. Scripture, they claim, has truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter, because its author ultimately is God.

Those pastors and church leaders who have been blessed with unusual evangelistic success have almost always been quick to affirm their complete trust in the total truthfulness of the Holy Scripture. Such belief does not guarantee evangelistic success (the belief is not a pragmatic tool with which to manipulate God's favor), but it is notable that God has so often chosen to bless those who do believe the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Is God not saying something to the Christian community by bestowing this most significant manifestation of His grace on those pastors and churches that unequivocally trust and obey His revealed Word, the Bible?

### **Common Misunderstandings About Inerrancy**

Some people think (mistakenly, I believe) that "inerrancy" is strictly a code-word for a political "power grab" in denominational institutions. Others think that belief in biblical inerrancy will destroy the scholarly study of the Bible. Still others warn that the doctrine of inerrancy will somehow prevent scholars from properly interpreting the Bible.

### **Inerrancy and Denominational Controversy**

Some Baptist leaders have rather consistently avoided the central theological elements in the recent inerrancy debates in order to focus on institutional concerns such as who will be elected as trustees and what policies will be followed in the days ahead. Efforts to influence or change institutions, agencies, and boards are not unique to Baptist life, of course,

<sup>17</sup>For extensive primary source documentation (in contrast to the less reliable work offered by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim) see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

<sup>18</sup>See L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980). All of the references found in the main body of this book are from primary source materials. Our goal was to provide an objective scholarly reference work drawn from Baptist writers from the seventeenth century until the modern day. In my mind, the historic position of mainstream Baptists is not in doubt. Affirmations of the total truthfulness of the authentic canonical text of the sixty-six books of the Old and the New Testaments are as characteristic of Baptist theology as are affirmations of believer's baptism.

nor to this period of our history, and we should be concerned about the integrity of denominational institutions. I contend, however, that biblical inerrancy is an important theological issue in its own right, and that it can and should be discussed separately and apart from matters relating to denominational politics.

When it comes to their denominational activities, I do not wish to judge or defend the motives or the activities of other people who may also affirm biblical inerrancy. There may be some activists with purely political motives and methods. However, Jesus clearly warns us against judging one another unfairly (Matt 7:1) and I surely hope that self-serving motives would be rare among Christians on either side of this issue. The utter hypocrisy of using a theological issue of such central importance to the spiritual health and well-being of the church as a “cover” for a purely personal desire for power or privilege is so blatant that to act with such motives would require a severely dulled conscience. I pray that that might never be the case, and if it is or has been that those thus described would repent and make appropriate efforts to restore proper Christian attitudes and relationships wherever possible.

Neither do I wish to defend those who ignorantly (or through superficiality) misread Scripture, who fail to study, who assume inappropriate dictatorial authority in the congregation of the Lord, who lack hermeneutical skills, who are anti-institutional, non-cooperative, unfair in their attitudes, misinformed in their accusations, or excessively narrowminded. I love scholarly activities. I expect my students to read widely, to think clearly, to analyze carefully, and to seek truth wherever it is to be found. (I believe all truth is God’s truth, and I have no fear that the real truth will ever contradict Scripture or harm the faith of a well-grounded believer.)

I cannot and will not defend biblical inerrancy as an issue of denominational politics. It is strictly a theological issue having to do, with the truthfulness of Holy Scripture. It is, however, understandable that many who believe in the full truthfulness of Scripture became seriously concerned when they discovered that their church offerings partly paid the salaries of some individuals who are or were in positions of influence and sometimes used that influence to oppose (even at times to ridicule) the beliefs of those who affirm biblical inerrancy. Negative attacks against well-known and much loved pastors among us, who are known for their strong affirmation of biblical inerrancy and whose lives and ministries have been unusually blessed with spiritual fruit, are a case in point.

Even more serious, however, is the matter of non-evangelical theology and negative biblical criticism that is found in some classrooms. These questions are being asked even by some who think they only apply to a few cases: Should the sacrificial gifts of dedicated Christians be used to



support the propagation of views that directly oppose the views held by those who made the sacrificial gifts believing they were giving to God? In light of 2 John 10–11 and other related passages, should evangelical Christians support those who do not teach evangelical theology or who promote views inconsistent with evangelical theology?<sup>19</sup> Could evangelistic and mission-minded people honestly provide financial support for the denial of biblical infallibility?

For many, the vast good of our denominational missions programs outweigh all theological concerns no matter how serious they might seem to be. Quite a few of the brethren seem to think that theological issues are esoteric and irrelevant to daily Christian life. For others, however, these theological concerns are so serious that they have felt compelled to work within the system to effect change. The resistance to change has been very strong (though this resistance did not always arise from a desire to defend or perpetuate aberrant theological positions), and indiscretion and impatience (perhaps even intolerance) has at times bubbled up to the surface on all sides. There has been a great deal of misunderstanding and many unfounded accusations (again from all sides). This must cause our Lord grief. We must seek the mind and the Spirit of Christ our Lord in any and every area of life. His way should be our way, else the name “Christian” loses its meaning.

May I summarize: some denominational political activity has undoubtedly arisen out of serious theological concerns, but I do not identify biblical inerrancy itself as a political issue. The inerrancy of the Scripture was believed by many of us long before any particular contemporary political activities began in our denomination. Many (perhaps most) Baptist theologians have taught this view throughout our history from the beginning until now.

Inerrancy, however, is an evangelical doctrine that is truly interdenominational. Inerrancy denotes a doctrine focusing exclusively on the truthfulness and the authentic canonical text of the Bible.

### **Inerrancy and Biblical Scholarship**

Some critics claim that belief in inerrancy will destroy scholarly activity. Rather than destroy, however, it has been the touchstone of some of the best in recent scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Whenever someone turns away from

<sup>19</sup>It is to be remembered that evangelical theology is not monolithic in its biblical interpretation. Many different views and interpretations can be encouraged as long as biblical truthfulness is not compromised. Denominational distinctives such as the various views of the ordinances or of church government may also be involved here, but evangelical theology as such focuses more on orthodox doctrines and attitudes toward Scripture that are interdenominational in the evangelical tradition of Christian Protestant orthodoxy.

<sup>20</sup>Evangelical book publishing has literally boomed in recent years. Many technical

the givenness of the objective truthfulness of the biblical text and substitutes the supposed truthfulness of even the most reasonable speculation, the epistemological structure of orthodox Christianity is at that point lost. Time and time again the reasoned speculations of dedicated theologians have eventually fallen to the ground while our Lord's confidence in the "unbreakableness" of Scripture has been reaffirmed (John 10:35).

Speculation once said that Babylonian king lists clearly demonstrated the non-existence of Belshazzar, just as Assyrian materials supposedly found Scripture to be in error about the existence of Sargon. Speculation doubted the existence of Hittites in the Fertile Crescent with what seemed to be good and reasonable evidence. Even many conservative scholars were at one time convinced that men in Moses' day could not write. The available evidence seemed to suggest that alphabetic language had not yet been invented. Some of the "oldtime" conservatives argued that it must have been a miracle that enabled Moses to write (since Scripture [cf. Exod 24:4] clearly seems to teach that he did). As another example, non-evangelical speculation once denied that any harmony could be achieved that would satisfy the chronological data given for the kings of Israel and Judah. None of those speculations stand today. It is the authentic canonical

research tools for biblical study and serious academic theological works have recently been published by Zondervan Publishing House, Baker Book House, Moody Press, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, InterVarsity Press, and many other evangelical publishers. Distribution of these scholarly tools is exceptionally high even at the most theologically conservative seminaries and Bible schools as well as among pastors and Bible teachers and students. Since inerrancy applies only to the actual meaning of the authentic text, many evangelicals who accept inerrancy have dedicated much of their scholarly activities to textual criticism, using their best available insights and procedures, trying to determine the original form of the authentic canonical text. Others have with equal dedication pursued studies in biblical backgrounds, ancient customs, technical linguistics, and other philosophical and theological disciplines. They have given themselves to studies in history and chronology, literary (genre) criticism, and the whole range of ancient near eastern studies. Evangelical scholars (as well as many fine nonevangelical scholars) have devoted themselves to biblical (Old and New Testament) archaeology, to the study of the Graeco-Roman period in particular, to studies in Jewish rabbinical literature, to the comparative study of ancient religions, and to a host of related scholarly activities. Those who believe in the integrity and the truthfulness of the authentic biblical text have also produced analytical as well as devotional commentaries on the biblical books. The *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* is a good place to sample some of the current work done by evangelical scholars. But scholarly Evangelicals are not all members of that particular professional Society and the range of scholarly contributions to biblical studies from Evangelicals world-wide is much broader, of course, than that one small Journal. A more representative source of Evangelical scholarship would be the academic book catalogs from Zondervan, Baker, Moody, and the many other fine conservative religious publishers. Evangelicals even publish with some of the scholarly publishers that are more eclectic in perspective, such as Harper and Row, or Oxford.

text of Scripture that stands vindicated.<sup>21</sup> We know through more recently discovered archaeological evidence the location and much of the content of both Sargon's and Belshazzar's headquarters. Today students can study firsthand the Hittite language and artifacts reflective of their culture. Reasonable chronologies have been achieved by evangelical scholars who patiently sought and finally discovered the biblical pattern for counting and thus for recording the years ancient kings reigned. Writing is now known to antedate Moses by at least several centuries.

I do not claim that all of these new discoveries were made by people committed to biblical inerrancy. That is not the case. But I do claim that the better the evidence gets, the stronger the claim for inerrancy becomes. Belief in inerrancy has not impeded the advance of true scholarship in any major area. In fact, if it has had an effect at all it has been to caution speculative scholarship against a too hasty dismissal of biblical testimony. Inerrantists have (or should have) a strong commitment to honest scholarship that helps us to understand better God's Word.

### **Inerrancy and Proper Interpretation**

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy does not prevent proper biblical interpretation, it fosters it. As evangelical Christian interpreters, we seek the actual meaning of the biblical text in its authentic context, and we accept that meaning as true. To misinterpret the text is to misunderstand that which God wants us to understand.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Even the cherished Pentateuchal documentary theories of Wellhausen (as "perfected" by Eissfeldt) have been seriously challenged in recent years by solid historical and linguistic evidence. Speculations about the late dating of New Testament books has recently encountered substantial rebuttal arguments even from non-evangelical scholars like the late John A.T. Robinson, formerly of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Among other sources, I would encourage the serious student to familiarize himself with at least these works: John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976); William Sanford LaSor, David Allen Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966); J.A. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970); Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986); E.M. Blaiklock and R.K. Harrison, eds. *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1983); and Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1: "Introductory Articles" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). Solid reference works such as the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* and the new *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, should also be consulted by those readers who wish to build their faith on reliable evangelical scholarly sources.

<sup>22</sup>If we were to read a figure of speech as if it were literalistically true, we would seriously misrepresent that actual teaching of the text. Unfortunately, even evangelicals may

Inerrancy then is not opposed to good interpretation; rather, it demands it. Good interpretation requires that one seek the harmonious, authentic meaning of the whole passage in its whole context given the legitimate parameters of word and phrase meaning provided by the ancient cultural setting. We must first of all interpret the Bible on its own terms, and then, when we fully understand what the text meant to its original author and his readers, we can make legitimate applications to our own cultural and personal situations.

### **The Real Meaning of Biblical Inerrancy**

Inerrancy is not a political issue. It is not an anti-scholarly attitude, and it does not support poor interpretive methods. What then does belief in biblical inerrancy actually mean?

Biblical inerrancy means that the authentic canonical text of Scripture is to be accepted as being truthful. We study the Bible in its canonical form to discover its specific and its contextual meaning. We then are to take that holistic meaning as being truth delivered with the authority of God.

All truth is God's truth. All authority ultimately proceeds from God. He stands as the veracious and the imperial authority of which there is no greater.

God, having graciously revealed Himself, having made known to us the truths He deemed good for us to know, having conveyed through His servants His will for human history and for our individual lives, expects us to hear His Word, to love Him and our neighbor, to be baptized (1) upon repentance from sin (as God defines it in Scripture), and (2) upon a public profession of faith in God's Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, as our resurrected Lord, and then to live a consistent, Spirit-filled life of service to God and to our fellow humans.

at times read out of a passage something other than what the author put in.

If we must err, however, it would seem to be better to stand before God's throne at the final judgment and plead guilty for taking something in Scripture too seriously than to be condemned for not taking it seriously enough, or worse for spiritualizing away the true meaning. How could it ever be acceptable to set our rational conclusions in opposition to the clear teaching of Christ our Lord? Remember, Christ Himself will be our judge (John 5:27; 1 Cor 4:4-5; Rom 14:10)!

Not everything in Scripture is perfectly clear, however, and we must always be open to better interpretations and new insights that others may have. We should not, on the other hand, take the position that Scripture itself is wrong at any point. Our understanding may (and does) need to be improved, but the Word of our Lord stands forever (1 Pet 1:24-25).

## What Difference Does it Make?

Though many continue to think of biblical inerrancy as a cause of division, rightly understood it is actually the essence of Christian unity. In addition to our common recognition of Jesus as Lord, the Bible we have in common is the Christian's legitimate "common ground" with other Christians. Differences in matters of interpretation obviously do exist, and they are sometimes a strain on Christian unity. Denominational distinctives for the most part are due to interpretive differences among Christians. Some of these differences are more serious and some are less serious. Some, I think, are destructive and some are not. But as Christians seek the unity spoken of in Ephesians 4, we must never forget the source by which we know what the one faith is and who the one Lord is.

Without getting into too much detail, I would like to briefly illustrate the way biblical inerrancy helps us to distinguish between legitimate differences of interpretation and destructive differences, and why this doctrine is able to help us make that kind of distinction. With apologies to my scholarly friends for the over-simplifications involved in the next few pages, I want to relate the true doctrine of biblical inerrancy to one of the controversial issues of biblical interpretation that is, in my view, a legitimate difference. Then I want to apply biblical inerrancy to a type of biblical interpretation that seems to me to have the potential for leading to destructive differences.

### Diversity Within Unity

The so-called "millennial question" has to do with the interpretation of biblical prophecy.<sup>23</sup> The implications, however, of the various interpretive systems that grow out of this matter extend to virtually every part of the Bible (not just to "prophetic" portions). Differences over the "millennial question" often result in different interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount, or of the parables of Jesus. Millennial views include different interpretations of the time, number, and nature of the judgment, the time, manner, and purpose of the second coming of Christ, and many other matters of interpretation in both the Old and the New Testaments that are significant in our Christian faith.

Some of us are amillennial and others of us are pre-millennial.<sup>24</sup> Some of us believe in a pre-tribulational rapture of the church. Others of

<sup>23</sup>The word "millennium" is from the Latin words for thousand (*mille*) years (*annum*) and is taken from the description found in Revelation 20. Some take the passage literally and others do not. Some identify the kingdom of God with that thousand year period and others do not. This seemingly simple distinction results in vastly different ways of interpreting the rest of the Bible, however.

<sup>24</sup>These terms carry vast meaning to informed Bible students. Amillennialists do

us believe in a post-tribulational rapture.<sup>25</sup> These and other related interpretive issues are real, and they are significant, but they are issues that are secondary to the inerrancy debate.<sup>26</sup>

No doubt many feel very strongly about these interpretive issues. Furthermore, there certainly have been, and perhaps there still is, in some circles, an unofficial bias against premillennial teaching. In the past, for example, Sunday School literature produced by our Sunday School Board has exclusively taught the amillennial system of interpretation. This unfortunate stance has proven to be very divisive, because it excluded a legitimate difference of interpretive opinion. Premillennial leaders in our convention often, unsuccessfully, sought fair and balanced treatment of millennial questions.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, millennial views have not been, and in my judgment should not become, a fellowship test within our denomination.<sup>28</sup>

not expect a future historical kingdom. They believe the kingdom of God is spiritual and exists now and is manifested by the existence of the church. Christ will return at the end of time. A pre-millennialist, on the other hand, expects Christ to return in order to establish (historically) the kingdom of God where His will is done on earth just as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). The return of Christ, then, is not at the end of time but rather is prior to (pre-) the time of the millennial kingdom. Though they are rare in Baptist life today, there are a growing number of Bible scholars who are renewing interest in an older view known as post-millennialism, the belief that a historical manifestation of God's kingdom will occur prior to the return of Christ: thus the Lord comes after (post-) the kingdom age.

<sup>25</sup>The tribulation is the time of God's great judgment on the earth at the end of this age (Matt 24:21; Rev 6:15–17).

<sup>26</sup>Inerrantists are found on all sides and inbetween on these eschatological matters. See Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977). Sometimes evangelicals debate Calvinism (in particular the doctrine of election). Once in awhile we differ on some other issue such as church government, ordination, baptism, even evangelism and social ministries. We even debate non-theological issues. Inerrancy relates to all of these matters, because no one seriously debates issues that are unrelated to truth values. If we did not believe one view was correct and the other view was wrong, we would not argue the point. Modern dialectical theologians tell us that truth is always somehow "both/and" rather than "either/or." Such an argument may stun us temporarily with its superficial appearance of profundity, but in our minds and in our hearts we know that truth is not infinitely eclectic. Truth is everlastingly narrow. Not every "either/or" is valid, however. I often urge students to look for "both/and" answers to certain kinds of questions. We must be as broadminded as the truth is broad, but when we adopt error as if it were simply a form of truth, we have been deceived. It is an error to assume that any authentic teaching of Scripture is false.

<sup>27</sup>I was pleased to read in August of 1984 that the trustees of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board had affirmed new editorial guidelines giving equitable treatment to various millennial interpretations in our church literature. This is a positive step toward convention harmony. It should have been done years earlier.

<sup>28</sup>Amillennialists and pre-millennialists agree on the fact of the personal return of Christ at the end of this "church age," and fellowship lines may be properly drawn there. We could not support someone who denied the reality of the Second Coming. Fellowship



### **Inerrancy as Common Ground**

The various millennial views are built on varying interpretations of Scripture, but they are important to us because we believe in common that the correct interpretation, whatever that is in this case, is the truth of God's Word. What happens, however, if we lose this common foundational assumption? What if we decide that Scripture may be wrong, that it may teach some things that are not true?

What if we use all our skill to determine the correct reading of our text, we use every bit of archaeological and historical information to discover the cultural setting and the original contextual meaning, we examine every bit of available linguistic evidence to discover grammatical nuances, and we study every serious commentary to gain insight from the research done by others, and thus arrive at the best interpretation we can, perhaps even the correct interpretation? Do we then have the real and final truth?

Could we discover, with certainty, the authentic meaning of the text and still be deceived, misled, or misinformed by the Bible? "No," say proponents of biblical inerrancy. "Yes," say those who deny inerrancy.

Here we reach the bottom line. Can we trust the Bible completely? Can we believe everything it teaches? If we agree that we can, then we will continue, perhaps, to debate our millennial views, our various degrees of acceptance of Calvinism, or any of our other theories with full seriousness yet with real potential for resolving our differences. But if we can agree on the authentic meaning of the text in its context and still disagree on what we are to believe, we have lost our common ground. We are left to our own subjective opinions, our own rational theories, our own futile speculations. This is how the secular world lives, but Christians claim to have a revelation from God. Because God is God, that revelation is infallible and authoritative. The inerrancy of Scripture is, therefore, our only truly foundational, rationally coherent, common ground.

does not require a total agreement, however.

It is simply and obviously false to claim that both views of interpreting the prophetic Scriptures are correct, or to claim that such interpretations really don't make any difference. They do make a big difference, but it is not the kind of difference that must organically divide us if fair and balanced treatment can characterize our academic discussions.

I don't expect a pastor to preach both sides in every sermon. I expect him to persuasively argue for the interpretation that he believes. But I do expect him to be aware of the issues involved, and I expect him to be truthful and fair.

Even more I would expect a trained academician, a college or seminary professor, to be fair. He may also have a view that he may persuasively argue, but because of his position as a teacher, supported financially by Christians of various persuasions, he is doubly under obligation to be fair, open-minded and balanced at this point.



### **The Loss of Christian Unity**

There is something that is often classified simply as a “matter of interpretation” which actually is the destruction of our common ground. That something is modern negative biblical criticism.<sup>29</sup> Its specialized theories of “community” authorship, conflicting sources, and doctrinal evolution removes from the ordinary reader the ability to interpret the Bible and gives it to an intellectual elite.

Modern biblical criticism often intimidates preachers and causes them to hesitate. It leaves them in perpetual uncertainty before their scholarly peers. It often dampens their spiritual fervor and sometimes discourages them from giving themselves fully to God.

It has never produced a spiritual revival. It does not contribute to evangelistic or missionary success. This spiritual loss would be expected of error, but it is not to be expected as a result from God’s truth.

Modern critics often work on naturalistic assumptions. Even when individuals deny personally having or using those assumptions, their critical conclusions may, nevertheless, remain compatible with them. They may downplay the miraculous for example, or they may discount predictive prophecy. They work with the Bible as if it were in its origin strictly a human book. (Modern critics and evangelicals have such different views about the sources and nature of the biblical text that it is almost as if they were looking at two different books.)

Is naturalistic humanism instead of Christianity the truth after all? No! God’s revealed Word is truth, even if every man turns out to be a liar (John 17:17; Rom 3:4).

### **Summary**

Legitimate differences of biblical interpretation do exist. These differences may be very serious, and they may produce much controversy. But among those who hold in common their belief in the infallibility of Scripture, the differences do not become destructive. Christian fellowship exists centered around a common commitment to seek the truth and a common agreement that doctrinal truth will be found in the Holy Scripture which we have in common.

