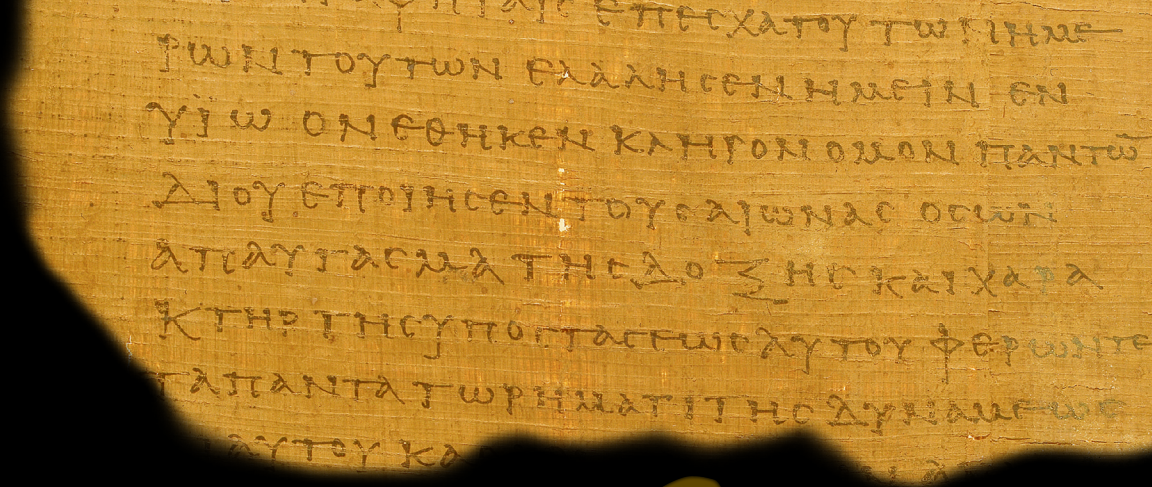

EVANGELICALS & SCRIPTURE

Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics

EDITED BY
VINCENT BACOTE,
LAURA C. MIGUÉLEZ
AND DENNIS L. OKHOLM

ESSAYS BY STANLEY J. GRENZ,
BRUCE L. MCCORMACK,
DONALD W. DAYTON AND OTHERS

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Contents

Introduction 7

PART ONE: SCRIPTURE AND THE EVANGELICAL TRADITION

1 NURTURING THE SOUL, INFORMING THE MIND 21
The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle
Stanley J. Grenz

2 INERRANCY AS INHERITANCE? 42
Competing Genealogies of Biblical Authority
Thomas Buchan

3 THE BEING OF HOLY SCRIPTURE IS IN BECOMING. 55
Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism
Bruce L. McCormack

4 THE PIETIST THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY . . 76
Donald W. Dayton

PART TWO: SCRIPTURE AND EVANGELICAL EXEGESIS

5 CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH? 93
Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture
John J. Brogan

6 THE SUN ALSO RISES 112
Accommodation in Inscripturation and Interpretation
Kent Sparks

7 JEREMIAH, THE SEPTUAGINT, THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND INERRANCY 133
Just What Exactly Do We Mean by the "Original Autographs"?
J. Daniel Hays

8 HOW MANY ISAIAHS WERE THERE AND WHAT DOES IT MATTER? 150
Prophetic Inspiration in Recent Evangelical Scholarship
Richard L. Schultz

PART THREE: SCRIPTURE AND EVANGELICALS IN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT

9 "NOW I WOULD NOT HAVE YOU IGNORANT" 173
Derrida, Gadamer, Hirsch and Husserl on Authors' Intentions
Bruce Ellis Benson

10 SCRIPTURE, TRADITION AND AUTHORITY 192
Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of *Sola Scriptura*
John R. Franke

11 CANONICAL UNITY AND COMMENSURABLE LANGUAGE. 211
On Divine Action and Doctrine
Daniel J. Treier

12 SCRIPTURE, TRUTH AND OUR POSTMODERN CONTEXT. 229
David Alan Williams

Contributors 244

Introduction

This book is the result of the Theology Conference held at Wheaton College, April 5-7, 2001, on *The Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture*. The essays selected represent a variety of perspectives on interesting developments in an evangelical understanding of God's Word. It may be appropriate to begin by noting the obvious: in the twenty-first century, there *is* no *one* "evangelical" doctrine of Scripture. Thus these essays offer not only a sampling of current views on Scripture held by those professing to be evangelicals, but also a window into the state of evangelical scholarship today. In fact, a more representative title for this conference—and this collection—might have been "Is There an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture?"

The current state of this discussion is reminiscent of that of the early church as it wrestled with the proper understanding of the divine-human nature of the incarnate Christ. As the early church saw the importance of holding to the totality of the testimony concerning Jesus Christ—he is *fully* God and *fully* human—so in our own day we continue to wrestle with a similar affirmation about the nature of the Old and New Testament revelation: it is *fully* divine in its origin, and yet it comes to us by means of *fully* human agents. To stress too strongly the divine origin at the expense of reducing the human participants to mere automatons is to run the risk of ignoring the wealth, variety and riches of the human practices and perspectives affirmed by the scriptural authors and witnesses; to stress too strongly the human limitations and fallenness of its composers is, in turn, to run the risk of limiting the divine initiative and supremacy, creating a god in the image of deism. What all of the essays in this volume seek to understand is how finite humans can make sense of the relationship between the divinely inspired Word written by fallible human beings and the living God who continues to speak to his people through the written Word by the illuminating work of his Spirit. As with early church debates, which were striving for an orthodox understanding of the incarnate Christ, our effort to determine the proper balance in understanding the divine-human authorship of the written Word, along with the ongoing illumination of

God's Holy Spirit, requires much wisdom and humility.

The collection of essays is broken down into three broad areas: Scripture and the evangelical tradition, Scripture and evangelical exegesis, and Scripture and evangelicals in the postmodern context. As stated earlier, all of the contributors are heirs of evangelicalism to one degree or another, each addressing the questions put forward in the three areas: Whence have we come? Where are we now? Where are we going? This volume will hopefully be a modest contribution in facilitating this ongoing discussion.

Scripture and the Evangelical Tradition

More than a quarter of a century has passed since the publication of Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible.* It is appropriate, then, that in the first section of this volume Stanley J. Grenz ("Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind: The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle"), Thomas Buchan ("Inerrancy as Inheritance? Competing Genealogies of Biblical Authority"), Bruce L. McCormack ("The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism") and Donald W. Dayton ("The Pietist Theological Critique of Biblical Inerrancy") are engaged in what Grenz calls the "theological history of the evangelical trajectory" of the centrality of Scripture. As Grenz admits, this is a crucial endeavor for evangelicals, for whom the formal principle is loyalty to a completely true and trustworthy Bible, the "norming norm" that is the final and authoritative source for theology. The historical treatments that begin this reassessment of the "evangelical doctrine of Scripture" attempt to put into perspective how evangelicals in the United States by the 1940s came to define Christian orthodoxy more generally and evangelical identity more particularly by the litmus test of inerrancy, with its precedent in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s and its context in the larger attack on biblical authority that began in earnest in the nineteenth century.

