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A THEOLOGICAL REASSESSMENT AND REFORMULATION OF  
THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY  
IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by  
Derek James Brown

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

A THEOLOGICAL REASSESSMENT AND REFORMULATION OF  
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To Amy,

“you surpass them all.”

To Jim and Helen Brown,

to honor you is my privilege and joy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>CD</i>	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i>
<i>CEJ</i>	<i>Christian Education Journal</i>
CSBH	Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics
CSBI	Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy
EPS	Evangelical Philosophical Society
ETS	Evangelical Theological Society
ICBI	International Council on Biblical Inerrancy
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
MT	Majority Text
NA <sup>27</sup>	Novum Testamentum Graece, 27 <sup>th</sup> ed.
<i>NDBT</i>	<i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i>
<i>NDT</i>	<i>New Dictionary of Theology</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene- and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>Summa</i>	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i>

*Them* *Themelios Journal*

*TMSJ* *The Master's Seminary Journal*

TR Textus Receptus

*TrinJ* *Trinity Journal*

UBS<sup>4</sup> *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.

WCF Westminster Confession of Faith

*WTJ* *Westminster Theological Journal*

## PREFACE

The doctrine of inerrancy is something to which I have given regular reflection ever since I trusted Christ fourteen years ago. Almost immediately upon my conversion, by God’s mysterious providence, I was introduced to a host of troubling issues related to the authority and truthfulness of Scripture. My introduction to the Bible’s various “problems” and “inconsistencies” would come via two streams: the sophisticated arguments of critical scholars and the nagging skepticism of a society lost in unbelief. These two streams would eventually converge into a torrent of doubt that threatened to undo my faith altogether. But the same God who led me into those treacherous spiritual waters was the same God who ultimately set me back upon a rock—wet and trembling, but sure-footed and ready to work for the good of others who were being pulled downstream.

So, it is no coincidence that I am today writing the preface to a research project that sets out to uphold the doctrine of inerrancy. More than ever I believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, fully trustworthy and void of any kind of error. Despite the recent arguments posed by evangelicals who hope to soften the inerrantist claim or do away with it once and for all, it is my contention that this precious doctrine is not only vital for the health of the church, it is thoroughly biblical, theologically coherent, and epistemologically satisfying. In my judgment and the judgment of many others, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy—the document to which I devote the remaining

sections of this dissertation—is a historically faithful, carefully nuanced articulation and defense of this doctrine. It has done my soul good to think carefully over its contents and the Bible about which it speaks.

In this process I have found the time required to research, write, rewrite, and rewrite again often competes with the time it takes to fulfill all my other responsibilities as a husband, father, and church member. The fact that I have been able to devote, over the past fourteen months, considerable amounts of time and energy to this project and my other tasks is due primarily to the unfailing sweetness and selfless sacrifice of my wife. Anytime she leaves with our son for a few days to visit family, I learn afresh that the stability she brings to my life is almost incalculable. I work harder and better because of her, and I am sure that this dissertation would have never found completion were it not for her support and encouragement.

God has graciously provided everything I have needed to finish this project. The love of my family and friends, adequate financial means, requisite time and energy, sufficient bibliographic resources, the clear teaching and godly example of my professors, and the careful and caring oversight of my supervisor Dr. Gregg Allison are all tangible evidences of God’s mercy upon my life and upon this project. May he alone receive all the glory, and may those who love Christ find in the following pages solid reasons for continued confidence in full truthfulness of his Word.

Derek J. Brown

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2014

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of inerrancy—a matter considered by many to be an “essential element to the authority of Scripture and a necessary ingredient for the health of the Church of Christ”<sup>1</sup>—has endured steady waves of criticism from opponents of evangelicalism<sup>2</sup> for over four centuries.<sup>3</sup> Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, however, similar critiques of the doctrine began to find approval and promotion among some professing evangelicals.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in 1978, while debate among evangelicals over

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), ix.

<sup>2</sup>I am assuming the following definition of “evangelicalism.” Historians Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and George Rawlyk argue that “evangelicalism” is “the best word available to describe a fairly discrete network of Protestant Christian movements arising during the eighteenth century in Great Britain and its colonies. The historical sense of ‘evangelical’ is complemented by a parallel use of the term designating a consistent pattern of convictions and attitudes.” They helpfully provide a list of characteristics that designate evangelicals. They classify these characteristics as “[b]iblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), conversionism (a stress on the New Birth), activism (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement, and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity).” Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6. This particular definition relies upon an earlier work by Bebbington. See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-19. In a separate study, Mark Noll, while admitting that arriving at a precise definition of “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” is difficult given the diversity of the movement, acknowledges the above definition as a “very useful touchstone for discussing other groups in the world that are linked to British evangelicalism or that possess characteristics resembling the groups Bebbington describes.” Mark Noll, “What is ‘Evangelical,’” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>3</sup>Gregg Allison notes that “the first significant challenge to this belief [that the Bible is without error] did not arise until the seventeenth century.” Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 99.

the doctrine of inerrancy was reaching its peak, prefatory comments introducing the latest issue of *The Christian Century* even predicted the encroaching demise of inerrancy:

“Evangelical waters are being stirred up by what may be the death throes of the ‘inerrancy’ doctrine—the idea that the Bible contains no errors of any kind.”<sup>5</sup> The periodical also suggested the doctrine’s usefulness and rational basis were in danger of being undone by one of its most resolute advocates, Harold Lindsell.<sup>6</sup>

These initial critiques and the growing controversy over the doctrine of inerrancy precipitated the organization of the ICBI, a group of evangelical pastors and scholars whose stated purpose was to “define, defend, and apply the doctrine of biblical inerrancy . . . in an attempt to win the church back to this historic position.”<sup>7</sup> The most noteworthy result of their collective effort was the creation in 1978 of the CSBI, a nearly eighteen hundred word document providing a nuanced definition of the historic doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Far from succumbing to any imagined “death throes,” the doctrine of inerrancy would gain renewed stability as the CSBI served as an evangelical standard, providing what J. I. Packer would later designate as a solid “reference point” for future discussions on

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<sup>4</sup>See for example, Dewey Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); idem, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); Jack Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977).

<sup>5</sup>James M. Wall, “In this Issue,” *The Christian Century*, November 27, 1976, 970.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. The reference here is to Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

<sup>7</sup>Geisler, *Inerrancy*, ix.

<sup>8</sup>This word count includes the preface, short statements, and the articles of affirmation and denial. It does not include the document’s accompanying exposition, which provides an additional three thousand words to the total word count. R. A. Peterson catalogs the whole document under this longer word count. See R. A. Peterson, “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 226-27. For a full version of the CSBI including the exposition, see Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 493-502.

inerrancy.<sup>9</sup>

Packer's prediction of the CSBI's enduring usefulness, however, would find only partial fulfillment. While subsequent works of evangelical scholarship and popular writings would engage, promote, and employ the CSBI for their discussions on inerrancy, the document's influence would eventually wane. Recent evidence of the CSBI's declining influence within evangelicalism is seen primarily in two ways: (1) by the growing number of confessing evangelicals who are openly challenging the doctrine of inerrancy generally or the CSBI specifically;<sup>10</sup> and (2) by this current generation's lack of familiarity with the CSBI.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1980), 47.

<sup>10</sup>Some confessing evangelicals still find statements in the CSBI that reflect "untenable theological positions" while others wonder if a twelve-page definition of the word "inerrancy" (as found in the CSBI) does not "empt[y] the word of its content." John J. Brogan, "Can I have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture," in *Evangelicals and Scripture*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 101-2; and A.T.B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 106, respectively. Craig Allert, in his work on issues of New Testament canon and biblical authority, suggests that portions of the CSBI tend to deny "that a critical examination of the phenomena of Scripture can inform a doctrine of Scripture," while decrying the statement's narrow definition of inerrancy—a constriction that inevitably requires too many qualifications. See Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 160-61. See also Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); idem, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012); Kenton Sparks, *God's Words in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); idem, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Carlos Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007); and idem, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

<sup>11</sup>This lack of acquaintance with the CSBI was highlighted as recently as 2004 when the Evangelical Theological Society at its Fifty-Sixth Annual Meeting formally referred to the document in order to clarify the Society's doctrinal basis ("The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs"). Jason Sexton reports, "A disturbing feature at the meeting was how few were familiar with the Chicago Statement. This was so stark that members of the

Some effort, nevertheless, has been exerted recently to reclaim the CSBI as an evangelical benchmark for the doctrine of inerrancy. ETS has sought to reinstate the CSBI among the Society's constituents and the greater evangelical community. In 2006, the presiding officers of ETS moved to adopt the CSBI into the Society's bylaws.<sup>12</sup> Most recently, Norman Geisler—a founding member of the ICBI—has attempted to recover the CSBI as evangelicalism's standard definition of inerrancy.<sup>13</sup> Geisler argues for the adequacy of the CSBI by defending its various affirmations and denials in theological and philosophical detail, concluding that the document is in no need of revision or amendment. One wonders, however, if Geisler's conclusion cannot be challenged given the recent developments among evangelicals over inerrancy. Has there been no positive advance in the doctrine of Scripture since 1978 that may help strengthen the CSBI for future theological use?<sup>14</sup> It is my contention that evangelical discussions over inerrancy

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Executive Committee were prompted to print copies of it for every attending member.” Jason S. Sexton, “How Far Beyond Chicago: Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate,” *Them* 34, no. 1 (2009): 26n2.

<sup>12</sup>James A. Borland, “Reports Relating to the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society,” *JETS* 50 (2007): 215. ETS has also recently highlighted the worth of the CSBI in other ways. For example, in his presidential address to the members of ETS in 2000, Wayne Grudem set the CSBI alongside the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325 and 381), the Chalcedonian Creed (A.D. 451), and Martin Luther's 95 Theses (A.D. 1517) as evidence of the Lord's continued doctrinal purification of his church. See 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): 13.

<sup>13</sup>See Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

<sup>14</sup>Even those who had a hand in writing the CSBI in 1978 recognized the limitations inherent in formulating a doctrinally weighty statement in such a short period of time and therefore did not desire to attribute creedal status to the document. The preface of the CSBI reads, “We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight.” Furthermore, the last paragraph of the preface invites a response from any who find reason to “amend its affirmations about Scripture in light of Scripture itself,” while expressing thankfulness for help that might be provided in strengthening the document. Indeed, this kind of reexamination appears to be what Carl Henry had in mind when he included the CSBI in the fourth volume of *God, Revelation and Authority* and noted in comments earlier in the book that the document was “subject to future revision.”

would benefit from added nuance to the CSBI.<sup>15</sup>

### **Thesis**

The argument of this dissertation is that in light of contemporary challenges, the CSBI, while providing a carefully nuanced definition of inerrancy at the time it was written, requires modification and revision in order to sustain its usefulness. Present developments in the doctrine of Scripture require a revised CSBI to address the following matters: the nature of biblical authority; the nature of written revelation; the centrality of narrative as a biblical genre; the diversity of the biblical discourse; recent changes in the discipline of textual criticism; the relationship between providence and inspiration; the nature of biblical phenomena; the human authorship of Scripture; and the validity of doctrinal development.

### **Methodology**

Although I am proposing revisions to the CSBI, I will approach this reassessment and reevaluation from the perspective that the document is a historically faithful, theologically comprehensive articulation of inerrancy. Accordingly, this dissertation is not an attempt to undermine the doctrine of inerrancy or the CSBI. My goal, rather, is to demonstrate the basic resilience of the CSBI amidst current challenges while using these challenges to highlight areas where the document can be improved.

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Carl F. H. Henry, *God Who Speaks and Shows*, vol. 4 of *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 141.

<sup>15</sup>I am not alone here. Greg Beale suggests that some minor changes in the exposition would be helpful. See G. K. Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 267n1. While noting their usefulness, Robert Yarbrough also admits that both Chicago Statements (Inerrancy and Hermeneutics) are “a generation old and bear revisiting and rephrasing today.” Robert Yarbrough, “The Embattled Bible: Four More Books,” *Them* 34, no. 1 (2009): 23.

After surveying the doctrine of inerrancy pre-CSBI (chap. 1) and observing important post-CSBI developments (chap. 2), I will offer my proposal for revisions in chapters 3, 4, and 5. In these chapters I will use the current CSBI as a template around which to frame my proposals as I examine each individual article of affirmation and denial. While there could be other ways in which to structure my project,<sup>16</sup> I find this approach advantageous for three reasons. First, following the CSBI's original layout allows me to interact systematically with the whole document as it was originally written, thus precluding potential oversight or inadequate treatment of particular sections. Second, this format provides an obvious structure to the reformulation section that will benefit readers by providing a clear outline to follow and the opportunity to reference quickly and easily particular sections of the CSBI as needed. Third, this structure will enable readers to gain an intimate knowledge of the CSBI as it was originally composed. Recent developments among evangelicals have exposed a general lack of acquaintance with the document that, in my judgment, has hastened the growing fracture among evangelicals vis-à-vis their doctrine of Scripture. More familiarity of the document, not less, is essential for continued progress in this important debate.

The CSBI consists of a preface, five summary statements, and the articles of affirmation and denial. The accompanying exposition consists of approximately two thousand words and provides the broader theological framework within which to understand and articulate the CSBI. For the sake of concision and space, however, this

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<sup>16</sup>For example, one might develop their argument around major theological categories (e.g., Inerrancy and the Nature of God, Inerrancy and Truth), thus following Norman Geisler and William Roach's recent defense of the CSBI. One complaint I have with *Defending Inerrancy*, however, is how often Geisler and Roach repeat their arguments and critiques throughout the book. I find this mainly a problem of structure rather than style. That is, the very organization of the book seems to necessitate needless repetition. If the book would have been framed differently—around the original CSBI, for example—I wonder if some redundancy could have been avoided.

dissertation will focus chiefly on the CSBI's articles of affirmation and denial. This approach is preferable for the following two reasons. First, the preface, short statements, and exposition depend, in large measure, upon the articles of affirmation and denial for their content. That is, because the purpose of the preface is to introduce the articles of affirmation and denial, the object of the short statements is to summarize the content of the articles, and the aim of the exposition is to place the articles in their appropriate biblical-theological<sup>17</sup> and historical-theological<sup>18</sup> framework, it is clear that the articles are what serve as the primary articulation of inerrancy. An effort to reformulate the CSBI requires, therefore, concentration on the articles of affirmation and denial. Second, because each article of affirmation and denial addresses a specific theological category and its relation to the doctrine of inerrancy, it is necessary that I relegate my efforts *only* to the articles of affirmation and denial in order to address adequately each category and the pertinent issues therein.

### **Outline**

I will proceed in this chapter by offering a brief historical survey of the doctrine of inerrancy in order to provide the context for how the doctrine is articulated in the CSBI. This section is particularly important because it demonstrates that the church has always endorsed the concept of a truth-affirming, error-free Bible. I will continue in

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<sup>17</sup>By "biblical-theological" I do not merely mean theology that is biblical in its affirmations. The CSBI exposition sets the doctrine of inerrancy in a framework that recognizes the unfolding storyline of Scripture and God's plan of redemption. The doctrine of Scripture—if it is to be properly evangelical—cannot be abstracted from God's purpose in history in forming a people for himself so that they might know, love, and obey him.

<sup>18</sup>By "historical-theological" I mean to indicate that the CSBI's exposition places the articles of affirmation and denial in their appropriate chronological setting by addressing theological issues relevant to the time it was written (1978).

this introductory chapter by investigating the factors that led to the formation of the ICBI and the writing of the CSBI. This section will also demonstrate the document's initial and enduring influence among evangelicals.

In chapter 2, I will examine post-CSBI developments within evangelicalism. Here I will engage a number of important evangelical works that have either questioned the adequacy of the CSBI or reframed the debate in a way that significantly undermines the usefulness of the document. I will also examine a number of important responses to the current opposition in order to glean helpful resources with which to propose added nuance to the CSBI. I will follow this investigation by a three-part section in which I propose modifications to the CSBI: chapter 3 (Articles I-V), chapter 4 (Articles VI-XIII), and chapter 5 (Articles XIV-XIX). In these three reassessment and reformulation chapters, I will examine the articles of affirmation and denial individually. I will first consider the original meaning and intention of the article and then proceed to engage contemporary challenges that relate directly to the subject matter of each article. In some cases, I will offer only the addition of new words, phrases, or sentences to existing articles; in others, I will propose a full revision of a given article. I will also propose the addition of new articles where theological developments necessitate. I now turn to examine how the church has understood the nature of Scripture with regard to its inerrancy.

### **Historical Survey of the Doctrine of Inerrancy**

When confronted by criticism leveled against the doctrine of inerrancy by those within their own camp, a significant component of the conservative evangelical response—both before and after the creation of the CSBI—was historical: scholars

sought to tether the evangelical position to the clear tradition of the church.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in order to proceed in my discussion of what factors led to the formulation of the CSBI, it is necessary to first provide a historical context for the doctrine of inerrancy and its definition as stated in the document.<sup>20</sup> My goal here, however, is not to provide a full history of the doctrine of inerrancy and the nature of biblical authority in the history of the church. Such a task, as John Woodbridge noted in his own volume on the subject, is “herculean,” and would, in this instance, require a separate dissertation altogether.<sup>21</sup> Rather, my aim in this chapter is to sketch a general picture of the church’s stance on biblical authority and the concept of inerrancy in order to lay the groundwork for the next section and my discussion of the CSBI. It will not be essential, however, to demonstrate that *every* expression of Christianity has articulated its belief in the authority of Scripture in the same way; it is only required for our purposes to establish that the concept of inerrancy as defined in the CSBI has strong historical precedent within the church. I will organize this section under four headings: (1) Early Church Fathers; (2) Middle Ages; (3) Reformation; (4) Post-Reformation and Modern Period.

### Early Church Fathers

Although the word “inerrant” is a modern term used to describe the nature of

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<sup>19</sup>For example, see Harold Lindsell, “An Historian Looks at Inerrancy (1965),” in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984); John D. Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers and McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>20</sup>By proceeding with this historical survey, I am consciously rejecting the view that inerrancy as it is currently articulated cannot be connected with the position of the early church. The late Donald Bloesch, for example, suggested that the effort to demonstrate a link between contemporary expressions of inerrancy and the early church’s understanding of biblical authority is an exercise in futility. See Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 105.

<sup>21</sup>Here I am referring to John Woodbridge’s work, *Biblical Authority*.

Scripture, the concept of inerrancy has been affirmed throughout the history of the church.<sup>22</sup> The early church is no exception.<sup>23</sup> While the ancient church fathers never sought to provide a systematic treatment of the doctrine of Scripture, they did assert throughout their writings that Scripture was without error.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it was their

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<sup>22</sup>J. I. Packer explains the origin and development of the word. “The word *inerrancy* (Latin, *inerrantia*) has a long history in Roman Catholic theological vocabulary but became a significant term in American Protestant usage only about a hundred years ago. Previously, the preferred term for expressing the conviction that Scripture never misinforms or misleads was infallibility, but when Presbyterians began to construct reduced accounts of infallibility, those who still wished to confess the Bible’s unqualified trustworthiness began to use the language of inerrancy for their purpose.” J. I. Packer, “John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture,” in *Inerrancy and the Church*, 144. Historian Mark Noll adds, “The term inerrancy was not common until the nineteenth century. But the conviction that God communicates in Scripture a revelation of himself and of his deeds, and that this revelation is entirely truthful, has always been the common belief of most Christians.” Mark Noll, “A Brief History of Inerrancy, Mostly in America,” in *the Proceedings of the Conference of Biblical Inerrancy* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 9-10. James Scott helpfully notes, “The fact that the particular word inerrancy apparently did not enter the English language until about 1834 . . . and did not come into common usage in this context until well into the twentieth century, does not change the fact that a long line of earlier theologians held that Scripture was without error in all matters.” James Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy: A Response to A. T. B. McGowan’s *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*,” *WTJ* 71 (2009): 191. Pinnock, writing in 1974, observed, “Even if it could be shown that inerrancy as a technical term were recent, the point would be of only *formal* and *not material* significance, since, whatever term was used, the idea of ascribing error to the Scriptures has always been unthinkable.” Clark Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative,” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), 143.

<sup>23</sup>James Bannerman, writing in 1865, observed, “The opinion of the early Christian Church as to inspired Scripture did not differ from that of its Jewish contemporaries. From the time of Christ downwards, and for centuries afterwards, there was hardly any difference of opinion as to the infallibility of the Bible, and little comparatively, for a time, of the perilous attempts to define or limit by human speculations the methods through which the result was accomplished.” James Bannerman, *Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of Holy Scripture* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1865), 122.

<sup>24</sup>Why do we not find in the early church fathers a detailed doctrine of Scripture that included nuanced descriptions of the concepts of inspiration or inerrancy? I suggest there are two primary reasons: (1) Early church theologians and apologists, in most cases, simply assumed the divine nature of the Bible and advanced their arguments on this foundational premise; and (2) their theological efforts were mainly taken up with other concerns, like explaining and defending the nature of Christ, defending the coherence of the Christian message, and similar matters. Bannerman explains, “The question of the authority and infallibility of Scripture did not, however, pass through this process [of controversy] until many centuries afterwards. There are no definitions and limitations of the doctrine on one side or another, elaborately drawn out and reduced to systematic form, as if armed on every side to repel assault, or fortified around to prevent controversy or misunderstanding. The belief of the early church in an infallible Bible was too simple to require to be fenced about with the safeguard of explanations, and too unanimous to need support from argument. There was neither controversy nor theorizing demanded to satisfy the faith of Christians; nor did the one or the other appear in connection with inspiration for the first eight hundred years” (Bannerman, *Inspiration*, 123). Mark Thompson comments, referring specifically to the doctrine of inerrancy: “As so often happens in the history of Christian theological reflection, the need for a detailed

unswerving commitment to the divine authorship of Scripture that led to their conviction concerning the nature of biblical truth; in their theological practice, the early church fathers saw inerrancy as a corollary to divine inspiration.<sup>25</sup> For example, Irenaeus attributes the “perfect” nature of the Scriptures to the fact that they were inspired by God. “We should leave things [of an unknowable] nature to God who creates us, being most assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit.”<sup>26</sup> Writing to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome exhorted his readers, “Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them.”<sup>27</sup> In the view of the ancient church fathers, because God was the author of Scripture, Scripture

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treatment of a specific theological topic became obvious only in the light of challenges and efforts to recast a long-standing theological consensus.” Mark Thompson, “The Divine Investment in Truth: Toward a Theological Account of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 73.

<sup>25</sup>Because the primary concern of this chapter is to demonstrate the church’s stance on inerrancy, I cannot enter into a discussion of the doctrine of inspiration as such. It is clear that the early church fathers believed strongly in the divine inspiration of the Scripture and held that inspiration extended to the very words of Scripture. Thus, my work in this chapter proceeds on the assumption that the early church fathers held closely to divine inspiration. For a defense of the early church’s historical stance in inspiration, see Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “The Church Doctrine of Inspiration,” in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 207; Allison, *Historical Theology*, 59-62; John D. Hannah, “The Doctrine of Scripture in the Early Church,” in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 3-22; Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 402-8.

<sup>26</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.28.2, in *ANF*, 1:399. For more on Irenaeus’s view of Scripture, see Michael G. Haykin’s recent article, “Fundamentum Et Columnam Fidei Nostrae: Irenaeus on the Perfect and Saving Nature of the Scriptures,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 135-47.

<sup>27</sup>Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 45, in *ANF*, 9:243. Clement’s comments immediately following the quote given above indicate that he viewed as trustworthy the Old Testament’s record of historical events. “The righteous were indeed persecuted, but only by the wicked. They were cast into prison, but only by the unholy; they were stoned, but only by the transgressors; they were slain, but only by the accursed, and such as had conceived an unrighteous envy against them. Exposed to such sufferings, they endured them gloriously. For what shall we say, brethren? Was Daniel cast into the den of lions by such as feared God? Were Ananias, and Azarias, and Mishael shut up in a furnace of fire by those who observed the great and glorious worship of the Most High? Far from us be such a thought!” (ibid.).

itself could not err.

Explicit statements concerning the nature of biblical truth are found throughout early church writings. Taken together, these statements communicate two basic ideas about the nature of biblical truth. First, biblical truth corresponds to reality. In other words, Scripture records events in the way they actually occurred, it reports statements in a manner that accurately communicates their intended meaning, and it predicates of God that which is true of his real character. Tertullian states unambiguously, “The statements of Holy Scripture will never be discordant with truth.”<sup>28</sup>

Second, Scripture cannot contradict itself.<sup>29</sup> Origen is resolute on this matter, likening the refusal to recognize the congruent nature of biblical truth to spiritual tone-deafness.

And likewise he becomes a peacemaker as he demonstrates that which appears to others to be a conflict in the Scriptures is no conflict, and exhibits their concord and peace, whether of the Old Scriptures with the New, or of the Law with the Prophets or of the gospels with the Apostolic Scriptures, or of the Apostolic Scriptures with each other. . . . For as the different chords of the psalter or the lyre, each of which gives forth a certain sound of its own which seems unlike the sound of another chord, are thought by a man who is not musical and ignorant of the principle of musical harmony.<sup>30</sup>

Justin, in his famous, *Dialogue*, states clearly, “Since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, to be

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<sup>28</sup>Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, 21, in *ANF*, 3:202.

<sup>29</sup>I take these two insights concerning the nature of biblical truth from Allison’s helpful chapter on this subject in his *Historical Theology*, 100-101.

<sup>30</sup>Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 2, in *ANF*, 9:413.

rather of the same opinion of myself.”<sup>31</sup>

Augustine, the famous bishop from North Africa and a contemporary of Jerome, affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture by his practice in preaching and writing, and in explicit statements concerning the integrity of the biblical text. For example, in a letter to Jerome, Augustine stated,

For it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books; that is to say, that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us, and committed to writing, did put down in these books anything false. It is one question whether it may be at any time the duty of a good man to deceive; but it is another question whether it can have been the duty of a writer of Holy Scripture to deceive. For if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away, as a statement in which, intentionally, and under a sense of duty, the author declared what was not true.<sup>32</sup>

In his *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*, Augustine set the Scripture apart from other theological writings—including his own—stating that the latter may, in certain instances, “[fall] short of the truth in obscure and recondite matters.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Christians are “without obligation to believe” what is contained in these treatises; they are beholden only to place themselves under the authority of the canonical Scriptures.<sup>34</sup> In a subsequent letter to Jerome, Augustine declared his own personal devotion to the

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<sup>31</sup>Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, 65, in *ANF*, 1:230. Irenaeus is as explicit as Jerome in this matter. “All Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found by us perfectly consistent; and the parables shall harmonize with those passages which are perfectly plain; and those statements the meaning of which is clear, shall serve to explain the parables; and through the many diversified utterances [of Scripture] there shall be heard one harmonious melody in us, praising in hymns that God who created all things” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.28.2, in *ANF*, 1:400).

<sup>32</sup>Augustine, *Letters*, 28, in *NPNF*, 1:251-52.

<sup>33</sup>Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*, in *NPNF*, 4:180.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

Scripture, linking his reverence for the Bible to its own inerrancy. “I have learned to yield this [total] respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture. Of these alone do I most firmly believe that their authors were completely free from error.”<sup>35</sup> If the bishop came across a text that appeared incongruent with other biblical teaching or seemed to purport some error, he located the root of the problem in one of three places: (1) a faulty copy of the original text; (2) a poor translation of the original text that does not capture rightly the author’s intended meaning; or (3) himself as a fallible interpreter.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, we see that the early church fathers through explicit statements and in their theological practice affirmed the error-free nature of Scripture.

### **Middle Ages**

The medieval church also affirmed the complete truthfulness of Scripture. For example, Anselm of Canterbury, in his famous *Cur De Homo?* declared that Scripture was the standard by which his own beliefs and teachings were to be tested:

But remember the proviso with which I began to deal with your perplexity: viz., that if I say something which a greater authority does not confirm, then even though I seem to prove it rationally, it should be accepted with no other degree of certainty than that it appears this way to me for the time being, until God somehow reveals the matter to me more fully. For if I say something that unquestionably contradicts Sacred Scripture, I am certain that it is false; and I do not want to hold that view if I know it [to be false].<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Augustine, *Letters*, 82, in *NPNF*, 1:350. Augustine continues with his assertions about the Bible’s inerrancy, assuming that Jerome would not want his writings to be compared to Scripture. “I believe, my brother, that this is your own opinion as well as mind. I do not need to say that I do not suppose you to wish your books be read like those of prophets or of apostles, concerning which it would be wrong to doubt that they are free from error” (ibid.).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid. Augustine’s complete statement: “And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to the truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it” (ibid.).

<sup>37</sup>Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, in vol. 3 of *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1974), 82.

For Anselm, the Bible provided the sure basis for theological inquiry and formulation. “Sacred Scripture everywhere teaches us how we are to approach the participation in such great grace and how we are to live under this grace. Sacred Scripture is founded upon solid truth, as upon a firm foundation; and with God’s help we have perceived this truth to some extent.”<sup>38</sup>

Thomas Aquinas, while not designating a section in his *Summa Theologica* to discuss the matter specifically, states clearly in it that same work he believes Scripture to be without error. “Hence, it is plain that nothing false can ever underlie the literal sense of Holy Writ.”<sup>39</sup> Later in the *Summa*, Aquinas precludes error from the historical aspects of Scripture when he comments, “A thing is of faith, indirectly, if the denial of it involves a consequence something against faith; as for instance if anyone said that Samuel was not the son of Elcana, for it follows that divine Scripture would be false.”<sup>40</sup> In the latter example, Aquinas does not classify only the spiritual aspect of Scripture as that which is without error; historical narratives must provide true information about specific people, or Scripture would be deemed false at these points.

In his discussion on the sin of lying, Aquinas comments, “It is unlawful to hold that any false assertion is contained either in the Gospel or in any canonical Scripture, or that the writers thereof have told untruths, because faith would be deprived of its

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>39</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, p. 1, q.1, art. 1. Immediately prior to the quote given above, Aquinas states that anthropomorphic descriptions of God must not be understood literally. For example, when Scripture speaks of God’s arm, we do not take such a description to mean that God possesses a corporeal member, but rather indicates his great power. Thus, it is clear in this passage that when Aquinas refers to that which is false, he means that which is contrary to reality.

<sup>40</sup>Aquinas, *Summa*, p.1, q. 32, art. 4.

certitude which is based on the authority of Holy Writ.”<sup>41</sup> This statement is made in response to an objection posed earlier in the article suggesting that the Gospel writers had, given their differing accounts of events in Christ’s life, lied at some point in their narratives.<sup>42</sup> Aquinas’s answer to this objection indicates that he considered such a notion untenable. The clear implication is that Aquinas regarded Scripture true in all it affirmed, even the reporting of historical particulars like Christ’s words and deeds.

The theologians of the medieval church, like those of the early church, held that divine inspiration necessitated an inerrant text. Alphonsus Tosatus, for example, held that “all Scripture . . . is a divine revelation by the agency of the Spirit, who not only inspires but also preserves the writer from error.”<sup>43</sup> Hervaeus Natalis believed that “whatever things are in Scripture are spoken by God” and because it is “certain that God cannot speak falsehood,”<sup>44</sup> Scripture could not err.

This pattern of belief in the inerrant Word of God during the medieval period was continued by the Reformers in the sixteenth century.

## **The Reformation**

Both Martin Luther and John Calvin spoke often of their view of Scripture and

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<sup>41</sup>Aquinas, *Summa*, p. 2, q. 110, art. 3.

<sup>42</sup>The objection to which Aquinas answers reads, “It seems that not every lie is a sin. For it is evident that the evangelists did not sin in the writing of the Gospel. Yet they seem to have told something false: since their accounts of the words of Christ and of others often differ from one another: wherefore seemingly one of them must have given an untrue account. Therefore not every lie is a sin” (Aquinas, *Summa*, p. 2, q. 110, art. 3).

<sup>43</sup>Richard A. Müller, *Holy Scripture The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, vol. 2 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy (ca. 1520 to ca. 1725)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 47.

<sup>44</sup>Hervaeus Natalis, *In quattuor Petri Lombardi Sententiarum* (Venice, 1505), prolog., q. 1, cited in Müller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:45.

the nature of the truth found therein. Luther's understanding of biblical inerrancy, like his predecessors, grew from his belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture. As Preus summarizes, "Luther's notion of biblical infallibility arose from his firm belief that the Bible is the Word of God and that God spoke to him there powerfully and authoritatively."<sup>45</sup> Also like his historical forerunners, Luther does not dedicate a particular volume or treatise to articulating a formal doctrine of Scripture; his commitment to divine inspiration is assumed throughout his writings. Nevertheless, as Preus observes, "one can find scores of statements of Luther's in which he expressly asserts that Scripture is God's Word that saves poor sinners."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Luther's commitment to biblical inerrancy followed the tradition established in the early church through the middle ages. That is, Luther believed that Scripture could not contradict itself and that it was truthful in all it affirmed—in matters historical, geographical, scientific, and spiritual. Several statements from Luther illustrate such a commitment. For example, Luther avers, "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself; it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites."<sup>47</sup> To Luther, Scripture contained no mistakes and was therefore the standard by which to judge the theological statements of others.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, to attribute error to Scripture would be to impugn God with the attempt to deceive. "Consequently, we must remain content with them [words], and cling to them as perfectly clear, certain, sure words of God which can never deceive us or

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<sup>45</sup>Robert D. Preus, "Luther and Biblical Infallibility," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, 110.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church through Luther," in *Inerrancy*, 380.

<sup>48</sup>Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 53.

allow us to err.”<sup>49</sup> In this last quote, it seems most natural to understand Luther to be classifying error in a comprehensive sense: God does not deceive on any matter—soteriological, historical, geographical, or scientific.

John Calvin also shared Luther’s commitment with regard to Scripture. Commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16—a crucial text for establishing the doctrine of inspiration—Calvin not only strongly affirmed the divine authorship of Scripture, but also the idea that Scripture is without error.

This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. . . . Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spake.<sup>50</sup>

His conclusion—“that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it”<sup>51</sup>—underscores the fact that Calvin precluded any human interference between God and the written word. A safe inference here would be that error is one of the human elements that the Holy Spirit kept from Scripture. That is not to suggest that Calvin held to a strict dictation theory of inspiration; indeed, he affirmed that the authors of Scripture freely wrote according to their own style and research.<sup>52</sup> Such freedom, however, did not diminish divine superintendence or necessitate the introduction of error into the original

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>John Calvin, *Second Timothy*, vol. 21 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 249.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>See Kenneth Kantzer, “Calvin and the Holy Scriptures,” in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 141.

text. In fact, statements from Calvin strongly imply that attribution of error to human authors would impugn the divine author. For example, in an attempt to deal with an alleged discrepancy in the creation narrative (Gen 1:16), Calvin provides a reason for why Moses would speak of the moon (the lesser light) as second only to the sun (the greater light) when it is clear to astronomers that Saturn is larger than the moon.

If the astronomer inquires respecting the actual dimensions of the stars, he will find the moon to be less than Saturn; but this is something abstruse, for to the sight it appears differently. Moses, therefore, rather adapts his discourse to common usage . . . . There is therefore no reason why [critics] should deride the unskillfulness of Moses in making the moon the second luminary; he does not call us up into heaven, he only proposes things which lie open before our eyes.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Moses was not in error by calling the moon the lesser light; he was only accommodating himself to his human readers. As his statements concerned earth-dwellers and their reliance upon the sun and moon for distinguishing signs and seasons, Moses spoke appropriately and accurately. There was an underlying motivation, however, that grew from Calvin's commitment to the doctrine of inspiration to deal rightly with these apparent discrepancies: to imply that Moses made a mistake when he wrote the Genesis account was to suggest that the Holy Spirit made a mistake. Indeed, it was ultimately the Spirit who accommodated himself to human beings. Regarding the language used in Genesis 1:16, Calvin comments, "[S]ince the Spirit of God here opens a common school for all, it is not surprising that he should chiefly choose those subjects which would be intelligible to all."<sup>54</sup> If Moses made an error, the Holy Spirit made an

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<sup>53</sup>John Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 87.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

error. Such an idea was unthinkable for Calvin.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, we see Calvin's commitment to inerrancy not only in explicit statements, but also in his exegetical practice; namely, in his relentless efforts at harmonizing apparent discrepancies in the text. Attempts to reconcile passages and provide answers to problem passages are found throughout his various writings and were sustained by a commitment to the divine authorship of the Bible. John Woodbridge comments, "Calvin's own efforts at harmonizing the Scriptures were based on the premise that the 'truth of God' undergirded what the biblical authors penned under the influence of the Holy Spirit."<sup>56</sup> In certain instances, when Calvin found himself confronted by what he perceived as an error in the text, he, like his predecessor, Augustine, would find resolution to the alleged discrepancies in granting that errors may have crept into subsequent copies of Scripture.<sup>57</sup> The original text, however, could not contain any error.

It should also be noted that during the Reformation, not only did Reformers like Luther and Calvin express through their various writings that they believed the Bible to be without error, but ensuing Protestant debates with the Roman Catholic Church demonstrated that, despite their differences with regard to soteriology and ecclesiology,

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<sup>55</sup>That Calvin could not countenance the notion that Scripture contained error is admitted even by those who do not themselves hold to the concept of biblical inerrancy. For example, Edward Dowey observes, "To Calvin the theologian an error in Scripture is unthinkable. Hence the endless harmonizing, the explaining and interpreting of passages that seem to contradict or be inaccurate." Edward Dowey, *Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 104. For more on Calvin's view of Scripture, see John H. Gerstner, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines," in *Inerrancy*, 385-410; J. I. Packer, "Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, 143-88.

<sup>56</sup>Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 58.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

both groups held to biblical inerrancy.<sup>58</sup> Such views of Scripture would continue into the post-Reformation and modern period.

### **Post-Reformation and Modern Period**

In the early 1600s a significant change began to take shape in Western intellectual culture. Developments in philosophy and science would dislodge Christian presuppositions from their preeminent epistemological status, and reason would increasingly stand in judgment over Scripture rather than Scripture serving as an authority over reason.<sup>59</sup> With these significant changes would come an approach toward biblical studies that would undermine the historical and scientific reliability of the Bible while introducing hermeneutical theories that would challenge long-held beliefs in God's supernatural action in the world.<sup>60</sup>

Despite these challenges, however, Christian theologians situated in the Protestant tradition would continue to uphold the Bible against both explicit attacks and implicit anti-supernatural theories of interpretation, and they would do so by arguing that the Bible, as a result of its divine inspiration, was wholly without error. For example, William Ames (1576-1633) in his *Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, contended that God's act

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 69-72.

<sup>59</sup>For a helpful survey of this significant shift, see W. Andrew Hoffercker, "Enlightenment and Awakening: The Beginning of Modern Culture Wars," in *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed. W. Andrew Hoffercker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 240-78.

<sup>60</sup>Bruce Demarest, "The Bible in the Enlightenment Era," in *Challenges to Inerrancy*, ed. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 31. For a helpful summary of these developments and how they relate directly to our study of biblical authority and inerrancy, see Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 85-99; Allison, *Historical Theology*, 109-16; Harold O. J. Brown, "Romanticism and the Bible," in *Challenges to Inerrancy*, 49-66. For an evaluation of these changes specifically in the realm of philosophy, see Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of its Philosophical Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

of inspiration kept the authors of Scripture from error.<sup>61</sup> A contemporary of Ames, William Perkins (1558-1602), stated plainly concerning the Scripture: “The purity thereof is whereby it remaineth entire in itself, void of defect and error.”<sup>62</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, penned in 1646, would ground the authority of the Bible in God, “who is truth itself.”<sup>63</sup> The Confession would state unambiguously that Scripture is the “Word of God,”<sup>64</sup> because God had “immediately inspired”<sup>65</sup> both the Old and New Testament texts; it was, therefore, worthy of full acceptance and obedience. Furthermore, the Confession described Scripture as “infallible truth”<sup>66</sup> in which no contradictions could be found.<sup>67</sup>

Thomas Helwys (1550-1616), one of the founders of the Baptist movement in

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<sup>61</sup>William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 185-86, quoted in Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 104. Ames comments, “In those things that were hidden and unknown, divine inspiration was at work by itself. In those things which were known, or where the knowledge was obtained by ordinary means, there was added the writers’ devout zeal so that (God assisting them) they might not err in writing” (Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 104).

<sup>62</sup>William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay, 1970), 549-50, quoted in Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 106.

<sup>63</sup>WCF, 1:4.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 1:8.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 1:5.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 1:9. That no contradictions could be found in all of Scripture is implied in the following passage from the Confession: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly” (ibid.). Here the authors of the Confession indicate they believed that obscure, difficult to understand, unclear passages could be resolved by appeal to other biblical passages. Such a position on the sufficiency of Scripture indicates that the Westminster divines believed that Scripture could not contain internal contradictions, because if it did, interpretation of difficult passages by appeal to other passages would yield nothing certain and be a simple waste of effort. John Woodbridge comments, “Nevertheless, it appears that when the Divines described the Bible as infallible, they primarily meant that it was ‘without error’” (Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 115).

England, in his work on the authority of the state and the Christian's liberty of conscience, esteemed Scripture even over the word of the king. "And yet neither [Jesus] nor his apostles that had the Spirit without error to deliver the counsels of God did ever by example, practice, or by rule command nor give power than any should be compelled by any bodily punishment to obey their laws and ordinances, which were infallibly true, holy, and good."<sup>68</sup>

Other Baptists would follow the tradition established by Helwys and reverence the Scripture as God's infallible word. Through confessions of faith, works of theology, exegetical practice, and personal devotion, Baptists in England and America would maintain a robust view of biblical inspiration and inerrancy throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, as Baptist historians L. Russ Bush and Tom Nettles observe,

Whenever controversy arose, whether in the seventeenth, eighteenth, or nineteenth centuries, Baptists were forced to direct their attention toward the issues involved in the definition of biblical inspiration. In these historical conflicts—first with those outside the faith and then among those within—several consistent streams of thought can be isolated. Those streams of thought serve to express what Baptists have meant when they say: "The Bible is inspired by God."<sup>70</sup>

Bush and Nettles then note two important designations Baptists historically have given to

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<sup>68</sup>Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (1612; repr., Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 54.

<sup>69</sup>L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles offer a thorough treatment of the Baptist legacy as it pertains to the doctrine of inerrancy. See *Baptists and the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999). Concerning specifically Southern Baptists, see James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis* (Dallas: Criterion, 1986). Hefley comments, "Most SBC moderates and even classic liberals in other denominations concede that church history until the 19<sup>th</sup> century belongs to inerrantists" (ibid., 1:35). See also James Draper, *Authority: The Critical Issue for Southern Baptists* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revel, 1984). For a helpful historical survey from the early church onward, see Tom Nettles, "Inerrancy in History," in *Authority and Interpretation: A Baptist Perspective*, ed. Duane Garrett and Richard Melik (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 127-54.

<sup>70</sup>Bush and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 392.

the Bible. First, Scripture is “infallible.” Bush and Nettles explain,

At least as early as 1651, Particular Baptists described the Bible as infallible. Williams, Bunyan, and Keach all used the word, as did the *Second London Confession* and several subsequent individuals. Later adherents to infallibility include Boyce, Broadus, Manly, Spurgeon, Carroll, and others. They used ‘infallible’ as a word that made a theoretical claim about the nature of Scripture as an inspired volume—it is inherently truthful in facts and ideas and is, therefore, incapable of misleading the careful interpreter in what it affirms or denies.<sup>71</sup>

Second, the Scripture is “inerrant.” Bush and Nettles continue,

This word is merely a nuance of ‘infallible’ and is implied by that term. Although the word has recently taken on an inflammatory character, it has significant historical precedent among Baptists. From John Smyth’s characterization of Scripture as being ‘without error in the first donation,’ to the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention’s *Baptist Faith and Message* phrase, ‘truth, without mixture of err, for its matter,’ some concept equivalent to inerrancy has been judged by most Baptists to express accurately their understanding of the nature of Scripture. Whereas ‘infallible’ in a general sense has referred primarily to the doctrinal content of Scripture, ‘without error’ has been more directly applied to the factual character of Scripture. Matters of apparent contradiction, alleged inaccuracies in history, in geography, and in references to nature; and acts supposedly antithetical to the revealed nature of God are problems within the area that Baptists have traditionally described as being without error.<sup>72</sup>

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the great American theologian in the Reformed tradition, though not of Baptist ecclesiastical persuasion, demonstrated his belief in biblical inerrancy explicitly in clear statements about the Bible, and implicitly in his massive collection of unpublished notes in which he sought to reconcile Scripture passages that contained apparent discrepancies.<sup>73</sup> Like his theological predecessor, John Calvin, Edwards’ commitment to the Bible’s wholesale truthfulness compelled him to seek solutions to apparent contradictions in Scripture. It seems unlikely in both cases that

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>John Gerstner, “Calvin and the Westminster Divines,” in *Inerrancy*, 402-8.

these men would expend such significant and consistent effort in reconciling Bible passages if they did not hold first to the idea that the Bible did not contain errors.

Yet, as arguments made against biblical inerrancy developed and received greater nuance, so did the church's response. Whereas Christian theologians had not, up to this point in history, established a full doctrine of Scripture in detailed treatises, the early 1800s would see the production of a few major works on the subject as Christian scholars sought to provide robust answers to contemporary challenges. Significant contributions to the doctrine of inerrancy would come from Princeton seminary.

B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), for example, professor of theology from 1887-1921, produced over his lifetime several scholarly articles that dealt with the matter of Scripture's divine inspiration, as he sought to confront current attempts "to undermine the historical truthfulness"<sup>74</sup> of the Bible's narratives. In many of these articles, Warfield spoke directly to the issue of inerrancy. For example, in a brief article entitled, "Inspiration" (1911), Warfield linked the reliability of Scripture to their divine authorship.

While on the other hand the human writers of Scripture are said to have spoken "in" the Holy Spirit (Mark xii; ii. 15; Matt xxii. 43, both R. V.) and are treated as merely the media through whom God the Holy Ghost speaks (Matt. i. 22; ii. 15; Acts i. 16; iv. 25; xxviii. 25; Rom. i. 2). Accordingly, the very words of Scripture are accounted authoritative and "not to be broken" (Matt. xxii. 43; John x. 31, 35; Gal. iii. 16); its prophecies sure (2 Pet. i. 20; John xix. 36, 37; xx. 9; Acts i. 16; cf. Ezra i. 1; Dan. ix. 2); and its whole contents, historical as well as doctrinal and ethical, not only entirely trustworthy, but designedly framed for the spiritual profit of all ages (2 Tim. iii. 16; Rom. xv. 4; 1 Cor. x. 11; Rom. iv. 23; ix. 17; 1 Cor. ix. 10; Gal. iii, 8, 22; iv. 30; 1 Pet. ii. 6; cf. 2 Chron. xvii. 9; Neh. viii. 1).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>B. B. Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," in *The Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 581.

Elsewhere, Warfield appealed to the view Jesus and the apostles held concerning the Old Testament to bolster his argument for inerrancy. “Our Lord and his apostles looked upon the entire truthfulness and utter trustworthiness of that body of writings which they called ‘Scripture,’ as so fully guaranteed by the inspiration of God, that they could appeal to them confidently in all their statements of whatever kind as absolutely true.”<sup>76</sup>

Recognizing, however, that errors have crept into subsequent copies of the Scripture through the mistakes of scribes and copyists, Warfield argues for the inerrancy of the original text.<sup>77</sup> Yet, he also affirms along with the Westminster Confession a distinction between the original and subsequent copies and that the transmitted text “has been providentially kept so pure as to retain full authoritativeness in all controversies of religion.”<sup>78</sup> While there were errors in the subsequent copies of Scripture, God’s providence had provided his people with a trustworthy text.

Scottish theologian, James Bannerman (1807-1868), while not a professor with Warfield, did receive his Doctorate of Divinity from Princeton, and argued extensively

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<sup>75</sup>B. B. Warfield, “Inspiration,” in *The Collected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 1, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 32. See also another article entitled “Inspiration,” written for Johnson’s *Universal Cyclopaedia* (1909), in which Warfield comments, “[T]he term ‘inspiration’ is reserved to denote the continued work of God by which—his providential gracious, and supernatural contributions being presupposed—he wrought within the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering the written product the divinely trustworthy Word of God.” Warfield concludes his essay, “If Christ and his apostles are not of infallible authority, even in the matter of their doctrinal teaching, the question cannot be raised whether they have been rendered by the Holy Ghost infallible, not only in the matter [of inspiration], but also in the very form of all their communications, of whatever kind” (*The Collected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 2: 615; 636).

<sup>76</sup>Warfield, “The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs,” 580.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 580-87.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 580-81. For a robust articulation and defense of Scripture’s inspiration and inerrancy, see B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948).

for the doctrine of inerrancy in his significant work, *Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures*. Throughout this volume, Bannerman defended the verbal-plenary nature of inspiration,<sup>79</sup> the historical veracity of the biblical authors,<sup>80</sup> and the infallible nature of Scriptural truth,<sup>81</sup> while concluding his work with a series of cogent answers to common objections posed against the doctrines of inspiration and infallibility.<sup>82</sup> On the whole, the views held and articulated by Warfield and Bannerman are representative of the positions maintained by Princeton faculty during the nineteenth century.<sup>83</sup>

John Murray (1898-1975), professor at Princeton in the early twentieth century and later founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, continued the tradition set by his predecessors. For example, in an address given to students at Inter-Varsity Fellowship in 1960, Murray articulated a doctrine of infallibility<sup>84</sup> that included

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<sup>79</sup>Bannerman, *Inspiration*, 103, 246, 347.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 18-32.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 104, 201, 214, 223, 509, 519.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 480-556.

<sup>83</sup>Warfield's predecessor Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) gave considerable attention to the doctrine of Scripture generally and to inerrancy specifically during his tenure. Alexander's colleague Charles Hodge (1797-1878) articulated his view of the Bible's comprehensive truthfulness in his work on systematic theology. Warfield's contemporary, Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), defended the inerrancy of Scripture as a vital component to his discipline of biblical theology. See Archibald Alexander, *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1836), 224-44; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:170; and Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. R. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 19.

<sup>84</sup>Up to this point in the church's history and during the time of Murray's address to the students at Inter-Varsity, the word "infallible" was used to denote the idea that Scripture was wholly without error in all that it affirmed. Distinction between the words "infallible" and "inerrant" came later as proponents for inerrancy recognized that some scholars were using "infallible" to say that Scripture was without error only in matters of faith and practice. That Murray understood "infallible" to include all of Scripture—including historic, scientific, and geographic assertions—becomes clear in the address itself.

the notion of verbal inspiration and was grounded in the witness of the Scripture itself.<sup>85</sup> Christians, then, were obliged to “defend the Scripture against allegations of error and contradiction,”<sup>86</sup> and to “show from the data of Scripture that the Scripture is consistent with itself.”<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, it was around the time of Murray’s address to the students at Inter-Varsity that unexpected opponents were found offering resistance to the doctrine of inerrancy; on this occasion, it was evangelical theologians who were leveling the challenges. It is to that time period and the controversy therein I now turn.

### **A Divide Emerges: Evangelicals and the Doctrine of Inerrancy, 1960-1977**

When confronted by challenges to the doctrine of inerrancy from those within its own ranks, evangelical theologians responded in light of what they understood to be assaults upon a historical precedent. Although the word “inerrancy” was coined during the modern period, inerrancy *as a concept*, as I noted above, was affirmed and reaffirmed throughout the history of the church. Evangelical theologians, then, were obligated to retain and defend such a position. The conservative evangelical response was also grounded in what they perceived as a departure from a clear and straightforward starting principle. John Woodbirdge, when surveying the theological landscape of evangelicalism at the time of his writing in 1982, notes this important factor.

Evangelicals have commonly assumed that the biblical writers, inspired by God the Holy Spirit, wrote infallibly. These authors did so, not only for matters of faith and

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<sup>85</sup>John Murray, “The Infallibility of Scripture,” in *The Claims of Truth*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976), 9-15.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

practice, but also in making incidental affirmations concerning history, geography, and the natural world. The contention of Evangelicals is usually based on the internal claims of the writers that what they had written came from God. It is also founded on an a priori premise: God cannot lie. His Word, therefore, contains no admixture of error.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, evangelicals believed both foundational theological premises and the history of doctrine necessitated a response to the current challenges. Prior to the early to mid-1970s, however, the doctrine of inerrancy was an issue opposed mainly by those outside the evangelical camp. To illustrate: In 1986, while reflecting on an article that noted the changing consensus within evangelicalism and its view of the Bible, D. A. Carson observed, “until fairly recently, the infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture was one of the self-identifying flags of evangelicalism, recognized by friend and foe alike.”<sup>89</sup> By the time of Carson’s writing, it was clear that such a consensus was “rapidly dissipating.”<sup>90</sup>

There were, however, earlier hints that a division was forming among evangelicals with regard to how those within the movement understood the nature of the Bible’s authority.<sup>91</sup> Writing as early as 1967, J. Barton Payne reported, “Doubts about Scripture’s veracity . . . are no longer limited to convinced doctrinal skeptics, whether of an unreconstructed sort of liberalism or of a more repentant kind of neo-orthodoxy. They are currently voiced among theologians generally classified as evangelical, among men

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<sup>88</sup>Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 20.

<sup>89</sup>D. A. Carson, “Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 62. Carson is commenting on one of the main points in Martin Marty’s article, “Tensions within Contemporary Evangelicalism: A Critical Appraisal,” in *The Evangelicals*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 170-88.

<sup>90</sup>Carson, “Recent Developments,” 62.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.* Even Carson observed that “in 1975 there were a few scholars who called themselves evangelicals but who expressed their displeasure with any notion of ‘inerrancy’ as traditionally understood” (*ibid.*).

who look to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”<sup>92</sup> Harold J. Ockenga, writing in 1980, noted a similar development. “The seeds of this struggle [over inerrancy had] been lying dormant in the environment of theological seminaries, denominations, Bible conferences, churches, colleges, and related institutions for several decades.”<sup>93</sup> Yet, in his book *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (1980),<sup>94</sup> J. I. Packer would position the starting point for much of the current discussion about inerrancy around a work published seventeen years prior by a confessing evangelical, Dewey Beegle.

Beegle argued that God’s use of human instruments in writing Scripture involved his allowance of slight historical mistakes in the biblical text.<sup>95</sup> According to Beegle, the doctrine of inerrancy was untenable and, as such, ultimately unhelpful in theological formulation.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, to begin with the “assumption of inerrancy” was illegitimate if for no other reason than Christ himself did not teach the doctrine.<sup>97</sup> To bolster his argument, he noted errors in the book of Jude, Second Kings, Genesis, Acts, Galatians, Mark, and First Corinthians.<sup>98</sup> A second edition of the volume in which

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<sup>92</sup>J. Barton Payne, “*Apeitheo: Current Resistant to Biblical Inerrancy*,” in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 115.

<sup>93</sup>Harold J. Ockenga, preface to *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsay Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 7.

<sup>94</sup>Packer, *Beyond Battle for the Bible*, 47.

<sup>95</sup>Dewey Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 165-68.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup>Dewey Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 175-97. This book was the revised edition to *The Inspiration of Scripture*, published in 1973 under a slightly different name. In the foreword to the revised edition, F. F. Bruce located Beegle’s first edition, *The Inspiration of Scripture* within the evangelical tradition, although he admits that Beegle had broadened his potential audience with the second edition. See F. F. Bruce, foreword to *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, 7.

Beegle articulated the above views garnered a blistering review by Gordon Clark who, writing for the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, forcefully stated his opposition to Beegle's volume: "Dewey M. Beegle's *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* . . . is an all-out, no holds-barred, always aggressive, sometimes insidious, attack on the truthfulness of Scripture."<sup>99</sup> In 1975, however, two years prior to the release of the second edition of Beegle's *Scripture, Tradition, and Authority* and Clark's subsequent review, Harold Lindsell would take formal notice of evangelicalism's increasing split on inerrancy in his book, *The Battle for the Bible*.<sup>100</sup>

In the foreword to *The Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell's friend and colleague, Harold Ockenga, characterized the increasing schism among evangelicals by offering simple definitions of the two opposing views: "The first view considers all of Scripture to be inspired and true, including the historical, geographical, and scientific teaching. The second view holds that only the Bible's teaching on salvation-history and doctrine is true. The Bible is authoritative for faith and practice only."<sup>101</sup> Ockenga agreed with Lindsell that the conflict over inerrancy had undoubtedly become a problem within evangelicalism; the body of Lindsell's *Battle for the Bible* supported this assertion with

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<sup>99</sup>Gordon H. Clark, "Beegle on the Bible: A Review Article," *JETS* 20 (1977): 265.

<sup>100</sup>In 1984, Packer recognized three primary precursors to the inerrancy debate. "The direct antecedents of the current evangelical debate were: (1) Dewey M. Beegle's book, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (1963, enlarged and reissued as *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, 1973), an attack by a professed evangelical on the idea of inerrancy, (2) the view that Scripture taught (and the use of it modeled) in some professedly evangelical seminaries during the sixties and seventies, and (3) Harold Lindsell's strident, *Battle for the Bible* (1976), the first blast of his trumpet against what he saw as the monstrous regiment of biblical errantists in the modern evangelical world." J. I. Packer, "John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 145.

<sup>101</sup>Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 8. Clark summarizes the debate well when he observes, "Discussions on inerrancy in recent years have often distinguished between the theological teaching and the so-called phenomena—i.e., historical, chronological, geographical and statistical data" (Clark, "Beegle on the Bible," 265).

multiple illustrations of defection within evangelical denominations and parachurch organizations. Most salient to our discussion of the growing split within evangelicalism concerning the inerrancy of the Bible is the parachurch organization at which Lindsell served as a founding faculty member: Fuller Theological Seminary. This investigation into Fuller Seminary will be followed by a brief discussion an important book edited by Fuller faculty member Jack Rogers: *Biblical Authority*.<sup>102</sup>

### **Fuller Theological Seminary**

Fuller Theological Seminary was officially organized in 1947. The founder, Charles E. Fuller, along with the founding faculty, Wilbur B. Smith, Everett F. Harrison, Carl F. H. Henry, Harold J. Ockenga, and Harold Lindsell, envisioned their fledgling seminary providing evangelicalism with what it otherwise lacked: “an interdenominational theological seminary of outstanding academic and evangelical qualifications.”<sup>103</sup> According to the school’s inaugural catalog, this new seminary was expected to fill the void left by those schools who had become infected by “naturalist modernism” or who had limited their effectiveness by associating themselves too tightly with specific doctrinal emphases.<sup>104</sup> Not far into its new life as an evangelical center for theological education, however, the school found itself bulging with controversy over one

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<sup>102</sup>Jack Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977).

<sup>103</sup>George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 55-56.

<sup>104</sup>Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 56. In a letter of congratulations to David A. Hubbard at the time of his installation as Fuller’s president in 1963, Ockenga would write, “We established the seminary in 1947 in order to maintain an institution committed to the absolute authority of Scripture. This view had been maintained at Princeton until its reorganization and then had been eroded until 1947. I felt that it was necessary to have a new institution fully committed to the authority of Scripture and fully positive in its testimony. This we expressed in our Statement of Faith and it is our keen desire to maintain it” (Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 220).

primary issue: the inerrancy of the Bible.

Minor rumblings over the nature of Scripture's authority came to the fore shortly after Fuller was organized. At the time of its founding, Fuller Seminary did not possess a statement of faith.<sup>105</sup> Harold Ockenga, then president of the new institution, proposed that the school's statement regarding the Scripture follow the "classic Presbyterian statement that the Scriptures 'are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.'"<sup>106</sup> In the 1948-49 academic year, however, the faculty determined the school's statement of faith should be endowed with greater nuance; they enlisted E. J. Carnell to prepare a draft of a new statement.<sup>107</sup>

Carnell, following in step with the training he received at Westminster Seminary, held that God's Word, as originally written, was wholly without error.<sup>108</sup> This application of inerrancy extended to all parts of Scripture; apparent errors exposed mistakes in one's own understanding of the text, not an actual error in the text itself.<sup>109</sup> Carnell's views on Scripture were eventually added to Fuller's statement of faith and brought before the faculty in the spring of 1949. George Marsden reports, "The key

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<sup>105</sup>Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 107.

<sup>106</sup>Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 113. Lindsell ties the purpose of Fuller's founding more directly to the doctrine of inerrancy. "From the beginning it was declared that one of the chief purposes of the founding of the seminary was that it should be an apologetic institution. . . . It was agreed from the inception of the school that through the seminary curriculum the faculty would provide the finest theological defense of biblical infallibility or inerrancy. It was agreed in addition that the faculty would publish joint works that would present to the world the best of evangelical scholarship on inerrancy at a time when there was a dearth of such scholarship and when there were few learned works promoting biblical inerrancy" (Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 107).

<sup>107</sup>Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 113.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid. Carnell articulated his position on Scripture in his book on Christian apologetics. See E. J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 191-210.

phrase [in the statement of faith was] . . . that the original Scriptures, ‘are plenary inspired and free from error in the whole or in the part.’”<sup>110</sup> This phrase would soon play a key role in the resignation of one faculty member, Béla Vassady, thus inciting the first surge of controversy at Fuller.<sup>111</sup>

On October 11, 1949, the Fuller faculty voted to make the adoption of the new statement of faith one of their top priorities with the view that every faculty member sign the statement “without mental reservations” each year. Vassady, however, “who was nothing if not intellectually honest,” said he could not sign the statement.<sup>112</sup> “Inerrancy,” he believed, “was a trait that could be applied to God alone and not to any production in which humans had a hand.”<sup>113</sup> The school, nevertheless, adopted the creed on January 31, 1950 and the faculty provided their signatures. Vassady, expectedly, refused to sign and eventually left Fuller.<sup>114</sup> The next significant crises would occur twelve years later.

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid. Here Marsden quotes from the statement of faith located in the *Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary*, 1950-51, p. 6.

<sup>111</sup>Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870-1970* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 644.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 645.