Modern criticism, however, at times concludes that even the correct interpretation of the authentic text is erroneous. The Bible is not always

<sup>29</sup>Not all biblical criticism is negative, of course. A sane and balanced discussion of contemporary evangelical thought on some aspects of critical studies is found in Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco: Word Books, 1979), 4:385–404. See also J. Barton Payne, “Higher Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, 83–113; and D.A. Carson, “Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool,” in *Scripture and Truth*, 115–42.

right or truthful, according to this view. Hence the “search for truth” shifts away from the Scripture we have in common, and it shifts to the persuasive reasoning of the scholarly mind. This subjective basis for faith does not finally submit to the objective Word of God, and thus the speculations are seldom more than intellectual and/or cultural biases. There is no compelling authority of God in the speculative reasonings of men, even devout men.

Scripture, however, viewed as inerrant, gives all of us a common source of knowledge about the faith. What we affirm together is our legitimate common ground: Inerrancy does not settle all specific interpretive issues, but it does provide an objective basis for an authentic orthodox faith. This is the true meaning of the doctrine of inerrancy. May God give us grace to renew our commitment to the ground and sole basis of “contentful” knowledge about our Lord and thus about our faith.

### **A Philosophical Postscript**

I make no claim to being a good philosopher, much less a profound one, but philosophical thinking is at its best simply clear thinking, logical thinking, thinking that searches out the implications of alternative ideas and tries to develop ideas that are intellectually strong. My reasoning may be inadequate—truth is often inadequately defended—but I am persuaded that sound thinking supports biblical inerrancy. One simply cannot argue logically from errancy to divine authority.

In the paragraphs that follow, I want to set forth one line of reasoning that supports the validity of believing in divine revelation. It is because we believe that “God has spoken” that we believe in the authority of the Bible.

In academic theological circles a highly specialized vocabulary has been developed in order to sharpen up our ideas. I will not hesitate to use this vocabulary to set forth my case, but I am aware that for that reason some readers will find this chapter to be more difficult or complex than some of the other chapters.

My purpose, however, is not to cloud the issues but rather to clarify them. If I fail to do that, or if my reasoning is unpersuasive, that means only that I have failed, not that truth has failed. The truth of God will stand whether I defend it successfully or not.

### **Essential Elements of Knowledge**

In the first place I contend that skepticism is the logical result of all forms of non-theistic humanism and non-biblical theisms.<sup>30</sup> It seems

<sup>30</sup>The Greek word for God is *theos*, from which we get our English terms, “theism”

to me that we must have at least these two elements in any valid knowledge claim: (1) a valid, cognitive starting point; and (2) a basis for trusting reason itself.<sup>31</sup> Biblical theism offers both. Non-theistic humanism and nonbiblical theisms seem to offer neither. Thus they tend to collapse into skepticism when pressed by Socratic inquiries.<sup>32</sup>

**A Basis for Trusting Reason.** The biblical God is no abstract monad. Rather, He is a complex, personal being living eternally in a dynamic, spiritual relationship. From eternity He has been producing and experiencing communication and love within His triune nature.

God is the absolute creator of all things, thus His knowledge is complete. He created by His Word. He spoke reality into being. This means that rational propositional knowledge of the universe is not only possible but is a part of the essential nature of the universe. Science is, therefore, a valid enterprise. The universe is rationally ordered and lawfully operating. It is not an accidental, unintelligible product of impersonal chaos and explosive disorder.<sup>33</sup>

According to the Bible this personal God by His rational Word also created mankind in His own image. Biblical theism, then, teaches that we are like God in that we too are personal beings with rational minds. We can act rationally. We can communicate and love. We can think and know.

If, however, my “rational” mind is not a product of divine creation but rather is a direct product of random mutations and impersonal, natural changes and chance processes, then why should I trust it to be a valid tool for the discovery of truth?

Undoubtedly the mind has a pragmatic usefulness. Our ideas can often be implemented and expected results can be achieved. But if the origin of mind is chance, then it is only by chance that it happens to work correctly. Chance processes are far more likely to be fundamentally unreliable. Surely randomness is an excessively weak basis on which to ground rationality and truth.

Whatever pragmatic usefulness our rationality may have, it ultimately must base its nature in its origin. If the source of mind is impersonal

and “theistic,” referring to systems of thought based on the existence of an all powerful, supreme, personal Being. Biblical theism is built on the assumption that the God of the Bible is that supreme Being.

<sup>31</sup>Knowledge claims, of course, also need empirical support and/or rational coherence and perhaps a measure of relevance as well, but we could never validate a knowledge claim that lacked the two elements mentioned in the text.

<sup>32</sup>A Socratic inquiry is a series of probing questions that forces one back to his or her primary, foundational presuppositions and assumptions. This was the dialog style followed by Socrates of Athens, one of the most famous of the early Greek philosophers.

<sup>33</sup>Some scientists accept a chaotic origin for the universe, but their complex, orderly, rational explanations of this original state don't sound like products of chaos.

matter in chaos plus time (and that alone), then if we affirm that mind ever achieves “personality” or in any significant sense transcends chaos, we will have affirmed that a great evolutionary miracle was performed by the impersonal decay process described as “time.” That is incredible. The assumption that time produces order out of chaos may be held only by one whose mind goes contrary to all known logical principles and all known scientific regularities.<sup>34</sup> Chaos produces more chaos, not order, and the verifiable facts of scientific research are all consistent with this conclusion, though some speculative, naturalistic cosmological theories still grasp at straws and argue otherwise.

If, on the other hand, our mind is a creation gift of a rational God, then our rationality originates and is based in ultimate personal rationality itself. Our minds are in the likeness of God’s own mind. Our reason, our logic, and our mental comprehension may be limited and often imperfect, but human rationality is not grounded upon nothingness. Biblical theists have a basis for trusting in the validity of reason itself, and the recognition of the fact of divine revelation by one or more of those devout human minds provides a valid starting point for knowledge itself.

**A Valid Cognitive Starting Point.** Non-revelationists must accept experience alone as the starting point of knowledge. More sophisticated thinkers try to modify this by emphasizing collective experience, publicly reported experiences, and perhaps a series of confirming experiences. These are all part of the Christian theory of knowledge as well. As Kant<sup>35</sup> clearly realized, however, unless there is some sure connection between perception and reality, which he believed there was not, we are doomed to ultimate agnosticism, if not skepticism. What could possibly bridge the gap between things as they are and things as we perceive them to be? We certainly know how things appear to be, but do we perceive them correctly? How could we know one way or the other?

We could know reality if we were given a body of truth as a valid starting point, and if we knew that perception and reason were valid tools. If we had some truth to start with, we could test our collective experiences by that truth and thus rationally expand our ideas with some confidence. This starting point must be epistemologically relevant and it must come from an utterly truthful source. Divine revelation is that kind of a starting

<sup>34</sup>The very fact that it is possible for a mind to think independently of both logic and scientific law is evidence that its nature is not strictly natural. Thought processes are not bound by natural laws to think only in natural cause and effect patterns. The human mind gives evidence of its natural component (the physical brain) and its non-natural component (its ability, among other things, to conceptualize, worship, and reason).

<sup>35</sup>Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was a Prussian philosopher who, among other things, is well known for his contributions to the modern theory of knowledge.

point. Revelation and reason come from God Himself, an utterly truthful source.

### **Revelation, Truth, and Meaning**

According to the world-view of biblical theism, human knowledge ultimately depends on divine revelation. God spoke to Adam first and gave him a responsible starting point and a direction for thought and action (Gen 1:28–30). Adam then could use the mind God gave him to respond, to learn, and to initiate new ideas (Gen 2:16–23).

Naturalism, on the other hand, has only evolutionary processes to fall back on to account for mind and rationality. The origin of true grammatical language is effectively unaccounted for in evolutionary theory. Naturalism offers only chance, or perhaps faith in some as yet undiscovered principle of nature, as a basis for trusting reason itself.

Biblical theism, however, does support rationality. The Bible accounts for reason. As Bible-believing Christians, (1) we can base reason in reality; (2) we can potentially know the real truth; (3) we have the rational potential to interpret the world correctly; (4) we can account for the existence of personality; (5) we can realistically have hope and meaning for life; and (6) last, but not least, we can have a moral base. Scripture reveals God's views concerning right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error. Divine revelation could not be false, else we would have a false god. The true God always speaks the truth. If God were not always truthful, we would fall right back into uncertainty as our ultimate epistemological principle. Knowledge would have no stability, truth could fluctuate into error and back again. The world would be ultimately meaningless! This hard reality is recognized and accepted by many of the more consistent naturalistic thinkers.<sup>36</sup> It is

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, Joe E. Barnhart, *Religion and the Challenge of Philosophy* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1975), 182–83: "Indeed, according to the naturalist, humanity was not begun for any cosmic purpose and has no cosmic aim, goal, or meaning.... Naturalists concede that for many human beings who are taught that they are eternally and cosmically important, the philosophy of naturalism is indeed a bitter pill to swallow." The dream of cosmic significance, such as that God made you for a purpose, and that God loves you in particular, is "born of both wishful thinking and the undisciplined vain imaginings of a finite species resentful of its mortality."

In his discussion of biblical authority, on p. 48, Barnhart explains: "In my own opinion, the infallibilists were right to fear that once the Bible is admitted to be not infallible in some minor parts, then it might very well turn out to be not infallible or trustworthy in any of its major doctrines. At the same time, I think that . . . a great many . . . biblical scholars have pretty well shown that there are errors in the Bible. The conclusion, I regret to say, is that the Bible seems not to be authoritative as a guide to such metaphysical doctrines as salvation, life after death, God's existence, and various other matters."

Barnhart is a very consistent naturalist, and thus, in chapter 12, p. 240, he tells us that: "The hypothesis to be considered in this chapter is that Jesus Christ did not exist in the first century, and therefore did not suffer under Pontius Pilate. Nor was he crucified

nevertheless devastating to those who, because they are made in God's image, naturally seek the meaningful relationships God intends for them to have with Him and others.

### **The Existence of God**

Chance and chaos are always alternatives to logic and biblical theism. There are no rationally inescapable arguments that can rule out the possibility that there might be no God. All may be ultimate chaos. This little eddy of human civilization may be just that, an accidental eddy.

But we do have strong reasons to argue differently. After all, chance never gives us more than a possible cause for something, yet we have an actual universe, and an actual human civilization on this special planet. This actual, contingent universe must have been actually caused, not just possibly caused. Contingency is not infinite, for if "something" is truly existentially dependent upon "something else," then that "something else" must actually exist or else the contingent "something" would not exist. For an "actual something" not to exist is self-contradictory and impossible. Thus arguments leading to such a conclusion must be false.

An actual, contingent entity needs an actual cause. I am an actually existing contingent being and thus whatever logic I may or may not use, I cannot existentially deny that there must be some actual, necessary, non-contingent reality that enables me to exist, to live and move and have my being. That reality is God. Theism provides an actual cause for existence, a source of knowledge, and a means for comprehending the truth.

### **The Existence of Truth**

If God were false, then there would be no source and basis for truth. But to claim that God is false is to claim that one knows what is true, or

and subsequently raised from the dead. The teachings attributed to him came mostly from Jewish history, and over a period of time the 'story' of Jesus, like many legends, was woven together from numerous pagan and Jewish sources. In short, the movement of Christianity came about without a historical Jesus."

While I respect Barnhart as a scholar and while he has always exhibited in every way kindness and respect toward me and my views, I must point out that his defense of naturalism, his denial of the existence of the biblical God, his denial of biblical infallibility, and his denial of the historicity of Jesus do set him apart from orthodox Christianity in very serious ways. Thus, I am puzzled by the positive comments some Southern Baptists have made about Barnhart's treatment of recent Southern Baptist history in his *The Southern Baptist Holy War* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1986). Conservatives could use the book to document their claims that some Baptists believe that the Bible is fallible. But those Baptists who wish to use the book to expose the evils of "Fundamentalism" must be aware of the hook that lies in that bait. If inerrancy is denied, as Barnhart thinks it must be, the result, as Barnhart sees it, is the loss of Christianity altogether. Politics still makes strange bedfellows. Barnhart, a former Southern Baptist, is currently a member of a Unitarian Universalist church.

at least that one can know what truth is not. But where could this idea and standard of truth originate? What universally agreed upon standard of truth could exist apart from God? Without a God of truth, truth itself would be nothing more than a relativistic subjectivism, and thus would not be truth. It seems that without God our intellectual categories would reduce to individual choice and fallible human opinion. Judgment then could only be based on someone's sincerity. Biblically speaking, judgment implies an ultimate standard, and that can only be an unchanging God. Ultimately God must stand as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He is the only source of absolute truth. Only the God of Holy Scripture can be the foundational source of truth and at the same time provide a foundational basis for comprehending the truth by making us in His image with individual, personal rationality.

Revelation from this God would then always be a revelation of truth. Scripture is an essential product of divine revelation. Scripture flows from truth, and truth does not of itself produce error. Therefore we expect to find Scripture to be inerrantly true.

Holy Scripture surely claims to be from God and thus to be truthful. Over and over again Scripture calls itself the Word of the Lord, and the New Testament apostles speak of the inspiration of God's Spirit. Scripture is evidenced to be truthful by archaeology, history, and a multitude of other confirming evidences. Reason recognizes these evidences for what they are and draws the conclusion that Scripture is truthful.

Not only that, but Scripture meets the best tests for truth. Reason examines Scripture and finds it to be rationally coherent and supported by adequate empirical evidence. Moreover, Scripture is also spiritually and existentially relevant to human life.

## **Conclusion**

These philosophical evidences are able to be elaborated in much more detail, but at least the trend and the flow of the argument has been given. To me this type of reasoning is sound. It is able to be tested by reason and evidence, and it is simply, yet definitely, confirmed by the attitude toward Scripture that Christ taught His apostles to have.

Reason tells me that if the Son of God believed Scripture to be the truth of God that I should believe it. I have at least five valid, independent historical testimonies collected in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul) that give inter-locking confirmation that this is exactly what Jesus did believe and teach.

If I am wrong, I will be wrong trusting Jesus to be right. The teaching of Christ stands above any and all philosophical reasoning. Christ taught



that Scripture was wholly trustworthy and that it would stand unbroken until the day of its final fulfillment. Even then it stands fulfilled forever.

### **A Summary and a Plea**

Holy Scripture is the written form of God's divine revelation to us. Therefore, as it was originally given, it is fully trustworthy, or inerrant.

Much of modern biblical criticism has assumed that Scripture is a composition of many wonderful accounts of deeply moving and profound religious experiences, but that these human accounts are often filled with personal opinion, theological bias, and human error. Evangelicals, on the other hand, reject the modern idea that Scripture is primarily a production of the religious community. Evangelicals reject the notion that biblical theology is only a composite of the theological and moral diversity of the ancients.

Evangelicals still adopt the older prophetic model of biblical authorship. We accept the Bible's own account of its origin whenever it provides one, and we seek to learn about the times and places and the cultural setting of each writing prophet or apostle. Furthermore we listen to Moses and the prophets and primarily to Christ and His apostles and adopt from them our belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture. This view is then confirmed by substantial supplemental evidences that persuade us that the scriptural accounts are factual and historically real. Our God-given reason recognizes the truth that Scripture is and must be inerrant if it is in any real sense the Word of God.

The inerrancy of Scripture is not a purely semantic issue. It reaches down into the philosophical depths of our soul and challenges us at the door of our very being. Christians, I believe, have a responsibility to study the Word of God prayerfully and learn as much as possible about who God is and what God is doing in our world. Then we must proclaim the Word of God to a lost and dying world. We should flee from any insignificant controversy and seek to obey Christ by following His example in life, in death, and in relationships to others. In particular we ought to follow His example by believing that Scripture is ever and always true.

In light of the clear, historic commitment of Baptist people to the full truthfulness and authority of Scripture, Baptist agency heads should reaffirm their continuing effort to seek the finest evangelical, Bible-believing, Christ-honoring leaders to work in the various agency programs. But the responsibility for perpetuating true Christian faith is not primarily in the hands of institutions or agencies. It is in the hands of local bodies of believers. Every pulpit committee should know how their prospective pastor stands on biblical authority and biblical truthfulness. The pulpit is no place

for the modern critic who doubts the Word of God. The under-shepherd must feed the sheep the truth of God's Word. Hesitation here is deadly for the missionary expansion of the church.

It is the content and teachings of Scripture and Scripture only that we must preach to the people of the world. It is Christ only who died that we might be saved from the wages of sin. It is the God of the Bible who created us and who will judge us both now and at the end of time. Obedience to God's will as revealed in Scripture characterizes the Christian lifestyle.

The Bible is God's truthful revelation written down by men moved to do so by the Holy Spirit. It inerrantly tells me that He loved me while I was yet a sinner. Scripture inerrantly tells me that Christ died in my place, making a substitutionary atonement for my sin. The Bible also inerrantly tells me that I must be born again, that the Christian life can be full of hope and meaning, and that one day Christ Himself will return to earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

### **An Important Addendum**

My intent in these pages was to explain and from my perspective defend the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. I have done that in the context of theological concerns that are currently being debated in our Southern Baptist circles. Nevertheless, there is another word that needs to be said concerning our Baptist academic life.

I must speak frankly in saying that problematic theological issues can be documented in Baptist life, and they are of serious concern to many of us. It is quite misleading, on the other hand, to ignore the many positive aspects of academic life and theological education in the Southern Baptist Convention.

The faculty of which I am a part is well known for its commitment to careful exegesis, biblical theology, missions, and evangelism. I have friends teaching on other campuses, both at the college and at the seminary level, who I know personally and in whom I have the greatest confidence. Southern Baptists must not solve their theological controversies by methods of wholesale destruction.

Deeply committed servants of God may differ in serious ways and yet find common ground in our Baptist heritage centered around the Christ of Scripture. The diversity we sometimes boast of is not infinite, however, and just any and every view will not do. We must never compromise the truth. To do so is to fail to take God's nature seriously enough.

In our concern to defend biblical inerrancy, however, I would urge my conservative brethren to realize that scholarship is a valuable commod-

ity. We must not arrogantly destroy a valued resource over what in many cases actually is a problem of semantics or misunderstanding.

Most of my faculty colleagues treat the Bible as the utterly truthful Word of God even when they refuse to speak of Scripture as “inerrant.” Some of them at times may differ with me over the nature and use of critical methods. We sometimes differ in matters of interpretation. Nevertheless, I can still learn from them when I have confidence in their integrity and when I know their heart and their commitment to Christ.

Inerrancy to me is a theological concept that embraces philosophical and hermeneutical methods as well as doctrines of biblical inspiration and authority. I know of many Baptist scholars who stand theologically in the evangelical tradition, who reject neo-orthodoxy, naturalistic humanism, and negative biblical criticism. These scholars love God and they love the church. They desperately need encouragement and support. They are too often overshadowed by suspicion due to over-generalizations and undue criticism.

We urgently need to rekindle fires of warm trust, not blind trust, nor apathetic trust, but sincere, informed trust that issues in communication and dialog. Devout scholarship is the energy that can hoist a new steeple over our convention that will point us to God. Anti-intellectualism and apathy are the drains through which our babies may be thrown out with our bathwater. At the same time we must be willing to admit that appropriate drains are essential to ‘the health of our little ones. May God help us find the solid rock of common ground in these days of testing.

My prayer is that this small volume can contribute to the inerrancy discussions in a serious way to bring about better understanding and a renewed commitment to biblical faith. Where we must disagree we can do so with integrity in dialog.

Jesus looked toward heaven and prayed:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20–23; NIV).

I too pray that we might all be one.

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## *The Issue Is Truth<sup>1</sup>*

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Controversy is neither novel nor necessarily harmful to Christianity. Rather, controversy has resulted in clarification and reaffirmation of the essentials of the New Testament faith. Historians and a sizeable contingency of laymen know that church history is replete with vigorous discussion and debate. The Reformation era is a classic case in point. Another example from nineteenth century English Baptist ranks is pertinent. Amid the fires of the Downgrade Controversy in England, Charles H. Spurgeon wrote on November 23, 1887,

It is a great grief to me that hitherto many of our most honoured friends in the Baptist Union have, with strong determination, closed their eyes to serious divergencies from truth. I doubt not that their motive has been in a measure laudable, for they desired to preserve peace, and hope that errors, which they

<sup>1</sup>In an era of semantic confusion, serious theological drift, frequent misrepresentation of the position of those who believe the Sacred Book, friends and associates requested that a series of tractates be prepared which would clarify the claims of those Christians who are convinced that the Bible is without error and which would answer the allegations that are often placed in array against us.

Although the author preferred a more exhaustive autograph in which the present subject could be elucidated in greater detail, the abbreviated format presented here was felt by all to be essential at the moment. Consequently, a succinct statement of what we believe to be the persuasion of most Baptists and other evangelicals throughout the earth is presented herein. The author is keenly aware that the Bible in one sense needs no defense. Attacks from without are notoriously unsuccessful. However, the subtle dangers of the crippling of missionary and evangelistic endeavors around the globe through the undermining of the very authority from which a bold mission mandate is given necessitates a strengthening of theological landmarks within.

Doctrinal orthodoxy is no substitute for evangelism. However, evangelism seldom, if ever, exists in any community of the faith other than those in which the Bible is the unquestioned authority. Therefore, these papers are humbly presented with the fervent prayer to God that His written word, the Bible, and the living Word, Jesus, may be loved and honored to the ends of the earth.

were forced to see, would be removed as their friends advanced in years and knowledge.