Grenz, McCormack and Dayton argue that the emphasis on an inerrant Bible rested on prior philosophical commitments that reflected the beliefs of the day. For one, it was tied to the reigning empirical scientific method with the result that Christians came to see Scripture as the repository of theological "facts" awaiting discovery in a manner similar to the chemist who goes through a set of procedures in the laboratory to unlock the identity of unknowns in a chemical solution. In addition, Scottish common-

sense realism (the notion that our minds are so constituted by God that we can know reality directly) fueled this treatment of the Bible. McCormack and Dayton argue independently that Karl Barth and the Pietists (unlike the neo-evangelicals) refused to *begin* with such philosophical commitments in their approach to Scripture, which they feared would force theology to conform to content of nonbiblical origin. Beyond the philosophical presuppositions operative in the view of Scripture as inerrant, Buchan further proposes that competing historical perspectives or genealogies of biblical authority have also played a role. He suggests that the intramural debate among evangelicals—particularly between the two camps that we will delineate shortly—involves the politics of equating evangelical identity with biblical inerrancy in campaigns meant to convince us all that a particular understanding of inerrancy has *always* been the church's teaching, even if only implicitly.

But here we come to the crucial point in this theological history of the evangelical conviction, illustrated in several of these essays by the manner in which the inspiration of Scripture has been understood. As Buchan points out, for inerrantists such as Lindsell, the doctrine of inspiration became the fundamental axis of the conservative evangelical position. Yet as Grenz, McCormack and Dayton argue, early evangelicals (by which they mean Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Puritans and the Pietists) were *not* concerned with devising theories about the *mechanics* of inspiration. Furthermore, while those who hold to Lindsell's view have grounded the inerrancy of the biblical text in the inspiration of the *text*, inspiration might more profitably be thought of as being related to the *author*. The significance of this distinction is brought out by McCormack's insistence that Barth was actually closer to the Reformers in his understanding that revelation is to be viewed as ongoing and in his contention (in agreement with Luther, Calvin and the Westminster divines) that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the original authors of the biblical text continues to illumine its contemporary readers. Making a similar claim about the Pietists' approach to Scripture, Dayton would agree with McCormack that the Lindsell perspective approaches the Bible with an "epistemological Pelagianism" that attempts to make evangelicals more respectable at the table of professional meetings where the meaning of the text is thoroughly unpacked by regenerate and unregenerate minds alike by means of critical methods that pay no regard to any spiritual influence or divine understanding. Grenz, for

one, claims that the cultivation of the Reformers' soil by the Puritans and Pietists led them to insist that the Holy Spirit enables the dead letter of Scripture to become a living power through the ongoing revelation of saving knowledge. It is in this sense that McCormack maintains Barth was more Reformed than contemporary inerrantists are, and that Dayton insists the Pietists were more dependent on the Bible than evangelical critics of Pietism are. And both McCormack and Dayton remind us that the evangelical charge of subjectivism in Barth and Pietism is not only unfair, but is not successfully countered by appeals to *human* reason that supposedly ensure Scripture's authority and unlock its "true" meaning.

So what the Reformers taught—indeed, what has been the "orthodox" position of the church through the ages on the authority of Scripture—has been debated *among* evangelicals. Grenz, Buchan and Dayton rehearse aspects of this debate to help us appreciate its nuances. The neo-evangelical consensus (represented by Harold Ockenga, for instance, and following the line of seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism, Francis Turretin, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Carl Henry and John Woodbridge) was challenged by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim. The former group understands the Bible to be primarily propositional revelation from God, emphasizing verbal inspiration, biblical inerrancy and a literalistic hermeneutic. (The last feature made the Princetonians and fundamentalists strange bedfellows when it came to their respective amillennial and premillennial eschatologies.) This school's stance on the origin, inspiration and authority of Scripture led to an insistence that the Bible is accurate in *every* detail and that it is primarily a storehouse of revealed propositions. Such an understanding of an error-free Bible undergirds what is purported to be the chief goal of theology—namely, to compile theological "facts" that arise out of the propositional character of the Bible as containing doctrinal truths to which one must give mental assent. This line was questioned by the latter group (of Rogers, McKim and others), who claimed that the modern inerrantists had moved away from the Reformers' confession of the what, who and why of Scripture as an article of faith to the how of Scripture as the foundation of an entire systematic theological program. As Grenz points out, this shift is in part understandable, since evangelicals were no longer addressing a Roman Catholic position on Scripture and tradition, but rather the rising influence of a secularized culture and liberal theology. In the end, however, Buchan cleverly argues that

the Rogers-McKim concern—viewing the Bible not as textually flawless but as an inspired message conveyed by means of accommodated divine language—leaves both camps suffering the distortions of their apologetic agenda and reading twentieth-century conceptions back into premodern sources. Thus both participate in an argument native to a particular form of evangelicalism.

For this reason, to ensure that we are leaving no conceptions behind in tracing the orthodox understanding of Scripture, Grenz's historical template is instructive. He suggests that the "evangelical trajectory" has emphasized two ways in which the Bible has *functioned* in the believing community. First, there are those who stress Scripture's role as the source of correct doctrine—the means for informing the mind. This is the emphasis of the former group cited above and a tradition that continues to be carried on by Wayne Grudem and, to some measure, Millard Erickson. Second, there are those who stress Scripture's role as the source of spiritual sustenance—the means for nurturing the soul. To some extent this is aligned with the Rogers-McKim camp and, according to Grenz, is illustrated as well in Clark Pinnock's work. Grenz traces the theological lineage of these views and concludes that the *sola scriptura* claims of the Reformers leads "most directly" to understanding Scripture's role as *primarily* a "source of sustenance." But the perspective that evolved from fundamentalist to neo-evangelical to evangelical eventually equated "believing the Bible" with "believing the doctrines that evangelical theologians concluded the Bible itself teaches" and represented as such a partial victory of Protestant scholasticism over the Puritan-Pietist legacy. This is a thesis Dayton applauds as well. And it is worthwhile to note in passing that both Grenz and Dayton cite James Orr as the one significant exception among the authors of the essays in *The Fundamentals* who did not support their understanding of inerrancy, but who appealed to the effect of the Bible in human hearts.