<sup>113</sup>Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 114. In his record of the situation, Lindsell affirms Vassady’s integrity and his unwillingness to sign the statement of faith without full conviction. “[Vassady] was a man of great integrity and was not in the least bit disposed to sign the statement tongue and cheek. In fact, as we shall see later, the catalogs of the school included a preface to the statement of faith to the effect that every member of the faculty signed it every year without mental reservation, and that anyone who could not so sign would voluntarily leave the institution” (Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 107-8). Personal correspondence between Vassady and then Princeton president John Mackay appear to indicate that Vassady, despite his problems with Fuller’s creed, also had some troubles with some of the other faculty, though speculation should not proceed too far here because it is difficult to know how one might feel about a faculty who holds to views different from one’s own (see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 114 and 114n56). Both Marsden and Lindsell confirm that Vassady left under “mutually agreeable terminal arrangements” (Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 108; see also Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 115).

<sup>114</sup>Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 108.

Prior to 1962, Ockenga served as Fuller's president from 1947 to 1954; E. J. Carnell took the helm of leadership from 1954-1959.<sup>115</sup> Ockenga resumed the post in 1960, but would exercise leadership long-distance, taking numerous flights to-and-from Boston, Massachusetts to Pasadena, California where Fuller was located. Chairman of the Board C. Davis Weyerhaeuser, however, was, at the time, pushing for a resident president. One candidate of whom Weyerhaeuser approved was David Hubbard, a thirty-two year old Fuller graduate who was currently teaching at Westmont College.<sup>116</sup> Hubbard's run for the presidency, however, would soon be compromised by an incident at Westmont.

While at Westmont, Hubbard was contracted by Eerdmans Publishing Company to write an Old Testament survey. For help on the project, Hubbard solicited the assistance of his friend, Robert Laurin, a teacher located nearby at American Baptist Seminary.<sup>117</sup> In order to refine the content of their writing project, both men used drafts of the forthcoming chapters in their classroom. At Westmont Hubbard's presentation of the chapters created a stir.<sup>118</sup> The chapters stated explicitly that the Bible was only reliable in theological or spiritual content, but not inerrant in historical and scientific

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<sup>115</sup>For details concerning Carnell's presidency, see Rudolph Nelson, *The Making and Unmaking of an Evangelical Mind: The Case of Edward Carnell* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 86-106.

<sup>116</sup>Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 208.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 209.

content. Some of the chapters also maintained the mythological character of Genesis and questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and dating of Daniel.<sup>119</sup>

When confronted by the administration at Westmont, Hubbard affirmed inerrancy. Although Hubbard's answer eventually satisfied the Westmont administration, Ockenga determined, after reading the classroom material, "that its teachings were incompatible with the Fuller statement of faith."<sup>120</sup> Now, with Hubbard's qualifications for president in question, some of the faculty feared that Lindsell would be brought in as president. In the past year, Lindsell, along with fellow faculty member Gleason Archer, had also met with Ockenga to express their deep concern about what they perceived as an "erosion of belief in the doctrine of inerrancy among the faculty."<sup>121</sup> On Saturday, December 1, 1962, at a ten-year planning conference for faculty and trustees, the simmering differences among the staff at Fuller Seminary would finally boil over into an impassioned debate over the meaning of inerrancy.

The debate was unleashed when Ockenga, in response to the suggestion by some of the other faculty that the seminary adopt a new creed, asked why such a move was necessary.<sup>122</sup> Daniel Fuller, the son of the school's founder and the forthcoming dean of Fuller's faculty, responded to Ockenga's question by asserting that there were errors in the text of Scripture that could not be adequately explained by appealing to the

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 209.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

original autographs.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, Fuller averred, the Bible itself only claimed inerrancy for the revelational portions; in historical and cosmological details, God “accommodated himself to the imperfect standards of the day. Thus, the Bible contained incidental errors, but these did not hinder God’s revelational purposes.”<sup>124</sup> On the contrary, Carnell objected, an inductive approach to the inerrancy of Scripture was “philosophically disastrous.”<sup>125</sup> Instead, one needs to come to the Bible with the firm presupposition that it is the word of God and then approach alleged discrepancies from within this framework.<sup>126</sup>

Eventually others entered the discussion. William LaSor sided with Fuller, citing Luke’s use of the faulty Septuagint text to give proof of Scripture’s authority in spite of obvious errors.<sup>127</sup> Weyerhaeuser defended Fuller and scoffed at the idea of appealing to the original text to remedy the impasse. He also suggested that the faculty reconsider their use of the word “error;” according to Weyerhaeuser, “discrepancy” was a better term. In either case, the statement of faith, as it read—the autographs were “free from all error in the whole or in the part”—was misleading.<sup>128</sup>

According to Marsden’s description of the account, the conservatives in the group—those who held that Scriptures was without error in its entirety, including historical, geographic, and scientific details—pointed to the history of Protestantism to

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 213.

demonstrate how “any weakness regarding inerrancy would leave an opening through which liberalism would inevitably rush in.”<sup>129</sup> The fall of Princeton, along with other schools (Harvard University, Andover Seminary, Union Theological Seminary) that, in the past, did not regard inerrancy as a test of orthodoxy and who had also fallen headlong into liberalism, served as cautionary tales to the faculty at Fuller.<sup>130</sup>

The following Monday, December 3, 1962, with the urgent matter of the presidency still looming, the search committee had a meeting with Ockenga about Hubbard. Despite previous hesitations with Hubbard’s views about the Bible, Ockenga finally stated that he was content with Hubbard’s stance on Scripture and, having decided it too difficult to transfer from Boston to Pasadena, would relinquish his post. Hubbard would be installed as Fuller’s new president in the winter of 1963. His acceptance of the presidency, however, initially brought the resignation of one of the school’s trustees, Charles Pitts, and several professors including Wilbur Smith, Harold Lindsell, and Gleason Archer. Each man would note the school’s recent concession on the issue of inerrancy as the primary reason for their departure.<sup>131</sup>

In the midst of Lindsell’s and Archer’s departure, another significant change occurred. The statement in the school’s catalog that required the faculty to sign the statement of faith without mental reservation was removed from the 1964-65 version. Later, in December of 1967, Daniel Fuller, in an address at a meeting of ETS in

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 214.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 220-23, 224. Charles Woodbridge had left Fuller in November 1956, having already indicated that he was concerned over Fuller’s drift away from orthodoxy. See also Nelson, *The Making and Unmaking of an Evangelical Mind*, 104.

Toronto,<sup>132</sup> argued for two kinds of Scripture: revelational and non-revelational. According to Lindsell, Fuller's point was plain: "revelational scripture is wholly without error; non revelational Scripture is not."<sup>133</sup> In 1971, Fuller Seminary would adopt a new statement of faith in accord with the position Daniel Fuller articulated in Toronto.<sup>134</sup> Whereas the former statement declared the Bible was "free from error in whole or in part," the new statement only affirmed the Bible as an infallible rule in faith and practice.<sup>135</sup> To Lindsell, the implications of the new statement were unmistakable: Fuller Seminary now clearly advocated partial inerrancy.<sup>136</sup>

The intra-institutional disputes and divisions over inerrancy that had occurred at Fuller over the past three decades would be exposed to the public in Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible*. Lindsell saw the struggle over inerrancy as the most important theological issue of the current age,<sup>137</sup> and he assessed the subject of inerrancy as a watershed of orthodoxy.<sup>138</sup> Bolstering the urgency with which Lindsell wrote was his argument that a denial of inerrancy would lead inevitably to more serious doctrinal

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<sup>132</sup>Daniel Fuller, "Benjamin B. Warfield's View of Faith and History: A Critique in the Light of the New Testament," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11 (1968): 75-83.

<sup>133</sup>Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 113.

<sup>134</sup>Allison, *Historical Theology*, 116.

<sup>135</sup>Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 116. Lindsell remarks, "[The statement] limits infallibility to matters of faith and practice. And this is the view espoused by Daniel Fuller in his address on Warfield. Scripture that does not involve matters of faith and practice is not infallible" (ibid.).

<sup>136</sup>Lindsell would assert this conviction and provide even more evidence of Fuller's departure from inerrancy in a later work. See Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 183-243.

<sup>137</sup>Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 13;

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 120.

denials and, finally, apostasy.<sup>139</sup> Lindsell's participation in the skirmish at Fuller and his trenchant observations of the greater evangelical world confirmed that some evangelicals were in danger of pursuing a course that could potentially lead to greater and greater error; for Lindsell, silence was not an option.

***Biblical Authority***  
**Edited by Jack B. Rogers**

Lindsell's book would draw both warm approval<sup>140</sup> and scathing critique.<sup>141</sup> It would be a book from the other side of the debate, however, that would sound a public alarm that a significant theological shift had already taken place within the boundaries of evangelicalism. The publication in 1977 of *Biblical Authority*, a compendium of essays edited by Jack B. Rogers, Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy of Religion at Fuller Seminary, "alerted many in evangelical churches, as well as in the religious

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 142. Stanley Gundry, in his presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, delivered on December 27, 1978 at the peak of the controversy, agreed generally with Lindsell's assessment of the current situation and his prediction for those who remained committed to a partial inerrancy: "Perhaps Harold Lindsell's historical and theological argument can be faulted in certain minor details. But the 'slippery-slide' theory . . . is pretty hard to refute in either its historical or theological version. . . . I am not arguing that inerrancy is the essence of what it means to be evangelical or Christian. . . . *But I am saying that historical precedents and epistemological considerations seem to indicate that one's position on inerrancy is a kind of watershed indicating the logical, and perhaps, eventual, direction of one's theology*" (emphasis added). Stanley N. Gundry, "Evangelical Theology: Where Should We Be Going?" in *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* ed. Andreas Köstenberger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 75-77.

<sup>140</sup>Approval like Gundry's response noted above. In a recent historical assessment of the debate, Barry Hankins designated *The Battle for the Bible* as a "bellwether call for the return to biblical inerrancy." Barry Hankins, *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism: A Documentary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>141</sup>Donald W. Dayton, "'The Battle for the Bible': Renewing the Inerrancy Debate," *The Christian Century*, November 10, 1976, 976-80. In a brief book review, Donald W. Shriver, Jr., of Union Theological Seminary in New York, concluded, "Here is a poorly researched, poorly reasoned, and poorly targeted book about the richest subject in the world!" Donald W. Shriver, Jr., "Review: The Battle for the Bible," *Interpretation* 32, no. 2 (1978): 214-18.

community at large, that a new theological polarization was emerging.”<sup>142</sup> With the publication of *Biblical Authority*, it was now clear to many that there were two opposing schools of thought within evangelicalism concerning the nature of Scripture’s authority. In a chapter of the book that would serve as an antecedent to his massive co-authored volume on the subject,<sup>143</sup> Rogers argued, by surveying several key theologians throughout church history, that it is “historically irresponsible to claim that for two thousand years Christians have believed that the authority of the Bible entails a modern concept of inerrancy in scientific and historical details.”<sup>144</sup> The “central concern” for men like Augustine, Calvin, Rutherford, and Bavink, was that believers would reverence the Bible as our “sole authority on salvation and the living of a Christian life.”<sup>145</sup> Because God had accommodated his word to human language, it was “no doubt possible to define the meaning of biblical inerrancy according the Bible’s saving purpose [while] taking into account the human forms though which God condescended to reveal himself.”<sup>146</sup> For Rogers, however, this meant that we cannot confuse “error” with a lapse

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<sup>142</sup>Hannah, *Inerrancy and the Church*, vii-viii.

<sup>143</sup>I refer here to Jack Rogers and Donald McKim’s book, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979). Although Hannah states that Rogers and McKim’s work in *Authority and Interpretation* would serve to highlight the differences over inerrancy among evangelicals to an even greater extent than Rogers’s *Biblical Authority* (see Hannah, *Inerrancy in the Church*, vii), I am choosing to remain strictly chronological in my presentation of these two books. Rogers and McKim’s co-written volume was not published until 1979. The CSBI was penned in October of 1978. I will examine Rogers and McKim’s *Authority and Interpretation* in greater detail as I consider post-CSBI developments in chap. 2.

<sup>144</sup>Jack B. Rogers, “The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority,” in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack B. Rogers (Waco, TX: Word, 1977), 44.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*

in “technical precision.”<sup>147</sup> In other words, in scientific details, for example, Christians need not concern themselves with arguing the Scripture’s accuracy; they are only required to “accept its saving message.”<sup>148</sup> Another article would question whether inerrancy was truly a logical corollary to inspiration and whether it was “critically honest” with the difficulties that had haunted biblical scholars for years.<sup>149</sup> Yet another article would claim that the recent discussions on inerrancy had not served to reinforce a high view of inspiration or the Bible’s authority because the debates were framed negatively (the Bible *does not* err) instead of positively (the Bible *does* teach truth).<sup>150</sup> With such statements and arguments, it was now clear that there were some within evangelicalism’s ranks who were not only unsatisfied with the doctrine of inerrancy; they were also ready to articulate their discontent with lengthy argument and careful detail.

The fracture that had now become starkly apparent within evangelicalism with the publication of *Biblical Authority* had not occurred overnight: the disagreement over the inerrancy of Scripture had been festering within evangelicalism—albeit, gradually—since the early 1960s. By 1977, however, with the publication of Rogers’s edited volume, the division among confessing evangelicals concerning the inerrancy of the Bible was unambiguous.

In response to these mounting challenges, the ICBI Inerrancy held its first

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<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Clark Pinnock, “Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology,” in *Biblical Authority*, 64-65.

<sup>150</sup>Berkeley Mickelsen, “The Bible’s Own Approach to Authority,” in *Biblical Authority*, 86-87.

international summit conference on the weekend of October 26-28, 1978, in Chicago, Illinois. Here, at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare hotel, approximately three hundred evangelical scholars, pastors, and laymen of diverse ecclesiastical and denominational backgrounds gathered to discuss and hear presentations on the issue of inerrancy.<sup>151</sup> The presentations—soon after compiled and bound in the volume entitled *Inerrancy* (1980)—were designed specifically to counter Rogers’s edited volume, *Biblical Authority*.<sup>152</sup> Corresponding to these presentations was the formulation of the CSBI.<sup>153</sup> The completed statement consisted of a summary statement, nineteen articles of affirmation and denial, and an accompanying exposition that places the doctrine of inerrancy “in the context of the broader teachings of Scripture concerning itself.”<sup>154</sup> The document touched on several important theological matters as they related to the doctrine of inerrancy. I will examine the document specifically in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

### Conclusion

The doctrine of inerrancy has strong historical precedent in the church. Yet, as the debate among evangelicals over the inerrancy of the Bible progressed from the 1960s to 1978, it appears that the lack of a thorough statement delineating a nuanced definition of inerrancy may have precipitated the current division among professing evangelicals.

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<sup>151</sup>Geisler, *Inerrancy*, ix.

<sup>152</sup>Jay Grimstead, “How the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy Began,” Coalition on Revival, [http://www.reformation.net/Pages/ICBI\\_Background.htm](http://www.reformation.net/Pages/ICBI_Background.htm) (accessed February 14, 2014).

<sup>153</sup>This document, which was understood to “defin[e] the biblical and historic position on the inerrancy” (Geisler, *Inerrancy*, ix), was signed by the conferees, among whom were Harold Ockenga, Harold Lindsell, and Gleason Archer. For a full list of signees, see The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, “List of Signers of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” Mosher and Turpin Libraries, [http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_1\\_typed.pdf](http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1_typed.pdf) (accessed February 14, 2014).

<sup>154</sup>Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 498. The exposition is approximately 3000 words.

What *was* the evangelical position on inerrancy? According to James Montgomery Boice, a member of the ICBI's executive counsel, the meeting in Chicago in the fall of 1978 provided the definitive answer.<sup>155</sup>

Many believed that it did. For example, in his presidential address to the members of ETS, Stanley Gundry acknowledged, "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy resulting from that meeting is a remarkably balanced and comprehensive document, especially considering the theological diversity of the participants and the time limitations within which they operated."<sup>156</sup> J. I. Packer, writing only two years after the statement was produced, designated the CSBI as a kind of plumline for further discussion. "The resulting . . . Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy was signed by over ninety percent of [the participants], and in view of this broad representative base of support it should be able to function as an agreed platform and reference point for the debates of the next generation."<sup>157</sup> Carl Henry, a founding member of Fuller Theological Seminary, included the full version of the statement in the fourth volume of his *magnum opus, God, Revelation, and Authority*.<sup>158</sup> Henry's own definition of inerrancy mirrors the CSBI at many points.<sup>159</sup> Norman Geisler, in the updated version of his classic, *A General Introduction to the Bible*,<sup>160</sup> provided all nineteen of the CSBI's articles of affirmation

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<sup>155</sup>Gundry, "Evangelical Theology," 81.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>157</sup>Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible*, 48.

<sup>158</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:211-19.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 201-10.

<sup>160</sup>Norman L. Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 181-84.

and denial, giving prefatory comments noting the statement’s reflection of the “modern evangelical position on Scripture.”<sup>161</sup> Concerning the document’s continued usefulness, Geisler comments, “Perhaps the most united manifestation of this confession is the Chicago Statement on Scripture (1978) published by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. . . . The ‘Chicago Statement’ will serve as a summary of the contemporary evangelical view on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible” (180).<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, by merely noting the number of volumes that contain or refer to the CSBI, it appears that Packer’s prediction of the CSBI serving as a theological benchmark for the continuing discussion on inerrancy was generally correct. Several evangelical works on the doctrine of Scripture—both popular and scholarly— written since the CSBI was produced, utilize the statement in one form or another as an aid in defining inerrancy.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>163</sup>For example, we find complete copies of the CSBI or references to relevant sections of the document in the bodies of various evangelical works. While impossible to mention every volume, a list of some significant works from both the scholarly and popular level will suffice to illustrate the above point. In his one-volume systematic theology, Wayne Grudem includes the preface, the summary statement and the articles of affirmation and denial in an appendix entitled, “Historic Confessions of the Faith” (1203-1205). See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). In their work in systematic theology, Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest reference the CSBI to supplement their definition of inerrancy. See Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 1:137-38. Greg Beale includes the entire statement in an appendix in a recent book on the doctrine of inerrancy. See G.K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 267-79. Joseph Wooddell, commenting on “Article I: The Scriptures,” notes the CSBI for further clarification on the definition of inerrancy in the *Baptist Faith and Message*. See *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 10n10 and 10n11. Brian Edwards looks favorably on the CSBI and provides the document’s preface, summary statement, articles of affirmation and denial in a postscript to a recent work on the doctrine of Scripture. See Brian Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth: The Inspiration, Authority and History of the Bible Explained* (New York: Evangelical, 2006), 485-92. In the preface to a recent work on gender and sexuality, J. Ligon Duncan and Randy Stinson make reference to the CSBI in noting the confusion that results when one no longer maintains the total truth of Scripture. See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), xii. In their work on the history of inerrancy among Baptists, L. Russ Bush and Tom Nettles mention the CSBI in their discussion of Wayne Grudem, favorably placing the CSBI alongside the “historic Baptist view of the full authority and truthfulness of all the Bible.” See L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and

Within the past decade, however, there has been considerable resistance from some confessing evangelicals over the doctrine of inerrancy generally and the CSBI in particular. I now turn to examine these developments in chapter 2.

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Holman, 1999), 384. David Dockery and David Nelson encourage their readers to consult the CSBI for further study in the doctrine of inerrancy in their chapter in a recent work on systematic theology. See David S. Dockery and David P. Nelson “Special Revelation,” in *Theology for the Church*, ed. Danny Aiken (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), 157. Norman Geisler recently included the CSBI’s summary statement and the nineteen articles of affirmation and denial in his recent systematic theology. See Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2002), 1: 419-22. Robert Plummer states that the CSBI “continues to serve as a touchstone for the definition of inerrancy.” Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 41. Jim Hamilton relies heavily upon the CSBI in his recent defense of an evangelical approach to Scripture. See Jim M. Hamilton, Jr., “Still *Sola Scriptura*: An Evangelical Perspective on Scripture,” in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christians Scriptures*, Gorgias Précis Portfolios 7, ed. Michael Bird and Michael Pahl (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 215-40.

## CHAPTER 2

### POST-CSBI DEVELOPMENTS

In the latter half of chapter 1, I sought to demonstrate the initial adequacy and usefulness of the CSBI. That the CSBI did enjoy a season of powerful and sustained influence among individual evangelicals and evangelical institutions does not mean that such influence continued without further opposition. Indeed, immediately after the CSBI was published, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim released a book in which they attempted to undercut any historical foundation upon which the CSBI stood.<sup>1</sup> I will examine this particular volume in a moment, for it will set the stage for the following reflections upon the participants in the current debate. Yet, even as Rogers and McKim's volume proffered a noteworthy challenge to evangelical inerrantists, significant conservative response would follow the inaugural writing of the CSBI and provide substantive historical, philosophical, exegetical, and theological grounding for the definition of

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<sup>1</sup>See Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). The authors address the CSBI only once in their introduction, briefly noting the ICBI, the 1978 meeting in Chicago, and some of the CSBI's contents. Rogers and McKim also mention the ICBI later in the book, recognizing it as a "recently created organization" in 1977 (*ibid.*, 315n90). I have chosen to include a discussion of Rogers and McKim's work in this chapter in order to maintain the chronological order of events and publications. Despite the fact that they do not address specifically the CSBI more than once in their volume, their overall argument takes direct aim at the document as it seeks to remove any historical precedent from the doctrine of inerrancy as defined in the CSBI. Such an argument flatly contradicts Article XVI of the Chicago Statement. "We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history. We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism" (Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, xxi). Rogers and McKim acknowledge that their argument opposes this particular article in the CSBI.

inerrancy represented in the statement.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, however, there has been a resurgence of confessing evangelicals who have either expressed explicit dissatisfaction with the CSBI or undermined the definition of inerrancy provided in the CSBI in their doctrines of Scripture. Just as in the years leading up to and shortly after the original writing of the CSBI, there has also been a considerable conservative response to these arguments. A major part of this chapter, then, will be the examination and evaluation of the arguments made by those who explicitly oppose or implicitly undermine the doctrine of inerrancy as it is defined in the CSBI. As I engage these arguments that challenge inerrancy, I will also interact with arguments made by those who have sought to uphold the CSBI and the version of inerrancy articulated therein. From these respective considerations I will draw insights with which to propose modifications to the CSBI in the following chapters. I now turn to Rogers's and McKim's important work, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*.

### **Rogers and McKim: *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible***

Rogers and McKim's volume was an attempt, primarily, to demonstrate that the conservative approach to the contemporary debate over inerrancy in the late 1970s

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<sup>2</sup>For example, James Montgomery Boice, ed., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels, eds., *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); Norman Geisler, ed., *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of its Philosophical Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); John D. Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*, (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984); D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Kenneth Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1988).

was historically misguided. Specifically, they sought to argue, through extensive research and a broad study of key historical figures, that recent conservative efforts to uphold the doctrine of inerrancy were grounded in theological innovation rather than historical precedent. In their reading of history, Rogers and McKim saw the Princetonians, specifically Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, departing from the historical position of the church—and specifically from their Reformed predecessor, John Calvin—as they formulated their doctrines of Scripture. Although Hodge and Warfield located themselves within the Reformed tradition, Rogers and McKim claimed that these two had actually adopted an approach to Scripture that was “rooted in a post-Reformation scholasticism, an approach almost the exact opposite of Calvin’s own.”<sup>3</sup> In their reaction to the current tenets of biblical criticism, Hodge and Warfield were guilty of following a theological method where the Bible’s authority was established on the wholesale inerrancy of Scripture rather than on its “function of bringing people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Such an approach to the doctrine of Scripture had left American Protestants to choose between the false dichotomy of rationalism and mysticism and had successfully sealed them off from the view of Scripture that had been affirmed by the early church, articulated by Augustine, and upheld by Calvin.<sup>5</sup>

One of the primary features of the Reformed approach to Scripture that had been lost in the uncritical embrace of post-Reformed scholasticism, argued Rogers and

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<sup>3</sup>Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, xvii.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., xxi-xxii.

McKim, was the Calvinist doctrine of accommodation. According to Rogers and McKim, Calvin viewed accommodation as the “process of fitting, adapting, and adjusting language to the capacity of the hearers. It was a matter of building a language bridge between the content of the presentation and the capacity of the audience.”<sup>6</sup> Following the early church fathers, Calvin would use the principle of accommodation not only in order to solve Bible difficulties, but also to help explain how God had provided his revelation in Scripture to human beings.<sup>7</sup> The principle of accommodation, then, informed Calvin’s understanding of error and inaccuracies in Scripture. Rogers and McKim argued that Calvin was “unconcerned with normal, human inaccuracies in minor matters”<sup>8</sup> and therefore exhibited minimal consternation when New Testament authors would misquote various Old Testament passages (i.e., Rom 3:4 citing Ps 51:4) or make historical mistakes, because such phenomena were simply the result of God’s act of accommodation.<sup>9</sup>

According to Rogers and McKim, Calvin’s understanding of what constituted an error in Scripture was identical to Augustine’s view.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, because Augustine and Calvin both believed that the authority of Scripture resided chiefly in its saving content rather than its technical accuracy, they did not need to protect the concept of a written revelation that contained inerrant words; these words could be mistaken since

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 111.

they were “part of the human, accommodated style of God’s gracious disclosure of himself to humankind.”<sup>11</sup> According to Rogers and McKim, Calvin applied this view of Scripture to matters of history, language, and science.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, Rogers and McKim sought not only to refasten the church’s doctrine of Scripture to what they understood as its historical moorings; they also took direct aim at the conservative evangelical effort to uphold the inerrancy of Scripture. Given their reference to the ICBI and the CSBI earlier in their introduction, it can be safely assumed they had in mind the document itself and those involved in its formulation and defense.

The Rogers-McKim proposal would garner a significant amount of response from the conservative side of the debate. Out of these, however, the most significant was John Woodbridge’s carefully researched *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*.<sup>13</sup> While commending areas of their work that were helpful and well-reasoned, Woodbridge finally countered Rogers and McKim on every point made with regard to the view of Scripture held by Augustine and the Reformers.<sup>14</sup>

By returning to and examining many of the primary sources cited in *Authority and Interpretation*, Woodbridge exposed much of the book’s scholarship as heavily

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 111-12. Roger and McKim’s statement: “Just as Calvin did not expect the Bible to be a repository of technically accurate information on language or history, neither did he expect that the biblical data should be used to question the findings of science. Calvin did not feel that the Bible’s teaching had to be harmonized with science. The purpose of Scripture was to bring persons into a right relationship with God and their fellow creatures. Science was in another sphere and was to be judged by its own criteria” (ibid., 111).

<sup>13</sup>Other evangelical scholars engaged and refuted many of the claims advanced in the Rogers-McKim proposal. For example, Hendrik Krabbendam, “The Functional Theology of G. C. Berkouwer,” in *Challenges to Inerrancy*, 285-316; and W. Robert Godfrey, “Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition,” in *Scripture and Truth*, 225-43.

<sup>14</sup>See especially, Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 141.

biased, selective, and prone to drawing false distinctions. The most noteworthy dichotomy was the wedge Rogers and McKim placed between Scripture's principal function as a means of salvific knowledge and its ability accurately to convey historical, scientific, and geographic truth. Woodbridge argued that the former does not logically preclude the latter, nor did accuracy in the latter undermine the primacy of the former. Indeed, God had given Scripture chiefly as a means to reveal himself, the gospel, and his instructions for fruitful and obedient Christian living, and he had taken care to convey the truth in a way that humans could understand. But in no way did such accommodation entail that God's revelation in Scripture contained error, spiritual or otherwise.

Furthermore, Woodbridge contended that such a position did not begin with the innovations of two men from a school in northwest New Jersey; it had been the view of the church from the early fathers to the Reformation, finding accurate expression in the contemporary evangelical church.<sup>15</sup> Hodge and Warfield had not departed from the tradition established by the ancient theologians and the Reformers; on the contrary, as they dealt with post-Enlightenment rationalism and its affect on biblical studies and theology, these men gave more nuanced articulation to a doctrine that had always been present in the church—even if that doctrine had only existed previously in its nascent form.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 119-40.

<sup>16</sup>See chap. 1 of this dissertation. There is a reason why the doctrine of Scripture did not receive detailed attention until later in church history: the inspiration and complete truthfulness of the Bible were largely assumed as theologians dealt with other pressing doctrinal issues. It appears that in their critique of Hodges and Warfield, Rogers and McKim mistook legitimate doctrinal development for theological innovation. The church's doctrinal understanding grows as it comes in contact with new arguments and new attacks on Christian truth, but this development never displaces former established positions; rather, new arguments draw out what was always there in the doctrine's embryonic form. What the church fathers meant by their belief that the Scriptures were wholly true would be defined with greater

Woodbridge's rebuttal of the Rogers and McKim project, as well as much of the material produced by the ICBI and those involved with the group, delivered powerful momentum to the conservative consensus and undergirded the CSBI with scholarly rigor. Of course, the CSBI and its attendant scholarly support did not put a complete end to the inerrancy debate. Challenges would continue and responses from those who held to the CSBI would be made. Even so, the CSBI provided a solid benchmark for evangelicals around which to conduct their discussions over the doctrine of Scripture.

### **Contemporary Developments**

In the last decade, as some professing evangelicals have voiced similar expressions of incredulity over the doctrine of inerrancy generally and the CSBI specifically, the debate over these important issues has again come to the fore.<sup>17</sup> I will now examine these contemporary developments. My study here will interact with those who have challenged the CSBI, as well as responses that have been made by evangelicals

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detail as Warfield and Hodge dealt with the issues of their day. In his brief narrative of the Rogers and McKim controversy, Daniel J. Trier interprets Woodbridge's conclusions in the way described above. "John Woodbridge of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (revitalized in the 1960s as an academically rigorous, inerrantist alternative to Fuller) responded with a strong historical rejection of their work: while biblical inerrancy was undoubtedly modern language responding to historical-critical controversies, it seemed to perpetuate commitments expressed by ancient and Protestant fathers." Daniel J. Trier, "Scripture and Hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Trier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39.

<sup>17</sup>Jason Sexton classifies these recent developments as a "third wave" of debate over the inerrancy of Scripture. The first occurred in 1893 and the second in 1973. Sexton discerns "at least four inextricable features" of a particular debate's "wave": "(1) a standing position is challenged; (2) multiple people from various positions are engaged in the conversation at once; (3) a large amount of publication on the topic commences; and (4) at least someone leaves or is dismissed from an institution or organization over the issue." Jason S. Sexton, "How Far beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate," *Them* 34, no. 1 (2009): 30n28. It is now clear that each of these features is present in the contemporary debate with Enns's resignation from Westminster Theological Seminary serving to fulfill the fourth criterion.

who hold to the CSBI as a faithful representation of the historic doctrine.<sup>18</sup> Before I enter into the remaining portion of this chapter, a word about method.

I will conduct the following study by focusing on individual authors and their most important works as they relate to the current debate. This method is advantageous for two reasons. First, as I investigate their respective works, it will become clear that despite some overlap of emphasis and concern, each author employs a particular approach in his discussion of Scripture and in his handling of the matters pertinent to the debate. By dealing with each relevant work individually, I will be able to draw out concerns as they relate to these specific methodologies, and my interaction with the conservative responses will be easier to follow because they have been, in most cases, responses to specific writers and works. Also, because each author selected represents a specific approach to the debate, I will be able to interact with other writers and their works as they share a particular author's given approach.

Second, by dealing systematically with individual authors, I will afford myself greater opportunity for thorough treatment of their work. Depth of critique is necessary in this instance in order to demonstrate the basic resilience of the CSBI and to prepare for the reassessment and reformulation section in chapters 3, 4, and 5.<sup>19</sup> I will follow this section with a summary of these developments and a conclusion.

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<sup>18</sup>I do not mean to imply that my interaction with contemporary writers will be limited only to this chapter. As subsequent discussion warrants, I will examine other works with which I have not thoroughly dealt in this chapter.

<sup>19</sup>Another reason I will proceed in the way described above is in order to highlight the differences of opinion among those evangelicals who are seeking to reframe the inerrancy debate. These differences are most apparent in Enns, Sparks, and McGowan. While the existence of discrepancies among writers who are discontent with the doctrine of inerrancy does not prove or disprove the validity of their positions, it does help further demonstrate the basic resilience of the CSBI and the trouble that attends a departure from it.

## **Peter Enns: Reassessing Old Testament Genre and Diversity**

In 2005, Peter Enns, then associate professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia,<sup>20</sup> published what has become a highly controversial book among evangelicals: *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*.<sup>21</sup> Enns's primary aim in the book is to demonstrate how evidence from ANE literature, the theological and textual diversity in the Old Testament, the New Testament use of the Old Testament, and other discoveries in contemporary scholarship must shape an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

Enns begins his book by examining a few key ANE documents and placing them alongside the biblical text in order to show the close similarities between the two stories. In so doing, he seeks not only to dispel common and unhelpful misconceptions about the Bible's uniqueness but also to establish what he believes is a better way to approach problems related to the historical and scientific accuracy of the biblical text. By placing the Bible's creation narrative, for example, within its ANE context alongside other ancient creation accounts, Enns attempts to classify the biblical narrative under the category of myth. Such a classification, however, should not trouble Christians,

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<sup>20</sup>Enns left Westminster in 2008 and currently teaches Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania (as of January 29, 2014). After 2008, prior to his arrival at Eastern, Enns would serve as an adjunct and visiting professor for several schools: Temple University in Philadelphia (fall 2011); Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia (fall 2011); Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ (fall 2009); Eastern University in St. Davids, PA (spring 2009); and Fuller Theological Seminary in Colorado Springs, CO (January 2009). For a full resume, see Peter Enns, "Peter Enns, PhD, Affiliate Professor of Biblical Studies, Eastern University," Patheos, <http://wp.patheos.com.s3.amazonaws.com/blogs/peterenns/files/2011/09/Enns-Resume-updated-2-12.pdf> (accessed January 29, 2014).

<sup>21</sup>Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

according to Enns: to equate myth with something that is patently false is to misunderstand the use of myth by ancient historians.<sup>23</sup> “A more generous way of defining myth,” suggests Enns, “is that it is *an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories: Who are we? Where do we come from?*”<sup>24</sup> Thus, to argue that Genesis is either myth or history is to present a false choice that is not only unhelpful but appears to succumb to contemporary categories.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, to foist upon the Genesis account expectations of modern science is wholly to misinterpret the purpose of the narrative.<sup>26</sup> The implication, then, is that Christians do not have to worry primarily about whether or not the Genesis account squares with modern scientific explanations of how the earth came to be; God did not give the text to answer those questions, but to show Israel that he was the one true God, worthy of its worship and trust.

Enns also investigates the diversity of the Old Testament, beginning with Proverbs and moving through the remaining wisdom literature into the historical books with the goal of “outlin[ing] some examples of diversity in the Old Testament in order to demonstrate that diversity is inherent to the text and not imposed onto the Bible from outside attacks on its unity.”<sup>27</sup> For Enns, “Any evangelical view of Scripture must take this diversity into account since it is an important part of Scripture’s own dynamic. It is

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. Emphasis original.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 73.

not simply a question of acknowledging diversity and then setting it aside at a safe distance. Rather, it is to ask what such diversity tells us about what the Bible is and who God is—a God who has given us Scripture that looks like this.”<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, Enns argues that the word “diversity” is better suited to describe the phenomena of Scripture than the word “error.” The various, seemingly contradictory portions of Scripture were never intended submit to the modern assessment of what constitutes an error. Rather, Christian readers are to see these instances of diversity as examples of God accommodating his revelation to people who lived in particular cultural and linguistic settings.<sup>29</sup> By insisting on such diversity, however, Enns does not mean to imply that Scripture is not God’s word, but only to discourage imposing a superficial unity upon Scripture that does not deal honestly with the “variety in historical context, purpose, and genre, [and] *content*”<sup>30</sup> found in the Bible.

In the final section of his book, Enns examines the hermeneutical issues related to the Old Testament’s use of the New Testament. An essential component to responsible New Testament interpretation, Enns argues, is a right understanding of the hermeneutical practices and assumptions of the time period in which the biblical texts were written. Enns gains a handle on these interpretive standards and customs by turning to examine a few important literary works from Second Temple Judaism. His study in these texts serves to illustrate the point that “These biblical interpreters exhibit for us an attitude toward biblical interpretation that operates on very different standards from those

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 107-9.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 109. Emphasis original.

of modern interpreters.”<sup>31</sup> According to Enns, interpreters at this time were not concerned mainly with capturing the original intention of the author but with “dig[ging] beneath the surface to reveal things . . . that the untrained and impatient reader would miss.”<sup>32</sup> Often, this approach required interpreters to “manipulat[e] the text to suit their purposes.”<sup>33</sup> As interpreters of the New Testament, then, contemporary readers should anticipate the biblical authors “to behave in a way that would make it recognizable to its contemporaries, rather than expecting it to conform to our own twenty-first century expectations.”<sup>34</sup> After establishing these interpretative methods of Second Temple Judaism, Enns examines several New Testament texts in which biblical authors apparently departed from a strict historical-grammatical approach to interpretation while following hermeneutical conventions that were normal for their time.

Like Rogers and McKim’s *Authority and Interpretation*, Enns’s book ignited a response from evangelical scholars who believed he had compromised an evangelical doctrine of Scripture on several fronts.<sup>35</sup> One concerted effort came from G. K. Beale’s, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical*

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>35</sup>For example, D. A. Carson, “Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review,” *TrinJ* 27 (2006): 1-62; Paul Helm, “Inspiration and Incarnation: The Problem of the Old Testament,” *Reformation* 21, <http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/inspiration-and-incarnation-evangelicals-and-the-problem-of-the-old-testament.php> (accessed January 28, 2014); James W. Scott, “The Inspiration and Interpretation of God’s Word with Special Reference to Peter Enns: Part I: Inspiration and its Implications,” *WTJ* 71 (2009): 129-83; idem, “The Inspiration and Interpretation of God’s Word with Special Reference to Peter Enns, Part II: The Interpretation of Representative Passages,” *WTJ* 71 (2009): 247-79; John Frame, “Review of Enns’ Inspiration and Incarnation,” *Frame and Poythress*, <http://www.framepoyth-ress.org/review-of-enns-inspiration-and-incarnation> (accessed January 28, 2014).

*Authority*.<sup>36</sup> Beale challenged Enns work on numerous points.

First, Beale questions whether Enns's use of myth to classify the Genesis narrative is helpful. In light of his definition of myth, Enns appears to imply that the Genesis creation and flood accounts do not correspond with reality—they do not convey history. Although Beale acknowledges that Enns never states this unambiguously, the inference seems clear.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Beale argues that Enns's insistence that we cannot impose modern standards of historic and scientific precision upon Scripture is somewhat misguided. On the one hand, it is right to say that we must not expect these ancient texts to communicate in a way that fits exactly our modern expectations. On the other hand, it is erroneous to suggest that ancient writers were not concerned with history or distinguishing truth from falsehood. "To say," Beale argues, "that ancient people could not narrate history in a way that sufficiently represented actual events of the past because they were not modern historians is a false dichotomy."<sup>38</sup>

By following this line of reasoning, Beale challenges Enns's use of the word "diversity" in the place of "error," with the most disconcerting issue being Enns's failure to define clearly what he means by "diversity." Beale comments, "His definition of *diversity* is not clear: does it refer to various but complementary viewpoints or to

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<sup>36</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 36. Enns failed to answer the charge directly in his reply to Beale. See Peter Enns, "Response to G. K. Beale's Review Article of *Inspiration and Incarnation*," *JETS* 49 (2006): 313-26. See also, Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 61.

<sup>38</sup>Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 36. Beale provides a number of books that argue that ancient conceptions of history, science, and mathematics were far more advanced than some may realize. For example, Beale cites Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 19-30 and 158-63; J. M. Steele and A. Imhausen, eds., *Under One Sky: Astronomy and Mathematics in the Ancient Near East* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002); and I. Provan, V. P. Long, and T. Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster, 2003), 50 (Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 46n30). Beale faults Enns for not at least interacting with these arguments, even if Enns would, finally, disagree with them.

irreconcilable perspectives on a given topic?”<sup>39</sup> The problem is acute because it appears that Enns would need to agree that if we *did* use a modern definition of error, the examples of diversity in Scripture would actually constitute real errors. But Beale also notices an additional problem with Enns’s argument.

But is there another logical fallacy in Enns’s attempt to affirm that the Old Testament cannot be judged by modern standards of “error” (e.g. pp. 80, 108)? Enns’s view appears to be non-falsifiable; if a liberal scholar finds a mistake anywhere in Scripture, Enns would say that the Biblical writers operated with a different view of error than our modern conception. So, what would count for a biblical writer being in error according to their own ancient standards? Enns never formulates an ancient conception of error, and until he does, his position must remain more speculative than the so-called modernist with which he disagrees.<sup>40</sup>

Beale notes further that inerrancy as a concept has a legacy that predates the Enlightenment and modernism, and that the pre-modern biblical authors, like modern scientists and historians—because they are made in the image of God—possessed faculties that enable them to understand and utilize the basic laws of logic, like the laws of non-contradiction and identity.<sup>41</sup> The conclusion seems inescapable: “Therefore, if Enns were to use what he considers a ‘modern’ definition of ‘error,’ would he conclude that what he labels ‘diversity’ is really error? The answer is not hard to determine: most likely, at several points, he would conclude this.”<sup>42</sup>

Beale also engages Enns’s discussion of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament by challenging directly Enns’s claim that the New Testament authors were not, in every case, attempting to quarry an Old Testament author’s original intention or

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<sup>39</sup>Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 41.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 44.

seeking to understand a given passage in its original context.<sup>43</sup> Enns’s primary goal in his claim about the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament is to demonstrate that the New Testament authors did not always remain within the boundaries of grammatical-historical exegesis, but instead used what Enns would refer to as a “christotelic” approach. Beale observes, however, that there are other exegetical methods not strictly grammatical-historical in their approach that still remain consistent with the Old Testament passage original context and meaning (e.g., a biblical-theological approach).<sup>44</sup>

A similar yet more scholarly treatment of many of the same issues broached by Enns would come three years later from the pen of college professor, Kenton Sparks.<sup>45</sup> It is to his work that I now turn.

### **Kenton Sparks: Integrating Critical Studies into an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture**

Kenton Sparks, professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University—an evangelical school by confession—offered his contribution to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture in *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship*.<sup>46</sup> As the title of the book suggests, and as he states clearly in the introduction, Sparks situates himself within the evangelical tradition. Thus, he approaches his work in appropriating historical-critical scholarship as one who is

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Most recently Enns has focused his energies on Genesis and the problem of a historical Adam. See Peter Enns *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012). I will return specifically to this book in chap. 4.

<sup>46</sup>Kenton Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

“committed to the Bible as God’s authoritative Word, to the doctrines of historic creedal orthodoxy, to the unique significance of the death, resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ, and to the hope of his return,”<sup>47</sup> and who has “profound appreciation” for evangelicalism’s “doctrinal commitment to the inerrancy of God’s Word.”<sup>48</sup> Sparks is concerned, however, over evangelicalism’s approach to assessing and using critical biblical scholarship; he considers himself as one of several emerging evangelical scholars who find the “standard critical arguments” for problems in the Bible offered by modern academics far more satisfactory than those posited in most evangelical efforts.<sup>49</sup>

Sparks begins his volume by surveying briefly the broad contours of the history of biblical interpretation, commencing with the pre-modern period and concluding in the contemporary period (chap. 1). He then examines the academic discipline of Assyriology and its relationship to historical criticism and the Bible (chap. 2). From these two studies, Sparks draws several important conclusions that frame, in large measure, much of his remaining argument. First, with regard to matters of hermeneutics, Sparks notes that finite human nature is a good gift from God that enables human beings to recognize the profound difference between their knowledge and God’s knowledge. God’s knowledge is perfect, comprehensive, unconditional, unmediated; human knowledge is imperfect, limited, historically and culturally conditioned, and mediated through various sources. It is foolish—even dangerous—therefore, for humankind to attempt to achieve a “god-like grasp” on truth that assumes a status of

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 12.

epistemic exhaustiveness.<sup>50</sup>

Second, Sparks observes that interpreters, given that they reside in a particular place in history, are inevitably influenced by the exegetical and hermeneutical practices of their time. Depending when biblical interpreters lived, they might seek the plain or allegorical meaning in a text, or concern themselves chiefly with historical issues, or give little to no attention to an author's intended meaning. It seems safe to assume, then, that this hermeneutical situatedness affected Paul as well as Augustine.<sup>51</sup>

Third, given that humans are able to communicate with each other despite our nature as limited, finite, hermeneutically situated creatures, Sparks wonders why we are in need of an inerrant Bible. The imperfection of our interpretative abilities seems to imply the imperfection of God's written revelation since it has been given to us via human authors:

Is it therefore possible that God has selected to speak to human beings through adequate rather than inerrant words, and is it further possible that he did so because human beings are adequate rather than inerrant readers? Might it be the very height of divine wisdom, of *inerrant* wisdom, for God to speak to us from an adequate human horizon rather than from his divine, inerrant viewpoint?<sup>52</sup>

Such questions lead Sparks to conclude that the Bible itself—rather than prior assumptions about the nature of Scripture—must tell us what kind of revelation God has provided his people. Despite these questions, Sparks states that he “will strongly support the doctrine of inerrancy when it comes to Scripture,”<sup>53</sup> but a version of the doctrine that

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 54-55

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

is different than traditionally understood.

Concerning matters of Assyriology and historical critical scholarship (chap. 3), Sparks establishes several important conclusions that will inform his study of the biblical texts throughout the remainder of his book. He observes from his study of several ancient Assyrian texts, for example, that (1) certain ANE narratives may have the appearance of an historical record but may instead be fictional; (2) these texts reflect the limited perspective of their authors; (3) they can sometimes contain “pseudoprophesies” and historical fabrications that fit the “propagandistic needs of kings or priests”;<sup>54</sup> and (4) they are often the work of several authors and redactors who would modify the texts as they made their way from generation to generation. The bulk of Sparks’s work from this point is an interaction with biblical texts that pose problems for the modern reader because many of the assertions in, and the implications of, these texts have been challenged by the findings of historical criticism. As he walks through these texts, Sparks shows the multitude of ways historical criticism aids in providing plausible explanations of Bible difficulties and generally informing an evangelical theology of Scripture that deals honestly with text of Scripture itself.

Throughout his study, and particularly in chapter 4, Sparks evaluates traditional approaches to the discoveries of historical scholarship and judges a large swath of evangelicals lacking in their approach to the problems posed by such scholarship. Sparks departs from these faulty evangelical approaches to historical criticism and develops his “constructive” method alluded to earlier in his book. Indeed, Sparks notes that the evidence provided by historical-critical scholarship has challenged

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 71.

the long-held traditional assumptions about the Bible and has recently brought many evangelical scholars to embrace more broadminded approaches to Scripture.<sup>55</sup>

Sparks argues that constructive responses to biblical criticism allow for better answers to the problems posed by historical scholarship. For example, classifying some sections of Scripture under the category of myth, legend, saga, and allegory allows for many of the Bible's difficulties to disappear.<sup>56</sup> According to Sparks, God, in using these various genres, accommodated himself to "mistaken viewpoints" of the time in order to communicate his message to humanity.<sup>57</sup> In the end Sparks desires to maintain the human component of Scripture as a vital aspect of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.<sup>58</sup>

Sparks recognizes that his proposals incite a significant theological problem related to God and the authority of the Bible. He asks, "how does the Bible speak as the authoritative voice of God if it includes diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives of its human authors?"<sup>59</sup> Sparks turns to the category of accommodation in order to answer this question, utilizing an argument similar to that of Rogers and McKim in which accommodation is viewed as "God's adoption in inscripturation of the human audiences finite and fallen perspective."<sup>60</sup>

Sparks then turns to apply his arguments to specific passages of Scripture. Although he is unable to conduct a comprehensive analysis of these passages, he seeks to

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 227.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 230. See also 229-59; 277-78; 326.

provide examples of how the method outlined earlier in the book leads to his exegetical and theological conclusions.<sup>61</sup> Sparks concludes his work by offering suggestions as to how his method of assimilating the findings of historical research with the teaching of Scripture should be brought to bear on the ministry of the local church and evangelical institutions of higher education.<sup>62</sup>

Like Enns, Sparks has seen significant response to his work.<sup>63</sup> The responses

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<sup>61</sup>Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 356. After surveying the rise of David's kingship, issues related to the eschatology in Daniel and Revelation, and the question of women's ordination to pastoral ministry, Sparks notes that his conclusions are not much different than those traditionally offered by evangelicals. Thus, the method he uses to arrive at these conclusions—what Sparks calls “believing criticism”—is superior to what is offered by “traditional fundamentalism on the one hand, and secular biblical criticism on the other” (ibid.), because it seeks “to assimilate the useful methods and reasonably assured results of biblical criticism to a healthy Christian faith” (ibid.)—an integration that neither theologically-driven evangelical or heavily biased secular critical scholarship can attain.

<sup>62</sup>While not advocating that all the questions posed by critical studies should be put before the church, Sparks does argue that pastors and teachers should exercise discretion to know when and how to share the insights of historical-critical studies to particular congregants. Moreover, given what postmodern epistemology has taught us, pastors and teachers should adopt a “humbler posture” (exemplified by certain key leaders within the emergent church) because our “interpretations of the Bible and . . . theological formulations can be dead wrong” (Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 361). Thus, pastors and teachers informed by the discoveries of historical criticism will avoid, for example, asserting that Genesis presents a literal six-day creation event, or that the diversity of human languages commenced at the tower of Babel. Moreover, they will cease to offer contrived harmonizations of the gospel accounts and stop replacing real theological formulation with mere proof-texting (ibid., 362). Evangelical scholarship, then, will serve the church by using historical-critical studies to equip college and seminary students with a doctrine of Scripture than can flourish under careful intellectual analysis (ibid., 374).

<sup>63</sup>Sparks followed *God's Word in Human Words* with a smaller treatment intended to serve as a textbook for Christian colleges, universities, and seminaries. In this book, however, Sparks pursues a narrower topic related the doctrine of Scripture. Specifically, he sets out to provide answers as to how Christians are to interpret passages in the Bible that advocate “terror”: the God-ordained slaughter of men, women, and children, the approval of slavery, the tacit sanction of male domination over women, and many other theological problems. *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* is Sparks's answer to these important yet disturbing matters and serves as his contribution to the developing field of biblical study called the theological interpretation of Scripture. Although structurally different from his prior work—the latter is much shorter, less technical, and more accessible to the layperson—Sparks builds his argument in his most recent book on a foundational principle that is similar to the one he employed in *God's Word in Human Words*. In both books, Sparks begins with the supposition that Scripture, even in light of its divine origin, is a human product that contains human elements. In the case of *God's Word in Human Words*, Sparks argues that because the Bible is written by limited, situated, fallen man, it must contain error. In *Sacred Word, Broken Word*, Sparks follows this general premise, but extends it further to argue that the theological and ethical problems we encounter in the Scripture are a result of the fact that Scripture itself reflects the fallen state of the creation in which it resides and from which it has

have come chiefly in the form of reviews<sup>64</sup> and a scholarly compilation of articles that considers the matter of the historical reliability of Scripture generally and Sparks's work in *God's Word in Human Words* specifically.<sup>65</sup> While offering commendations of Sparks's broad knowledge of historical-critical studies, his ambitious attempt to meld biblical scholarship, background inquiries, theology, epistemology, and exegesis into a unified contribution to the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, and his desire to look unflinchingly at the evidence offered by historical research, many conservative scholars have found Sparks's overall project plagued by significant problems.

The first problem with which critics of Sparks take issue is his introductory discussion of epistemology and hermeneutics.<sup>66</sup> In this section, it is argued, Sparks fails to establish a fundamental tenet for the rest of his project. Throughout *God's Word in Human Words*, Sparks builds his argument for an errant Bible on the supposition that

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come. See Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

<sup>64</sup>For example, Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Embattled Bible: Four More Books" *Them* 34, no. 1 (2009): 6-25; Peter J. Williams, review of *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriate of Biblical Scholarship*, by Kenton Sparks, *SBET* 30, no. 1 (2012): 113-19.

<sup>65</sup>James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, eds., *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). The foreword to the book indicates that *God's Word in Human Words*, "created the immediate occasion for writing of *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith*" (John Woodbridge, foreword to *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith*, 13). Norman Geisler and William Roach devote a section of their book to refuting much of Sparks's work. See Norman Geisler and William Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 112-31.

<sup>66</sup>See Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 25-55. Sparks included this section against the wishes of some of whom he solicited for editorial appraisals of his manuscript. "Some friends and colleagues who have read this manuscript have suggested that this part of my discussion ought to be presented later in the book, or left out altogether" (*ibid.*, 25). Thomas McCall agrees with these friends, noting that, despite his erudition in the area of historical-critical studies, Sparks does not evidence a reliable awareness of epistemology, historical theology, or systematic theology. See Thomas McCall, "Religious Epistemology, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, and Critical Biblical Scholarship: A Theologian's Reflections," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 46.

Scripture, as a human product, must contain error;<sup>67</sup> however, he never demonstrates the validity of this logical move. As Thomas McCall notes, it is assumed throughout the book that “the property of *being said or authored by a human* entails the property of *being mistaken*,”<sup>68</sup> yet Sparks never provides any reason why one should accept error as a necessary entailment of human speaking or authorship. Indeed, there are good reasons to reject this move, as it can be shown rather easily that finite humans can produce correct statements on a host of issues.<sup>69</sup>

Sparks also neglects to distinguish carefully between error in knowledge and the limitations of knowledge inherent in the finite human perspective. In sections where Sparks discusses the fact that humans are unable to acquire unmediated, infinite, “god-like” knowledge of the world as a result of their “finite capacities,” he often and mistakenly equates limited knowledge to knowledge that inevitably involves error.<sup>70</sup> Sparks makes it appear as though knowledge that is finite, partial, and limited, *must* be mistaken at some level. Williams observes, “It seems that Sparks does not adequately distinguish between weakness and limitation in communication or perception on the one hand and straying in communication on the other.”<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, Sparks appears to misunderstand the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy to equate error-free knowledge with exhaustive knowledge. Thus, when

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<sup>67</sup>See Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 55, 171, 225-26, 252-54, 298-99.

<sup>68</sup>McCall, “Religious Epistemology,” 50.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid. See also Williams, review of *God’s Word in Human Words*, 114, 116.

<sup>70</sup>See Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 55, 171, 225-26, 241, 252-54.

<sup>71</sup>Williams, review of *God’s Word in Human Words*, 114.

evangelicals claim inerrancy for Scripture, their claim is immediately suspect because such a position implies that a person is able to attain to comprehensive, “god-like” knowledge.<sup>72</sup> Sparks faults evangelicals for falling into an illegitimate Cartesian epistemology where the search for certainty assumes that human beings have the ability to perceive the world the way God does. But, as we have seen, the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy assumes no such thing, nor is it correct to locate the blame for evangelicalism’s quest for certainty at Descartes, for the language of certainty is found early in church history.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Christian theologians have argued recently, in light of postmodernism’s suspicion of universal truth claims, that a limited perspective does not necessarily preclude the acquisition of true knowledge. In other words, one may know something truly, even if not exhaustively.<sup>74</sup> Sparks, however, does not allow for a limited-yet-true kind of knowledge, nor does he demonstrate that such evangelical discussions of epistemology exist.

One can also apply these epistemological considerations to Sparks’s Christology. That is, contrary to Sparks’s argument that Jesus, as a human, was

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<sup>72</sup>Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 57.

<sup>73</sup>Williams, review of *God’s Word in Human Words*, 118.

<sup>74</sup>In his critique of Stanley Grenz’s work, *Renewing the Center*, a book I will examine later in this chapter, D. A. Carson comments, “Postmodernism is entirely right to remind us that all human knowing is necessarily the knowledge of finite beings, and is therefore in some ways partial, non-final, conditional, dependent on a specific culture (after all, language itself is a cultural artifact). . . . Various scholars have developed the hermeneutical spiral, the pairing of ‘distanciation,’ and ‘fusing of horizons,’ asymptotic approaches to knowledge. All of these have argued, convincingly and in detail, that notwithstanding the genuine gains in humility brought about by postmodernism, finite human beings may be said to know some things truly even if nothing absolutely/omnisciently.” D. A. Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz’s *Renewing the Center*, in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 46. It would seem that Sparks would, at some level, need to affirm this argument, for it grounds his assumption that what he says about historical-critical scholarship is indeed true, despite that fact that he cannot claim (his impressive grasp of the material notwithstanding), an exhaustive knowledge of historical-critical studies.

sometimes mistaken in his assertions about various matters (thus leading to the conclusion that the Bible's human authors must also err),<sup>75</sup> one can say that the property of existing as a human does not necessarily imply the property of mistake-making. Sparks might counter this objection by suggesting Christ's possession of a *fallen* human nature would seem to imply that error is something to which Christ, at times, might succumb; this explains why we see mistakes in some of Jesus' historical, botanical, and geographical statements, and certain affirmations of Old Testament authorship.<sup>76</sup> If so, Sparks does not adequately demonstrate that Christ did, in fact, possess a fallen nature, or that the tradition demands that we formulate our Christology in this way. Indeed, persuasive arguments have been offered to establish that the property of being human does not entail the property of fallenness.<sup>77</sup> Sparks fails to interact with these arguments, nor does he give the impression that there is a strong case for a viewpoint other than his own. He does not, therefore, consider that it is possible that Jesus could be truly human while also avoiding error and mistaken human viewpoints.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 252.

<sup>76</sup>Sparks briefly ponders the issue of whether or not Christ took upon himself a fallen human nature (*ibid.*, 252n67). He only offers a selection of sources that represent opposing sides of the debate; he does not enter into the debate directly. He broaches the topic again in *Sacred Word, Broken Word* and seems to favor the historical arguments that suggest that Jesus did have a fallen human nature. See Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word*, 23-29.

<sup>77</sup>See Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90-117. Although he cites Crisp's "Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?" in the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 (2004): 270-88, Sparks does not indicate that Crisp actually argues that there are several problems with claiming Christ possessed a fallen nature in (Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 252n67). Furthermore, Crisp demonstrates that the view that Christ possessed a fallen human nature is relatively new, gaining significant allegiance only in the last fifty years.

<sup>78</sup>Indeed, as Mark Thompson observes, "In [Christ] we are reminded that it is not sin or error or failure that makes us genuinely human" (Mark D. Thompson, "The Divine Investment in Truth: Toward a Theological Account of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 90).

Moreover, Thomas McCall observes that Sparks’s version of a “mistaken Jesus” does not comport well with classical or contemporary Christological models that fall within Chalcedonian parameters. In other words, neither the medieval christologies that state that Jesus’ human soul had full access to the “beatific vision,” nor Thomas Morris’s “two minds” model that allows for the interrelation of an infinite divine mind and a finite human mind appear to allow for the notion that Christ would have made mistakes during his time on earth; even kenotic Christological models do not seem to allow that Jesus would have been in error about certain subjects.<sup>79</sup> It seems, then, that only those Christological models that fall *outside* Chalcedonian boundaries are able to provide a paradigm for the kind of “mistaken Jesus” that Sparks proposes. The burden would be upon Sparks, then, to demonstrate why the church should move away from such a foundational confession on the nature of Christ.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, Sparks demonstrates an inadequate understanding of accommodation. Like Rogers and McKim, Sparks appeals to the notion of accommodation in order bolster his case for an errant Bible. He observes that the church since its inception has utilized the category of accommodation to account for the diversity of Scripture. Sparks defines accommodation as “God’s adoption in inscripturation of the human audience’s finite and fallen perspectives. Its underlying conceptual assumption is that in many cases God does

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<sup>79</sup>One version of kenotic Christology would allow for Sparks proposal—what Oliver Crisp designates as the “*strong ontological account of the incarnation*” (Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 119). This version of kenotic Christology, however, falls outside Chalcedonian parameters because it states that Christ set aside *all* of his divine attributes during the time his humiliation.

<sup>80</sup>Sparks questions directly whether one’s Christology should be adjusted in light of critical scholarship. “If the critical evidence against the traditional authorial attributions in the Old Testament is as strong as it seems to be, then it is perhaps evangelical Christology—and not critical scholarship—that needs to be carefully reconsidered” (Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 164-65). It seems unfair, if not inconsistent, however, to allow critical scholarship such epistemological superiority. The historical position of the church should call the conclusions of critical scholarship into question.

not correct our mistaken human viewpoints but merely assumes them in order to communicate with us.”<sup>81</sup> Although God adopts mistaken human viewpoints in order to convey his message to humans, he does not err in doing so.<sup>82</sup> Sparks appeals to Calvin in order to undergird his understanding of accommodation and then draws from several theologians from church history further to strengthen his case. From here he turns to critique two evangelicals—Wayne Grudem and Carl F. H. Henry—who, in his judgment, leave no room for the idea of accommodation in Scripture.<sup>83</sup>

The major problem afflicting Sparks’s discussion in this section is that he first misunderstands the historic articulation of accommodation and then uses this flawed interpretation to argue that conservative evangelicals typically reject the idea of accommodation. Ironically, rather than following church tradition on the matter, it is Sparks who embraces a Socinian framework where accommodation is understood as God’s adaptation to the errant viewpoints of the biblical authors.<sup>84</sup> It was this view of accommodation that Rogers and McKim promoted and the view that Sparks embraces. As detailed earlier, that this particular version of accommodation was the position of the

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<sup>81</sup>Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 230-31. Sparks comments further, noting again his belief that accommodation entailed God’s adopting an author’s mistaken viewpoint. “Whether Scripture’s cosmologies are science, myth, or something else altogether, there is little doubt that they reflect an ancient and errant viewpoint” (ibid., 234).

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 256.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 247-55.