But at last even these will, I trust, discover that the new views are not the old truth in a better dress, but deadly errors with which we can have no fellowship. I regard full-grown “modern thought” as a totally new cult, having no more relation to Christianity than the mist of the evening to the everlasting hills.<sup>2</sup>

Both in the Reformation and in the Downgrade Controversy the pivotal issue was religious authority with the crucial question being, “How do you know that what you say is true?” Philosophers call the investigation of truth claims “epistemology.” The present contention among various Christian groups has as its focus a series of simple questions which demand some precise answers:

1. Is the Bible true?
2. If the Bible is true, in what sense can it be said to be true?
3. How much truth must the Bible contain in order to be a reliable and authoritative guide for faith and practice?

Ultimately the issue is truth!

### **The View of Jesus**

The strangest enigma of the modern theological scene is the parade of theologians and churchmen who discount the total reliability of Scripture while affirming that Jesus is the only authority for the Christian. The logical dilemma in such a position is apparent. If it be granted that Jesus is the only authority, then how does one know what Jesus said or thought? The answer is that the only source for the teaching and thought of Jesus is the Bible. But if we cannot absolutely trust the Scriptures, then how do we know for certain what Jesus said or thought? Again, Spurgeon delineated the problem with precision:

Let us see to it that we set forth our Lord Jesus Christ as the infallible Teacher, through His inspired Word. I do not understand that loyalty to Christ which is accompanied by indifference to His words. How can we reverence His person, if His own words and those of His apostles are treated with disre-

<sup>2</sup>Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 152.



spect? Unless we receive His apostles' words, we do not receive Christ; for John saith, "He that knoweth God heareth us, he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, if Jesus is actually the ultimate authority to whom appeal is made in matters of faith, then why not listen to Jesus when He speaks about the Scriptures? This consideration makes a summary examination of what the Lord said about the Scriptures paramount in the present controversy. What follows does not begin to exhaust the subject, but it will demonstrate the lucid convictions of Jesus regarding the Bible:

### 1. Verbal Inspiration

Jesus answered and said unto them, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt 22:29–32; KJV).

The Sadducees, who rejected the possibility of resurrection, had a favorite parable which inevitably silenced the Pharisees, who were proponents of the resurrection. Sensing that Jesus believed in the resurrection, they broached the subject with Him. The well-known parable imagined an unlikely situation in which a woman married seven successive brothers according to the dictates of the law of Levirate marriage (Deut 25:5–6). "When all are resurrected," they inquired, "whose wife will she be?" The Lord's reply clearly affirms God's hand in Scripture. After assuring them that marriage was not a celestial contract, He spoke definitively of the resurrection. "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was *spoken unto you by God*, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" [author's italics]. Jesus is quoting Exodus 3:6, a passage written down by some human author, whom most of us would identify as Moses. Yet Jesus says that it was "spoken by God."

Matthew 19:4f is even more precise.

<sup>3</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 373.



And he answered and said unto them, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?'"

Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, a passage written by Moses in which Adam uttered these words about his new union with Eve. Jesus says that Adam spoke God's Word.

Here is verbal inspiration. Critics denigrate this evangelical affirmation by assigning to it the meaning of mechanical dictation *in toto*. Such a claim is a misrepresentation. It is a handy straw man which at best displays theological ineptitude and naiveté. Properly understood, "verbal inspiration" means the following:

- a. Through visions, direct utterances, superintending the thought processes of writers, and other ways, God communicated to the prophets and the apostles the precise message which He willed them to record.
- b. Since the Bible consists of words, if there is inspiration of any kind, it certainly must include "verbal inspiration."
- c. The Spirit of God superintended the writing of the message so that what was recorded by the human author who penned the passage was exactly what God intended.
- d. Therefore, in the Bible we do not have merely an account of men's religious experiences, but we do have the very words of God.

J.B. Tidwell, the inimitable Bible scholar of the Department of Religion at Baylor University, said,

It should also be said that inspiration affected the very words. For it would be hardly possible for inspiration to insure the correct transmission of thought without in some way affecting the words. God so controlled the writers in the expression of His thought that they gave us the word of God in the language of men. And, being directed by an infallible guide, they kept out all error in the statement of facts. It is then as truly God's own word as if He had used no instrument at all in writing it. The ideas it expresses are the very ideas which God wanted to convey, so that God is fully responsible for every word of it.

Paul teaches this by saying he spoke in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth (1 Cor 2:13).<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Plenary Inspiration

Then he said unto them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25–27).

Clearly Jesus believed that God had spoken in the Scriptures. But to what extent do the Scriptures contain God’s Word? Most modern theologians are happy to agree that a portion of the Bible is reliably the Word of God. Only those passages offensive to autonomous reason and pseudo-aesthetic sensibilities are excluded. How much of the Bible did Jesus believe?

First, one must note that it is never recorded a single time that Jesus called into question anything written in the Scriptures. Furthermore, the passage before us records the post-resurrection conversation of Jesus with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Lord rebukes them sternly but compassionately, calling them “fools” and “slow of heart to believe *all* that the prophets have spoken” [author’s italics]. Verse 27 declares that “Beginning at Moses and *all* the prophets, he expounded unto them in *all* the scriptures the things concerning himself” [author’s italics]. Interestingly, Jesus apparently considered Moses to be the author of the Pentateuch. Anyone who claims otherwise does not submit to Jesus’ authority. The Jewish canon was divided in several different ways, but as often as not the Old Testament Scriptures were simply denominated “the Law and the prophets.” Twice Jesus says that the Emmaus duo should have believed *all* the prophets, and once He declares that they should have believed *all* the Scriptures. Would the Lord require less of us?

Evangelicals also affirm the plenary or full inspiration of the Scriptures. This is precisely what Jesus maintained in the passage above. Ecclesiastes, Second Chronicles, and Revelation are just as much inspired as Isaiah, John, or Romans. There are degrees of worth in the Bible but not degrees of inspiration. Obviously John is more crucial than Ecclesiastes just as the laws of the United States Congress are more important than the National Football League Rule Book. But both of these latter com-

<sup>4</sup>J.B. Tidwell, *The Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 28.

pilations represent the law to which respective domains must conform. John tells the story of God's ultimate revelation in Jesus and therefore goes beyond Ecclesiastes. But the same Holy Spirit who inspired Solomon to pen Ecclesiastes later directed John to write the Gospel. The Bible in its entirety and in all its parts is the Word of God.

### 3. Infallibility

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honor from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words (John 5:39–47).

Infallibility is a term which Christians have used to indicate that the Bible will not lead one astray. It is incapable of teaching deception. Obviously, since Jesus believed that the Scriptures were from God, He also believed that they could not teach deception, or else the flawless and impeccable character of God is self-negated. Furthermore, one must note Jesus' crystal-clear indictment: the Jews failed to believe Moses and his writings. In fact, He argued, "But if you believe not his [Moses'] writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:47). Once again note the following:

- a. Jesus apparently believed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch so that for one not to believe thus constitutes a rejection of Jesus' authority.
- b. In any case, He believed that the key to truth was to believe Moses, i.e., the Pentateuch.
- c. Verse 47 once again places the *words* of Moses on the same level as the words of Jesus. To adhere to the *words* of Moses is to ensure that one will not go astray.

#### 4. Inerrancy

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot nor one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt 5:18).

When Christians speak of the “inerrancy of the Bible,” they refer to the conviction that the Bible contains no falsehood or mistake. This claim is made concerning the autographa and is essential to truth, as we shall see later. Dr. Wayne Dehoney stated the case at the 1979 Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, Texas, when he remarked that Southern Baptists had always believed that “in the original autographs God’s revelation was perfect and without error, doctrinally, historically, scientifically, and philosophically.”<sup>5</sup> But the question is this: Did Jesus believe Scripture to be inerrant?

No modern believer has ever ventured any more sweeping claims for the truthfulness, reliability, accuracy, or inerrancy of the Bible than that propounded by Jesus in Matthew 5:18. Jesus first declared that “one jot nor one tittle shall *in no wise* pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” [author’s italics]. The expression translated “in no wise” is the English rendering of the Greek double negative *ou mē*. Double negatives are not permissible in English, but in Greek they were not only acceptable but also provided a method of expressing negation more saliently than is possible in English. Literally Jesus said, “Under no circumstances ever” shall a jot or tittle pass from the law.

“Jot” is a translation of *iota* and referred in turn to the *yod* [י], the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It appears to be a comma that leaped up above the line. “Tittle” is an unusual rendering of *keraiia* and refers to a small appendage, a diminutive horn or several Hebrew letters which distinguishes them from others. For example, the Hebrew letter י differs perceptibly from י only by the *keraiia*, the little appendage attached to the lower right of the letter. That 1/32<sup>nd</sup> of an inch mark of the pen is a “tittle.” Jesus says that neither a *yod* nor a *keraiia* shall pass. Neither the smallest letter nor even a pen stroke shall pass until all be fulfilled. The weight of such a dictum necessitates meticulousness in accuracy of expression. Dare anyone say that God left it up to the human writers to express His thoughts in their own language alone? Then, if they, in fact, made errors, God, by His very decree must fulfill even the errors the writers have made.

<sup>5</sup>James C. Hefley, “Southern Baptists Turn Toward Inerrancy,” *Moody Monthly* (September, 1979): 130.

This brief survey establishes that Jesus had a much higher view of Scripture than most contemporary theologians. The attitude of modern theologians, who delight in asserting imagined errors, contradictions, and anachronisms, is far removed from the attitude of Jesus. In fact, the burden of proof is upon the detractors who claim that Jesus did not believe in inerrancy and infallibility of the verbally and plenary-inspired Scripture to demonstrate that Christ's position was otherwise.

Why don't they produce such evidence? Three choices remain for those who do not accept the perfection of Scripture.

- a. They must demonstrate that Jesus had doubts about some passages,
- b. They must affirm the same thing about the Bible that Jesus affirmed (The silence of most theological communities is deafening!), or
- c. They must cease with the pious but nauseous platitudes about bowing only to the authority of Jesus.

The *truth* is that Jesus believed the Bible to be factually and propositionally *true*.

Jesus referred to the Old Testament. Is there evidence that the New Testament should also be considered inerrant? In II Peter, answers are provided, together with a superb explanation as to how such accuracy and truth were accomplished. There remains a mystery in revelation known only to God. But as nearly as the operation can be described, such elucidation is provided in II Peter 1:12–21,

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure

word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Read the passage and note the following.

- a. Peter has not followed “fables,” Greek *muthois*, or “myths,” (v. 16).
- b. He possesses a word “more sure” (v. 19) than that to which he had been an eyewitness (v. 16) or that which he had heard (v. 18) on the mount of transfiguration.
- c. Such certainty is possible because no prophecy of Scripture is of any “private interpretation” (Greek *idias epiluseōs*, literally “no personal loosing upon”). In other words, men did not just decide to loose Scripture upon the world. Scripture was not given through the will of men (v. 21).
- d. Holy men of God spoke as “they were moved” by the Holy Spirit (v. 21). The word “moved” is *pherō* (Greek), meaning “to bear along.” The word depicts the action of one entity upon another. In this case, the Spirit of God acted upon the minds of the authors of Scripture. Certainly the writers cooperated. But such cooperation is not even in view here. The stress is upon the activity of God’s bearing along the prophets so that they spoke only truth.

Second Peter 3:15–16 further indicates that the emerging New Testament was viewed by Peter in the same way. He acknowledges that Paul has written some things hard to understand. Believers are prepared to admit that there is still much truth in the Bible which must be understood and assimilated. But the limitation is in man and not in the Scriptures. Peter continues by asserting that unlearned and unstable men “wrest” these difficult utterances of Paul as they “do also the other scriptures.” Clearly Peter viewed Paul’s writing as being the identical variety of inspired language as was the Old Testament about which he spoke in II Peter 1:21. The New Testament also is truth!

### **Wresting the Scriptures**

“Wrest” is an English translation of the Greek *streblousin*. Peter’s concern in the latter part of II Peter is for those who are guilty of “wrest-

ing” the Scriptures as a matter of habit and commitment. The Greek word is colorful, depicting a twisting and distorting of the Word of God. What Peter avers to be true in his era has subsequently been true of almost every generation. Our own epoch is no exception. “Streblousinizers” (men who stray by distorting the Scriptures) abound, often sincere but deluded, sometimes deliberately capricious and destructive. A committed Christian dare not remain ignorant of the twisting, turning verbal gymnastics emphasized by “streblousinizers” to avoid the issue of truth. Some of these efforts in this present day will be delineated below. But the ingenuity of the “streblousinized” mind will concoct new evasions. All must be subject to the tribunal of truth in the Scripture. Ten present objections made by “streblousinizers” follow:

### 1. Non-biblical Language

*Inerrancy and infallibility are not biblical terms and therefore should be avoided.* The answer to this first avowal assumes three logical forms.

- a. Consistency—If we must use only biblical terms in our theology, then we must eliminate such words as “Trinity” which are descriptive of biblical truth but which, as such, are not found in the Bible.
- b. Integrity—Using only the language of Scripture would be delightful for any believer. However, the theologians who “wrest” the Scriptures have demonstrated their determination to eisegete the Scriptures (“read into” the Scriptures any view they wish). By distorting the plain sense of the Bible’s claims for itself, biblical authority is reduced to human judgment. Therefore, because of such efforts to misrepresent the Scriptures, additional defining of terms must be employed.
- c. Logic—Few words have only one precise meaning in any language, and fewer still are ideally adequate vehicles for the translation of thought from one language to another. If this canon demanding the usage of biblical words alone were rigorously applied, one could use only Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic terms.

### 2. Negative Connotations

*“Infallible” and “inerrant” are words which have negative connotations, and Christians should accentuate the positive.* Once again there are four answers to such charade.



- a. The language of Scripture itself is often negative. The various prohibitions in the Decalogue provide sufficient example.
- b. Jesus Himself is described by such negative formulations as “without spot” and “without blemish.” In theology, we describe God as infinite and immutable.
- c. The necessity for the employment of such terms as “infallibility” and “inerrancy” developed as a result of the allegations of the theologians that the Bible is “fallible” and “errant.”
- d. The Baptist Faith and Message speaks of the Bible as “a perfect treasure of divine instruction” and as “truth without any mixture of error.” Such phrases are fine if accepted for what they originally and plainly meant. If one affirms those truths, he has affirmed “inerrancy,” whether he uses the term or not. The question then becomes one of integrity.

### 3. Creedalism

The charge of creedalism is most often voiced when those who desire greater freedom from accountability have exhausted their means of logic and have no sturdier barriers behind which to hide. An attempt is made to persuade the general public that advocates of biblical inerrancy want a creed, while historically in Baptist circles creedalism has been rejected. Charges of creedalism are only as effective as the public is gullible. Therefore, we reply:

- a. Baptists who advocate inerrancy are forever opposed to binding creeds.
- b. However, conservative Christians also recognize that the real reason for rejecting creeds has always been that one could not improve upon a perfect Bible. Baptists reject creeds *because we affirm sola Scriptura*.
- c. Confessions are therefore employed to affirm the major truths most surely held by a church, association, or other cooperating body.
- d. Such confessions are essential if various major theological positions are to be differentiated.
- e. Absolute biblical authority based upon total reliability remains the only way to avoid the imposition of the authority of ecclesiastical bodies or a consensus of theologians.

#### 4. The Authority of Christ

The most inconsistent charge of the “streblousinizers” is the appeal to the authority of Christ over the Bible. Like fundamentalist preachers, theologians may be heard giving impassioned pleas for the authority of Christ. The answers are obvious, but we share them anyway.

- a. All ultimate authority does indeed rest in Christ.
- b. As has been pointed out earlier, there exists no reason for distinguishing between the authority of Christ, who is God, and the authority of the Bible, which is God’s Word.
- c. As a matter of fact, we know nothing about the mind or teachings of Jesus except that which is revealed on the pages of the Bible.
- d. If portions of the Bible are untrue or erroneous, then we cannot know for certain what Jesus thought or taught, and hence appeals to the authority of Christ would be useless anyway.

#### 5. Absence of the Autographa

Advocates of inerrancy attribute inerrancy only to the autographa, i.e., the author’s actual manuscripts. Since we do not possess the autographa, we are assured that the whole debate is superfluous and cannot be proved. We reply with these considerations:

- a. While we cannot produce the inerrant autographa, neither has anyone produced the “errant” autographs laden with mistakes. The burden of proof is upon the doubters to demonstrate original error.
- b. The assumption that the autographa were inerrant is an essential one if we are to know anything for certain. Suppose, for example, that we determine through careful comparison of ancient manuscripts that a certain reading of John 1:14 is the way it was originally written. If the autograph was inerrant and we have established what that autograph said, then we have everything—a clear word from God. But even if we discover exactly what John 1:14 said, if the autograph had errors, we still may not have discovered what God actually said. Worse still, there is no criterion available by which we can find out what God actually said.

## 6. Infallibility of Intent

Under pressure, liberal theologians, who usually call themselves “moderates,” have found a new loophole. Ten years ago most would have loathed the concept of infallibility. Now, however, with increasing pressure from the bill-paying laity, who provide their financial support, a chorus has arisen affirming “infallibility of purpose,” of “intent,” or sometimes “salvific infallibility.” By this, such theologians mean that the Bible may be trusted when it “intends to be teaching” or when it “speaks concerning salvation themes.” However, it is not always reliable historically or scientifically. We simply inquire thus:

- a. Who will tell us when the Bible “intends to teach” and when it blunders, staggering in the worldview of its limited human authors? Who will define which matters are distinctly salvific (pertaining to salvation)?
- b. The answer is obvious. The theologians want us to depend upon the autonomous reason of man, notably the reasoning of the theologians themselves.
- c. By what logic did those thinkers arrive at the concept of “infallibility of purpose”? This is a faith affirmation outside the realm of empirically demonstrable proof. The only difference between “infallibility of purpose” and total infallibility is that some wish to circumscribe the Scriptures, cutting away those teachings or affirmations which are personally unpalatable.

## 7. Alleged Errors

Strangest of all is the retreat to the alleged errors in the Scripture, as though this were some startling new discovery of each decade. A long list of apparent contradictions can be marshaled by most theological faculties. Several truths must be noted:

- a. All of the alleged errors of Scripture were known from antiquity.
- b. These apparent contradictions and alleged mistakes are comparatively few in number.
- c. Far fewer exist today since many passages have been demonstrated to be fully accurate through the years with advances in science, archaeology, history, etc.
- d. For the remainder of the problem texts, perfectly conceivable harmonizations abound in the books of saintly, believing biblical scholars.

- e. Allegations of error never arise from reverent exegesis but always from philosophical predilections. As often as not, they owe their origin to a particular theologian's dislike of some teaching of the Bible concerning the pivotal and debated doctrines of God's wrath, the nature of hell, the personhood of Satan, the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus, special creation as opposed to evolution, the virgin conception of Jesus, or role assignments for men and women.

### **8. Record of Revelation**

No phrase is anymore durable in the hand of a "streblousinizer" than the lofty proclamation that the Bible is a "record of revelation." The danger in that appeal is that it is true only insofar as it goes. But caution is in order for the believer.

- a. The tablets of stone given by God to Moses constituted a record of revelation but also were actual revelation! The same is true of the writing on Belshazzar's palace wall done by a portion of a man's hand. The Bible is not just a record of revelation; it *is* revelation!
- b. As often as otherwise, those who speak of the Bible as a "record of revelation" are implicitly, seldom explicitly, implying that the record keeping of revelation was besmirched with human foible, even if the actual revelation in antiquity was correct.

### **9. Disruption of Denominational Harmony**

When those reasons that pass for theology, philosophy, or exegesis fail, as a last resort opponents of biblical inerrancy may appeal to sentimentalism and denominational loyalty and warn of the threat of disrupting the harmony within a denomination if dissension proceeds. Such allegations are absurd, but nonetheless we must respond.

- a. Honest discussion of the issues, privately and publicly, will not disrupt a denomination unless a substantial portion of its constituency has become committed to error. Truth, like cream, rises to the top and never fears encounter with falsehood.
- b. In all controversy at least one side is in error. All errors need to be exposed and truth located and articulated. The fatuous assumption that a denominational umbrella is big

- enough to harbor radically divergent views and still realize a common goal is historically rare and philosophically naïve.
- c. Scripture teaches otherwise. Paul's dispute with Barnabas (Acts 15:36–41) did not hinder the expansion of the gospel. Nor did Paul's terse debate with Peter prove devastating for missions. On the contrary, both ultimately assisted the spread of the faith. Did Paul's vigorous polemic in Galatians or John's apology in First John interfere with evangelism? Never! They only guaranteed the continual dissemination of truth!
  - d. Dean Kelley has demonstrated in his sociological study, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*,<sup>6</sup> that a strongly authoritative position tends to build a denomination. Furthermore, the shrinking of many formerly influential denominations can be attributed to the dilution of their stand on biblical authority.
  - e. Throughout the history of Baptists, a constant vigil has had to be maintained, not against the devastating divisiveness of orthodoxy but against the license of liberalism.
  - f. Since when were God's people to be more loyal to any denomination or program than they are to Christ?

### 10. Interference with World Mission Programs

This avowal is the greatest calumny of all. Incredibly, some have averred that insistence upon biblical inerrancy will circumvent efforts to evangelize the world.

- a. No great missionary movement or profound evangelistic thrust in 2,000 years of Christian history has ever originated in a community of Christians in which there were questions raised about the accuracy of the Scriptures. No modern church questioning the veracity of the Bible will be set aflame with fires of evangelistic zeal.
- b. On the other hand, the list of those who ardently believe every word of the Bible and are the progenitors of mass evangelistic outreach is nearly endless. Carey, Judson, Rice, Moody, Spurgeon, Sunday, Graham, Riley, Truett, Carroll, Scarborough, Criswell, and Boyce—to name only a few—advocated the perfection of the Bible.