So this first collection of essays suggests that much of the "battle for the Bible" *among* evangelicals has to do with rival political agendas and differing conceptions of the role Scripture plays in theological systems and in the life of the believer. Is the Bible primarily the locus of the one, complete, timeless body of correct doctrines compiled and scientifically systematized by the theologian? Or is it primarily the Spirit's means of the ongoing process of accommodated revelation, stretching from the inspiration of human authors to the illumination of human readers? Grenz suggests that

we need not and should not choose between these perspectives. Both lines in the evangelical genealogy are required: the Bible functions to nurture the soul *and* to inform the mind (though Grenz proposes that the former is the *primary* function of Scripture, which the latter then serves).

Still, we are in a bit of a theological muddle. If these first four essays are even partially correct, we are left with a puzzle proposed by Dayton and seconded by Buchan: With regard to the doctrine of Scripture, how *did* evangelicals come to think of themselves as *the* children of orthodoxy and to place a debatable interpretation of the magisterial Reformers over against the Pietists? Have evangelicals been presumptuous and highjacked a lineage not entirely their own? Or, in a manner reminiscent of John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, have they made explicit what the orthodox Christian church has always held? And even if we give the benefit of the doubt to the camp represented by Henry, Lindsell, Woodbridge and others, Grenz poses two significant questions to this group. First, is not this view, tied as it is to a specific conception of the scientific method, out of sync with recent developments in the philosophy of science and with shifts in epistemology that have chastened the Western understanding of autonomous human reason? Second, if the purpose of Scripture *is* to read *through* the texts to the underlying doctrinal system, then once the doctrinal system has been constructed, does this evangelical approach ironically make the Bible superfluous in the end, undermining the role of Scripture as a means of the soul's nurture? Grenz's concluding queries suggest that it is time to engage in some honest reflection about just how evangelicals *do* understand the nature and role of Scripture in our exegetical work and in the context of a postmodern culture.

Scripture and Evangelical Exegesis

The four papers in part two offer a similarly interesting complement to one another. What they hold in common is that all grapple with what we mean by and how we are to take seriously the divine-human nature of God's Word. John J. Brogan's "Can I Have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture" provides an introduction to the history of how Scripture has been understood, focusing primarily on the New Testament. His historical overview briefly summarizes conceptions that were common in the patristic and medieval periods in order to provide a backdrop for the changes brought about by

the rise of textual criticism. How did the early and medieval church view the many textual variants that existed in its day? What did it do about challenges to the canon? Might the answers to these questions provide any guidance for the church today? Brogan then addresses the challenges that resulted from the advent of textual criticism, once again with an eye toward examining how the church responded to these in connection with a doctrine of Scripture. On what bases did the church come to determine which version was to be the authoritative one? What influences (both positive and negative) and challenges arose as a result of the rise of textual criticism? How did the church respond to them? Further, how has evangelicalism responded since? Next, Brogan explores and critiques the ways in which, on the one hand, evangelicalism has incorporated many findings of textual criticism while, on the other, it has insisted on an inerrant autographic text. He points out perceived inconsistencies in such a methodology, noting that an emphasis on *an* inerrant text is a relatively recent development in the life of the church—and perhaps one that finally is inadequate. He then proceeds to offer some challenges to the evangelical church, arguing ultimately for a return to an understanding of Scripture that is more consistent with the church's historical position, accepting it as the authoritative and inspired revealed Word from God to his people.

In "The Sun Also Rises: Accommodation in Inscripturation and Interpretation," Kent Sparks begins with a more recent historical overview. In this instance the focus is on a theological overview of how Scripture has been interpreted. He starts by noting the positions of various Reformers during and following the time of the Copernican revolution and what their objections were, on *biblical* grounds, to the heliocentric perspective (i.e., the once-suspect notion that the Earth revolves around the sun). What insights are to be gained from these past biblical hermeneutical mistakes, and how can they help keep the present church from making the same kinds of errors in its own use and interpretation of Scripture? Might the objections and concerns presented by the Reformers about the science of their day have been avoided had some of them been more receptive to accommodation as an interpretive tool? Having surveyed the Reformers, Sparks also returns to the early church, seeking guidance from and exploring examples in both the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of interpretation, demonstrating how both all too gladly made use of accommodation as an interpretive tool for the sake of preserving and protecting divine

consistency. Sparks then turns to the present evangelical arena by recommending ways in which evangelicals might also profitably appropriate an accommodationist hermeneutic as a means of coming to greater clarity regarding the teachings revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Addressing possible misgivings that evangelicals may have toward an accommodationist position, he closes with two final excursuses in which he reflects further on the implications that such a position might entail with regard to the doctrine of inerrancy and its interpretive control so prized by evangelicals.

The third essay in this section, J. Daniel Hays's "Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy: Just What Exactly Do We Mean by the 'Original Autographs'?" raises the provocative question of whether the Old Testament—as is the case with the New—ought to be tied to the *original* manuscripts or the *final* version of the manuscripts as we now have them. Hays begins by noting the uneasy relationship that has existed between the views of systematic theologians and of textual critics on matters of inerrancy and textual criticism. He observes that there has been little exchange between these disciplines, especially when dealing with the Old Testament. To further complicate matters, one tendency that occurs far too often is that principles drawn from *New Testament* textual critical studies (e.g., hearkening back to the original autographs) are uncritically applied—or assumed to apply—to *Old Testament* critical studies, in which it is far more common to work with the final compositions of these collections. Hays offers other examples of how these two disciplines differ and explores the book of Jeremiah as an example of how scholars have dealt with conflicting data between the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Septuagint versions of this book. How is an evangelical who is committed to the authority of God's Word to make sense of these differences? Hays presents and critiques some of the solutions offered to date, presenting interesting and important historical background as to why the church has sometimes preferred the Septuagint rendering and at other times the Masoretic Text. He concludes with an assessment and recommendation of how we might continue to uphold the authority of God's Word while wrestling with the texts that have been handed down to us.

In the final essay of this section, "How Many Isaiahs Were There and What Does It Matter? Prophetic Inspiration in Recent Evangelical Scholarship," Richard L. Schultz investigates the nature of criticism today by surveying recent debates on the book of Isaiah. He offers a brief introduction

to the long-standing controversy on its composition: Is it the product of one author? Two? Three? A community? An ongoing process? Schultz correctly notes that in the not-too-distant past, evangelicals were in agreement in their understanding of Isaiah's unity: the consensus was that there was only one author—Isaiah himself, as borne witness to in the biblical record. However, in the current evangelical climate, a *variety* of understandings are being held that have creatively tried to marry historical-critical tools with a divine understanding of this book's authorship. He places these developments within the context of the broader Isaian studies and presents recent examples of the various ways in which evangelicals are grappling with—and expanding the boundaries of—divine inspiration in their understanding of the composition of this canonical book. Schultz incorporates critical and insightful questions throughout this work as a means of challenging a number of these positions. By what methodology do we disallow the testimony offered in the text itself? How do we keep from reading back into the text interpretations that become controlled by the construals we bring with regard to its composition? In his final section, Schultz thoughtfully explores the implications of this scholarship for understanding biblical prophecy and the relationship it has to inspiration, prediction, the prophetic books and the authority of Scripture itself.