<sup>84</sup>Thompson, “The Divine Investment in Truth,” 91. John Woodbridge concurs with Thompson in classifying Sparks’s position as Socinian: “Like Professors Jack Rogers, Donald McKim, and Peter Enns, Professor Sparks mistakenly thinks that God accommodated Scripture to the faulty worldviews and perspectival human limitations of the biblical writers. Given the ‘human authorship’ of Scripture, it necessarily contains errors. . . . He advocates a form of ‘accommodation’ but unwittingly identifies it with what Richard Muller and Glen Sunshine have labeled a Socinian doctrine” (Woodbridge, foreword to *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith*, 16).

early church and Calvin was thoroughly challenged by historian John Woodbridge. It is a logical fallacy, then, to say that because evangelicals do not embrace *this form* of accommodation, they therefore reject *the idea* of accommodation altogether. It is a particular *kind* of accommodation that evangelicals like Grudem and Henry reject; namely, accommodation of the Socinian variety.<sup>85</sup> Evangelicals do, however, advocate a view of accommodation that recognizes God’s gracious condescension to use language with which his creatures were acquainted but that does not consent to the idea of errors in the text. It is this version of accommodation that aligns with the historic position.<sup>86</sup> The Socinian view of accommodation was rejected for the very reason that it allowed for errors in the biblical text.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Sparks’s presentation of the church fathers and of Calvin never actually proves these men embraced and promoted a version of accommodation that allowed for error. In his survey of Calvin, Sparks simply appears to

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<sup>85</sup>See Wayne Grudem’s discussion of accommodation in “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 53-57. Grudem rejects “accommodation” vigorously, noting, among other things, that Scripture itself testifies to the veracity of *all* its contents, not merely those that touch upon spiritual or theological matters. One must be careful to discern that what Grudem rejects is not the idea of God condescending to speak to humans in their language, but the notion that God used the errant viewpoints of his listeners for the sake of communication. When Grudem speaks of “accommodation,” he means “accommodation to error” (ibid., 55). He is quite willing to say that, “God does condescend to speak our language, the language of humans” (ibid., 56). “But,” he adds, “no passage of Scripture teaches that he ‘condescends’ so as to act contrary to His moral character. He is never said to be able to condescend to affirm even incidentally something that is false” (ibid.).

<sup>86</sup>Richard Müller comments, “The Reformers and their scholastic followers all recognized that God must in some way condescend or accommodate himself to human ways of knowing in order to reveal himself. This *accommodatio* occurs in the use of human words and concepts for the communication of the law and gospel, but it in no way implies the loss of truth or the lessening of scriptural authority. . . . Note that the sense of *accommodatio* that implies not only a divine condensation, but also a use of time-bound and even erroneous statements as a medium for revelation, arose in the eighteenth century . . . and has no relation to either the position of the Reformers or to that of the Protestant scholastics, either Lutheran or Reformed.” Richard A. Müller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 19. Graham A. Cole provides this helpful reference to Müller in his article, “The Peril of a ‘Historyless’ Systematic Theology” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 65.

<sup>87</sup>Müller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 278.

misunderstand the Reformer or to take his words out of context; the examples he provides of the church fathers all could fit comfortably under the evangelical version of accommodation described by Müller.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, it should give the reader pause to learn that Sparks never interacts with nor mentions Woodbridge's volume in his entire book.

Overall, Sparks's ambitious attempt to provide a well-argued framework that integrates critical scholarship into an evangelical doctrine of Scripture fails because of the foundational problems noted above. Nevertheless, his work, like that of Enns, registers a direct challenge to the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy generally and the CSBI specifically that not only requires response but should also provoke a fresh examination of the CSBI to determine possible deficiencies in the document and discern where it might be strengthened. I will take up this very issue in the next three chapters. For now I turn to consider other recent challenges to the doctrine of inerrancy that are somewhat different than the two I examined above. Whereas Enns and Sparks sought to provide a basic structure for how evangelicals should assimilate the findings of historical-critical and ANE scholarship into their doctrine of Scripture, the proposals below consider the

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<sup>88</sup>One example of this point should suffice. Sparks quotes Origen at length without proving that Origen's idea of accommodation included the notion that God adopted the biblical author's errant viewpoints. Origen states, "Just as when we are talking to very small children we do not assume as the object of our instruction any strong understanding in them, but say what we have to say accommodating (*harmosamenos*) it to the small understanding of those whom we have before us . . . so the Word of God seems to have disposed the things which were written, adapting suitable parts of his message to the capacity of his hearers and to their ultimate profit" (Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.71, quoted in Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 237). Forming words and finding phrases with which to speak to a small child, however, does not necessarily imply that the speaker must adopt the child's mistaken viewpoints. A daddy does not, in order to communicate comfort to his child, have to tell his child that the boogiemer will not get him, thus acquiescing to the child's errant belief that the boogie does, in fact, exist. The daddy can just as easily tell his child that the boogiemer is *not real*. Such a statement would be true, and the child would easily understand it.

issue of inerrancy from different concerns.<sup>89</sup>

### **A. T. B. McGowan: Positing a Third Position between Errancy and Inerrancy**

Like the works discussed above, A. T. B. McGowan's *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* contributes to evangelical discussions on the doctrine of Scripture.<sup>90</sup> According to McGowan, evangelicals are in need of renewed examination of our theological language so that we might “clarify precisely what we mean when we speak about Scripture as the Word of God.”<sup>91</sup> Specifically, “spiration” will now replace “inspiration”; “illumination” will yield to “recognition”; and “infallibility” will take the place of “inerrancy.”<sup>92</sup> In order to establish the basis for this latter proposal concerning inerrancy, he first traces how liberal theology, fueled as it was by the Enlightenment's turn to the subject,<sup>93</sup> shaped two respective responses concerning the truthfulness of Scripture from neo-orthodox and conservative evangelical

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<sup>89</sup>Indeed, McGowan suggests that those who reject inerrancy based on the ‘assured results’ of historical-critical scholarship (e.g., C. H. Dodd, Rudolf Bultmann) have built their doctrine of Scripture on “outdated and inadequate Enlightenment presuppositions.” As a result, “their critical approach to Scripture is not well founded and is now widely regarded as theologically bankrupt.” A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 105. It seems, then, that McGowan would disagree with Sparks's general approach to critical scholarship in *God's Word in Human Words*. McGowan also takes issue with Enns's incarnational analogy as it is applied to Scripture in *Inspiration and Incarnation*. See McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 120. So, at least between these three non-inerrantists there does not appear to be agreement as to how evangelicals should reframe the inerrancy debate.

<sup>90</sup>McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 9.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 38-49.

<sup>93</sup>Although McGowan does not use the phrase “turn to the subject,” it accurately captures his reading of how the Enlightenment brought men to shed external authority and trust reason as the sole—or principal—arbiter of truth. See McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 51.

theologians.<sup>94</sup> According to McGowan, the doctrine of inerrancy grew out of the conservative evangelical response, developed and articulated chiefly by Princetonians Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield.

As McGowan surveys the debate among evangelicals concerning the doctrine of inerrancy, however, he notes that the discussion itself has forced Christians into a false dilemma. On one side are evangelicals who argue for a doctrine of inerrancy reflected in the CSBI; on the other side are evangelicals who follow a position expressed by neo-orthodoxy generally and articulated by Rogers and McKim specifically.<sup>95</sup> But there is a better way, according to McGowan: a more biblical, historically faithful position that navigates between these two extremes.<sup>96</sup> McGowan explains this “alternative” view.

My argument is that Scripture, having been divinely spirated, is as God intended it to be. Having freely chosen to use human beings, God knew what he was doing. He did not give us an inerrant autographical text, because he did not intend to do so. He gave us a text that reflects the humanity of its authors but that, at the same time, clearly evidences its origin in the divine speaking. Through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, God is perfectly able to use these Scriptures to accomplish his purposes.<sup>97</sup>

It appears that McGowan, in order to adequately account for the human element of Scripture, wants to say that there is the *possibility* of error in Scripture, while not affirming that there *are* errors in Scripture.<sup>98</sup> If this understanding of his position is

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 50-83.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>As I will demonstrate below, McGowan is inconsistent here and appears to affirm that there are errors in Scripture, if not by explicit statement, at least by implication of his view that we do not have an inerrant *autographa*. What else can one conclude other than there are errors—that which is contrary to fact—in the original text of Scripture? Generally speaking, McGowan’s ambiguity in this respect is far more confusing than it is illuminating.

correct, the nuance is found in his removing a particular *a priori* judgment about the nature of Scripture—given God’s character, Scripture cannot err—to allow for the chance that the biblical writers made mistakes in their writings.<sup>99</sup>

This position, then, helps evangelicals chart a course between the two extremes of inerrancy and errancy.<sup>100</sup> In light of Scripture’s divine and human composition, McGowan proposes that evangelicals dismiss inerrancy in favor of infallibility.<sup>101</sup> Such a position discourages interpreters from recommending unlikely solutions to apparent discrepancies or proposing strained harmonization of disparate passages for the sake of maintaining the coherence of their theological system.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, in order to maintain the human element of Scripture, McGowan is concerned that evangelicals finally reject any theory of inspiration that involves dictation, and he believes that James Orr and Herman Bavinck’s doctrines of Scripture accomplish this move by emphasizing the reality that God inspired Scripture in concurrence with the author’s personalities, skills, personal research, and other normal features of human writing.<sup>103</sup>

Despite his effort to reconstruct the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, and, more specifically, the doctrine of inerrancy, McGowan’s proposal falls short for several

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<sup>99</sup>McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 136-37.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 148-49.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 149. McGowan comments, “One consequence of the nature of Scripture’s dual authorship is that the theologian must be confident that God has spoken and therefore Scripture is infallible, not in the sense of inerrant *autographa* but in the sense that God has given us the Scripture and they will infallibly achieve God’s purpose in giving them” (ibid.). McGowan is unable fully to affirm the claim that the *autographa* are without error.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 149-50.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 156.

reasons.<sup>104</sup> The problems begin, as James Scott observes, because McGowan is not careful to define what he opposes.<sup>105</sup> He appears to reject the notion that Scripture is wholly without error when he states plainly that God did not give us inerrant autographs.<sup>106</sup> He challenges evangelicals to be willing to accept all that is implied by the fact of Scripture's human authorship, and he takes issue with those who hold to a strict view of inerrancy, yet "his arguments against inerrancy would apply to looser views as well."<sup>107</sup> McGowan, however, never uses the word "error" directly with reference to the original text of Scripture but only with regard to corrupt copies of the *autographa*. His preferred term is "discrepancy," and he also speaks of "textual issues," "textual problems," and "apparent contradictions."<sup>108</sup> Yet, because McGowan denies that God has given us inerrant *autographa*,<sup>109</sup> it would seem that the inevitable implication is that there

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<sup>104</sup>James Scott provides a very thorough and penetrating review of *Divine Authenticity* that deals with issues related to McGowan's general doctrine of Scripture. For sake of brevity, I am only focusing on McGowan's treatment of inerrancy, although by necessity I will interact with other issues in McGowan's book as they are related to my subject matter. See James W. Scott, "Reconsidering Inerrancy: A Response to A. T. B. McGowan's *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*," *WTJ* 71 (2009): 185-209.

<sup>105</sup>Scott, "Reconsidering Inerrancy," 186.

<sup>106</sup>McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 124.

<sup>107</sup>Scott, "Reconsidering Inerrancy," 186.

<sup>108</sup>Scott provides a helpful catalog of the phrases that McGowan uses to describe the various difficulties one finds in Scripture. "McGowan asks in the context of questionable qualifications of inerrancy, 'When is an error an error?'—implying that there really are errors in Scripture. Elsewhere he speaks of 'discrepancies' (118, 119), 'apparent discrepancies' (163), 'contradictions (163, where 'apparent contradictions' was probably intended), 'apparent contradictions' (119, 149), 'apparent conflicts and contradictions' (112), 'difficulties,' (119, 163), 'synoptic issues' (119), 'varying accounts,' (125), 'textual issues, (112), 'textual matters (125), 'textual disagreements' (209), 'minor textual discrepancies (125), 'minor textual difficulties' (125), and, indeed, 'whatever' (125)" (Scott, "Reconsidering Inerrancy," 185n3). Consider the discussion of Fuller Seminary in chapter one: Davis Weyerhaeuser also recommended that the word "discrepancy" replace "error." See George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 213.

<sup>109</sup>McGowan states, "In other words, I am arguing that Scripture is as God intended it to be, in his gracious providential overruling, but reject the implication that thereby the *autographa* must be inerrant" (McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 124).

are errors—statements that do not align with reality—in the original text of Scripture. This ambiguity proves detrimental to much of his proposal, for it leads him to offer a solution that suggests there is something between truth (that which corresponds to reality) and error (that which does not correspond to reality).

In his complaint that the debate between Rogers and McKim and John Woodbridge never finally answered the problems posed by each respective side, McGowan claims that the discussion itself has presented Christians with a false dilemma.<sup>110</sup>

On the whole, Woodbridge had the best of the argument, but the problem remains—there are references produced by Rogers and McKim that cannot be accommodated by Woodbridge's hypothesis, and there are references produced by Woodbridge that cannot be accommodated by Rogers and McKim's hypothesis. How are we to explain this difficulty? The answer lies in recognizing that we are being offered a false choice here. We do not have to choose between Woodbridge's inerrantist text and Rogers and McKim's errant text. There is a third option, namely that the Scriptures we have are precisely as God intended them to be, but we must take seriously the fact that God used human authors to communicate his Word and did not make them into ciphers doing so.

McGowan's neglect to provide even one example of these alleged unanswered references notwithstanding, it is difficult to see how he has offered a genuine alternative that will negotiate a path between an inerrant text and an errant text. Keeping within normal epistemic categories of truth and error, a distinction between these categories must be maintained. McGowan claims that the debate has polarized the two sides, thus presenting a false dichotomy between inerrancy and errancy. Yet, why must this be a false dichotomy? It appears that McGowan has taken the terms inerrancy and errancy to represent respective theological positions with their various complex arguments rather

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 125.

than seeing the words to denote the particular epistemological categories of truth and error and the question of whether Scripture does or does not contain the latter.<sup>111</sup>

In his proposal, McGowan attempts to transcend this so-called false dichotomy created by the inerrancy debate by positing that in his good providence, God gave his people the Scriptures “precisely as [he] intended them to be.”<sup>112</sup> This attempted solution, however, leads to a second weakness in McGowan’s proposal. Not only has he still left unresolved the question of whether or not the Scriptures contain error, he has confused the theological categories of providence and inspiration as they relate to the Bible’s authorship.

Both inerrantists and evangelical errantists typically agree that the Scriptures we have are what God intended them to be. The debate lies not mainly here, in God’s providential working to ensure the final text is what he intended, but in the doctrine of inspiration where the question is to what degree God guided the authors of Scripture to write his word and whether or not he guarded them from error as they did so. Actually, to state only that the Scriptures are what God intended them to be says nothing about whether or not they are the word of God, much less that they have been kept from error. Scott explains,

But merely writing what God wants one to say does not make what is written the word of God. Ordinary providence can produce no more than the word of godly men, however much God may endorse its content. Only the direct and immediate influence of the Spirit on a human writer can make God the author, so that what is written can properly be called the word of God.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy,” 193.

<sup>112</sup>McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 125.

<sup>113</sup>Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy,” 206.

McGowan continues to confuse these two categories in his discussion of God's providential preparation of the biblical authors. Following Herman Bavinck, McGowan affirms that God designed the world and its events to prepare the biblical authors to write what they did. "Nevertheless, in the mysterious providence of God he so overruled providentially in their nature, character, upbringing, education and so on that what they wrote was what God wanted them to say."<sup>114</sup> By framing his proposal in such a way, where inspiration is conflated with God's providential preparation of the biblical authors, McGowan is now able to leave open the possibility that the authors did err occasionally because God, in his gracious providence, worked with fallen, error-prone men to bring about his written word. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that errors did creep into the original text as these fallible men wrote. Scott responds, "But if after all their preparation, when the actual writing began, the Holy Spirit, in his act of inspiration, directed the human writers to write the word of God, then we may be sure that that direction was such that nothing was written that was inconsistent with the character of God by being untrue or erroneous or misleading."<sup>115</sup> Inerrancy, while fully consistent with the idea that God sovereignly prepared the biblical authors for their task of writing by providing the various means with which to compile the necessary information (memory, external written sources, oral reports, and the like), maintains that during the act of inspiration, the Holy Spirit enabled the writers to record only truth and guarded them from writing anything that did not correspond to actual states of affairs. This careful designation of what inerrancy affirms vis-à-vis the doctrine of inspiration leads us to a

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<sup>114</sup>McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*," 149.

<sup>115</sup>Scott, "Reconsidering Inerrancy," 206.

third drawback in McGowan's proposal.

McGowan does not accept the doctrine of inerrant *autographa* because he believes it is theologically unnecessary to affirm such an idea. McGowan asks, If an inerrant *autographa* is so essential to the life and health of the church, why did God not preserve those original texts or precise copies of the originals in the first place?<sup>116</sup> One could offer good reasons as to why God did not preserve the original texts or precise copies of the originals,<sup>117</sup> but the more important question at this juncture is why evangelicals have insisted that inerrancy be tied to the *autographa* at all.<sup>118</sup> Historically, evangelicals ascribe inerrancy to the original *autographa* in order to safeguard God's character in the inspiration process.<sup>119</sup> If McGowan is going to reject the idea of an

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<sup>116</sup>McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 109.

<sup>117</sup>I will suggest three. (1) God desired to help his people avoid idolatry and the temptation to worship the original manuscripts. (2) The loss of the original manuscripts causes God's people to focus on what is most important: the original *text* rather than the original *codex*. (3) It may have been *better* to allow errors to creep into subsequent copies so that the original text might be recovered with a large degree of certainty. If the claim is made that a pristine text has been handed down from generation to generation (as with the Qu'ran), then this claim can only be taken by faith. That is, there is no way of knowing beyond the claim whether or not it is true; one can only hope that the text has been passed down without error. Errors in the subsequent copies of the biblical text require the comparison of the various manuscripts in order to determine the original reading. Through the work of textual criticism, scholars can determine the original text with a high degree of certainty. It appears, then, that in his infinite wisdom, God allowed for errors to creep into copies of Scripture for the very purpose of providing the apparatus with which to reclaim the text with confidence without having to rely upon a non-falsifiable claim.

<sup>118</sup>In chap. 4 I will discuss in more detail the issue of inerrant *autographa* when I examine a recent article by evangelical non-inerrantist, John Brogan. He argues that the current state of textual criticism significantly undermines our ability to define and, therefore, reclaim an *autographa*. Thus, inerrancy should be abandoned on the basis of text-critical considerations. See John J. Brogan, "Can I have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture," in *Evangelicals and Scripture*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 93-111.

<sup>119</sup>The argument for inerrant *autographa* is grounded in the biblical teaching that God, as the ultimate author of Scripture, cannot breathe out error. When the autographical text was penned, therefore, it could not have contained any error, for to ascribe error to the *autographa* would be to ascribe error to the ultimate author, God. It became necessary to affirm this truth in light of the fact that subsequent reproductions of biblical texts contained error as a result of the copying process. For more on the argument for inerrant *autographa*, see B. B. Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," in *The Selected Shorter Writings of B. B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and

inerrant original, then it would seem he is also obligated to explain how a false statement can be truly deemed God's word. If God did not protect the writing of Scripture at the point of the error, then how can we assert that he truly inspired the text in question?<sup>120</sup>

McGowan recognizes that his challenge to inerrancy at the point of the *autographa* draws him into issues related to the doctrine of God. Indeed, he remarks that inerrantists, in claiming that a truthful God cannot inspire an errant Scripture, have presumed wrongly that "given the nature and character of God, the only kind of Scripture he could 'breathe out' was Scripture that is textually inerrant."<sup>121</sup> McGowan is concerned that such a conjecture limits God by implying that God is "unable" to do something. Surely, inerrantists would agree that it is wrong to draw illegitimate limits upon God's omnipotence; but to affirm that God cannot do certain things is something to which Scripture attests. As inerrantists themselves have always maintained, God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). Yet, such inability to speak falsehood does not constitute an actual restriction upon God or his omnipotence; indeed, it is a beautiful and admirable character quality without which Christians could have no sure hope in divine promises. So, when McGowan maintains in opposition to these so-called illegitimate assumptions that "God is free to act according to his will,"<sup>122</sup> inerrantists can respond by noting that the doctrine

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Reformed, 1970), 2:580-87; idem, "Westminster and the Original Autographs," in *The Selected Shorter Writings of B. B. Warfield*, 2:588-94; Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 149-93; John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 4 of *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 239-52.

<sup>120</sup>John Frame believes McGowan's thesis must be taken to mean that God does "breathe out" errors. See Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 547.

<sup>121</sup>McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 113.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 118.

of inerrancy affirms that very thing. Specifically, in his act of inspiring Scripture, God works freely and according to his nature as a truth-telling God and breathes out only that which is without error.<sup>123</sup>

A fourth problem afflicting McGowan’s proposal is one that we have seen already in our discussion of Kenton Sparks. Like Sparks, McGowan assumes throughout the formulation of his position that in order for Scriptures to be a fully human product, they must contain error. Granted, Sparks is far more straightforward in this claim; however, McGowan at least rejects an inerrant *autographa* and therefore allows for the possibility of minor errors in the text.

Furthermore, the connection between McGowan’s concern that Scripture retain its full humanity while allowing for the possibility of error is implied throughout his work. For example, McGowan maintains that God gave us a text that “reflects the humanity of its authors,” and that we must “take seriously the fact that God used human authors to communicate his Word and did not make them into ciphers in doing so”<sup>124</sup> while upholding the notion that in the act of inspiration, God did not “overrule [the

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<sup>123</sup>Interestingly, although McGowan accuses those who hold to inerrancy of “assum[ing] that God can only act in a way that conforms to our expectations, based on a human assessment of his character” (McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 118), he never demonstrates how his view escapes the same accusation (why is his expectation that God *could* inspire an errant text superior to the inerrantist who says God *could not*?), nor does he ever ground his alternative view in Scripture. It is difficult to take seriously this accusation when McGowan himself states dogmatically that “God did not give us an inerrant autograph, because he did not intend to do so” (ibid., 124), while not offering *any* Scripture to establish his case. Scott makes this very point in his article (see Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy,” 196). Inerrantists, however, typically base their argument for the nature of God’s character and its relation to the inspiration of Scripture on specific Bible texts (e.g., 2 Sam 7:28; Ps 18:30; Ps 119:160; Prov 30:5; Matt 5:18; John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 2:21; Heb 6:13). If McGowan’s position is “more biblical” (McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 123), it would seem that such a claim would require actual interaction with Scripture—at the very least, with texts that inerrantists have normally employed to establish their view.

<sup>124</sup>McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 124-25.

author's] humanity."<sup>125</sup> Yet, when he mentions the humanness of the Bible's authors, it is always within the context reaffirming the idea that Scriptures contain "minor textual discrepancies or varying accounts,"<sup>126</sup> or that God did not give us inerrant *autographa*.<sup>127</sup> It appears, then, that McGowan is laboring under the assumption that the qualities of error or proneness to error are essential properties of existing as a human: unless one admits that Scripture contains error (minor though it may be), one has not truly affirmed the humanity of the authors or of Scripture itself. As already shown, it is not essential in order to retain the status of fully human that one err or that one be prone to error.<sup>128</sup> It is not surprising then, that McGowan has trouble finally establishing his position, for his concern to retain the full humanity of the biblical authors can be accomplished by giving heed to other qualities like the authors' different styles, their varying approaches to writing, the range of emotions expressed in their poetry, and their distinct theological emphases, to name only a few.<sup>129</sup> None of these aspects of human authorship, however, imply error or a proneness to error. This latter point brings us to the fifth and final

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>128</sup>Humans in their fallen condition do err and have a tendency to err, but these qualities are incidental, not necessary properties. I doubt that McGowan would want to argue that in their glorified state, Christians will be any less than human or that their humanity post-resurrection will depend upon their tendency to err.

<sup>129</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully observes that Scripture's diversity is a vital element of its humanity. "A thoroughgoing acknowledgement of Scripture's diverse forms better helps us to understand the *humanity* of Scripture, without surrendering the notion of divine authorship. God used linguistic and literary convention in order to communicate with human beings. The diverse literary forms, far from being a weakness of Scripture, ensure a rich communication and are actually one of Scripture's perfections." Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 79.

weakness in McGowan’s proposal.

As one reads McGowan’s reformulation of the doctrine of inerrancy, one is struck by how often he states the position of inerrantists as though it were something new, or how many times he mistakenly accuses inerrantists of not incorporating key elements into their doctrine. For our purposes, I will focus on McGowan’s failure to understand the CSBI and his neglect to give adequate attention to the document’s affirmations and denials in the course of his proposal.

McGowan mentions the CSBI specifically as he presents his arguments against the inerrantist position, claiming that its length and its various affirmations and denials—all required to define what evangelicals mean by the word *inerrant*—“empties the word of its content.”<sup>130</sup> As an illustration, McGowan considers the matter of numerical inaccuracies in Scripture. “For example, if numbers can be inaccurate but not affect the claim to inerrancy, then when is an error an error? One gains a clear impression that no matter what objection might be brought against the inerrantist position, it would simply be argued that this is an exception quite permissible within the terms of the definition.”<sup>131</sup> But McGowan appears to misunderstand the inerrantist position, for the CSBI allows for the use of round numbers within the biblical narrative in a way that does not negate the claim that the Scriptures are without error.<sup>132</sup> When Scripture is read according to the

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<sup>130</sup>McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 106.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup>The denial portion of Article XIII reads, “We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.”

intention in which it was given, and readers are careful not to foist a standard of precision upon the Bible that is foreign to its historical context, then matters like numerical inaccuracies do not pose a problem for inerrancy. If David killed 18,432 Edomites in the Valley of Salt, yet Scripture records 18,000 (2 Sam 8:13), the text does not err; it provides an accounting that is appropriate for the given context.

Yet these issues highlight another problem with McGowan's interaction with the CSBI. He assumes that the document is a lengthy definition of the term "inerrancy" that contains innumerable qualifications that finally rob the word of any real theological weight. In actual fact, the CSBI provides a concise definition of inerrancy in Articles XII and XIII.<sup>133</sup> Simply stated, inerrancy is the claim that Scripture is entirely truthful and contains no error. The remaining sections of the CSBI, therefore, do not constitute qualifications to this brief definition as though the framers of the document were simply dismissing the obvious and irremediable problems inherent in their position. Several of the articles deal with issues related to inerrancy, like inspiration, authority, revelation, and human authorship; others are the application of the definition to the various phenomena of Scripture and pertinent theological categories.<sup>134</sup> It is no coincidence, therefore, that the discussion of the Bible's phenomena comes directly after the concise

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<sup>133</sup>Article XII: "We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, and deceit." Article XIII provides the positive affirmation of the same: "We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture."

<sup>134</sup>Furthermore, the act of qualifying a particular word is not itself inherently misleading or confusing. On the contrary, the qualification of various words of doctrinal import is essential for doing theology. What, for example, do we mean by the word "God" or "Jesus" or "Holy Spirit" or "atonement?" Each of these words requires careful definition and "qualification" so that they are rightly communicated and distinguished from wrong uses. Scott helpfully observes, "The Chicago Statement actually deals broadly with the inspiration, authority, and interpretation of Scripture, not merely with defining and explaining inerrancy. A mere eight words are required to define the word *inerrant* in Article 12" (Scott, "Reconsidering Inerrancy," 193).

definition of inerrancy found in Articles XII and XIII, for those things listed in the denial portion of Article XIII *do not affect the truthfulness of what Scripture affirms*. So, to answer McGowan’s question, “When is an error an error?” inerrantists would say, “When it is contrary to actual states of affairs.” The CSBI concisely states this definition and applies it across the relevant theological and biblical categories.<sup>135</sup>

There are more flaws in McGowan’s proposal we could note; for example, his poor reading of Herman Bavinck<sup>136</sup> or his misuse of the word “infallible.”<sup>137</sup> But the above examples suffice to undermine considerably McGowan’s attempt to reframe the debate and to posit a third view that resides somewhere between inerrancy and errancy. McGowan has not succeeded in articulating a coherent position that somehow solves the impasse between inerrantists and errantists.

We now turn to examine Craig Allert, another evangelical who has formally announced his discontent over the CSBI, but under a category different from Enns,

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<sup>135</sup>McGowan also neglects in several instances to acknowledge where the CSBI actually affirms his position. For example, McGowan states that in his choice to inscripturate his word, God chose certain human beings and did not “overrule their humanity” (McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 118). Article VIII of the CSBI, however, maintains this very thing. It is difficult to determine why McGowan believes his view in this case actually differs from the inerrantist position. Later, McGowan restates his position, claiming a high view of Scripture that depends upon God’s spiration of the biblical text but that acknowledges that God chose to use human authors and accepts “all the implications of that decision” (ibid., 124). Again, however, does not the CSBI also affirm this notion as far as it goes? As I just noted above, the CSBI asserts that God, in his work of inspiration, did not override the personalities of the biblical writers. Moreover, the existence of phenomena like “a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole, and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations” (Article XIII) can legitimately fulfill the concern that we acknowledge the “implications” of human authorship.

<sup>136</sup>Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy,” 207-8. For a more reliable presentation of Bavinck’s view of inspiration and inerrancy, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *God’s Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic, 2008), 47-103.

<sup>137</sup>Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy,” 188-89.

Sparks, and McGowan.

### **Craig Allert: Articulating Inerrancy In Light of Canon Formation**

Craig Allert's volume, *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*,<sup>138</sup> is another recent contribution to the evangelical doctrine of Scripture. While mainly dealing with historical and textual matters related to canonicity, Allert broaches the matter of inerrancy occasionally throughout his work, finally dedicating an entire chapter to the issue in the latter portion of the book. Prior to the chapter in which he expresses in some detail his complaint against the doctrine of inerrancy generally and the CSBI in particular, Allert registers his concern over the doctrine in a few places, some only in passing, others with a little more specificity.

In chapter 6, Allert focuses his efforts on the matters of inspiration and inerrancy. The burden of this chapter is to challenge the idea that inspiration was the key criterion used by the early church to determine the canonicity of the New Testament Scriptures. In order to do assert this challenge, Allert examines three texts central to the doctrine of inspiration to ascertain what the New Testament teaches about inspiration: 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; and John 10:35. Because evangelicals see inerrancy as a corollary to inspiration, Allert also weighs in on this issue specifically in the latter half of the chapter.

From his investigation into 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Allert contends that the Scriptures for which Paul claims inspiration do not necessarily refer to a completed canon

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<sup>138</sup>Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*, Evangelical Ressourcement (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

of Old Testament writings, because it “is probable that the Christian church did not inherit a closed canon of Hebrew Scriptures.”<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, given the fact that the word translated “inspiration” (*theopneustos*) only appears here in the entire New Testament, any attempt to define the word etymologically runs the risk of drawing an ill-found conclusion on the word’s meaning, or provides a definition that is, at best, only probable.<sup>140</sup> Thus, Allert concludes, “The stress of the passage is not on *theopneustos*; instead, it is on the usefulness of Scripture. . . . In line with the fact that the text does not define *theopneustos*, it is difficult to find in the passage a detailed theory of inspiration.”<sup>141</sup>

Allert expresses similar reservations about 2 Peter 1:19-21. Here, however, he challenges the notion that Peter’s reference to prophecy refers to all of Scripture and suggests, rather, that the apostle means only to include sections of Scripture that can be properly classified under the category of prophecy as such. Thus, when the context of this particular text is rightly understood, “the attempt to make the passage into an argument for the inspiration of the Bible (in the verbal sense) appears strained.”<sup>142</sup> Finally, after a brief discussion of John 10:34-35, Allert concludes that drawing a connection between biblical authority—a notion clearly affirmed in the text—and inspiration is “contextually incorrect.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 158-59.

From this concise study of three New Testament passages and their relation to the doctrine of inspiration, Allert turns to the matter of inerrancy. After perceiving that there is some discrepancy within the evangelical community regarding this issue, Allert looks to the CSBI to provide some context and definition. In his examination of the CSBI, he cites fully points four and five in the document's "Short Statement" section,<sup>144</sup> concluding that these "Summary Statements appear to be denying that a critical examination of the phenomena of Scripture can inform a doctrine of Scripture."<sup>145</sup> Further, drawing also from Article XII of the CSBI, Allert observes, "On the basis of these Summary Statements and the Articles of Affirmation and Denial, one might conclude that inerrancy as applied to the Bible means that everything that it states is unequivocally and literally true, without regard to whether it is a statement about religion, science, history, geography, and so on."<sup>146</sup> Allert claims that the document "recognizes difficulties in defining 'truth,'" and therefore qualifies the definition of inerrancy rather extensively in both Article XIII and the exposition.<sup>147</sup>

Allert then provides an example of "some of the issues raised above"<sup>148</sup> by surveying Harold Lindsell's attempt to reconcile the divergent account of Peter's denial

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<sup>144</sup>Point 4 of the CSBI's short statements: "Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives." Point 5: "The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in anyway 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>145</sup>Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 160.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

<sup>148</sup>Allert is not clear as to which issues he is referring specifically.

of Christ given in all four gospels. Allert claims that Lindsell failed to uphold the notion of inerrancy and, “rather than demonstrate the accuracy and truthfulness of the Gospels . . . has actually shown that none of the gospels give . . . an accurate account of how many denials there were.”<sup>149</sup> Allert concedes that Lindsell’s example is “extreme,” but it “well illustrates the problem of a faulty definition of truth and error in relation to the Bible.”<sup>150</sup>

Accordingly, Allert broaches the epistemological matter of truth and error, claiming, “Often definitions of truth and error are assumed when the Bible is read.”<sup>151</sup> The real problem lies in the definition of inerrancy. Some evangelicals argue that inerrancy should be defined “in terms of whether the Bible fulfills its intended purpose of making people wise to salvation.”<sup>152</sup> Other evangelicals, define inerrancy in terms of truth and error. Correspondingly, there are two primary ways truth is defined. The first way is in terms of willful deception. Those who frame the discussion of truth in these terms claim that the Bible teaches in ways that are consistent with the ancient culture in which the Scripture was written. “Thus, to speak of error in the modern sense is entirely unhelpful and confusing.”<sup>153</sup> Error, according to this view, is that which willfully deceives, not necessarily that which does not correspond with reality.

That truth and error be defined according to that which does or does not

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<sup>149</sup>Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 162.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 163.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid. Allert is here referring to G. C. Berkouwer in *Holy Scripture*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 182-85.

<sup>153</sup>Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 164.

correspond to reality is the concern of the second group of evangelicals. Taking from Norman Geisler’s systematic theology, “*Truth is that which corresponds to its referent, i.e. to the state of affairs it purports to describe.*”<sup>154</sup> From this definition Allert concludes, “In this view Scripture is *not* to be defined in terms of Scripture’s intended purpose because such a definition is based on pragmatic view of truth rather than truth as correspondence to states of affairs.”<sup>155</sup> Allert recognizes that proponents of this view of truth allow for textual issues like loose quotations, round numbers, and phenomenological language, but he also notes that “The tension in inerrancy has resided in the difference between modern standards of precision and biblical standards.”<sup>156</sup> The tension between these two views of truth, according to Allert, is seen especially in the controversy surrounding Robert Gundry’s expulsion from the Evangelical Theological Society in 1983.<sup>157</sup>

Despite several commendable qualities of Allert’s work—his desire for

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<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>157</sup>Gundry claimed in his commentary on Matthew that the evangelist regularly utilized the rabbinic genre of midrash and exaggerated historical events and statements for the sake of his theological purposes. Gundry’s statements about Matthew’s use of midrash drew the concern of not a few ETS members and finally led to his resignation from the society. Nevertheless, Allert observes that not everyone in ETS articulated their concern over Gundry’s work in the same way or linked their misgivings directly to the doctrine of inerrancy. Douglas Moo, for example, stated in an article addressing the controversy that “Gundry’s classification of Matthew as midrash . . . cannot a priori be ruled out because of a commitment to inerrancy.” Douglas J. Moo, “Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry’s Approach,” *JETS* 26 (1983): 32. Instead, the question that needs to be asked is whether or not Matthew is using midrash. Allert worries that “the logic of Gundry’s critics” could eventually lead to an affirmation of inerrancy that neglects to acknowledge important hermeneutical concerns and thus concludes that those who differ in a particular interpretation of Scripture have thus denied inerrancy. Furthermore, because Scripture itself does not provide us with a detailed theory of inspiration, evangelicals should be careful with drawing inerrancy as its logical corollary while also avoiding the tendency to come to Scripture with presumptions about what the Bible should be, rather than studying Scripture on its own terms (Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 172).

evangelicals rightly to understand the dynamics of canon development and assimilate this understanding into their doctrine of Scripture, and his concern that the doctrine of inspiration be grounded in the text of Scripture—there are some serious areas to critique as they pertain to our discussion of inerrancy and the CSBI. Because his primary discussion of inerrancy comes in chapter 6, I will focus my efforts there.<sup>158</sup>

The first problem is Allert’s treatment of inspiration, two issues in particular. First, he is not sufficiently clear how he understands *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16. As noted above, Allert warns evangelicals to avoid defining the word based on its etymology or attempting to derive more than a probable definition of inspiration from the passage. He appears to disapprove of Warfield’s overwrought use of the word, but then affirms his statement that *theopneustos* simply indicates that the Scriptures are a divine product, saying that he does not wish to “deny or undermine the divine origin or purpose of the Bible.”<sup>159</sup> This statement given by Allert, however, is similar to a comment by Warfield quoted earlier: “In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a divine product.”<sup>160</sup> Thus, the question: in what way does Allert’s position differ from Warfield’s? Furthermore, as Gregg Allison notes, Allert does not offer any significant reflection on how we are to construct a definition of words, like *theopneustos*, that only appear once in the canon. And, although Allert warns us to not

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<sup>158</sup>While important, his comments concerning inspiration and inerrancy prior to chapter six serve mainly to indicate that Allert on the whole has some trouble with the two doctrines as they have been defined historically; he reserves the last chapter of the book to give full voice to his concern.

<sup>159</sup>Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 154.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid. Allert is quoting Warfield’s “Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 1, *Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. E. D. Warfield, W. P. Armstrong, and C. W. Hodge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 80.

build an entire definition on one word, he does not give space to “weigh adequately the transparency of the adjective: *theos* (God) and *pneō* (having to do with breathing).”<sup>161</sup>

Second, in his survey of 2 Peter 1:19-21, Allert illegitimately limits prophecy to refer only to that which refers to the coming Christ event foreseen in the Old Testament. To extend prophecy to include the entire Bible—and therefore imply that Peter is referring to the inspiration of all Scripture in his verse—appears strained, according to Allert. Yet, Allert’s own treatment of the verse is far from adequate. Allison explains:

However, Allert misses the opportunity to look at how the expression is used elsewhere in Scripture (e.g. Romans 16:26) and in extra-biblical literature (e.g. Justin Martyr). Moreover, he fails to note the context of Peter’s discussion (2:1) with its reference to the entire Old Testament period in which ‘false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers’ who will arise among the church in the post-Old Testament period. That is, a good case can be made that ‘the prophetic word’ to which Peter makes reference is the whole of Hebrew Scripture, not just its prophetic portions (e.g. Isaiah, Daniel, Amos) nor the prophetic divine words announced on the Mount of Transfiguration.<sup>162</sup>

It does not seem, therefore, that Allert has built a strong enough case to dismiss Warfield and those who side with the view that 2 Peter does speak to the inspiration of all Scripture. Nor does Allert’s treatment of John 10:34-35 add to his challenge.

Allert’s main contention with John 10:34-35 is that evangelicals have typically taken this verse to provide clear teaching on inspiration. While he concedes that Scripture’s authority is obviously in view (“Scripture shall not be broken”), Allert wonders where this verse teaches on inspiration directly. It is agreed that Jesus is arguing

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<sup>161</sup>Gregg Allison, “A Theologian Addresses Current Theological Issues Impinging on Christian Education,” *CEJ* 8 (2011): 88.

<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

with the Jews based on a common understanding of Scripture’s authority, but the connection in this passage often made by evangelicals between authority and inspiration is “contextually incorrect.” While Allert is not clear as to what contextual factors he is referring, it does not seem that he has considered the possibility—indeed, the probability—that the Jews believed in the authority of Scripture because they also believed its divine inspiration. In his insistence that this passage does not teach specifically on inspiration, Allert “fails to consider that there just may be good reason for this intuitive connection to inspiration: a view of Scripture shared between Jesus and his Jewish audience, yes, but even more specifically, a shared conviction of the inspiration of Scripture.”<sup>163</sup> Overall, then, Allert does not provide a strong enough case to jettison a traditional evangelical interpretation of these three passages and their teaching—explicit or implicit—on the doctrine of inspiration.

Allert’s discussion of inerrancy and the CSBI is also lacking. I will note three primary areas of concern. First, Allert does not appear to understand the CSBI on its own terms. After he cites fully statements four and five of the document’s Short Summary, he concludes that such affirmations deny that a “critical examination of the phenomena of Scripture can inform a doctrine of Scripture.”<sup>164</sup> These two summary statements, however, only assert that the Scripture is wholly without error in whatever they affirm; such an assertion does not preclude critical study *unless* what one means by “critical study” is that which allows for the discovery of error in the biblical text, which is clearly question-begging. Furthermore, such a claim by Allert fails to consider that “the explicit

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<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

<sup>164</sup>Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 160.

statements of Scripture are themselves indispensable “phenomena.”<sup>165</sup> That is, critical study of the biblical phenomena must include not only things like scientific imprecision and grammatical irregularities, but also the clear teaching given throughout the canon regarding the truthfulness of God and his Word (e.g., Prov 30:5-6; Heb 6:18). Yet, Allert continues, “On the basis of these Summary Statements and the Articles of Affirmation and Denial, one might conclude that inerrancy as applied to the Bible means that everything that it states is unequivocally and literally true, without regard to whether it is a statement about religion, science, history, geography, and so on.”<sup>166</sup> This is a puzzling statement, for, on the one hand, the CSBI does maintain that inerrancy is comprehensive—it applies to everything Scripture affirms, from geography to soteriology—but, on the other hand, it also allows for the existence of different genre within the Bible that require their own interpretive approaches.<sup>167</sup> Allert’s comment here makes it sound as though the doctrine of inerrancy only allows for the most wooden interpretations that give little room for various genre, figures and speech, and other aspects of language. If this is what Allert is arguing, then he has badly misunderstood the doctrine’s use among evangelicals who embrace the CSBI.

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<sup>165</sup>Thompson, “The Divine Investment in Truth,” 76n19.

<sup>166</sup>Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 161.

<sup>167</sup>The exposition reads, “We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of His penmen’s milieu, a milieu that God controls in His Sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise. So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole as hyperbole, and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it.”

To be fair, Allert recognizes that the CSBI does not allow for the use of interpretive approaches that judge the claims of Scripture based on standards foreign to the text. Yet even his discussion here indicates he is not following closely the CSBI's affirmations. "But the statement also recognizes difficulties in defining 'truth,'" Allert comments. "Article 13 affirms that it is improper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth that are alien to its own usage or purpose."<sup>168</sup> The problem is that Allert has equivocated on the word "truth" and therefore misrepresents what the CSBI is really saying. In actual fact, the CSBI defines truth as that which corresponds to reality; falsehood is that which does not. What the CSBI acknowledges is not varying standards of *truth*, but varying standards of *precision* vis-à-vis affirmations of truth. Thus, Article XIII and the Exposition do not qualify the doctrine of inerrancy; they apply it across the whole of Scripture, keeping in mind the various contours of language and respecting the text's own intention, context, and genre. The phenomena listed in Article XIII are given as examples precisely because they do not affect the truthfulness of the statements in which they occur. The exposition's acknowledgement of the various genre throughout Scripture serves to guard interpreters from forcing expectations of one category of literature (e.g., didactic) upon another (e.g., poetry). Truth is not in question here, but precision.

Second, in his discussion of truth and error and his presentation of the two prevailing positions within evangelicalism with regard to these categories, Allert fails to grapple with whether or not one position is superior to the other or if by separating the positions and claiming mutual exclusivity, evangelicals have drawn a false dichotomy

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<sup>168</sup>Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 161.

between them. His neglect to ask these important questions gives the impression that the difference between the two sides is not a significant concern when, in fact, the history of the inerrancy debate has centered in large measure on this very issue. Furthermore, in his discussion of those who take a correspondence view of truth, Allert is unclear as to what he means by his phrase “differing standards of truth.” He comments: “Those who hold to the correspondence view are quite aware of the differing standards of truth employed by biblical authors. In regard to the matter of loose quotations and the reporting of numbers, even in modern usage we employ these types of loose approximations without considering them to be in error.”<sup>169</sup> Only a paragraph later, Allert observes, “The tension in inerrancy has resided in the difference between modern standards of precision and biblical standards.”<sup>170</sup> Again, he has used the words “truth” and “precision” interchangeably so that it appears that the CSBI qualifies what it means when it uses words like “truthfulness” and “falsehood.” As demonstrated above, however, the CSBI does not qualify these words and their standard definitions. Yet, Allert should not receive all the blame for such ambiguity: it appears that in some areas the CSBI itself is a little unclear at this point. I will take up this matter in chapter 4 when I examine specifically Article XIII. Even so, although Allert raises some important questions, his challenge to the doctrine of inspiration and doubts about inerrancy do not seem warranted. In large measure, his missteps are in his assumption that inerrancy cannot provide a framework for a critical scholarship and in his failure to understand the CSBI on its own terms.

I now turn to consider Carlos Bovell—another evangelical who has recently

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

attempted to reframe the inerrancy debate by taking specific aim at the CSBI and inerrantists' tendency to downplay the narrative aspects of Scripture.

### **Carlos Bovell: Contending for a Post-Inerrantist Mindset**

In his first book specifically addressing this issue of inerrancy,<sup>171</sup> Carlos Bovell argues that the doctrine of inerrancy has had a profoundly negative effect on this generation of evangelicals—men and women age 18 to 30.<sup>172</sup> Bovell, therefore, calls for greater flexibility in allowing younger evangelicals to form their own convictions about the nature of Scripture. This flexibility would include, among other things, the demotion of inerrancy from its status as distinguishing marker of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture to a doctrine that one can choose whether or not to embrace.<sup>173</sup>

In his most recent book, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* (2012),<sup>174</sup> Bovell takes issue with the CSBI directly, devoting a chapter to a discussion of the document and its failure to provide an adequate framework within which to understand rightly the category of biblical narrative. Because Bovell deals directly with the CSBI in the latter volume, I will focus my efforts here.

Bovell's main trouble with the CSBI is that it relies exclusively on a

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<sup>171</sup>Carlos R. Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007).

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 152. Bovell comments, "The purpose of the entire book is to inform those evangelical teachers and leaders who communicate, implicitly or otherwise, that inerrancy is a watershed issue that they may be inadvertently obstructing their pupils spiritual formation."

<sup>173</sup>For Bovell, this question is already settled: "There exists a host of philosophical, theological, and historical details that appear to render an inerrant Bible approach to the Christian life untenable" (ibid., 149).

<sup>174</sup>Carlos Bovell, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

correspondence theory of truth, thus giving the impression of uniformity among philosophers and interpreters with regard to how we are to understand truth, reality, and language. Such an impression, according to Bovell, is misleading and fails to account for the lack of agreement among philosophers over various theories of truth; it also fails to explain well the interpretive difficulties that attend biblical study.<sup>175</sup> The CSBI, therefore, should not be used with students, for it “forecloses critical discussion regarding how most fruitfully to understand how the bible is ‘true’”<sup>176</sup> and “gives students no indication whatever that philosophy (as usual) still has plenty to sort out.”<sup>177</sup>

Contemporary discussion of metaphysics has demonstrated that the nature of what inerrantists refer to as “reality” is not as straightforward as they would suggest. In this regard, Bovell’s chief problem with the CSBI’s reliance upon a correspondence theory of truth is how it is tethered to the nature of God:

The concern I have about the Chicago Statement’s emphasis on ‘God, who is himself Truth and speaks truth only,’ has to do with the way it emboldens students to uncritically presuppose a simplified, unified ‘how things are’ mentality while reading biblical narratives, dialectically reinforcing a metaphysical expectation for ‘how things are’ correspondence. The correspondence inerrantists discern between truth-bearers (whether sentences or propositions) and truth-makers (facts or states of affairs in reality) are notoriously mysterious. This helps obscure from students some of the more serious difficulties.<sup>178</sup>

Thus, Bovell rejects the idea, affirmed by Article IX of the CSBI, that “in every way available biblical narratives should be understood as corresponding to reality, and this

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<sup>175</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 53.

correspondence is made good by actual states of affairs.”<sup>179</sup> Such a conception of the biblical narrative’s relation to truth is “rigid” and precludes profitable and honest Bible study. “If students presuppose that God is a God who speaks truth only and God is believed to ‘speak’ through scripture,” Bovell argues, “then they will be predisposed to uncritically assign genres to biblical literature that seem most easily understandable as God speaking truth to them.”<sup>180</sup> Therefore, the classification of the biblical narratives as stories is ruled out, for the category of “story” implies that the narrative contains elements that are not historical in a strict sense.<sup>181</sup> Requiring students to maintain inerrancy will have the unfortunate effect of shielding them from reading much of Scripture according to its multifaceted literary features.<sup>182</sup>

Furthermore, Bovell contends that inerrancy does not adequately explain how we are to understand aspects of biblical language that do not fall readily under the headings of assertive or descriptive. What about commands? Pleas? Interrogatives? In a discussion of Paul Helm’s review of McGowan’s *Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, Bovell critiques Helm for ignoring important features in the gospel narratives by assuming that a “narrator’s claim qua statement-made-within-the-telling-of-a-narrative [e.g., “Jesus asked, ‘Who do people say that I am?’”]” is a propositional truth claim.<sup>183</sup> Bovell wonders aloud why inerrantists are in “such a hurry” to distinguish and classify biblical

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 61.

sentences occurring within the biblical narrative as “facts.” Such an urgency reveals the inerrantist’s tendency to “propositionalize” without considering other features of the biblical narrative.<sup>184</sup>

Toward the conclusion of the chapter, Bovell returns to his initial concern, noting that the framers of the CSBI, while claiming to draw their assertions from the biblical teaching that God is truth and speaks truth only, actually relied heavily upon a certain philosophical framework. Inerrancy, then, “requires of students that they take unwavering stances on a number of complex philosophical issues, that, in the broader philosophical literature, remain as open problems. These include truth, hermeneutics, and philosophy of literature.”<sup>185</sup> The CSBI is ultimately “unhelpful” because it “omits the pre-bibliological discussion of what the Bible is, of what the Bible might turn out to be, of how *imaginative* it is.”<sup>186</sup> On the whole, inerrantists have failed to ask, “*what kind of literature is biblical narrative?*”<sup>187</sup> Bovell desires to maintain the possibility, in light of similar features in other literary works, that Scripture can also contain elements that are “invention rather than report, [and] story rather than history.”<sup>188</sup> Indeed, as Bovell reveals in the following chapter, working within such possibilities can lead the interpreter to conclude, for example, that stories like 1 Samuel 5 do not need to provide an historical record that corresponds to actual states of affairs but can consist of elements that were

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 63. Bovell is quoting Peter Lamarque and Stein Olson, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 262.

invented by the author in order to accomplish a particular purpose.

One of the tasks of an interpreter is to discern what kind of “language games” the author of a particular passage is playing and evaluate the text accordingly. Bovell contends that a “misguided zealotry for the Bible’s truthfulness, construed in overly narrow terms of correspondence to facts,”<sup>189</sup> has led inerrantists to conclude wrongly that the authors of narrative sections of Scripture were merely playing the language game of “reporting facts.” Yet, Bovell wonders if the author of 1 Samuel 5 is playing another kind of language game. Could he not be inventing a story and telling it?

Here, in the context of his suggestion that the author of 1 Samuel could be doing something more than reporting facts, Bovell interacts with the complex issue of speech act theory and its relationship to inerrancy. He notes that sentences—the locutions—are that which philosophers typically identify as either being true or false. The illocution, the force or intent of the speaker’s locution, is not so easily classified under true or false categories. Furthermore, while the locution is singular, illocutions are not, for they “tend to accomplish several things simultaneously.”<sup>190</sup> Bovell suggests that it is the “*spiritual-theological* illocution that evangelicals are ultimately after,” but that inerrantists mistakenly assert that “one of the truth-makers for biblical narrative must be the state of affairs that comply with the rules of the language game, ‘reporting and historical event.’”<sup>191</sup> Yet, he considers this an illegitimate assumption on the part of inerrantists, for they have “decided in advance on what the truth-maker for narrative

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<sup>189</sup>Bovell, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear*, 69.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid.

truth-bearers has to be.”<sup>192</sup> That is, there are certain authorial intentions that attend a speaker’s locution that do not depend on that locution’s correspondence to actual states of affairs. An example of such a text is found in 2 Samuel 12 where Nathan employs a fictional story in order to bring David to the recognition of his sin. The locution—the story of the man and his baby lamb—is not historical and therefore does not correspond to a particular man and his lamb. For his part, David did not recognize that the narrative conveyed by Nathan was fictional; indeed, his conviction and repentance was dependent on his belief that it was true. Even so, the story is used effectively by God to bring David to genuine repentance. The lack of correspondence of the story did not render Nathan’s (and God’s) rebuke of David any less “true.” Rather, this incident “suggests that what the virtues of accuracy and sincerity entail for a given communicative act can shift in accordance with the language game in operation.”<sup>193</sup> Applying the category of truth as correspondence across all the biblical narratives fails to acknowledge these various language games.<sup>194</sup> Bovell concludes, then, that narrative can be employed by God to convey important, life-changing truth without meeting the correspondence requirement.<sup>195</sup>

Although I find the title of his work a little misleading—*Rehabilitating Inerrancy* is mainly an exercise in dismantling inerrancy that offers little by way of positive proposal—I will make a few evaluative comments of his general argument here.

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<sup>192</sup>Ibid.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 75-76.

First, although Bovell helpfully warns inerrantists to discern carefully the genre of biblical texts as they form their doctrine of Scripture and to take notice of their tendency to “propositionalize” statements without considering other aspects of the biblical narrative, he does not seem to recognize that inerrancy traditionally understood is nuanced enough to allow for a plurality of genre in the Bible. This is seen in Bovell’s example of Nathan’s story in 2 Samuel 12. He contends that Nathan’s imaginary story, utilized as it was by the Lord to bring King David to repentance, demonstrates that biblical sentences—locutions—“do not themselves qualify as truth-bearers, at least not directly, and certainly not in ways that inerrantists otherwise expect given a correspondence theory which treats locutions only.”<sup>196</sup> From here Bovell suggests that we should expect biblical narratives on the whole to evoke ethically appropriate responses regardless of whether or not they correspond to actual states of affairs (e.g., the story of the ark and the Philistine god, Dagon, in 1 Samuel 5:1-12). What Bovell is missing here, however—and why 2 Samuel 12 is not as good an example as he might hope—is that the *interpreter* is able to distinguish that Nathan’s account of the man and his lamb is not necessarily historically true because the features of the narrative indicate that the prophet is telling a story that may or may not be fictional. Inerrancy is interested in safeguarding the historical integrity of biblical books and passages that are intended as recording events that really happened *as* they really happened. Inerrancy *does not* claim

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<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 76. I. Howard Marshall takes a similar stance when he comments, “If it is recognised that the Bible contains parables which do not need to be literally or historically ‘true’ in order to be ‘true’ on the level of the message which they teach, then the same may be also the case with other non-factual ways of teaching. We find no difficulty with the use of metaphor an analogy and similar forms of language in this regard. When we read that a sharp two-edged sword proceeded from the mouth of the Lord (Rev. 1:16), we know not to take the description literally; it is true in another kind of way. Perhaps, then, we ought to find no difficulty with the use of myth and legend. There is no reason in principle why God should not be able to make use of such literary forms.” I. Howard Marshall, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 55.

or require that truths found in the illocutions of fictional stories (e.g., the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Pearl of Great Price) require one-to-one correspondence with actual states of affairs. Of course, the ethical and theological truths embedded in the fictional story do correspond with actual states of affairs: in David's case, the pride and selfishness of the imaginary man was (and is) abhorrent to God.<sup>197</sup> Inerrancy does, however, require that the story recorded by Samuel of Nathan's interaction with David is historically reliable because the features of the narrative indicate that the story is, among other things, to be taken as an accurate portrayal of what really happened. The jump from the particular example of Nathan utilizing a fictional story to promote repentance in David to the universal claim that God can do the same thing in the larger biblical narrative—given the ability of the reader to discern the difference between truth and fiction within the narrative of 2 Samuel 12—is not so easily accomplished.<sup>198</sup>

Second and related, Bovell appears to draw a false dichotomy between narrative and history, thus precluding the possibility of a genre that can be understood best as *true story*. It is not necessary that narrative and essential history stand in opposition to one another. The authors of Scripture can employ a “theological selectivity” in a way that respects the historical facts and that tells a compelling story of

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<sup>197</sup>This assumes that which is ethically abhorrent is always so because God is the standard by which we judge that which is to be esteemed and that which is to be detested.

<sup>198</sup>Furthermore, it is not clear from the story itself that David believed Nathan's story was, in actual fact, true. David's passionate response does not depend on the story's correspondence to actual states of affairs—it may have been provoked by the ethical implications of the story. One can feel the proper indignation and pronounce a fitting judgment on a moral matter contained in fictional story just as well as he can on a true narrative. If it is the case that David was able to discern that the story was fictional, then it only strengthens my position.

God's work of redemption.<sup>199</sup> Bovell is right to emphasize that we cannot distill biblical narrative into mere correspondence categories; biblical narratives do more than just report the facts. Yet, although there is more going on in the narrative texts than the recounting of what happened in this or that event, there is not less. Furthermore, it is entirely possible to write a compelling, theologically shaped, selective history that is accurate in all it affirms. Why must a story be fictional in order to remain "imaginative" or accomplish spiritually significant effects upon the reader?<sup>200</sup> I see no necessary connection between the genre of fiction and these two latter goals. Ultimately, it appears that Bovell is not willing to say that inerrantists have rightly assessed the narrative texts until it is admitted that these texts contain legendary or fictional elements.<sup>201</sup>

I now move to examine a work on the doctrine of Scripture that does not address the matter of inerrancy directly but does, by its approach to the debate, demonstrate that it belongs in our discussion.

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<sup>199</sup>Speaking specifically of the selectivity of the Gospel writers, Vern Poythress observes, "God as Lord of history gives meaning to events. Because in the plan of God the events themselves have meaning and purpose, theological interpretation is not a biased imposition on 'neutral' or 'brute' events but, when soundly based, an exposition of what the events themselves actually meant." He continues, "Because the events are rich in meaning within the total plan of God, all theological exposition of the events is necessarily selective in emphasis." Vern Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 38.

<sup>200</sup>Consider Kevin Vanhoozer's comment concerning imagination: "For too long evangelical scholarship has given the imagination a bad rap. To be sure, there are vain imaginings. But this no more disqualifies the imagination *per se* from theological service than logical fallacies disqualify reason. A false picture of the imagination as the power of conjuring up things that are not really there has for too long held us captive." Kevin Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Interpretation," *JETS* 48 (March 2005): 109.

<sup>201</sup>In this way we must disagree with Bovell's earlier comment that it is primarily "the *spiritual-theological* illocution that evangelicals are ultimately after." It is true that evangelicals read and interpret Scripture in order to apprehend spiritual and theological truths, but these things should never be divorced from historical reality. See Graham A. Cole, "The Peril of a 'Historyless' Systematic Theology," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith*, 55-69.

## **N. T. Wright: Attempting to Move Beyond the Bible Wars**

The title of the first American edition of N. T. Wright's book *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God—Getting Beyond the Bible Wars* (2005)<sup>202</sup> makes it clear that he is addressing an issue central to our discussion in this dissertation.<sup>203</sup>

Wright's primary concern in the book is to answer the question, What does it mean that the Bible has authority?

In answering this query, Wright first argues that we must think of the authority of Scripture in terms of “the authority of God *exercised through* Scripture” (emphasis original).<sup>204</sup> That is, authority resides in God (Rom 13:1) and Christ (Matt 28:18), while Scripture finds its place as “part of a larger divine authority.”<sup>205</sup> Thus, Scripture is to be received as a “delegated” or “mediated” authority (rather than, it is assumed, an ultimate authority). Within this framework, Scripture must also be rightly appropriated with regard to its content and, specifically, its overall genre. According to Wright, Scripture is not “a list of rules, though it contains many commandments of various sorts and in various contexts. Nor is it a compendium of true doctrines, though of course many parts

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<sup>202</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of the Bible—Getting beyond the Bible Wars* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

<sup>203</sup>Interestingly, this book was published originally in the United Kingdom under the title, *Scripture and the Authority of God*. The latter half of the subtitle, it is assumed, was added by the North American publisher in order to appeal to readers familiar with the long-standing debate among evangelicals over the issues of the authority and inerrancy of Scripture in this country. The second edition takes a name closer to the its U.K. original—*Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (2013)—and adds two “case study” chapters at the end of the book. It is this second edition I will consider here. N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013).

<sup>204</sup>Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 21.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid.

of the Bible declare great truths about God, Jesus, the world, and ourselves in no uncertain terms.”<sup>206</sup> How, then, should we define Scripture? Wright answers: “Most of its constituent parts, and all of it when put together (whether in the Jewish canonical form or the Christian one), can best be described as *story*.”<sup>207</sup>

The question that immediately follows such classification, is “How can a story be authoritative.”<sup>208</sup> Wright explains,

A familiar story told with a new twist in a the tale jolts people into thinking differently about themselves and the world. A story told with pathos, human, or drama opens the imagination and invites readers and hearers to imagine themselves in similar situations, offering new insights about God and human beings which enable them to order their lives more wisely.<sup>209</sup>

He concludes, “All of these examples, and many more besides which one might easily think of, are ways in which the Bible does in fact work, does in fact exercise authority.”<sup>210</sup> The implications for how the church and its leaders wield Scripture are significant, for “[The multifaceted way Scripture exercises authority] strongly suggests that for the Bible to have the effect it seems to be designed to have it will be necessary for the church to hear it as it is, not to chop it up in an effort to make it into something else.”<sup>211</sup> Although the authority of Scripture has been understood historically within the context of ecclesiological debate and its use for doctrinal proofs, Wright suggests that we need to place authority within the broader framework of God’s kingdom. “Scripture’s

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid.