<sup>6</sup>Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977).

- c. While a high view of the Bible may not always produce evangelism and missionary concern, it is an essential concomitant for the impetus of outreach.

Liberalism of a former era had integrity. Men rejected portions or all of the Bible and said so vociferously. The neo-liberal of our own era is often lacking such basic integrity. He employs the “language of Zion” but affixes new meanings known only to philosophically-oriented initiates. He may speak passionately, using phrases designed to allay the fears of cautious lay people, while privately rejecting much of the Bible. The day has come for Christians to insist that their leaders tell them plainly and specifically what they believe!

### The Nature of Truth

Frank Stagg recently provided an article entitled, “What is Truth?” in a *Festschrift* to Eric Rust. He quotes English New Testament scholar C.H. Dodd, saying, “Although he carefully qualifies his generalization, C.H. Dodd offers this judgment as to the most significant Greek and Hebrew words for truth, *alētheia* is fundamentally an intellectual category, *émeth* a moral category.”<sup>7</sup> Dr. Stagg proceeds, attempting to argue that truth is primarily moral as opposed to propositional. This is done despite Dodd’s proposal regarding the factual nature of *alētheia* in Greek.

Dr. Stagg’s actual conviction is elucidated far more clearly in a recent article by Norm Geisler.<sup>8</sup> Geisler points out that many theologians of the modern era have a very different view of truth. While most people have a *correspondence* view of truth, neo-orthodox theologians maintain an *intentionalist* view of truth. To most of us, truth is that which corresponds to the actual state of affairs. An error is that which does not correspond with what really is the case. But many theologians are content to use the term “truth” in a far more elastic manner. According to this view, a statement is true if it accomplishes what the author intended it to accomplish. This is an *intentionalist* view of truth.

An illustration of this latter view concerns the hypothetical situation of a man who wishes to go from Dallas, Texas, to Houston, Texas, though he is unfamiliar with the way. A friend who works with the Weather Bureau knows that a hurricane is about to inundate Houston, so he tells his acquaintance to go due west from Dallas. The man follows this instruction

<sup>7</sup>Frank Stagg, “What is Truth?” in *Science, Faith, and Revelation*, ed. Robert E. Patterson (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 240.

<sup>8</sup>Norm Geisler, “Inerrancy: Truth or Consequences?” (Paper, Evangelical Theological Society, 28 December 1979).

and is saved from the ravages of the hurricane. Thus, the friend from the Weather Bureau told the truth because he accomplished what he intended. But, in fact, the truth was not told. The traveler is likely to be irate when he finds himself 200 miles west of Dallas and with Houston now in sight. Especially is that true if his business in Houston was critical.

This strange and alien view of truth is merely another evidence of the inevitable result of human depravity. Man is determined to “wrest” not only the Scriptures but also the obvious sense of language in order to maintain aberrant views, while still concealing his real position under the guise of commonly accepted terminology.

Truth has never changed. Moral truth is right because it is anchored solidly in the nature of God. We know that truth because it has been propositionally revealed to us in the Bible. The necessity for reaffirming this concept is what prompted Francis Schaeffer to begin speaking of “true truth.” J.P. Boyce of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*:

The author has aimed to make the discussions in this volume especially Scriptural. He believes in the perfect inspiration and absolute authority of the divine revelation, and is convinced that the best proof of any truth is that it is there taught. He questions, indeed whether man can know with absolute certainty any truth which is not thus uttered by God. Into all else must enter the liability to error which arises from human imperfection. So far, therefore, as the Scriptures speak, and so far only does man have certainty of knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Smokescreens will abound. Some will say that the whole inerrancy debate is just a semantic battle, and they further declare that everyone is actually saying the same thing. It is not so. Others will say that this is only a matter of interpretation and not essential doctrine. They may even suggest that the position of evangelical Christians has never been the inerrancy of Scripture.

In 1925, Kirsopp Lake, distinguished professor at Harvard, wrote a book entitled *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow*. Though Lake was a man of spotless integrity, he was no friend to any form of Fundamentalism. He wrote,

It is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose

<sup>9</sup>James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), vii.

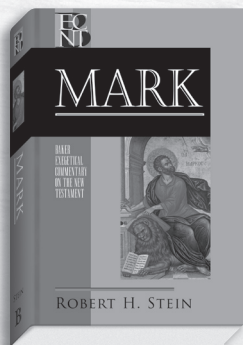


that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind; it is partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of all Scripture? A few, perhaps, but very few. No, the fundamentalist may be wrong; I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the *corpus theologicum* of the Church is on the fundamentalist side.<sup>10</sup>

The issue is not interpretation. Neither can it be construed as a semantic puzzle. The issue is not even whether we use “infallible” and “inerrant” as descriptive terms to depict the Scripture. The issue is truth. Did God tell us in the Bible that which corresponds to reality? If so, did He tell us only the truth? If He did give us truth, then we have a sure guide for faith and practice. If not, we know nothing, and we are cast on the hopeless sea of human subjectivism in a ship of autonomous reason battered by ever increasing waves of divided human speculation with no port available and no lighthouse in sight. The issue is truth! “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

<sup>10</sup>Kirsopp Lake, *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Boston: Houghton, 1926), 61.

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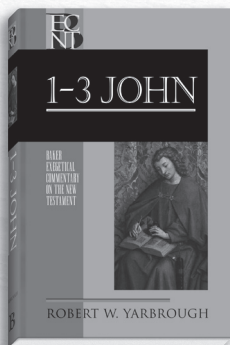
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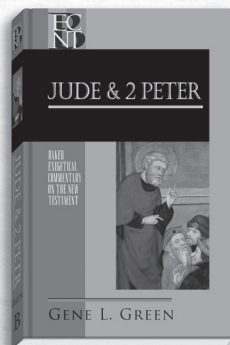
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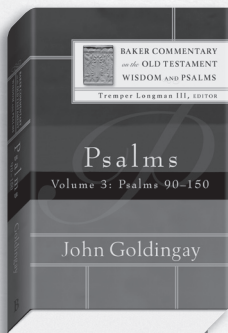
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*Is Inerrancy Sufficient?  
A Plea to Biblical Scholars concerning the  
Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture*

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**Introduction**

I admit the title of this essay immediately begs the question, “Inerrancy is not sufficient for what?” At first blush, the paper smacks of someone who wants to push the confessional envelope with respect to what is allowable within the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). Yet what I intend to argue is actually not all that controversial—or at least it shouldn’t be in a society whose foundational doctrinal precept consists in a confession of belief in the doctrine of inerrancy. After all, all of us in the ETS have put our names on the dotted line affirming the first item in the ETS’ doctrinal basis: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.”<sup>1</sup> Not only that, but as a result of the Open Theism controversy,<sup>2</sup> our society has taken steps

<sup>1</sup>Article 3 of the Constitution of the Evangelical Theological Society (Adopted 28 December, 1949, and amended in 1950, 1951, 1959, 1976, 1985, and 1990).

<sup>2</sup>Open Theism is the view that the future choices of free creatures are in no way augmented by God’s knowledge of the future because God has chosen to limit His knowledge of the future. Thus God does not know the future insofar as future events depend upon the choices of people who have an uncoerced, libertarian free-will. This view has become popular in certain sectors of evangelicalism, so much so that the Southern Baptist Convention voted to amend its doctrinal basis with an explicit affirmation of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge of future events: “God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures.” *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, Article II.

The Open Theism controversy in the ETS centered on the membership qualifications of two prominent proponents of Open Theism. These two members, Clark Pinnock and John Sanders, have argued in favor of the Open Theism position in their published works. Roger Nicole, therefore, challenged the membership credentials of Pinnock and Sanders by claiming that their Open Theism is incompatible with the doctrine of inerrancy, a doctrine that every member of the ETS must affirm. Pinnock and Sanders responded to these charges

to define clearly what we mean by inerrancy. In November 2004, the ETS Executive Committee unanimously recommended a resolution that was intended to clarify what our doctrinal basis means by the word “inerrant.”<sup>3</sup> The resolution reads as follows:

For the purpose of advising members regarding the intent and meaning of the reference to biblical inerrancy in the ETS Doctrinal Basis, the Society refers members to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978). The case for biblical inerrancy rests on the absolute trustworthiness of God and Scripture’s testimony to itself. A proper understanding of inerrancy takes into account the language, genres, and intent of Scripture. We reject approaches to Scripture that deny that biblical truth claims are grounded in reality.<sup>4</sup>

This resolution passed with 80% in favor and 20% opposed. Clearly we are a society of scholars committed to the doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture (or, at the very least 80% of us are). So what I want to argue should not be all that controversial because it is consistent with a confession of the inerrancy of scripture.

Nevertheless, the very controversy that I just referred to and this most recent clarification of our position reveal that a mere confession of inerrancy is not enough. That is, a mere confession of inerrancy is not sufficient to maintain a traditional evangelical orthodox consensus. Of course, the devil is in the details as to what precisely a “traditional evangelical orthodox consensus” is or even was.<sup>5</sup> On this score, Roger Nicole’s membership challenge of Clark Pinnock and John Sanders is instructive. At least 63% of the Society regards John Sanders’s open theism as outside of the “consensus” insofar as his position has been shown to be irreconcilable with inerrancy.<sup>6</sup> What this open theism controversy has demonstrated is that sizeable majorities of the ETS still think that a confession of inerrancy

by maintaining that they affirm inerrancy, even though they do not affirm the exhaustive foreknowledge of God. In the end, Roger Nicole’s membership challenge of Pinnock and Sanders did not pass, and both men remain members of the ETS today. “Reports Relating to the Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Society,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* [JETS] 47 (2004): 170–71.

<sup>3</sup>“Reports Relating to the Fifty-sixth Annual Meeting of the Society,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 209–212.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>5</sup>David Wells notes “the interesting question of whether there ever was a theological structure that evangelicals commonly held and that held them together in a common world of belief.” See David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 133.

<sup>6</sup>“Reports Relating to the Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Society,” 171.

involves some necessary theological entailments—that is, theological implications that may not be explicit but that nevertheless follow. Thus in this instance, 63% decided that Sanders’s mere confession of inerrancy is not enough.

What does all of this have to do with this essay? Having been a witness to what has transpired in the last several years in our society, I would agree with the 63% who indicated that a confession of inerrancy is not enough. Indeed, I would suggest that such a confession requires two concomitant obligations: (1) a definition of what inerrancy is, and (2) a clear delineation of the hermeneutical and theological implications of such a confession.<sup>7</sup>

I make this suggestion in large part because I want to see our society grow and deepen with respect to its adherence to biblical authority. But I also offer this reflection because the absence of these two elements opens up our position to criticism from those who perceive inerrancy to be an incoherent and unnecessary doctrine. In an essay for the *Baptist Standard*, Roger Olson makes a critique that has become standard fare among opponents of inerrancy. He argues that ever since Harold Lindsell’s popular 1976 book, *The Battle for the Bible*, there has been an “evangelical inquisition about a word [inerrancy].”<sup>8</sup> Olson urges that proponents of inerrancy “kill the ordinary meaning of the word with the death of a thousand qualifications,”<sup>9</sup> such that there isn’t really any substantive difference between conservative evangelicals who refuse the term and those conservatives who accept it. Olson brings out some old saws to make his case, claiming that even inerrantists admit that no existing Bible is inerrant. Moreover, appealing to the Chicago Statement, he says that, “if ‘inerrancy’ is compatible with flawed approximations, faulty chronologies, and use of incorrect sources by the biblical authors, it is a meaningless concept.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, for Olson, “‘inerrancy’ has become a shibboleth—a gate-keeping word used to exclude people.”<sup>11</sup> To Olson, and many others, inerrancy is a mere slogan, not a concept with

<sup>7</sup>Craig Blaising’s remarks in his 2005 ETS presidential address are apt in this regard: “The question to ask, it seems to me, is what is the epistemological and methodological significance of the revealed and written word of God for the theological knowledge of the body of Christ?” Craig A. Blaising, “Faithfulness: A Prescription for Theology,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 12.

<sup>8</sup>Roger Olson, “Why ‘inerrancy’ doesn’t matter,” *Baptist Standard* (February 3, 2006), <http://www.baptiststandard.com/postnuke/index.php?module=htmlpages&func=display&cpid=4516> (Accessed 16 March 2006).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

any real theological substance or import. It's just a political tool wielded by fundamentalists to demagogue opponents.<sup>12</sup>

Even though I think Olson is way off-base in his complaints against the inerrancy position,<sup>13</sup> I still think there is a question that we self-professed inerrantists need to ask ourselves. Do we contribute in any way in our own theological and ecclesiastical endeavors to this kind of cynicism about inerrancy? My answer to that question is, "Yes, we often do." For many in our own society and in the institutions, churches, and denominations that we represent, we often treat inerrancy as a slogan to identify us with a particular religious movement called "evangelicalism" while not giving due attention to what inerrancy is and what its entailments are.

That brings me to the subject of this paper and to the theme of this conference. As I stated above, I argue that a confession of inerrancy requires two concomitant obligations: (1) a definition of what inerrancy is, and (2) a clear delineation of the hermeneutical and theological implications of such a confession. While this paper will deal briefly with the first item, the main thrust deals with item number two (inerrancy's necessary entailments). I will defend the thesis that a mere affirmation of the doctrine of inerrancy by itself is insufficient as a basis for Christian theological discourse and as a guide for the life of the church. Unless one embraces both the inerrancy and the sufficiency of scripture, then a commitment to inerrancy means nothing. It is as Roger Olson contends a mere "shibboleth—a gate-keeping word used to exclude people."

### Defining Inerrancy

As I said, in terms of definition, my aim here is not to rehash old debates about what inerrancy is.<sup>14</sup> In light of the society's recent actions, it

<sup>12</sup>This is in fact how a theologically moderate religious press describes inerrancy: "While the BGCT includes individuals and churches who use the term 'inerrant' to describe the Bible, most BGCT leaders and messengers in recent years have shunned that word as a politicized codeword more than a descriptive theological statement, while still affirming the complete authority and trustworthiness of the Bible." "What's the difference between the BGCT and the SBTC," *Baptist Standard* (February 11, 2002) [http://www.baptiststandard.com/2002/2\\_11/pages/difference.pdf](http://www.baptiststandard.com/2002/2_11/pages/difference.pdf) (Accessed 16 March 2006).

<sup>13</sup>Perhaps my chief objection would be that the Chicago Statement does not characterize apparent discrepancies with words like "flawed," "faulty," and "incorrect." Thus this is not really a fair characterization of the inerrancy position. Still these kinds of distortions need to be addressed anew by evangelical proponents of the inerrancy position. I think this is why Andreas Köstenberger highlights the need for a "commitment to inerrancy, properly defined," as evangelicals engage the challenges of post-modernity. Andreas Köstenberger, "Editorial," *JETS* 49 (2006): 2.

<sup>14</sup>For a fine collection of papers on contemporary questions concerning an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, see *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity,



is appropriate for us to take the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) as a common point of departure for the definition of inerrancy. We must, however, take note of one item in the ETS's resolution on the Chicago Statement. The resolution affirms that "The case for biblical inerrancy rests on the absolute trustworthiness of God and Scripture's testimony to itself."<sup>15</sup> This item is important not merely because it gives a theological grounding to the factual claims of the Bible (though this is true enough).<sup>16</sup> The statement is important because it also implies a necessary connection between the Bible's accuracy and its authority<sup>17</sup> as divine revelation. In other words, with respect to accuracy the very words of the Bible are true because God Himself is true and cannot lie. But with respect to authority, the statement also requires recognition that the Bible is authoritative because God Himself is authoritative.<sup>18</sup> The Scripture's connection to the Deity makes it not just *a* sourcebook for accurate religious information, but also *the* guidebook whose very words command the obedience of all its readers. As the Chicago Statement itself affirms, "Holy Scripture . . . is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises."<sup>19</sup>

2004).

<sup>15</sup>"Reports Relating to the Fifty-sixth Annual Meeting of the Society," 210.

<sup>16</sup>Popular definitions often focus solely on the factual claims of the Bible. For example, Robert H. Stein writes, "The term 'inerrant' means that what the authors willed to convey with regard to matters of fact (history, geography, science, etc.) are also true and will never lead us astray." Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 62. This is a common and, I think, unfortunate reduction of what inerrancy is. Inerrancy refers not merely to so-called matters of fact, but also to matters of faith. This is true at least as far as the Chicago statement is concerned.

<sup>17</sup>Perhaps it would be helpful to define what I mean by authority. I am happy with Millard Erickson's definition: "By authority we mean the right to command belief and/or action." Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 268.

<sup>18</sup>N.T. Wright makes precisely this point in his recent book. N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 23, 25: "the central claim of this book: that the phrase 'authority of scripture' can make Christian sense only if it is a shorthand for 'the authority of the triune God, exercised somehow *through* scripture. . . . When we take phrase 'the authority of scripture' . . . , we recognize that it can have Christian meaning only if we are referring to scripture's authority *in a delegated or mediated sense* from that which God himself possesses and that which Jesus possesses as the risen Lord and Son of God, the Immanuel. It must mean, if it means anything Christian, 'the authority of God *exercised through* scripture.'"

<sup>19</sup>Number 2 in the "Short Statement," in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978). Kevin J. Vanhoozer agrees: "Divine authority ultimately belongs to God alone . . . Scripture is not authoritative simply because the church needs a criterion but because it is part of the revelatory and redemptive economies of the triune God. The canon is the locus for God's communicative action—past, present, and future—the divinely approved means by which God exercises authority in, and over, the church. It is primarily in the church's



It is ironic that an evangelical moderate like Roger Olson would argue against inerrancy on the basis of the fact that the original manuscripts no longer exist. It is ironic because committed theological liberals have been making this argument for quite some time, but unlike Olson have used it as an argument against evangelical faith. One recent example of this line appears in Bart Ehrman's recent, popular<sup>20</sup> book *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*.<sup>21</sup> Ehrman's book is mainly about the discipline of textual criticism, but the whole work is framed in his personal spiritual journey. For Ehrman, the absence of the original biblical manuscripts was a "compelling problem,"<sup>22</sup> one that eventually led him to deny his previous commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture. In Ehrman's story, the undoing of inerrancy resulted in the undoing of his Christianity.<sup>23</sup> Ehrman concluded that if the Bible could not be relied upon as inerrant, it certainly could not be relied upon as an authoritative or sufficient basis for Christian faith. Once inerrancy fell, so did everything else.

The irony of Roger Olson's position is that the lack of inerrant manuscripts does not lead him away from affirming the authority of the Bible (like Ehrman), but to affirming it nevertheless. Unlike Ehrman, Olson does not see biblical authority as inexorably bound up with biblical inerrancy. Bart Ehrman on the other hand finds the lack of inerrant manuscripts grounds for rejecting the Bible and Christianity altogether. What Ehrman observes is merely what we have already seen above. Inerrancy is grounded

reading of Scripture that the risen Christ, through his Spirit, exercises his lordship over the church." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 124.

<sup>20</sup>Bart Ehrman's book is "popular" in the sense that it is intended for lay-readers, not specialists. But it is also "popular" in the public's reception of the work. Ever since its publication late last year, it has become increasingly apparent that Ehrman has reached his target audience, and then some. He has been interviewed twice on National Public Radio to talk about his book—once by Diane Rehm (8 December 2005) and once by Terry Gross (14 December 2005). In 2006, the book landed him a spot on the popular cable program "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" (15 March 2006). This attention is not surprising given the success of his popular lectures for The Teaching Company and the fact that his many writings have distinguished him as a leading expert in the field of Text Criticism. His important scholarly contribution to the subject appears in his book, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also, he has revised a new edition of what is the standard introduction to the field: Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>21</sup>Bart D. Ehrman. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005). Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart: A Review Article of *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman," *JETS* 49 (2006): 327–49.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>23</sup>Ehrman says that it was one "picayune mistake in Mark 2" that opened the "floodgates" of skepticism and unbelief. *Ibid.*, 9.

in a theological conviction concerning the person of God. To let go of inerrancy (properly conceived) is to let go of something about God Himself. If there are errors in the Bible, then there are errors in God. When one comes to this conclusion, then the entire edifice of the Christian faith falls. This is why the admission of one “picayune mistake in Mark 2” had such a devastating effect on Bart Ehrman. When inerrancy fell, Christianity fell.

I can imagine that many readers will have already thought of a significant objection to my argument to this point. One might object, “There are plenty of Christians who do not affirm inerrancy but who nevertheless are Christians with a pious regard for and submission to the Bible’s authority. Therefore, you are wrong to claim that there is a necessary connection between the inerrancy of Scripture and the authority of Scripture.” In one sense, this is certainly a valid observation. For example, anyone who has ever heard or read a scholar of the likes of N.T. Wright knows that it is possible to have a high view of the authority of Scripture while refusing to acknowledge the inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>24</sup> I will certainly concede this point. But that does not overthrow my argument that biblically and theologically speaking there is a necessary connection between the inerrancy and the authority of Scripture such that to compromise the one is to compromise the other. What then do I make of those who disagree, like N.T. Wright? This is one of those cases in which I am thrilled that the opponents of inerrancy are inconsistent. Yes, there are some who deny inerrancy, but thankfully they are inconsistent and do not allow their error to dampen their commitment to the authority of the Bible.