These four essays wisely illustrate how evangelical biblical scholars are wrestling with the very issues raised in the first part of this volume, especially with the evolving understanding of the appropriate manner in which the exegete should approach the biblical text and the relation of inspiration to various features of the text's composition. Add the contemporary cultural context next, and the waters seem to get muddier.

Scripture and Evangelicals in the Postmodern Context

The challenges raised by postmodernity are addressed in the final section of this volume. Bruce Ellis Benson ("'Now I Would Not Have You Ignorant': Derrida, Gadamer, Hirsch and Husserl on Authors' Intentions") begins by addressing the issue of authorial intent. While some proponents of the postmodern turn have argued that a great chasm exists between the authors' intentions and the readers' comprehension of meaning, Benson avers that it is possible for words to express intentions adequately enough for successful discernment by readers and listeners. Taking us on a journey through Ed-

mund Husserl's theory of meaning intentions, Jacques Derrida's understanding of "presence," Hans Georg Gadamer's horizons and E. D. Hirsch's view of meaning and significance, Benson helps us to understand how there is a level at which we can understand the biblical texts, even though they were written in a different historical horizon. The key lies in acknowledging that, while it may be true that we cannot read the Bible in an identical way to how it was read by those who lived in that era, we are not so *completely* different from Paul and other biblical writers that we read completely differently. In fact, it is impossible for us to be so categorically different from other human beings that we are unable to have an understanding of meaning that is the "same" as that of the author—at least on some level. The issue of understanding is a difficult one, but not so difficult that words must be assumed to block all discernment of an author's intentions.

The authority of tradition in relation to Scripture receives a nonfoundationalist spin in John R. Franke's essay, "Scripture, Tradition and Authority: Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of *Sola Scriptura.*" Addressing the relationship between tradition and the Protestant Reformational principle of *sola scriptura,* this essay contends that *sola* was never intended to cast tradition aside in the task of interpretation and theological construction, contrary to some predominant evangelical perceptions of this principle. While acknowledging that the Reformers reacted against an undue elevation of tradition in the church and that Protestant reaction to the Council of Trent hardened the attitude toward tradition, Franke argues that it was not the intent of all of the Reformers (for example, Calvin) to abolish any and all reference to tradition in biblical interpretation and theological development. In fact, at issue was a struggle over differing concepts of tradition. The essay proceeds to demonstrate a link between pneumatology and tradition, noting the relationship between the Spirit's role in forming the Christian community and the community's Spirit-guided production of the biblical text. The work of the Spirit in this regard has not ceased, however. Though our context is not that which produced the canon, the Spirit illuminates the reading community in a manner similar to the way he inspired the early church to recognize the canon. Franke contends that "it continues as the Spirit attunes the contemporary community of faith to understand Scripture and apply it afresh to its own context in accordance with the intentions of the Spirit." This ongoing, open-ended, eschatologically oriented work throughout the

ages is the tradition, which Franke understands to be the hermeneutical trajectory of the theological task. The pneumatological turn of this essay also is key to its nonfoundationalist stance, as authority is now rooted in the Spirit rather than in the text or the tradition produced by the Spirit. This approach encourages us to view Scripture and tradition as aspects of the Spirit's ongoing ministry with an emphasis on the community's performance of the biblical message in every context.

Pneumatology also plays a significant role in Daniel J. Treier's contribution to this volume, "Canonical Unity and Commensurable Language: On Divine Action and Doctrine." Like Franke, Treier has a concern for the Christian practices, but he understands these to be conceptual traditions that function as habits which have a level of permanence relative to their contextual adequacy. This enables him to find commensurability between various theological judgments made in response to questions posed to the text. Just as Benson was concerned with showing that contemporary humans can discern the intentions of the biblical authors, Treier wants to show the possibility of conversation and understanding among different responses to the gospel message. A chief concern is how it is possible to link the canonical linguistic "world" of Kevin Vanhoozer and the eschatological "world" of Grenz with the worlds in which we live. The essay shows us that doctrine emerges as a result of the Spirit's work in enabling the church to indwell the biblical story and to derive doctrinal concepts (habits) from the text itself and by extension of the canonical teaching in particular cultural-linguistic contexts. Tradition—the church's Spirit-led performances, past and present—links us to the canonical world and sharpens the vision we portray of the world to come. The Spirit's role here is directive, authoritative and productive of tradition, but it is not the source of a nonfoundational approach as found in Franke's essay. By the Spirit, the church is able to maintain constancy (not sameness) through doctrinal practices across the ages, an idea similar to Franke's view of tradition as a hermeneutical trajectory. In the case of both Treier and Franke, the desire is not to usurp biblical authority, but to find a better link between tradition and Scripture from an evangelical perspective. Their approaches reveal an emphasis on pneumatology and performance that is helpful in deepening our understanding of Scripture amidst postmodern concerns.

Performance or act finds another use in David Alan Williams's essay, "Scripture, Truth and Our Postmodern Context." Drawing on pragmatism

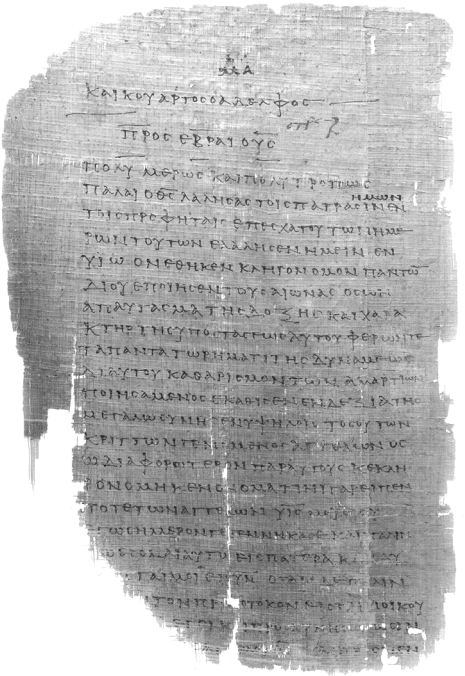
and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's understanding of metaphorical language, Williams helps us broaden our understanding of truth by revealing different metaphors for truth and noting that a key point is how metaphors both reveal and hide truth, an insight too often overlooked when considering their value. While most evangelicals unconsciously use the language of truth as an object, this essay reveals that this common way of speaking about truth—what Williams refers to as a metaphor—also hides aspects of truth such as the links between the knower and the known, a prominent postmodern concern. By focusing on the metaphor of truth as solidarity, process or act, Williams reveals the interconnection between belief and identity. Beyond this, Scripture is found to use not only the metaphor of truth as object, but also, significantly, the metaphor of truth as an action. In Scripture, it is important not only to apprehend truth, but also to perform the truth. This brings attention to the need for evangelicals to be as concerned about their performance of the text as they are about obtaining truth from the text, an emphasis with which both Franke and Treier would concur. Williams is quick to point out that his concern is to broaden our conception of scriptural truth, not to make a case for the exclusive use of one metaphor above others. This broader understanding of truth does justice to the many metaphors for truth used in Scripture and should help illuminate discussions about the Bible and truth.