<sup>209</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid.

own preferred way of referring to [the matter of God exercising authority over the world], and indeed to the saving rule of Jesus himself, is within the more dynamic concept of God's sovereignty, or *Kingdom*."<sup>212</sup> We cannot, then, view Scripture as merely providing "true information about, or even an accurate running commentary upon, the work of God in salvation and new creation, but as taking an active part within that ongoing purpose. . . . Scripture is there to be a means of God's action in and through us—which will include, but go far beyond, the mere conveyance of information."<sup>213</sup>

Furthermore, our conception of biblical authority must reach beyond the idea of God speaking through Scripture, or the more narrow assertion that "God speaks only through Scripture."<sup>214</sup> Although God *does* speak in Scripture,

we must not confuse the idea of God speaking, in this or any other way, with the notion of *authority*. Authority, particularly when we locate it within the notion of God's kingdom, is much more than that. It is the sovereign rule of God sweeping through creation to judge and to heal. It is the powerful love of God in Jesus Christ, putting sin to death and launching new creation. It is the fresh, bracing, energizing wind of the Spirit.<sup>215</sup>

After establishing these few foundational matters, Wright turns in the remainder of the book to consider the issue of biblical authority within several important contexts, closing his volume with two chapters examining a specific case study within the framework of his proposal.

Although there is much to commend in Wright's work, and not much with which I would strongly disagree, perhaps the most frustrating aspect of this book is the

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 31.

bypassing of vital questions related to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. It appears that Wright’s plan to “get beyond” the Bible wars is to simply ignore them and give little attention to the important questions these “wars” have raised. John Frame explains this problem of omission.

If one is to deal seriously with the “Bible wars,” even somehow to transcend them, one must ask whether and how inspiration affects the text of Scripture. Wright defines inspiration by saying that “by his Spirit God guided the very different writers and editors, so that the books they produced were the books God intended his people to have. . . . But the same can be said about the books in my library: that God moved writers, editors, and publishers, and others, so that the books in my library are the ones God wants me to have. . . . So it is important to ask whether inspiration is simply divine providence, or whether it carries God’s endorsement. Is God, in any sense, the *author* of inspired books?”<sup>216</sup>

Even Wright’s contention that God’s Word in Scripture is more than doctrines and commands fails to answer important questions about the nature of Scripture. Frame continues,

Wright is right to say that God’s word, and specifically Scripture, is more than doctrines and commands. But if inspiration confers divine authorship, and if God’s word is true speech, then it becomes very important, within the context of the kingdom narrative, to believe God’s doctrines and obey God’s commands. Indeed, as Wright notes, the very nature of narrative poses the question whether the events described “really happened”—that is, what we should believe about them, and how we should act in response. But then narrative itself implies doctrines to be believed and commands to obey.<sup>217</sup>

Yet, “That is what the Bible wars are about,”<sup>218</sup> Frame notes. “One can believe everything Wright says about the narrative context of biblical authority and still ask

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<sup>216</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 522. These comments are from a review for the first American edition of the book, *The Last Word* (2005), but are still pertinent here because there was little change between editions beyond the addition of the final two “case study” chapters in the 2011 and 2013 versions.

<sup>217</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 523.

<sup>218</sup>*Ibid.*

responsibly whether the words of Scripture are God’s words to us.”<sup>219</sup> Unfortunately, Wright’s volume does not “speak helpfully to this question, nor does it succeed (if this was Wright’s purpose) in persuading us not to ask it.”<sup>220</sup> So long as we believe the Bible is God’s Word, we will be concerned to affirm accurately the nature of its inspiration and authority and answer directly challenges made against these matters. Although Wright offers several useful insights into Scripture, he does not finally provide a satisfying answer as to why we can move beyond the “Bible wars.”

I will now look at one last important evangelical figure as we consider post-CSBI developments: Stanley Grenz.

### **Stanley Grenz: The Doctrine of Scripture In Light of Postmodernism**

Prior to his untimely death, Stanley Grenz (1950-2005) was a productive scholar and teacher. While serving at various colleges and universities, Grenz authored many books, articles, and reviews, punctuating his writing efforts with a massive collection of formal presentations, addresses, academic lectures, and various other speaking engagements. For my purposes, I will only examine two of Grenz’s published works as they relate most directly to my topic: *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1993)<sup>221</sup> and *Renewing The Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-*

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<sup>219</sup>Ibid.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid. Consider also Kevin Vanhoozer’s comments on Wright’s book. “Coming from the opposite direction, N. T. Wright observes that biblical authority only makes sense if it is shorthand for ‘the authority of the triune God, exercised somehow *through* Scripture.’ . . . Wright rightly identifies the triune agent but is vague about the way in which Scripture is the medium of divine authority.” Kevin Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse, Part 1,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 26-27.

*Theological Era* (2006).<sup>222</sup>

In these two books, each with their own specific emphasis and argument, Grenz sets out to call evangelicals to reconsider both their identity and their approach to theology in light of postmodernism and its effect upon their epistemological assumptions. Central to Grenz's proposal is a "rethinking" of how evangelicalism should be defined. Rather than "understanding the essence of the [evangelical] movement as a whole with its focus on certain theological commitments,"<sup>223</sup> evangelicalism must now be described in terms of a common "vision" of the Christian life.

Because evangelicalism is not primarily constituted by a body of beliefs, the evangelical ethos is more readily 'sensed' than described theologically. . . . For participants in the movement as a whole, being an evangelical means sharing a sense of belonging, a sense that 'these are my people.' And this sense of belonging arises because as evangelicals we all are seeking to live out a similar, specific vision of what it means to be a Christian.<sup>224</sup>

Grenz's comments here are given in the context of his discussion of inerrancy and the insistence of some evangelicals—Harold Lindsell specifically, and others like him,

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<sup>221</sup>Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993). Grenz would later include these ideas in his systematic theology. See idem, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 494-527.

<sup>222</sup>Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). Although related to my topic, I have intentionally omitted a discussion of Grenz's book, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* co-authored with John Franke, for two reasons. First, *Beyond Foundationalism* relies upon and rearticulates much of what Grenz proposes in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, focusing specifically Scripture's role in a revised evangelical theological method. Second, in chapter 6 of *Renewing the Center* ("Evangelical Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism"), Grenz provides a summary of the general argument of *Beyond Foundationalism*. Thus, it appears sufficient to examine *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* and *Renewing the Center* in order to gain an accurate representation of Grenz's influence on the evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Furthermore, I will have significant interaction with *Beyond Foundationalism* in chapter three. See Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

<sup>223</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 29.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 31.

generally—that this doctrine must serve as a defining point for evangelicalism. Grenz agrees that true evangelicals are, despite debates over how they should rightly articulate the doctrine of Scripture, “Bible-centered people,”<sup>225</sup> yet fretting over inerrancy should not be of primary concern.<sup>226</sup>

Grenz desires to reformulate an evangelical doctrine of Scripture into a model that regards properly the human component of the Bible’s authorship and interpretation. Such a model would integrate more closely the doctrine of Scripture with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. According to Grenz, the theological method of “classic Reformed approach” severed the vital connection between Scripture and Spirit, drawing the Bible into a place of epistemic primacy.<sup>227</sup> This move, however, has come with significant cost.

Many reformed theologians treat bibliology as the central dimension of the discussion of revelation that is placed as prolegomenon to the development of systematic theology. The Bible is the deposit of special revelation . . . . Transformed in this manner into a book of doctrine, the Bible is easily robbed of its dynamic character. Separating the doctrine of Scripture from its natural embedding in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit conceptually separates Scripture from the Spirit, whose vehicle of operation it is. And treating revelation and Scripture as prolegomenon can easily result in a static understanding of the relationship between the two.<sup>228</sup>

The classic Reformed approach that views Scripture as Spirit inspired, inerrant, and thus, authoritative revelation, “runs the risk of paying only lip service to the corollary affirmations that the biblical documents are human products. . . . Rarely do our evangelical systematic theologies contain a well-articulated section on the Bible as a

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<sup>225</sup>Ibid.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., 114-15.

human book.”<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, the traditional approach, by emphasizing the Spirit’s inspiration of Scripture, also tends to relegate God’s act of revelation to the past. “On the basis of an emphasis on the inspired nature of the Bible, the evangelical reader comes to the Bible with the purpose of delineating the revelatory message that was encoded in its pages centuries ago. This ancient yet eternal message is the ‘voice’ of the Spirit. In this manner we often collapse the Spirit into the Bible.”<sup>230</sup> Therefore, evangelicals can no longer articulate their doctrine of Scripture according to the classic formulation, especially with its strict focus on inspiration. “On the contrary, as the actual practice of evangelical spirituality suggests, the confession of the inspiration of the Bible is closely intertwined with the experience of illumination.”<sup>231</sup> Consequently, a fresh approach to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture would acknowledge the vital role that human recognition played in the formation of the canon and the spiritual value that Scripture holds in the church; biblical authority would not be tied exclusively to inspiration, but also, and just as important, to the work of illumination as the Spirit used the Scriptures among the community of faith.<sup>232</sup>

Implicit in these comments from Grenz that call for a tightening of the relationship between the doctrines of inspiration and illumination, is an emphasis on the

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<sup>229</sup>Ibid., 116. Grenz continues, “For all our talk of ‘concurrent action’—God and the human authors working together—when evangelicals do broach the topic of the human authors, we generally do so only to delineate how God providentially prepared his holy messengers to be vehicles for the inscription of special revelation” (ibid.). One wonders what Grenz is after here. He is not specific with his complaint, nor does he reference at all the CSBI that speaks in some detail about the human authors and their role in writing Scripture.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., 118-20.

community of faith. A classical formulation of the doctrine of Scripture seems to require a model of single authorship across the whole canon in which the Holy Spirit moved in individual authors to write inspired documents. According to Grenz, however, such a model does not account for all the biblical documents.<sup>233</sup> Contrary to the traditional evangelical view of inspiration, Grenz claims that

our Bible is the product of the community of faith that cradled it. The compiling of Scripture occurred within the context of the community. And the writings contained in the Bible represent the self-understanding of the community in which it developed. . . . Within the community these took on, as it were, a life of their own, forming part of the authoritative materials that the community, under the direction of the Spirit, interpreted and reapplied to new situations.<sup>234</sup>

For Grenz, one of the advantages of formulating the doctrine of Scripture in this way is that the issue of Scripture's trustworthiness is now "Spirit-focused rather than text-focused."<sup>235</sup> Viewed this way, the Scriptures now holds a "constitutional role" in the church because "they reflect the formation of the Christian identity at the beginning, they hold primary status at all stages in the life of the church as constitutive for the identity of the Christian community."<sup>236</sup>

Moreover, a reformulated doctrine of Scripture must find a way to better account for how the human words of Scripture are God's words to us. It must "chart the way beyond the evangelical tendency to equate in simple fashion the revelation of God with the Bible—that is, to make a one-to-one correspondence between the words of the

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<sup>233</sup>Ibid., 121. It is assumed here that Grenz has in mind places in Scripture that evince redaction (e.g., the Pentateuch) and compilation (e.g., Psalms). He does not say so explicitly.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>236</sup>Ibid., 125.

Bible and the very word of God.”<sup>237</sup> Here, Grenz argues that the Scriptures themselves make a distinction between the word of God and Scripture, with the former preceding the act of inscripturation and the latter providing, according to Paul Rainbow, “an absolutely sure criterion by which we can test the church’s proclamation of the word of God in the present.”<sup>238</sup> Grenz continues, “Historically the divine initiation of communication from God to humankind went before the inscripturation process, and logically it carries priority. In this sense, the Bible presupposes the reality of revelation.”<sup>239</sup> Revelation and Scripture are related, however, precisely because God’s act of self-disclosure occurred alongside of and in concurrence with the formation of the Scripture, “as the community of faith under the guiding hand of the Spirit struggled with the ongoing work of God in the world and in the context of the earlier divine self-disclosure and the Scripture traditions that the earlier events called forth.”<sup>240</sup> Nevertheless, because “God’s ultimate self-disclosure . . . lies yet in the future,”<sup>241</sup> we must treat Scripture as servant to revelation, recognizing that Scripture is only revelation in a “derivative [,] . . . functional [and] intermediary”<sup>242</sup> sense. First, Scripture is derivative revelation because the Bible is a “witness to and the record of the historical revelation of God.”<sup>243</sup> Second, Scripture is

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<sup>237</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>238</sup>Paul Rainbow, “On Hearing the Word of God,” (convocation address, North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, S.D., 1990), quoted in Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 131.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid.

<sup>240</sup>Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid.

functional revelation because the Bible “points beyond itself, directing the reader’s attention to the revealed God and informing the reader as to how God can be known.”<sup>244</sup>

Third, Scripture is intermediary revelation because it “mediates to the reader the proper understanding of what God is like. It is God’s word to us in that it is the word about God.”<sup>245</sup>

In *Renewing the Center*, Grenz attempts to add historical weight to the arguments made in *Revising Evangelical Theology*. Previewing in the introduction the general claims in the book, Grenz notes,

Chapter 2 argues that the contemporary evangelical understanding of the great Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* was not shaped solely by Luther nor for that matter by the line running from Calvin, through the Puritans and Pietists, to the early evangelical reverence for the Bible as a practical book. Instead, the character of the Scripture focus among many evangelicals today is also the product of the approach to bibliography devised by the Protestant scholastics, which transformed the doctrine of Scripture from an article of faith into the foundation for systematic theology. The nineteenth-century Princeton theologians appropriated the scholastic program in their struggle against the emerging secular culture and a nascent theological liberalism. Drawing from this legacy, turn-of-the-century fundamentalism elevated doctrine as the mark of authentic Christianity, transformed the Princeton doctrine of biblical inspiration into the primary fundamental, and then bequeathed the entire program to the neo-evangelical movement.<sup>246</sup>

The remaining sections of *Renewing the Center* set out to analyze the current state of evangelicalism and propose a way forward—a new way of viewing Scripture and how evangelicals should employ Scripture in their theological formulations. In light of postmodernism, evangelicals can no longer cling to modern (i.e., foundationalist) epistemologies; they must embrace a theory of knowledge that is non-foundationalist and

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<sup>244</sup>Ibid.

<sup>245</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>246</sup>Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 25.

centers on the believing community.

While Grenz does not take direct aim at the CSBI in either of these two books, his approach to the doctrine of Scripture, by removing its basic epistemic foundations and wrongly recasting the doctrine of inspiration, undermines inerrancy as it is expressed in the document. Because Grenz is committed to a theological method that readily embraces postmodernism and disavows foundationalism, and because he desires to retain a determining role of the community in epistemological formulations, he is unable to say that the Scriptures are, finally, revelation from God. As we noted above, Grenz flatly denies that a “one-to-one” correspondence exists between the words of Scripture and revelation. The very giving of the revelation that occurred in the writing of Scripture was produced by the community of believers as they “struggled” with God’s work in the world and with past tradition and teaching. The doctrine of inspiration is, rather than linked closer to, now conflated with, the doctrine of illumination. The focus is now no longer upon an inspired text, but an illumined author as he (along with the community) grapples with God’s past and current revelation. Such a formulation runs contrary to the doctrine of inspiration traditionally understood and as it is given in the CSBI. In order to arrive at the doctrine of inerrancy, one must first have a sound doctrine of inspiration. Unfortunately, by his embrace of certain aspects of postmodern epistemology, Grenz downgrades the doctrine of inspiration—moving it from a direct revelation of God to an indirect revelation from God through illumined authors—and removes the possibility of or the necessity for an inerrant text. Thus, Grenz must concede that Scripture is no longer the foundation of the Christian’s epistemology; rather, “Scripture forms the foundation

for the evangelical ethos.”<sup>247</sup>

## Conclusion

Other recent challenges to the doctrine of inerrancy have emerged since the inaugural writing of the CSBI.<sup>248</sup> Thom Stark’s *The Human Faces of God* (2012) which takes direct aim at the CSBI specifically,<sup>249</sup> and Michael Licona’s massive *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (2012), which classifies Matthew 27:52-53 as legendary or poetic, but not strictly historical.<sup>250</sup> One inerrantist who appreciates the CSBI has even recently expressed concern that the statement not be

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<sup>247</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 135. In a recent Ph.D. thesis at the University of St. Andrews, Jeffery Oldfield, while not proposing to jettison the doctrine of inerrancy entirely, argues that it no longer reside as a foundational doctrine of the church. Oldfield appears to follow Grenz in much of his proposal. See Jeffery Stephen Oldfield, “The Word Became Text and Dwelt Among Us? An Examination of the Doctrine of Inerrancy” (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2007).

<sup>248</sup>Not all of them explicitly engaging inerrancy but rather ignoring the doctrine altogether. For example, in a recent compendium on biblical authority, William Brown notes that, despite the diversity of the contributions, the volume included “no essay that champions the inerrantist or fundamentalist position.” William Brown, introduction to *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), xi. Because the findings of historical-critical scholarship are mostly assumed, there are essays that do much to undermine the doctrine of inerrancy although the issue itself is not addressed specifically. One exception is Frank Matera’s chapter in which he articulates a partial inerrancy position. “Inspiration guarantees the truth of God’s revelation rather than the historical and scientific accuracy of every statement the Bible makes. To talk of inspiration and even inerrancy, then, is to speak about the Bible’s authority in matters of God’s self-revelation for the sake of the world’s salvation” (Frank Matera, “Biblical Authority and the Scandal of the Incarnation,” in *Engaging Biblical Authority*, 101). Christian Smith sees the CSBI as one document (among others) that has promoted the unhealthy trend of evangelical “Biblicism.” See Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011), 14-15.

<sup>249</sup>Thom Stark, *The Human Faces of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011). I am not including a full discussion of this book for two reasons. (1) Stark admits that his views are not new; and (2) his proposal so dismantles the usefulness and relevancy of Scripture that it does not seem to fit alongside the evangelical works examined above. Although fraught with serious problems, the texts investigated above present approaches to Scripture that are far more constructive than Stark’s approach. For a helpful and penetrating response to Stark’s book, Denny Burk, Review of *The Human Faces of God* by Thom Stark, *SBJT* 15 (2011), 83-86.

<sup>250</sup>Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 552-53.

used in a heavy handed or overly restrictive fashion where one must agree to every detail of the document in order to find employment or speaking engagements.<sup>251</sup>

Despite the developments just mentioned, the examples provided in the main body of this chapter serve as a representative sample of evangelicals who have challenged the CSBI from different concerns while also providing a sense of the general tenor among those who find inerrancy unsound. The evangelical non-inerrantists examined above are worried that inerrancy traditionally understood does not adequately account for biblical scholarship, the various genres of Scripture, the nature of Scripture as story, the biblical teaching on inspiration, philosophical complexities tied to theories of truth, the humanity of Scripture, and/or the epistemological problems posed by postmodernism. These non-inerrantists have therefore sought to reframe the inerrancy debate by redefining the word itself or words related to it, by offering alternatives that chart a course between inerrant and errant Scripture, by formulating doctrines of Scripture that rely upon non-foundationalist epistemologies and novel definitions of inspiration and illumination, by applying relentless and detailed critique, and/or by simply ignoring the issue altogether.

In my interaction with these writers, I have sought to not only present their

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<sup>251</sup>See Craig Blomberg, review of *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* by Carlos Bovell, in the *Denver Journal* 15 (2012), <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/rehabilitating-inerrancy-in-a-culture-of-fear/> (accessed February 5, 2014). Blomberg comments, “I come to a reading of Bovell from a curious position. I am an inerrantist who does not find the classic formulations as problematic as he does, but I do lament the heavy-handedness with which some American evangelicals wield the doctrine, especially when people have to sign off on every jot and tittle of the extensive Chicago Statement on Inerrancy in order to be acceptable (i.e., employable or invitabile) to churches, parachurch organizations, or educational institutions” (ibid.). So Blomberg’s problem appears to be with how the CSBI is used and not the CSBI itself. It is difficult, however, to separate the CSBI from how it is used if those who are using it to vet who may teach or speak at their institutions are simply asking whether or not a person agrees with the statement. Raising questions about exactly where one does disagree with the CSBI does not seem to me to be heavy handed but helpful in determining where a given theologian stands on other important matters, for the CSBI speaks not merely to inerrancy, but to several issues related to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

views, but also critique their respective positions and point out weaknesses in order to demonstrate both the resilience of the CSBI and where these evangelicals have failed to understand rightly or appropriate fully the document. As I have noted above, fundamental epistemological and theological missteps attend many of the recent challenges to inerrancy generally and to the CSBI in particular. Yet, I am convinced that in light of these recent developments, evangelicals must ask themselves: Can some of the concerns expressed by evangelical non-inerrantists be attributed to the way the doctrine of inerrancy is framed in the CSBI? Have they, by their criticisms, brought to light areas of legitimate weakness, neglect, ambiguity, heavy-handedness, imbalance, disorder, or obsolescence? If so, then it behooves inerrantists to take careful note of these matters and update their doctrine. To do so will actually be to follow the premise stated earlier in this chapter: the doctrine of inerrancy is not something invented by the Protestant scholastics or two theologians from Princeton; it has always been the teaching of the church. Like all other doctrines, the expression of a doctrine grows and receives greater nuance as contemporary challenges necessitate. In the next chapter, I will begin a three-part section in which I will propose modifications to the CSBI in light of the developments just studied.

CHAPTER 3  
CSBI REASSESSMENT AND REFORMULATION  
PART 1: ARTICLES I-V

The following five articles of the CSBI address matters related to the doctrine of inerrancy under two specific theological categories: authority and revelation. The first and second articles provide affirmations and denials within the former category, while articles three, four, and five, posit statements in the latter. It is fitting that these two categories are placed together, for Scripture derives its authority from the fact that it is a revelation from God. The placement of these two doctrinal categories at the beginning of the statement is also appropriate. Although the words “inerrant” or “inerrancy” are not used in the following articles, it is plain that the subject matter of the statements relates directly to the doctrine of inerrancy. Indeed, Articles I-V lay the foundation upon which to formulate and understand the doctrine of inerrancy by establishing the supreme authority of God’s Word, the comprehensive scope of revelation, the adequacy of human language as a means for divine communication, and the nature of Scripture as progressive revelation. In the following sections, I will provide each article in its entirety, discuss briefly its original intent and meaning, and offer the appropriate modifications to the affirmations and denials as needed. I will also propose additional articles of affirmation and denial where necessary.

The headings given to each article are not found in the original statement. I have provided these headings for the sake of organization and to help readers discern the

logical flow of the articles. A cursory glance at the CSBI might lead one to conclude that the placement of the articles of affirmation and denial betrays a lack of intentional arrangement. Such is not the case. R. C. Sproul, in his commentary on the CSBI, provides appropriate designations alongside each article in his table of contents (e.g., Article I: Authority; Article II: Scripture and Tradition, and so on). These designations indicate that the articles are arranged in a particular order *and* that each article is meant to touch upon an important theological category as it relates to the doctrine of inerrancy. Although I follow Sproul's general classification of the articles, I have expanded or renamed most of them, while also keeping within their original theological categorization in order accurately to reflect their content. I turn now to Article I and the issue of the Bible's authority.

### **Article I: The Source of Scripture's Authority**

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

The framers of the CSBI originally penned Article I in order to mark a clear distinction between the Protestant belief in the sufficiency of Scripture and the Roman Catholic view in which Scripture is subordinate to the judgment of the church and is, therefore, on equal footing with other authoritative church pronouncements.<sup>1</sup> Article I intends to emphasize that the Scriptures possess an intrinsic authority because they are God's Word and are

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary* (Oakland, CA: The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1980), 8-9.

therefore not dependent upon the church’s recognition or declaration as such. The Bible’s authority, consequently, reigns over *all* people. In his commentary on the CSBI, Sproul emphasizes this point when he notes that the phrase “by the church” was left out of the affirmation statement in the final draft because the framers thought it best to convey that both believers and unbelievers are obligated to receive Scripture as God’s authoritative word.<sup>2</sup> The inability of unbelievers to receive Scripture as God’s word does not lessen their responsibility as God’s creatures to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the affirmations and denials in Article I, some evangelicals, as I noted in chapter two, have recently questioned the relationship between the Bible’s authority and its inerrancy. And, as the epistemological assumptions of postmodernism increasingly have found their way into the doctrinal formulations of evangelical theologians, the capacity of God’s word to speak authoritatively to matters of theology—much more to issues of science, ethics, and other important areas—has been greatly challenged and undermined. A renewed CSBI, then, should reflect an awareness of these developments by providing nuance and support to the existing articles and establishing new articles where necessary.

In the case of the first article, I suggest a few changes in light of these contemporary challenges. First, concerning order, I recommend that a slight reorganization of the first five articles be considered in an effort to (1) link the authority of God’s Word more clearly to the fact of revelation; and (2) present these articles in an

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<sup>2</sup>The affirmation statement in the initial draft of the CSBI indicated that Scripture was to be received *by the church* as the authoritative Word of God.

<sup>3</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 8-9.

order that better suits their content. Specifically, I suggest that Article I acknowledge revelation first then proceed to affirm that the Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative word of God.<sup>4</sup> Article I should also emphasize God's character in providing a written revelation. While it is clear that some contemporary evangelical opponents of inerrancy have misunderstood how accommodation has functioned historically or how it is intended to operate theologically<sup>5</sup>, their emphasis on God's gracious character *in* accommodating himself to his creatures should not be overlooked.<sup>6</sup>

Second, I propose the inclusion of a reference to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture in the affirmation statement of Article I. Because both Article I and Article II (see below) deal explicitly with the issue of authority and, implicitly, with matters of related to the Bible as a self-authenticating text (our reception of the Scriptures

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<sup>4</sup>I am recommending that a reference to revelation come prior to affirmations of the Bible's authority because the former proceeds the latter in *logical* order. That is, in order to establish the claim that Scripture possesses an inherent authority, it must first be acknowledged that Scripture is a revelation from God. Furthermore, the doctrine of revelation serves as the broader category under which the doctrine of Scripture resides. The doctrine of revelation establishes that God has disclosed himself to his creatures in general and special ways. Scripture is one of many ways God has revealed himself and is therefore located as a subcategory of the doctrine of revelation.

<sup>5</sup>A mishandling of the doctrine of accommodation appears to be one of the primary problems afflicting non-inerrantist evangelicals from Jack Rogers and Donald McKim to Peter Enns and Kenton Sparks. See chap. 2 for an in depth discussion of these evangelicals and their use of accommodation.

<sup>6</sup>Timothy Ward considers whether the rejection of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture has more to do with the way it is presented than in inherent intellectual barriers. "In fact it is arguable that many who have come to reject the evangelical doctrine of Scripture have done so not so much because they have just found it to be wrong biblically or intellectually incredible, but because they have found the expositions of it which they know of to be lacking in what we might call dynamic spirituality. In the writing of theology there is indeed a need for careful precision; there should also be times when the doctrine is related directly to Christian life and home lived out in relationship to God." Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 51. Although I am not willing to attribute departure from inerrancy merely to dry, abstract, articulations of the doctrine that are unattached to real life (I believe there are other factors at play when evangelicals deny inerrancy), I do think Ward's comments are insightful. A truly evangelical doctrine of Scripture must not only provide rigorous articulation of important theological truths about the Bible; it must also communicate these truths in a way that reflects their grandeur and beauty, their relation to God, and to vital spirituality. The CSBI does this at some level in the articles and in the exposition, but greater attention could be given at this point.

as the word of God, their distinction from other human sources of theological authority, and so on), there should be a clear reference to the inherent nature of Scripture's authority and how the Scripture sets itself apart from other religious documents. By including a reference to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, a stronger position is established from which to deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from some other source as the denial portion of Article I states, and that no other document possesses authority greater or equal to that of Scripture, as Article II states.<sup>7</sup>

Third, I recommend a reference within the affirmation statement of Article I that recognizes the nature of Scripture vis-à-vis God's relationship to humanity. Although a clear articulation of the authority of Scripture is essential for an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, there is a danger here of underemphasizing how this authority functions for the benefit of or in relation to God's creatures. Scripture's purpose does not lie merely in providing an assortment of doctrines or a list of commands to be obeyed. At its heart Scripture is a "book of the covenant" between God and his people that provides,

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<sup>7</sup>See Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), for a strong defense of the "self-authenticating model" of New Testament canonicity. Kruger's model is multi-dimensional, based upon three components of a "proper epistemic environment" which God has provided for his people so that they might have intellectually sufficient grounds for their faith in the New Testament canon. *Providential exposure*: "We trust the providence of God to expose the church to the books it is to receive as canonical." *Attributes of canonicity*: "The Scriptures indicate that there are three attributes that all canonical books have: 1) divine qualities (canonical books bear the 'marks' of divinity), 2) corporate reception (canonical books recognized by the church as a whole), and 3) apostolic origins (canonical books are the result of the redemptive-historical activity of the apostles)." *Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*. "The internal testimony is not private revelation that tells us which books belong in the canon, but it is the Spirit opening our eyes to the truth of these attributes and producing belief that these books are from God" (ibid., 290). For an excellent exposition of Scripture's self-attestation and inherent authority, see Matthew Wireman, "Scripture's Self-Attestation as the Proper Ground of Systematic Theology" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012). For more on Scripture's self-attestation, see Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); and Sinclair Ferguson, "How does the Bible Look at Itself," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

through a rich collection of diverse literary genre, the various facets of the covenant. Indeed, the entire collection of Scripture's narratives, commands, promises, poetry, and instructions can be understood as facilitating and advancing God's purpose of creating a people for himself (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 30:22; Rev 21:3-4). Timothy Ward helpfully explains this relationship between God's purpose in redemption and the nature of Scripture.

'I will be your God and you will be my people.' This is the most straightforward form in which God expresses the redemptive relationship he establishes with his people. It is a covenant relationship: a relationship established by means of a promise. Throughout the Bible 'covenant' is the most wide-ranging single description of the way God relates to humankind in his desire to redeem them. . . . We are in Christ, redeemed by the cross, because God has acted to bring this about in fulfillment of covenant promises made and recorded in Scripture. God redeems us because in the covenant he has promised to be our God, and to make us his people. Through its various unfolding manifestations in redemption history, therefore, God's covenant is a single mode of relationship, and the full significance and reality of it unfolds through time. . . . The covenant which Christ brought to fulfillment was transmitted in written form. . . . Indeed within the Old Testament the title 'book of the covenant' was ascribed to both small and larger sections of Torah material (Exod. 24:7; 2 Chr. 34:30).<sup>8</sup>

Ward continues, noting the various covenantal features of the New Testament documents.

The messianic, redemptive events the New Testament relates fulfil that covenant which God has been establishing from the beginning. . . . His life, in both word and deed, fulfils the covenant. He also . . . foresees and authorizes the giving of further words from him, beyond his ascension, to the apostolic community through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This is what the early church discerned in those texts it came to regard as scriptural: they bore in their content and because of their authorship from within the early apostolic community. Thus these Christ-given writings, authored by the apostles and their close associates, expounding and applying the meaning of Christ as the fulfilment of the covenant, constitute the New Testament as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

The New Testament, then, serves as the concluding "chapters" of God's covenant book.

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<sup>8</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 52-54.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 54.

These closing chapters not only provide the stipulations of the new covenant; they clearly establish God's faithfulness to fulfill what he had promised in the earlier sections of the covenant document. Ward comments,

In this light the New Testament constitutes the final chapters of the book of the divine covenant. The Scriptures as a whole constitute the ongoing form in which God makes his covenant promise to his people. They are the means by which the Father articulates the covenant promise he has brought to fulfilment in Christ, which is now offer to the whole world, and in which he demonstrates his faithfulness to the covenant through extraordinary ups and downs. The Bible is rightly thought of as fundamentally the book of the inaugurated and fulfilled covenant.<sup>10</sup>

Anticipating the objection that one cannot place all of Scripture under the covenantal rubric, Ward argues that, on the contrary, "every literary genre and form within Scripture is linked directly to Scripture's basic covenantal form and function."<sup>11</sup>

*Commandments* declare the stipulations of the covenant. *Prophecy* and *epistles*, in particular, expound and apply those stipulations in specific contexts; they are, in effect, the covenant preached in different situations. *Narrative* relates the unfolding events in which God's people have successfully trusted and rejected him, and through which God has faithfully enacted the consequences of his promises, whether in blessing or judgment. Indeed narrative takes up more space in the Bible than any other literary genre. We might guess that this is because narrative is the form of writing best suited to answering with clarity and conviction the key questions which the offer of a promises always raises: Can I trust the person making this promise? What happens when it seems as if he is failing to keep his promise? What will the consequences if I trust him, or if I don't? It is answers to these fundamental questions about the covenant that biblical narrative serves to give (see

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 55. Graeme Goldsworthy rightly notes that Scripture's unity cannot be affirmed along literary lines, for Scripture's diversity is found primarily in the fact that it includes many different kinds of literature. "The literary unity cannot be usefully reduced to the fact that all sixty six books have come to be collected under one cover. In fact there is very little by way of unity at the level of literary genres. A collection of documents written over more than a thousand years in three different languages and containing a long list of different genres and forms does not make for much that we can call unity. . . .The diversity of the canon is found principally in its literary dimension." Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 47. In order to successfully affirm the unity of Scripture, then, one's unifying principle must adequately account for and allow full voice to Scripture's diverse literary forms. Categorizing Scripture as covenant document adequately accomplishes this task.

1 Cor. 10:1-13; Heb. 4:1-13).<sup>12</sup>

But not only do the didactic, prophetic, and narrative portions of Scripture appear to fit well under a covenantal rubric, so do the Psalms and apocalyptic literature. Ward continues,

*Psalms* give exemplary forms in which a believer can address God in many situations in life while remaining faithfully within the covenant, whether one is full of praise for experience of blessing, or confused and despairing over God's apparent failure to keep his promises. And *apocalyptic* demonstrates graphically the full reality of the present and ultimate consequences of either blessing or cursing that follow from obedience or disobedience to the covenant."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Ward concludes,

To describe Scripture as 'the book of the covenant' must therefore not be thought of as forcing a complex and rich Scripture into a one-dimensional theological mould . . . Yet to see the Bible as 'the book of the covenant' is not simplistic or reductionist. It is rather to recognize Scripture's profound role in the relationship between humanity and God that God wants to establish.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 55.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. Additionally, although Ward does not mention wisdom literature explicitly, we can add that *Job* describes the suffering that may befall one with whom God has made his covenant, *Ecclesiastes* portrays the despair of attempting to find purpose and meaning outside of covenant with one's Creator, *Proverbs* provides instruction for wise and faithful living within and according to the covenant, while *Song of Songs* offers a picture how much joy and pleasure can be found in the earthly covenant of marriage. Concerning *Song of Songs*, Scripture is clear that earthly marriage is intended to reflect and portray God's covenant with his people (e.g., Jer 2:2; Hosea 2:14-15; Eph 5:21-32).

<sup>14</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 56. Drawing all of Scripture under this one category of covenant book is vital for our doctrine of Scripture this very reason: we remove the tendency to "flatten" Scripture into merely one kind of speech-act, thus allowing each genre in Scripture to have its full voice. Kevin Vanhoozer aptly comments, "What are the implications for a doctrine of Scripture of a view that sees the Bible composed of a variety of divine communicative acts? We may say, first of all, that there is no one kind of speech-act that characterizes all of Scripture. . . . Any attempt to catch up what is going on in Scripture in a synoptic judgment must be careful not to reduce the many communicative activities to a single function, be it doctrinal, narrative, or experiential." Kevin Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *A Pathway into Holy Scripture*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 173. Viewing Scripture primarily as a covenant book helps us heed Vanhoozer's warning, for it allows each genre to fulfill its own unique function within the covenantal framework while Scripture's diversity and unity are thus maintained. John Frame notes also how viewing the Bible as a covenantal document does justice to both the diversity and unity of Scripture. "This diversity [in Scripture's different literature, styles, and perspectives] has given some readers another occasion . . . to find disunity in Scripture—contradictions, factual disagreement, and so on. In my view, however, the covenant content of Scripture enables us to see a fundamental unity among these sixty-six books. These books didn't just happen to come together. As we have seen, God intentionally provided them for his

By placing the designation of Scripture as ‘the book of the covenant’ within the realm of authority, authority is now understood in an appropriate framework.<sup>15</sup> The authority of God in Scripture is a covenantal authority—it is an authority used for the purpose of relationship.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, by placing at the beginning of the CSBI a statement that references the nature of Scripture as a covenant book, the entire discussion of inerrancy is located within its proper context. Inerrancy is not an abstract concept arbitrarily applied to Scripture for the sake of apologetic advantage; it is intensely *personal* because it has to

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people. Through all the diversities, they are his speech to us. The covenant structure enables us to see God’s reasons for structuring Scripture as he has.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 4 of *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 146. Classifying Scripture as a covenantal document does not, however, obligate one to embrace a covenantal biblical theology as such. My proposal does not depend on a particular framework vis-à-vis the biblical covenants (whether there be a covenant of works, a covenant of grace, how these each find fulfillment in the NT, and so on); it only requires that Scripture be taken as a document whose primary function is to further God’s plan to form a people for himself and to come into relationship with this people (Jer 30:22; Rev 21:3-4).

<sup>15</sup>I do not desire to set these two in necessary opposition to one another, but contrast this covenantal framework for articulating biblical authority with N. T. Wright’s “kingdom” framework. Wright argues that authority in Scripture does not consist “solely in a final court of appeal, or a commanding officer giving orders for the day” (N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* [San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013], 26). Authority is tied, rather, to the in-breaking of God’s kingdom into this world, seen especially in Jesus’ healing and teaching ministry.

<sup>16</sup>See also Peter Jenson who describes the authority of Scripture according to its covenantal nature. “The covenantal people of God have the Book of the Covenant, which is coterminous with the Scriptures. The covenant origin of Scripture then reveals both the authority and the nature of Scripture. We can continue to honour its authority, while at the same time recognizing the special features that help to determine the sort of authority it possesses. Thus, on the one hand, the covenantal approach challenges the view that the Bible is merely a textbook for finding out about God. On the other hand, it challenges the view that it is merely a witness to the word of God. Neither adequately describes the book through which God rules his covenant people.” In short, “The authority of Scripture is the personal authority of the Lord over the people whom he has saved.” Such a designation, however, does not imply that Scriptures neither provide truth about God nor possess a ‘teaching’ function. On the contrary, “Scripture serves a definite didactic function, and is the foundation of doctrine.” Yet, Jenson quickly adds that this “didactic function is exercised in the context of relationship with God; it is shaped by the knowledge of the God who says, ‘This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my word’ (Is. 66:2).” Peter Jenson, *The Revelation of God, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 154-55. J. I. Packer also helpfully reminds us that our doctrine of Scripture cannot be abstracted from the redemptive work of God in the world as it has to do with salvation and relationship with God. “That Scripture is intrinsically revelation must also be affirmed. . . . But when this affirmation is not related to God’s saving work in history and to the illuminating and interpreting work of the Spirit, it too is theologically incomplete.” J. I. Packer, “Scripture,” in *NDT*, ed. Sinclair Ferguson, D. F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1988), 628.

do directly with God’s trustworthiness in communicating the various components of his covenant to his people. As a vitally personal (i.e., covenantal) doctrine, then, inerrancy is not to be mistaken as a claim that Scripture possesses a particular kind scientific or grammatical precision; rather, it is seen primarily as *covenantally faithful speech*.<sup>17</sup> Such a designation helps us articulate the doctrine of inerrancy in a way that accounts for the way Scripture presents itself. That is, as a covenant document, Scripture is written in ordinary language, accessible to the covenantal partners.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, while some may not find inerrancy necessary to maintain God’s trustworthiness, the very nature of covenantal faithfulness appears to demand that the

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<sup>17</sup>John Frame helpfully remarks, “This covenantal model of canonicity is enormously helpful in dealing with questions concerning biblical authority, infallibility, and inerrancy. On this model, God is the ultimate author of Scripture, and we vassals have not right to find fault with that document; rather, we are to be subject to it in all our thought and life” (Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 148).

<sup>18</sup>See Article XIII of the CSBI where the phenomena that attends the Bible’s use of ordinary language (round numbers, grammatical irregularities, and so on) does not vitiate the doctrine of inerrancy so long as inerrancy is understood to denote, mainly, the truthfulness of Scripture rather than a kind of scientific precision. Commenting on the adequacy of human language—a topic we will examine in more detail below—Vern Poythress explains the manner in which God has delivered his revelation in Scripture through the use of ordinary speech. “Positively, natural languages are adequate vehicles for human communication and for communication between God and human beings. Some of the features that might be supposed to be imperfections are in fact positive assets. In the Bible, God uses ordinary human language rather than a technically precise jargon. He does not include all the technical, pedantic details that would interest a scholar. By doing so, he speaks clearly to ordinary people, not merely to scholars advanced technical knowledge. What God says is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient to save us and to provide a sure guide for our life.” Vern Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 69-70. John Frame concurs: “In giving the Bible, God’s purpose is communication. Clearly, the art of communication is to speak the language of one’s hearers. When God communicates, therefore, He speaks as humanly as anyone could possibly speak—the language humans are used to, in ways humans are used to hearing.” A little later, while considering whether or not a more “uniform” written revelation would have been an improvement on the Bible, Frame notes, “Some types of ‘uniformity’ actually *hinder* communication. Utter consistency of style can be monotonous. Recounting every detail of a historical event with ‘pedantic precision’ can detract from the point of the story. . . . If God had spoken to the Hebrews using the precise language of twentieth-century science, He would have been thoroughly incomprehensible. If every apparent contradiction were explained in context, what would happen to the emotional impact of the words?” John Frame, “The Spirit and the Scriptures,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 218. Ultimately, Scripture is “what God has said in ordinary literature to ordinary people” (Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 104).

speaker of the covenant—God—be trustworthy in every speech act he makes. What appear to be only minor errors in the text of inspired Scripture are very problematic, for every speech act is tied inextricably to other portions of the covenant document. If God speaks mistakenly in one seemingly insignificant place, how can he be trusted in other more important places?<sup>19</sup>

It will soon become clear that the above portrait of Scripture as covenant document will flavor my remaining reformulations of the CSBI's affirmations and denials. For this reason I recommend reframing the affirmation statement of Article I in such a way that acknowledges God's gracious character in revealing himself in self-authenticating Scripture and the covenantal nature of that revelation. The revised affirmation statement would read,

We affirm that God has graciously revealed himself in the self-authenticating Scriptures. The Bible, therefore, is to be received as God's covenantal, authoritative Word.<sup>20</sup>

The denial portion of Article I sharpens the statements in the affirmation section by noting Scripture's inherent authority vis-à-vis other potential sources of authority. Because Scripture is revelation from God, its authority is not contingent upon

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<sup>19</sup>Evangelical errantists typically answer this objection by claiming that it is not God who makes the error but the finite and fallen human authors of Scripture who error. So, while the writers of Scripture may not always be trustworthy (in the minute sense), God always is. Whether or not one can sustain the claim that all Scripture is inspired (i.e., breathed out) by God and simultaneously hold that such speech contains error, however, is another question entirely. It is not likely that one can hold to these two premises simultaneously without some modification of one or the other (see especially my critique of Kenton Sparks and Andrew McGowan in chapter 2). Packer aptly highlights the necessity of trustworthy covenantal documents: "If documents designed to make God in Christ known to all generations are untrustworthy and thus inadequate for their purpose, God has indeed failed badly. See Packer, "Scripture," in *NDT*, 629.

<sup>20</sup>The CSBI's exposition helpfully highlights the covenantal nature of Scripture, but I believe it wise to draw this emphasis into the articles of affirmation and denials alongside those articles that speak specifically to the authority of Scripture. It is especially fitting that the introductory article (Article I) would set the tone of the remaining articles by designating Scripture as God's covenantal word.

any human source to deem it as such—even if that human source is God’s people, the church. The church does, however, have a key role to play in *recognizing* the authority of Scripture. That is, while God has not granted the church authority to determine what books belong in the canon of Scripture, he has, by his Spirit and through the means of a “proper epistemic environment,”<sup>21</sup> given it the *ability* to identify which documents are revelation from God. Indeed, such recognition by the church of which documents were truly inspired by God is what led to the establishment of the canon.<sup>22</sup>

The ability to recognize authoritative Scripture, however, does not imply that there is an authority that lies outside the text itself that somehow enables the church to draw conclusions about the nature of Scripture. This fact is implicit in the designation of Scripture as self-authenticating, as we noted above. Stanley Grenz and John Franke, however, contend that the ability to recognize Scripture’s authority is not grounded in the self-attesting text, but in the Spirit who has decided to speak through the text of Scripture.

The Protestant principle [of biblical authority] means the Bible is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. Taking the idea a step further, the authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is. As Christians, we acknowledge the Bible as scripture in that the sovereign Spirit has bound authoritative, divine speaking to this text. We believe that the Spirit has chosen, now chooses, and will continue to choose to speak with authority through the biblical texts.<sup>23</sup>

Grenz and Franke further argue that the church comes to identify the authority of Scripture, not because of “some purported ‘pristine character of the autographs,’”<sup>24</sup> but

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<sup>21</sup>Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 290.

<sup>22</sup>That God has given his people the ability to discern which books are the products of divine inspiration is the underlying premise of Kruger’s *Canon Revisited* mentioned above.

<sup>23</sup>Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 65; see also 66-68.

because of the power of the Spirit in the documents.<sup>25</sup> “The church, in short, came to confess the authority of Scripture because the early believers experienced the power and truth of the Spirit of God through these writings. They knew these documents were ‘animated with the Spirit of Christ.’”<sup>26</sup> By formulating the relationship between Scripture, the Spirit, and the community of believers in this way, Grenz and Franke attempt to chart a course between Protestant and Catholic Scripture principles.

Stephen Wellum comments,

Thus, on the one hand, they agree with Protestant theology that the text produced the community. But, on the other hand, they also defer to the Catholic tradition by asserting that ‘community preceded the production of the scriptural texts and is responsible for their content and for the identification of particular texts for inclusion in an authoritative canon to which it has chosen to make itself accountable.’ In this sense, then, Scripture is a product of the community of faith that produced it. But what unifies the relationship between Scripture and community is the work of the Spirit, who ‘appropriates’ the biblical texts and speaks to us through it.<sup>27</sup>

But such a position does not go far enough precisely because it does not clearly affirm Scripture’s inherent authority. Wellum continues, offering a critique of Grenz and Franke at this very point.

They deny that Scripture has an ‘inherent’ authority due to its divine authorship or inspired character and thus is not a self-authenticating or self-attesting text. Instead, they view the authority of Scripture in a *dynamic* manner—the Spirit “appropriating” the text and speaking “through” it. They seem to believe that if

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<sup>24</sup>Edward W. Goodrick, “Let’s Put 2 Timothy 3:16 Back in the Bible,” *JETS* 25, no. 4 (1982): 196, quoted in Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

<sup>25</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>27</sup>Stephen Wellum, “Post-conservatives, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 178.

inspiration is viewed as a past event, then this implies that God has ceased to act and has become directly identical with the medium of revelation. They seem to echo Barth's concerns that God always remain only *indirectly* identical with the creaturely mediums of revelation, including Scripture, otherwise God's freedom will be compromised and human beings would be able to move from a position of epistemic dependency to one of epistemic mastery. But surely there is something strange about saying that an inspired, objective text, the product of God's mighty actions, would change the epistemic relationship between God and ourselves from that of dependence to mastery.<sup>28</sup>

The main problem afflicting the Grenz and Franke proposal is that, as Wellum notes, they locate the authority of Scripture outside of the text of Scripture. Although authority is now situated in God through his Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, the text itself no longer retains a self-authenticating authority. This shift of authority from Scripture to Spirit, as Wellum concludes, "does not do justice to what the Bible claims regarding itself."<sup>29</sup>

I recommend, therefore, that the denial portion of Article I counter these misguided attempts to reframe the doctrine of biblical authority by rejecting explicitly the notion that the Bible's authority does not reside in the text of Scripture. The revised denial would read (with changes in italics),

We deny that Scripture receive its authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source. *We further deny the claim of those who imply that Scripture does not have inherent, divine authority.*

With this new sentence, the denial portion is more clearly linked with affirmation statement concerning Scripture's nature as a self-authenticating document. To state positively that the Scripture is self-authenticating is to imply that its authority cannot

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<sup>28</sup>Wellum, "Post-conservatives," 189-90. Stephen Oldfield has recently construed the Spirit's function in enabling the Church to recognize the authority of Scripture in a way that displaces Scripture's authority away from the text itself. Oldfield, an evangelical who claims a high view of Scripture but does not prefer a Warfieldian brand of inerrancy, holds that Scripture does not possess authority apart from the contemporary work of the Spirit upon the believer. See Stephen Jeffery Oldfield, "The Word Became Text and Dwelt Among Us? An Examination of the Doctrine of Inerrancy (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2007), 228.

<sup>29</sup>Wellum, "Post-conservatives," 190.

reside elsewhere, even if that elsewhere is God himself *at the expense* of the biblical text. Scripture retains an inherent, self-authenticating authority precisely because it is a word from the God who possesses all authority.

Article II, although touching on the doctrine of authority and therefore similar in subject matter to Article I, now shifts slightly in emphasis, focusing on Scripture's authority in relation to other church documents.

### **Article II: The Scope of Scripture's Authority**

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

We deny that church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

The second article continues with the theme of authority but now moves to deal specifically with “the unique authority of the Bible with respect to binding the consciences of men.”<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, Article II affirms that the Scriptures are the “supreme written norm” to which human conscience is bound, while other written documents, although important, do not possess authority equal or superior to that of the Scriptures. Sproul notes, nevertheless, that the statements in Article II are not meant to imply that Christians can disregard authority structures or other written norms, for “the Bible itself exhorts us to obey the civil magistrates,” and there are extra-biblical documents that are significant for the life of the church.<sup>31</sup> Rather, the intention of the article is to designate Scripture as the highest authority under which all other authorities

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<sup>30</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 9.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

exercise their authority, and that which Christians are finally beholden to obey if conflict arises between the Bible these other authorities.

It is concerning this issue of tradition, however, that Grenz and Franke register their concern that evangelicals have not rightly understood biblical authority.<sup>32</sup> In their view, because the Spirit is the one responsible for “both the development and formation of the community as well as the production of the biblical documents and the coming together of the Bible into a single canon,”<sup>33</sup> the “authority of both Scripture and tradition is ultimately an authority derived from the Spirit.”<sup>34</sup> They continue,

Each is part of an organic unity, so that even though scripture and tradition are distinguishable, they are fundamentally inseparable. In other words, neither scripture nor tradition is inherently authoritative in the foundationalist sense of providing self-evident, noninferential, incorrigible grounds for constructing theological assertions. The authority of each—tradition as well as Scripture—is contingent on the work of the Spirit, and both scripture and tradition are fundamental components within an interrelated web of beliefs that constitutes the Christian faith. To misconstrue the shape of this relationship by setting scripture over against tradition or by elevating tradition above scripture is to fail to comprehend properly the work of the Spirit. Moreover, to do so is, in the final analysis, a distortion of the authority of the triune God in the church.<sup>35</sup>

Although it is true that God has delivered his Word through historical means and incorporated theological tradition as a vital component for interpreting this Word, it is incorrect to place Scripture and tradition on the same plane of authority. The main error

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<sup>32</sup>Although Article II originally sought to establish a clear distinction between a Roman Catholic and Protestant understanding of authority vis-à-vis Scripture and tradition, I am placing my discussion of Grenz and Franke under this section because their concerns relate specifically to these issues (of authority, Scripture, and tradition) even if they are not taken up from within a Roman Catholic framework.

<sup>33</sup>Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 116.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

that Grenz and Franke make at this point is that they have conflated the Spirit's work of *inspiration in Scripture* with the Spirit's work of *guidance in tradition*. Protestants have typically (with the exception of some radical groups) regarded tradition as one of the Spirit's tools for affirming biblically faithful theological formulations and correcting wayward ones. God has used the rule of faith/canon of truth (Irenaus, Tertullian), the early creeds (e.g., Nicene, Chalcedon), the writings of Christian theologians throughout the centuries (e.g., Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Bavinck, Warfield) and the development of robust statements of faith (e.g., The Westminster Confession, The Helvetic Confession, The London Confession) to help establish sound doctrine in his church and mark parameters within which it can safely practice its theological reflections. In a very real sense, then, the Spirit is doing a genuine work of doctrinal guidance in the church for its well being and blessing. But we can only affirm this work of guidance—and herein lies the need for a clear distinction between Scripture and tradition—inasmuch as such guidance is found to be in accordance with Scripture. The Spirit's work of inspiring Scripture and his work of guiding the church in its theological tradition are two qualitatively different works: the former produced the very word of God while the latter serves as a tool to help the church rightly understand and affirm the teaching of that word. Peter Jenson rightly comments,

However respectful we may rightly be of tradition, which gives a vote to the past, we need to recognize that it is at its most useful in helping us to interpret Scripture. But it can achieve this role satisfactorily only if we recognize that the word of God (even a traditional word of God) must take sovereign priority over tradition, no matter how venerable the latter may be or how suitable it was for a bygone age. The sharpness of the gospel must not be compromised.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Jenson, *The Revelation of God*, 171.

These two works of the Spirit, therefore, must be kept distinct and in their proper order with inspiration viewed as the ontologically superior work.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, by granting Scripture and tradition equal authority as Grenz and Franke have done is to, using their own words, “misconstrue the work of the Spirit.”<sup>38</sup>

There is a growing tendency, however, especially within contemporary evangelicalism, to disregard the doctrinal consensus of the past and view tradition with a measure of distrust. Instead of using an appeal to tradition to sanction unbiblical practices, “much contemporary church life seems to suggest that we are the first Christians, and that we begin with the Bible and nothing else.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, such a mind-set toward tradition forgets that “every Christian is heir to the interpretation of the Bible that issued in the great Christological and trinitarian dogmas. These shape the very nature of our Christianity, whether we know it or not.”<sup>40</sup> How important are these theological traditions? Jenson explains, “They constitute authorized, traditional ways of reading the Bible. The Bible stands over them and independent of them in principle, but every generation that passes simply confirms that they are, in essence, the true reading of

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<sup>37</sup>Although God’s guidance in tradition and God’s inspiration of Scripture are both works of the Spirit, I believe it is correct to claim an ontological superiority for inspiration because its final product (Scripture) is ontologically superior to tradition’s final product (agreed-upon theological formulations). That is, the very *nature* of Scripture is fundamentally different from the nature of tradition because the former is the very word of God while the latter is not.

<sup>38</sup>My critique of Grenz and Franke at this point assumes the inadequacy of their anti-foundationalist epistemology. For a critique of antifoundationalism and a proposal of modest foundationalism, see J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese, “The Premature Report of Foundationalism’s Demise,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 81-107.

<sup>39</sup>Jenson, *The Revelation of God*, 171.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

Scripture and so unrepealable.”<sup>41</sup> So while Grenz and Franke do not maintain a sharp enough distinction between Scripture and tradition, evangelicals must take care not to react in such a way so as to banish tradition from its rightful place as a God-ordained parameter within which to conduct our interpretative work. To do so actually would be to depart from our Protestant heritage. Daniel Treier comments,

The Protestant distinctive of *sola Scriptura*, “Scripture alone,” rejects the “coincidence” and “supplementary” views of Tradition’s relation to Scripture in favor of an “ancillary” view: contrary to popular misconceptions of *nuda scriptura*, tradition plays a vital role when understanding God’s revelation via Scripture, but the role is “ministerial” rather than magisterial. Scripture is the final authority over, but not the sole source of, Christian belief and practice.<sup>42</sup>

For the reasons outlined above, the clarity with which the CSBI distinguishes Scripture and tradition in Article I and Article II is essential in order to maintain an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Nevertheless, without corresponding references to the value of tradition alongside these two articles, one wonders if the CSBI might aid in perpetuating a kind of *nuda Scriptura* among evangelicals. The CSBI is right to clearly affirm that Scripture is the Church’s “supreme written norm” and deny that tradition in the form of church pronouncements, creeds, or councils supersedes the authority of Scripture. But does such a strong contrast between Scripture and tradition without a balancing reference to the usefulness of tradition leave the statement vulnerable to charges of obscurantism? In my judgment, Article II can be strengthened by maintaining a clear distinction between Scripture and tradition while also offering positive comment

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Daniel J. Treier, “Scripture and Hermeneutics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Treier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35. By “coincidence” Treier refers to the Orthodox view that sees Scripture authority as a “subset of the Church’s great Tradition” (ibid.). By “supplementary,” Treier refers to the Roman Catholic position that affords Tradition “the decisive role in [Scripture’s] interpretation” (ibid.).

about the place of tradition within the context of biblical authority. Before I note these changes, however, we must probe a little deeper into Grenz and Franke's work.

Grenz and Franke's refusal to recognize Scripture's inherent authority also leads them to separate Scripture's authority from God's authority. Ultimate authority is now situated in God and not in Scripture as such.

A nonfoundational understanding of Scripture and tradition locates ultimate authority only in the action of the Triune God. If we speak of a 'foundation' of the Christian faith at all, then, we must speak of neither Scripture nor tradition in and of themselves, but only in the triune God who is disclosed in polyphonic fashion through scripture, the church, and even the world, albeit always normatively through Scripture.<sup>43</sup>

Yet it is difficult to reconcile such statements with the biblical declarations that indicate God speaks in the Scriptures themselves (e.g., Rom 9:17). If the Bible is truly God's word, than any bifurcation between the authority of God and the word he has spoken is illegitimate.<sup>44</sup> Ironically, by separating God's authority from Scripture's authority, we run the risk of robbing God of his proper authority in the church. The continued need to

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<sup>43</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 117-18. Grenz and Franke's concern over the misplacement of divine authority echoes a similar concern voiced by James Dunn fourteen years prior. "By asserting of the Bible an indefectible authority, they are attributing to it an authority proper *only* to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If we say the biblical authors wrote without error, we attribute to their writing what we otherwise recognize to be true only of Christ. We do for the Bible what Roman Catholic dogma has done for Mary the mother of Jesus; and if the charge of Marioltry is appropriate against Catholic dogma, then the charge of bibliolatry is no less appropriate against the inerrancy dogma." James Dunn, *The Living Word* (London: SCM, 1987), 106. Dunn's book received a recent update through a different publisher: *The Living Word*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009). The content of the above quote, however, is identical in the second edition.

<sup>44</sup>Jenson observes that normal communication requires that we assume a vital connection between the person and the letter he has written. "If one person communicates with another, say through a letter, the recipient neither confuses the instrument with the sender nor separates the inseparable. It would be intolerable for the recipient to say, for example, that he did not keep to arrangements for a meeting, set out in the letter, because they were only words and not the person. One can never plausibly say, 'I did not believe your words, because they were not you.' Even in human affairs we stand by our words. As you treat my words, so you treat me. I am rightly offended, in a personal way, if you slight, disregard, disobey, or contradict my words. I think you have done these things to me. Likewise, if you trust my word, you are trusting me; if you obey my word, you are honouring me. That is the nature of language and persons in everyday experience" (Jenson, *The Revelation of God*, 165).

assert the denials found in Article I and Article II of the CSBI is thus apparent.

Nevertheless, in light of the challenges presented by postmodernism generally and Grenz and Franke specifically, I propose a reformulated affirmation and denial statement that addresses specifically the matter of God's authority in Scripture. The revised statements would read:

Because divine authority resides in Scripture, we affirm that the Bible is the only written norm by which God teaches his people, binds the conscience, and guides his church. We further affirm the authority of the Church and her theological traditions reside solely in its faithful exposition and application of Scripture.

Although a useful tools for aiding in our interpretation of Scripture and our theological formulation, we deny that church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of Scripture. We further deny that the Spirit's work of inspiration in Scripture is equal to his work of guidance in tradition, or that the authority of Scripture can be separated from the authority of God himself.

This revised version of Article II maintains a clear distinction between Scripture and tradition positively, by affirming the subordination of all tradition under Scripture, and negatively by denying an ontological identity between God's work in inspiring Scripture and his work in guiding the church in her theological formulations. Article II also reflects changes in Article I by emphasizing, from a slightly different angle, the claim in that Scripture's authority resides in the text of Scripture. Article II clearly denies that one can legitimately create a division between the authority of God's Word in Scripture and the authority of God himself. I now turn to Article III to examine specifically the matter of revelation and its relation to Scripture.

### **Article III: Scripture and Revelation**

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Having established the authority of Scripture in Article I and Article II, Article III now focuses on another aspect of Scripture, namely, Scripture's nature as a revelation from God. In the article's affirmation statement, the CSBI designates the whole of Scripture as a revelation from God. The emphasis on the comprehensive scope of revelation is significant because it rejects neo-orthodox notions that imply that Scripture *contains* God's revelation and merely witnesses to it, or that it *becomes* revelation upon a person's reading the Bible or hearing it taught.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Article III emphasizes the objective nature of God's revelation in Scripture by maintaining that the revelation itself is not dependent upon human recognition of it as such.

The objectivity of the revelation also implies that revelation is propositional in nature. Such an assertion is not meant to flatten the diversity of genre in Scripture, but to affirm that the Bible "communicates a content that may be understood as propositions."<sup>46</sup> The propositional content of God's written revelation refers to those elements in Scripture that can be classified according to their truth or falsity. The main intention of Article III, then, is to "declare with confidence the content of Scripture is not the result of human imagination or cleverly devised philosophical opinions . . . . [It] embodies truth that comes to us from beyond the scope of our abilities. It comes from God himself."<sup>47</sup>

Although Article III takes direct aim at the main tenets of neo-orthodoxy and implies that Scripture communicates to mankind in the form of propositions, the epistemological assumptions underlying our postmodern intellectual climate have done

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<sup>45</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 12.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

much these past three decades to cast significant—even dogmatic—suspicion over the idea that Scripture contains revelation that is propositional in nature. Stanley Grenz is one evangelical who has articulated a concern that some evangelical theologians—Carl Henry in particular, tied as he was to modernistic theories of truth—have developed theologies of Scripture that overemphasize the propositional nature of God’s revelation and, consequently, mute the Bible’s ability to speak authoritatively and effectively in a postmodern context. Moreover, by treating the Bible as a storehouse of theological facts, evangelicals of the Henry ilk have also unwittingly removed the Scripture from its central place in the church.<sup>48</sup>

While I cannot enter here into a full critique of Grenz’s evaluation of Henry and others like him, it is important to note that at the center of his observations lies the problem of rightly understanding the nature of God’s revelation in Scripture.<sup>49</sup> Specifically, the question of whether or not we should understand Scripture as propositional revelation has recently become a matter of considerable concern and reflection among evangelicals. In light of these developments, then, I propose that the CSBI broach the topic of propositional revelation directly rather than implicitly, and offer statements that uphold the propositional nature of revelation while also acknowledging, as D. A. Carson has rightly observed, that the “Bible’s appeal to truth is rich and complex” and, therefore, “cannot be reduced to, but [should] certainly includ[e], the

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<sup>48</sup>Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 60-63; see also Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 100-10.