What this means is that the Chicago statement is correct, in spite of anecdotal indications to the contrary. It says, “The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.”<sup>25</sup> Regardless of individual exceptions to the rule, those who are biblically and theologically consistent cannot diminish inerrancy without also diminishing the authority of Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>The question of inerrancy is in fact a lacuna in his recent work on the authority of the Bible, *The Last Word*, in which he does not even address the issue.

<sup>25</sup>Number 5 in the “Short Statement,” in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).

<sup>26</sup>That is why the response to Peter Enns’ recent proposal has been so vehement. Enns’ appears to be diminishing Scripture’s inerrancy by suggesting that parts of the OT should be read as “myth”—that is, as “made up” stories. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 41. The implications of such a position are problematic to say the least and pose no little challenge to the doctrines of inerrancy and authority. See G.K. Beale, “Myth, History, and Inspiration: A Review Article of *Inspiration and Incarnation* by Peter Enns,” *JETS* 49

## Defining Sufficiency

If the Bible is indeed authoritative in what it says, then there are implications for how we understand what the Bible seems to be saying about itself. As Article 15 of the Chicago statement affirms, the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in what the Bible teaches about itself.<sup>27</sup> The classic biblical text on the nature of Scripture not only addresses the Scripture's own inspiration, but also its own sufficiency.<sup>28</sup> This text indicates that the written Word of God, Scripture (γραφή), is totally sufficient for everything that the Christian<sup>29</sup> (and thus the church) needs. Of course I am

(2006): 287–312; Peter Enns, “Response to G.K. Beale’s Review Article of *Inspiration and Incarnation*,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 313–26.

<sup>27</sup>Article 15 of “The Articles of Affirmation and Denial,” in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).

<sup>28</sup>Wayne Grudem defines the sufficiency of Scripture as follows: “The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 127. Cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new combined ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 168: “Over against the position that Scripture needs some complement, the Reformers asserted the *perfectio* or *sufficientia* of Scripture. . . The Reformers merely intended to deny that there is alongside of Scripture an unwritten Word of God with equal authority and therefore equally binding on the conscience. And in taking that position they took their stand on Scriptural ground”; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 183: “All that Protestants insist upon is, that the Bible contains all the extant revelations of God, which He designed to be the rule of faith and practice for his Church; so that nothing can rightfully be imposed on the consciences of men as truth or duty which is not taught directly or by necessary implication in the Holy Scriptures. . . The people of God are bound by nothing but the Word of God. . . If we would stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, we must adhere to the principle that in matters of religion and morals the Scriptures alone have authority to bind the conscience.”

<sup>29</sup>The “man of God” may perhaps refer narrowly to Timothy, the Christian leader, 1 Tim 6:11; so Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 280. It may also refer to Christians in general. I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 656–57; 796. Perhaps the difference between the two interpretations is mitigated by the fact that Christian leaders were to teach the Scriptures to the Christians in their congregations, as Paul so clearly exhorted Timothy to do (1 Tim 4:13–16). Thus, we would presume that the effect of the Scriptures on the leader would be that which was also intended for the congregation. After all, Timothy was charged to be “an example of the ones who believe” (1 Tim 2:12). As William D. Mounce writes, “Scripture . . . provides the content and direction necessary for Timothy, Christian leaders, and by implication all Christians to be fully equipped, enabled to do every good work, among which are teaching, reproving, correcting, and training in righteousness.” William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 570–71.

talking about II Timothy 3:16–17: “All<sup>30</sup> scripture is God-breathed<sup>31</sup> and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness in order that the man of God might be adequate, having been equipped for every good work.”

The crucial implication of this text is that the written Word of God is put forth as all that the Christian person needs to live a life faithfully *coram deo* (“in the face of God”). The written Word makes a person “adequate” to construct Christian doctrine (διδασκαλίαν) and to embody Christian ethics (παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ). Indeed the “Scripture” itself is sufficient for “every good work.” As Wayne Grudem has commented on this text,

If there is any “good work” that God wants a Christian to do, this passage indicates that God has made provision in his Word for training the Christian in it. Thus, there is no “good work” that God wants us to do other than those that are taught somewhere in Scripture: it can equip us for *every* good work . . . what must we do in addition to what God commands us in Scripture? Nothing! Nothing at all! If we simply keep the words of Scripture we will be “blameless” and we will be doing “every good work” that God expects of us.<sup>32</sup>

If the sufficiency of Scripture is a valid implication of what the Bible teaches about itself, there are massive repercussions for how we inerrantists conceive of our vocations as scholars and as churchmen. It is not enough to sign the ETS doctrinal statement or merely to be in favor of inerrancy in principle. Unless we also take upon ourselves the concomitant obligation of bowing to the authority and sufficiency of Scriptures (two necessary entailments of the inerrancy position), then inerrancy becomes nothing more than a slogan and shibboleth. So I would like to suggest some ways

<sup>30</sup>I agree with I. Howard Marshall that to make a decision between “every” and “all” to translate πᾶς is really not that important: “To say ‘All of the Scripture’ is in effect to say ‘every passage of Scripture’, and at the end of the day a decision is not important.” I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 792.

<sup>31</sup>Commentators have been divided on whether θεόπνευστος should be understood attributively or predicatively. Daniel Wallace has done extensive research on this question and has argued decisively that it is predicate. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 313–14; cf. J. William Johnston, *The Use of Πᾶς in the New Testament*, Studies in Biblical Greek 11, ed. D.A. Carson (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 178–83.

<sup>32</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127–28.

that we can enact our commitment to the Scripture's sufficiency in our own theological and ecclesiastical contexts.

### Enacting Sufficiency

To begin with, I have a word that applies to us biblical scholars in particular. We have for too long tolerated the virtual divorce<sup>33</sup> between biblical theology and dogmatic/systematic theology.<sup>34</sup> In other words, we have caved in too much to the temptation to see our task as a purely descriptive, historical exercise. This caving in has caused at times a preoccupation with minutiae and an unwillingness to write and publish on topics that are theological in nature. We can account for this reticence in part by understanding the history of our discipline and how it has come to conceive of its tasks and methods.

It was the publication of J.P. Gabler's epoch-making address in 1787 that sounded a clarion call for biblical scholars to make a methodological distinction between history and theology in the pursuit of biblical theology.<sup>35</sup> For Gabler, this distinction did not entail a denial of a legitimate relationship between the task of history and the task of theology. On the contrary, he said that dogmatic theology is "made more certain and more firm" after the distinction has been observed and carried through one's interpretation of the biblical text.<sup>36</sup>

But his suggestion did lead subsequent generations of biblical scholars to make a false disjunction between history and theology. Whereas Gabler meant to make a distinction, and thereby establish proper grounds

<sup>33</sup>Max Turner and Joel B. Green, "New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology: Strangers or Friends?" in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies & Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 3–4: "The church, of course, has always maintained that Bible and theology belong together. But driven by developments within the academy, following Gabler's programmatic distinction between the tasks of biblical theology and those of dogmatics, the two became separated, if not divorced."

<sup>34</sup>Evangelical theology today rarely shares this degree of intense biblical thought and evangelical biblical scholarship rarely displays this concern for a common theology inhering the canon." Blaising, "Faithfulness," 15.

<sup>35</sup>J.P. Gabler's address was originally published in 1787 under its Latin title *De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus*. An English translation appears in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* in 1980. John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980): 133–58. Gabler actually called for the distinction between "biblical theology" and "dogmatic theology." *Ibid.*, 137. He argues that biblical theology is of "historical origin" while dogmatic theology derives not only from the Scripture but also from what "each theologian philosophises rationally about divine things." *Ibid.*, 136–137.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

for dogmatic theology,<sup>37</sup> others have sought to separate the two enterprises altogether. In 1897, an important essay by William Wrede argued this very point. Wrede wrote, “New Testament theology must be considered and done as a purely historical discipline.”<sup>38</sup> According to Wrede, when the historical task of biblical theology concerns itself with dogmatic implications, “Biblical theology will be pressed for an answer to dogmatic questions which the biblical documents do not really give, and will endeavour to eliminate results which are troublesome for dogmatics.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Wrede calls for a complete separation of biblical theology from dogmatic theology, of the historical task from the theological task. Herein is the fissure that has crackled its way down even into our own day.<sup>40</sup>

Lest one think I am overstating the case, listen how the spirit of Wrede broods over a recent essay by Michael V. Fox in a recent edition of “The SBL Forum.” Fox writes:

Faith-based study has no place in academic scholarship, whether the object of study is the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or Homer. Faith-based study is a different realm of intellectual activity that can dip into Bible scholarship for its own purposes, but cannot contribute to it. . . . Faith-based study of the Bible certainly has its place—in synagogues, churches, and religious schools, where the Bible (and whatever other religious material one gives allegiance to) serves as a normative basis of moral inspiration or spiritual guidance. This kind of study is certainly important, but it is not scholarship. . . . The best thing for Bible appreciation is secular, academic, religiously-neutral hermeneutic.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Gabler said that the proper distinction between the historical and dogmatic tasks would ultimately strengthen the results of dogmatic theology, “Exactly thus will our theology be made more certain and more firm.” *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>38</sup>William Wrede, “The Tasks and Methods of ‘New Testament Theology,’” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter*, ed. Robert Morgan, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series 25 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1973), 69.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>Gerd Luedemann reflects this disjunction in his remarks after having lost his full teaching status at the University of Göttingen, “All I have claimed is that the pursuit of theology as an academic discipline should not be tied to the confession [of faith], and that if it is, it is not a true academic discipline.” Rob Simbeck, “Belief vs. Academic Freedom,” *The Washington Post*, 6 April 2002, B09.

<sup>41</sup>Michael V. Fox, “Bible Scholarship and Faith-Based Study: My View,” *The SBL Forum* (February/March 2006): <http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=490> (Accessed 16 March 2006).



I am arguing that Wrede and his successors have misconstrued the task of biblical theology. What the biblical texts have joined together, Wrede and his successors have put asunder. Proceeding from the dogma of Enlightenment theories of knowledge, Wrede urges a disinterested, objective, historical inquiry into the writings of the New Testament in order to understand the history to which those writings give testimony.<sup>42</sup> For many modern practitioners, therefore, understanding this history is the end game of biblical theology. All that matters is the descriptive task of laying out what the Bible meant without any concern for what the Bible means.

This conception of the task, however, fails because there is in fact no such thing as a “disinterested” inquiry into the New Testament. Adolf Schlatter’s insight on this score is instructive,

The word with which the New Testament confronts us intends to be believed, and so rules out once and for all any sort of neutral treatment. As soon as the historian sets aside or brackets the question of faith, he is making his concern with the New Testament and his presentation of it into a radical and total polemic against it.<sup>43</sup>

Schlatter continues, therefore, “The Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the spirit in which it was written,”<sup>44</sup> or else a proper understanding of the New Testament is impossible.

The whole tenor of the New Testament witness is that God has acted decisively in history in the person of Jesus Christ. The New Testament presents the event of the incarnation as the ultimate revelatory act of God (John 1:17 and Heb 1:3 are typical). Indeed Jesus is portrayed as the very *logos* of God (John 1:1–18). It is impossible to imagine anything but that the authors of the New Testament intended to communicate words about God (theology) through their witness to the incarnation (history). Therefore, to posit a disjunction between the theological task and the historical one is to kick against the goads of the authors’ clear intention in chronicling the incarnation—that God might make Himself known in history. Consequently, to separate the task of history from the enterprise of theology is to introduce a disjunction where the biblical writers never meant

<sup>42</sup>The first few pages of Wrede’s essay are rife with the language of defunct Enlightenment epistemological premises, “self-evident” (4 times), “logical,” “objectively,” “science,” “facts,” and “disinterested concern for knowledge.” William Wrede, “The Tasks and Methods of ‘New Testament Theology,’” 68–70.

<sup>43</sup>Adolf Schlatter, “The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics,” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, ed. Morgan, 122.

<sup>44</sup>This principle is attributed to the early church father, Jerome. Peter Stuhlmacher, *How To Do Biblical Theology* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995), 66, 70n24.



for one to exist. This separation also introduces a disjunction which would have been strange indeed to Christian theologians who have been studying the Bible through the long history of the church. As Wright has recently noted,

Though we often think of . . . writers like Origen, Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine—and, much later, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin—as great “theologians,” they would almost certainly have seen themselves first and foremost as Bible teachers. Indeed, the modern distinction between “theology” and ‘biblical studies’ would never have occurred to any of them.<sup>45</sup>

Any valid biblical theology must have an eye to the integration of the tasks of history *and* theology, of exegesis *and* synthesis, and of biblical theology *and* dogmatic theology. This is precisely why Al Mohler has recently commented,

A resistance to systematic theology reflects a lack of discipline or a lack of confidence in the consistency of God’s Word. We are to set out the great doctrines of the faith as revealed in the Bible—and do so in a way that helps to bring all of God’s truth into a comprehensive focus. The preacher must be ready to answer the great questions of his age from the authoritative treasury of God’s truth.<sup>46</sup>

In other words, there is an implicit questioning of the Bible’s authority and sufficiency when biblical scholars conceive of their task as purely descriptive. Yes, a part of our task is descriptive, but it is also theological. There are indications that more evangelicals are coming around to this position,<sup>47</sup> but more work needs to be done.

<sup>45</sup>Wright, *The Last Word*, 4. Consider also Blaising, “Faithfulness,” 14: “What our situation actually calls for here, the mission impossible assignment, if we choose to accept, is to go back to a common affirmation of the inerrant written Word of God alone and on that basis do what the earliest church and the Reformers set as their task, and that is speaking the truth in love, to strive for the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.”

<sup>46</sup>R. Albert Mohler, “Let Him Who Boasts Boast In This’—Knowing God, Studying God’s Word, Knowing God’s Truth, and Serving God’s People,” January 22, 2006. [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2006-01-22](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-01-22) (Accessed 23 January 2006).

<sup>47</sup>For example, see the essays in Joel B. Green and Max Turner, eds., *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies & Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Likewise, Grant R. Osborne has recently noted, “It is now widely recognized that theology is a partner and a path to history . . . The attempt to bifurcate history and theology and to see a dichotomy between the facts and the story line is unfortunate and wrong.”

Andreas Köstenberger recently opined, “Too many of us write our books essentially for our academic peers or the larger academic community rather than for students or people in the churches.”<sup>48</sup> I agree with Köstenberger’s assessment and would add that if biblical scholars in particular were to come to grips with the implications of sufficiency, we might find time to write and publish works that address the church, and not just other scholars in our disciplines. D.A. Carson is exemplary in this respect. Here is an outstanding biblical scholar who not only makes significant contributions to his field, but who also who writes and publishes on pressing theological issues facing the church. His books on postmodernism<sup>49</sup> and the emerging church<sup>50</sup> are cases in point. The Emerging Movement is an entirely new departure in evangelicalism that is addressing questions of great theological import: the atonement, community and ecclesiology, post-modernism and missional cultural engagement, and the new perspective on Paul, just to name a few. In addition to making solid contributions to his field, Carson labors to bring a biblical theology to bear on these important topics.

I think this is the kind of model that we need to pursue as biblical scholars. To be sure, time is short, and we must prioritize our work. But if those we teach and the churches we serve never see us giving our time and talent to addressing the pressing issues of the day, issues that are unambiguously theological, what will they conclude about the Bible? If they see us merely describing its contents and never see us applying its message in a theologically coherent way, they will likely do the same. They will see us as people who give lip-service to inerrancy without appropriating the doctrine’s necessary entailments. It should be no surprise to us that preaching has become so biblically and theologically vacuous when the preachers’ teachers in the seminaries set such poor examples in the way that they treat the biblical text. If we are not passionate about the inerrancy and sufficiency of the Scripture in our work, then why should they be?

The connection that I am making between inerrancy and sufficiency is precisely what Wayne Grudem argued in his 1999 presidential address to ETS.<sup>51</sup> The reason he asked the question of integrity is because he believed

Grant Osborne, “Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 676, 688).

<sup>48</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Setting the Agenda for Evangelical Scholarship to 2050: New Testament,” Biblical Foundations, <http://www.biblicalfoundations.org>. (Accessed 16 March 2006).

<sup>49</sup>D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

<sup>50</sup>D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>51</sup>Wayne Grudem, “Do We Act As If We Really Believe That ‘The Bible Alone, and the Bible in Its Entirety, Is The Word of God Written?’” *JETS* 43 (2000): 5–26.

that there are necessary, practical implications for how we do scholarship if this inerrant Word is in fact from God. He summarizes the implications in six suggestions:

Suggestion #1: Consider the possibility that God may want evangelical scholars to write more books and articles that tell the church what the whole Bible teaches us about some current problem.

Suggestion #2: Consider the possibility that God wants the church to discover answers and reach consensus on more problems, and wants us to play a significant role in that process.

Suggestion #3: Consider the possibility that God wants evangelical scholars to speak with a unified voice on certain issues before the whole church and the world.

Suggestion #4: Consider the possibility that God may want many of us to pay less attention to the writings of non-evangelical scholars.

Suggestion #5: Consider the possibility that God may want us to quote his Word explicitly in private discussions and in public debates with non-Christians.

Suggestion #6: Consider the possibility that the world as we know it may change very quickly.<sup>52</sup>

To be sure, some of Grudem's suggestions would not go over well in the secular guild of biblical studies—at least insofar as the secularists think that there is no place for the construction of theology in what should be a purely descriptive discipline. But sometimes faithfulness to God requires us to challenge the assumptions of the secular guild—even when those assumptions might cost us advancement and prestige among scholarly elites. So, for instance, it is not just our task to describe what Paul thought about pederasty or Gentile homosexuality. We must bring that message to bear upon current debates about gender and sexuality. Likewise, we cannot pretend that there aren't profound ecclesiological ramifications for us in the Bible's teaching on the role of men and women in ministry. We must bring the apostolic testimony to the contemporary debates. We have an

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 26.

obligation to show our churches and indeed the world that God's written Word is sufficient to address these issues.

### Conclusion

Is inerrancy enough? It is not enough if inerrancy produces merely a slogan on our lips without a calling on our lives. If we all affirm inerrancy, then we must also affirm the absolute authority of scripture. As Craig Blaising has exhorted, "Our call is ultimately, for all the work we do, a simple one. May we be faithful in the work of the Word."<sup>53</sup> This authoritative Word declares itself to be wholly and completely sufficient for our lives, our scholarship, and our churches. Let us embark upon journey of scholarship that is guided by a recognition of a holy understanding of our vocation. God forbid that inerrancy should ever become a shibboleth among us. But may we ever be learning, writing, publishing *coram deo*—in the face of God.

<sup>53</sup>Blaising, "Faithfulness," 16.

## *Book Reviews*

### **Biblical Studies**

***A Biblical History of Israel.* By Iain Provan, V. Phillips Long, and Tremper Longman III. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. 426 + xiv pages. Softcover, \$34.95.**

Very little will distinguish one Bible-based history of Israel from another unless that history courageously addresses the current scholarly debate that could potentially place the validity of its own existence into question. This history accepts that challenge. Israel's ancient past (alleged past for many contemporary scholars) comprises the second of two parts or, roughly, two-thirds of the book. Part one addresses the question, "Can a history of Israel, strongly relying on the Bible, be formed so as to be considered viable by the larger scholarly community?" Though this book cannot be considered the final answer in what has become an intricate philosophical debate, it does provide tangible weight to maximalist arguments, thus keeping the skeptics honest.

Part one outweighs the rest of the book in importance because of the necessity of establishing the relevance of any history of Israel. A history of Israel does not stand on its own merit anymore. Instead, in light of current debates on the historicity of the primary sources, a comprehensive apology must be offered as well. The first five chapters concisely address the concerns of the authors about attempting such a history in light of K.W. Whitelam's demand that it is "time [to] formally reject the agenda and constraints of 'biblical history'" (3).

Each contributor brings to the discussion a background in Old Testament studies that reflects his interest in the debate. From their studies on ancient Israelite historiography and their collected commentaries on narrative texts from the Ancient Near East, each contributes substantive experience as historian, professor, researcher, and author.

The introduction by the authors reveals the scope of the book at the conclusion to part one (chap. 5). It is an honest appraisal of the perspective of the book. These are Old Testament scholars who happen to be historians as well. They regard the Bible to be Scripture as well as a source for historical data and, therefore, recognize that theological convictions will arise in their writing.

Though the biblical texts are rightfully considered to be primary sources, other secondary sources are given considerable (in some cases, equal) weight in relevance. These include non-biblical literary sources, non-literary archaeological sources and, to a lesser degree, anthropological and sociological considerations.

In part two, Provan et al purposefully link their history of Israel to the apologetics in the first half by structuring that history around the evidence that supports it. Chapters one through three paint a recent history of historiographical scholarship that includes input from scholars such as Whitelam, J.A. Scoggin and works by J.M. Miller and J. Hayes. In chapter four, Long addresses the issue of assessing historic value based on literary genre by presenting narrative forms as a useful and necessary vessel for history.

Chapter six recalls the patriarchal period and candidly admits that the sole source is Genesis. Chapter seven recounts the various scholarly models for Canaanite settlement and cites extra-biblical sources: the Merneptah Stela and the Amarna Letters. Chapter eight's history explores the plausibility of an historical David. Chapters nine through eleven include mention of archaeological finds and additional literary sources that aid in the understanding of the later monarchy and the era of the divided kingdoms.