These four essays contribute to the ongoing discussion of Scripture in evangelicalism by helping us do the hard work of addressing issues such as authorial intent, tradition and our language for truth. These authors are not in complete agreement on every issue, but their work serves as a catalyst for discussion among those with postmodern concerns. The essays provide a service to the church by helping us gain insight into the mystery of words, the importance of a tighter relationship to our shared tradition, the significance of the various modes of doctrinal performance and a deeper understanding of truth.

The editors of this volume would like to express our appreciation to InterVarsity Press for the long relationship they have had with the Theology Conference and their generous cosponsorship of it from the beginning. It is our hope that this book will make a positive contribution to the church's ongoing struggle to understand more clearly the nature and content of God's gift of the written Word. To that end, Jesus Christ the Word, to whom the text points, will be glorified.

PART ONE

Scripture and the Evangelical Tradition



1

Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind

The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle

STANLEY J. GRENZ

From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 TIMOTHY 3:15 NIV

In 1977, at the height of the "battle for the Bible" that was threatening to polarize American evangelicalism, Kenneth Kantzer described the movement (of which he was an important leader) as concerned above all with "addressing the lost, confused, and desperately needy world . . . with the gospel of God's redeeming love and the sure biblical chart for sailing on life's uncharted seas."[1] This illuminating description of the evangelical self-consciousness embodies two central principles that have marked the movement throughout its three-century trajectory: the concern to be a "gospel people" and the concern to be a "Scripture people."[2] In keeping with this sentiment, many contemporary evangelical leaders speak about evangelicalism as being characterized by commitment to a formal and a material principle.[3] Although difference of opinion remains regarding the

[1]Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith," in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, rev. ed., ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1977), 81.

[2]For a fuller development of the history sketched here, see my *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000). The author expresses appreciation to Baker Book House for permission to draw from previously published materials.

[3]See, e.g., the statement produced by the 1989 consultation on Evangelical Affirmations cosponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School as published in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 37-38.

latter, American evangelicals since the mid-twentieth century have come to a near consensus that the formal principle of the movement entails loyalty to the Bible as the completely true and trustworthy, final and authoritative source for theology.[4] Kantzer, in fact, went so far as to assert that this principle "represents a basic unifying factor throughout the whole of contemporary evangelicalism" and that as a result "the evangelical . . . seeks to construct his theology on the teaching of the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible."[5]

Kantzer's conclusion may well be a bit overstated, especially as a characterization of evangelicalism as both a historical and a global phenomenon. Moreover, allegiance to Scripture is not a distinctively evangelical commitment, for all ecclesiastical traditions view the Bible as in some sense normative for community life and teaching. Yet evangelicals tend to see themselves as the true guardians of this common Christian heritage. They claim that the church is by its very nature a community that gathers around the Bible and for which the Bible is not merely *a* norm but *the norming* norm. Taking their cue from John Wesley—who in the preface to a collection of his sermons declared tersely, "Let me be *homo unius libri*"—evangelicals understand themselves not only as a people of the book, but as a people of *one* book.[6]

But what does it mean to be a people of one book? My goal in this essay is to offer a description of what loyalty to the Scripture principle has entailed when viewed from an evangelical perspective. More specifically, I am posing the historical-theological query, what concerns led to the centrality of Scripture in evangelical theology? And I will respond by retelling the theological history of the evangelical trajectory.

The Formation of the Evangelical Scripture Principle

Although evangelicals have always elevated the Bible, they have not agreed—and do not yet agree—among themselves as to how the Bible functions within the believing community. In fact, we could pinpoint at

[4]Kantzer, e.g., at one point identifies the material principle as "the gospel of Christ" (Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity," 73).
[5]Ibid., 72.
[6]R. P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley, His Own Biographer,* vol. 1 of *The Elusive Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 149.

least two quite different, yet mutually informing, approaches to the role of Scripture prevalent among evangelical thinkers.

Some view the Bible primarily, if perhaps not exclusively, as the source of correct doctrine. This is especially evident, for example, in Wayne Grudem, who subtitled his mammoth text in systematic theology "an introduction to biblical doctrine" and, in the preface, stated that the book is "for every Christian who has a hunger to know the central doctrines of the Bible in greater depth."[7] Millard Erickson offers a bit more nuanced understanding. He views the Bible as the means through which we gain access to Jesus' teaching regarding, to cite his words, "what is to be believed and what is to be done."[8] Yet in what follows in his three-volume *Christian Theology,* Erickson's keen commitment to the task of gaining sound doctrine from Scripture is overwhelmingly evident. In short, these theologians look to the Bible above all as the means for informing the Christian mind.

Others, in contrast, see Scripture first and foremost as the source of spiritual sustenance. They speak of the Bible as the place—ultimately the only place—where the words of everlasting life may be found. Indicative of this viewpoint, Clark Pinnock observes that because they understand the Bible to be "the God-given documentation which preserves for all time the gospel of our salvation . . . ordinary believers know instinctively from the Spirit their teacher to go there to be nourished in their faith."[9] We might say that these evangelicals view the Bible primarily as the means for nurturing the soul.

In what follows I intend to trace the theological lineage of these two quite distinct yet interrelated understandings of the character of the evangelical Scripture principle and then draw a few conclusions from my historical survey. The obvious place to begin the story is with the turning point in theological history from which nearly all evangelicals everywhere track their lineage, the Reformation.

From *Sola Scriptura* to the Reverence for the Bible

In taking their stand on the Bible as the norming norm, evangelicals claim the legacy of the Reformation and especially of Martin Luther's great dic-

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[7]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 15.

[8]Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983), 1:36.

[9]Clark Pinnock, "What Is Biblical Inerrancy?" in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 75.

tum, *sola scriptura*. This is surely correct both historically and theologically, insofar as the starting point for the evangelical Scripture principle lies with the concerns of the sixteenth century. Although the trajectory from Luther forward eventually launches both aspects of the evangelical view of Scripture, it leads most directly to a reverence for the Bible as Scripture because Scripture is seen primarily as a source of sustenance.

The return of biblical authority. The Protestant commitment to the "Bible alone" arose in the midst of a wider theological conflict with the Roman Catholic Church over the question of the final authority in the church, a dispute that had already charted a two-hundred-year history by the sixteenth century. What brought Luther to enter this fray was his search for a gracious God, a quest that led him to the Bible. In his subsequent conflict with Rome, Luther sought to undercut the Catholic position, which endowed the pope and church councils with ultimate authority and thereby effectively set the church above the Bible.