<sup>49</sup>For a robust appraisal of Grenz and the so-called post-conservative movement, see *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*.

notion of propositional truth.”<sup>50</sup> Although Carson strongly criticizes Grenz’s couched disregard for propositional revelation, he also recognizes that postmodernism has exposed the weaknesses inherent in defining divine revelation exclusively in propositional categories.<sup>51</sup> Christians must recognize both the broad semantic range of the word “truth” as it appears in Scripture and the reality that not every statement in the

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<sup>50</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 163. This is an instance where the CSBI should borrow from the insights of the CSBH. Although the CSBH was written four years after the CSBI, we should not see the CSBH strictly as a self-contained document that focuses exclusively on the matter of hermeneutics; we should, in a significant sense, view it as an *update* of the CSBI. See especially the CSBH, Articles I, II, VI, X, XIII, XVII, XX, XXI, XXII.

<sup>51</sup>For his critique of Grenz, see D. A. Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz’s *Renewing the Center*,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, 33-55. Whether or not Henry is actually guilty of defining revelation exclusively in propositional categories is not of chief concern here. There are good reasons to believe he is *not* guilty of such narrow formulations. Carson’s treatment of the issue of propositional revelation generally and Carl Henry specifically implies that he does not think Henry was guilty of such an overly restrictive definition (Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 39, 59, 78, 82, 163, 182, 186-187; 202, 343, 430). Henry’s own comments appear to preclude Grenz’s interpretation. “That Scripture contains metaphors, similes, parables, and verbal techniques such as hyperbole in no way excludes the truth of what the Bible teaches. Some literary techniques more than others sharpen communication of truth by rousing the imagination, stirring the emotions, and stimulating the will.” Carl F. H. Henry, *The God who Speaks and Shows*, vol. 4 of *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), 109. Henry continues, however, noting that poetry can usually be “restated in prose form,” so that the meaning of the text, “the Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” (Isa 52:10 KJV), can be said to mean, “that Yahweh will accomplish his sovereign purpose” across the globe (*ibid.*, 109). Vanhoozer, however, observes that to restate poetry into prose is, as literary critic Cleanth Brooks notes, to commit the “heresy of paraphrase” (Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 69). Vanhoozer continues, “To believe, as Henry does, that what is said in poetry may be paraphrased so that its content is clearly stated is to invoke the wrath of literary critics who view poetry and other literary forms as other than informative” (*ibid.*). One wonders, nevertheless, how it is that we are to interpret poetic texts that speak specifically, for example, about the nature of God. Perhaps Henry’s restatement of the Isaiah text was too simplistic, and greater nuance was needed to do justice to the force of the saying. Is the implied complaint here more about *reducing* Scripture’s poetic sections to a one-sentence paraphrase? It could be that Henry would have done better to say that Is 52:10 says more than merely, “Yahweh will accomplish his sovereign purpose.” If this is the critique, then it is gladly acknowledged: Isaiah’s rich imagery demands more than a quick summary. Even so, the tendency toward reductionism notwithstanding, such texts, though poetic in form, are given to communicate *something* (2 Tim 3:16) and the propositional content should not be divorced from the literary form in which it is conveyed. Later in his essay, Vanhoozer references literary critic Gerald Graff who argues strongly that a text’s form and content “are often inseparable,” and that the literary form is derived from “its conceptual content” (Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 72). Thus, “Paraphrase does, according to Graff, constitute a *part* of a poem’s meaning: ‘But if the aim of the paraphrase is more modestly conceived as giving an equivalent not of the total meaning of the utterance paraphrased but only of the *conceptual* portion of that meaning, then we can speak of most utterances as accessible to paraphrase” (*ibid.*, 73).

Bible can be classified as a proposition or analyzed according to its truth or falsity.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, Carson warns that we not allow these considerations to overturn the doctrine of inerrancy.

[It] is one thing to find an example of a sentence in Scripture to which some term as “inerrant” does not easily apply, and another to infer that the Bible is errant. What believers mean when they say that the entire Bible is inerrant is that whatever the category (and in the theological arena it is a sophisticated category!) is applicable to the Bible, it prevails. To find some places where it is not directly applicable is not the same thing as finding places where it is applicable but is falsified.<sup>53</sup>

Carson then turns to examine how speech act theory might aid in developing more thoroughly a doctrine of inerrancy that accounts for all categories of discourse in Scripture.<sup>54</sup> I will consider the role of speech act theory for understanding inerrancy in the following chapter. For our purposes here it is only necessary to emphasize Carson’s observation that God’s revelation in Scripture consists of both propositional and non-propositional elements while also maintaining that the doctrine of inerrancy traditionally understood with some stress on the former is by no means overthrown by the existence of the latter. Thus, I offer the following revisions to Article III (with changes in italics):

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is a revelation given by God. *We further affirm that God’s revelation in Scripture is given in a diversity of literary genre that contains both propositional and non-propositional elements, and that both are equally authoritative.*

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<sup>52</sup>Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 165.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid. John Frame comments, “In one sense, then, Scripture incorporates many kinds of language other than propositions. Propositional language is only one of the many aspects of biblical revelation. But remember that to know what propositional information God is revealing to us, we must consult the whole Bible. In that sense, the whole Bible is propositional. That is to say . . . propositional truth is both a single aspect of Scripture and a perspective of the whole Bible. Now, inerrancy is a quality of propositions. So in one sense it pertains to only one aspect of Scripture; in another sense it pertains to the whole Bible. It is possible to put too great a stress on inerrancy, neglecting the authority of the Bible’s nonpropositional language. But of course, in our time, the danger is largely on the other side: of denying or neglecting inerrancy” (Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 170-71n13).

<sup>54</sup>Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 165-66.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity. *We further deny that existence of non-propositional elements in Scripture overturns the legitimacy of classifying propositional elements in Scripture.*

These modifications to Article III answer directly the complaints that inerrantists cast their doctrine of Scripture in an exclusively propositional mold. The affirmation statement acknowledges the existence of both propositional and non-propositional elements in Scripture, but links authority to both aspects so that one is not exalted at the expense of the other. The addition to the denial portion of Article III parallels the affirmation section by stating that the non-propositional aspects of the Bible do not render Scripture's propositional content useless or meaningless. An updated Article III would rightly acknowledge the fact that God has revealed himself in Scripture in ways that are non-propositional while simultaneously denying that such features of biblical revelation nullify the propositional character of Scripture.

Closely related to this discussion of propositional and non-propositional elements in Scripture, however, is the matter of whether or not God discloses himself or merely truth about himself in Scripture. Although these two issues are intricately related, I propose the addition of another article to address specifically the personal nature of God's revelation in the Bible.<sup>55</sup>

**Additional Article:  
The Personal Nature of Revelation**

One of the recent complaints against the evangelical emphasis on the

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<sup>55</sup>Combining several issues under one article is possible but not desirable. In order to maintain the CSBI's accessibility and clarity, each theological subject, where possible, should be treated under its own heading.

propositional character of God's revelation in Scripture is that this conception weakens the personal component of divine disclosure. "God does not reveal propositions, he reveals himself," is the common protest.<sup>56</sup> Conservative evangelicals, however, do not disagree that God reveals *himself* in Scripture and not merely abstract truths about the divine essence. The problem with the above objection is not that it highlights the personal aspect of God's revelation, but that it posits a false dichotomy between the personal character of God's revelation in Scripture and propositional mode of that revelation: that God's revelation remain at all times personal does not require, logically or otherwise, that such revelation contain no propositional elements. J. I. Packer puts it well:

The first point to underline is that while God's work in revelation certainly includes the imparting of truths and commands, it is he himself, their source, who is thereby revealed. What God makes known to us is God, not just theology! Revelation of God and knowledge of God are correlative. Just as the latter is in essence personal, relational knowledge, to which factual knowledge about God leads up, so the essential object of the former, over and above facts about God, is God himself.<sup>57</sup>

Packer recognizes the tendency to trim the rich contours of divine communication by merely equating, without clarifying nuance, Scripture with revelation. He acknowledges that the Bible is "central and crucial to divine communication," but that is so precisely

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<sup>56</sup>See Paul Helm, "Revealed Propositions and Timeless Truths," in *Religious Studies* 8, no. 2 (1972): 127-36. For an early example of this kind of dichotomy, see John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956). "Our examination of the New Testament usage thus amply confirms our conclusion that what is revealed, that is, the content of revelation, is not a body of information or of doctrine. It may, however, be asked, whether it quite confirms our further conclusion that what is revealed is God Himself" (ibid., 60). More recently, Frank Matera expresses the concern that a commitment to a propositional approach to revelation devalues Scripture's personal nature. "The Bible then is authoritative not because it is a book about God but because it is a book of divine self-revelation. Although some may think this revelation is a series of propositional truths about God, the narrative and poetic nature of the biblical writings that God's revelation is more personal." Frank Matera, "Biblical Authority and the Scandal of the Incarnation," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 100.

<sup>57</sup>J. I. Packer, "An Evangelical View of Progressive Revelation," in *Engaging the Written Word of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 80.

because the Scripture “records, interprets, and shows the right response to God’s revelation of himself in history, and . . . is the means whereby God brings all subsequent believers to recognize, receive, and respond to that revelation for themselves.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, an evangelical doctrine of Scripture must maintain the vital link between the propositional means and personal nature of divine revelation.<sup>59</sup> The propositional element of revelation is one of the primary channels by which God reveals himself and is therefore *essential*; the personal aspect of revelation is that which guides a proper apprehension and use of Scripture and is therefore *ultimate*. Furthermore, the covenantal nature of Scripture provides a framework in which we can consistently affirm both aspects of God’s revelation in the Bible. John Frame comments,

The covenant form, however, presents us with a model of revelation that is both highly personal and highly propositional. God reveals his name, which is virtually equivalent to himself. He authors the entire treaty, revealing himself throughout its pages. He communicates love, by revealing his past blessings and by promising future ones to those who are faithful. He speaks intimately to his people. He promises that he will be personally involved with his people to bless, to punish, and to chastise.

At the same time, the covenant is propositional. It is a document containing words and sentences. It functions as a legal constitution for God’s people. It is to be kept, passed on, from generation to generation (Deut. 6:4ff; Jude 3). It contains

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Millard Erickson concludes that we should not choose between the orthodox claim that revelation is propositional and the neo-orthodox assertion that revelation is personal. “A better way of formulating the doctrine is to observe that revelation is both personal and propositional. God does not simply reveal information for the purpose of informing. The knowledge of God is for the purpose of relationship. What God reveals is God. But the question must further be asked, How does He reveal Himself. The answer is, at least in part, through revealing information about Himself. He does not merely meet us; He introduces Himself to us and tells us about Himself.” Millard J. Erickson, “Revelation,” in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 16. It should also be asserted that the very nature of Scripture’s authorship indicates that it is personal revelation, for the human authors each wrote with a particular audience in mind whenever they penned their narratives, poetry, or letters. Granted, this aspect of the Bible’s composition does not speak directly to the reality of personal *divine* communication, but it does help establish the case that the God who inspired these human authors is concerned with personal disclosure (see Erickson, “Revelation,” 11).

information about God's name, his mighty deeds, his will for our lives, his sanctions, and his established institutions.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, I recommend the addition of an article that upholds this crucial relationship between the propositional mode and the personal nature of God's revelation in Scripture:

We affirm that God's revelation in Scripture is a covenantal and thus personal revelation of himself. We further affirm that propositional truth is a vital means by which God reveals himself.

We deny that the personal character of God's revelation in Scripture necessarily precludes the propositional nature of that revelation. We further deny that propositional truth hinders personal revelation.

The claim that Scripture is revelation from God, however, depends upon another foundational claim; namely, that human language is a suitable vehicle through which God is able to reveal himself. It is to this issue I now turn.

#### **Article IV: The Adequacy of Human Language for Divine Revelation**

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Whereas Article III clearly specifies the extent—and, to some degree, the nature—of revelation, Article IV touches on the mode of revelation. Here, the CSBI confronts directly a problem that many opponents to the doctrine of inerrancy have exploited over the past several decades: the matter of human language as an adequate vehicle for revelation in light of human finitude and fallenness.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 153.

Article IV affirms that God has used language to communicate his revelation to his creatures. Furthermore, it contends the human state of corruption and human being's inherent limitations do not render language insufficient to convey divine truth. Although a human being is sinful and thus prone to error, it does not follow that one *must* err, or, much less, that one must err every time one speaks.<sup>62</sup> Yet, while error is not a necessary property of existing as a human, it is true that human beings have a tendency to lie and to err. God's work of inspiration, mentioned in the last sentence of Article IV, nonetheless overcomes the human propensity to lie and secures a text free from error.<sup>63</sup>

Although helpful in answering some of the challenges related to the nature of revelation and the adequacy of human language, I contend that Article IV would benefit from some modification. First, I would strengthen the affirmation statement by wording it in such a way so as to highlight God's intention in designing language specifically for the purpose of revelation. As it stands now, the affirmation statement, while acknowledging that some relationship exists between God, the creation of mankind in his own image, and the adequacy of human language, is neither sufficiently clear nor strong enough in these matters. The original statement makes it appear as though God has chosen merely to use language to communicate; it does not indicate unambiguously that he has designed human language for the very purpose of providing a sufficient vehicle for

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<sup>61</sup>For a thorough defense of the claim that human language is a suitable instrument for divine revelation, see J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 197-226.

<sup>62</sup>For a defense of this claim and a refutation of the notion that man must err when he speaks because he is human, see Thomas H. McCall, "Religious Epistemology, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, and Critical Biblical Scholarship," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith*, 33-54. See also chap. 2 of this dissertation, especially my discussion of Peter Enns, Kenton Sparks, and A. T. B. McGowan.

<sup>63</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 13-14.

revelation. I suggest, therefore, the updated affirmation statement read as follows:

We affirm that the God who speaks created man in his image and designed human language for the very purpose of revelation.<sup>64</sup>

By establishing the starting principle of God's intention in creating human language, this updated affirmation statement immediately precludes arguments that suggest human language is somehow inadequate for divine communication. In my judgment, by merely affirming that God used human language in order to reveal himself, the original affirmation statement is left vulnerable to the claim that God, in delivering his revelation to his creatures, simply utilized what was available to him. Accordingly, it becomes easy to suggest that the divine work of inspiration, beleaguered as it was by the inherent weakness and insufficiency of human language, ultimately faltered in securing an inerrant text. If, however, God fashioned language with revelation in mind, then it becomes far more plausible that language is a sufficient vehicle for divine communication.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Genesis 1:26 provides exegetical grounds for this affirmation. In this text, God, apparently in conversation with himself ("Let us"), chooses to create man in his own image. The connection between God's speech within himself (i.e., among the members of the Trinity), the many references to God's speech in the immediate context (Gen 1:1-31) and the formation of man in his own image implies that language will reside at the center of what it means for humans to exist in the image of God. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to assume that the very design of human language was modeled after intra-trinitarian communication (the capacity to speak and receive speech is a characteristic that originated with God) and intended to serve as a vehicle for God would reveal himself to his creatures. See also Ward, *Words of Life*, 34. To bolster this claim, Ward helpfully notes three biblical examples where God is said to have placed his very words into the mouth of a human agent: Moses in Deut 18:15-20; Jeremiah (Jer 1:9b-10); and Balaam (Num 22) (ibid., 35). Additionally, the many instances where God's spokesmen evoke the phrase, "Thus says the LORD," also give implicit support to the notion that human language is an adequate vehicle with which God is able to reveal himself (e.g., Exod 5:1; Josh 24:2; Judg 6:8; 1 Sam 2:27; 2 Sam 7:5; 1 Kgs 12:24; 2 Kgs 1:4; Jer 2:2). Similar coupling of human messages with the divine word are found in the New Testament as well (e.g., Matt 19:4-5; John 15:4-5; Rom 9:17; 1 Thess 2:13).

<sup>65</sup>Contra Grenz who remarks that God's disclosure of himself through the "instrumentality of human words" is a "scandal." Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 110. It is a scandal in light of postmodernism, yes, but certainly not a scandal as the reality of God's disclosure is considered in a larger biblical-theological framework. God designed human language, among other reasons, for the *purpose* of revelation. Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully comments, "As Christians walk through the postmodern valley of shadow of deconstruction, it is good to know that language is a God-ordained gift, a created good, a means of fellowship with God and others." Kevin Vanhoozer, "Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the

Furthermore, by classifying God as the “God who speaks,” the relationship between God, the creation of humans in his image, and the significance of language as a vehicle for revelation is made clear. This designation of God as the “God who speaks” also challenges the notion that postmodernism has so decimated our confidence in human language that we can no longer hear God speak authoritatively.<sup>66</sup> Finally, these proposed updates strengthen the logical connection between the affirmation and denial portions of this particular article. The connection is seen especially when we add the word “therefore” to the denial section.

We *therefore* deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Yet, there is still more work to be done. First, I suggest that the denial section link more precisely our limitations as humans to our nature as finite creatures. Although the original article clearly intends “creatureliness” to refer to our finite condition, I think it best to make this classification explicit, for the second denial answers the question of whether or not our *sinful* condition has rendered human language and culture insufficient for divine revelation. Also, including a clear reference to human finitude here links Article IV more closely to Article IX: “We deny that the finitude or fallenness of [the human writers], by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God’s

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Claim that God Speaks, Part 2,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 52. Vern Poythress notes God’s sovereignty in the matter of language sufficiency. “Since he is sovereign, language offers no resistance to his purposes and cannot frustrate his desire to communicate.” Vern Poythress, “Adequacy of Language and Accommodation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from the ICBI Summit II* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 352.

<sup>66</sup>For a penetrating critique of postmodernism and powerful defense of the Bible’s ability to speak authoritatively into our contemporary intellectual climate, see Carson, *The Gagging of God*.

Word.” This connection is vital because some contemporary opponents to the CSBI build their challenges upon the notion that human finitude prohibits one’s ability to convey accurately divine truth.<sup>67</sup> I will address the epistemological problems inherent in these kinds of objections in chapter 4 when I examine Article IX. For now, I only want to note that an affirmation of God’s intentional design of human language allows us to maintain an optimistic outlook—despite our fallenness and sin—on language as an adequate vehicle for divine communication. Therefore, I propose the denial section read as follows:

We therefore deny that human language is so limited by our nature as finite creatures that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Having now examined the authority of Scripture, the reality of God’s revelation in Scripture, and the adequacy of human language to convey this revelation, I now turn to the final article of this section and to examine the progressive nature of this revelation.

#### **Article V: Scripture as Progressive Revelation**

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill or clarify earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

In the final section touching on the issue of revelation, Article V addresses the matter of Scripture as progressive revelation. The affirmation plainly acknowledges the fact of progressive revelation, while the denials provide more nuance as to what this designation entails: although God revealed himself gradually in documents that were written and

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<sup>67</sup>See chap. 2 of this dissertation, especially my discussion of Kenton Sparks.

compiled over several centuries, latter declarations do not contradict former teaching, nor were earlier affirmations about God, his character, or his plan of salvation ever intended to be exhaustive. As such, the article speaks of the *fulfillment* of previous revelation by later revelation and dismisses the notions of *contradiction* or *correction*. Moreover, although Scripture is by its very nature progressive revelation, the denial section of Article V restricts authoritative revelation to the canonical books of Scripture. That is, upon the completion of the New Testament, God has chosen no longer to provide further written revelation.<sup>68</sup>

A surprising omission here, however, is the article's lack of theological grounds for affirming Scripture as an internally coherent revelation that develops over time. Evangelicals have traditionally upheld the idea of progressive revelation in light of a theological assumption about God's relation to Scripture: because God is the author of *all* Scripture, Scripture must reflect the coherence and consistency of God himself. Because the exposition section ties the unity of Scripture to its nature as a product of one divine Author, I recommend that the articles which touch upon the categories of progressive revelation (Article V) and the internal consistency of Scripture (Article XIV) also reflect this vital connection. I will discuss Article XIV later under its own heading in chapter 5. For now I suggest that Article V include a clear reference to God's divine authorship. Also, given the constant refrain among those who dislike the doctrine of inerrancy that conservative evangelicals do not give adequate attention to the humanity of Scripture or to the historical character of biblical revelation, it seems appropriate that Article V include balancing references to the chronological nature of Scripture's

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<sup>68</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 14-15.

compilation and the recognition by the authors themselves of a developing redemptive story line. I will discuss the issue of “story” in more detail in a moment. Here I recommend that the revised affirmation statement read as follows:

We affirm that God’s revelation, as the product of one divine Author jointly composed by many human authors over the course of several centuries, was necessarily progressive, cumulative in nature, and thus always coherent and increasing in clarity. We further affirm that the human authors of Scripture recognized the developing nature of redemptive history and the revelation that accompanied it and wrote accordingly.

By framing the affirmation statement in this way, the denial section follows more logically with its claim concerning the relationship between earlier and later revelation. Yet, the denial section itself could also use some attention.

First is the matter of fulfillment. Although the issue of *how* the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament is a matter of significant debate among evangelicals,<sup>69</sup> the *fact* that the New Testament fulfills the Old is affirmed unanimously. In light of such agreement among evangelicals, I am puzzled why Article V would present the matter of fulfillment so tentatively: “We deny that later revelation, which *may fulfill earlier revelation*, ever corrects or contradicts it” (emphasis added). Granted, the emphasis of the article is upon the internal coherence of the Bible and not fulfillment as such; nevertheless, given the intricate—inextricable—relationship between these two subjects, it seems best to state that the fact of fulfillment more pointedly. We might say, “We deny that later revelation, *which often fulfills earlier revelation*, ever corrects or contradicts it.” Such a formulation, while strengthening the link concerning the issue of

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<sup>69</sup>For example, see John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988); and Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

fulfillment between the testaments and the internal consistency of God’s revelation, still refuses to privilege one biblical system (e.g. dispensationalism) over another (e.g. covenant theology), thus allowing for hearty agreement concerning the inerrancy of the whole Bible between proponents of divergent “whole-Bible theologies.”<sup>70</sup>

**Additional Article:  
The Bible as Story**

In close relation to the subject of Scripture’s nature as progressive revelation (Article V) is the matter of the Bible’s genre, intended in this sense: not the individual genre of Scripture—i.e., poetry, narrative, or parable—but the Bible as a whole. Although the Bible is composed of many different books—indeed, the Bible is a rich “library” of various types of literature—it is understood by evangelicals to constitute *one* book. The affirmation and denial statements of Article V (and Article XIV) reflect this conviction. Yet, inherent in the designation of the Bible as one book is the assumption that Scripture consists of a clear and developing plot line, various central and ancillary characters, traceable themes, and other important literary elements. In other words, the Bible is a *story*.

An emphasis upon the idea that the Bible is a single book that tells a consistent and compelling story has seen some significant attention in the past few decades.<sup>71</sup> Some

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<sup>70</sup>I take this phrase, “whole-Bible theologies” from Stephen Wellum in *Kingdom through Covenant*. Wellum helpfully notes that dispensationalism and covenant theology are distinct ways of that evangelicals have typically “put their Bibles together.” Each framework, then, is a “whole-Bible theolo[gy].” Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 25.

<sup>71</sup>Craig T. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Story of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); James O. Chatham, *Creation to Revelation: A Brief Account of the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Preban Vang and Terry G. Carter, *Telling God’s Story: The Biblical Narrative from Beginning to End* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006); Morris A. Inch, *Scripture as Story* (New York: University Press of America, 2000); Walter C. Kaiser,

of this renewed attention may be reflective of some of the ways postmodernism has helped dislodge modernism's attachment to reason and linear argument as the sole arbitrator of truth and beauty. Whatever the case, the rekindled reflection on the Bible as story is certainly a welcome development. That the Bible can consist of both story *and* historical truth, however, has not been so readily embraced. Hans Frei, for example, though not confessedly evangelical, affirms the narrative storyline of the Bible yet without simultaneously upholding the correspondence of the narrative to actual history.<sup>72</sup> Carlos Bovell, an evangelical we noted in chapter 2, is troubled by the doctrine of inerrancy and suggests that inerrantists have difficulty classifying biblical narratives as stories "since stories qua stories defy [the inerrantist's] pre-theoretical inclination toward construing (and establishing) truth by correspondence."<sup>73</sup> According to Bovell

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*Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). Christian Publishers have introduced Bibles that are configured around the narrative structure of Scripture: see *The Story: Read the Bible as One Seamless Story from Beginning to End* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). Even the development of an evangelical approach to biblical theology can be viewed in significant measure to be an emphasis on the Bible as story. Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); idem, *Gospel Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles for Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). In a book already examined in chap. 2, N. T. Wright states that "most of [the Bible's] constituent parts, and all of it when put together (whether in the Jewish canonical form or the Christian one), can best be described as *story*" (emphasis original). N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God—Getting Beyond the Bible Wars* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2005), 26.

<sup>72</sup>See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); idem, *The Identity of Jesus: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). Frei does not state explicitly that the narratives do not correspond to actual history; he just never poses or answers that question. John Johnson argues that Frei's discussion of Christ's resurrection in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, if coupled with the use of evidential proofs of the resurrection, could present a strong apologetic case for Christ's resurrection. The need for greater attention to historical evidence, however, appears to still beg the question of whether or not Frei was ready to link the biblical narrative with actual history. See Jack J. Johnson, "Hans Frei as Unlikely Apologist for the Historicity of the Resurrection," *Evangelical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2004): 135-51.

<sup>73</sup>Carlos Bovell, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 59.

inerrantists cannot fully embrace the category of story because the classification by definition implies the inclusion of elements in the narrative that are fictional, legendary, or intentionally fabricated.<sup>74</sup>

Is such skepticism warranted? Although some wonder, in light of historical criticism and contemporary ANE studies, if much of the biblical narrative represent actual history at all, it does not appear that story and essential history as such must stand in opposition to one another. That is, it is not unreasonable to assert that the Bible is both story *and* history; or, more accurately: that the Bible is *true story*.<sup>75</sup> In Scripture God has given mankind a captivating account of his redemptive action in the world that is historically reliable, even inerrant.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, in light of the helpful emphasis these past

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 63. Here, Bovell suggests that the Bible's narrative can include elements that are invented by the author. He also, in my judgment, draws a false antithesis between history and story. "Lamarque and Olsen helpfully remind us that although 'a literary work can give form to a subject or story which need not be invented by the author,' 'many literary works do, wholly or to some extent, consist of descriptions and stories which are made up or constructed.' And this brings us to the inerrantists' sticking point: Can scriptural narratives be 'poesis,' that is, 'invention rather than report, story rather than history?' Inerrantists tend to say "No," because, as I have suggested, according to them the only way for biblical stories to be 'true' is if they correspond to reality. A God who 'speaks truth only' can only inspire stories that correspond to reality" (ibid.). As V. Phillips Long affirms, however, history writing can be true and simultaneously a "creative enterprise." V. Phillips Long, "History and Fiction: What is History?" in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation: Six Volumes in One* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 319-37.

<sup>75</sup>See Tremper Longman III, "Storytellers and Poets in the Bible: Can Literary Artifice Be True?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 137-49. Longman defends the notion that biblical narrative can be both compelling, entertaining story and historically accurate. "The question of historical truth of the text boils down to the question of who ultimately is guiding us in our interpretation of these events. If human beings alone, then artifice may be deceptive. If God, then no. To recognize this difference is to recognize that a literary analysis of a historical book is not incompatible with a high view of the historicity of the text, even one which affirms the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture in the area of history" (ibid, 147).

<sup>76</sup>For an excellent contemporary example of how true history and story can coexist as one entity, one might think of David McCullough's recent work. In his biographies of Harry Truman and John Adams, and his recounting of the most significant battles of the revolutionary war, McCullough writes in a stirring, captivating prose that is tied directly to actual historic events and states of affairs. McCullough intentionally leaves footnotes and endnotes out of main text—relegating all notes to the back of the book—presumably in order to maintain the narrative feel of the account. See David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); idem, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); idem, *1776* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

several years on the nature of the Bible as story, and the apparent false dichotomy drawn by some between reliable history and story, I recommend the addition of an article to the CSBI that recognizes this vital component in the doctrine of Scripture and concurrently maintains the essential history of the biblical narrative.

We affirm that the Bible is a glorious and compelling story of God's redemptive action in the world. We further affirm that the biblical narrative faithfully portrays in the sum of its parts God's purpose in creation, fall, redemption, and judgment, and is paradigmatic for every element of what we call 'story.'

We deny that story and essential history are mutually exclusive, or that the designation of the Bible as story implies that the biblical narratives contain untrue, mythical, or fabricated elements, or cannot be said to correspond to actual states of affairs.

In providing this additional article, the CSBI gains some needed balance. Some of the articles of affirmations and denial have a tendency to cast Scripture in a rather plain, lackluster mold. Although Article XVIII hints at some of the richness contained in Scripture (referring to the Bible's "literary forms and devices"), and the exposition implies that Scripture contains a plotline and some theme development, on the whole, the statement does not present the Bible as a captivating yet true story that compels imagination *and* repentance; appreciation *and* faith; delight *and* serious study. Furthermore, the affirmation designates biblical narrative as the archetype of all other stories. Thus, Scripture is not subject to the evaluative principles of literary critics, but rather serves as the standard by which all other stories are judged.

### **Conclusion**

In the preceding pages I have sought to demonstrate that the CSBI's introductory articles require updates based on contemporary developments in the areas of authority, revelation, language, and the nature of Scripture as progressive revelation. I

also argued for the addition of two new articles that touch upon issues relevant to the content of the original articles but that require separate articulation in light of recent developments in the doctrine of Scripture.

In my reassessment and reformulation, I claimed that the current status of the evangelical discussion of the doctrine of Scripture necessitates a clear articulation of Scripture's nature as a self-authenticating text that functions chiefly as a covenant document between God and his people. As a self-authenticating text, Scripture possesses inherent authority that cannot be located outside the text at the expense of the text, even if the preferred location is in the Spirit himself.

I proceeded to argue that the CSBI offer direct comment concerning the validity of classifying some revelation in Scripture as propositional, while also acknowledging that not all biblical revelation is propositional. I also sought to demonstrate that the CSBI would benefit from the addition of an article that articulates the personal nature of biblical revelation while maintaining that no inherent contradiction exists between personal and propositional revelation.

This discussion of the personal nature of revelation was followed logically by an examination of the claim that human language is adequate for divine communication. Although I made it clear that I fully embrace the notion that human language is an adequate vehicle by which God is able to reveal himself to his creatures, I suggested that a renewed article should affirm the adequacy of human language with greater force, placing the ground of this claim in God's *design* of human language for the purpose of revelation rather than his *use* of language as a vehicle for revelation.

I followed this discussion with an examination of Scripture's nature as

progressive revelation. Here I offered revised statements of affirmation and denial that reckoned more explicitly with the reality of the Bible's nature as progressive revelation and with the reality of fulfillment between the testaments. The issues broached here led naturally to the next section in which I recommended the addition of a second article that drew from the idea of Scripture as progressive revelation. In this section I argued that in light of recent developments in the area of literary theory, a revised CSBI should include an article that acknowledges the Bible's nature as a compelling and true story.

Having now considered the articles that focus on authority and revelation (Articles I-V), we are now prepared to examine matters related to inspiration and inerrancy. It is to these two issues I now turn in the following chapter as I consider Articles VI-XIII.

CHAPTER 4  
CSBI REASSESSMENT AND REFORMULATION  
PART 2: ARTICLES VI-XIII

While Articles I through V establish the foundation for the remaining affirmations and denials, articles six through thirteen constitute the very heart of the CSBI, for the latter define precisely what is meant by the use of the terms *inspiration* and its corollary, *inerrancy*. The scope of inspiration is comprehensive—every word of Scripture is included—while the mode of inspiration is reckoned a mystery. Although the origin of inspiration is divine and therefore the communication of true doctrine and faithful historical accounts is assured, the CSBI also acknowledges that God sovereignly employed the human authors in such a way that inspiration coincided seamlessly with the author’s personality and writing style. The result of divine inspiration was an inerrant text, a text that includes no distortion, falsehood, fraud, or deceit. Like inspiration, the extent of inerrancy is all-embracing, touching upon every theme in Scripture, not merely those of a spiritual, religious, or redemptive sort. Nevertheless, the claim to inerrancy—that is, the “complete truthfulness of Scripture”—must be tested according to standards of truth that are native to and demanded by the text itself. Biblical phenomena such as the use round numbers, grammatical irregularities, or the reporting of falsehoods, to name a few, do not constitute errors because their existence in the text does not affect the complete truthfulness of the text.

Expectedly, it has been this portion of the CSBI in particular that has received

the most attention the past three decades. In the following section of this chapter, I will examine each of the articles under its own heading, explain its original intent and the reason for its inclusion, and conclude each segment with proposals for updates to the specific article. I will also propose the addition of new articles where necessary.

### **Article VI: The Nature and Extent of Inspiration**

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

In this article, the CSBI affirms the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration. As the designation itself implies, *all* Scripture is inspired, even the very *words*.<sup>1</sup> The denial portion intends to counter the claim that one can speak of the inspiration of the entire Bible while also maintaining that some sections of the whole are not inspired. For example, one might claim that in his act of inspiring Scripture, God communicated ideas, not words. Inspiration, then, can be claimed for the whole Bible—that is, the whole *message* of the Bible—but not for the actual *words* of Scripture. Article VI answers this position directly, denying, by definition, any attempt to claim that inspiration can encompass the entire Bible without including every part and every word of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This view of inspiration is defended in several places in Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980). See, for example, Paul Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, 277-83; and J. I. Packer, “The Adequacy of Human Language,” in *Inerrancy*, 210-11. The reason I cite these articles is because *Inerrancy* was published as an ICBI resource only two years after the inaugural writing of the CSBI. The connection between verbal-plenary inspiration and inerrancy is essential as these and other articles in Geisler’s edited volume ably demonstrate.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Jenson provides a succinct yet helpful response to the claim that Scripture is only partly inspired. First, he notes that the NT itself treats the entire OT as inspired (e.g. Rom 3:2) even those texts in which God is not speaking directly (Matt 19:4-6; Heb 4:7 cf. Ps 95). Secondly, Jenson appeals to the necessity of context in order for one to properly convey communication to another. Concerning this second

The doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration, though, does not require a mechanical or dictation theory in order to account for God’s comprehensive oversight of the text.<sup>3</sup> While the mode of inspiration is a mystery (see Article VII)—we are not told specifically *how* God inspired Scripture—the CSBI maintains that God utilized “the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers” (Article VIII) in his work of inspiring the biblical text. Thus, divine inspiration occurred concurrently with the work of the human author so in the end we have the word of God in the word of men.

While it is difficult to improve on this particular article given its clear, straightforward assertion of the comprehensive scope of Scripture’s divine inspiration, there are a few subtle modifications that would further strengthen this article and the remaining articles that touch upon the doctrine of inspiration. The first change I propose concerns specifically the word “inspiration.”

Historically, the majority of contemporary English copies of the Bible have employed the word “inspiration” and its cognates to translate the Greek word *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16. These English versions are based on the KJV (1611): “All Scripture is given *by inspiration* of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, correction for instruction in righteousness” (emphasis added). Since the publication of

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point, he comments, “To delineate between the parts of Scripture that are inspired and those that are not, whether on the ground that some parts are more powerful than others, or on the ground that some parts even claim to speak directly from God, is to remove the background that makes sense of the foreground. It is to fall into the same intellectual trap as those who wish to treat Scripture merely as a doctrinal handbook. Only by having Ecclesiastes and the Gospel of John in the same volume can we know what God is saying to us.” Peter Jenson, *The Revelation of God*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 160-61.

<sup>3</sup>Often the words *mechanical* and *dictation* are used interchangeably to refer to a theory of inspiration that views the human role in the composition of Scripture as little more than a secretary writing the words given to him by God.

the KJV, many English translations have followed suit in their rendition of this text.<sup>4</sup> As these copies became available for study, theologians imbibed the language of 2 Timothy 3:16 and formulated their doctrine of Scripture by employing the word “inspiration” as a technical term to denote the divine nature of the Bible. Over time, however, the word “inspiration” in the common parlance has come take on new connotations that differ from how it was used in 2 Timothy 3:16 or in theological texts. While still maintaining the sense of a divine work, “inspiration” can now refer to ordinary events like an “inspired performance” or a “feeling of inspiration” that motivates one to work hard or where one is supplied with moments of genius-like brilliance.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the shift in the word’s customary meaning and usage has signaled to some Bible translators and theologians that care must now be taken in communicating not only the truth of 2 Timothy 3:16, but also in how one describes the divine nature of Scripture. In order to maintain the passage’s emphasis on the origin of Scripture, some contemporary versions of the Bible have shelved the word “inspiration” and instead rendered *theopneustos* as “God-breathed.” The NIV, for example, reads, “All Scripture is *God-breathed* and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (emphasis added). The ESV has followed the NIV in this particular translation.

Some theologians have also recently expressed their complaint that the word “inspiration” no longer captures—at least in light of the contemporary linguistic milieu—what the Bible teaches about its own origin. Wayne Grudem, for example, chose to leave

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<sup>4</sup>For example, the NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NLT, and NET.

<sup>5</sup>Consider B. B. Warfield’s etymology of the English word “inspiration.” See B. B. Warfield, “Inspiration,” in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915), 1473-83.

out the word “inspiration” in his discussion of the doctrine of Scripture in favor of the NIV phrase “God-breathed.”<sup>6</sup> A. T. B. McGowan has even proposed a wholesale overhaul of our theological vocabulary in this regard, arguing that “spiration” is a better way to speak of the Scripture’s divine origin rather than “inspiration.”<sup>7</sup> On the less extreme end of the spectrum, John Frame, while not electing to strike “inspiration” from his theological vocabulary, does recognize that “God-breathed” is a proper and useful translation of *theopneustos*.<sup>8</sup>

Although it is not the intention of this dissertation to recommend the removal of the word “inspiration” from the CSBI and, along with McGowan, propose the installation of a new theological term that might better and more accurately denote the divine origin of Scripture, I do think it would be helpful to add a phrase to the affirmation statement that acknowledges the usefulness of the term “God-breathed” in relation to the doctrine of inspiration. The revised affirmation statement would read (with changes in italics),

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration, *so that it is appropriate to say that all Scripture is breathed out by God.*

By making the claim to Scripture’s divine origin even more explicit and explaining the nature of that divine work, the additional clause counters, with greater force, arguments that are used to assert Scripture’s divine origin but also simultaneously reject inerrancy.

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<sup>6</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 75n6.

<sup>7</sup>A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 38-43.

<sup>8</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 4 of *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 124-25.

Even for evangelicals who dislike the doctrine of inerrancy, it is difficult—if not impossible—to maintain, with any consistency, that God has *breathed out* that which is false or mistaken.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, providing this additional clause also helps allay the complaints by CSBI inerrantists like Grudem who find the use of the word “inspiration” problematic. Attention to one particular issue in the denial section might also prove beneficial.

According to R. C. Sproul’s commentary on the CSBI, the assertions made in Article VI are not intended to imply that a dictation theory of inspiration is required to affirm the full inspiration of Scripture.<sup>10</sup> By stating that the mode of inspiration is “largely a mystery to us” in Article VII, the framers refused to endorse any particular theory of inspiration, much less a mechanical or dictation theory. Article VIII further distances the CSBI from any claim that inerrancy implies a dictation theory of inspiration by affirming that God, in his act of inspiration, “utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles” of the human authors.

Given the problems inherent in defending inerrancy on the basis of a dictation theory of inspiration, however, it still appears necessary to draw out an explicit reference to these theories and their relation to inspiration. Granted, evangelical defenses of inspiration from a dictation or mechanical framework are almost non-existent; nevertheless, in light of the recent challenges surveyed in chapter 2, it seems necessary

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<sup>9</sup>For example, John Frame, in his critique of A. T. B. McGowan’s *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* and McGowan’s suggestion that inspired texts could include error, remarks, “To breathe out is to speak. To say that God breathes out errors is to say that he speaks errors. That is biblically impossible. God does not lie, and he does not make mistakes (Heb 4:12). So he speaks only truth” (Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 547).

<sup>10</sup>See R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary* (Oakland, CA: The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1980) 17.

for the CSBI to speak more directly to this matter.<sup>11</sup> Along these lines, Gregg Allison, directing his comments specifically to Christian educators, notes that, “the mechanical dictation theory of inspiration is bankrupt and should be avoided strenuously.”<sup>12</sup> Allison continues,

Not that the view is common; often it is more a charge leveled against evangelicals by (post) liberals or neo-orthodox scholars and theologians who disagree with our doctrine of Scripture. As their charge is worded, evangelicals believe that God dictated the Bible to its human authors, because this mode of inspiration was the only way God could ensure an inerrant text. But the mechanical dictation theory cannot account for the many differences in personalities, writings styles, theological emphases, grammatical capabilities, genre, and the like that are very evident in Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

Because many of the contemporary challenges to inerrancy appear to betray an underlying influence from or commitment to a Barthian view of Scripture, it is crucial to include in the denial portion of Article VI an unambiguous statement that separates the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration from a dictation theory of inspiration.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup>McGowan, for example, believes that the doctrine of inerrancy—at least as it is articulated by some evangelicals—strongly implies a mechanical view of inspiration. He opts for the term infallibility because it is a “more dynamic (or organic) and less mechanical view of authority” (McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 49). James Scott notes that McGowan’s mistake here is based upon using the word “infallible” in a technical sense that departs from its original meaning, and upon the failure to recognize that an organic theory of inspiration can coexist coherently with the doctrine of inerrancy, as it does in, for example, B. B. Warfield. See James Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy: A Response to A. T. B. McGowan’s *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*,” *WTJ* 71 (2009): 189.

<sup>12</sup>Gregg Allison, “A Theologian Addresses Current Theological Issues Impinging on Christian Education,” *CEJ* 8, no. 1 (2011): 93.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>14</sup>Consider the third appendix to G. K. Beale’s *Erosion of Inerrancy* in which he provides a selection of sixteen quotes from Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* in response to contemporary evangelical developments in the doctrine of Scripture. “The point of this appendix is to show that Barth believed that Scripture contained errors but that, nevertheless, God could communicate his message even through such fallible parts of the Bible. Likewise, some of the quotations reveal that Barth did not identify God’s Word with the Bible but that the Bible is a witness to the Word.” G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 281. Most if not all of these quotations sound very similar to the proposals we examined in chapter 2. For example, consider the following selections from Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. “The men whom we hear as witnesses speak as fallible, erring men like ourselves. What they say, and what we read as their word, can

revised denial statement would read (with changes in italics),

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole. *We further deny that divine inspiration requires a dictation from God to the human authors.*

The following article (VII) will reemphasize the statement made here by maintaining the mysterious nature of the mode of inspiration. It is to that article I now turn.

### **Article VII: The Definition and Mode of Inspiration**

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

The affirmation section of Article VII emphasizes the divine origin of Scripture while also recognizing the human participation in writing God's word. "Inspiration" is the theological term used to designate the process whereby God, by his Spirit and through the involvement of human writers, provided his word to humanity. Importantly, the affirmation indicates that while we can know that Scripture's origin is ultimately divine and concurrently human, we cannot know *how* inspiration actually occurred.

The denial portion counters an idea of inspiration akin to moments of brilliance, flashes of religious insight, or instances of intellectual or emotional lucidity.

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of itself lay claim to be the Word of God, but it can never sustain that claim" (Barth, *CD*, I/2, 507). "We have to face up to them and to be clear that in the Bible it may be a matter of simply believing the Word of God, even though it meets us, not in the form of what we call history, but in the form of what we think must be called saga or legend" (ibid., 509). "But the vulnerability of the Bible, i.e., its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological context" (ibid., 509). Barth, "We must dare to face the humanity of the biblical texts and therefore their fallibility without the postulate that they must be infallible, but also without the superstitious belief in any infallible truth alongside or behind the text and revealed by ourselves" (ibid., 533). For more on Barth's view of Scripture and the weaknesses therein, see Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Authority of Scripture in Karl Barth," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 275-94.

The biblical doctrine of inspiration refers, rather, to the divine source of the text. R. C. Sproul explains,

The word inspiration can be used and has been used in our language to refer to moments of genius-level insight, of intensified states of consciousness or of heightened acts of human achievement. We speak of inspired poetry, meaning that the author achieved levels of insight and brilliance that are extraordinary. However, in this dimension of “inspiration” no suggestion is at hand that the source of inspiration is divine power. . . . Here the [CSBI] is making clear that by divine inspiration something transcending all human states of inspiration is in view, something in which the power and supervision of God are at work. Thus, the articles are saying that the Bible, though it is a human book insofar as it is written by human writers, has its humanity transcended by virtue of its divine origin and inspiration.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the denial statement clarifies what is intended by the use of the word *inspiration*, distinguishing its meaning in Article VII from other common connotations.

Although these explanations are helpful, there are a few recommendations I propose in light of some contemporary developments in the area of the doctrine of inspiration. First, with regard to the affirmation statement, I advocate the addition of a sentence that highlights the concurrence between the divine word and the human word in a distinctively helpful, clarifying manner. While the CSBI as a whole affirms that God’s act of inspiration worked in such a way so as avoid violating the personalities of the human authors (see Article XIII), there is need for a more direct reference to the doctrine of concurrence in the document. Such a reference would help alleviate some of the tension that exists between statements that affirm God’s divine oversight of the biblical text and statements that affirm human involvement in the writing of these texts.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 19.

<sup>16</sup>See my discussion of Article XIII below where I argue that some of this tension is relieved if we acknowledge that the biblical authors, generally speaking, wrote according to their own free expression. The affirmation that biblical authors wrote according to their own free expression, however, is dependent

doctrine of concurrence is vital to a robust articulation of inspiration because it affirms that God’s providential activity cooperates with, not in opposition to, creaturely activity in order to bring about divine purposes. Thus, in the writing of Scripture, we can rightly assert that what the biblical authors wrote according to the dictates of their own free agency was simultaneously God’s word. John Frame emphasizes the harmony of purpose between the divine and human participants in particularly effective fashion when he observes that inspiration is the “divine act creating an identity between a divine word and a human word.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, I suggest the affirmation portion of Article VII read, along with minor stylistic adjustments (with changes in italics),

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. Although the origin of Scripture is divine, the mode of inspiration is largely a mystery to us. *We further affirm that in Scripture there is an identity between the divine word and the human word without the loss of either.*

With the addition of this new sentence, Article VII upholds the doctrine of concurrence and honors the divine *and* human nature of Scripture, thus laying a sturdier foundation upon which simultaneously to assert God’s supervision of the text and the free expression of the human authors in Article VIII.

Second, with regard to Craig Allert’s suggestion that evangelicals rethink their doctrine of inspiration based on his observation that the word *theopneustos* was applied by the ancient church to writings other than Scripture,<sup>18</sup> I suggest Article VII note the *unique* character of biblical inspiration. The revised denial portion would read:

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upon a logically prior affirmation; namely, that God providential activity coincides seamlessly with creaturely activity.

<sup>17</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 143.

<sup>18</sup>Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*, Evangelical Resourcement (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 64-65.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind. *We further deny that inspiration can be rightly applied to early Christian documents in the same way that it can be applied to Holy Scripture.*

While Allert is correct in his observation that some theologians in the early church did classify their writings as *theopneustos*, it does not follow that in so doing they were, in every case, placing their writings on the same authoritative plane as Scripture, or that they considered their writings to share ontological categories with the canonical books.<sup>19</sup> Nor does the observation that some theologians of the early church referred to documents other than Scripture as *theopneustos* overturn the claim that this word with reference to Scripture bears a distinctive meaning.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is fitting that the CSBI respond to such arguments by affirming the Scripture's *exclusive* status as God-breathed literature.

At this point, however, before we engage the following article (VIII), I propose the addition of a new article that addresses specifically an issue found in at least two of the authors we studied in chapter 2.

### **Additional Article: The Providential Preparation of the Human Authors**

In their respective attempts to reframe the inerrancy debate, both A. T. B.

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<sup>19</sup>By the phrase “ontological categories” I mean to argue that Scripture by its very nature is superior to any other human work. Thus, ontologically speaking, Scripture is in a class by itself, distinct from the writings of any early church theologian. D. A. Carson rightly notes that in the case of the church fathers there was often the combining of two doctrinal categories that theologians would later view separately. “In short, a number of Fathers use a variety of expressions, including ‘inspiration,’ to lump together what many theologians today would separate into two categories ‘inspiration’ and ‘illumination.’” D. A. Carson, “Approaching the Bible,” in *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 33.

<sup>20</sup>See also Michal Kruger’s contention that the early church’s occasional use of a particular document as Scripture does not demand that such a book be taken *as finally canonical*. There are more factors involved in determining which books belong in the canon, and occasional disagreements over what books should be considered Scripture do not by themselves undermine that claim that a general consensus of the canonical list did exist. See Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 57n127.

McGowan and N. T. Wright are careful to uphold God’s sovereignty in the work of inspiration by affirming that the Scripture we have is the Scripture God intended us to have. As James Scott has observed, however, such affirmations, though true and embraced gladly by all evangelicals, actually say nothing directly about the doctrine of inspiration or the doctrine of inerrancy as such. Indeed—and this is more clear in McGowan than in Wright—there appears to be in these writers a conflation of the two theological categories of providence and inspiration.<sup>21</sup> Over a century ago, however, B. B. Warfield recognized that one could make a mistake precisely at this point.

When we give due place in our thoughts to the universality of the providential government of God, to the minuteness and completeness of its sway, and to its invariable efficacy, we may be inclined to ask what is needed beyond this mere providential government to secure the production of sacred books which should be in every detail absolutely accordant with the Divine will. The answer is, Nothing is needed beyond mere providence to secure such books—provided only that it does not lie in the Divine purpose that these books should possess qualities which rise above the powers of men to produce, even under the most complete divine guidance. For providence is guidance; and guidance can bring one only so far as his own power can carry him.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, Kevin Vanhoozer argues that despite this claim that something other than providence is needed to provide us with God’s word in human form, Warfield finally concedes to the providential model to explain inspiration.<sup>23</sup> So, the problem facing us at this point is that providence is a “necessary but not sufficient condition for God’s inspired

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<sup>21</sup>James W. Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy: A Response to A. T. B. McGowan’s *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*,” *WTJ* 71 (2009): 206. Kevin Vanhoozer notes that others have questioned the “inspiration-as-providence model, wondering whether it goes far enough.” Vanhoozer continues, noting the same concern broached by Scott: “It is not enough to say that God guided those who produced the books of the Bible for the simple reason that divine providence is the ultimate factor—the remote cause—behind *all* the books that have ever been produced!” See “Triune Discourse, Part 1,” 34. Concerning Wright, see Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 522.

<sup>22</sup>B. B. Warfield, “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 157-58.

<sup>23</sup>Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse, Part 1,” 34.

word to be spoken.”<sup>24</sup> Although space does allow for a full discussion of these important matters,<sup>25</sup> it is necessary to note how providence and inspiration are distinguished theologically. The doctrine of providence establishes the biblical teaching that God is actively involved with the universe, preserving, sustaining, and directing every element of the creation for his own purposes.<sup>26</sup> The doctrine of inspiration, although rightly understood as a subset of the doctrine of providence, is viewed as a *unique* work within the sphere of God’s general activity of sustaining and directing people and events for his own ends.

It seems appropriate, therefore to formulate an additional article to the CSBI that makes a distinction between providence and inspiration, indicating clearly that inspiration is a work that sets Scripture apart from other works that God has, by his providence, decreed to come into existence. Specifically, I propose an article that (1) affirms the providence of God in preparing the authors of Scripture; (2) affirms the providence of God in securing a text that was exactly what he wanted; and (3) distinguishes clearly between God’s work of providence and his work of inspiration. The new article would read,

We affirm that God providentially prepared the authors of Scripture to write what they did. We further affirm that, as the Spirit revealed divine truth to the authors of Scripture, they wrote exactly what God intended them to write.

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<sup>24</sup>John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 249, quoted in Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse, Part 1,” 34n33.

<sup>25</sup>A full discussion of this issue would require the appraisal of various models of inspiration akin to Vanhoozer’s discussion in “Triune Discourse, Part 1,” 31-43. Vanhoozer examines three models, attempting to understand where we should place inspiration among the doctrinal loci. Should we formulate our doctrine of inspiration via our doctrine of providence, incarnation, or revelation?

<sup>26</sup>See Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 17-24; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 315-54.

We deny that God's act of inspiration can be equated with his providential preparation of the biblical authors or that it is adequate merely to claim that the Scriptures are what God intended them to be.

With this additional affirmation and denial, the CSBI would not only acknowledge the important role of providence in securing the biblical text, it would also protect the doctrine of inerrancy from the kinds of challenges offered by McGowan and Wright. In the case of McGowan, because providence is distinguished from inspiration, we are guarded from the claim that errors could have crept into the text as God providentially worked with fallen men to inscripturate his word. In the case of Wright, we are forced to reckon with rather than bypass important questions related to inerrancy.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the reference to *revelation* in the affirmation statement and to *inspiration* in the denial statement bolsters the claim that providence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for inscripturation: it was required that God disclose knowledge to the biblical writers that they could have not otherwise ascertained.

The discussion of God's providential preparation of the biblical authors and the distinction between providence and inspiration leads naturally to a concentrated focus on the human authorship of Scripture in Articles VIII-XIII. It is to this important issue I

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<sup>27</sup>See, for example, John Frame's review of Wright's book, *The Last Word*, and his critique of Wright's unwillingness to enter into the important, historical discussions related to inerrancy. "But there is a major problem of omission. If one is to deal seriously with the 'Bible wars, even somehow to transcend them, one must ask whether and how inspiration affects the *text* of Scripture.' Wright defines inspiration by saying that 'by his Spirit God guided the very different writers and editors, so that the books they produced were the books God intended his people to have' [N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005), 37]. But the same can be said about the books in my library: that God moved writers, editors, publishers, and others so that the books in my library are the ones God wants me to have. . . . So it is important to ask whether inspiration is simply divine providence, or whether it carries God's endorsement. Is God, in any sense, the *author* of these books?" (Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 522). Wright, however, never answers these kinds of questions apparently assuming that his appeal to providence says all that is necessary for the inspiration of Scripture. As we noted above, however, providence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the inscripturation of God's word.

now turn.

### **Article VIII: The Human Authorship of Scripture**

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

As I noted in chapter two, a common complaint among those who find the doctrine of inerrancy unsatisfactory is that it does not account adequately for the humanity of Scripture.<sup>28</sup> While not answering every concern in this vein of criticism, Article VIII does acknowledge the concurrence between God’s act of inspiration and the work of the human authors in writing Scripture. The affirmation portion emphasizes that God’s work of inspiration worked in such a way so as to respect the human agents’ freedom of expression, personal style, and personality. Nevertheless, it also recognizes the sovereignty of God in superintending the authors of Scripture so that their style, personal motivations for writing, and other important factors would coincide with God’s goal in providing a written revelation. The result is a text that is the very word of God, but one

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<sup>28</sup>Could it be that some of Warfield’s descriptions of the doctrine of inspiration perpetuate the idea that divine inspiration (and, by implication, inerrancy) must, by necessity, diminish Scripture’s “humanity?” For example, Warfield, commenting on the matter of revelation, states, “In the view of the Scriptures, the completely supernatural character of revelation is in no way lessened by the circumstance that it has been given through the instrumentality of men. They affirm, indeed, with the greatest possible emphasis that the Divine word delivered through men is the pure word of God, diluted with no human admixture whatever” (Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 86). By “human admixture,” Warfield clearly means anything that is *merely* human, not human as such, for it was “through the instrumentality of men” that God gave his revelation. While I am not convinced Warfield was entirely wrong to use such language—the apostle Paul gave priority to the divine aspect of his message over the human vehicle through which it came (e.g., 1 Thess 2:13)—one needs to consider whether there are *better* ways to communicate what we mean when we define the doctrine of inspiration.

that has been conveyed through the free expression of the human authors.<sup>29</sup> The denial portion reiterates the main point of the affirmation statement but highlights again that God's sovereign control over the text in no way precluded or hindered the free expression of the authors. "What is overcome or overridden by inspiration," Sproul underscores, "is not human personality, style, or literary structure, but human tendencies to distortion, falsehood, and error."<sup>30</sup>

As I have already noted in chapter 2 and previously in this chapter, one of the major complaints leveled against inerrancy is that it requires a kind of inspiration whereby God merely dictates the content of Scripture to the biblical author, or controls the author in such a way that the author himself is unaware of what he is writing. The doctrine of inspiration rightly understood, however, implies no such thing. Article VIII underscores the statements made in earlier articles by highlighting the human component

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<sup>29</sup>By "free expression" I mean that the authors wrote what they most wanted to write according to what they judged to be true and fitting for a given situation; such a notion expresses a common view of self-determination and avoids both positions of indeterminism and hyper-determinism. However, while Article VIII is intended to counter the claim an inerrant text implies a mechanical theory of inspiration where the authors were mere automatons through whom God wrote his word (see Sproul, *Explaining*, 19-20), "free expression" may not be the best way to describe every instance of divine inspiration. In some cases, it is clear that God did dictate his word to the biblical authors; in such instances as God giving Moses the words of the law (Exod 34:27), Jeremiah's dictation to Baruch the words of God (Jer 36:4), or Christ's directions to the seven churches (Rev 2-3), the authors were not used in such a way so as to respect their "freedom of expression." In these cases they were told what to say and how to say it. A thorough analysis of Scripture, however, reveals that inspiration *on the whole* was a process that worked concurrently with the human authors where the authors were free to express themselves in the manner they saw fit. The final product, by the work of inspiration, was the very word of God. Peter Jenson affirms that in some cases, dictation is a proper way to describe the interaction between the divine and human author in the writing of Scripture. See Jenson, *The Revelation of God*, 158; see also Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 141-42; and Gordon R. Lewis, "The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 258-59. Sinclair Ferguson rightly notes that our understanding of inspiration and how God brought men to write his word must involve examining the entire Bible, not just portions of it. "The nature of inspiration cannot be determined in an a priori fashion from the simple fact of it. . . . The mode of inspiration must be discovered exegetically, not dogmatically, in an a posteriori manner, by the examination of the whole Scripture, with special attention to its reflection on the mode of the production of its various parts." Sinclair Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 56.

<sup>30</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 20.

in the Bible's authorship. Yet, a question: Can we reframe this article in such a way that the human component of Scripture's authorship might be emphasized in a more clear and helpful way?

On the whole, Article VIII clearly emphasizes the divine initiative and superintending results of inspiration. The article affirms that it was *God's* work of inspiration through the authors *he* chose and prepared; it was *God* who *caused* these writers to write the words that *he* selected without overriding their personalities. Yet, because this article provides us with a clear, biblical emphasis on the divine source of Scripture and God's superintending work to secure a particular text, the assertion that inspiration does not supersede the personalities of the authors seems only to beg the question. Said another way: If we affirm that God worked in such a way so as to cause the writers "to use the very words he chose," one wonders how such a statement can comport in any meaningful way with the previous statement about God utilizing the "distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers." Granted, the mode of inspiration is a mystery (Article VII), but this does not mean that we are unable to describe more fully the author's role in communicating the divine word so that we might avoid question-begging assertions about the nature of inspiration. The statement, "We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared," is a claim that a concurrence exists between the divine work of inspiration and the human work of writing the Scripture. We see clearly the human component at work throughout Scripture. For example, the author of Ecclesiastes drew upon basic observations of human life to form his argument (Eccl 1:13-14); Luke utilized historical resources to write his accounts

(Luke 1:1-14); Paul offered his own counsel to instruct the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:12-17); and the Holy Spirit assisted the natural memory of the disciples so that they could record accurately the words and ways of Jesus (John 14:25). What is needed in this CSBI is a description of the human work of authorship that lends credence specifically to the claim that human personalities and literary styles were not overruled by God's act of inspiration. With these things in mind, I suggest the following addition to the affirmation statement in Article VIII. The revised affirmation statement would read (with additions in italics),

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He chose and prepared. *We further affirm that in most cases, the biblical writers wrote according to their own free expression, writing what they most wanted to write.*

By acknowledging the biblical authors' ability to write what they most desired to write, Article VIII now significantly relieves the tension produced by the seemingly incongruent statements about God's sovereign control over the text and the full humanity of the writers. From a divine standpoint, God sovereignly caused every word of Scripture; from the human standpoint, men wrote what they most wanted to write, according to their own research, background, personality, and literary skill. With the phrase, "in most cases," the revised statement acknowledges that Scripture indicates that a kind of dictation was sometimes—though rarely—used to write the text.

With the addition of the above statement, the denial can now reassert a key truth concerning inerrancy and the human authorship of the Bible. As I noted in chapter 2 and already in this chapter, one of the primary complaints among evangelical non-inerrantists is that inerrancy inherently limits the humanity of the human authors. As we will see in the discussion of the following article (IX), much of this critique is

grounded in a faulty epistemological principle regarding human nature. In the article currently under discussion (XIII), I suggest the addition of a statement to the denial section that plainly asserts that no inherent conflict exists between affirmations of inerrancy and the claim that God's work of inspiration respected the full humanity of the authors. The revised denial portion would read,

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities. *We further deny that inerrancy necessarily requires a limitation on the humanity of the biblical authors.*

Although the following article (IX) indicates that the "finitude and fallenness" of the biblical authors does not necessarily entail the introduction of error into their writings, the above addition to Article VIII offers a slightly different nuance by asserting that inerrancy does not conflict with the claim that the Bible was written through the free agency of the human authors. By touching upon a related matter, however, this additional statement leads Article VIII naturally into the affirmations and denials of Article IX.