This book answers with a resounding *no!* the charge of the historical minimalists who insist that a proper history of Israel is impossible to attain due to lack of evidence. The authors argue logically that no historian worth his salt would throw out a primary source (and, in some cases the only source) due to some perceived, albeit minor, inconsistencies—a sacrifice that would leave him with virtually nothing. Instead, he would embrace it warmly as he would any source. It would only be questioned when challenged by other, more significantly reliable, sources. Instead of questioning the biblical record out-of-hand, Provan et al have demonstrated the rationale for up-front acceptance of biblical texts for understanding Israel's history.

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***The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31.* By Bruce K. Waltke. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. 589 pages. Hardcover, \$50.00.**

In this second volume of a two volume work on the book of Proverbs, Bruce K. Waltke, continues his discussion of this important book of the

Bible in a manner consistent with and based upon the excellent foundations for understanding the book he outlined in volume one. The chapters of Proverbs included in this volume include some of the most difficult to categorize texts in the book, as well as some of the better known sections. One would be hard pressed to find a Christian parent who is not familiar with Proverbs 22:6 or a Christian mother who has not received a Mother's Day card with at least a portion of Proverbs 31:10–31 quoted within it. As such, a text written by someone of Waltke's skill and expertise ought to be seen as a welcome reality to all who desire to move beyond popular misconceptions of texts in order to gain a deeper understanding of what a life lived before God actually entails.

The first several chapters of the book of Proverbs covered in this volume continue the genre of proverb that began in volume one of this commentary set. Therefore, if one is going to understand properly the nature of much of the argumentation going on in this volume, he should first visit the introductory discussions of volume one. The nature of these proverbial sayings as instructions for life is sometimes missed on those who would generally consign them to being merely easy to remember statements of truth. Conversely, they might be improperly applied by those who turn a genre of instruction into a list of promises being made by God. Waltke thoroughly and appropriately outlines the proper hermeneutical methodology when calling on his readers to interpret and apply these sayings in a manner that avoids either extreme. Furthermore, his treatment of the "Valiant Wife" of Proverbs 31 is handled quite admirably in its ancient Near Eastern context by noting not only the similarities with other such discussions, but more importantly its differences. The end result is a commentary that draws the reader to recognize the nature of the text as that which God would hold up as truly praiseworthy, across the millennia and in a variety of contexts.

As with the previous volume, Waltke seems sometimes to forget that not all of his readers have the depth of understanding of Hebrew that he possesses, though this is far less prevalent in this volume than in the previous. Nevertheless, this volume, like the first, represents an important evangelical perspective on the book of Proverbs and is a helpful addition to the library of anyone who wants a thorough understanding of the type of wisdom God would have us possess.

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***Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament.* Edited by Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 330 pages. Paperback. \$29.00.**

Without question, the issue addressed in this composition of articles is vital to the study of both the Old and New Testaments. The book is comprised of a compilation of articles presented at the 2003 Colloquium in New Testament, which was held at McMaster Divinity College. The organization is simple with an introduction by the editor, followed by ten chapters each from a different author, then a conclusion by Andreas Köstenberger, who contributes one of the earlier chapters and interacts with the other chapters in the conclusion.

The first two chapters are intended to be foundational to the discussion of the remaining eight. The first chapter, written by Daniel Stamps, addresses the general use of the Old Testament in the New. However, the author raises more questions than he is able to answer related to the wide range of approaches to understanding how the New Testament writers interpreted the Old Testament within their own contexts. He concludes rather benignly that the primary way the New Testament writers employed the use of the Old Testament was as a rhetorical device.

In the second chapter Timothy McLay gets somewhat bogged down with trying to determine the nature of the canon available to the New Testament writers. He believes that any reference to a “biblical text” in the early church is anachronistic. Later in the book, his contention that there was no “unanimity regarding what particular books were considered Scripture in the Early Church” (43) is later questioned in the conclusion (261).

The four chapters related to the use of the Old Testament in the Gospels each address how biblical quotations are generally introduced and how they are used by the authors. The chapter on the use of the Old Testament in John, written by Paul Miller, would have been strengthened by an emphasis on Jesus’ use of the Old Testament. Rather, the writer spends much of the chapter attempting to explain that “the true meaning of scripture cannot be found within the text itself” (131), and concludes that the text of Scripture is “completed, superseded, and even replaced by the living words of Jesus” (131), which seems circular in nature given the fact that we have received those words from Scripture.

The strengths of the two chapters on Paul’s use of the Old Testament by James Aageson and Sylvia Keesmaat are their emphases on the need for the practical application of Paul’s message for the church today. However, Aageson’s argument is weakened by his contention that readers today have license to interpret Scripture in the same way as Paul (158). In the conclusion Köstenberger rightly questions this claim based on Paul’s authority as an Apostle (285). Additionally, and more fundamentally, it

should be emphasized that Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Aageson's conclusion that Paul's experiences were "as important in the interpretive enterprise as were the texts of Scripture" (158) carelessly elevates experience to the same level as the authority of Scripture.

An entire chapter in the book, written by Kurt Richardson, is dedicated to James' use of Job as an example of faith. Although the case is well made that Job serves as an exemplar of James' teaching on faithfulness amidst suffering, the chapter seems to overstate the impact of Job on the book of James.

The final chapter was prepared subsequent to the colloquium by Köstenberger and attempts to cover the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament books of I and II Timothy, James, Hebrews, Jude, I and II Peter, I, II, and III John, and Revelation. He does a good job summarizing these uses within each book but clearly felt constrained by the amount of material and the attempt to "close some of [the] gap" (294) in areas not previously addressed. Consequently, the mass of material in this chapter is both too much to be instructive for the discussion and out of proportion to the other chapters.

Köstenberger is also the author of the conclusion. He does a good job interacting with the previous articles; however, the chapter would have been strengthened by utilizing a different author than one from the previous chapters, which prevented any response to his own chapter. Moreover, in the conclusion, he raises questions of several of the chapters to which the authors of those chapters are not given a chance to respond.

Overall, the book provides a helpful addition to the study of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. It effectively calls for further study and hopefully stimulates greater interest in rightly dividing the Word of God.

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***Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony.* By Richard Bauckham. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 538 +xii pages. Hardcover, \$32.00.**

Richard Bauckham—prolific writer, prominent scholar, and Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland—presents a refreshing and formidable case for the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the four canonical Gospels. This book successfully goes against the grain of most New Testament scholarly writings today and answers such common assertions as: (1) the historical Jesus is hidden in the

Gospels and must be dug out by experts, (2) there are many inaccuracies and anachronisms in the Synoptic Gospels, and (3) John's Gospel is totally unreliable.

Bauckham carefully builds upon the work of Swedish scholar Samuel Byrskog, who claims the Gospel writers followed the accepted practice of Greco-Roman historians. They believed the best source for writing history was to be an actual participant in the event (direct autopsy); however, this situation was often not possible. So, interviewing eyewitnesses (indirect autopsy) was the next best practice (8–11, 27, 479–80).

The subject is well researched and documented. Bauckham carefully walks his readers through his inductive, logical study, amply giving seventeen helpful tables when needed (ix). He strongly advocates his case; yet, he keeps the proper scholarly hedge to avoid discussion-stopping dogmatism. He deals kindly with scholars with whom he disagrees (e.g. 246–48, 267, 308). The footnotes are ample, as are the four appendices.

The strengths of this book are its contributions to New Testament studies through some strong, positive assertions rarely heard in New Testament scholarship today. First, Bauckham validates the accuracy and importance of eyewitness testimony in the Gospels—which are the primary sources for at least Mark and John. He gives a helpful list and description of the most reliable kinds of eyewitness testimony (330–35). Second, he posits a short period of time between the historical Jesus and the writing of the Gospels—well within the lifetime of living eyewitnesses—a belief many modern scholars sadly reject (8, 240). Third, he clarifies the early Christian preference for oral *history* (living eyewitness testimony) rather than oral *tradition* (community memory: a misunderstanding postulated by many scholars today and a cornerstone of form criticism) (30–34). Further, by refining Birger Gerhardsson's work on memorization (249–52) and Kenneth Bailey's idea of formal controlled tradition, Bauckham affirms the control of eyewitness testimony (by access to the living eyewitnesses, memorization, and designated teachers within each community) as well as accounts for the known variations (280–87). Fourth, he boldly asserts that harmonization *can* be a viable solution to explain certain Synoptic variants, such as Thaddeus and Judas the son of James being the same person (99–101).

No doubt many conservative readers (as well as this reviewer) disagree with Bauckham's contention that John the Elder instead of John the son of Zebedee wrote the Gospel of John (358–71). He claims the Beloved Disciple, aka John the Elder, was the author of John and a member of a wider group of disciples than the Twelve (16–17, 467–68). His arguments are interesting but not convincing. However, one should not miss the important point that Bauckham believes an apostolic eyewitness

of Jesus *did* write this Gospel—a position disputed by many current New Testament scholars. Bauckham's solid case for the truthfulness and veracity of John's Gospel—evidenced by its eyewitness testimony—is much needed in scholarly circles today.

Weaknesses in the book are few. There appears to be too much reliance upon the veracity of Papias' statements (12–37, 202–39, 412–37), a sometimes dubious source that is now extant only through Eusebius. Bauckham admits even Eusebius did not trust Papias (13)! Second, too much is made of the alleged inclusio of eyewitness testimony in Mark, John (124–29), and Luke—the latter instance being the least convincing (130–32). Yet, this hypothesis deserves further study, as does the revival of Cuthbert Turner's interesting claim that the plural-to-singular narrative device with an internal focalization (point of view) in Mark is a literary tool indicating an eyewitness source (156–64).

Bauckham's book has stirred up the strongholds of form and redaction criticism, and rightly so. His strong stand for living eyewitness testimony in the Gospels is dearly needed.

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***Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah.***  
**By Walter Brueggemann. Edited by Patrick D. Miller. Minneapolis:**  
**Augsburg Fortress, 2006. 255 pages. Hardcover, \$35.00.**

Reading Walter Brueggemann's latest work on the prophecy of Jeremiah is at times inspiring and at other times frustrating. The book, edited by Patrick Miller, is a collection of some of his "older" journal articles and often reads more like lecture notes than written articles. Further, at \$35.00, the book seems somewhat overpriced.

Some of the positive aspects of the volume are its discussion of recent scholarship of the book of Jeremiah, an explanation of the role of Jeremiah as a bridge between oral and written prophecy, the emphasis on the initiation of the message by God, and the role of hurt and hope in the prophet's message.

The strength of the book is Brueggemann's articulate and imaginative style. However, his prose often subtly undermines the text. For example, readers may marvel as he picturesquely highlights the person and work of the prophet Jeremiah. Throughout the book, he describes the prophet's life, his context, his message, his difficulties, and his coming to terms with God's call. The value of this description is Brueggemann's emphasis that the message of the prophet demands and depends on the context in which

it was delivered. However, that strong affirmation is deflated by the author's conclusion that Jeremiah was not necessarily a real person. In fact, he concludes that "any historical person of Jeremiah is in any case unrecoverable and that what we likely have in the text is an imaginative literary construct of the person and the prophet presented for interpretive reasons" (18–19).

Another example of a seeming contradiction in the work is his critique at one point of those who dismiss the historicity of the book claiming that they "loosen the text from history" (59). However, at another point, Brueggemann, who clearly espouses a minimalist view of the authorship of the book, is critical of those who are held "hostage" by their attempt to make the work historical.

In another place, Brueggemann is critical of those who dismiss the book as "unreadable," (67–68) yet he later concludes that the book is "marked by a host of uncertainties that preclude a 'readable' commentary" (86).

One final example of a seeming contradiction in the book relates to the author's view of the contemporary application of the message of Jeremiah. In a few places, he suggests that the message is applicable to everyone today. However, in his most extended discussion of the book's contemporaneity, he asks the question, "Can this prophetic faith rooted in old treasured texts be credible in our situation?" (81) He cites four scenarios which, if true, render the message inapplicable, yet subsequently seems to avoid his own question in any concluding fashion.

On a couple of occasions in the text, Brueggemann attempts to give a definition of the role of a prophet. One of them lacks a key ingredient of prophetic utterances and the other seems too stereotyped to cover the range of prophets described in Scripture. In the first definition, he characterizes the prophets as "a series of human speakers . . . who were emboldened by holiness and who conceived of scenarios of possibility that 'the rulers of this age' had declared to be impossible" (77). The problem with this definition is that it makes the message one of the prophets' own conception, rather than of divine origin. In the author's second attempt to define the prophetic role, he states that a prophet is one "who stands outside the mainstream of public power and exposes what's going on" (199). This is certainly true of Jeremiah; however, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, and Daniel could hardly be described as "outside the mainstream of public power" (199).

At one point in the book, Brueggemann carelessly suggests a hierarchy in the church that he may not have intended. He begins a concluding paragraph with the sentence, "I don't care whether you're a pastor, a student, a lay leader, or just an ordinary Christian" (198). I hope he does not intend to suggest that pastors, students, and lay leaders are more important

or less ordinary than those who do not perform these functions. It is more likely just a poorly worded sentence.

Undoubtedly the weakest chapter in the book relates to his espousal of a negative view of American consumerism and militarism. The section seems over-stated and forced into the text for political purposes. Moreover, it is not the subject of the text he uses to support his views. The text is talking about the failure of priests and prophets, which he applies to this country's business and military leaders. It is a disappointing and misplaced polemic.

Overall, the book lacks logical progression, seems poorly edited, is at times redundant due to the fact that it is a collection of previously written articles, and at other times appears contradictory.

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***Logos Bible Software, Scholar's Library: Gold. Series X. Version 3.0.***  
**Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, \$1,379.95**

Logos completely revised its user interface as well as its entire software from the ground up for the Libronix Digital Library System (LDLS) Series X, Version 3, and the results are spectacular. Scholar's Library: Gold—Logos' premier collection—is truly the gold standard in electronic Bible study. Now more user friendly for the novice, faster for the speed searcher, and with more tools and books than ever before, Scholar's Library: Gold is a powerful program and an excellent buy for users of all levels of proficiency.

With Version 3, Logos fixed their primary weakness of previous versions: slow searches. The Bible Speed Search tool provides a swift search on par with other major Bible software systems. However, other searches, such as the Exegetical Guide, still take some time—understandable considering the abundance of information they collect. An easy way to reduce search time is to create custom collections to search.

Scholar's Library: Gold is an excellent choice of Bible study software for pastors, ministers, Bible teachers, students, and lay people. Why? It offers numerous, completely searchable electronic books. It is the largest Bible software collection available from Logos (or anywhere else), and it contains over 700 titles which Logos says cost \$11,700 in the print editions. It would far exceed the length of this review to list these books, but in addition to 23 English, 16 Greek, and 4 Hebrew Bibles, it contains a number of Bible commentaries (including the NAC and NIGTC), dictionaries, lexicons, and other resources, including numerous books on



apologetics, archeology, Christian living, ethics, leadership, ministry, prayer, preaching, and small groups. Owning these books in electronic form saves approximately 75 feet of shelf space! Their commitment to continue to add resources to their product line ensures the LDLS will be a viable and up-to-date Bible software system for years to come. The Scholars Library: Gold electronic library is space saving, completely portable, and totally searchable—a winning combination.

Whether one is a novice to computers or to Bible study, Logos allows one to dig deeply. Starting on the home page, there are automated, customizable daily Bible readings, devotional readings, and prayer lists. There are three Bible study starters that guide the non-specialist through simple steps that dig into many of the Bible study tools: Study Passage, Study Word, or Study Topic.

The Study Passage has a fuzzy logic program that tries to guess what passage the user wants by matching what is typed with pericope (paragraph) headings. It is quite helpful if one is able to remember a name or a major detail in a pericope. What would help this tool is to add key phrases to the search base.

Biblical People is enjoyable to use and quite helpful. Clicking on any name in a biblical text provides a genealogical/relationship diagram. However, some of the data needs to be expanded. For James the brother of Jesus, it lists Jude and Jesus, but it does not list the two other brothers (Matt 13:55), nor does it list Mary and Joseph as his parents.

Parallel Passages is a tool that is quite adaptable and beneficial. One can select a passage and view it in *A Harmony of the Gospels* by Robertson; however, Logos can insert the text in any Bible translation text Logos has, including the NA 27. Or, one can look at the passage in *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* by Aland and insert the NASB text. These new combinations do not exist in print form.

Of course, nothing can replace the systematic learning of Hebrew and Greek. However, for people who have not learned these languages, Logos can get them closer to the languages than ever thought possible. Tools such as the English-Greek reverse interlinears, Bible Word Study report (which gives a useful, searchable graph of Greek or Hebrew word usage), and instant Keylinking (which gives much information by simply clicking on any Hebrew, Greek, or English word) give powerful research information to the novice in a few quick and easy steps.

The intermediate user finds a wealth of adaptable tools, including the Notes tool and the Visual Markup Tools (for highlighting and marking text). The Exegetical Guide displays much information on every word of a Bible passage automatically after one simply types in the Bible reference. In addition to commentaries and dictionaries, there are original language



grammars, lexicons, syntactical visualizations, and even text critical apparatuses (1977 BHS for Hebrew and 1894 Tischendorf for Greek—unfortunately, the NA 27 and UBS 4 apparatuses are available only with an add-on). Lexicons and Bible texts with critical apparatus in Logos provide a feature not possible in print editions: the many abbreviations and Scripture references are hot spots.

The Vocabulary List tool is beneficial for learning biblical languages. It allows the creation of a list of Greek or Hebrew words and definitions from any Bible book or section of Bible text. One can sort the list by frequency or alphabetically, then save the list for review or print vocabulary cards. A helpful improvement would allow the learner to go through the vocabulary list and re-sort it according to how well he knows the words.

Scholars Library: Gold makes good use of the Internet for research. First, the Remote Library Tool is a helpful way to access the catalogues of 7 national libraries and 52 theological schools to retrieve bibliographic references. Then Logos can export them in a choice of 10 bibliographic styles, such as APA, Chicago, MLA, SBL, and Turabian. However, the web addresses need to be updated more often—23 of the theological libraries and 2 national libraries came back with error messages. Yet, the 29 theological and 5 national libraries with good web addresses were more than sufficient for a beneficial search. All of the theological schools were English-speaking and most of them were American. It would help to add some schools from Germany and France considering their impact on theological studies. Second, a quick click opens the Perseus Digital Library, a growing, online database of Greek and Latin words used in classical contexts—good for comparing the biblical use against the common, everyday use of a word.

The Sentence Diagram tool allows one to work with the biblical text to make and save grammatical line diagrams or block diagrams (a new feature for this tool). Personal diagramming can be invaluable in sermon preparation—especially for determining the main points in the Bible text. The Morphological Search and Graphical Query are both highly versatile tools for searching for words and patterns in specific morphologies in a selected text or Bible book range.

The standout feature of Scholars Library: Gold is the Syntax Search tool, which no other Bible software program offers at this time. This tool opens the door to go beyond just morphological searches (for word forms) to the syntax level (how words are used in a sentence, such as subject or direct object). Thus, one can now create a search with four layers: syntactical criteria, semantic range, morphological criteria, and lexical information. After creating this powerful search, one can export the results. The only weakness is that syntactical tagging is somewhat subjective. So far Logos has one Hebrew (Andersen-Forbes) and two Greek texts (Open Text and

Lexham, though the latter is currently available for just 13 New Testament books) with syntactical tagging.

The Scholars Library: Gold is an amazing and powerful tool, but as with most software today there is no user's guide in print form. Unfortunately, with Logos' voluminous scanning of books, there are inevitable and occasional errors in English (e.g., throughout the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series, the old English æ is rendered as a Greek mu), Hebrew (e.g. reverse words and gobbledygook in Schaff, *History of the Church* 1.1.9), and Greek (e.g., Tertullian, *On Baptism* 1, ICQUS rather than IXΘΥΣ). No doubt these errors will be fixed in future releases. A nice improvement would also be to have the citation from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* in the proper form, such as Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.2, rather than citing the entire volume of *ANF*.

Scholars Library: Gold is a wonderful, highly versatile electronic Bible study program, complete with a large library of helpful resource books. Although the price is hefty, it is still a bargain considering the print cost of those books and the powerful study tools. I highly recommend it.

The minimum system requirements are 500MHz Pentium III (1 GHz Pentium III recommended), 192 MB RAM (512 MB recommended), CD-Rom or DVD drive, 550 MB hard drive (less size needed if running the files off of the CD or DVD, but this is not recommended), Microsoft Windows 98 or later, screen resolution 800x600 (1024x768 recommended), and Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 or later. This reviewer used a laptop with an Intel Core 2 Duo @ 2.2GHz processor, 2 GHz RAM, 111 GB hard drive, and both XP and Vista (on different computers).

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### Theological Studies

***Inspiration of the Bible.* By B.H. Carroll. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1930. Reprint, Volume 1 of the Southwestern Library of Centennial Classics, Fort Worth, 2008. 122 pages. Hardcover, \$100.00 for set.**

In celebrating the Centennial of Southwestern Seminary it is quite appropriate that a selection of the Seminary's classic works should begin with a volume by B.H. Carroll. Not only founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1908, he was also a scholar, professor and a pastor. In the prefaces to his book *Inspiration of the Bible*, Carroll is lauded as one of the greats of his time, having earned commendations from both George

W. Truett and L.R. Scarborough. As a Bible professor for many years at Waco and at Southwestern he, in both the pulpit and the classroom, taught the truths of the Bible which he believed to be inerrant, infallible, and inspired. As indicated by the title, the last of these is the discussion he takes up in this present work.

Before a summary is given of the work itself, one should note some of the arguments Carroll was combating when he wrote this book. The ideas of evolution, higher criticism, and neo-orthodoxy all attacked, in their own way, the verbal inspiration of Scripture. In defense of the Bible he cherished, he penned this book to clarify for the academy and the churches alike that the Bible, God's Holy Word, is in fact inspired.