Luther's position was closely connected to, and found its theological basis in, his understanding of the gospel. In his estimation, justification by faith meant that humans are completely dependent on God's mercy, which we cannot earn and for which we can do nothing. For Luther, this dependency is not only operative in salvation; but because it is soteriologically centered, it affects the realm of knowing God as well. He was convinced that true knowledge of God arises only out of God's self-disclosure in the Word and through the Spirit. Luther likewise attacked the Roman Catholic claims that tradition ought to be placed alongside of Scripture and that only the Roman Catholic Church's teaching office can interpret the Bible properly. In response to what he saw as the erroneous foundation on which Roman Catholic theology was constructed, Luther introduced the principle of *sola scriptura,* the claim that Scripture alone is the ultimate authority for Christian faith and practice.

Like Luther, John Calvin viewed Christ as the Word of God in the ultimate sense.[10] Yet Calvin also spoke of the Bible as the Word,[11] in that it is God's testament or witness to us[12] and the content of divine revelation is

[10]John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.8; quotations are taken from Henry Beveridge's translation (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989).
[11]Ibid., 1.7.
[12]John Calvin, *Sermons sur le Deuteronome,* in *Corpus Reformatorum,* ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretscheider (Halis, Saxony: C. A. Schwetschke and Son, 1848), 56:617.

Christ himself.[13] As the Word of God, Calvin declared, Scripture does not derive its authority from the church.[14] Rather, the church is built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, and this foundation is now found in Scripture.[15] In Calvin's estimation, the authority of the Bible does not emerge *sui generis,* but arises from the fact that God speaks in it. Hence, rather than depending on philosophical argumentation to support this claim, Calvin viewed the authority of the Bible as in a certain sense self-authenticating.[16] For Calvin, then, the recognition of the Bible as our authority is closely connected with God's gracious salvific work. As Justo González succinctly declares regarding the Geneva Reformer, "the reason that Scripture is authoritative for him is the experience of grace."[17]

The regenerate reader. Calvin's approach, including his emphasis on the self-authenticating nature of Scripture through the internal testimony of the Spirit, lived on in the English Puritans, who were concerned as to how the insights of the Bible might be applied to church order and to the daily life of the saints.[18] The Puritan understanding of biblical authority, which undergirded their program of church and personal reform, came to expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith.[19] Like the Reformers, the Westminster divines called for a link between Word and Spirit. They appealed to the Spirit as the one who not only guides the reader in understanding Scripture, but also continually leads God's people into ever-clearer understandings of the Bible.[20]

At one point the Westminster divines took the teaching of their mentors a step further. In contrast to the apparent epistemological Pelagianism of the day, the Puritans were convinced that the true significance of Scripture could be understood only by those whose minds were enlightened by the Spirit.[21] In this manner, the link between Word and Spirit that the Reform-

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[13]Calvin *Institutes* 4.8.5; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John,* trans. William Pringle, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), 17:218.
[14]Calvin *Institutes* 1.7.1.
[15]Ibid., 1.7.2.
[16]Ibid., 1.7.5.
[17]Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought,* 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970-1975), 3:160.
[18]F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 20.
[19]For a helpful summary, see Jack B. Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 200-218.
[20]Jack B. Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 425-26.
[21]*The Westminster Confession* 1.6, in *Creeds of the Churches,* 3rd ed., ed. John H. Leith (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 195.

ers had forged came to include, as the location of the Spirit's operation through the Word, the regenerate heart and mind. Maintaining this position, however, required that the Puritans differentiate between two levels of meaning in the text: "the grammatical construction" and "the spiritual and divine sense" (to cite Edward Reynolds's descriptors).[22]

This Puritan emphasis found echo among the continental Pietists, who sought to bring the Reformation to completion in response to what they considered to be the deadness of Lutheran credalism. The Pietists believed that Scripture was not so much a source of doctrine as a devotional resource and guide for life. In their attempt to maintain the Reformation link between Word and Spirit, the Pietists followed Calvin in appealing to the internal testimony of the Spirit. But here they, like the Puritans, took a step beyond the Reformers. By the *testimonium spiritus internum,* Pietists such as Philipp Jakob Spener meant the enlightening work of the Spirit within the heart that leads believers to understand the Scriptures. According to the Pietists, the presence of the Holy Spirit within a believer enables the dead letter of the sacred writings to become a living power.[23] Thus, although Spener acknowledged that the Bible is objectively true, he asserted that it is transformative only in the life of the reader who allows the Spirit to work through Scripture. In Spener's estimation, therefore, it is not possible to grasp the spiritual significance of the Bible unless the reader is illumined by the Spirit, that is, unless a person is born again.

The Pietists paralleled the Puritans in another manner as well. Similar to Reynolds, who made a distinction between the two levels in Scripture, they differentiated sharply between mere theological knowledge, which anyone can attain, and true saving knowledge, which only the Spirit can give. Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen offered this definition of illumination:

> Illumination itself consists in this, that in his light the Holy Spirit mediates the heavenly truth of the Word of God to the human understanding, introducing it and giving it to be recognized so clearly, so powerfully and so convincingly that from this the human person recognizes it as truth, believes it

[22]Edward Reynolds, "The Sinfulness of Sin," in *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds, D. D. Lord Bishop of Norwich,* 6 vols., ed. J. R. Pitman (London: S & R Bentley, 1826), 1:103.

[23]Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria,* trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 46.

> with divine certainty, and thereby knows what has been sent to him from God by grace, and that spiritual things are to be spiritually judged.[24]

One long-term result of the Pietists' reformulation of biblical authority was a renewal of devotion to Scripture. The Pietists sought to place the Bible in the hands of the laity. Francke and his associates put wings on their theological convictions by establishing a publishing venture for the purpose of producing inexpensive editions of the Scriptures for mass consumption. The historian of the movement, F. Ernest Stoeffler, concludes, "It was Francke who, above all others in the history of later Protestantism, supplied the initial inspiration to make the Bible really a book of the people."[25]

Reverence for the Bible. As Puritan concerns and Pietist renewal converged in the eighteenth century, they gave birth to an evangelicalism that looked to Scripture as the vehicle through which the Spirit accomplishes the miracles of salvation and sanctification. Sparked by their experience of the nurturing work of the Spirit through the pages of the Bible, their overriding aim was to allow the message of the Bible to penetrate human hearts and to encourage the devotional use of Scripture.