#### **Article IX: The Definition of Inerrancy**

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Having upheld in the previous article the concurrence between God's work of inspiration and the human act of writing, Article IX addresses the matter of human authorship in more depth, now with critical epistemological and anthropological concerns in view. As such, Article IX makes two important clarifications. The first concerns a distinction that must exist between the scope of the authors' knowledge and the reliability of their

communication. One of the criticisms aimed at the doctrine of inerrancy at the time the CSBI was written was that it appeared to imply that authors must possess omniscience in order accurately to convey divine truth. The affirmation statement counters this criticism and differentiates between exhaustive knowledge and reliable statements, implying that the possession of former is not required for delivery of the latter. In his work of divine inspiration, God did not bestow omniscience upon the human authors because he did not have to, but he did ensure that whatever the authors wrote was “true and trustworthy.”

The second clarification is related to the first. A criticism leveled by Karl Barth against the doctrine of inerrancy was that it truncated the human component of Scripture by removing the possibility of human error from the process of inspiration.<sup>31</sup> Inherent in Barth’s criticism, however, was a faulty epistemological principle: Barth believed that “fundamental to our humanity [is] that we are liable to error.”<sup>32</sup> The denial portion, with careful nuance, counters this misguided assumption by rejecting any logical necessity between the property of existing as a human and the property of mistake-making.

Furthermore, it is incorrect to say that a tendency to err is an essential property of human personhood. Consider a prelapsarian Adam and Eve, for example, or saints in their future glorified states; these are both instances of genuine human personhood where there is no commission of error (Adam and Eve) or a tendency to err (glorified saints). Therefore, because the tendency to err is not an essential property of human personhood—it is an accidental property—and because it is not necessary that persons err

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

every time they speak or write, the CSBI can maintain the doctrine of inerrancy while simultaneously holding to the full humanity of the biblical authors: nothing truly human is lost in a process by which God guarantees the writing of an error-free text.

Even with these clear affirmations and denials, however, the epistemological and anthropological issues raised here reside at the center of the current inerrancy debate. As I noted in chapter 2, Kenton Sparks appears to have blurred the distinction between exhaustive knowledge and truthful utterance. To Sparks, the doctrine of inerrancy implies that the biblical authors required omniscience—a “god-like grasp on the truth”<sup>33</sup>—in order to speak truthfully in all the areas on which they wrote. Peter Enns, A. T. B. McGowan, as well as Sparks, all ground their argument for an errant text, at least partially, on the assumption that genuine human personhood entails the property of mistake making: to assert an inerrant text implies—demands—the conclusion that inerrantists have minimized much of the Bible’s human component.

In view of these contemporary challenges, then, I recommend the following changes to Article IX. First, explicit rebuttal of the idea that exhaustive human knowledge is necessary for the accurate conveyance of truth should be added to

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<sup>33</sup>Kenton Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 54. On the next page, Sparks concedes that reasoning from the character of God to an inerrant Scripture is legitimate, yet, he believes that such a formulation “overlook[s] that God has chosen to speak to human audiences through human authors in everyday human language” (ibid., 55). Sparks then asks, “Is it therefore possible that God has selected to speak to human beings through *adequate* rather than *inerrant* words, and is it further possible that he did so because human beings are *adequate* rather than *inerrant* readers” (ibid.)? Because these statements represent the foundation of Sparks’s argument, a few words of critique are necessary. First, Sparks appears to misunderstand the doctrine of inerrancy, at least as it is articulated in the CSBI. One of the primary contentions of the CSBI is that inerrancy must be judged according to the biblical text—a text that has been given in *everyday human language* (see especially Article XIII and the exposition). The CSBI certainly cannot be charged with “overlooking” the reality that God has spoken to mankind by way of normal human discourse. Secondly, the CSBI does not posit any inherent conflict between adequate language and inerrant language. Indeed, the distinction made by Sparks at this point is false: a person is quite able to speak both truthfully yet not exhaustively about a particular subject.

affirmation statement. The statement already rejects the idea that inspiration involved the bestowal of omniscience to the biblical authors, but an additional affirmation that touches upon the epistemological principles inherent in this particular issue would further strengthen the article. The affirmation statement would read (with changes in italics),

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write. *We further affirm that exhaustive human knowledge is not necessary to accurately convey historical events or theological truth.*

Second and related, I recommend that the denial portion of Article IX receive an additional statement addressing directly the misguided assumption that the property of existing as a human entails the property of mistake-making. Again, the denial statement takes up this issue at some level by noting that neither human fallenness nor finitude entail, by necessity, the reporting of error in the biblical text. Even so, the statement could be supplemented with more logical force.<sup>34</sup> That is, a principle could be provided in the statement that precludes the claim that inerrancy requires the loss of Scripture's human component. Note the following modification (with changes in italics):

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word. *We further deny that the commission of or tendency to error is a property essential to genuine human personhood, or that the inerrancy of Scripture and the full humanity of Scripture are logically incompatible.*

Now that we have seen the compatibility between Scripture's full humanity and the doctrine of inerrancy, I turn to consider the matter of Scripture's original autographs.

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<sup>34</sup>In his discussion of the humanity of Scripture and the tendency of some to commit the logical misstep described above, Paul Wells aptly concludes, "At this point a doctrine of Scripture in which humanity and fallibility are not synonymous is vital." Paul Wells, "The Doctrine of Scripture," in *Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 32.

## Article X: Inerrant Autographs

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Recognizing that errors have crept into copies of the autographs, the affirmation section of Article X asserts that inspiration pertains only to the original texts. If this is so, then only to the degree that copies of Scripture faithfully reflect the original autographs can they be said to be God's word.<sup>35</sup> The science of textual criticism has restored texts to a high proximity to the originals and translations that follow carefully these critical texts can provide readers a faithful rendition of Scripture in their own language.<sup>36</sup>

There are, however, some discrepancies among the copies in which it is difficult to determine the original text. The denial portion tacitly acknowledges this reality while emphasizing that such discrepancies do not affect significantly any Christian doctrine. The final sentence of the denial portion rejects directly the notion that the claim

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<sup>35</sup>Under the heading "Transmission and Translation," the exposition states, "Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the *autographa*. Yet, the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true word of God is within their reach."

<sup>36</sup>For the reliability of the New Testament text, see Daniel Wallace, "The Reliability of the New Testament Manuscripts," in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, ed. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 111-20. For more on the discipline of textual criticism, see Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Kurt Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

to inerrancy is deemed useless or irrelevant without the existence of the original manuscripts.

This particular article also has been subject recently to much scrutiny, as some evangelicals have found it unhelpful and/or inaccurate, or have simply rejected its claims outright. A. T. B. McGowan, for example, states clearly that God “did not give us an inerrant autographical text, because he did not intend to do so.”<sup>37</sup> A similar complaint lodged by James Brogan, another evangelical non-inerrantist, is that the appeal to the *autographa* is something into which inerrantists are “forced” given their commitment to God’s perfect character and the existence of variants and errors among the extant copies of Scripture.<sup>38</sup> Because I evaluated McGowan’s protest in chapter 2, I will examine the latter criticism here.

In articulating his concern over the evangelical appeal to inerrant *autographa*, Brogan draws specifically from the discipline of textual criticism. First, he surveys the history of the discipline, noting how even as early as the third century the existence of textual variants necessitated the discussion of these issues among Christian theologians.

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<sup>37</sup>McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 124.

<sup>38</sup>See John J. Brogan, “Can I Have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 100. In claiming that evangelical inerrantists, in light of their theological convictions about the nature of God and the existence of variant texts, are “forced” into the position of affirming inerrant autographs, Brogan cites Greg Bahnsen. In the article in question, however, Bahnsen does not indicate or imply that evangelicals are somehow forced into their affirmation of inerrant autographs as if their theological commitments have caused them to ignore clear evidence. On the contrary, Bahnsen’s recognition of the differences among the extant copies compels him to *refine* the doctrine of inerrancy according to the evidence. Bahnsen even chides those who have “gone to unscholarly excess in the interest of protecting the divine authority of Scripture” (Greg Bahnsen “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in *Inerrancy*, 155). He lists Philo, Owen, Hollaz, Quenstedt, and Turretin as those guilty of allowing their desire to protect the authority of God’s word to overwhelm their judgment at this point. I will discuss in more detail below Brogan’s interaction with Bahnsen.

As the Enlightenment dawned and the recovery of original texts became paramount, more New Testament manuscripts were discovered and cataloged. The result of these new discoveries was the multiplication of textual variants among the extant manuscripts. As the practice of textual criticism continued to develop, “Two extreme responses to the findings . . . emerged.”<sup>39</sup> On the one hand, some saw the existence of the multiple variant readings as an indication that they could no longer trust the authority or reliability of Scripture. On the other hand, some argued for a “God-protected” text: “These Christians argued that since the autographs were inspired and without error, then God must have faithfully preserved these original autographs throughout the history of the church and that the original text could be found in the [*Textus Receptus*].”<sup>40</sup> The TR has supporters today, but its general reliability has been strongly challenged since the late nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup>

Another view similar to those who accept the TR as the authoritative text is typically referred to as the “Majority Text” view. Proponents of this particular text claim that “the original text of the New Testament has been preserved in the text found in *the majority* of extant manuscripts.”<sup>42</sup> Brogan explains further, noting the general weaknesses in the position.

The overwhelming majority of the thousands of minuscule (cursive) manuscripts dating from the ninth through fifteenth centuries contain a very similar text (often referred to as the Byzantine text-type). . . . The basic weakness of the Majority Text argument is that there is little (if any) textual evidence that the Byzantine text existed before the fifth century. None of the manuscripts from the second through

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<sup>39</sup>Brogan, “Can I Have Your Autograph?,” 97.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

fourth centuries display this type of text. In summary, both the [TR] and Majority Text advocates begin with the theological presupposition of the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the autographs *and then* proceed to argue for the providential preservation of that text *in one particular text or text-type*.<sup>43</sup>

Evangelicals who have embraced the findings of textual criticism, therefore, appear to be at an impasse: how are they able to acknowledge a corrupt text while simultaneously maintaining the doctrine of inerrancy? The answer, historically, has been to attribute inerrancy to the original texts rather than the later copies. The discipline of textual criticism has alleviated much of the trouble created by the corruption of subsequent copies by restoring texts, as B. B. Warfield has averred, that are very close to the original.<sup>44</sup> From here, Brogan begins his critique of the evangelical approach to textual criticism and the doctrine of inerrancy.

Although he commends evangelicals for integrating textual criticism into their doctrine of Scripture, Brogan faults conservative theologians for misappropriating the data produced by textual criticism in order to “sustain untenable theological positions.”<sup>45</sup> He criticizes conservative evangelicals at three specific points. First, he chastises them for continuing to rely upon text-critical approaches that are out-of-date and do not take into adequate account recent findings that suggest that the New Testament text was more fluid than fixed, thus making very idea of an “autograph” more and more elusive.<sup>46</sup>

Secondly, Brogan chides evangelicals for misusing the discipline of textual

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 99-102.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 102-03. Brogan remarks, “Evangelicals who claim we have the exact words of the autographs in one of our current critical editions (such as UBS<sup>4</sup> or NA<sup>27</sup>) or, worse yet, in an uncritical text (the TR) tend to ignore the opinions of textual critics who argue in some cases *none* of our extant Greek manuscripts contain the original wording” (Brogan, “Can I Have Your Autograph,” 102).

criticism to overturn long-held text-critical methods. As an example, Brogan cites James Borland's exhortation to evangelicals to reject text-critical methods that tend to undermine the idea of inerrant autographs. Brogan claims, however, that Borland's attempt to turn his evangelical constituency to more conservative text-critical methods is merely a move to promote the Majority Text. Brogan dismisses such efforts as theologically biased and ultimately not helpful.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, Brogan reproves his fellow evangelicals for resorting to the claim of textual corruption in order to reconcile a difficult reading when no evidence exists for the corruption of the passage in question. Here, Brogan argues that Gleason Archer, in his attempt to refute claims from William LaSor and Dewey Beegle that certain parallel Old Testament passages (e.g., 2 Sam 10:18; 1 Chron 19:18) contained contradictory information, utilized text-critical arguments that had no actual textual warrant.<sup>48</sup> On the whole, Brogan finds that the evangelical approach to textual criticism and its integration into a larger doctrine of Scripture leaves more questions than it answers.

In light of these findings, Brogan states that he cannot accept the idea of "inerrant autographs" because (1) inerrancy is not a biblical word or concept ("trustworthiness" is a word with stronger historical precedent); (2) the New Testament authors extended the concept of "trustworthiness" to the current copies of Scripture not merely the autographs; (3) the inerrantist position does not take into account the entire phenomena of Scripture including the process of inspiration, transmission, and

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 104-5. Brogan cites James Borland, "Re-examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," *JETS* 25 (December 1982): 499-506.

<sup>48</sup>Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph?," 105. Brogan cites Gleason Archer, "Alleged Errors and Discrepancies in the Original Manuscripts of the Bible," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 55-82.

canonization; (4) inerrancy does not allow for honest inquiry into the problems posed by scholarship conducted in other areas of learning; (5) inerrancy yields little to no pastoral benefit.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in formulating their doctrine of Scripture, evangelicals must take care to explain the Bible's divine origin while also integrating all the various phenomena of Scripture. Problems posed by textual critical studies should not be troublesome, for "God is able to communicate through, and despite of, the frailties of human spoken and written language."<sup>50</sup>

While inerrantists can be thankful to Brogan for the exhortation to handle the discipline of textual criticism with greater care and integrity, they must also form their own critiques of his position, which includes a few missteps. First, Brogan never actually overturns the idea of inerrant autographs. His primary complaint with inerrantists is that they have mishandled the discipline of textual criticism and skewed specific data to fit their own theological assumptions. While Brogan's contention here may be true at some level, it does not in and of itself disprove the doctrine of inerrant autographs. The claim of an inerrant *autographa* is simple enough: inspiration and inerrancy only apply to the time when the Scripture was originally penned and the resulting inscripturated text.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 107-9.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>51</sup>The question of what constitutes the *autographa*, nevertheless, may require some rethinking by evangelicals committed to the doctrine of inerrancy. For example, concerning specifically the inspiration of the Old Testament, Michael Grisanti proposes that we understand inspiration under the larger heading of inscripturation. Inscripturation is the process whereby God's people commit his word to written documents and draw these documents into their final canonical form. We should view the process of inspiration, however, as an activity that lasts during the entire event of inscripturation. For the Old Testament specifically, we would mark this period from the time Moses first penned Genesis to the time the Old Testament canon was finally closed. Inspiration, therefore, would be applied to those who added to and organized the Old Testament books. Yet, at every point during the inscripturation process, God's word is fully inspired, trustworthy, and wholly without error. See Michael Grisanti, "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture," *JETS* 44 (2001): 577-98.

The use and misuse of textual criticism by particular evangelicals as they seek to establish the original text, however, is not tied essentially to the doctrine of inerrant *autographa*. That is, one can still contend for inerrant original autographs while acknowledging that some evangelicals have misused textual criticism in their attempt to restore those original autographs. We may not have an absolutely fixed final form of the entire text, and we can grant that our work in the discipline of textual criticism is ongoing, but this is *not* the same as saying there was never an original form of the text or that this original form was not inerrant.

One of the main problems is that Brogan has misunderstood the relationship between inerrancy and the recovery of the *autographa*. If he is suspicious of the doctrine of inerrancy on the basis of the claim that we are unable to recover the autographs, it is because he has overlooked an important matter: the recovery of the original text is a matter pertaining first to the doctrine of inspiration, then to the doctrine of inerrancy. “Inspiration relates to the *wording* of the Bible,” Daniel Wallace notes, “while inerrancy relates to the *truth* of a statement.”<sup>52</sup> Wallace helpfully illustrates this point. “If I say, ‘I am married and have four sons, two dogs, and a cat,’ that is an inerrant statement. It is not inspired, nor at all related to Scripture, but it is true. Similarly, whether Paul says, ‘we have peace’ or ‘let us have peace’ in Romans 5:1, both statements are true (though each in a different sense), though only one is inspired.”<sup>53</sup> The goal of textual criticism is to get to that originally inspired text. Wallace continues, providing two reasons for why a

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<sup>52</sup>Daniel Wallace, “The Gospel According to Bart: A Review Article of *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 334.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

position like Brogan's is problematic.

Regardless of what one thinks about the doctrine of inerrancy, the argument against it on the basis of the unknown autographs is logically fallacious. This is so for two reasons. First, we have the text of the NT *somewhere* in the manuscripts. Second, the text we have in any viable variants is no more a problem for inerrancy than other problems where the text is secure. Now, to be sure, there are some challenges in the textual variants to inerrancy. This is not denied. But there are simply bigger fish to fry when it comes to issues inerrancy faces. Thus, if conjectural emendation is unnecessary, and if no viable variant registers much of a blip on the radar called 'problems for inerrancy,' then not having the originals is a moot point for this doctrine. It is not a moot point for verbal inspiration, of course, but it is for inerrancy.<sup>54</sup>

By dismissing inerrancy in light of the claim that we do not have the original autographs, Brogan fails to acknowledge that we do in fact have much of the original text, as Wallace contends, somewhere in the manuscripts, and that the less reliable sections pose no greater threat to inerrancy than the more reliable ones. Ultimately, inerrancy as a doctrine is not dependent on whether we can recover the autographical text as it is contingent upon whether or not God inspired an error-free autograph in the first place.<sup>55</sup>

Second, Brogan appears to make the mistake of attributing the faulty text-critical positions of some evangelicals to all inerrantists. He rightly criticizes the claim that God preserved his word exclusively in a particular textual tradition like the *Textus Receptus* or the Majority Text.<sup>56</sup> But it does not follow necessarily from this critique that inerrantists cannot hold to an inerrant autographical text while also rejecting the

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 334.

<sup>55</sup>As I will note below, inerrancy *does* compel our studious search for the original text. Jason Sexton offers a defense for why inerrancy should be a prerequisite for those who seek to establish the original text. See Jason S. Sexton "NT Text Criticism and Inerrancy," *TMSJ* 17 (Spring 2006): 51-59.

<sup>56</sup>Daniel Wallace, for example, has summarily criticized the view that God has preserved his word *only* in the TR or the MT. See Daniel Wallace, "The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique," *JETS* 37 (1994): 185-215.

arguments of TR and MT proponents. For example, John Frame, an apt defender of the doctrine of inerrancy, recognizes the weaknesses of such arguments while also affirming God's preservation of the original text.<sup>57</sup>

To be fair, Brogan acknowledges that some evangelicals have departed from the TR and the MT to argue that the texts found in UBS<sup>4</sup> and the NA<sup>27</sup> are nearly identical to the original *autographa*. Yet, he finds even this position unsatisfactory. Why? Brogan hints at an answer: "Considered all together, evangelicals put together a nice, neat package. Unfortunately, those who hold these views do not consider *all* of the implications of textual criticism and, as a textual critic, I feel their solutions raise more questions than they answer."<sup>58</sup> One can assume, based on his previous critiques, that by "*all* of the implications of textual criticism" he means those that suggest that (1) recovery of an autographical text is nearly impossible; (2) the New Testament text was far more fluid in the first and second century than previously believed; and/or (3) irreconcilable errors exist in the original text. I will examine issues related to (3) below as I discuss Brogan's theological bias against inerrancy. Here, I will note that his hesitations in (1) and (2) reflect the current shift in textual criticism pertaining to the discipline's chief objectives. That is, it makes sense that Brogan would have a difficult time accepting the inerrantist text-critical proposals because the focus of his discipline as a whole over the past thirty years has moved from recovery of an original text to investigating the historical significance of the variants. Daniel Wallace explains,

Until the 1990s, there was little question that the primary objective of NT textual

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<sup>57</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 247n9.

<sup>58</sup>Brogan, "Can I have Your Autograph," 106.

criticism was to examine the copies of the NT for the purpose of determining the exact wording of the original. In 1993, Bart Ehrman's provocative book *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* appeared. [By the statement of his methodology] Ehrman . . . shifts the goal of textual criticism slightly: no longer his concern for the original words of the text as much as it with seeing the corruptions of the text in early transmissional history. Although this is not a denial of the prime objective, it is giving it considerably less weight than other textual critics had previously done.<sup>59</sup>

In his presidential address to the Southeastern regional Society of Biblical Literature in 1997, Ehrman stated that "the primary goal of textual criticism was now 'to see how the transmission of this text came to be so thoroughly enmeshed in the concerns and conflicts of the emerging Christian church.'"<sup>60</sup> David Parker, professor of theology at the University of Birmingham and one of the leading experts in the field of textual criticism, published a book that same year in which he would advocate for a new approach to the discipline. As Wallace summarizes, each manuscript of the New Testament, according to Parker,

tells a story, and it is the task of the textual critic to find out what that story is. It does not matter that the MSS differ from each other, because the objective is no longer to get back to the original text. The objective is to learn what we can about the social milieu and theological tensions that early Christians faced. In other words, Parker is assuming that the quest for the autographic text is virtually irrelevant and that the goal of textual criticism should be to focus on the rich heritage of textual variants that the scribes have bequeathed to us.<sup>61</sup>

So, if the recovery of the original text is no longer the overriding purpose of textual criticism, then Brogan's concerns may have some merit: why uphold inerrancy if we are unable to determine the original text? Some evangelicals, however, are not so ready to jettison as the principal goal of textual criticism the establishment of the original text.

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<sup>59</sup>Daniel Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism for the Twenty-First Century," *JETS* 52 (2009): 80.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.

Wallace quotes Moisés Silva who, while acknowledging the worth of text-critical goals that go beyond the recovery of the original text, still maintains that such retrieval is not only of primary importance, but even provides the framework for these other aims.<sup>62</sup>

Wallace agrees: “When all is said and done, we still must affirm the following as the *primary goal* of NT textual criticism: the study of copies of the NT for the primary purpose of determining the exact wording of the autographs.”<sup>63</sup> The kind of approach to textual criticism advocated in this new shift is ultimately self-defeating “because it has to presuppose an original text in order to blur the distinctions between it and any secondary text.”<sup>64</sup> Wallace thus concludes, “In short, the quest for the wording of the autograph is still worth fighting for.”<sup>65</sup>

It is difficult, however, to discern exactly where Brogan stands on this issue, for he also cites Moisés Silva who, while warning that we not turn UBS<sup>4</sup> or NA<sup>27</sup> into another *Textus Receptus*, acknowledges that the UBS reflects “a broad consensus and . . . thus provides a convenient starting point for further work.”<sup>66</sup> Point taken: because the inerrantist position does not depend necessarily on a theology of preservation that requires God’s sovereign protection of one particular textual tradition, evangelicals

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 84. See Moisés Silva, “Response,” in *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. David Alan Black (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 149.

<sup>63</sup>Wallace, “Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism,” 85. Wallace ties this shift in textual criticism to a post-modern ethos that has crept into the discipline of textual criticism just as it has in virtually all areas of learning.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Brogan, “Autograph,” 106. Brogan is quoting Moisés Silva, “Modern Critical Editions and Apparatuses of the Greek New Testament,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 290.

can affirm an inerrant *autographa* while also fully acknowledging errors in subsequent copies, the existence of multiple manuscripts and subsequent textual variants, and the ongoing need to improve the current text. Why must this present a problem for inerrantists or the notion of an inerrant *autographa*?

Generally speaking, it appears that Brogan has a bias against inerrancy that will not allow him to embrace the text-critical conclusions of any inerrantist. In other words, although Brogan builds his critique around the discipline of textual criticism, he cannot help but reflect theological assumptions himself, something of which he accuses inerrantists throughout his article. In the end, he even resorts to *theological and philosophical categories* to complete his critique. For example, in the final section of his article, Brogan states that he rejects inerrancy because it is neither a biblical concept nor a teaching with historical precedent. He prefers “trustworthiness,” claiming the church fathers as his reference point.<sup>67</sup> He dislikes the inerrantist view because, in his judgment, it does not take into account the whole process of inscripturation: inspiration, redaction, canonization, transmission, and translation. But certainly he cannot mean that evangelical theologians have failed to produce literature that interacts with these issues

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<sup>67</sup>Here he cites Greg Bahnsen’s article, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” rejecting Bahnsen’s claim that the authors of Scripture, in their use of the Old Testament, made a distinction between extant copies and the autographs. Brogan, however, does not explain why he does not accept Bahnsen’s argument, only that he finds it “completely unconvincing,” presumably because “[Bahnsen] allows his theological presuppositions to dictate the outcome of his findings rather than opening his views to be challenged and perhaps changed by the evidence at hand” (Brogan, “Can I Have Your Autograph,” 107). Brogan states further that Bahnsen “fails to recognize that his distinctions between autograph are purely modern constructs” (ibid.). But these are assertions, not arguments. And, if one refuses to engage an opponent at the level of his allegedly flawed presuppositions while also neglecting to interact with any of the evidence presented, then one will only be guilty of begging the question himself. In my judgment, Bahnsen’s argument for the biblical author’s distinction between copy and autograph is sound and grounded squarely *on the biblical text*. Brogan does not attempt to interact at any level with Bahnsen’s arguments or evidence.

from an inerrantist perspective.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Brogan follows his complaint with a question:

How do we explain that except for a small handful of people who were permitted to read possibly one of the autographs, everyone has heard and responded to God through reading or hearing “errant” copies of the biblical text, including the translations based on the ‘scandalously corrupt’ Greek text used by most evangelicals today?<sup>69</sup>

Here Brogan appears to accuse inerrantists of promoting a view of Scripture that requires the transmission of error-free copies in order to preserve the gospel and promote salvation. Evangelical theologians can gladly acknowledge that God has been pleased to save a multitude of sinners over the centuries with copies of Scripture that were far from perfect. The doctrine of inerrant *autographa* does not imply that inerrant copies are required in order for someone to repent and believe the gospel; no evangelical embraces this idea. Yet, neither does God’s grace in saving people with less-than-perfect copies alleviate the responsibility continually to work for a better, more accurate text.

Brogan also complains that inerrancy does not allow “honest inquiry into the historical or scientific details within the biblical record or the complex history of the Bible’s composition, transmission, and canonization.”<sup>70</sup> By claiming that the Bible is without error in every detail, one is forced to “explain away *every* challenge that is made

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<sup>68</sup>To mention a few: D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984); D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Conn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1988); Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1986); Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

<sup>69</sup>Brogan, “Can I Have Your Autograph,” 108.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

about the Bible's accuracy."<sup>71</sup> Well-founded scientific, archeological, and historical arguments or hypothesis must be ignored; the discoveries of source, form, and redaction criticism disregarded; and internal discrepancies in the text of Scripture overlooked.

"The possibility that there be 'mistakes' in the way information is presented or inaccuracies in details or discrepancies between accounts," Brogan protests, "is not even an option open to an inerrantist." Brogan continues, accusing inerrantists of "forc[ing] the biblical authors to comply with modern standards of history and science concerning 'truth' and 'error,' although these categories are completely foreign to the culture and contextual worlds of the biblical authors."<sup>72</sup>

While Brogan's generalizations in all three statements fail to take into account the work done in these areas by evangelical scholars laboring from an inerrantist perspective—it is simply unfair to imply that on the whole evangelical inerrantists "ignore" or "explain away" problems produced by historical-critical studies or science<sup>73</sup>—it must be noted that Brogan has now subtly moved his critique out of the realm of textual criticism into epistemology. He is no longer operating from the standpoint of questioning the claim of inerrantists concerning the accuracy of our current copies of Scripture; rather he is claiming that inerrancy as a doctrine per se is unfeasible because it disallows critical scholarship, rejects the assimilation of discoveries in other areas of learning, and thrusts a theory of truth upon Scripture that is alien to the biblical authors and their cultural setting. But with these concerns he is reaching beyond the

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Unless, of course, one is committed to the position that the Bible does contain errors. If this is one's position, then no matter how rigorous the treatment, one will never be satisfied that it was thorough or honest enough until it admits to errors in the text of Scripture.

discipline of textual criticism and appealing to matters related to knowledge theory and how one structures the interface between biblical affirmations and historical research. I bring up Brogan's couched appeal to epistemology here only to demonstrate that there is more aggravating his general discomfort with inerrancy than what textual criticism affords.

I have spent significant space in my critique of Brogan, not to belabor my criticism of his position, but to illuminate the state of the current debate over matters of textual criticism and the inerrancy of the Bible. While I find Brogan's argument generally weak, I do think he highlights ways in which the CSBI might be strengthened in the manner it addresses textual criticism and the inerrancy of the autographs.

An updated CSBI, therefore, should acknowledge the changing shape of textual criticism and assert directly the possibility of recovering the original text. Care should be taken, however, to root inerrancy in God and in Scripture rather than in the discipline of textual criticism. One of the mistakes made by evangelicals, zealous for absolute certainty in the recovery of the original text, is to—wittingly or unwittingly—ground the doctrine of inerrancy in this discipline. When this doctrinal misplacement occurs, inerrancy becomes *dependent upon* the recovery of an errorless original text. Therefore, I recommend the modification of Article X that acknowledges the state of current text-critical scholarship and the addition of another article that clearly distinguishes the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy from the doctrine of preservation and the discipline of textual criticism.

Regarding Article X, I suggest only the denial portion undergo any changes. The affirmation statement carefully places inspiration in the original autographs, while

also avoiding two potential pitfalls: (1) the suggestion that recovery of the original text is dependent upon the preservation of one text type; and (2) the implication that the original text can be recovered with absolute certainty. Concerning the second pitfall, the statement affirms the general reliability of our current text-critical work by using the phrase “great accuracy,” but it also eludes the indefensible position of utter epistemological certainty as it pertains to recovery of the original text.<sup>74</sup>

The denial portion of Article X would answer the matter of recent developments in the area of textual criticism, while also retaining the original denial that the absence of the autographs injures any major element of the Christian faith. I do, however, recommend the excision of the last sentence of the denial section due to its redundancy. The reworded affirmation statement, the addition to the denial portion, and the proposed additional article (see below) all demonstrate the relevance of the doctrine of inerrant autographs and provide ample reason for why the absence of the *autographa* does not render such affirmations invalid. The updated denial portion of Article X, then, would read as follows (additions in italics):

*We deny that manuscript discoveries or other developments in the discipline of textual criticism hinder rather than strengthen the possibility of determining an original text. We further deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs.*

The addition of another article to the document would bolster these affirmations and denials by (1) acknowledging the need for ongoing work in the discipline of textual

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<sup>74</sup>Wallace helpfully comments concerning the matter of textual criticism and epistemological certainty. “Can we know with absolute certainty that what we have in our hands today exactly replicates the original text? Of course not. We can never have absolute certainty about any historical documents whose originals have vanished. And postmodernism is a corrective to the naïve epistemological triumphalism of the evangelical community. So, if we do not have absolute certainty about the wording of the original, what do we have? We have overwhelming probability that the wording in our printed Bibles is pretty close” (Wallace, “Challenges to New Testament Textual Criticism,” 86).

criticism; and (2) denying the claim that the doctrine of inerrancy requires a perfect reconstruction of the autographs. Both statements taken together under this new article would help further detach the doctrine of inerrancy from dependency upon the discipline of textual criticism. The additional article, under the heading, “The Usefulness of the Existing Copies,” would read:

We affirm that the work of textual criticism is ongoing as we continually seek to improve our current text for the benefit of the church.

We deny that the transmission of perfect copies is required to affirm the inerrancy of the autographs, or that an error-free rendition of the autograph is necessary for one to respond in faith to the gospel. We further deny that the doctrine of inerrancy requires rather than motivates our recovery of the original text.

These new affirmation and denial statements acknowledge the need for continued work in the discipline of textual criticism but simultaneously reject the idea that gospel proclamation and response depends upon full restoration of the autographical text.

Having established the matter of inerrant *autographa*, the CSBI now moves to consider the relationship between the word *inerrancy* and another related theological term, *infallibility*.

#### **Article XI: Inerrancy and Infallibility**

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

As the debate over inerrancy developed in the 1960s and 1970s, a distinction between the words *inerrant* and *infallible* began to emerge as evangelical inerrantists and non-inerrantists refined their respective positions. Although *inerrant* was used occasionally prior to the mid-twentieth century, *infallible* was used most often to denote the Bible’s

nature as an error-free revelation. Often, the words were used interchangeably. It was not until some evangelicals began to articulate their position by using the term *infallible* to mean that the Bible does not mislead in areas of faith and practice but may be mistaken in areas of history or science that inerrantists were required to express their position by utilizing with greater exclusivity the word *inerrant*.<sup>75</sup> These two terms, then, came to take on divergent though related definitions. *Infallible* referred to the idea that the Bible does not mislead readers in matters of faith and practice, but the term no longer implied that Scripture is without error in all that it affirms. This definition was still able to retain some of the original meaning of the word—that Scripture never fails to fulfill the purpose for which it was given (see Isa 55:11)—because non-inerrantists held that God’s chief intention in inspiring Scripture was to provide Christians with a guide for salvation and Christian living.<sup>76</sup> *Inerrancy* affirmed the idea that Scripture does not mislead, but the

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<sup>75</sup>For example, in 1977, Stephen Davis, a professing evangelical, stated that he believed in infallibility but not inerrancy. “But despite these problem areas [in Scripture], I can and do believe that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. In matters of faith and practice it does not mislead us. But the specific highly technical claim that the Bible is inerrant is one that in all humility I cannot affirm.” While recognizing that these two words are synonymous, Davis clearly distinguishes between their definitions as they were being articulated in the contemporary theological milieu. “Let us say that a book is ‘inerrant’ if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements. Thus to claim that the Bible is inerrant is to claim much more than that it is ‘the only infallible rule of faith and practice. It is to claim that the Bible contains *no errors at all*—none in history, geography, botany, astronomy, sociology, psychiatry, economics, geology, logic, mathematics, or any area whatsoever. . . . To many persons the term ‘infallible’ seems to connote the notion that the Bible is entirely trustworthy in matters of faith and practice. . . . The word ‘inerrant’ is a technical theological term used almost nowhere else but in the context of the theological debates about the Bible. It seems to connote the notion that the Bible is entirely trustworthy on all matters. Accordingly, I will use the two terms in these senses in this book.” Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 15-16. Prior to Davis’s book, E. J. Young made a distinction between “infallible” and “inerrant.” See E. J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 113. Jason Sexton believes Young was the first evangelical to distinguish these terms. See Jason S. Sexton, “How Far Beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate,” *Them* 34, no. 1 (2009): 29.

<sup>76</sup>As I. Howard Marshall would contend in a 1983 publication on the doctrine of inspiration. Basing his argument on the text of 2 Tim 3:15-16, Marshall observed that God’s principal intention in inspiring Scripture was to “provide the instruction that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” I. Howard Marshall, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 53. Marshall continues, “The purpose of God in the composition of the Scriptures was to guide people to salvation and the

term also spoke explicitly to the error-free nature of all Scripture, not just portions related to faith and practice.<sup>77</sup>

The framers of the CSBI acknowledged the theological development of these two terms but refused to allow an impenetrable dichotomy to form between them. That is, evangelical inerrantists at the time wanted to make clear that they embraced just as fully the idea that Scripture does not mislead in matters of faith and practice and that it fulfills its divinely given purpose, and they also wanted to affirm that the scope of Scripture's reliability reached beyond these areas to "all the matters it addresses." Furthermore, it was essential to highlight the logical problem inherent in positing that Scripture could be infallible but simultaneously errant, especially in light of the historic definition of *infallibility*. Sproul explains,

Though the words infallible and inerrant have often been used interchangeably and virtually as synonyms in our language, nevertheless there remains a historic, technical distinction between the two words. Infallibility has to do with the question of ability or potential. That which is infallible is said to be unable to make mistakes or to err. The distinction here . . . is between the hypothetical and the real. That which is inerrant is that which in fact does not err. Again, theoretically, something may be fallible and at the same time inerrant. That is, it would be possible for someone to err who in fact does not err. However, the reverse is not true. If someone is infallible, that means he cannot err; and if he cannot err, then he does not err. To assert that something is infallible yet at the same time errant is either to distort the meaning of "infallible" and/or "errant," or else to be in a state of confusion.<sup>78</sup>

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associated way of life. From this statement we may surely conclude that God made the Bible all that it needs to be in order to achieve its purpose. It is in this sense that that the word 'infallible' is properly applied to the Bible; it means that it is 'in itself a true and sufficient guide, which may be trusted implicitly. . . . We may therefore suggest that 'infallible' means that the Bible is entirely trustworthy for the purposes for which God inspired it" (ibid.).

<sup>77</sup>For brief yet helpful summaries of the use of these two words in light of the past and current waves of the debate, see J. I. Packer, "John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 144-45; and Daniel J. Treier, "Scripture and Hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Treier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38-40.

<sup>78</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 25.

In light of this logical misstep made by some who were denying inerrancy in favor of infallibility, Article XI denied that one can maintain the former without affirming the latter.

In the recent wave of the inerrancy debate, however, the question of how to navigate these two terms has again come to the forefront. A. T. B. McGowan, for example, argues that *infallibility* stands as the historic evangelical position and evangelicals should therefore embrace the word in place of *inerrancy*.<sup>79</sup> John Frame, a strong advocate of inerrancy, sides with Sproul and likewise argues that, given the dictionary definition of these two terms, *infallibility* should not be viewed as a weaker term than *inerrancy* (as McGowan suggests), but as a stronger term, for the latter states that the Bible is without error, while the former claims that it is impossible for the Bible to err.<sup>80</sup> James Scott concurs, critiquing McGowan's position:

However, the terms *inerrancy* and *infallibility* should not be used to represent different theological positions at all. The original and general meaning of infallible is 'incapable of error,' and *inerrant* means 'free from error.' Since God is incapable of making an erroneous statement, it follows that the statements in his word, the Scriptures, cannot contain any errors. And if Scripture *cannot* contain any errors, or is infallible, then it necessarily follows that it *does not* contain any errors, or is inerrant. So infallibility implies inerrancy. Accordingly, the terms infallibility and inerrancy have often been used virtually interchangeably—at least by those who believe that Scripture is free from error.<sup>81</sup>

Kevin Vanhoozer, however, takes *infallible* in a slightly different way than Sproul, Frame, and Scott, choosing to emphasize the idea that Scripture is unable to fail in its divine purpose, while simultaneously rejecting views of infallibility that limit Scripture's

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<sup>79</sup>McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 123-64.

<sup>80</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 168-69.

<sup>81</sup>Scott, "Reconsidering Inerrancy," 189-89.

reliability to the faith and practice portions. Vanhoozer works from this definition in his discussion of how speech act theory relates to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

Perhaps the most surprising consequence of considering Scripture as a collection of divinely inspired discourse acts is the rehabilitation of the concept of infallibility. . . . Like all other human acts, speech acts are fallible—liable to fail. God’s speech, however, is not so susceptible . . . Scripture is . . . indefatigable in its illocutionary intent. It encourages, warns, asserts, reproves, instructs, commands—all infallibly. Note that this makes inerrancy a *subset* of infallibility. On those occasions when Scripture does affirm something, the affirmation is true. Thus, we may continue to hold to inerrancy while at the same time acknowledging that Scripture does many other things besides assert. . . . God’s word invariably accomplishes its purpose (infallibility); and when this purpose is assertion, the proposition of the speech act is true (inerrancy).<sup>82</sup>

*Infallibility*, therefore, while not replacing *inerrancy*, serves as a category that is “broader in scope, logically prior, and covers all of Scripture’s authoritative functions.”<sup>83</sup> This framework, then, provides a way forward for the doctrine of inerrancy by “affirm[ing] that Scripture is trustworthy in all matters on which it intends to speak.”<sup>84</sup>

Against those who hold too narrow a view of inerrancy, we have pointed out that Scripture’s truthfulness involves more than mere adherence to a principle of strict historical correspondence. The manifold ways in which texts say truly . . . include more than wooden historical correspondence. On the other hand, our proposed view of infallibility must acknowledge those biblical texts that do indeed have as one of their primary purposes the communication of historical information. . . . In these cases too, as in any others, Scripture speaks infallibly.<sup>85</sup>

Vanhoozer’s proposal allows for all of Scripture to correspond to reality, even if certain truths are borne by genres that are not strictly historical. He continues,

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<sup>82</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 94-95.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 102-3.

Scriptural truth is neither enslaved to the idea of correspondence to historical fact alone nor relegated to the realm of faith and practice. Rather, as infallible, Scripture successfully and truly speaks about many things in many ways, all of which ‘correspond to reality.’ Far from limiting inerrancy, our proposed sense of infallibility actually enlarges it and makes clear the ways in which Scripture may be said to be both successful in its meaning-intents and wholly true. Scripture speaks truth in many ways.<sup>86</sup>

Although Vanhoozer’s proposal relies upon taking *infallible* to mean “unable to fail,” he is entirely within the basic connotation of the word to do so (see table 1).<sup>87</sup>

Table 1. Lexical definition of infallible and infallibility

Infallible	Infallibility
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Of persons, their judgments, etc.: Not liable to be deceived or mistaken; incapable of erring.</li> <li>2. Of things: Not liable to fail, unfailling.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The quality or fact of being infallible or exempt from liability to err.</li> <li>2. The quality of being unfailling or not liable to fail; unfailling certainty.</li> </ol>

So, even though Vanhoozer’s use of the word *infallible* to mean that which does not fail is completely legitimate, it appears, at least lexically, that the words *infallible* and *infallibility* refer chiefly to the definitions provided by Sproul, Frame, and Scott mentioned above. It would be irresponsible, however, to conclude that Vanhoozer’s proposal is undermined by the fact that it relies upon a secondary definition of the word *infallible*. Vanhoozer’s scheme is based upon the argument that the secondary definition, considered in the realm of biblical semantics, actually provides the logical grounding to

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>87</sup>Definitions taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7: 915.

affirm the primary definition, for one must first determine what the Scripture is doing before one can determine whether or not it has committed an error.

Furthermore, Vanhoozer's proposal affords us categories with which we can distinguish between these two definitions of *infallible*. As Vanhoozer mentions in his own survey of the history of the word, *infallible* "until recently was the church's near unanimous choice for expressing its high view of Scripture as 'exempt from the liability to err,' or 'not liable to fail.' This traditional sense of infallibility is virtually identical with the meaning of the more recent term 'inerrancy'—freedom from error."<sup>88</sup> The only problem, of course, is that *infallible* has a secondary meaning which *inerrancy* does not share; namely, that Scripture is "unable to fail." In the final analysis, however, inerrancy still relates to both the primary and secondary meanings of *infallible*. It relates to the primary meaning because *inerrancy* is the fulfillment of potential: Scripture *cannot* err (infallibility) and therefore *does not* err (inerrancy). *Inerrancy* relates to the secondary meaning of *infallibility* because it resides as a subcategory, affirming one of the many ways Scripture "cannot fail."<sup>89</sup>

So, where does Article XI fall in this discussion? As we have already seen, Sproul contends that *infallible* as it is used in Article XI means unable to err. It is also

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<sup>88</sup>Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 101-2.

<sup>89</sup>See Gregg Allison's slight objection to Vanhoozer's proposal. Allison argues that we should not so quickly relegate *inerrancy* to only those portions of Scripture that can be readily evaluated according to true-false categories. Vanhoozer appeals to *infallibility* in order to account for all speech acts of Scripture; inerrancy, he claims, only applies to assertions (see my discussion of speech act theory below for a brief summary of these linguistic categories). Allison contends that all speech acts in Scripture contain propositional content and therefore fall under the *inerrancy* category. See Gregg Allison, "Speech Act Theory and its Implication for the Doctrine of the Inerrancy/Infallibility of Scripture," *Philosophia Christi* 18 (1995): 10-12. Even stories that are not strictly historical (Vanhoozer appeals to Jesus' narrative of the prodigal son) bear propositional elements that must be counted inerrant for they tell us things about the character of God, the nature of true forgiveness, the danger of self-righteousness, and other important spiritual realities that surely correspond with reality.

apparent that the article means to communicate three things with regard to the word *infallible*: (1) Scripture does not mislead; (2) Scripture is true in *all* that it affirms, not merely the portions related to faith and practice; and (3) there is a logical inconsistency in affirming that Scripture can be *infallible* and at the same time contain errors.

So, it appears that in Article XI *infallible* has reference, primarily, to matters of truth and error. Accordingly, the matter of success or failure is therefore found in whether or not Scripture communicates that which is true: to say that Scripture does not fail is to say specifically that Scripture does not fail to accurately convey all matters on which it touches. This definition of *infallibility*, however, has been challenged by some evangelicals (McGowan) and nuanced by others (Vanhoozer). An updated CSBI, therefore, must take into account the way the word *infallible* has been used since the document was first written, making it clear what definitions are in view. In so doing, the CSBI can offer linguistic and theological precision as to what *infallible* really means and how it is used in reference to *inerrancy*, thus promoting clarity for future discussion and precluding the word's misuse among evangelicals.

I propose, therefore, the following changes to Article XI. First, the article must affirm that *infallible*, by definition, means unable to err. As such, the affirmation will highlight more explicitly the logical inconsistency of using *infallible* as a term preferable to *inerrancy*. Secondly, the affirmation should recognize the legitimacy of using *infallible* to mean “unable to fail,” making sure to link this definition to *inerrancy* as it relates to Scripture's varied speech acts. The revised affirmation statement would read (with changes in italics),

We affirm that Scripture, as a result of divine inspiration, is *infallible* and is therefore unable to err or mislead in any way. *We further affirm that Scripture is*

*infallible and therefore will not fail to achieve the purpose for which God has given it.*

The denial portion of Article XI will draw out with greater clarity the logical misstep in attempts to place infallibility at odds with inerrancy already addressed in the affirmation.

It will also reject the attempt to use infallible as a term preferable to inerrancy.

We deny the legitimacy of asserting that Scripture is infallible yet may contain errors. *We further deny that it is appropriate to use infallible as a term in opposition to inerrant in our description of Scripture.*

Having offered a clear definition of infallibility and its relation to inerrancy, I now turn to consider the central article of the CSBI.

### **Article XII: The Extent of Inerrancy**

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

If Articles XI-XIII constitute the heart of the CSBI, then it could very well be said that Article XII comprises the heart of the heart—that it is the most important article of this section. Article XII provides a clear, succinct definition of inerrancy while also affirming its comprehensive scope: just like inspiration, inerrancy should be applied to the entire Bible, not just “spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes.” As we saw in chapters 1 and 2, those who object to the inerrantist position are happy to accept that certain “theological” sections of the Bible are without error; when it comes to the empirically verifiable aspects of Scripture—the historical, scientific, and geographic content—there is room for the idea that the biblical authors made some mistakes. The framers of the CSBI answered these challenges directly and affirmed that inerrancy included all

Scripture—empirically verifiable content included.

Given the challenges we noted in chapter 2 and the overall controversy surrounding the words *inerrant* and *inerrancy*, however, it seems appropriate to consider how we might modify this brief definition in order to express with greater clarity what is meant by these words. First, I suggest that the affirmation statement reflect an awareness of the many contemporary challenges we have seen previously in this chapter and in chapter 2. Specifically, our definition of inerrancy should now include references not only to falsehood and deception, but also to unintentional mistakes. Also, in order to link the concept of inerrancy with the positive parallel concept that the Bible is truthful in all that it affirms, I recommend the inclusion of an explanatory parenthetical statement that asserts the truthfulness of Scripture. The revised affirmation statement would read (with changes in italics),

We affirm that all of Scripture inerrant—*that is, entirely truthful*—being free from any falsehood, deceptive statements, or *unintentional mistakes*. *We further affirm that inerrancy is attributed to Scripture, not merely to the character of God.*<sup>90</sup>

The denial portion of Article XII is vital because it strikes right at the core of the inerrancy controversy. Inerrancy is applied particularly (though not exclusively) to biblical statements that touch upon areas of science and history precisely because these are the areas that were subject to significant challenge, originally, from non-evangelical scholars: to say that the Scripture is inerrant is to say specifically that it makes no error when it speaks to historical, geographic, or scientific matters. The denial portion of Article XII addresses two areas in which the truth of biblical affirmations are to triumph over the declarations of science: creation and the flood. The framers were careful,

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<sup>90</sup>This last additional sentence answers the claim made by Kenton Sparks who is ready to affirm the inerrancy of God but not of Scripture. See Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 256.

however, to avoid privileging certain hermeneutical conclusions over others by remaining silent on how one should understand the literary genre of Genesis or the extent of the flood. The aim of Article XII is to affirm that whatever Scripture teaches concerning these empirically verifiable matters cannot be contradicted by the assertions of science. The determination of *what* the Scripture teaches on these issues is a matter that allows for some interpretational variety.<sup>91</sup>

This does not mean, however, that science does not have some bearing on our interpretation of Scripture. As an example of how science does impact our reading of the Bible, Sproul reminds us of a time in the Middle Ages when the church, because of its misinterpretation of Scripture, wrongly chastised Galileo as a heretic for proposing that the earth was not the center of the universe or solar system. The uproar over Galileo's discovery, however, led the church to reevaluate its understanding of Scripture at this point. "Upon reexamining what Scripture really taught, the church came to the conclusion that there was no real conflict with science on this question of geocentricity because the Bible did not in fact in any place explicitly teach or assert that the earth was the center of either the solar system or the universe."<sup>92</sup> In this case, the findings of science helped correct a misreading of Scripture and brought the church to a more faithful interpretation. Yet, such examples, Sproul avers, do not grant us the freedom to "reinterpret Scripture to force it into conformity to secular theories of origins or the like."<sup>93</sup> Science can prompt us to reconsider our interpretations, but it should never

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<sup>91</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 27.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

preside over Scripture as an authority to which Scripture must submit.

The CSBI's omission of specific hermeneutical conclusions concerning matters of science is an important feature to recognize for the very reason that there were differing opinions over these issues even among those who signed the original document. The issue of whether Genesis 1, for example, should be understood as describing actual twenty-four hour days or long day-ages does not find uniform agreement among all the original signatories of the CSBI: some were young-earth creationists, others were old-earth creationists. Original signatory Gleason Archer would even argue in an article published six years after the inaugural writing of the CSBI that young-earth creationists were undermining inerrancy.<sup>94</sup> The document, then, could not bind inerrancy to either one of these interpretations; it could only conclude that whatever Scripture did indeed affirm cannot be reversed by scientific pronouncements.

The evangelical debate over the issue of origins and, specifically, how we are

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<sup>94</sup>Gleason Archer, "A Response to the Trustworthiness of Scripture in Areas Relating to Natural Science," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 325. Archer contends that a twenty-four hour day interpretation of Gen 1 undercuts inerrancy because such an interpretation "gives rise to an insoluble contradiction with Genesis 2" (ibid., 325). According to Archer, it is impossible to believe that Adam could have completed his assignment to classify and name the animals (Gen 2:19) in a mere twenty-four hours. Without the aid of computer technology, Archer asserts, "it is safe to conclude that Adam must have required several months at least to carry out this project in an adequate fashion—especially in view of the factor of personal fellowship with each specimen to be assigned a distinctive name" (ibid., 326). Add to Adam's duty to name all the animals his divinely induced slumber and God's fashioning of Eve from Adam's rib and we are quickly running out of time in a normal solar day. Because *yōm* ("day") can mean more than a twenty-four hour day in the immediate context and greater context of Scripture (e.g., Gen 2:4; Jer 46:10, respectively), a responsible hermeneutical methodology compels us to accept an interpretation that does not require Adam to fulfill such a massive task in less than twenty-four hours. But Archer goes farther, claiming emphatically that the twenty-four hour position should be abandoned on the basis of hermeneutical factors alone. "Entirely apart from any findings of modern science or challenges of contemporary scientism, the twenty-four hour theory was never correct and should never have been believed—except by those who are bent on proving the presence of genuine contradictions in Scripture" (ibid., 329).

to understand the creation narrative in Genesis, continues to this very day.<sup>95</sup> The debate, rigorous and complex as it may be, can be summarized rather straightforwardly. Those who hold to a twenty-hour day interpretation of Genesis 1:1-31 believe that old-earth creationists are subtly—albeit, in many cases, unwittingly—exchange the authority of Scripture for the authority of science.<sup>96</sup> Old-earth creationists contend that young-earth creationists refuse to acknowledge reality by ignoring the plain evidence that science has uncovered.<sup>97</sup> Others, holding the framework view of the Genesis narrative, claim that by asking scientific questions about origins or the age of the earth, evangelicals have missed the literary intent of the passage altogether.<sup>98</sup> The question looming over this entire debate, however, is how we should define inerrancy in light of these diverging opinions. More to the point: does inerrancy, by its very definition, preclude any of these interpretations, or can it allow each of these interpretations within its boundaries?

The CSBH, penned four years after the CSBI, makes an explicit claim regarding the Genesis narrative. Article XXII states, “We affirm that Genesis 1-11 is factual, as is the rest of the book. We deny that the teachings of Genesis 1-11 are

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<sup>95</sup>See, for example, J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999); David G. Hagopian, ed. *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on Days of Creation* (Mission Viejo: Crux, 2001). Most recently: J. Daryl Charles, ed., *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013); A. B. Caneday and Matthew Barrett, eds., *Four Views of The Historical Adam*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

<sup>96</sup>Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, eds., *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, (Green Forest, AR: Master, 2012), 17.

<sup>97</sup>For example, Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 38-44.

<sup>98</sup>Lee Irons and Meredith Kline, nevertheless, understand the framework interpretation to respect the “inerrancy” of the Genesis narrative. “The Holy Spirit has given us an inerrant historical account of the creation of the world, but that account has been shaped, not by a concern to satisfy our curiosity regarding sequence or chronology, but by predominately theological and literary concerns” (Lee Irons and Meredith Kline, “The Framework View,” in *The Genesis Debate*, 217).

mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.”<sup>99</sup> In the attached exposition, J. I. Packer comments on this subject further, echoing Article XII of the CSBH. “What the Bible says about the facts of nature is as true and trustworthy as anything else it says.”<sup>100</sup> Packer notes, however, that the Bible’s references to natural phenomena were given in “ordinary language, not in the explanatory technical terms of modern science,” and that Scripture “accounts for the natural events in terms of the action of God, not in terms of casual links within the created order; and it often describes natural processes figuratively and poetically, not analytically and prosaically as modern science seeks to do.”<sup>101</sup> Varying interpretations of Genesis, then, should be expected; indeed, “differences of opinion as to the correct scientific account to give of natural facts and events which Scripture celebrates can hardly be avoided.”<sup>102</sup> Because the Bible was given to reveal God and “not to address scientific issues in scientific terms,”<sup>103</sup> knowledge of science is not necessary to grasp the Bible’s basic message about God and man. Rather, “Scripture interprets scientific knowledge by relating it to the revealed purpose and work of God, thus establishing an ultimate context for the study and reform

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<sup>99</sup>For a full copy of the CSBH, see James Montgomery Boice, *Standing on the Rock: Biblical Authority in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 161-78. See also, The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics,” Mosher and Turpin Libraries at Dallas Theological Seminary, [http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_2.pdf](http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_2.pdf) (accessed, February 3, 2014).

<sup>100</sup>J. I. Packer, “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics: Exposition,” in Boice, *Standing on the Rock*, 176.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

of scientific ideas.”<sup>104</sup> While scientific theories are not allowed to determine what Scripture really teaches, they may, along with other extra-biblical material, help correct misinterpretations of Scripture.<sup>105</sup>

Packer’s comments are helpful as far as they go, but they do not aid one in negotiating specifically what interpretations of the Genesis narrative may or may not undermine inerrancy. Packer agrees that Scripture’s authority on origins or any other matter is ultimate, and that science properly conducted and articulated will not contradict Biblical affirmations.<sup>106</sup> But he appears to leave the hermeneutical circle broad enough to allow for any interpretation that gives priority to the historicity of the biblical text. That is, it is presumed that what Packer has in mind here are interpretations that fall under the scope of Article XII of the CSBH and that respect the factual nature of the creation account.

Given, however, the CSBI and the CSBH’s strong affirmations of Scripture’s unity and the necessity to interpret Scripture canonically it does seem that some statements prohibit some interpretations of Genesis 1 because evangelical hermeneutical efforts are, in some significant measure, guided by the doctrine of inerrancy.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>See Packer’s comments under the heading, “Biblical and Extra-Biblical Knowledge.” “Since all facts cohere, the truth about them must be coherent also, and since God, the author of all Scripture, is also Lord of all facts, there can in principle be no contradiction between a right understanding of what Scripture says and a right account of any reality or even in the created order. Any appearance of contradiction here would argue misunderstanding or inadequate knowledge, either of what Scripture really affirms or of what the extra-biblical facts really are” (Packer, “Exposition,” in *Standing on the Rock*, 175-76).

<sup>107</sup>Packer emphasizes the connection between inerrancy and the practice of hermeneutics, noting, “as knowledge of the inerrancy of Scripture must control interpretation, forbidding us to discount anything that Scripture proves to affirm, so interpretation must clarify the scope and significance of that

Specifically, I recommend that the denial section of Article XII of the CSBI exclude any interpretation that undermines or rejects the reality of a historic Adam.

Although I believe that a day-age interpretation of the Genesis narrative does not reckon carefully enough with the effect that the Enlightenment had upon the scientific enterprise and the anti-supernatural bias that has since undergirded and propelled the study of origins, I do not think the position inherently undermines the doctrine of inerrancy per se, for it seeks to preserve the historical (i.e. factual) nature of the Genesis account. Roger Newman highlights this very point by contrasting the old-earth creationism with theistic evolution vis-à-vis the problem of an historic Adam and Eve.

The biblical problems for theistic evolution . . . arise in Genesis 2. Here, many theistic evolutionists resort to claiming that these accounts are parables or allegories (fictitious history), because otherwise we have a narration that includes explicitly miraculous intervention in both the creation of Adam and of Eve. According to an evolutionary scenario in which God does not miraculously intervene, humans must have developed gradually from apes, and thus at any time there would be a whole population of such creatures, and thus no historical Adam and Eve. So the boundary between human and ape would presumably be a fuzzy one, like the boundary between the colors red and orange. This approach introduces the concept of fictitious history into the biblical narrative, which (as I mentioned earlier) seems to me to be a serious mistake. I would like to avoid introducing fictitious history either into nature or Scripture if at all possible, for unless the data we are using is reliable, how can we possibly have any assurance that our interpretations are worthwhile.<sup>108</sup>

Moreover, beyond introducing fictitious elements into the Genesis account, theistic evolution also undermines theological affirmations found later in the canon that are dependent upon an historical Adam, Paul's discussion of the imputation of Adam's sin to all humanity and the imputation of Christ's righteousness being the most significant

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inerrancy by determining what affirmations Scripture actually makes" (Packer, "Exposition," in *Standing on the Rock*, 169).

<sup>108</sup>Robert C. Newman, "Progressive Creationism," in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, ed. J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 114-15.

(Rom 5:12-21). If the foundational premises of inerrancy and the basic principles of evangelical hermeneutics include the recognition that Scripture is, at least, a unified whole, then one must reject any interpretation of the creation account that removes the reality of an historic Adam.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, I recommend the denial portion of a revised Article XII read as follows (with changes in italics),

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science *properly conducted*. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation, *the historicity of Adam and Eve*, and the flood.

By upholding the reality of a historic Adam and Eve, the CSBI would take an important stance on issues related to the interpretation of Genesis and the doctrine of inerrancy. As I noted above, the discussion of the first humans cannot be relegated to the creation narrative alone; there are significant canonical and theological implications that flow from denying the historicity of this account. I now turn to address another important issue related to the extent of inerrancy.

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<sup>109</sup>A. B. Caneday helpfully notes the theological and canonical implications of denying a historic Adam. “This bold endeavor to reorient evangelical Christian beliefs concerning the origins of the universe and of Adam especially holds ramifications that extend far beyond calling into question the historicity of Adam. If Adam was not the first human and progenitor of all humanity, as Genesis and the apostle Paul affirm, then the gospel of Jesus Christ inescapably falls suspect—because the Gospel of Luke unambiguously traces the genealogy of Jesus Christ back through Joseph who was thought to be his father, all the way back through Enos, to Seth, and then to Adam, and finally to God (Luke 3:18).” A. B. Caneday, “The Language of God and Adam’s Genesis and Historicity in Paul’s Gospel,” *SBJT* 15 (2011): 27. After a brief discussion of Luke’s narrative, Caneday concludes, “Without a doubt, Luke regards Adam to be the real first human ancestor of the Christ” (ibid.). See also J. P. Versteeg’s brief yet helpful *Adam in the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2012); contra, Peter Enns, who is committed to evolution as scientific fact, and therefore interprets Genesis in light of this commitment. For Enns, reading Gen 1-2 as essential history simply is not an option. Enns argues that, “One cannot read Genesis literally—meaning as literally accurate description of the physical, historical reality—in view of the state of scientific knowledge today and our knowledge of ancient Near Eastern stories of origins. Those who read Genesis literally must either ignore evidence completely or present alternate ‘theories’ in order to maintain spiritual stability.” Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012), 137.

## **Additional Article: The Diversity of the Biblical Discourse**

One contemporary complaint that has arisen among some evangelicals is that inerrancy cannot, by definition, apply to Scripture “in its entirety” as Article XII claims. The argument here, however, is not that it should only apply to the “spiritual” as opposed to the “empirically verifiable” areas of Scripture (per Article XII). Rather, given the Bible’s many genres—parables, stories, proverbs, for example—and varying elements of communication—statements of fact, commands, pleas, exhortations, to name a few—the concern is that the word *inerrant* is simply inadequate to describe the portions of Scripture that cannot readily be assessed according to their truth or falsity.<sup>110</sup> David Clark, drawing from insights found in speech act theory,<sup>111</sup> helpfully underscores the

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<sup>110</sup>The complaint that inerrancy does not readily apply to every genre of Scripture is not new. Clark Pinnock, writing in 1973, noted a similar criticism given by non-inerrantists: “Despite [the fact that the complete trustworthiness of Scripture is the historic Christian position], the term inerrancy has become less and less popular. Some of the reasons given to explain this are not convincing. For example, it is objected that inerrancy is a term which applies better to material in Scripture of a strictly factual nature, and not to such forms as lyric poetry, ethical exhortation, or parable.” Clark Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), 144. It is well known that Pinnock changed positions, embracing limited inerrancy later in his academic career. See Clark Pinnock, “Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology,” in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack B. Rogers (Waco, TX: Word, 1977), 49-73; and Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 262.