Carroll sets the work in an inclusio of the article from the New Hampshire Confession of Faith on the Holy Scriptures, "We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired," (15, 122), thus setting the tone for the entirety of the work. The first chapter, "Inspiration of the Scriptures as Believed by Baptists," begins his defense for believing in inspiration from the Bible itself, citing such passages as Hebrews 4:12 and II Timothy 3:16-17. Here he also launches an attack against a neo-orthodox view of the Word calling it "fool-talk" (20).

Chapter two is concerned with looking at the arguments of the higher critics declaring that for the first time the attack on the Bible has come from within the church rather than from "heathens" or "infidels" (28). Seeing these scholars claiming to be working from science, he calls them into question as mere speculatives who daily offer different opinions. After showing their error, he buttresses his argument with more Scripture and gives a formal definition for inspiration (37).

Chapter three begins a series of chapters that look at the method of inspiration more in depth, citing seven examples of God "inspiring" or breathing out upon something. In chapter four he looks at Luke's account of the gospel and indicates how Luke itself is inspired, closing the chapter by contrasting the exposition of Spurgeon, who led many men to repentance, against the higher critics, who led few.

Chapter five is concerned with analyzing the method a bit more closely by citing examples of the text where evil men or beasts spoke. Carroll claims that in each of these instances the participants were used by the Spirit, but were not themselves inspired, Caiaphas being an example. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the Spirit does inspire words, but not in a pure dictation. The Spirit inspires men to write words according to their own style.

Chapter six looks to further difficulties in the text, especially as it seeks to differentiate between illumination and illustration. Chapter seven takes, arguably one of the most difficult books of the Bible, Daniel, and

demonstrates how it too is a product of inspiration rather than a later composed myth. Finally, the last chapter not only summarizes the thesis thus far but also addresses the issue of science and the Bible concluding that the two, when one looks at science rightly, are in complete harmony with one another.

Carroll's work is short and simple enough for the average layman to read, yet its simplicity does not jeopardize its depth of subject matter. Throughout the book one can find allusions to Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, which demonstrate Carroll's scholarship, as well as illustrative sayings that resonate with the masses at large, demonstrating his desire to be connected to the churches and not only the academy. This work not only establishes a concise view of inspiration in the Bible, but gives a glance at the historic Baptist pastor theologian who founded and prolonged the tradition of Southern Baptists.

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***Baptist Identities: International Studies from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries.* Edited by Ian M. Randall, Toivo Pilli, and Anthony R. Cross. Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 19. Milton Keynes, UK; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006. 357 + xx pages. Softcover, \$38.00.**

This book is a compilation of papers presented at the third International Conference on Baptist Studies held in Prague. Consequently there is a great diversity of both subject matter and locale. It discusses aspects of the Baptist experience from the middle of the seventeenth century to the present day. Baptists from the Philippines, India, Zimbabwe, Latvia, France, and Germany all give expression to their understanding of Baptist identity, alongside better known formulations from Britain and North America.

A valuable aspect of the book is the insight it provides into Baptist history and theology in a large number of contexts. While knowledgeable American readers will doubtless know about Hanserd Knollys and the early Particular Baptists in England or William B. Johnson and the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention, far fewer will know about Julius Köbner and pioneering Baptists in nineteenth century Germany or Godhula and the founding of Baptist churches among the Naga people of India. Some authors endeavor to tell the entire history of Baptists in a particular nation or area. Within this book can be found good introductions to the history of Baptists in Wales, Latvia, Australia, Zimbabwe, and

the Maritime Provinces of Canada. Other authors examine the currently evolving state of Baptist theology and identity in a specific context. One can learn how Baptists in France have responded to the growth of the charismatic movement, how Filipino Baptists shape much of their identity around worship practices, or even how one Scottish Baptist church has called pastors. Yet other authors delineate the impact of an individual on Baptist identity. Alexander Campbell is examined to see how Baptists formulated their identity in response to him, while consideration is given to Walter Rauschenbusch's thoughts on what it means to be Baptist. Finally, some authors engage a particular historical issue such as Baptist devotional practices in eighteenth century England, developing concepts of religious liberty in the nineteenth century, or Baptist responses to the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of the 1950s.

From a historical perspective, the book can be a mixed bag. Most of the authors are conscientious and cautious historians who are trying to draw out what different Baptists believed and how that impacted their identity. There is a particular effort by many to draw on the larger cultural context of a given nation and examine how Baptist identities were changed by it. For example, Sébastien Fath considers the historical and sociological context of French Baptists before examining the relationship of different Baptist communities to the charismatic movement (78–83). A thoughtful consideration of the relationship between the extra-theological forces of society and culture and theological development is commendable. Students of Baptist history and theology will find many excellent examples of such research in this book. Unfortunately, not every writer manages to conceal their own biases. Kenneth Roxburgh uses the supposed theological openness of William B. Johnson to challenge the current theological direction of the Southern Baptist Convention (152). William Pitts gives a detailed case study of a Southern Baptist church moving in a progressive direction by ordaining female deacons (199–210). Li Li praises the International Mission Board for its efforts in China while Henry Mugabe expresses frustration with IMB policies in Zimbabwe where it has not yet allowed Zimbabweans to gain control of significant mission assets (253, 305, 310). However, most of the authors do not venture beyond describing what their fellow Baptists have believed or currently believe to begin describing what certain Baptists should believe.

More troubling than the historical perspective offered by some of the authors is the attitude toward culture that is too often exhibited. Some authors reflect the idea that there is a trans-cultural biblically-based essence of Baptists, although its exact expression in different cultures can be highly varied. Others, however, take a more accommodating approach to culture. Important points of belief and praxis are defined by cultural norms,

with very little critical reflection. While it is undoubtedly true that the larger cultural context can play a major role in the self-understanding of people and their consequent religious identity, it is also true that a failure to examine critically one's culture in light of biblical teaching can lead one far away from a biblical faith. Baptists are no exception and a few of the authors seem dangerously close to falling into this trap.

Despite the shortcomings of a few, this remains an excellent book. It approaches the complex subject of Baptist identity from a variety of angles that is difficult to find elsewhere. The individual studies will be valuable to researchers and some can serve as introductions to entire fields of research. As a whole, the book will provide students of Baptist history and theology a broad understanding of the dynamics found among Baptists around the world. That in itself commends it.

David Erickson

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***A Concise History of Christian Thought. Revised and Expanded. Edited by Tony Lane. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006. 336 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.***

Tony Lane, professor of historical theology and director of research at the London School of Theology, has produced a comprehensive overview spanning Christian thought, beginning with the background of the earliest church fathers and progressing through the twentieth century. This work builds upon and is an expansion of an earlier work by Lane under a different title. The work that Lane has done shows his commitment to studying the past "in order to understand the present" and "in order to escape the present" (1).

The book is structured to move throughout the history of the church by discussing the primary players, movements, and events that have affected Christian thought. Lane does a commendable job of connecting the dots between these players, movements, and events. The result for the reader is more of an overall progression of Christian thought, instead of disconnected snapshot portraits of persons and events. This interplay between the actors and the stage is seen throughout the work as Lane has placed asterisks in the text by those names or events that have their own article in the book. The first section of the book covers the church of the fathers until 500. Parts two and three of the book cover the Eastern tradition from 500 and the Mediaeval West from 500, respectively. Part four of the book covers the period of the Reformation, which Lane places between 1500 and 1800, and the final section covers Christian thought from the year 1800 to the present.



Several strengths of Lane's work should be commended. First of all, his inclusions are numerous and varied. There are well over one hundred articles that cover persons in addition to the numerous articles on councils, confessions, and movements. Lane does well to introduce his subjects by letting them speak for themselves, as he includes primary selections and references throughout the work. All works written originally in a language other than English are referenced using their English title along with the original classical reference and date of the work. Another strength of the book is the depth to which Lane covers the subjects. The interconnected nature of the presentation points to Lane's extensive research. Lane shows that concise does not have to mean shallow and rudimentary.

One recommendation that this reviewer has regarding Lane's work is the addition of an index. While the asterisks are helpful in indicating those subjects that have their own article, there is not an index showing on what pages each subject appears. An index would only add to the interconnected nature of Lane's work. The book is overall a good introduction to Christian thought through the centuries. It would be a good inclusion as a required text in an introductory church history course. The beginning student will be challenged by the breadth of information but will get a picture of the themes which have affected the church's history. This work can surely be the foundation to spur students to more specific studies on those themes that are introduced. The book also has value as a quick reference guide for the student or layperson, since he can go directly to the article on the particular subject in which he is interested. Tony Lane's *A Concise History of Christian Thought* is to be commended and would be a good addition to the library of student, pastor, and layperson alike.

Steven L. James

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***Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions.* By Wayne Grudem. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006. 284 pages. Paperback, \$14.99.**

The field of biblical manhood and womanhood is one in which Wayne Grudem's voice is uniquely valuable. Among Grudem's contributions to this area is the volume *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*. In the first section of the book Grudem lays out the classic complementarian position, which he titles "A Biblical Vision for Manhood and Womanhood." Grudem does well to begin here as he lays the foundation for the remainder of the book in both content and methodological framework for responding to egalitarian arguments. These chapters are a foundation



in content in that they contain Grudem's summary of what the Bible says about the roles of men and women. These chapters also serve as the foundation for his methodology by modeling the complementarian hermeneutic which elevates the authority of Scripture over experience. This methodology crystallizes the fundamental difference between the egalitarian and complementarian positions. The key expression of Grudem's position concerning women in the church comes in the following summary statement: "[When] there is an assembled group of Christians, women should not teach the Bible to men or exercise authority over men"(49).

In the remaining portion of the book Grudem aggressively addresses the many arguments set forth in favor of the egalitarian interpretation of Scripture. These arguments are organized in nine categories based upon the type of argument offered by egalitarians. Finally the book concludes with Grudem's vision for biblical manhood and womanhood in the future. Here Grudem calls for pastors and theologians to believe and teach complementarianism.

Grudem's treatment of feminism in the evangelical churches reveals the truths that should guide individuals' thinking. His treatment displays a hermeneutical approach that submits to Scripture as final authority. A consequence of submitting to the authority of Scripture is the appropriately lower position of experience. The hermeneutical significance of Grudem's work is likewise found in his exposure of the faulty interpretive priorities of egalitarianism. Through the process of refuting numerous arguments for egalitarian gender roles, Grudem demonstrates that these arguments are of an entirely different nature from complementarian arguments. The egalitarian arguments are constructed from priorities that elevate the authority of experience over the authority of Scripture (267). The clarification of this difference in interpretive approaches is the greatest strength of the book. This clarification paints egalitarianism as an evangelical feminism which in its true light dismisses biblical authority in order to embrace experiential authority.

While there are many strengths of this work there is a weakness that requires mention. Grudem devotes the vast majority of the work to biblical gender roles with reference to the church. This emphasis is critically important. However, this devotion is done at the cost of discussing in significant detail the issues pertinent to gender roles in the home. Grudem could have constructed his thesis and title in such a way to communicate that the purpose of the book was primarily to address the issue within the church. However, this specification is absent leaving the reader to expect a full treatment of the two areas of gender debate. An implication of this imbalance is that Grudem does not explicitly call pastors and theologians to be consistent complementarians. Rather, he provides a soft call for

complementarianism without clarifying that the issue is as important in the home if not more so than in the church.

This volume possesses usefulness as a selective treatment of gender roles. Grudem has published several volumes that address the subject in much more detail. Those volumes serve well as references for an investigation of gender roles. This book stands in contrast as a condensed statement of the complementarian interpretation of Scripture. This feature positions the book as a useful tool for equipping church members with the knowledge necessary to navigate gender roles in contemporary culture. With such a tool in hand, theologians and pastors should not wince at the call provided by Grudem to teach proper gender roles. He appropriately notes that a decision to avoid taking a stance on the issue is in fact choosing a slide toward liberalism (282). The fact that the topic is currently controversial in Western culture does not mean that it is an issue which should be avoided for the sake of peace. Rather Christians are called to stand with courage in proclaiming the biblical gender roles despite pressures to the contrary (299).

Jon Wood

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***God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice.* Edited by Timothy George. Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2006. 175 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.**

Timothy George intends to bring the discussion of the Trinity from the circles of academia into the pews of the church in *God the Holy Trinity*. Acknowledging that the ultimate “problem” of Christian doctrine is “how the eternal God can be both One and yet ever Three at the same time” (9), George presents this volume as one voice in the resurgence of Trinitarian conversation that has taken place in the past century. Surveying doctrinal emphases since the Reformation, George asserts that “the doctrine of the Trinity remained marginalized in a great swath of Protestant theology” (11). This volume consists of a collection of essays originally presented at a symposium held by Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. Attempting to avoid presenting the doctrine of the Trinity as a “theological conundrum” (13), the participants of this conference investigated how the Trinity impacts the Christian life. While the contributors bring distinct approaches to the topic and come from various ethnic backgrounds and theological traditions, George insists that these essays “represent an underlying commitment to the trinitarian faith of the apostolic tradition” (12).

These scholars reflected an ecumenical spirit as they dialogued with each other under the umbrella of Nicene Orthodoxy.

Taken as a unit, the first two essays by Alister McGrath and Gerald Bray function as the centerpiece of the book. McGrath seeks to recover the notion of the Trinity as a profound “mystery” and enable believers to “grapple” with this doctrine (22). He applauds the recent resurgence of Trinitarian discussion, but offers two concerns. McGrath recognizes the tendency of the discussion to digress into rampant speculation that employs unnecessarily extra-biblical terms and concepts. Thus, he urges theologians to have “Trinitarian modesty” (32) by maintaining a close proximity to the language of Scripture and by keeping a healthy distance from constructions built on speculative foundations.

In the successive essay, Bray answers McGrath’s call by providing a thoughtful investigation of the relationship between the Christian Trinity and the God of Judaism. Bray’s key insight is in highlighting the hermeneutical shift that takes place in a Christian reading of the Old Testament, whereby the one God of Judaism is demonstrated to be the Trinity of Christianity. Viewed externally, God is one, but viewed internally, God is three. Bray then demonstrates that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a “description of what that experience of God’s inner life is like” (45–46). The rest of Bray’s essay consists of a theological exposition of Galatians 4:6 that shows how “*God* has sent the *Spirit* of his *Son* into our hearts, crying: Abba! Father!” Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity springs from the Christian’s life experience rather than his philosophical speculation. In his attention to Scripture and theology, Bray’s essay functions as an apt illustration of McGrath’s model for Trinitarian reflection.

The group of essays that follow are as eclectic as they are ecumenical. James Earl Massey investigates the theological underpinnings of African-American Spirituals. Cardinal Avery Dulles applies the doctrine of the Trinity to ecclesiology. Frederica Mathewes-Green engages in art criticism of *The Old Testament Trinity* by Russian artist Andrei Rublev. J.I. Packer provides a “Puritan perspective” on the Trinity in a biographical essay of John Owen. Timothy George examines the implications of the Trinity for interacting with Islam. Ellen Charry argues for the legitimacy of Divine Perfections in thinking about God and his salvation. Finally, Cornelius Plantinga ends the volume with a sermon-like exhortation to submit to the “deep wisdom” of Christ’s selflessness evidenced in the Gospel of John.

One obvious strength of this work is the diversity of contributors and their attempt to translate the sometimes oblique discussion of the Trinity into a volume designed to engage the church. The first two essays provide a helpful framework for thinking through the mystery of the Trinity in light of the biblical text. After these chapters though, the focus of the book

begins to wander. Both the nature of the topic and style of presentation vary greatly as the reader moves through this section of the work. Massey's investigation of African-American spirituals is interesting, but his discussion of the Holy Spirit in these songs is more tenuous than with the other members of the Trinity. Dulles' ecumenically driven discussion of "Trinitarian ecclesiology" engages in the speculation McGrath cautions against in his essay. Mathewes-Green's art criticism is intriguing but is based on a debated Trinitarian interpretation of Genesis 18:1–2. The chapters range from biography (Packer), to apologetics (George), to art criticism (Green), to literary criticism (Massey), to philosophical debate (Charry), and to sermon (Plantinga). This topical diversity reflects the ecumenical makeup of the contributors but also detracts from the structural focus of the work. Though George accomplishes his goal of starting an engaging Trinitarian conversation, an editorial comment on how each essay relates to the next would provide this volume with the thematic cohesion that would strengthen its overall impact.

Ched Spellman

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*A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed.* By James D.G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. 136 pages. Softcover, \$15.00.

To a conservative reader who is familiar with the excesses and problems of the new perspective on Paul brought by E.P. Sanders, Dunn's calling for a new perspective on Jesus could have unwelcome connotations. However, there is no need for fear and trepidation, for Dunn brings a welcome and long-needed correction not only to the quests for the historical Jesus in particular, but to numerous errors in handling the Synoptic Problem and New Testament higher criticism for the last two hundred years.

Dunn is the Emeritus Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham. A prolific writer and expert in many New Testament subjects, Dunn wrote *Jesus Remembered* in 2003, and this present small volume is a summarization of that much larger volume as well as a moving forward of some of its points (7–8). Dunn delivered parts of the three chapters and appendix in this book in a variety of scholarly lectures presented from 1999–2004 (7).

The three major failures of the previous quests for the historical Jesus, according to Dunn, are that its proponents "started from the wrong place, began with the wrong assumptions, and viewed the relevant data from the wrong perspective" (57). From a neophyte or lightweight theologian,

these claims might sound presumptuous or pejorative, but Dunn is a major scholar. He presents solid evidence to justify his claims, and he offers thoughtful correctives for each of these excesses. Dunn devotes a chapter to suggesting how to right each of these errors: (1) realize Jesus' disciples responded to him by faith from the beginning of his ministry—long before their post-Easter insights, so one does not need to strip away reflections of faith in the Gospels (15–34); (2) recognize the important oral stage of performance and transmission of Jesus stories, so as not to get bogged down in examining a written stage only (35–56); and (3) seek the characteristic Jesus (what the Gospels agree were his characteristics) rather than the distinct Jesus (only searching for obscure elements in the Gospels) (57–78). All of these responses are needed correctives, and Dunn clearly and compellingly sets them forth.

Demonstrating a lucid writing style with good examples (44–45, n. 31, 68, 79–81) as well as helpful summaries and transitions (34, 53–54, 56–58, 77), Dunn's book is both accessible to the novice and enlightening to the expert. Yet, although meant to be short, this book is too short. Much of the appendix—a presidential address by Dunn at the University of Durham—repeats chapter two, so it would have been more helpful to abridge it and add more material to the three main chapters of the book.

Dunn's primary strength lies in his call for an acknowledgment and reassessment of an oral stage of transmission of Jesus material. Although Richard Bauckham, in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 2006, offered some needed nuances to Dunn's theory of oral transmission, Dunn's descriptions are helpful. Dunn explains and elaborates five important characteristics of oral tradition (46–51, 93–99); however, his fifth point about the fluidity and flexibility within oral transmission may be overstated and problematic (51–52), allowing for too much divergence. Bauckham offers a needed corrective to Dunn that not only the community exercised control over the oral transmission, but the individual eyewitnesses did as well (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 260–63).

Typical of many New Testament scholars, Dunn believes in the two-document hypothesis, Markan priority (103), and the Q hypothesis (110). Interestingly, he does not propose a Q document so much as oral and written Q material, which he says will never be fully delineable (122). In the end, this is more plausible than the hypothetical Q document. Dunn's assertions reveal the need of a total reopening of the Synoptic Problem (see 112). This book, along with, *Jesus Remembered*, present important corrections in the field of Gospel studies.

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***Walking God's Path: The Life and Ministry of Jimmy Draper.* By John Perry. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005. 256 pages. Hardcover, \$19.99.**

With the recent retirement of James Draper from LifeWay, this biography of his life, by John Perry is timely, well-researched, and enjoyable to read. Perry is an accomplished writer with experience in writing biographies, including those of Charles Colson, Sgt. Alvin York, and Mrs. Robert E. Lee.

*Walking God's Path* provides a candid and direct look at Draper's impressive career and ministry from the successes of his early pastorates to his turbulent times at the First Baptist Church of Dallas; and from his refusal to change in Southern Baptist's theological battles to the changes he led at LifeWay. The author handles sensitive issues with honesty and clarity, yet with sensitivity and fairness to all involved. Readers will be struck by the clear hand of God's providence that is evident throughout Draper's life.

Perry is more than an impersonal chronicler of Draper's life and ministry. Throughout the book, the admiration of the author toward the subject of his work is evident. Perry traces Draper's career from his early days at Baylor University, where he served on preaching teams with Chuck Swindoll and others to his successful pastoral career before transitioning to LifeWay.

Fewer details are given of Draper's pastorates in Iredell Baptist Church, Temple Baptist Church in Tyler, University Park in San Antonio, Red Bridge in Kansas City, Del City in Oklahoma City, and the First Baptist Church of Euless, while careful attention is given to Draper's two eventful years on staff at the First Baptist Church of Dallas. Perry candidly recounts the events leading up to Draper's disappointments with Criswell and eventual conflict with Mrs. Criswell. Perry points to Criswell's naivety and Mrs. Criswell's jealousy as largely to blame for the departure of Criswell's probable successor.

Perry also describes Draper's role in the conservative resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention. Perry highlights Draper's service on the Board of Trustees for the Annuity Board, Baylor University, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The author examines Draper's role in the controversy at Baylor University as well as the impact of Draper's book, *Authority: the Critical Issue for Southern Baptists*, written to combat the work of Russell Dilday and others whose writings espoused a more moderate view of scriptural authority.