Evangelicals agreed that the Bible is inspired by God. Yet they were not particularly concerned with devising theories to explain the dynamics of inspiration. Moreover, the early evangelicals displayed a remarkable fluidity in opinions about the effects of such inspiration. Some, such as the British evangelical Charles Simeon, went so far as to acknowledge within Scripture "inexactnesses in reference to philosophical and scientific matters, because of its popular style."[26] Rather than constructing theories about the Bible, these evangelicals were content simply to cherish the Bible. They often expressed their devotion to Scripture in symbolic acts of reverence for the actual copies they possessed. Hence, his biographer said about the nineteenth-century evangelist Henry Moorhouse, "He would not suffer anything, not even a sheet of paper, to be laid upon his Bible."[27]

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[24]Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen, *Grundlegung der Theologie, darinn dir Glaubenslehren aus göttlichem Wort deutlich fürgetragen* (1712), 166 (translation mine).
[25]F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 36.
[26]As cited in Robert S. Dell, "Simeon and the Bible," in *Charles Simeon (1759-1836),* ed. Michael Hennel and Arthur Pollard (London: SPCK, 1959), 44.
[27]J. Macpherson, *Henry Moorhouse: The English Evangelist* (London: Morgan & Scott, n.d.), 94.

From Scholastic Propositionalism to Neo-evangelical Inerrancy

Beginning in the 1820s, the reticence to theologize about the Bible began to wane. Some theologians came to insist that the truly evangelical approach to Scripture includes the affirmation of verbal inspiration and biblical inerrancy, together with a literalist hermeneutic. The roots of this growing focus lay in the post-Reformation era known as Protestant scholasticism.

The scholastic defense of the Bible. The ongoing controversy with the Roman Catholic understanding led seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians to seek out a clearer Protestant understanding of biblical authority by concerning themselves with questions about the origin, inspiration and authority of Scripture. As a result, many came to treat Scripture as accurate in every detail and as a storehouse of revealed propositions. Some asserted that even the vowel points in the Masoretic Text were as inspired as the consonants.[28]

In its attitude toward Scripture, Lutheran scholasticism marked a significant shift from Luther. Carl Braaten pinpoints the nature of this shift:

> Protestant scholasticism appealed not to the content of Scripture, its witness to Christ and the gospel, but to the manner in which it was written, the *how* of its inspiration by the Holy Spirit. . . . For Luther the *sola scriptura* was a consequence of the *solus Christus* and the *sola fide;* for the scholastics the *sola scriptura* was the first principle from which the *solus Christus* and the *sola fide* were derived.[29]

Similarly, Gary Dorrien concludes that seventeenth-century Lutheran thinkers transformed the doctrine of Scripture from an article of faith into the foundation of the entire systematic-theological program.[30]

Actually, the Lutherans were preceded in this move by theologians in the Reformed tradition.[31] The thinker most often connected with the genesis of the so-called Reformed scholasticism is Francis Turretin (1623-1687). Turretin viewed the task of theology as that of setting forth what can be known of God as he has revealed himself in his Word,[32] a

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[28]González, *History of Christian Thought,* 3:240.

[29]Carl E. Braaten, "A Shared Dilemma: Catholics and Lutherans on the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture," *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (winter 2001): 66-67.

[30]For this judgment, see Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 21-22.

[31]For this conclusion, see Braaten, "Shared Dilemma," 66.

[32]Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (1679; reprint, Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:16.

task that can be accomplished primarily by means of systematizing the teachings of Scripture.[33] Turretin's theological method required an error-free Bible as its foundation. "The prophets did not fall into mistakes in those things which they wrote as inspired men and as prophets, not even in the smallest particulars," he assured his readers, for "otherwise faith in the whole of Scripture would be rendered doubtful."[34] In addition, Turretin was convinced that the text of the Bible had been miraculously preserved in its pristine purity. In fact, to suggest that God allowed corruption to occur by the hands of copyists would be to deny God's providential hand in the preservation of the divine word given through inspiration; and it would impinge on the deity of Christ, in that our Lord could not "bear to use corrupted books."[35] Turretin's commitment to the full inspiration of the biblical documents led to the claim set forth in the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675) that the divine inspiration of the Old Testament extended beyond the consonants of the Hebrew words to encompass "either the vowel points themselves, or at least the power of the points."[36]

Scientific inerrancy. In the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the interest in defending the Bible as an error-free source of truth, which had played such an important role in the older Protestant orthodoxy, entered the evangelical mainstream. Yet the approach that emerged in the 1800s was generated by a different theological challenge than was that of its seventeenth-century precursor. Beginning in the eighteenth century, Protestant theologians saw the Christian faith contested not so much by what they perceived as the errors of the Roman Catholic Church as by the rising influence of empirical science. This challenge called for new strategies.

As the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, theologians found themselves seeking an intellectually unassailable bedrock on which to construct their theological house. The quest led some to religious experience, which in a sense marked an extension of the interest in experimental religion that had characterized eighteenth-century evangelicalism and lives on in certain streams within the contemporary evangelical move-

[33]Ibid., 1:5.
[34]Ibid., 1:55-56, 62-63.
[35]Ibid., 1:107.
[36]John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 310.

ment. But the theological stance of the neo-evangelicalism that emerged in the mid-twentieth century was far more indebted to the attempts of those theologians who sought to follow the lead of their scholastic forebears in setting forth an invulnerable foundation for theology in an error-free Bible, which they viewed as the repository of divine revelation.[37] Above all, this agenda dominated the theologians at Princeton Seminary: Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander Hodge, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and J. Gresham Machen.

The die for the nineteenth-century Princeton theology was clearly cast by the reigning scientific method of the day together with the common-sense realism that Charles Hodge's predecessor, Archibald Alexander, imported from Britain. In the wake of these developments, Hodge and his successors viewed the theological discipline as a science, understood in the empiricist sense of the study of "the ordered phenomena which we recognize through the senses."[38] Convinced that theology and science, as branches of the human knowing enterprise, share a common method,[39] Hodge patterned his work after that of the scientist. Just as the natural scientist uncovers the facts pertaining to the natural world, he asserted, so the theologian brings to light the theological facts found within the Bible.[40] And these facts are uncovered by applying the empirical method to the Scriptures.

Hodge's appropriation of the reigning scientific model also affected how he viewed the products of his labors. He assumed that the theological propositions he drew from the Bible stated universal—even eternal—facts and that the chief goal of theology as an intellectual, scientific discipline is to compile these various facts. Hodge's theology contained a pietistic or devotional strand, which is evident, for example, in his declaration, "It would be safe for a man to resolve to admit into his theology nothing which is not sustained by the devotional writings of true Christians of every denomina-

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[37]Charles Hodge, e.g., asserted that the Bible is "free from all error, whether of doctrine, fact, or precept"; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1872), 1:152.

[38]For a discussion of this definition, formulated by Charles Hodge but indicative of other nineteenth-century conservatives, see George Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," in *Faith and Rationality: Faith and Belief in God,* ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 245-47.