<sup>111</sup>Speech act theory is a branch of philosophy resides within the philosophy of language. It was first articulated in J. L. Austin’s ground-breaking book, *How to Do Things with Words*, later developed and augmented by John Searle in *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* and most recently amplified by William Alston in *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1969); idem, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and William P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). Recently, scholars have sought to apply speech act theory to biblical studies, the doctrine of revelation, hermeneutics, and other important theological areas. For example, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard S. Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2001); J. Eugene Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991); Dietmar Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An*

difficulty of classifying every type of utterance in Scripture with regard to inerrancy—that is, in terms of its truth or falsity. First, Clark rightly notes that the basic premise of speech act theory is the claim that we do more with words than merely describe some state of affairs.<sup>112</sup> Speech act theorists, therefore, generally group linguistic acts into five categories: (1) *Statements* that explain how the world is; (2) *commands* that attempt to get the world to be a certain way (by getting someone to do certain things); (3) *promises* that obligate the speaker to act in a specific way; (4) *exclamations* that “express feelings or attitudes;” and (5) *performatives* that “create new realities.”<sup>113</sup> Central to the discussion of inerrancy is the observation that in the list provided above, not every category of speech act can be readily classified according to its correspondence with reality; only *statements* are those speech acts that can be appraised according to their truth or falsity. Accordingly, Clark asks, “How could an utterance that does not correspond to anything still succeed as a linguistic act?”<sup>114</sup> He continues, emphasizing that “[u]tterances can accomplish what their speakers intend without offering descriptions,” while providing a clarifying illustration of his point.

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*Analysis of I John*, (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994); Bridget Gilfillan Uptan, *Hearing Mark's Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory*, (Boston: Brill, 2006); Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); idem, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 49-104; Cullen Tanner, “Climbing the Lampstand-Witness-Trees: Revelation’s Use of Zechariah 4 in Light of Speech Act Theory,” *JPT* 20, no.1 (2003): 81-92; Brevard S. Childs, “Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” *SJT* 58, no. 4 (2005): 375-92.

<sup>112</sup>David Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy: Speech Acts and an Evangelical View of Scripture,” in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology*, ed. James K. Beilby (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 118. This premise was at the heart of Austin’s development of the theory in *How to Do Things with Words*, 1.

<sup>113</sup>David Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy,” 119. Clark cites John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 146-52.

<sup>114</sup>Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy,” 119.

For instance, Tim and Jose are America sports fans at the summer Olympic Games. They are watching the decathlon and are ecstatic that Smith, an American, is doing very well. Smith runs an outstanding four hundred meters. As a rabid America fan, Tim yells, “Yeah Smith!” The purpose of his exclamation is to express his feelings. It makes no sense to ask whether “Yeah Smith!” is true. Tim is conveying his joy. Now if Jose’s mind is wandering, Tim’s exclamation might enable him to infer that things went well for Smith. Still, it is not Tim’s intention to tell Jose how things are. He is emoting, expressing how he feels. So is, “Yeah Smith!” true? No. Does it communicate, of course. A child could understand it. Further, the assertion “Smith is leading the decathlon” is true. So is “Tim is excited about Smith’s lead.” The latter two sentences tell what is the case (and they may or may not do other things). But Tim would never intend the perfectly legitimate natural utterance “Yeah Smith!” to do the same thing as “I am excited about Smith’s race.” “Yeah, Smith!” expresses Tim’s feelings. That is all Tim intends it to do. In this way, some non-descriptive utterances succeed.<sup>115</sup>

Clark then turns to relate his observations to the doctrine of Scripture generally and inerrancy specifically.

Applying these briefly stated claims to a doctrine of Scripture, some perfectly acceptable biblical speech acts are legitimate even though they have no descriptive force. Utterances that lack descriptive content do not possess truth value as such. The purpose of such utterances is not to correspond to the world. So it makes no sense to denote them as either true (in that they correspond successfully) or false (in that they do not). That is, these utterances are neither errant (false) or inerrant (true), and the evangelical theologian who is obsessed with inerrancy will ask the wrong questions of these utterances.<sup>116</sup>

What Clark’s illustration and general argument highlight is that Scripture’s many speech acts cannot and should not be drawn under one evaluative category. Specifically, evangelicals who are concerned with upholding the complete truthfulness of Scripture must take care not to flatten the Bible’s multi-faceted linguistic discourse<sup>117</sup> by forcing

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>I am using the word “discourse” to refer to communicative acts that “[have] a sense (something said), a reference (about something), and a destination (to someone)” (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 214). Scripture is collectively God’s communicative act by which he made specific utterances (the text), about something (the gospel), to someone (his creatures).

non-descriptive language to answer the errant-inerrant question.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, Clark contends that speech act theory not only exposes the inadequacy of using *inerrancy* as an all-inclusive term to describe the nature of Scripture; it also provides resources with which evangelicals can uphold the Bible’s complete truthfulness while acknowledging the various forms of communication in the Bible. “Speech act theory,” Clark observes, “makes it possible to drive a middle road between modernism and deconstructive postmodernism.”<sup>119</sup> On the one hand, he notes, modernist philosophical movements like empiricism and positivism have “erred in making description the key function, the only important task, of language.”<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, “certain forms of postmodern nonrealism err in disparaging descriptive language.”<sup>121</sup> Emphasizing one class of speech act at the expense of rightly acknowledging the other is not preferable.

But just as it is a mistake to denigrate nondescriptive spiritual utterances, so it is wrong to claim that theological language never functions properly when it describes the world. . . . Both limiting religious language to description and rejecting all meaningful religious description are caught in an either-or vortex. . . . But a speech act approach moves evangelical theology past this unnecessary vortex. In this approach to biblical language, Scripture does many things well. And describing—including predicating concepts of God—is one of the things it does. Expressing spiritual sentiments, evoking worship experiences, and commanding God-honoring behavior are among the other things Scripture does well.<sup>122</sup>

Even so, how are we to judge whether Scripture does certain things well when it

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<sup>118</sup>As Vern Poythress aptly states, “When we say that God’s speech is always truthful, we should endeavor to preserve the richness of his speech and not insist that only some kinds of discourse or only some pieces within a discourse have authority over us.” Vern Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 28.

<sup>119</sup>Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy,” 120.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 120-21.

implements various kinds of speech acts? Here, Clark turns to explore the three aspects into which individual speech acts are typically divided and evaluated. Because he does not offer much here by way of definition, I will supplement Clark's discussion with further description and illustrations of the three characteristics of a speech act. The first is the *locutionary* aspect, which refers to the words used in a statement and the meaning of that statement. The second is the *illocutionary* aspect, which refers to the force with which the utterance is made: a promise, a command, a warning, and so forth. Clark comments, "This is the effect the speaker hopes to accomplish in uttering the sentence. Not every utterance has descriptive content, but each one has illocutionary force."<sup>123</sup> The third is the *perlocutionary* aspect, which refers to the actual effect of achieving the intended response: inciting trust, prompting obedience, or urging caution, and so forth. A brief illustration from Austin will help us navigate these terms. First, the *locution*—the words and their intended meaning: "He said to me, 'Shoot her!' meaning by 'shoot' to shoot and referring by 'her' to *her*."<sup>124</sup> Second, the *illocution*—the force of the utterance (warning, command, etc.). "He urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her." Finally, the *perlocution*—the result. "He persuaded me to shoot her."<sup>125</sup>

Austin also helps us determine what constitutes a successful speech act. Gregg

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>124</sup>At the locutionary level, Austin distinguishes between three features of this particular speech act. "We have made three rough distinctions between the phonetic act, the phatic act, and the rhetic act. The phonetic act is merely the act of uttering certain noises. The phatic act is the uttering of certain vocables or words, i.e. noises of certain types, belonging to and as belonging to, a certain vocabulary, conforming to and as conforming to a certain grammar. The rhetic act is the performance of an act of using these vocables with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference" (Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 95). When speaking of the locutionary aspect, then, we are referring primarily to the rhetic component—the actual words uttered with a particular sense and reference. The other two features of the locutionary aspect need not detain us in this section.

<sup>125</sup>Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 101-2.

Allison explains, “Austin was also instrumental in setting forth the conditions for a successful speech act, conditions which (in most cases) go beyond the evaluative criterion of true/false to include ‘infelicities (Austin’s term) as ‘misfires,’ ‘abuses,’ ‘misinvocations,’ ‘insincerities,’ etc.”<sup>126</sup> In order to determine whether or not a speech act has been successful, however, one must run the given speech act through a battery of questions that help uncover essential characteristics of the given speech act.<sup>127</sup> But what about the perlocutionary aspect of a speech act? Does a successful speech act require a fulfillment of the perlocutionary aspect? Allison answers,

On this point, speech act theorists are in agreement. What constitutes a successful speech act is not the actualization of a certain intended response; rather, it is the satisfaction of the four conditions—essential, sincerity, propositional, and preparatory—of the illocutionary aspect, leading to the comprehensibility of the propositional content (locutionary aspect) and the force (illocutionary aspect) of the

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<sup>126</sup>Allison, “Speech Act Theory and its Implication for the Doctrine of the Inerrancy/Infallibility of Scripture,” 2.

<sup>127</sup>First, in order for a speech act to be successful, it must fulfill the illocutionary point of the speech act—that is, the purpose for which the speech act is used (Allison, “Speech Act Theory,” 5). Nevertheless, one must “maintain a distinction between illocutionary *point* and illocutionary *force*” (ibid., 5). The point of a request and command are the same—in both cases, the person making the utterance is attempting to get the listener to do something. Nevertheless, as Allison helpfully observes, “a command comes with a significantly greater illocutionary force than does a request” (ibid., 5). Second, in order to be successful, a speech act must provide the proper fit between the words and the world. For example, an assertive attempts to get the words in the speech act to truly convey what is happening in the world. The goal is to get one’s words to match the world. On the other hand, a request is a case where the person performing the speech act seeks to get the world to match the words—to bring the happenings of the world into conformity with the words spoken in the speech act (ibid., 5-6). Third, the speaker’s psychological state must correspond to the intention and type of speech act in order for the given speech act to find linguistic success. A person making a promise, for example, must intend sincerely to fulfill that promise. This criterion has been called the *sincerity condition* (ibid., 6). Fourth, an effective speech act’s propositional content must be suitable to the nature of its illocutionary aspect. A promise, for example, must refer to a time in the future in which the promise will be fulfilled. (It is linguistically and metaphysically impossible to make backward-looking promises.) An assertive may regard the past, present, or future. A report may concern the past or the present, and so on. Allison calls this principle the *propositional content condition* (ibid.). Finally, a successful speech act must fulfill *preparatory conditions*—that is, the given speech act must correspond to the required relationship between the speaker and hearer. For example, in order for a person to deliver a successful command, he must be in authority over the one to whom the command is given, the hearer must have the ability to perform the obligations of the command, and the speaker must believe that the hearer possesses the requisite ability to carry out the command (ibid.).

speech act by the hearer.<sup>128</sup>

For example, in order for a directive to find linguistic success, the hearer must understand “the propositional content of the command, warning, etc., and [grasp] the fact that the utterance is an attempt to get him/her to do something. Whether the hearer actually obeys the command or flees the danger expressed in the warning is irrelevant from the point of view of the successfulness of the speech act.”<sup>129</sup> To draw the point home, How does the taxonomy of speech act theory relate to inerrancy?<sup>130</sup>

While this dissertation is not an attempt to undermine the heritage of the word *inerrancy* nor an effort to propose another, less troublesome word to help explain what evangelicals believe about the Bible, I do recognize the problem inherent in using a term that implies that every text in Scripture falls strictly within true-false categories.<sup>131</sup> Yet, this dissertation proceeds under the conviction that the word *inerrancy*, while perhaps not perfect,<sup>132</sup> adequately (though not exhaustively) describes the nature of Scripture when

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Although their work focused mainly on spoken sentences, Austin’s and Searle’s development of speech act theory laid the foundation for other philosophers to apply their findings to literary theory and, importantly, interpretation of texts. See, Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text*, 210.

<sup>131</sup>Consider Pinnock and Callen who contend that, in light of the way the word *inerrancy* has recently taken on a meaning that does not adequately account for the humanness of Scripture. Therefore, “the wisest course now is either to abandon the term altogether or alter its common meaning to better fit the purpose of the Bible and the actual phenomena that its text displays” (Pinnock and Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 262). I do not take the first suggestion as a legitimate option. Donald Bloesch also makes a similar plea to drop *inerrancy* from our theological vocabulary. See Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 116.

<sup>132</sup>Even one of inerrancy’s champions, Paul Feinberg, conceded to this reality. Feinberg, however, desired to retain the use of the word and argued that there was currently no better word with which to describe evangelical belief about the nature of the Bible. See Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, 267-303. John Frame admits he would like to do away with the word altogether. “I could wish myself that we could get rid of the term *inerrancy* (and most all other technical theological terms as well) and simply speak of *truth*. That God’s word is true is easily established from Scripture (Pss.

properly defined and applied. Furthermore, it is the argument of this specific section that speech act theory provides us with useful categories to assess portions of Scripture that cannot be classified according to their truth or falsity.

The portions of Scripture that can be readily evaluated according to their truth or falsity, following the taxonomy of speech act theory, are statements, those forms of speech that declare the way things are in the world. For example, the phrase, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1), is a statement. Statements whose content accurately describe the world are classified as true; assertives that do not accurately describe the world are false. Thus, the term *inerrant* expresses a vital aspect of Scripture: those statements that can be classified according to their truth or falsity, cannot error. This feature of Scripture is captured well in the CSBI.<sup>133</sup>

What about other categories of speech acts? How do promises, commands, warnings, and other forms of speech relate to inerrancy? Taking promises first, we can say that divine promises can be analyzed according to their truth or falsity and thus may be thus classified generally under the category of *inerrancy*. If God commits himself to some future course of action, he is bound by that statement and, because he cannot lie, will inevitably bring about the promised outcome. If the promised outcome does not occur, then the promise itself is false and thus errant.<sup>134</sup>

With commands, however, one does not immediately see a correspondence between the propositional content of the speech act and the world. Does this situation,

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19:9; 119:160; John 17:17). Of course, there is a need to discuss how that truth can be seen in different genres, parts, and aspects of Scripture” (Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 533).

<sup>133</sup>Consider Article XI, XII, and XIII.

<sup>134</sup>Allison, “Speech Act Theory,” 13.

however, render *inerrancy* useless as a category to describe the nature of Scripture?

Turning to an Old Testament example to highlight the problem, how does the command “Praise the Lord,” (e.g., Pss 146:1; 147:1; 148:1) fit within true-false categories?<sup>135</sup> Help is found in Searle’s observation that commands do raise the question of truth vis-à-vis the subject and content of the command. Searle explains, “the man who asserts that Socrates is wise, the man who asks whether he is wise, and the man who requests him to be wise may be said to raise the question of his being wise (of whether ‘wise’ is—or in the case of requests will be—true of him).”<sup>136</sup> Searle’s example, of course, applies to commands made to human subjects that imply a question about a particular quality of the subject. In the case of Socrates, the question of whether or not he was wise is raised by the command, “Socrates, be wise!” In the directive, “Praise the Lord,” the command is made toward a human subject with God as the intended object of praise. Nevertheless, there is still content presupposed in such a directive that can be assessed according to true-false categories. In the command, “Praise the Lord,” the truth of God’s worthiness to be praised is in question.

In Scripture, praiseworthiness is based on other biblical statements and recorded acts that demonstrate God’s faithfulness and character. The beauty of God’s character is expressed in these statements and acts as they are fulfillments of particular

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<sup>135</sup>Biblical statements like “Praise the Lord,” can also be classified simultaneously as exclamations, not merely commands. The fact that we cannot, in many cases, relegate particular speech acts to *only* one evaluative category highlights one of the weaknesses of the theory itself. Despite the hope that speech act theory would protect the richness and variety of human discourse, it may, by consigning each speech act to only one category, serve to accomplish the opposite. For a helpful and constructive discussion of the potential weaknesses of speech act theory as it pertains to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, see Vern Poythress, *In the Beginning was the Word: Language, A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 353-69.

<sup>136</sup>Searle, *Speech Acts*, 14.

promises. As we have already noted, statements about God and his mighty acts fall under the category of statements or assertives—speech acts that can be evaluated according to their truth or falsity. Divine assertives are always inerrant. Promises, speech acts that obligate God to a specific future action can also be considered under the category of inerrancy. The command “Praise the Lord,” then, is bereft of genuine content if we detach it from the surrounding assertives and commissives that provide evidence of God’s praiseworthiness. To narrow our definition of inerrancy in such a way so as to exclude directives is to ignore the fact that they depend upon assertives, commissives, and other speech acts in Scripture that can be categorized according to their truth or falsity for their very meaning. According to Clark, such descriptive language provides the “metaphysical context” in which directives can make any sense at all. He explains that

the illocutionary force and the perlocutionary force of commands, promise, exclamations, and performatives must connect in complex ways to true statements. The illocutionary force of these nondescriptive utterances depends upon contextual realities described by true propositions and understood by believers as part of the background knowledge . . . . Propositions that describe these background realities speak about the metaphysical context in which the nondescriptive utterances occur: Nondescriptive utterances are parasitic on this metaphysical context. Without these background realities, described accurately by true propositions, the nondescriptive utterances lose their force. This is why evangelical theology must retain, as a core feature of its doctrine of Scripture, a commitment to the truthfulness of the Bible.<sup>137</sup>

Although it may at first seem awkward or odd to ask whether or not a command is inerrant,<sup>138</sup> such a question is not altogether unwarranted given the canonical context in

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<sup>137</sup>Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy,” 124. John Frame makes a similar observation. “Jesus’ parables do not narrate historical events in this sense, and I certainly would not claim that they are less value on that account. But the parables, like all the rest of Scripture, are embedded in the context of a narrative that clearly makes historical claims, claims that various events really took place in geographical space and calendar time” (Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 504).

<sup>138</sup>See Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy,” 123; Allison, “Speech Act Theory,” 14.

which such commands fall.<sup>139</sup> If biblical commands cannot exist without the metaphysical structure provided by biblical assertives, then the application of inerrancy to such directives is not entirely inappropriate, although the application is not direct. Because directives occur within the context supplied by the assertives and depend upon those assertives for their very meaning, directives must, by necessity, share in their linguistic categorization at some level. To complain that commands do not have a historical referent and therefore cannot be assessed according to categories of truth or falsity is to wrest such commands from their appropriate context and examine them in a way that does not correspond to their nature. Biblical commands were never intended to be analyzed apart from the greater context in which they have been given, especially when that context provides the metaphysical grounding for those commands in the first place. The command to praise the Lord means nothing if the Lord does not exist (Gen 1:1; Rom 1:20), if he is not worthy of praise (Ps 18:3), if those enjoined to praise him do not know that he is worthy of praise, and so on. Similar remarks can be made for other directives like warnings.

With regard to warnings, Allison gives the example of a situation where one yells, “There is a snake in the grass.” The warning itself is infallible—it meets all the requirements for a successful speech act. Yet, the warning could be also classified as inerrant because it is dependent upon the snake actually being in the grass. It would be a “false” alarm if one gave the warning when there was no snake in the grass. Allison,

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<sup>139</sup>Here I am using the phrase “canonical context” alongside of Clark’s “metaphysical context” to convey similar ideas. It is legitimate to speak in either manner about the way biblical assertives provide the framework for understanding portions of Scripture that are not readily assessed according to their truth or falsity. One can use philosophical categories, as Clark does, to argue that biblical assertives form the “reality” required to understand biblical commands. Or, one can utilize literary categories, as I have with the phrase “canonical context,” in order to argue that biblical assertives establish the rhetorical framework within which to rightly assess Scripture’s many imperatives.

however, is unconvinced that such a classification is fully satisfactory.<sup>140</sup>

One could object and claim that despite speech act theory's many helpful resources for understanding biblical inerrancy, this may be one area in which biblical categories must dictate the way we assess our understanding of speech act rather than the other way around. That is to say, while human warnings may or may not be true, divine warnings are always true and thus belong in a class by themselves. In the case of divine warnings, the threat will obtain if the corresponding condition is not met. In this way, a warning is much like a promise: promises can be assessed according to their truth or falsity because the statement of the commitment to a future course of action will be found as occurring or not occurring at a future time. A warning is similar. Take, for example, the statement, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt 24:13), whose implication—warning—is that those who do not endure to the end will not be saved. Because there is a chance that you may not be saved in the end so take care that you will be. Because this warning is uttered by one who cannot lie, it is true that anyone who does not endure to the end will not be saved: damnation *will* occur for those who do not heed the warning. Thus, one might argue that divine warnings are inerrant because they never fail to obtain.

Yet, it is difficult to say that a conditional warning considered by itself is "true" if that warning depends upon something else occurring (a breach of the condition) in order to obtain. When speaking about inerrancy, we are referring to true-false categories vis-à-vis a state of affairs in the world, but it appears problematic to say that a conditional warning corresponds with reality. The conditional warning may or may not

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<sup>140</sup>Allison, "Speech Act Theory," 15.

correspond with actual states of affairs, depending upon whether or not the condition is met. Indeed, divine warnings are given in order to deter individuals or groups from a particular course of action (e.g., 1 John 3:15; Jonah 3:4). We might even say that biblical warnings are given *for the very purpose* of creating a situation in which the conditions will not be met (see Ezek 18:30-32). Thus, the conditionality of the warning appears to preclude the classification of true-false categories.

That warnings do not fall under the scrutiny of truth-false classification, however, does not render the label of inerrancy useless or inapplicable as description of the nature of Scripture. Just as we observed above, commands and warnings rely upon assertives, promises, and other speech acts in order to be meaningful in the greater biblical discourse. Specifically, in order for warnings to carry any weight, God's character must be trustworthy and he must be a God who does not utter idle threats. Biblical assertives that speak to these aspects of God's character provide the metaphysical framework in which divine warnings can retain their illocutionary force. Similar arguments could be mounted for exclamations and performatives.

In light of this above discussion, then, it seems appropriate to add another article to the CSBI that addresses directly the matter of speech acts and the legitimate application of the term *inerrancy* across the entire biblical discourse.

We affirm that inerrancy can be rightly applied to the whole of Scripture, for all non-descriptive elements in Scripture are supported by, and find their meaning within, the canonical context provided by Scripture's descriptive statements.

We deny that genre in Scripture that are not readily evaluated according to true-false categories should be classified in a way that undermines the inerrancy of Scripture's descriptive elements. We further deny that it is appropriate to analyze any portion of Scripture without considering the entire canonical context in which is given.

In this new affirmation, the phrase "non-descriptive elements" refers to the many speech

acts of Scripture that do not readily yield to true-false categories. The “descriptive statements” refer to assertives and declarations—those aspects of Scripture that are rightly categorized according to their truth or falsity. This new statement is careful to not apply inerrancy directly to those non-descriptive statements, but it still retains the legitimacy of using inerrancy as a term to describing the nature of Scripture. Inerrancy does not say everything about Scripture; but without it, we would be greatly hindered in saying much of anything else.

Also, although this new article is preceded by a concentrated discussion on speech act theory, it does not include a reference to this particular category of philosophical inquiry for two reasons. First, I omit an explicit mention of speech act theory because I do not want my proposed modifications to the CSBI to hinder its accessibility by adding more technical jargon. Second, because speech act theory is meant to serve as a useful tool for understanding the biblical discourse and not a comprehensive framework for achieving philosophical transcendence, it is best to utilize those aspects that are most helpful without condoning a wholesale embrace of the system.<sup>141</sup> I now turn to consider some specific examples of areas in Scripture where our application of inerrancy requires some careful nuance.

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<sup>141</sup>See Poythress, *In the Beginning was the Word*, 369.

### **Article XIII: Truthfulness and the Phenomena of Scripture**<sup>142</sup>

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Given that some have taken the term inerrant to imply that Scripture must provide a kind of scientific precision in all that it affirms, Article XIII helpfully tethers inerrancy to the concept of *truthfulness* in order to guard Scripture from this type of misunderstanding.

That is, Article XIII insists that one judge the inerrancy of Scripture according to standards of precision in communication that are native to the text itself. Biblical phenomena like “lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature,” and the like do not negate the concept of inerrancy because none of these phenomena impinges on or contradicts the truthfulness of statements in which they occur. For example, if David killed 18,432 Edomites in the Valley of Salt, yet Scripture records 18,000 (2 Sam 8:13), the text does not err; it provides an accounting that is appropriate for the given context. If Paul or John’s

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<sup>142</sup>I am including Article XIII here because it is so closely linked, in terms of content, to the other articles in this chapter. In his commentary on the CSBI, Sproul places this particular article under a heading separate from Articles XI-XII. I find Sproul’s collation of the articles unhelpful at this point. Article XIII answers some of the questions raised by Article XII and provides the necessary positive parallel to the definition of inerrancy we find in the previous article: as Article XIII indicates, inerrancy is nothing more than an affirmation of the complete truthfulness of Scripture. Furthermore, when Article XII asserts that Scripture contains no falsehood, for example, it *does not* mean that Scripture cannot accurately report the falsehoods spoken by a biblical character; Article XIII makes this clear. The following article (Article XIV) speaks of the “unity and internal consistency” of the Bible and naturally begins a new section of doctrinal focus.

grammar is unusual in some instances, these irregularities cannot be said to affect the truth of their statements any more than my statement “I ain’t seen him” truthfully communicates, despite its colloquial grammar, that I did not see the person to whom the reference is made. When biblical authors record that the sun rose, they do not, by making statements from an earth-dweller’s perspective, err any more than the newspaper errs when it reports the time of the sunrise and sunset for any given day. The main point of Article XIII is to call the reader to judge biblical statements and affirmations according to their own genre, purpose, and audience. James Scott rightly describes the importance of appraising Scripture according to its own presentation:

The doctrine of inerrancy requires a sympathetic and reasonable understanding of what biblical statements actually affirm and do not affirm. Nothing is gained by setting up artificial standards of “accuracy” that ignore the realities of language. Inerrancy requires that the exact truth be within the range of possibility allowed by the words used, and nothing more.<sup>143</sup>

Accordingly, the CSBI does not attempt to qualify inerrancy in a way that allows for actual errors in the text. Just the opposite: the denials in Article XIII contend that the biblical phenomena *do not constitute an actual error* with regard to a correspondence to reality. By articulating the denials in this way, the CSBI does not equivocate on or redefine the words “truth” and “error;” rather, it respects the way Scripture defines these terms and seeks to apply the concept of inerrancy accordingly. “When we speak of inerrancy,” Sproul comments, “we are speaking of the fact that the Bible does not violate its own principles of truth. This does not mean that the Bible is free from grammatical irregularities or the like, but that it does not contain assertions which are in conflict with

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<sup>143</sup>James Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy: A Response to A. T. B. McGowan’s *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*,” *WTJ* 71 (2009): 194.

objective reality.”<sup>144</sup>

Despite the clarity of the original affirmation and denials statements, I do believe attention to two specific details will strengthen this particular article. First, I recommend changing the sentence “according to standards of *truth and error* that are alien to its usage or purpose” (emphasis added) to read “according to standards of *precision* that are alien to its usage or purpose” (emphasis added). In my judgment, placing the phrase “standards of truth and error” prior to the list of biblical phenomena implies that the CSBI equivocates on these terms, especially if “truthfulness” in the affirmation refers, primarily, to that which corresponds with reality. A grammatical irregularity, for example, does not constitute an error in this sense. If one insists that a grammatical irregularity *is* an error in the text of Scripture, one would not be guilty of judging Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are foreign to the text as much as he would be requiring a *precision of language* that is foreign to the text; namely, a standard of modern grammatical convention. Truth is not in question here, but precision in communication is; the “error” is not a lack of correspondence to actual states of affairs; it is a lack of conformity to a contemporary rule of language, and compliance with these rules of language is not required in order to communicate faithfully an event as it really happened.

Moreover, in his commentary on the CSBI, Sproul states that the phrase “standards of truth and error” is “directed toward those who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal or the like, rather than to mean that

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<sup>144</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 29.

which corresponds to reality.”<sup>145</sup> If this is the case, the inclusion of this phrase in Article XIII is somewhat redundant, for the previous article (Article XII) already indicates that inerrancy should be applied to the whole of Scripture, not merely its spiritual, redemptive, or religious sections. In the above case, Article XII addresses the attempt by non-inerrantists to place an emphasis on the salvific purpose of Scripture in order to allow for errors in portions of the Bible that do not readily deal with matters of redemption and Christian practice. These efforts to separate the Bible’s redemptive content from its historical, scientific, and geographic content appear to apply standards of truth that are foreign to the text.<sup>146</sup> Article XIII, however, addresses a slightly different issue. The phrase “standards of truth and error” here Article XIII, then, is unnecessary not only because it causes confusion as to what the CSBI claims with regard to truth and the phenomena of Scripture, but also due to its repetitiveness in relation to Article XII. Also, if the phrase “according to standards of precision” should be included in the revised statement, then I also recommend the removal of the phrase, “the lack of modern technical precision” due to repetitiveness and to the fact that the list of phenomena *are*—with the exception of the phrase, “the reporting of falsehoods”—examples of biblical expressions that do not conform to modern standards of precision.

The issues noted here highlight a problem that has afflicted the doctrine of

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<sup>145</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 31.

<sup>146</sup>See Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 177-78. Frame gives five reasons for why it is invalid to argue against inerrancy by appealing to Scripture’s purpose and claiming that the Bible “is written to tell us of salvation, not about matters of history, geography, science and so on” (ibid., 177). The first two reasons will suffice to demonstrate that such arguments are guilty of applying standards of truth that are alien to the text of Scripture. “(1) Scripture does not distinguish in any general way between the sacred and the secular, between matters of salvation and mere worldly matters. (2) Scripture speaks not only of salvation, but also of the nature of God, creation, and providence as the presuppositions of salvation. But these deal with everything in the world and with all areas of human life. So Scripture makes assertions not only about salvation narrowly considered, but about the nature of the universe” (ibid.).

inerrancy ever since it was formalized in evangelical doctrines of Scripture. The problem relates specifically to the word itself. John Frame explains,

The word [inerrancy] has come to suggest to many the idea of precision, rather than its lexical meaning of mere truth. Now, *precision* and *truth* are not synonyms, though they do overlap in meaning. A certain amount of precision is often required for truth, but that amount varies from one context to another. In mathematics and science, truth often requires considerable precision. If a student says that  $6+5=10$ , he has not told the truth. He has committed an error. If a scientist makes a measurement varying by .0004 cm of an actual length, he may describe that as an *error*, as in the phrase *margin of error*. But outside of science and mathematics, truth and precision are often much more distinct.<sup>147</sup>

In chapter 2 we observed how Craig Allert's equivocation on the words *truth* and *precision* brought him to conclude that there is a "tension" that resides between the claim that Scripture is wholly true and the acknowledgement of biblical phenomena like round numbers, colloquial statements, and unscientific language. In light of what Frame has observed about the important difference between these two words, we may not be able to lay the fault entirely at Allert's feet: Article XIII appears to promote confusion rather than alleviate it.

Furthermore, because contemporary critiques of inerrancy have revealed a broad misunderstanding of what the word intends to communicate vis-à-vis the nature of Scripture, I believe it would be helpful in the denial portion to replace *inerrancy* with the word *truthfulness* in order to reemphasize the inextricable parallel between these two concepts. I also recommend replacing the word *negated* with the word *compromised* in the second sentence of the denial portion. I suggest this latter modification for the following reason: if we desire to guard the doctrine of inerrancy from the complaint that the word *inerrancy* implies categories of scientific precision or places too strong an

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<sup>147</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 171.

emphasis on the propositional aspects of Scripture, then we should be careful not to use words that strengthen this perception as we define the doctrine. The word *negate* implies precision and does not seem to fit squarely with a list of biblical phenomena that demonstrate the imprecision of some biblical language. *Compromise*, on the other hand, while suggesting that the existence of the biblical phenomena does not force inerrantists to prevaricate on their definition of truth or concede that there really are exceptions to inerrancy in the Bible, better fits with the list of phenomena in Article XIII. Although this is a fine point and one that relates more to aesthetics than to doctrine, I do believe a change here will improve the CSBI's general presentation of the doctrine of inerrancy.<sup>148</sup>

The revised denial section would read (with changes in italics),

We deny that it is legitimate to evaluate Scripture according to standards of *precision* that are foreign to its original intention or purpose. We further deny that phenomena such as irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations, *compromise the truthfulness of the biblical statements in which they occur*.

Next, the affirmation would be improved by adjusting the definition of biblical phenomena to include direct statements of Scripture that speak to the matter of truth, God's written word, inspiration, and God's character as it relates to these issues. Among the many evangelical challenges to inerrancy is a collective plea to pay attention to the various phenomena of Scripture as we formulate our understanding of biblical authority and inerrancy. Evangelicals concerned with rightly understanding and articulating the

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<sup>148</sup>With the matter of aesthetics in mind, we should consider whether or not some of the language in the CSBI might be what has contributed to the distaste some evangelicals have toward the doctrine of inerrancy. If God has chosen to reveal himself in a book that consists of a broad range of genre and colorful literary expression, we should pay attention to how winsomely we frame our description and discussion of this book.

doctrine of inerrancy would do well to heed this call to understand Scripture on its own terms. Contemporary appeals to biblical phenomena—especially the ones I investigated in chapter 2—restrict these phenomena to particular aspects of Scripture that appear to represent the “human” component of Scripture’s authorship; other facets of the Bible, like explicit statements about God’s character and its relation to the written word, are ignored. Yet, there seems to be no biblical warrant to divide such phenomena this way. If we are going to judge Scripture on its own terms and build our doctrine of inerrancy on the whole Bible, we must take into account not only phenomena such as irregular grammar or a lack of scientific precision, but statements that speak directly about God, his character, and the inspiration of Scripture as well.<sup>149</sup>

Although inerrantists and errantists alike have typically classified phenomena as those characteristics of Scripture that reflect its nature as a human document, I agree with Mark Thompson that we must avoid setting explicit statements about the Bible’s divine origin against these other so-called phenomena. Commenting on deductive versus inductive approaches to Scripture, Thompson observes: “Some accounts [of the nature of Scripture] tend to privilege observations about the phenomena of Scripture as basic to an inductive approach and fail to recognize that the explicit statements of Scripture are themselves indispensable ‘phenomena.’”<sup>150</sup> Thompson senses an inherent flaw in forcing a dichotomy between the aspects of Scripture that are typically labeled “phenomena” and those aspects of Scripture that attest to its divine origin. In my judgment, if inerrantists

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<sup>149</sup>The exposition states that we should not set the so-called phenomena of Scripture against what the Scripture claims about itself.

<sup>150</sup>Mark Thompson, “The Divine Investment in Truth: Toward a Theological Account of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 76n19.

and errantists are going to hold to a basic lexical definition of the word “phenomena,” then neither party can posit one set of texts at the expense of another in defense of their position.<sup>151</sup> Classifying certain elements of Scripture like round numbers or grammatical irregularities as “phenomena” while grouping the self-attesting portions of Scripture in a separate category seems only to perpetuate confusion at this point.<sup>152</sup> With these considerations in mind, therefore, I propose that the revised affirmation statement would read as follows (with changes in italics),

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term to refer to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. *We further affirm that biblical statements about God, his character, his relation to Scripture, and the truth and reliability of Scripture are rightly classified as biblical phenomena.*

The additional sentence confronts directly the tendency among evangelical errantists and inerrantist alike to categorize biblical phenomena exclusively as those aspects of Scripture that appear more “human” or tend to pose problems for inerrancy. This

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<sup>151</sup>“Phenomena” is simply the plural form of “phenomenon.” The primary definition of the latter is, “A thing that appears, or is perceived or observed; an individual fact, occurrence, or change, as perceived by any of the senses, or by the mind: applied chiefly to a fact or occurrence, the cause or explanation of which is in question” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 11:674). A secondary definition acknowledges the use of the words “phenomena” and “phenomenon” in theological discourse. To “save the phenomena” is to “reconcile the observed or admitted facts with some theory or doctrine with which they appear to disagree” (*ibid.*). This latter use, however, highlights a common misunderstanding concerning how inerrantists approach their doctrine of Scripture. Inerrancy, it is often claimed, is a position grounded in a deductionist approach to the Bible where basic presuppositions about God and the nature of divine revelation are first assumed and then applied to our doctrinal formulations about Scripture. This kind of *a priori* approach to the Bible, it is claimed, keeps inerrantists from dealing fully with any aspects of Scripture that appear to throw inerrancy into question. As a matter of fact, however, the doctrine of inerrancy is drawn from *explicit texts* that speak of God’s character, the nature of Scripture, and so on. These particular texts from which the doctrine of inerrancy is drawn are just as much a part of the biblical landscape as grammatical anomalies, variant accounts, and other kinds of so-called “phenomena.” Thus, using a word that has the lexical capacity to apply to all of Scripture to only refer to certain portions of it seems only to confuse the issue.

<sup>152</sup>Thompson also notes a defect in Kenton Sparks’s critique of Carl Henry’s deductionist approach to the doctrine of Scripture. Although Sparks admirably desires to form a doctrine of Scripture that reckons with the Bible *as it really is*, Thompson rightly wonders how one can reject Henry’s “deductionist” approach when Henry is simply taking into account biblical texts that attest to Scripture’s divine nature. Each class of texts—the so-called “phenomena” and the self-attesting portions—come from the Bible *as it really is*. See Thompson, “The Divine Investment in Truth,” 76n19; cf. Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 139.

affirmation statement now requires those who would formulate their doctrine of Scripture around or in light of the CSBI to reckon with the whole Bible equally, not giving unbalanced attention to one class of texts over the other.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have assessed the articles of the CSBI that deal most explicitly with the subject of inerrancy. In my evaluation of these articles, I have noted areas of strength and weakness necessitating the modification of existing articles and the addition of new articles in order to answer recent challenges to the CSBI. Thus, these modifications and additions are intended to strengthen the CSBI at its most crucial points, offering greater nuance and more precise wording in order to preclude misunderstanding or misappropriation of the doctrine of inerrancy.

As I reassessed these articles, I argued that, in light of contemporary language and the general usage of the word *inspiration*, changes should be made that better reflect Scripture's nature as a "God-breathed" document. I also recommended that a forthright rejection of the dictation theory be appended to the statement in order to further distance the doctrine of inerrancy from accusations that it requires mechanical interaction between the divine and human author. Along these lines I further argued for the addition of a statement clearly articulating the "identity" that exists between the divine and human word in Scripture while also arguing that some comment be made designating the unique status of Scripture as an inspired document among all other Christian literature.

Attention was given to the matter of God's providential supervision of the biblical authors and the biblical text by proposing an additional article clearly differentiating between this doctrine and the doctrine of inspiration, noting that the

former is necessary but not sufficient to explain the latter. In a related discussion, I maintained that the CSBI have a modification added that spoke to the human authorship of Scripture in such a way so as to relieve the tension between God's sovereign control of the text and the parallel claim that man's personality was in no way violated during the writing process.

My interaction with matters related to the authorship of Scripture led naturally to a reappraisal of how the CSBI upholds the humanity of Scripture. In this section I argued that the CSBI requires stronger, more explicit articulation of how a claim to inerrancy in no way necessitates a loss of Scripture's human component. In my discussion I demonstrated how logical missteps at this point have afflicted many of the contemporary challenges to inerrancy and now require direct address in a revised CSBI. In the following section, I dedicated several pages to exploring a contemporary challenge to inerrancy that has come from the realm of textual criticism. Here I recommended changes to the existing article and the addition of a new article that accounts for the recent changes in the discipline of textual criticism while relating these changes specifically to the doctrine of inerrancy. Here I noted that despite the changing nature of textual criticism as a discipline, recovery of the original text is still a valid and necessary endeavor, but is not required by the doctrine of inerrancy itself or needed in order to promote saving belief in the gospel.

Next, I argued that an updated CSBI requires a clear articulation of the difference between the words *infallibility* and *inerrancy*, taking into account their historical, lexical, and theological usage. I claimed that clarification here is necessary in order to avoid future confusion and misuse of these words. I further argued that the CSBI

must, in light of the controversy surrounding interpretations of the Genesis record, oppose directly any approach to this particular text that undermines the necessity of a historic Adam and Eve.

I followed this discussion with the proposal of an additional article that touches upon the diversity of the biblical discourse and utilizes resources from speech act theory in order to defend the universal classification of inerrancy upon the whole of Scripture, not merely the descriptive portions. I concluded my reassessment and reformulation by interacting with the issue of inerrancy and the biblical phenomena. Here I offered significant modifications to the existing document with the aim to forestall equivocation in our usage of two related yet often confused words *precision* and *truth* while also recommending that the category of “phenomena” should no longer exclude the self-attesting portions of Scripture.

Now, having defined inspiration and inerrancy, the CSBI moves in the last set of articles to discuss other issues related directly to the previous eight articles. Although these last articles are integral for formulating a robust doctrine of Scripture and a statement that rightly expresses the doctrine of inerrancy, they are difficult to categorize under one broad heading. Nevertheless, it will become clear that what is stated in the latter portion of the CSBI is of vital importance. I now turn my reassessment and reformulation of Articles XIV-XIX.

CHAPTER 5  
CSBI REASSESSMENT AND REFORMULATION  
PART 3: ARTICLES XIV-XIX

These latter articles of affirmation and denial round out the CSBI by addressing issues that are integrally related to the doctrine of inerrancy but that do not set out to define the doctrine as explicitly as the previous articles. Nevertheless, the matters covered Articles XIV-XIX are essential for developing a robust articulation of inerrancy and for demonstrating how inerrancy cannot be detached from other categories related to a sound theology of Scripture. Article XIV, for example, speaks of the “unity and internal consistency of Scripture.” The strong affirmation of an error-free biblical text provided in the previous set of articles (Articles VI-XIII) requires by necessity that Scripture not contain internal contradictions. Importantly, the denial portion of Article XIV also indicates that the definition of inerrancy offered in the previous articles is not dependent upon the reconciliation of every alleged problem in Scripture. Article XV affirms that inerrancy is the natural corollary of inspiration, while also addressing matters related to divine accommodation and Scripture. Article XVI ties the doctrine of inerrancy to a strong historical precedent in the church while Article XVII recognizes the Holy Spirit’s role in solidifying the Christian’s confidence in Scripture. The second-to-last article (XVIII), while not utilizing the words *inerrant* or *inerrancy*, rejects any hermeneutical approach to Scripture that undermines the definition of inerrancy provided in the previous series of articles. The final article (XIX) notes the spiritual significance

of upholding the truths expressed in all the previous articles and offers a brief warning to those who might reject what has been previously affirmed.

It is clear, then, that in a reassessment and reformulation of the CSBI, these articles of affirmation and denial must be engaged just as rigorously as the previous articles. In the following sections, therefore, I will examine each of these articles of affirmation and denial, providing a description of their original intent and purpose and offering the requisite modifications and additions to the articles under their respective sections.

#### **Article XIV: The Unity of Scripture**

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

The unity and internal consistency of Scripture is a natural corollary of the doctrine of inerrancy. If Scripture is without error, then by definition it cannot contain contradictions.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the affirmation here also recognizes that the unity and internal consistency of Scripture is, like inerrancy, founded upon the fact that Scripture is God's Word. If Scripture is from one divine author, then it is reasonable to assert that such a work would possess a coherent message, consistent storyline, and unified doctrinal structure.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This notion that Scripture does not and cannot contain internal inconsistencies or contradictions appeared early in the church's discussion of the error-free nature of the Bible. See Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 99-102.

<sup>2</sup>See my discussion of Scripture's unified storyline in chap. 3.

The doctrine of inerrancy, however, is not dependent upon the reconciliation of every alleged problem in Scripture or the harmonization of every puzzling chronological discrepancy and variant account. Although evangelical scholars and theologians throughout history have provided reasonable solutions for many of the alleged problems in Scripture, there are some issues that have not yet been resolved. That there are some matters for which an adequate solution has not been found, however, does not overturn the doctrine of inerrancy, for if it is true that all of Scripture is from one divine author who has spoken truthfully in all he has communicated, then it is reasonable to suggest that the inability to resolve particular problems in Scripture is due to a deficiency in us or in the resources we currently have at hand, not the communication itself.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it is not required of one to abandon a theory if there are some pieces of evidence that appear to undermine the theory. Comparing the existence of apparent problems in Scripture to anomalies in various scientific theories, Sproul observes,

Anomalies may indeed be so significant that they make it necessary for scientists to rethink their theories about the nature of geology, biology, or the like. For the most part, however, when an overwhelming weight of evidence points to the viability of a theory and some anomalies remain that do not seem to fit the theory, it is not the accepted practice in the scientific world to “scrap” the whole well-attested theory because of a few difficulties that have not yet been resolved.<sup>4</sup>

These statements, however, should not give the impression that inerrantists can merely resign themselves to the existence of problems in Scripture without working diligently to provide possible solutions; nor should one exploit these assertions as an excuse to ignore

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<sup>3</sup>To recall, this was Augustine’s recourse when he encountered areas in Scripture that did not appear to align with other texts or that seemed to affirm false ideas. See Augustine, *Letters*, 82, *NPNF*, 1:350.

<sup>4</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary* (Oakland, CA: The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1980), 32-33.

the difficulties that have remained unresolved: problems in the Bible, especially the ones that give us the most trouble, must be “face[d] squarely and honestly.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, because we are dealing with the contents of God’s word, these matters demand “our deepest intellectual endeavors.”<sup>6</sup>

While this article helpfully acknowledges the unity of Scripture and detaches the viability of the doctrine of inerrancy from a requirement to resolve every apparent problem in the Bible, there are some modifications that would further strengthen the affirmations and denials found therein. First, as I noted briefly in chapter 3, I contend that the CSBI generally would benefit from a greater explicit emphasis on the character and person of God in the affirmation and denial statements. Related to our discussion here, I argued that Article V should include a reference to the one divine author in its affirmation of the nature of Scripture as progressive revelation: because Scripture is the product of one divine author jointly written by human authors over the course of many centuries, it should be affirmed that Scripture is both internally coherent *and* progressive. Similarly, because Scripture is ultimately the product of one author, an affirmation of the Bible’s unity and internal consistency should be made. Like Article V, however, I recommend that Article XIV link explicitly Scripture’s unity to the nature of God and the doctrine of inspiration. By doing so, not only will we strengthen the affirmation statement, we will provide the grounds for the denial portion as well. That is, inerrancy and the corollaries of Scripture’s unity and internal consistency will be tied to God and

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

the doctrine of inspiration, not to the resolution of problem areas in Scripture.<sup>7</sup> The revised affirmation statement would read,

We affirm that Scripture, as the word of one divine author who is unified, coherent, and consistent within himself, possesses, by necessity, an internal unity, coherence, and consistency.

The next portion should then draw from this theological foundation to deny that the existence of alleged contradictions in Scripture undermines the truth claims of Scripture or the doctrine of inerrancy; this connection would be made by using the word “therefore” in the first part of the denial statement. Finally, I recommend that this revised statement recognize, given the unity and internal consistency of Scripture, that the harmonization of biblical difficulties is both possible and valuable, while also including a statement that clearly separates the validity of the doctrine of inerrancy from the resolution of difficulties in Scripture. Accordingly, the denial statement would be modified as follows (with changes in italics):<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>This is much like the discussion in chap. 4 concerning inerrancy and the discipline of textual criticism (see Article X: Inerrant Autographs). It is essential for the doctrine of inerrancy that it not depend upon the transmission or recovery of an error-free text. Likewise, inerrancy is not dependent upon the reconciliation of every problem in Scripture; rather, it is based upon God and the biblical teaching about inspiration.

<sup>8</sup>Although inerrancy is not dependent upon the resolution of every difficulty in Scripture, it should be acknowledged that evangelical inerrantists have produced a plethora of books that offer a many plausible solutions to the problem passages in the Bible. For whole Bible, see Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clean and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), and Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982). For the gospels, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007); Vern Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). While there is no excuse for forced, unreasonable, ignorant attempts at harmonization in the name of inerrancy, it is equally illegitimate to assign apparent difficulties to the category of “error” while disregarding probable solutions offered by inerrantists. We must exercise caution, however, so that our efforts at harmonization do not discredit our stance on inerrancy. Raymond Dillard rightly remarks that harmonization “as an exegetical method has a long history and has made many important contributions to biblical studies. But it has also been somewhat of a mixed blessing. When too facilely employed, it tends to lack credibility and does not commend the cause (the doctrine of Scripture) it seeks to uphold.” Raymond Dillard, “Harmonization: A Help and a Hindrance,” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 163.

*We therefore deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible. While the harmonization of many problem passages is both possible and valuable, we further deny that inerrancy is founded upon full resolution of problem passages rather than the biblical teaching about God and inspiration.*

Secondly, I propose that an additional article be appended to the CSBI in order to address the important matter of worldview and its relation to the doctrine of inerrancy. I suggest that this new article appear directly after Article XIV because how one defines and determines Scripture's unity, internal consistency, and alleged errors will depend, in large measure upon what one believes about God, human nature, and the character of Scripture; that is, upon one's worldview.

**Additional Article:  
Inerrancy and Worldview**

Most recently, Vern Poythress, professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia has investigated these matters in *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (2012).<sup>9</sup>

Poythress explains the characteristics and significance of one's worldview as it relates to our discussion here.

Many basic assumptions about the nature of the world fit together to form a *worldview*. A worldview includes assumptions about whether God exists, what *kind* of God might exist, what kind of world we live in, how we come to know what we know, whether there are moral standards, what is the purpose of human life, and so on.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Vern Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). Poythress's book is hailed on the back cover as the "first worldview-based defense of inerrancy."

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

Each of the components of a worldview that Poythress lists—and his description is not exhaustive—relates directly or indirectly to several (if not all) of the theological categories under which I have assessed and offered modifications to the CSBI. In other words, the matter of worldview has immediate relevance to how one frames one’s doctrine of Scripture. The crux of the problem, however, is that “Most modern worldviews differ at crucial points from the worldview offered in the Bible.”<sup>11</sup>

These considerations should immediately draw our attention back to the discussion in chapter 2 of evangelicals who are proposing a wholesale modification of our understanding of inerrancy based on modern critical studies. Kenton Sparks, for example, argues that evangelicals can and should assimilate the “assured results” of historical-critical scholarship into their doctrine of Scripture. Sparks demonstrates not only a broad knowledge of historical scholarship, but also a profound appreciation for those who have labored in the field. What he fails to consider, however, is that those who have conducted such work have labored from a worldview that is, at several points, diametrically opposed to a biblical worldview. This is not simply a matter of accusing historical-critical scholars of being devoid of the Holy Spirit;<sup>12</sup> the underlying intellectual

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Sparks strongly rebuffs this kind of approach to historical-critical scholarship. The conservative argument, according to Sparks, usually proceeds in the following manner: “Biblical critics are not Christians, and, as Paul has said, ‘The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned’ (1 Cor. 2:14 NIV). End of argument. According to this line of thought, the critics err because they do not share our assumptions and/or because they lack the resources of the Holy Spirit. So we may safely ignore their pagan view of ‘scholarship.’” Kenton Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 303. While we can join with Sparks in chiding those who use theological reasons to bypass rigorous engagement with historical-critical scholars, we must also point out the validity of this deduction from 1 Cor 2:14. The Scripture is replete with evidence suggesting that one’s spiritual commitments will determine one’s intellectual commitments. Those who were blind to Jesus’ identity even sought to undermine the historicity of his resurrection (Matt 28:13); unregenerate man suppresses the truth of the gospel (Rom

commitments—certainly guided by deep spiritual commitments—that form the scholars’ worldview will inevitably affect their study of history and the conclusions they draw about the veracity of the biblical narrative. If scholars’ presuppositions about whether God exists, the kind of God that exists, the nature of humankind, the direction of history, the possibility of miracles, and the role of reason are in opposition to what Scripture asserts regarding these matters, it is likely that they will make direct and significant challenges to Scripture’s truth claims, whether they are aware of their core intellectual commitments or not. It appears theologically and epistemologically naïve, therefore, for evangelicals to enter into an examination of historical-critical studies without a robust recognition of the profound and fundamental differences that exist between an evangelical and a non-evangelical worldview and how such differences will guide one’s study of the Bible.

An updated CSBI, therefore, would acknowledge these important realities in both the articles of affirmation and denial and the exposition. (The exposition broaches the topic of worldview, but only briefly.<sup>13</sup>) Included in the CSBI would be an article that addresses the comprehensive nature of a given worldview’s affect on biblical studies generally and inerrancy specifically. This new article would also note inerrancy’s reliance upon a biblical worldview while denying that a correct understanding of

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1:18). There is a kind of healthy suspicion believers might have when those who reject the God of the Bible undertake the study of his word.

<sup>13</sup>The CSBI exposition reads, “Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world-views have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism which denies that God is knowable, the rationalism which denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism which denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism which denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-biblical principles seep into men’s theologies at [a] presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.”

inerrancy can be articulated apart from specific, essential biblical givens. The new article would state,

We affirm that a person's worldview will have a definite yet often subtle effect upon one's study of Scripture and one's acceptance of its truth claims. We further affirm that inerrancy is consistent with a biblical worldview that upholds the Creator-creature distinction, the sovereignty of God, the truthful nature of God's communication, the personal character of the universe, the human nature, and the adequacy of human language.

We deny that inerrancy can be rightly understood or articulated apart from a biblical worldview.

The affirmation statement acknowledges the subtlety with which one's worldview will determine one's approach to Scripture and one's subsequent exegetical conclusions.

While it is true that underlying spiritual commitments inevitably shape the way scholars conduct their biblical and historical research, inerrantists must take care to avoid the claim that scholars are fully aware of these influences and are consciously attempting to deceive others. Rarely, if ever, is this the case. The new article, nevertheless, does recognize that inerrancy as a doctrine fits within a broader framework of Christian theology and cannot be rightly articulated or defended apart from other key doctrines.

#### **Article XV: Inspiration, Accommodation and Jesus' View of Scripture**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Just as today, so in the years leading up to the formulation of the CSBI there were those who argued that inerrancy was not a biblical teaching. Article XV counters this notion by stating emphatically that inerrancy is "grounded in the teaching of the Bible about

inspiration.” While the word *inerrancy* is not used in Scripture, the concept is clearly evident in the biblical doctrine of inspiration, for it is unthinkable that God would breathe out error, fraud, or deceit (see Article XII).

Furthermore, the inerrantist position is also based largely on Jesus’ teaching regarding the Old Testament. John Wenham, one of the original signers of the CSBI, argued, in a book published six years prior to the document’s original composition, that Christ’s use and description of the Old Testament demonstrated that he believed Scripture was inspired, authoritative, and without error.<sup>14</sup> Some Protestants at the time, however, while conceding that Jesus did maintain a high view of Scripture during his time on earth, held that his belief about the nature of Scripture was simply an accommodation to the mistaken viewpoints of his time.<sup>15</sup> The appeal to accommodation, as we observed in chapter 2, was an attempt by non-inerrantists to provide a basis for why we should expect to find errors in Scripture. In the process of disclosing himself to humanity, they contended, God adapted his revelation to fit mankind’s faulty worldviews. The final revelational product in Scripture, then, was not perfect, for it contained historical, scientific, and geographical mistakes; it did, however, serve as an adequate vehicle for divine revelation.<sup>16</sup> God’s revelation in Christ, accordingly, followed a similar pattern. In his humanity, so the argument went, Jesus was not omniscient—there were things he

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<sup>14</sup>John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972), 11-42. The chapter in which Wenham discusses specifically Jesus’ view of the Old Testament was reprinted eight years later—two years after the CSBI was published—under the title “Christ’s View of Scripture,” in *Inerrancy*, 3-36.

<sup>15</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 32.

<sup>16</sup>Jack Rogers and Donald McKim argued that such a view of accommodation was the historic position of the church. See Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). Their argument was soundly refuted in John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

did not know. It was reasonable, therefore, to suggest that Jesus would not have known that the prevalent contemporary beliefs about the nature of Scripture were misguided due to an ignorance of (future) critical scholarship. The denial portion answers this claim directly, stating that appeal to accommodation or to Jesus' humanity rightly understood cannot be used to overturn his teaching on the authority and inerrancy of the Old Testament.

There have been recent attempts to draw upon the category of accommodation in order to provide ground for the claim that Scripture contains mistakes. Kenton Sparks, for example, promotes the view that Jesus accommodated to the mistaken viewpoints of his contemporaries. Furthermore, Sparks argues that Jesus' teachings and his understanding of the Old Testament were affected by the fact that he possessed a finite human nature.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Jesus "would have erred in the usual way that other people err because of their finite perspectives. He misremembered this even or that, and mistook this person for someone else, and thought—like everyone else—that the sun was literally rising. To err in these ways simply goes with the human territory."<sup>18</sup> The obvious implication is that Jesus' view of the Old Testament cannot be wholly embraced, for such views simply reflected the misguided beliefs of his time.<sup>19</sup> The necessity for present-day inerrantists to uphold the denial given in Article XV is thus evident.

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<sup>17</sup>See Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 23-29.

<sup>18</sup>Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 252. Sparks is hesitant in *God's Words in Human Words* to affirm explicitly that Jesus had a fallen nature. In his most recent work, however, he makes it clear that he finds it "more reasonable—and more Scriptural—to affirm that Jesus was both finite and fallen, in all respects like us 'sin excepted'" (Heb 4:15) (Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word*, 25).

<sup>19</sup>Evangelical non-inerrantist Peter Enns has also recently advocated a view of accommodation that suggests that God adapted the mistaken worldviews of the Old Testament authors for the sake of

Given the significance of Jesus' teaching about and use of Scripture for the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy, however, it is surprising that the CSBI's articles of affirmation and denial are not more explicit in asserting this connection. To my mind, Jesus' view of Old Testament Scripture constitutes one of the strongest arguments for the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Granted, those who reject Scripture altogether will find the appeal to Jesus' view of the Old Testament hopelessly circular;<sup>20</sup> but for those who profess evangelical faith in Christ, the evidence found in the gospel narratives with regard to Jesus' use of and teaching about the Old Testament should carry significant weight in the development of one's doctrine of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> I suggest, therefore, that a statement be appended to Article XV that expressly acknowledges the foundational importance of Christ's use of and teaching about the Scripture for the articulation of inspiration and inerrancy. The revised affirmation statement would read (with changes in italics),

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration *and aligns with Jesus' own view and teaching about the nature of Scripture.*

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revelation. See Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). Although Enns is careful not to say explicitly that Scripture makes mistakes or commits error, his general argument leaves little doubt this is what he implies. See G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>20</sup>The charge of circularity, however, can itself be challenged, for there always exists a kind of circularity when one is attempting to establish one's ultimate authority, regardless if that ultimate authority is the biblical witness to Jesus or one's own autonomous reason. In the case of the latter, it can be observed that when the rationalist attempts to establish the authority of his reason, he must first demonstrate the reliability of reason in order to complete his case. Yet, in demonstrating the reliability of his reason, the rationalist already assumes the reliability of his reason: his reason must be reliable in order to provide discernable evidence of its reliability.

<sup>21</sup>Consider Abraham Kuyper's contention that calling Christ "Lord" obligates the Christian to adopt Christ's view of Scripture. See Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 551, cited in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 97.

With the addition of this sentence, we also form a connection between the affirmation and denial statements. In the original article, it is difficult to see any link between these two sections. What does grounding the doctrine of inerrancy and the doctrine of inspiration have to do with Jesus' teaching about Scripture? The revised affirmation statement removes any potential ambiguity between these two sections while also acknowledging the significance of Jesus' teaching with regard to the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. The denial portion, however, could also use some attention.

In his recent doctrine of Scripture, A. T. B. McGowan employs several strategies to persuade evangelicals to table *inerrancy* in favor of *infallibility*. One of those strategies is to argue that inerrancy is merely an implication of a doctrine—rather than a biblical teaching itself—and therefore should not carry obligatory weight among evangelicals.<sup>22</sup> Speaking of Carl Henry's response to Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible*, McGowan comments,

Henry was very unhappy with the publication of Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* because it appeared to call into question the reality of the Christian profession of those who denied inerrancy. Henry insisted that many evangelical Christians rejected inerrancy and that their Christian profession should not be called into question. He believed them to be Christians. He took this position because he recognized that inerrancy is not a biblical doctrine but an implication drawn from another biblical doctrine (inspiration). It was an implication Henry himself accepted and for which he argued strongly. He recognized, however, that other evangelicals did not accept the implication and, since it was an implication and not itself a biblical doctrine, it could not be insisted upon as a test of Christian discipleship.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, for McGowan, the implication is a “rationalistic nineteenth century response to the developing liberal theology, based on a particularly high view of the

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<sup>22</sup>A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 114-15.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

notion of scientific accuracy.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, he mentions that evangelicals would do well to abandon inerrancy for a doctrine with stronger biblical and historic precedent.

The problem with McGowan’s argument, however, is twofold. First, assuming that inerrancy is an inference from inspiration, this fact does not provide grounds for our dismissal of inerrancy. That is, generally speaking, if the inference in question is a legitimate implication of a clear biblical teaching, then it holds authoritative weight and should be embraced by evangelicals. Furthermore, it is possible to err when one formulates doctrines based on clear biblical teachings; that inerrancy might be an inference from another obvious biblical doctrine “is not in itself a criticism of it.”<sup>25</sup> Secondly, as John Frame observes, inerrancy “is not *merely* an inference. For inerrancy is only another word for truth. And that God’s word is always *true* or *truth* is not merely an inference. It is an explicit teaching of the Bible.”<sup>26</sup> If inerrancy is understood as another way of expressing the Bible is wholly true (as the CSBI does in Article XIII), then the charge that it is simply an inference from the doctrine of inspiration cannot finally hold. In light of McGowan’s challenges, then, I recommend an addition to the denial portion of Article XV that answers directly the argument that inerrancy is a mere inference from other doctrine and therefore easily dismissed. The revised statement would read (with additions in italics),

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity. *We further deny that inerrancy can be rejected as a mere inference from the doctrine of inspiration.*

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 4 of *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 546.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

The addition of this second sentence in the denial portion relates back to the first clause of the affirmation portion as it makes a claim regarding specifically the doctrine of inspiration and its relation to inerrancy. Thus, Article XV now addresses the basis for our belief in the doctrine of inspiration, links this belief directly to Jesus' view of Scripture, and answers challenges to inerrancy that appeal to the argument that inerrancy is merely an implication of a biblical doctrine. The CSBI now turns to another important issue: the history of the doctrine of inerrancy.