Perry credits Draper with the restoration and much of the recent success at LifeWay, pointing to his pastoral style that helped ease the road for the many changes from leadership style and focus, to store operations,



to the name change, and finally LifeWay's national impact. Perry concludes with an optimistic promise that Draper's ministry is not completed, just transitioning again.

At several points along the journey, Perry points to key individuals who played important roles in encouraging and assisting Draper. Among those included Billy Graham, Luther Dyre, Youth for Christ, John Bisagno, and Paige Patterson.

Perry has done an excellent job capturing the passion of one of Southern Baptists' great leaders and statesmen. Readers will be reminded of Draper's consistent stand on the authority and inerrancy of God's word and a refusal to compromise that will serve as a lasting challenge for countless young leaders of faith today. Pastors and Christian leaders will be blessed to learn of an anointed leader through the hands of a gifted writer.

Deron J. Biles

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***Has God Said? Scripture, The Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority.* By John Douglas Morrison. The Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series, volume 5. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006. 306 + xiv pages. Softcover, \$30.00**

Is God mute? Is the Creator of this world incapable of communicating with his creatures using meaningful, content-filled human language? Unfortunately, since the time of the Enlightenment, many theologians and biblical scholars would answer these questions in the affirmative. However, until recently the overwhelming consensus of the church has been that the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures are the very Word of God. This "identity thesis," the belief that these texts as texts are also truly the Word of God which bears "content-ful" communication from God (5), had been central to the church's understanding of Scripture from the very beginning. What has caused many within the churches and the academy to alter their stance on this all-important doctrine? In *Has God Said? Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority*, John Douglas Morrison seeks to identify the primary forces responsible for the rejection of the identity thesis and seeks to find a way in which contemporary churches can reaffirm this all important theological position.

Morrison correctly attributes the rejection of the identity thesis to an intellectual shift that occurred as a result of the writings of thinkers such as Baruch de Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, and Sir Isaac Newton (chapters 2–3). The shift in the intellectual climate led to what Morrison describes



as destructive cosmological and epistemological dualisms. These destructive dualisms, which are neither grounded in nor required by the teachings of Scripture itself, nevertheless led many to conclude that there could be no meaningful congress between God and his creation. Kant's division of reality into the knowable phenomenal world and the noumenal world which is unknowable by pure reason is not only representative of but also furthered this intellectual shift (ch. 3). Add to this shift in thinking the recognition that there is a decidedly human element within Scripture and it became increasingly difficult for scholars to affirm that the Scriptures are truly the Word of God.

Morrison's analysis of the forces behind the rejection of the identity thesis is both thorough and insightful. He is able to demonstrate how one or both of these destructive dualisms lay at the heart of many modern theological discussions of the nature of Scripture. This is true not only of liberals such as Friedrich Schleiermacher but also evangelicals such as Donald Bloesch and Clark Pinnock. Morrison's work does not end simply with an analysis of the destructive forces that led to the rejection of the identity thesis; he also seeks to suggest a new way in which the Church can envision how this very human text can also be the very Word of God.

Borrowing insights from Albert Einstein, Thomas F. Torrance, and John Calvin, Morrison proposes what he calls a "Christocentric, Multi-leveled, Interactive model of Scripture as the written Word of God" (221). Agreeing with one of Karl Barth's central emphases that Jesus Christ is truly and uniquely the Word of God (224), Morrison asks how we can also think of Scripture as the Word of God. Rejecting the Newtonian, dualistic view of reality that has been so destructive for theology over the past several centuries, Morrison favors a more unified view of reality as exemplified in the work of Albert Einstein. Einstein found what can only be described as a miraculous "correlation between human thought and the independent empirical world" (226). Our understanding of the world around us opens us upward to higher "levels of rationality" (226). The very intelligibility of the universe leads us necessarily to recognize that there are higher levels of intelligibility that actually ground our knowledge of the world around us. This multileveled, unified view of the world, in which the intelligibility of the lower levels points to, opens us "up" to, and is ultimately grounded in higher levels of intelligibility, differs significantly from Newton's disjunctive, dualistic view of reality.

In his use of Einstein, Morrison is not appealing to some sort of natural theology. Rather, he uses Einstein's multileveled view of reality analogically in order to present a more biblical, and specifically more Hebraic, way of describing how the historical text of Scripture can be seen to participate in and be grounded in God's revelation in Jesus Christ (234–235).

The very fact that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, has broken into history in the incarnation opens up and includes the Scriptures within God's revelation of himself in Christ. This is so because these texts make up part of that very history of incarnation in that they preceded, pointed to, and later interpreted the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. However, the Scriptures are more than mere witnesses to this event. They are truly the Word of God because they derive their being as the Word of God, by the Spirit, from the higher level of reality, the eternal Word of God. The Scriptures are a crucial historical aspect of God's larger redemptive revelation centered in Jesus Christ and flow from God "in, under, of and from the Word-Act of God at the higher level, Jesus Christ" (237). Through the process of revelation and inspiration the Scriptures are truly the Word of God because they derive their being and status as "Word of God" from their participation in this higher level of reality, the eternal Word of God (236). Morrison includes John Calvin in this discussion because Calvin exemplifies the model of Scripture that Morrison envisions, in that Calvin understood Scripture actually to "be the word of God in and as an aspect of the larger action of God in revelation as 'inspired' interaction, response, witness and *interpretation*" (235).

*Has God Said?* is a significant contribution to the discussion of the nature of Holy Scripture. It is carefully researched and compellingly argued. Morrison's insightful analysis of the theological landscape and the philosophical forces at work behind the scenes that have shaped that landscape is enough to recommend this book. Add to this a somewhat daring, though perhaps not universally accessible, suggestion for re-envisioning how we might understand the relationship between the Word of God as text and the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, and we have a helpful resource for believers who wish to stand alongside the church's long tradition of affirming that the Scriptures truly are the very Word of God.

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### Ethics and Philosophy

***The Passionate Intellect: Incarnational Humanism and the Future of University Education.* By Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmerman. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 208 pages. Softcover, \$18.00.**

Norman Klassen (DPhil., University of Oxford) is associate professor of English at St. Jermone's University and Jens Zimmerman (PhD,

University of British Columbia) is associate professor of English at Trinity Western University. Their book, *The Passionate Intellect*, was written by these two Christian professors in an attempt to encourage and guide Christian undergraduate students who, according to Klassen and Zimmerman, as a category, are facing enormous intellectual opposition to the veracity of their faith in virtually every Western university on the planet. Including the intense peer and cultural pressures to leave religion at home, the Christian who attempts to acquire an education in a university finds himself in an institution that has lost its identity (8). Thus, a second goal of the authors is to facilitate discussion and generate awareness among students, parents, and administrators of the ideological displacement from the original holistic nature of university education to its current demise into a consumer driven business enterprise.

The authors believe that recovering the medieval ideal of humanistic education, which coordinated all of the disciplines in a holistic manner toward the goal of producing good men and women for the benefit of society, will save the universities from a meaningless existence of self-perpetuation. The current secular humanism that pervades Western education has caused the institution, the products of their education, and thus society as a whole to drift toward nihilism. By recovering the original intent of university education, which entails what the authors refer to as incarnational humanism, the grip of the secular/utilitarian worldview will be released and replaced by a religiously accommodating worldview that allows the quest for truth to be open to a multitude of perspectives.

One of the strengths of the book is that it highlights the importance of worldview formation, which is an inherent part of the university. Intellectually honest universities encourage faculty and students to probe into every avenue of potential truth, which include religious truth claims. Not only has religion been fundamental to the very formation of the modern university, but it (Christianity specifically) offers a coherent set of propositions that can explain fundamental aspects of reality without contradicting truth claims from other disciplines. Though the authors do not provide an apologetic for religious truth, they at least make the argument that religion is compatible with, and does not contradict, a holistic education. The authors are right to argue that religion has been and will continue to be instrumental in preparing students to face the issues of our culture.

Another strength of the book is that it provides motivation for potential high achieving students to become a part of, succeed in, and challenge the secular universities' guiding assumptions. Prominent lawyers, doctors, policy-makers, etc. are predominantly forged in institutions dominated by secular ideologies. The benefits of a stellar education from a high-ranking school are undeniable. With a reasonable number of Christians succeeding

in various disciplines in these schools, the authors are right to note that the anti-intellectual stance of the church that has led to the marginalization of Christians from the mainstream could be reversed.

One of the weaknesses of the book is that at times the authors appear focused exclusively upon the pragmatic rewards of reforming the institution. While reform is a noble goal, and it is certainly the desire of the authors to see culture reformed through the transformation of the universities' ideology, it can be a tempting idol. The authors do not warn of this danger. If a Christian's primary interest becomes the improvement of this world, and not the transformation of souls for their improvement in the next, one is in a precarious spiritual spot. However, reforming the university does not preclude the opening of many doors through which the Christian perspective can receive a proper hearing, and perhaps transform many lives in the process, not only for their betterment in this world but also in the one to come.

If the authors' vision is realized, then western universities will no longer be dominated by a secular worldview and the best and brightest of our world will acquire knowledge in the context of religious awareness and appreciation. Ultimately, this informative book is a call for Christian students to be the paradigm of academic excellence, exercising the virtues of a regenerate life to shape and guide culture through moral and academic excellence. If enough Christian students will do this now, then perhaps in the near future the commanding heights of academia could once again be dominated by the proper perspective – one that perceives reality through the lens of the gospel.

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***Reading Scripture with the Church.* By A.K.M. Adam, Stephen Fowl, Kevin Vanhoozer and Francis Watson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 160 pages. Softcover. \$17.99.**

*Reading Scripture with the Church* is a collection of four essays and four brief responses written by Adam, Fowl, Vanhoozer and Watson. The Winslow Lectures at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary were the original setting for the papers. Each essay recognizes the polyphonic qualities of Scripture though the authors describe the nature of this polyphony differently. The essays also intend to encourage (and perhaps to extend) the practice of theological interpretation of Scripture. There is also the common theme of resisting some of the monolithic concerns of a modern, critical approach to interpreting biblical texts. The authors present their

interpretative task as an ecclesial one and one that recognizes the uniqueness of biblical texts.

Adam contends for a releasing of the constraints on biblical interpretations. He argues that the scholarly guild has sequestered biblical interpretation through its imposed guidelines for biblical inquiry. Adam hopes that more involvement of "laity" (those outside of academia, whether clergy or not) will encourage the recognition of the abundance of meaning in biblical texts. To liberate the "enclosed" meaning of texts one must recognize that the interpretative task should move beyond a near-sighted interest in verbal meaning only and grant that biblical theology is a "signifying practice." Some signifying practices of biblical theology include listening to voices from other cultures or centuries and participation in worship.

Fowl's essay calls attention to the "multivoiced literal sense" of Scripture mainly through the lens of the interpretative practice of Thomas Aquinas. Fowl argues that Aquinas's understanding of literal sense allowed quite divergent interpretations to stand both as appropriate and as literal. A reason for this multilayered literal meaning is that Scripture reflects the abundance of God's revelation. The ultimate purpose of God's multifaceted speech is to draw humans into relationship with him.

Vanhoozer provides more biblical rationale for his hermeneutical theories described in other works. He makes use of the master-slave imagery from Philemon to question the respective roles of authors, readers and texts. Though Vanhoozer agrees with Adam and Fowl that an overly monolithic understanding of the meaning of a text is not conducive to theology, he also grants a more significant role for firm parameters in the interpretative enterprise. Vanhoozer's use of speech-act theory fosters his interest in the active nature of divine discourse in Scripture.

Watson offers rationale for the four-fold gospel. The four-fold gospel has been defended throughout Christian tradition for historical and theological reasons. Watson gives a significant amount of his essay to the symbolic analogies used by Irenaeus of Lyons in his apology for the four-fold gospel. While Watson does not accept the analogies wholesale, he does note that Irenaeus's perspective is helpful to the contemporary interpreter in recognizing the fullness of the combined meaning drawn from the unique pictures of the individual gospels.

Adam's essay provides a needful reminder that theological interpretation is not for the scholarly guild only. However, his desire to remove the restrictions on meaning raises the question of whether there are genuine, objective parameters for the interpretative task. Historians would have reservations of how Fowl uses Aquinas's methodology in buttressing his own approach. In his response, Vanhoozer indicates the ambiguity in Fowl's article on the multiple levels of literal sense. Some philosophers and

theologians will lament that Vanhoozer continues to rely on the paradigm of speech-act theory in his hermeneutical work. However, he does interact more with biblical texts in this essay than in his previous works, though he does stop short of issuing a *mea culpa*. Watson's essay could have been strengthened by following Irenaeus's appeal to the four-fold gospel being consistent with the message of the Old Testament. According to Irenaeus, the four-fold apostolic testimony found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is authoritative because it is consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures in its revelation of Christ.

Jason K. Lee  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Thiselton on Hermeneutics: Collected Works with New Essays.* By Anthony C. Thiselton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 827 pages. Hardcover, \$85.00.**

While participating in a faculty forum at Union University, Anthony Thiselton was asked whether he regretted anything about his academic career. Thiselton responded by expressing his regret over “the higher ratio of research articles to books over the years” (xv). In *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, he seeks to remedy this perceived disparity. As its title suggests, this volume is a compilation of articles, essays, and selections from Thiselton's larger works. Aside from his major monographs, Thiselton has produced and published articles and presentations since the early 1970s. His primary goal in gathering these various writings into one volume is to provide “a structured and consistent account of hermeneutics as a developing and multi-disciplinary subject area” and of his attempts to contribute to this synthesis (xv). Accordingly, in selecting the material for this volume, Thiselton strove to include the articles “that best serve the coherence and distinctive multi-disciplinary themes of the present contribution” (xvi).

Thiselton divides the book into seven parts. Each section contains a number of essays grouped around a particular theme or topic. The first section “situates the subject” of hermeneutics in the field of theological study and serves as a programmatic introduction to the rest of the book. Part two contains studies on the relationship between hermeneutics and speech-act theory. Part three relates hermeneutics to semantics and conceptual grammar. Part four investigates lexicography, exegesis, and reception history. Part five interacts with parables, narrative-worlds and reader-response theories of interpretation. Part six engages philosophy, language, and post-modernity. Finally, part seven treats hermeneutics, history, and theology.



Building upon his previous work, Thiselton uses this volume to further his thought in certain areas. One of Thiselton's continuing concerns is the "respect for the other" in interpretation. He ends the first section by arguing that the "heart of the hermeneutical endeavor" does not involve "the way of self-assertion, self-affirmation and a 'mastery' that understands the other in terms of self and self-interest" (50). Rather, hermeneutics should seek "to renounce manipulative ways of understanding and communicating" in favor of modes of interpretation which meet the text on its own terms (50). Thiselton also sees the reception history of texts as an important area of discussion. Here, his concern is for the "impact of texts and of successive readings and interpretations of texts on subsequent generations of readers after a first reading" (40). Further, Thiselton investigates throughout this volume the possibility of formulating a "theological hermeneutics" that respects the discrete witness of both theology and the interpretive task (36–39, 769–807).

A unique strength of the book is the access it affords to Thiselton's own self-reflection. Thiselton guides the reader through his writings by providing a new reflective essay at the end of each section that reevaluates and interacts with the preceding material. Far from an afterthought, these essays are both substantive and instructive, as they benefit from hindsight and further development in the field. In addition to these new essays, Thiselton supplies a brief annotation before each selection that discusses his motivation in writing this particular piece and provides additional critical reflection. Within the reproduced essays themselves, Thiselton inserts descriptive headings designed to highlight for the reader the structural flow of his thinking. These elements provide insightful clarity in most cases and function as an autobiographical guide to Thiselton's treatment of a broad range of hermeneutical issues.

Part of the achievement of this work is its demonstration of the interdisciplinary nature of hermeneutics. Throughout his editorial comments, Thiselton underlines his concern for relating the interpretive task to the full range of disciplines available to the interpreter. In his major works, Thiselton reflects this interest. His earlier book *The Two Horizons* deals with philosophy of language and hermeneutical theory. His massive commentary on *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* engages in biblical studies, and his recent *Hermeneutics of Doctrine* investigates the task of theology. The scope of the essays included in this volume allows the reader to appreciate the foundational framework and methodological context in which these larger works were written. Thus, it proves a fitting companion resource to these seminal works.

A possible drawback of this volume is its formidable size and substantial price, which may discourage some readers from purchasing the



book. Additionally, most of this material has been published elsewhere in journals or in symposium books. However, the fresh reflective content along with the previously unpublished papers give this volume considerable new material, and despite the density and size of the collection, Thiselton's work maintains a refreshing clarity of style and argument. In light of these considerations, even someone who has followed Thiselton throughout his career will want to read this collection for his editorial commentary on and critical self-evaluation of his own corpus. One absent feature that would have improved the volume in this regard is an appendix containing a comprehensive bibliography of all of Thiselton's publications to date.

*Thiselton on Hermeneutics* is not geared toward the beginning or casual participant in the hermeneutical conversation. Rather, the book will prove most helpful to one desiring to grapple with the important trends and issues at stake in current hermeneutical debates. Accordingly, a serious student of hermeneutics convinced of the interdisciplinary nature of the interpretive task will find the fruit of Thiselton's prodigious career both instructive and rewarding.

Ched Spellman

PhD Student, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

### Preaching and Pastoral Ministries

***Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation.* By Michael Pasquarello III. Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006. 215 pages. Softcover, \$18.99.**

In *Christian Preaching*, Michael Pasquarello III cites a major need for revision in the church. He believes a problem has resulted from a change of subject in the pulpit. Whereas in the past the Triune God was the subject, object, and driving force behind all that the church was and did, now the sense of reverence for the Triune God as the center of ecclesiology has been lost. Pasquarello believes this has occurred because the Trinity is fundamentally absent in the proclamation event today.

Pasquarello identifies Finney and his preaching as a typical example of making man and not God the subject of proclamation. He continues to argue that Rick Warren is a contemporary practitioner and disciple of Finney's homiletic. Pasquarello then explains that the issue is not fixed by examining a method of interpretation or delivery, but by recapturing a sense of who the Triune God is and learning to see preaching as a theological practice that worships, loves, and proclaims the Trinity and causes the listeners to do the same.

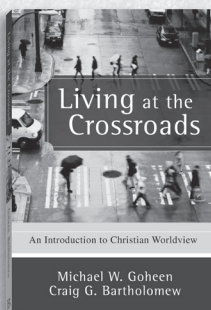
He offers seven chapters that define preaching in terms of speaking of God with a certain emphasis such as creating a redeemed community that God chooses to work through (Ecclesial Practice) and creating a place where we behold our destiny as a community awaiting the New Jerusalem (Pilgrim Practice) (87–109, 183–204). In each chapter, he supports his claim by offering the practice and writing of a major figure of church history such as Augustine, Luther, and Wesley. Ultimately, his aim is the “changing of the subject’ of Christian preaching from ourselves to the Triune God” (10).

Pasquarello may have missed an opportunity with this work to explain how the doctrine of the Trinity should impact the preparation and delivery of a message. In the title and introduction, it appeared he would take such an opportunity. Instead, he argues for the Trinity as the content of preaching and for the use of Trinitarian language in our liturgy. A review of literature in the area of preaching and theology indicates that there is a deficiency in studies that examine this connection. There are a couple of other weaknesses in this work as well. First, in most chapters the specific claim he is trying to make and how it relates to the corresponding title is unclear. For instance in Chapter 4, Pasquarello does not give a summary statement of the claim until pages 19 and 20, which is almost halfway through the chapter, and even when he does, it is long and tedious. Second, by analyzing his sample sermons, it is questionable whether he has, in fact, delivered what he promised. It appears in some cases he fails to make what God has intended the center of his preaching. Pasquarello does this by allowing his theology to drive the sermon and not the text proper.

Pasquarello, however, must be praised on at least two counts. First, he offers strong historical evidence to support his claims by drawing on and explaining the preaching and theology of some prominent figures in church history. Second, he rightly identifies the problem in the pulpit today that derives from man-centered preaching as a theological issue. As such, he addresses the problem and attempts to rectify the issue through a theological discussion and not by offering a “preaching how-to.” This volume is for any serious student of preaching and anyone who cares deeply about the proclamation of God’s Word with the cautions that it is not an easy read nor is it intended to be a textbook on how to prepare and deliver a message.

Adam L. Hughes  
PhD Student, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

# NEW AND NOTEWORTHY



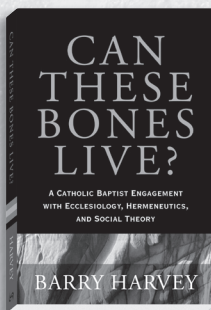
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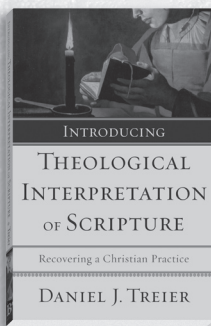
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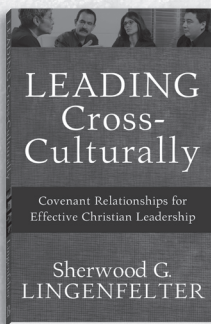
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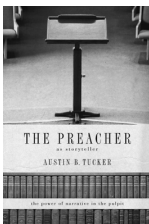
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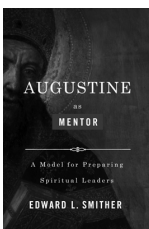
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