### **Article XVI: The History of the Doctrine of Inerrancy**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Both before and after the CSBI was penned, one of the primary strategies utilized by non-inerrantists to undermine the inerrantist position was/is to make an appeal to the historic teaching of the church. The early church fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Bavink, and Kuyper, they claim, all held to a view of Scripture that was far different than what inerrantists advance today.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, not only was inerrancy a departure from the historic position of the church, it is a doctrine that owed its origin to a specific era of church history in which the Protestant response to the assaults of higher criticism

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<sup>27</sup>The most famous work that sought to undermine the historical precedence of the doctrine of inerrancy was Jack Rogers and Donald McKim's tome, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). Despite John Woodbridge's sound rebuttal of this interpretation of history in *Biblical Authority*, some today continue to appeal to history in order to overturn inerrancy and what they view as a novel doctrine. See Woodbridge's most recent work on the history of inerrancy in John D. Woodbridge, "Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Andreas Köstenburger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 104-38.

compelled scholars to form a theology of Scripture according to modernistic rather than biblical categories. The result was a doctrine that established Scripture as epistemological first principle and therefore required an error-free text in order to retain its appropriate authority for Christians.

While the argument for inerrancy does not finally rest upon historical precedent, it was/is necessary for inerrantists to refute the kind of historiography described above and bind their argument to the teaching of the church.<sup>28</sup> The affirmation section makes a positive claim—the doctrine of inerrancy has strong historical precedent—while the denial portion makes a parallel assertion, rejecting the idea that inerrancy is a recent doctrine concocted and crystallized during a time of rigorous debate in the seventeenth century over the reliability of the Bible and in response to the findings of historical-critical scholarship.

As we observed in chapter 1, although the words *inerrant* or *inerrancy* were never used prior to the modern period, the idea of an error-free text has certainly been embraced by a large segment of the professing Christian church since the first century. A question that naturally emerges as one considers the rigor with which the doctrine of inerrancy was defended and defined in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, however, is why so much attention was given to the doctrine in the latter half of the second millennium? Such a recent upsurge in scholarship devoted to the doctrine of Scripture generally and to inerrancy specifically does seem to give some weight to the

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<sup>28</sup>For example, see Harold Lindsell, “An Historian Looks at Inerrancy (1965),” in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984); John D. Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*.

claim that the idea of an error-free text—at least as it is currently defined—is a modern invention.

### **Additional Article: Inerrancy and the Validity of Doctrinal Development**

It is at this point that I suggest the CSBI could be strengthened, not by modifying the existing articles but by including an additional article that asserts the legitimacy of doctrinal development and acknowledges the contemporary articulation of inerrancy as a detailed yet valid expression of the historic teaching of the church.<sup>29</sup> The new article would read,

We affirm that theological formulations often receive greater nuance as we engage contemporary issues. We further affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is a nuanced yet valid expression of the church’s historic position on the nature of Scripture.

We deny that inerrancy rightly articulated is the misguided product of modernism, common-sense realism, or any other external framework applied to Scripture rather than the teaching of Scripture itself.

This new article is vital, for it introduces a category the original CSBI neglected to include. Article XVI simply denies that inerrancy is a novel doctrine, crafted relatively recently in church history. This is helpful and necessary, but it appears as a mere reaction unless it is set alongside a statement that legitimizes the idea that Christian doctrine, over time and as a result of encountering contemporary issues, grows and matures in nuance

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<sup>29</sup>James Buchanan, writing on the doctrine of justification, expresses well the nature of doctrinal development. “It is not necessary to say in reply to [the claim that justification is trite and exhausted], as some might be disposed to say, that ‘what is new in Theology is not true, and what is true is not new;’ for we believe, and are warranted by the whole history of the Church in believing, that Theology, like every other science, is progressive—progressive, not in the sense of adding anything to the truth once for all revealed in the inspired Word, but in the way of eliciting and unfolding what was always been contained in it—of bringing out one lesson after another, and placing each of them in a clearer and stronger light—and discovering the connection, interdependency, and harmony, of all the constituent parts of the marvelous scheme of Revelation.” James Buchanan, *Justification* (1867; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997), 1.

and detail. As doctrines develop, however, they continue to retain fundamental aspects of the original teaching, as children retain the features that were faintly apparent in their prenatal state.<sup>30</sup> Inerrancy is not a doctrinal invention conceived by Christian apologists in order to retain intellectual credibility in the throes of modernism or to counter the arguments of higher-criticism; it is an example of what happens when a historic doctrine confronts contemporary issues related directly to what the doctrine originally asserted.<sup>31</sup> As I noted in chapter 1, it was not until the latter half of the millennium that the doctrine of Scripture received any concentrated attention. The reason for this rather recent development is because it is only of late that epistemological, biblical, and theological developments have *necessitated* concerted interaction with issues related to the nature of Scripture.<sup>32</sup> The view that Scripture is entirely truthful and without error in all it affirms was largely assumed by the bulk of the church until after the Reformation, so there was no need to argue strenuously for it. We should, therefore, expect a stronger and more detailed emphasis on the error-free nature of Scripture when nineteenth century scholars presented sophisticated arguments that undermined the truthfulness of major theological affirmations and large swaths of the biblical narrative.<sup>33</sup> This new article establishes a

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<sup>30</sup>Consider, for example, the advances that were made between the Council of Nicea and the Council of Chalcedon with regard to Christ's divine and human natures.

<sup>31</sup>Contra Todd Mangum, who plainly states, "Within [the modernist-fundamentalist] debate, conservatives developed the doctrine of inerrancy to guard the Bible against attack." Todd Mangum, "The Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy, the Inerrancy of Scripture, and the Development of American Dispensationalism," in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Authority of Scripture: Historical, Biblical, and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Carlos R. Bovell (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 47. Such a conception of how the doctrine of inerrancy was articulated in the early twentieth century ignores important historical factors and does not give any consideration to the matter of legitimate doctrinal development.

<sup>32</sup>See my comments in chap. 1, 10n24.

<sup>33</sup>Concerning the significant development of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture in the nineteenth century, D. A. Carson comments, "The Princetonians had more to say about Scripture than some

category within which to understand both the doctrine of inerrancy and the CSBI as natural developments in the course of church history. I now move to consider another significant topic: the role of the Holy Spirit and His relation to the doctrine of inerrancy.

### **Article XVII: The Internal Testimony of the Spirit**

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

The original point of this article was to maintain the vital connection between the Word of God and the Spirit of God. While an individual's confidence in Scripture rests upon actual evidence for its divinity, the Holy Spirit is responsible for confirming this evidence in a person's heart. Thus, the article states that the Holy Spirit "bears witness to the Scriptures" and that he "assures believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word." The Spirit does not witness apart from Scripture, nor does he validate the divinity of the Bible against one's reason. Rather, "God himself confirms the truthfulness of his own Word." Moreover, because he is the author of Scripture, the Holy Spirit will not witness in a way that is contrary to the Scripture.

One contemporary complaint related to issues raised in this article is that inerrancy fixes the authoritative work of the Holy Spirit squarely in the past and does not account for the Spirit's present action of convincing believers of Scripture's authority.

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of their forebearers, precisely because that was one of the most common points of attack from rising liberalism of the (especially European) university world." D. A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's *Renewing the Center*, in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 44.

Stephen Jeffrey Oldfield argues in this manner, finding in the doctrine of inerrancy the inherent tendency to downplay the Holy Spirit's role in establishing the authority of Scripture for the contemporary reader.

It seems that one of the main points of the doctrine of inerrancy is that [,] in order to have an authoritative Bible [,] the Bible must have been first given without error. It would be consistent then for inerrantist to concentrate on the past work of the Holy Spirit in creating an errorless autograph. What is evident is that the Spirit does play a primary role in establishing biblical authority, but it is the past work of the Spirit that does this. . . . Without this decisive act of the Spirit there could be no doctrine of inerrancy. It is only because God has 'breathed' the Scriptures that they can be said to be inerrant. . . . What is important about this condition is the kind of emphasis placed on the Holy Spirit. There is little to no appeal by the inerrantist to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit that happens in a believer's life today.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, although Oldfield cites the CSBI throughout his doctoral thesis, his remark that the inerrantist position does not allow for the affirmation of the Holy Spirit's current work in the believer's life actually runs contrary to what is explicitly affirmed in Article XVII of the CSBI. That is, while they certainly asserted the past work of inspiration, the framers of the CSBI were also careful to maintain the Holy Spirit's role in enabling contemporary individuals to recognize the truthfulness of Scripture. It is strange that Oldfield would miss this clear affirmation of the Spirit's role in establishing biblical authority.

A second problem with Oldfield's complaint is that he appears to misunderstand the place of inerrancy in relation to biblical authority. This confusion appears earlier when he suggests that, "the doctrine of inerrancy must be challenged . . . in its claim to be the foundation for a person's faith."<sup>35</sup> Yet, we must ask:

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<sup>34</sup>Jeffery Stephen Oldfield, "The Word Became Text and Dwelt Among Us? An Examination of the Doctrine of Inerrancy" (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2007), 221-22.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 218.

Would we still recommend removing inerrancy as a foundation for the church's faith if the word "inerrancy" was replaced with—per Article XIII—the word "truthfulness?" In my judgment it becomes very difficult to sustain a proper evangelical claim that the *truthfulness* of Scripture cannot remain the foundation of a Christian's faith. It seems that Oldfield takes the term inerrancy to imply a kind of precision that, if challenged, could cause a believer's faith to crumble. His repeated references to the Bible as a "scientific textbook"<sup>36</sup> indicate that he may misunderstand the doctrine of inerrancy at this very point.<sup>37</sup> It is no wonder, then, that he recommends that we remove inerrancy from its foundational status for Christian belief: inerrancy so understood could potentially damage a people's faith because it runs contrary to the biblical witness and phenomena.

Yet, Oldfield's complaints also indicate that he is following Stanley Grenz and John Franke by conflating the doctrines of inspiration and illumination. Commenting on Grenz and Franke specifically, Michael Horton observes that both theologians have exhibited an "immanentistic way of conflating inspiration and illumination" resembling

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 224ff.

<sup>37</sup>Oldfield comments, "But if one wants to see scripture as a *scientific textbook* that acts as the foundation for the church's faith then one has to restrict the role of the Spirit to the past act of inspiration. What we are suggesting here is that one recognizes the necessity of the Spirit's contemporary work in making scripture authoritative to mankind and so not treat it as a text with which one can do anything one likes. If we reduce the Spirit's role in scriptural authority to the past act of plenary inspiration then not only are we prone to treat the text we have as a *scientific textbook* that is the foundation of our faith, but also we are in danger of deism—the Holy Spirit acted once before in the past but we no longer need him to continue to act for us to believe" (ibid., 224-225; emphasis added). It is difficult to determine what Oldfield means when he refers to Scripture as a "scientific textbook." Is he referring to Charles Hodge and his description of theology as a "science" of retrieving and properly arranging biblical data? Or does he have in mind the claim that Scripture does not speak according to modern convention with regard to origins, cosmology, and other important scientific matters? Given his discussion earlier in his thesis (ibid., 84) and his repeated reference in the above quote to the Bible as the "foundation of the church's faith" and the "foundation of our faith," leads me to believe that he has in mind the former category. I find his ambiguity here, given the nature of the debate, largely unhelpful.

the proposals of Fredrich Schleiermacher two centuries ago.<sup>38</sup> Grenz, because he rejects a one-to-one correspondence between Scripture and the Word of God and argues that, “spirituality is generated from within the individual,”<sup>39</sup> views the Bible chiefly in functional rather than ontological categories. The Bible is the “foundational record” for how the ancient community responded to God’s revelation should therefore exist “alongside of experience and culture.” Horton detects a problem here, however. “In this way, inspiration is lowered to the level of illumination and therefore broadened to include the whole history of the people of God and their experience of this interplay between Scripture, tradition, and culture.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, John Franke collapses the act of the Spirit speaking through the text of Scripture and his act of speaking through culture into one unified act.<sup>41</sup> “At this point,” Horton contends, “Franke seems to conflate inspiration with illumination—and beyond this, to conflate the Spirit’s illumination of unbelievers and believers alike by common grace (through general revelation) with the illumination of believers to interpret special revelation faithfully.”<sup>42</sup>

The result of Grenz and Franke’s failure to maintain an appropriate distinction between inspiration and illumination is that Scripture is now viewed in functional rather than ontological categories: God’s revelation in the Bible is understood chiefly by its role in the community of believers rather than by its nature as a God-breathed written

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<sup>38</sup>Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 169-70.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 170. Horton is drawing from Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993).

<sup>40</sup>Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 170.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. Horton is drawing from John Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

revelation.<sup>43</sup> By framing their proposals in such a way, however, something significant is lost in the understanding of and approach to the Bible. That is, their view puts us in danger of “treating Scripture merely as an inspired record of Spirit-assisted ecclesial reflection rather than an inspired record of Spirit-breathed revelation from God.”<sup>44</sup>

Horton continues, “In short, God’s agency is made subordinate to human agency, and this inevitably undermines *sola gratia* (grace alone). While affirming Scripture as a means of grace, this view has the unintended consequence of eliminating Scripture’s status as a revealed canon that stands outside and above the pious individual or community.”<sup>45</sup>

Maintaining a clear distinction, therefore, between the doctrines of inspiration and illumination is essential for upholding a properly evangelical doctrine of Scripture. In light of the above proposals, however, it seems necessary to equip Article XVII with modifications that acknowledge attempts among evangelicals to collapse the categories of inspiration and illumination. Accordingly, the affirmation and denial statements would read (with changes in italics),

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word, *and that this witness is vital for a proper*

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 172.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. Related to our earlier discussion of Scripture as covenant document in chapter 3, Horton draws his discussion of Grenz and Franke’s proposal to a final conclusion. “The Bible is not ‘the church’s’ book if by that one means that the community created its own canon—which is tantamount to saying that the vassal (servant) rather than the Suzerain (Lord) is the author of the covenant. To whatever extent ‘the people’ create their constitution in modern states, the biblical canon must be defined by its own covenantal history, in which God’s saving action and revelation create the community rather than vice versa” (ibid.,173). In order to maintain our earlier affirmations that Scripture must be received as God’s covenantal word, we must also uphold a distinction between inspiration and illumination. If we fail to preserve this difference, we lose the personal (i.e., covenantal) nature of God’s revelation to us, for Scripture is no longer a clear word from our Creator but a product of the community. The potential of loss at this point is ironic especially for Grenz who sought in his theological efforts to emphasize the personal aspect of God’s relationship to his people over against mere doctrinal correctness.

*reverence for and understanding of the Bible. We further affirm that the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration is distinct from and prior to his work of illumination.*

We deny that the witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture *or that he adds additional infallible verbal revelation to Scripture.*

The modifications to the affirmation portion of Article XVII make two important claims. First, the additional statement to the first sentence emphasizes the necessity of the Spirit's work for rightly approaching and fully appropriating the Bible. Yet, there is a danger, as Horton notes, that we articulate the doctrine of inspiration in such a way that we turn the Scripture into mere document void of effective power. "If we divorce illumination (the inner testimony of the Spirit) from inspiration, we easily fall into the impersonal view of Scripture as a dead letter, a view for which conservative Christians are often criticized and caricatured."<sup>46</sup> It seems that Oldfield is sensitive to this danger and therefore desires to preserve the contemporary work of the Spirit in the lives of believers. Article XVII now clearly affirms that the work of the Spirit is essential for believers' approach to and handling of the Bible. The second full sentence answers in the affirmation section answers directly the proposals made by Grenz and Franke by upholding a distinction between inspiration and illumination.

The denial portion receives an additional statement in order to preserve the traditional view of illumination. This clarification is necessary because there is a tendency to mistake illumination for continuing revelation. The additional denial counters this tendency and ties in well with the previous distinction between inspiration and illumination for the Scripture. The Bible is an inspired, fixed text. The Spirit's work

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 169.

of illumination does not add to this text, but opens the mind of the believer rightly to understand and apply it.

### **Article XVIII: The Interpretation of Scripture**

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

The original concern of Article XVIII was that Scripture would be interpreted “as it was written,” rather than the way readers in their respective circumstances would have liked it to be written.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, the article asserts that Bible interpreters follow the principles of “grammatico-historical exegesis” so that they would “take the structures and time periods of the written texts seriously as [they] interpret them.”<sup>48</sup> Such an affirmation, however, does not imply that interpreters should disregard the various genre of Scripture or the literary devices employed by its authors. By its reference to “grammatico-historical exegesis,” the CSBI is emphasizing that legitimate interpretation appropriately respects the text of Scripture as it was given and the manner in which it was given.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the whole interpretive enterprise must be guided by the principle supplied by Article XIV concerning the Bible’s internal coherence and consistency:

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<sup>47</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 38.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>The exposition expands on this principle: “So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violate no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in the Bible writers.”

Because the Bible does not contain any contradictions, every hermeneutical effort that yields results that are at odds with other biblical affirmations must be disregarded.<sup>50</sup> Positively, this means that interpreters are to use the whole of Scripture to aid in understanding the various parts of Scripture.

The denial section of the article criticizes the use of source-critical scholarship that undermines biblical affirmations or its clear claims to authorship. Such a denial, however, does not reject all attempts to discover the sources that may have been used by the biblical writers as they compiled their research; it is intended primarily to curb attempts to undermine the historical aspects of Scripture or contradict any biblical affirmation.

An important question here, however, is whether the CSBI illegitimately restricts an affirmation of inerrancy to a particular hermeneutical system with its reference to “grammatico-historical exegesis.”<sup>51</sup> It is well known that a grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation is, as Robert Thomas observes, one of the “ongoing hallmarks of dispensationalism.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, so closely related is dispensationalism to this particular method of interpretation that the latter inevitably leads to the former. According to Thomas, “a choice of traditional grammatical-historical interpretation must lead to dispensational conclusions.”<sup>53</sup> Taking these statements in

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<sup>50</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 39.

<sup>51</sup>Robert L. Thomas *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 365. See also Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 47-48.

<sup>52</sup>Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 353. See also Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 47-48.

<sup>53</sup>Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 365. Thomas is contrasting traditional dispensationalism (his position) with progressive dispensationalism, claiming that the latter does not hold consistently to a grammatical-historical hermeneutic.

light of Article XVIII, therefore, the implication would seem to be that departure from dispensationalism and its closely associated hermeneutic indicates a departure from inerrancy.<sup>54</sup>

There are two problems with this kind of reasoning. First, Thomas's claim that a grammatical-historical approach to biblical interpretation must lead to dispensational conclusions fails to recognize how evangelicals dispute among themselves concerning (1) the precise definition of grammatical-historical hermeneutics; and (2) what conclusions one is required to adopt based on one's use of a grammatical-historical approach to Scripture.<sup>55</sup> Second and related, there are other ways in which inerrantists can and do practice biblical interpretation that are not readily classified as "grammatico-historical" but that respect the text of Scripture and all of the Bible's historical, geographical, and scientific statements. Would it not be better to say that we should handle the text of Scripture with hermeneutical methods necessitated by the biblical text itself rather than drawing attention to a specific interpretative approach that has become attached to a particular way of putting the Bible together? In his response to Peter Enns,

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<sup>54</sup>Thomas appears to draw this implication explicitly. "The new approaches [to evangelical hermeneutics] tend to abandon authorial and historical interpretation, the type of interpretation that prevails under strict grammatical-historical guidelines. This is somewhat surprising, coming as it does so close on the heels of consensus statements by evangelicals in the late 1970s and the early 1980s that the grammatical-historical method alone is compatible with an inerrant Bible" (Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 20). The two statements to which Thomas refers are the CSBI and the CSBH.

<sup>55</sup>What is entailed by a truly grammatical-historical approach to biblical interpretation is a matter of debate, and some evangelical inerrantists who engage specifically the subject of biblical hermeneutics would disagree with Thomas's assertion concerning the connection between grammatical-historical hermeneutics and traditional dispensationalism. See, for example, Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994); Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). While I acknowledge that the existence of disagreement among evangelicals over these matters does not disprove Thomas's position, the debate does signal, I contend, that inerrancy can no longer be attached to nomenclature that connotes a particular hermeneutical system.

Greg Beale suggests that the New Testament writers themselves may have utilized a form of hermeneutics that, while entirely legitimate and one that did not preclude careful attention to the biblical text in its original context, does not fit neatly under the category of grammatico-historical exegesis. “For example,” Beale comments, “the New Testament authors may be using a *biblical-theological* approach that could be described as a canonical contextual approach. This approach is not a technical *grammatical-historical* one but takes in wider biblical contexts than merely the one being quoted, yet is not inconsistent with the quoted text.”<sup>56</sup> The appeal to a different yet legitimate hermeneutical method, however, does not imply that interpreters should not handle the Bible according to grammatical and historical concerns while working in the text to determine what the author meant. What is important is the detachment of inerrancy from a phraseology that has come to be identified mainly with a particular hermeneutical method.

Concerning the matter of inerrancy and hermeneutics, a question that inerrantists might need to ask is this: was the controversy with Robert Gundry an example of how tying inerrancy too closely to a particular hermeneutical method can cause some inerrantists to misplace their critiques when confronted by interpretative practices that do not immediately appear to fit with the traditional understanding of particular passages? In the case of Gundry, it was not the inerrancy of Scripture per se that he questioned as he applied the category of midrash to specific sections of Matthew’s

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<sup>56</sup>Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy*, 87. See chap. 2 for a discussion of Peter Enns’s attempt to reframe the inerrancy debate and Beale’s response to these attempts.

gospel.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, it was Gundry's use of this particular hermeneutical method that brought Norman Geisler to contend strongly that Gundry had undercut inerrancy. The response of other inerrantist scholars like Douglas Moo and D. A. Carson, however, was not to question Gundry's stance on inerrancy as such, but to demonstrate that Gundry was not interpreting Matthew according to a method that was consistent with the actual text.<sup>58</sup> That such methods could ultimately undermine the doctrine of inerrancy was not of primary concern for Moo and Carson: they were careful to maintain the important distinction between the *doctrine of inerrancy* that guards the truthfulness of biblical affirmations and the *practice of hermeneutics* through which interpreters endeavor to establish what those biblical affirmations really are. In my judgment, this distinction is blurred if the CSBI is left to affirm what has come to represent an exclusive hermeneutical method in relation to inerrancy. Instead, it is better to ground proper interpretive methods in the text itself. The revised article would read (with changes in italics),

*We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by hermeneutical methods that are necessitated by the text itself and consistent with the Bible's own categories, while taking into account grammatical structure, historical setting, genre, and literary forms. We further affirm that the Bible should be interpreted according to its textual, epochal, and canonical horizons, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.*

By broadening Article XVIII here, the CSBI allows for other legitimate hermeneutical approaches that are not strictly "grammatico-historical" but that respect the Bible's own

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<sup>57</sup>See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 628-40.

<sup>58</sup>By the phrase "consistent with the text," I mean to include everything related to the text: words, grammatical structures, genre, and literary forms and devices. For helpful reviews of Gundry's commentary on Matthew, see D. A. Carson, "Gundry on Matthew," *TrinJ* 3 (1982): 71-91; Douglas J. Moo, "Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Approach," *JETS* 26 (1983): 31-39.

categories and the truth of Scripture's affirmations. The aim of the original wording of the article is retained by references to "grammatical structure" and "historical setting," but now the *text* of Scripture determines what hermeneutical approaches should be engaged. Moreover, the statement is no longer bound to a phrase that has come to connote a particular hermeneutical system.

The revised statement also includes a statement that affirms interpretive methods that follow Scripture's "textual, epochal, and canonical horizons."<sup>59</sup> With this three-fold designation, biblical interpretation is now tied not only to the immediate text, but to greater canonical developments as well. As such, the analogy of faith is affirmed and the unity of Scripture is upheld (see Article XIV). I now turn to the final article in order to consider the spiritual import of all that we have discussed over the past several pages.

### **Article XIX: The Spiritual Significance of these Doctrines**

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to the individual and to the Church.

The last article of the CSBI does not focus on articulating doctrinal matters and their relation to inerrancy; rather it draws together the previous affirmations and denials and places them in their proper perspective. The inerrancy of Scripture is not a pedantic

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<sup>59</sup>I take these categories directly from Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 290-311.

matter or a speculative doctrine that can be set aside without serious consequence; it is vital to the health of the Christian and the greater church. Nevertheless, although essential to individual and corporate spiritual wellbeing, an affirmation of inerrancy is *not* required for salvation. That is, people may embrace the fundamental components of the gospel and even uphold the truthfulness of most of the Bible while at the same time denying inerrancy. “We gladly acknowledge,” Sproul avers, on behalf of the other CSBI framers and signees, “that people who do not hold to this doctrine may be earnest and genuine, zealous and in many ways dedicated Christians. We do not regard acceptance of inerrancy to be a test for salvation.”<sup>60</sup>

Recently, evangelical non-inerrantist Carlos Bovell has challenged the conservative claim that maintaining inerrancy is vital for the church’s spiritual health. He argues that the doctrine of inerrancy, rather than aiding in the nurture of Christian spiritual formation, actually promotes the opposite effect by forcing younger evangelicals to frame their doctrines of Scripture within restrictive philosophical and theological categories that do not account for the critical data of Scripture.

Theology and philosophy are geared toward generalizing and universalizing theories whereas historical and biblical scholarship tends to examine individual cases. A predilection for theory and system on the part of many evangelical leaders, it seems, is driving evangelical youths to “frequently fall into error” . . . . What’s more, inerrancy, time and again, has proven an unhelpful purview from which to attempt to systematically account for individual critical cases. The result is often to habitually turn a blind eye toward many of the critical cases in question.<sup>61</sup>

Drawing from his own experience as he found himself woefully unprepared when confronted by the discoveries of critical scholarship while working from an inerrantist

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<sup>60</sup>Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 40.

<sup>61</sup>Carlos R. Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 5.

framework, Bovell sets out to “illustrate why the dogma of inerrancy is unhelpful to younger evangelicals and why evangelical leaders should either discontinue its dissemination or begin supplementing it with acceptable, alternate theories.”<sup>62</sup> Toward the end of the book, Bovell summarizes his intention in writing: “The purpose of the entire book is to inform those evangelical teachers and leaders who communicate, implicitly or otherwise, that inerrancy is a watershed issue that they may be inadvertently obstructing their pupils’ spiritual formation.”<sup>63</sup> Throughout his work, then, he endeavors to demonstrate the weaknesses inherent in a brand of inerrancy upheld by ETS and EPS, whose respective doctrinal affirmations state, “We believe the Bible, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and therefore inerrant in the autographs.” Because it has been this particular variety of inerrancy that has stifled in many cases the spiritual growth of younger evangelicals (those who were born after 1975) and driven some to abandon the faith altogether, Bovell proposes that “conservative evangelical teachers and leaders set out to teach their dogmas of Scripture more responsibly, allowing their students some breathing room to approvingly spiritually furlough in the theological company of committed non-inerrantist Christians.”<sup>64</sup>

Bovell’s contention that inerrancy is to blame for the near shipwreck of his own faith and the spiritual injury endured by many younger evangelicals today, however, is not without its problems. First, of course, is the appeal to experience from the other end of the spectrum. What about those younger evangelicals who have encountered

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 154.

similar difficulties in their study of historical-critical scholarship but have grown stronger in their affirmation of inerrancy as a result? Might not their experience, taken by itself, support the doctrine of inerrancy? Whether or not these contrasting experiences are relevant, however, depends upon a second point. Could it be that the spiritual troubles that some younger evangelicals are facing today are not a result of the doctrine of inerrancy, but the product of not rightly understanding the doctrine of inerrancy?<sup>65</sup> In chapter 1 I suggested that the lack of a clear, consensual definition of inerrancy among Christian theologians is what precipitated the divide that occurred within evangelicalism in the 1950s through the 1970s. I also noted this current generation's general lack of acquaintance with the CSBI—a lack of acquaintance demonstrated especially in the recent incorporation of the document into the ETS bylaws. In light of these two observations, then, it appears just as reasonable to assume that inerrancy as such is not to blame for dampening and even ruining the spiritual lives of some younger evangelicals, but inerrancy *wrongly articulated and subsequently misunderstood*. Indeed, it is one of the contentions of this dissertation that confusion about or lack of awareness of what the doctrine of inerrancy actually affirms and denies is at the root of many of its critiques.

Even so, while I do not agree that the answer lies in setting aside the doctrine of inerrancy for the sake of younger evangelicals, Bovell may have a point that placing undue pressure upon younger evangelicals to accept the doctrine of inerrancy will eventually damage them spiritually. The pressure they feel, however, may come from

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<sup>65</sup>How one understands inerrancy will also depend upon one's of worldview and epistemology. I suspect some younger evangelicals are struggling with the doctrine of inerrancy because they have imbibed—wittingly or unwittingly—postmodern views of truth and language, and assumed postmodern theories of knowledge that undermine the doctrine of inerrancy at a fundamental level. Thus, when I say that the spiritual struggles of younger evangelicals may be the product of not rightly understanding the doctrine of inerrancy, I am acknowledging that a right understanding of inerrancy also involves a right understanding of other doctrinal and philosophical truths.

biblical and theological illiteracy rather than from the doctrine itself. That is, these young evangelicals' inability readily to embrace the doctrine of inerrancy may have more to do with a lack of knowledge of Scripture and the evidence that supports its reliability than with whether or not the doctrine is logically tenable. Robert Yarborough, a long-standing advocate of inerrancy, insightfully comments,

Even people who want to believe all of the Bible to the fullest possible extent may be deficit in knowledge of what the Bible actually says. Add to this the fact, as many of us can attest, that even if we possess sound knowledge of the Bible, it is no easy thing to be able to defend the Bible's truth at points where it is questioned. Informed advocacy of inerrancy typically requires years of study, often knowledge of ancient languages, and not seldom graduate degrees or the equivalent. Extensive pastoral or academic teaching experience is also helpful. All of these things take time, commitment, sacrifice, and the blessing of God.<sup>66</sup>

The remedy, then, is not in dismissing inerrancy as a useless doctrine, but in taking care how we seek to persuade others about it. Yarbrough continues, "We go astray when we bind people's consciences to convictions that they have not had sufficient opportunity to embrace personally in an informed way. We may actually damage people's moral and emotional health by pressuring them to assent to a doctrine like inerrancy before they have an adequate grasp of what this means."<sup>67</sup> Therefore, I recommend that this particular article link spiritual health to a correct apprehension and application of the doctrine. Evangelicals who desire to see the doctrine of inerrancy upheld and promoted should gladly refute truncated versions of the doctrine, for they only lead to greater perplexity and difficulty for younger evangelicals. The revised article would read (with changes in italics),

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<sup>66</sup>Robert W. Yarbrough, "Inerrancy's Complexities: Grounds for Grace in the Debate," *Presbyterion* 37 (Fall 2011): 98.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ *and genuine spiritual health*.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to the individual and to the Church, or that *inerrancy rightly understood inhibits spiritual formation rather than promotes it*.

### **Conclusion**

In this final chapter of reassessment and reformulation, I investigated the last six articles of affirmation and denial. I examined each article according its original intent and in light of contemporary challenges, offering appropriate modifications to the existing articles and proposing the addition of two new articles.

I first argued that the CSBI provide a reference the theological basis for Scripture's unity and coherence alongside statements that clearly detach the doctrine of inerrancy from dependence upon the harmonization of the Bible's problem passages. Although Christian theologians must attend to the legitimate reconciliation of apparent contradictions in Scripture, it is unwise to attach inerrancy to our ability or even the necessity to harmonize every apparent problem in the Bible.

Second, I recommended the addition of a new article that touched upon the matter of worldview and its relation to inerrancy. Here I interacted with a recent evangelical work that helpfully underscored how particular worldviews shape how we view Scripture and its truth claims. I argued that evangelicals must be aware of how the various intellectual and spiritual commitments of critical scholars inevitably influence how they approach biblical truth claims and the conclusions they draw pertaining to the reliability and accuracy of the biblical text.

I followed this discussion of worldview with an examination of the CSBI's stance on accommodation. Here I claimed that Article XV as it currently stands suffers from an unclear connection between the affirmation and denial statements. Thus, I proposed a change in the affirmation statement that emphasizes that the doctrine of inerrancy aligns with Jesus' own teaching on the nature of the Old Testament in order to connect the reference to Jesus in the denial statement. Finally, I proposed an additional statement in the denial section that opposes directly the popular claim that inerrancy is a mere inference of the doctrine of inspiration.

Next, after examining Article XVI and the issue of inerrancy's history as a doctrine of the church, I proposed the addition of a new article in order to establish the category of doctrinal development. This additional article is especially important because it answers directly the charge that inerrancy is a recent doctrinal innovation—not merely by reacting to the charge, but by acknowledging the validity of appropriate doctrinal development within the course of church history. Inerrancy is not the product of doctrinal invention, but the natural result of theological reflection upon basic biblical teaching applied to contemporary settings.

After my discussion of inerrancy's relationship to history, I turned to consider the Holy Spirit's relation to the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. In this section I sought to answer a few contemporary doctrinal formulations that tend to collapse the doctrines of inspiration and illumination. In light of these developments I claimed that the CSBI was in need of statements that clearly distinguished the Spirit's work of inspiration and illumination, while also emphasizing the vital need for the latter.

Related to this discussion was the issue of inerrancy's relation to hermeneutics. In this section I argued that the CSBI should remove its reference to "grammatical-historical exegesis" in order to separate inerrancy from an particular hermeneutical approach to Scripture. I noted that a reference to grammatical-historical exegesis tends to imply that inerrantists must be dispensationalists, or that inerrancy demands a dispensational approach to Scripture. Thus, a revised CSBI should articulate a concern for proper hermeneutical practice by locating our exegetical controls in the text itself, rather than in a phrase humming with overtones of a particular hermeneutical system.

Finally, I argued that the CSBI must answer recent complaints that inerrancy is detrimental to the spiritual health of young evangelicals. Here I argued that the spiritual troubles that many young evangelicals face over the doctrine of inerrancy has more to do with a misunderstanding of the doctrine than it does with the doctrine itself. Thus, evangelical inerrantists must continue to affirm that inerrancy is vital to the health of the church and to the individual believer.

Having now touched upon each of the nineteen articles of affirmation and denial, I have completed my reassessment and reformulation section. I turn in the sixth and final chapter to summarize my research and draw conclusions relevant to the arguments I have made.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Over the past five chapters, I have argued two main points. First, I have argued that the CSBI is a useful, theologically comprehensive articulation of the doctrine of inerrancy. I have supported this claim chiefly in two ways. First, by demonstrating that the doctrine of inerrancy has strong historical precedent in the church. Second, by showing that contemporary challenges to inerrancy offered by some evangelicals have failed rightly to understand the CSBI on its own terms or posit compelling arguments to abandon the document.

The second argument of my thesis was that the CSBI, despite its usefulness and theological resiliency, requires, in light of contemporary developments, some updating for the sake of future usefulness. My proposals in chapters 3, 4, and 5, combine to establish, at the very least, that basic claim that the CSBI is in need of revision. Whether this revision comes by way of reformulating and republishing the existing statement or composing an entirely new statement is irrelevant. My study of the current developments among evangelicals over the doctrine of Scripture validates my contention that an articulation of inerrancy for this next generation requires attention to new categories, new arguments, and new problems. To hold onto the CSBI of thirty-five years ago without answering these new developments will only lead to obscurantism and greater division among evangelicals.

We cannot, however, conduct our work in this area without beginning with the CSBI. Whether evangelicals consider it necessary to reformulate the CSBI or form a new consensus of theologians to write another statement, failure to appropriate the 1978 statement and understand it on its own terms and according to its own historical context will lead to little progress in this important debate.<sup>1</sup>

In order to aid readers in rightly understanding and appropriating the CSBI, therefore, I dedicated a significant portion of this dissertation to placing the document within its proper historical-theological setting while also using the original articles of affirmation and denial as a template around which to determine potential modifications and additions. In my study of the CSBI, my assessment of contemporary challenges to the doctrine of inerrancy, and my appraisal of developments pertaining to the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, I found it appropriate to modify all but one of the nineteen articles of affirmation and denial and propose the addition of six more articles of affirmation and denial. I will now summarize my findings from the three-part reassessment and reformulation section.

### **Summary of Reassessment and Reformulation Section**

In chapter 3, I argued that evangelicals must give significant attention to theological developments in the areas of authority and revelation and to how these two categories relate to doctrine of inerrancy. Responses to post-modernism, especially the work of Stanley Grenz and John Franke, necessitate a reevaluation of how evangelicals

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<sup>1</sup>In his article addressing the most current wave of the debate, Jason Sexton argues persuasively that the “discussion about inerrancy cannot be held without acknowledging and relating to CSBI somehow.” Jason S. Sexton, “How Far beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate,” *Them* 34, no. 1 (2009): 39.

articulate the doctrine of inerrancy and a fresh consideration of what areas the CSBI is deficient to answer these new challenges. My study of these developments revealed that a revised CSBI must reestablish the inherent authority of Scripture as a vital first principle. Thus, I proposed the addition of statements affirming the self-authenticating nature of Scripture that also distinguish a qualitative (i.e., ontological) difference between Scripture and church tradition. Yet, in order that evangelicals might articulate the doctrines of authority and revelation within an appropriate framework, I recommended that the CSBI affirm the covenantal nature of Scripture. God has given the Bible to his people for the purpose of relationship; the categories of revelation, authority, and inerrancy must be viewed from this perspective so that evangelicals are able to (1) provide a basis for maintaining that Scripture is a self-authenticating document; (2) demonstrate that the authority of Scripture relates directly to the good of God's people; (3) maintain a vital connection between the propositional and personal nature of biblical revelation; and (4) ensure that inerrancy is understood, not merely as an apologetic resource, but as the natural implication of viewing God as a truth-speaking, faithful covenantal partner. Thus, an affirmation of the covenantal nature of Scripture should reside at the center of our theological formulations, especially an evangelical articulation of inerrancy.

I also noted that a revised CSBI must establish with greater specificity that human language is an adequate vehicle for divine revelation. Rather than claiming that God merely used language in order to reveal himself, a new CSBI should assert that God designed human language *for the very purpose of* divine revelation. This claim helps

avoid the potential challenge that argues that human language is, due to sin and finite human nature, incapable of accurately communicating God's word.

Finally, I argued that a revised CSBI must take note of recent developments in the area of biblical theology and the recurring observation among recent Christian theologians that Scripture should be, in large measure, approached and studied according to its nature as *story*. An updated CSBI, therefore, must assert that the Bible is a compelling and coherent narrative of God's saving action in the world. Yet, the CSBI must simultaneously maintain that there is no necessary conflict between the designation of Scripture as *story* and the affirmation that the Bible is *wholly true*. The subject matter of chapter 3 set the stage well for my proposals in chapter 4.

In the second part of my reassessment and reformulation, I dealt with the "heart" of the CSBI. The articles discussed in chapter 4 are particularly important because they touch upon topics that relate most directly or speak specifically to the doctrine of inerrancy. The doctrine of inspiration, for example, serves as logical antecedent to the doctrine of inerrancy; matters of textual criticism highlight the need to affirm the error-free nature of the biblical *autographa*; the theological relationship between the terms *inerrancy* and *infallibility* must be addressed; and weighty matters pertaining to science, the generic diversity of the biblical discourse, and problematic "phenomena" require careful attention.

First, in order to distinguish clearly what is meant by the word *inspiration* within the contemporary linguistic milieu and to forestall the argument that God inspired a text that contains error, I recommended the addition of a statement that affirms the validity of designating Scripture as a God-breathed document. In order to avoid the

objection that the doctrine of inerrancy requires a mechanical theory of inspiration, I also proposed the addition of a sentence that plainly denies any logical connection between inerrancy and a need for dictation between God and the human author. Furthermore, in light of contemporary arguments that the early church viewed extra-biblical works as “inspired” (*theopneustos*) documents, I recommended that an updated CSBI maintain the *unique* character of biblical inspiration.

Next, given the fact that some evangelical scholars have conflated the doctrines of inspiration and providence, I also proposed the addition of a new article in order to maintain a clear distinction between these two theological categories. It is not enough to affirm that Scripture is what God intended his people to have (for such a classification could apply to every book in the world that God has allowed providentially to come into existence): a properly evangelical doctrine of Scripture maintains that God, while revealing divine truth, superintended the writing of Scripture *and* guarded the authors from any error.

The notion that God kept the biblical authors from error during the writing process, however, has garnered significant opposition from evangelical non-inerrantists. Such a position, they argue, minimizes the human aspect of the Scripture’s authorship. In response to these kinds of objections, I recommended that the CSBI undergo a modification in order to affirm that the biblical authors wrote according to their own free-expression. By maintaining that the biblical authors wrote according to their own free agency—i.e., writing what they most wanted to write—the updated statement relieves significant tension between the claim that God superintended the writing of Scripture and the assertion that in so doing, he did not violate the personalities of the human authors.

I also posited two other recommendations under the discussion of the human authorship of Scripture. Given that some evangelicals appear to assume that a robust affirmation of the Bible's human authorship must include the admission of error in Scripture, I first proposed that the CSBI reject the idea that humans require exhaustive knowledge in order to make true statements. Second, I suggested that a revised document clearly reject the idea that error (or the tendency to error) is an essential property of human personhood.

I followed this important discussion with an examination of the issue of inerrant *autographa*. In this section I interacted with the arguments of an evangelical non-inerrantist who believes the current state of textual criticism as a discipline undermines the doctrine of inerrancy. Although I found his argument untenable and generally unsupported, I did note that his basic contention signals a shift in the realm of textual criticism that an undated CSBI must take into account. Specifically, a revised CSBI must acknowledge the changing shape of textual criticism while simultaneously affirming both the possibility *and* the worth of recovering the autographical text. Moreover, I suggested that the CSBI affirm that neither the doctrine of inerrancy or one's response to the gospel is dependent upon the errorless recovery of the autographical text.

I followed my discussion of inerrant *autographa* with a consideration of how the CSBI must, in light of contemporary use and misuse of the words *inerrant* and *infallible*, rightly define both terms and solidify each word's meaning in relation to the other. These reflections on the necessity of carefully defining theological terms led naturally to the next section in which I argued that an updated CSBI should acknowledge explicitly the illegitimacy of attributing inerrancy to God instead of Scripture.

Furthermore, I contended that the current debate among evangelicals over the subject of human origins requires attention to the historicity of Adam and Eve. I proposed, therefore, that the CSBI include an unambiguous statement linking inerrancy to the affirmation of a historic first couple.

Questions concerning the extent of inerrancy were also broached in the following section in which I proposed a new article acknowledging recent progress in the linguistic study of speech act theory. I suggested that this new article take note of the usefulness of speech act theory for explaining how particular speech acts that are not readily assessed according to true-false categories can still fit under inerrancy as a general category for classifying Scripture.

I concluded chapter 4 by considering how the doctrine of inerrancy relates to Scripture's various "phenomena." Here, I argued that an updated CSBI must frame its affirmation of biblical "imprecisions" in a way that does not appear to equivocate on the corresponding affirmation that Scripture is wholly true. Furthermore, in order to prevent a false dichotomy from forming between the "human" and "divine" aspects of Scripture, I argued that the category of *phenomena* no longer exclude the self-attesting portions of the Bible.

In chapter 5, I began my examination of the latter portion of the CSBI by suggesting that an updated document should ground the doctrine of inerrancy more explicitly in the doctrine of God. Here I argued that because God is unified, coherent, and consistent in himself, we should expect his revelation to retain these same characteristics. Thus, we find that Scripture possesses a unified storyline and a coherent system of doctrine. I followed this proposal with the recommendation that the CSBI must

more sharply deny that inerrancy is dependent upon the harmonization of difficult passages; it is, rather, dependent upon the nature of God and the biblical teaching concerning inspiration.

How one determines what constitutes a “difficult passage” and approaches the task of harmonization, however, will vary based on one’s worldview. Thus, I proposed that evangelicals should introduce into the CSBI a new article that addresses how one’s worldview influences one’s handling of Scripture and whether or not one finds inerrancy tenable. The doctrine of inerrancy, I argued, cannot be rightly articulated or defended apart from a biblical worldview; an updated CSBI, therefore, must acknowledge inerrancy’s dependence upon specific doctrines related to the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man.

Next, given the contemporary developments among evangelical non-inerrantists pertaining to the nature of accommodation and Jesus’ affirmations about Scripture, I argued for additions to the CSBI that claim explicitly that inerrancy is grounded in Jesus’ view of Scripture. Furthermore, I proposed that the CSBI deny unambiguously that inerrancy can be rejected on the grounds that it is a mere implication of the doctrine of inspiration.

In the following section, although I did not propose any modifications to the article concerning the history of inerrancy, I argued for the addition of a new article that defends inerrancy by affirming the validity of doctrinal development. While the original CSBI acknowledges that inerrancy is a teaching found early in church history and not, as many inerrantists claim, a doctrinal innovation of the nineteenth century, I argued that appeal to the category of doctrinal development would better reinforce this claim.

Contemporary articulations of inerrancy rightly formulated are not theological novelties; they are nuanced expressions of a biblical doctrine as it meets present-day questions and challenges.

Next, in light of recent arguments that appear to conflate inspiration and illumination, I recommended that the CSBI acknowledge the vital need for the Spirit's help to rightly interpret Scripture, but I also suggested that a renewed document simultaneously maintain a clear distinction between this work of interpretational assistance and the work of leading the biblical authors to write God's word. Furthermore, with regard to the matter of interpretation, I argued in the next section that a revised CSBI would avoid tying inerrancy to a particular hermeneutical method by removing the phrase "grammatico-historical exegesis" from the statement. Finally, I concluded chapter 5 with the suggestion that the CSBI counter recent attempts to portray the doctrine of inerrancy as the primary culprit undermining the spiritual lives of young evangelicals. The CSBI must state clearly that it is inerrancy *wrongly explained and subsequently misunderstood*—not the doctrine itself—that should be to blame for the trouble that some evangelicals have with the doctrine.

Unfortunately, as in any research project, I had to make choices on what issues to concentrate and what areas to treat lightly or forgo altogether. In the next section I will consider areas for further research that will supplement my work on the CSBI.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

In light of my decision to focus primarily on the CSBI's articles of affirmation and denial, I would first recommend further research on and reformulation of the CSBI's exposition. To recall from chapter 1, the CSBI's exposition sets the document in its

proper biblical-theological and historical-theological context. As I noted in chapters 3, 4, and 5, new developments in the doctrine of Scripture necessitate a wholesale reevaluation of the articles of affirmation and denial. Thus, it seems necessary to posit a revised exposition that takes account of the new arguments and claims of the reformulated articles.

Second, I recommend a reassessment and reformulation of the CSBH. As I noted in chapter 3, the CSBH was not a self-contained document that focused exclusively on issues related to evangelical hermeneutics. In many ways, the CSBH served as an *update* of the CSBI by adding further nuance to what had been articulated four years prior. (Accordingly, a few of my proposals for the CSBI are drawn from these helpful updates offered in the CSBH.) That the CSBH relied upon and served to add some vital elements to the evangelical position on inerrancy, however, should not come as a surprise. As my discussion of contemporary developments in chapter 2 and my proposals related specifically to hermeneutics in chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, the doctrine of inerrancy is tied inextricably to how we approach and interpret Scripture. More work must be done on the issue of evangelical hermeneutics and its relation to the doctrine of inerrancy in order to answer vital questions: In what specific ways should the doctrine of inerrancy guide and influence our hermeneutical practice? Is it possible or desirable, as Kenton Sparks argues, to come to evangelical doctrinal conclusions while disregarding a traditional doctrine of inerrancy?<sup>2</sup> In what ways can a pre-commitment to inerrancy hinder profitable Bible interpretation or our formulations of other aspects of an

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<sup>2</sup>See Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 329-56.

evangelical doctrine of Scripture?<sup>3</sup> What apparatus do we use to determine if the doctrine of inerrancy is rightly or wrongly influencing our interpretational methodology?<sup>4</sup> How should biblical affirmations interface with historical and scientific claims and influence our inquiry into these areas?<sup>5</sup> How do we establish the criteria to determine when our attempts at harmonization have become forced, unreasonable, and improbable?<sup>6</sup> While these are only a few questions pertaining to how inerrancy relates to evangelical hermeneutical practice, it should be clear that a reformulated document articulating the former would necessitate a revised statement expressing the latter.

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<sup>3</sup>Craig Allert is one evangelical who believes that the doctrine of inerrancy as expressed in the CSBI precludes critical study of Scripture and the development of a robust doctrine of Scripture with regard specifically to issues of canon. See Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*, Evangelical Ressourcement (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 147-76.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Gundry complained that Norman Geisler had not, in his review of Gundry's commentary on Matthew, engaged the issue of hermeneutics or admitted that hermeneutical complexities exist in the text of Scripture. See Robert Gundry, "A Response to Methodological Unorthodoxy," *JETS* 26, no. 1 (March 1983): 95; Norman L. Geisler, "Methodological Unorthodoxy," *JETS* 26, no. 1 (March 1983): 88-94. D. A. Carson notes that Geisler's criticisms were "ill-conceived," for they failed "to see that the problem lies solely at the interpretive level." D. A. Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 93-94.

<sup>5</sup>The area of scientific inquiry is a ever-growing field of study that gives rise to many hermeneutical complexities and therefore requires close attention and careful nuance from evangelical theologians. For an introduction to the debate and the complexities therein, see Gerald Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate: Six Models of the Beginning of Everything* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012); Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

<sup>6</sup>It is agreed by both inerrantists and non-inerrantist that a few of Harold Lindsell's attempts at harmonization in the name of inerrancy were hermeneutically strained and generally unhelpful. From a non-inerrantist perspective, see, Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 161-63. From an inerrantist perspective, see Carl F. H. Henry, *The God who Speaks and Shows*, vol. 4 of *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), 62, 176. What must be considered with greater effort, however, is the methodological apparatus with which one might arbitrate between probable and improbable efforts at harmonization. I do not mean to suggest that such work has not already been done, only that a revised consensual statement on evangelical hermeneutics should offer basic principles for adjudicating such questions.

## **Conclusion**

The CSBI, a document composed nearly thirty-five years ago, resides at the center of the current inerrancy debate. While it has lost influence among some evangelicals due to ignorance, misappropriation, or unhappy spiritual experiences attributed (wrongly, I contend) to the doctrine of inerrancy, it is apparent that the statement still retains a position of high esteem and usefulness among many others. Furthermore, in light of the history of the inerrancy debate, the factors leading up to the writing of the CSBI, and the scholarly rigor employed by evangelical theologians to adorn and defend the document, it becomes incumbent upon anyone who desires to enter into the debate to adequately acknowledge the document's historical background and rightly understand its doctrinal claims.

Even so, the document's status as a useful, well nuanced, and comprehensive articulation of inerrancy does not shield it from critique and reassessment. Although the challenges I surveyed in chapter 2 and throughout my reformulation chapters were, generally speaking, based on faulty epistemological principles, a lack of understanding of the CSBI, and/or a failure to interact with the best work of inerrantists, they did serve in several cases to highlight areas of weakness within the document. My proposals, therefore, were offered in order to strengthen the document for future effectiveness and resiliency.

My final recommendation is for inerrantists to establish formally a new assembly of scholars and pastors for the purpose of (1) reevaluating and reframing the current CSBI; or (2) composing a new statement based upon the CSBI and recent work in the doctrine of Scripture. Delay in forming a new consensus of theologians in order to

articulate the doctrine of inerrancy for a new generation will only hasten to deepen fractures already present among evangelicals concerning this important doctrine.

## APPENDIX 1

### COMPLETE LIST OF REVISED CSBI ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

#### **Article I: The Source of Scripture's Authority**

We affirm that God has graciously revealed himself in the self-authenticating Scriptures. The Bible, therefore, is to be received as God's covenantal, authoritative Word.

We deny that Scripture receive its authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source. We further deny the claim of those who imply that Scripture does not have inherent, divine authority.

#### **Article II: The Scope of Scripture's Authority**

Because divine authority resides in Scripture, we affirm that the Bible is the only written norm by which God teaches his people, binds the conscience, and guides his church. We further affirm the authority of the Church and her theological traditions reside solely in its faithful exposition and application of Scripture.

Although a useful tools for aiding in our interpretation of Scripture and our theological formulation, we deny that church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of Scripture. We further deny that the Spirit's work of inspiration in Scripture is equal to his work of guidance in tradition, or that the authority of Scripture can be separated from the authority of God himself.

#### **Article III: Scripture and Revelation**

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is a revelation given by God. We further affirm that God's revelation in Scripture is given in a diversity of literary genre that contains both propositional and non-propositional elements, and that both are equally authoritative.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation

in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity. We further deny that existence of non-propositional elements in Scripture overturns the legitimacy of classifying propositional elements in Scripture.

#### **Article IV: The Personal Nature of Revelation**

We affirm that God's revelation in Scripture is a covenantal and thus personal revelation of himself. We further affirm that propositional truth is a vital means by which God reveals himself.

We deny that the personal character of God's revelation in Scripture necessarily precludes the propositional nature of that revelation. We further deny that propositional truth hinders personal revelation.

#### **Article V: The Adequacy of Human Language for Divine Revelation**

We affirm that the God who speaks created man in his image and designed human language for the very purpose of revelation.

We therefore deny that human language is so limited by our nature as finite creatures that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

#### **Article VI: Scripture as Progressive Revelation**

We affirm that God's revelation, as the product of one divine Author jointly composed by many human authors over the course of several centuries, was necessarily progressive, cumulative in nature, and thus always coherent and increasing in clarity. We further affirm that the human authors of Scripture recognized the developing nature of redemptive history and the revelation that accompanied it and wrote accordingly.

We deny that later revelation, which often fulfills earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it.

#### **Article VII: The Bible as Story**

We affirm that the Bible is a glorious and compelling story of God's redemptive action in the world. We further affirm that the biblical narrative faithfully portrays in the sum of its parts God's purpose in creation, fall, redemption, and judgment, and is paradigmatic for every element of what we call 'story.'

We deny that story and essential history are mutually exclusive, or that the designation of the Bible as story implies that the biblical narratives contain untrue, mythical, or fabricated elements, or cannot be said to correspond to actual states of affairs.

#### **Article VIII: The Extent of Inspiration**

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration, so that it is appropriate to say that all Scripture is breathed out by God.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole. We further deny that divine inspiration requires a dictation from God to the human authors.

#### **Article IX: The Definition and Mode of Inspiration**

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. Although the origin of Scripture is divine, the mode of inspiration is largely a mystery to us. We further affirm that in Scripture there is an identity between the divine word and the human word without the loss of either.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind. We further deny that inspiration can be rightly applied to early Christian documents in the same way that it can be applied to Holy Scripture.

#### **Article X: The Providential Preparation of the Authors**

We affirm that God providentially prepared the authors of Scripture to write what they did. We further affirm that, as the Spirit revealed divine truth to the authors of Scripture, they wrote exactly what God intended them to write.

We deny that God's act of inspiration can be equated with his providential preparation of the biblical authors or that it is adequate merely to claim that the Scriptures are what God intended them to be.

### **Article XI: The Human Authorship of Scripture**

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He chose and prepared. We further affirm that in most cases, the biblical writers wrote according to their own free expression, writing what they most wanted to write.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities. We further deny that inerrancy necessarily requires a limitation on the humanity of the biblical authors.

### **Article XII: The Definition of Inerrancy**

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We further affirm that exhaustive human knowledge is not necessary to accurately convey historical events or theological truth.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word. We further deny that the commission of or tendency to error is a property essential to genuine human personhood, or that the inerrancy of Scripture and the full humanity of Scripture are logically incompatible.

### **Article XIII: Inerrant Autographs**

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that manuscript discoveries or other developments in the discipline of textual criticism hinder rather than strengthen the possibility of determining an original text. We further deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs.

### **Article XIV: The Usefulness of the Existing Copies**

We affirm that the work of textual criticism is ongoing as we continually seek to improve our current text for the benefit of the church.

We deny that the transmission of perfect copies is required to affirm the inerrancy of

the autographs, or that an error-free rendition of the autograph is necessary for one to respond in faith to the gospel. We further deny that the doctrine of inerrancy requires rather than motivates our recovery of the original text.

#### **Article XV: Inerrancy and Infallibility**

We affirm that Scripture, as a result of divine inspiration, is infallible and is therefore unable to err or mislead in any way. We further affirm that Scripture is infallible and therefore will not fail to achieve the purpose for which God has given it.

We deny the legitimacy of asserting that Scripture is infallible yet may contain errors. We further deny that it is appropriate to use infallible as a term in opposition to inerrant in our description of Scripture.

#### **Article XVI: The Extent of Inerrancy**

We affirm that all of Scripture inerrant—that is, entirely truthful—being free from any falsehood, deceptive statements, or unintentional mistakes. We further affirm that inerrancy is attributed to Scripture, not merely to the character of God.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science properly conducted. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation, the historicity of Adam and Eve, and the flood.

#### **Article XVII: The Diversity of the Biblical Discourse**

We affirm that inerrancy can be rightly applied to the whole of Scripture, for all non-descriptive elements in Scripture are supported by, and find their meaning within, the canonical context provided by Scripture's descriptive statements.

We deny that genre in Scripture that are not readily evaluated according to true-false categories should be classified in a way that undermines the inerrancy of Scripture's descriptive elements. We further deny that it is appropriate to analyze any portion of Scripture without considering the entire canonical context in which is given.

#### **Article XVIII: Truthfulness and the Phenomena of Scripture**

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term to refer to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. We further affirm that biblical statements about

God, his character, his relation to Scripture, and the truth and reliability of Scripture are rightly classified as biblical phenomena.

We deny that it is legitimate to evaluate Scripture according to standards of precision that are foreign to its original intention or purpose. We further deny that phenomena such as irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations, compromise the truthfulness of the biblical statements in which they occur.

#### **Article XIX: The Unity of Scripture**

We affirm that Scripture, as the word of one divine author who is unified, coherent, and consistent within himself, possesses, by necessity, an internal unity, coherence, and consistency.

We therefore deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible. While the harmonization of many problem passages is both possible and valuable, we further deny that inerrancy is founded upon full resolution of problem passages rather than the biblical teaching about God and inspiration.

#### **Article XX: Inerrancy and Worldview**

We affirm that a person's worldview will have a definite yet often subtle effect upon one's study of Scripture and one's acceptance of its truth claims. We further affirm that inerrancy is consistent with a biblical worldview that upholds the Creator-creature distinction, the sovereignty of God, the truthful nature of God's communication, the personal character of the universe, the human nature, and the adequacy of human language.

We deny that inerrancy can be rightly understood or articulated apart from a biblical worldview.

#### **Article XXI: Inspiration, Accommodation and Jesus' View of Scripture**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration and aligns with Jesus' own view and teaching about the nature of Scripture.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity. We further deny that inerrancy can be rejected as a mere inference from the doctrine of inspiration.

#### **Article XXII: The History of the Doctrine of Inerrancy**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

#### **Article XXIII Inerrancy and the Validity of Doctrinal Development**

We affirm that theological formulations often receive greater nuance as we engage contemporary issues. We further affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is a nuanced yet valid expression of the church's historic position on the nature of Scripture.

We deny that inerrancy rightly articulated is the misguided product of modernism, common-sense realism, or any other external framework applied to Scripture rather than the teaching of Scripture itself.

#### **Article XXIV: The Internal Testimony of the Spirit**

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word, and that this witness is vital for a proper reverence for and understanding of the Bible. We further affirm that the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration is distinct from and prior to his work of illumination.

We deny that the witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture or that he adds additional infallible verbal revelation to Scripture.

#### **Article XXV: The Interpretation of Scripture**

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by hermeneutical methods that are necessitated by the text itself and consistent with the Bible's own categories, while taking into account grammatical structure, historical setting, genre, and literary forms. We further affirm that the Bible should be interpreted according to its textual, epochal, and canonical horizons, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

**Article XXVI: The Spiritual  
Significance of these Doctrines**

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ and genuine spiritual health.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to the individual and to the Church, or that inerrancy rightly understood inhibits spiritual formation rather than promotes it.

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Wireman, Matthew "Scripture's Self-Attestation as the Proper Ground of Systematic Theology." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012.

## ABSTRACT

### A THEOLOGICAL REASSESSMENT AND REFORMULATION OF THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

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Chapter 1 introduces the thesis, methodology, and outline of the dissertation. It also includes a brief historical survey of the doctrine of inerrancy and a study of the factors that led to the formation of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, ICBI) and original writing of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, CSBI). The final section of this chapter examines the initial usefulness of the CSBI among evangelicals.

Chapter 2 traces the developments that occurred within evangelicalism with regard to the doctrine of inerrancy immediately after the formation of the ICBI and the writing of the CSBI. This study is followed by an examination of major contemporary developments concerning the doctrine of inerrancy. In this latter section, the works of several important evangelical scholars who have recently attempted to reframe the inerrancy debate are examined and assessed in order to demonstrate the resilience of the CSBI and note the areas that require reformulation.

Chapter 3 begins a three-part reassessment and reformulation section in which the CSBI's nineteen articles of affirmation and denial are studied in their original context

and in light of the contemporary challenges examined in chapter 2. Chapter 3 examines specifically Articles I-V. These articles deal chiefly with matters related to the doctrine of revelation. Chapter 3 offers several modifications to these existing articles as well as proposing two new articles.

Chapter 4 is the second part of the reassessment and reformulation section. This section comprises an examination of Articles VI-XII. These articles deal primarily with matters related to the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. This chapter examines these articles in their original context, offers several modifications to the existing articles, and proposes the addition of two new articles.

Chapter 5 is the final part of the reassessment and reformulation section. This section examines Articles XII-XIX. These articles deal mainly with miscellaneous issues related to the doctrine of inerrancy. Chapter 5 examines these articles in their original context, offers several modifications to these existing articles, and proposes the addition of two new articles.

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter in which I summarize my research and offer suggestions for future studies in this vital area. I recommend that a new group of evangelicals gather together to reconsider the CSBI as it currently stands and use the work provided in this dissertation to begin a conversation toward a revised statement.

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