[39]For this judgment, see John W. Stewart, "Mediating the Center: Charles Hodge on American Science, Language, Literature and Politics," *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 3 (winter 1995): 26.

[40]Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 1:18.

tion."[41] Nevertheless, his focus on the propositional character of its content led him to view the Bible as above all the source for religious teachings, with faith being primarily assent to truth.[42] These teachings may include precepts for living, but the central, foundational and most significant dimension of biblical truth lay in the area of doctrine.[43]

The orientation to scientific theology led the Princeton theologians to elevate the inerrant character of the Bible, understood now as a storehouse for true propositions. Hence, Hodge's successors at Princeton—his son, A. A. Hodge, and Warfield—affirmed what they called "the great Catholic doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," namely, "that the Scriptures not only contain, but *are the Word of God*, and hence that all their elements and all their affirmations are absolutely errorless, and binding the faith and obedience of men."[44]

Despite the Princeton dogmatists' claim to stand squarely in the Reformed tradition, their elevation of inerrancy to the centerpiece of their confession of biblical authority was motivated by a task unlike what had consumed the thinkers of the seventeenth century. In contrast to their forebears, who appealed to the Scripture principle to counter the position of Rome, the Princeton theologians needed an inerrant Bible to respond to the challenges of an increasingly secular culture, on the one hand, and a rising liberal Christianity, on the other. To this end, Warfield reasoned from the divine, "God-breathed" nature of Scripture, as attested by the biblical authors, to the entire trustworthiness of the Bible and hence to the fidelity of each biblical text.[45] Unlike Turretin, however, A. A. Hodge and Warfield were content to argue only for the inerrancy

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[41]Ibid., 1:16-17. Hodge also wrote a devotional book entitled *The Way of Life* (1842), reprinted in *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life,* ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Paulist, 1987), 45-233. For a recent treatment of the piety of the Princeton theologians, see Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981).

[42]Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 3:42.

[43]Richard J. Mouw, "The Bible in Twentieth-Century Protestantism: A Preliminary Taxonomy," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History,* ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143.

[44]A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration," *Presbyterian Review* 2 (April 1881): 237; reprinted in A. A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), 25-29. For a similar claim to be representing the teaching of the whole church, see Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 1:154.

[45]Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible,* ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948), 150.

of the original autographs.[46] And they were undaunted by the difficulties they discovered in the Bible. Warfield held out the hope that whatever problems and internal discrepancies that could be neither dismissed as errors in the transcription process nor harmonized with each other[47] would be removed by future "earnest study of the Word."[48]

Fundamentalism and the Princeton influence. The new evangelicalism that was launched in the 1940s did not inherit its theological ethos directly from the Princeton dogmatists. Rather, the temporal gap between the two was spanned by a phenomenon that paralleled roughly the life of the last of the Princeton theologians, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937). The early fundamentalists were united in their belief that the only sure antidote for the ills of liberalism lay in an uncompromising loyalty to Scripture arising out of a high view of biblical authority. Even though the Princeton theologians were somewhat ambivalent toward the movement[49] and hence not fundamentalists in the strict sense, the participants in the fledgling coalition nevertheless claimed these thinkers for the cause, viewing them as having provided the intellectual framework for elaborating fundamentalism's felt loyalty to Scripture and commitment to the Bible's complete trustworthiness.[50]

Inerrancy was by no means universally elevated among the early fundamentalists. George Marsden cites Augustus Hopkins Strong, Robert Stuart MacArthur and Curtis Lee Laws as leading conservatives who did not subscribe to inerrancy.[51] Moreover, many of the currents that fed into fundamentalism, including the Niagara Conference, had not previously used the term *inerrancy* to articulate their view of biblical inspiration.[52] Perhaps the most erudite fundamentalist who disavowed this hallmark of the

[46]Rogers and McKim argue that A. A. Hodge moved to this position sometime between 1860 and 1879 (*Authority and Interpretation*, 304).

[47]Hodge and Warfield, "Inspiration," 238-41. See also A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, rewritten and enlarged ed. (London: Banner of Truth, 1879), 75.

[48]Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration Not Invalidated* (New York: Ketcham, 1893), 180.

[49]For a confirmation of this judgment by a contemporary fundamentalist historian, see Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, 138-39.

[50]For a helpful summary of the connections between the Princeton theologians and the fundamentalists, see Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 77-80.

[51]George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 107.

[52]Ellingsen cites the 1878 Niagara Creed as an example of a statement that does not include the term *inerrancy* (*Evangelical Movement*, 53).

Princeton trajectory was the Scottish theologian James Orr, who was one of the authors of *The Fundamentals*. Orr's inductive study of the phenomena of the biblical documents led him to conclude that "a just view of the actual historical genesis of the Bible" simply does not support the claim "that 'inerrancy' in every minute particular is involved *in the very idea* of a book given by inspiration by God."[53] He therefore rejected as "a most suicidal position for any defender of revelation" the claim that "unless we can demonstrate what is called the 'inerrancy' of the Biblical record, down even to its minutest details, the whole edifice of belief in revealed religion falls to the ground."[54]

In advocating this more nuanced view, Orr could have claimed the legacy of Charles Hodge himself, who had made a somewhat similar point. In contrast to Turretin, who was convinced that to admit that the biblical writers made even a minute mistake was to "render doubtful the whole of Scripture,"[55] the elder Hodge had suggested the apparent discrepancies and factual problems he found in Scripture were irrelevant to the question of biblical authority.[56] Hence, he remarked rhetorically, "No sane man would deny that the Parthenon was built of marble, even if here and there a speck of sandstone should be detected in its structure."[57] But Orr took the matter a step further. He sidestepped the entire attempt to establish the authority of the Bible by demonstrating the facticity of the biblical records, a demonstration that essentially accepts the hegemony of empirical science. Instead, reminiscent of the Pietists, Orr appealed to the effect of the Bible in human hearts. He concluded his *Revelation and Inspiration* by declaring,

> In the last resort, the proof of the inspiration of the Bible—not in every particular, but in its essential message—is to be found in the life-giving effects which that message has produced, wherever its word of truth has gone. . . . The Bible has the qualities claimed for it as an inspired book. . . . It leads to God and to Christ; it gives light on the deepest problems of life, death, and eternity; it discovers the way of deliverance from sin; it makes men new crea-

[53]James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (London: Duckworth, 1910), 213.
[54]Ibid., 197-98.
[55]Turretin, *Institutes,* 1:55-56, 62-63.
[56]Charles Hodge, "Inspiration," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 29 (October 1857); reprinted in *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921,* ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983), 140-41.
[57]Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 1:170. For a summary of the debate about the meaning of Hodge's statement, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), 130-31.

> tures; it furnishes the man of God completely for every good work. . . . The Bible that embodies this word will retain its distinction as *the Book of Inspiration* till the end of time![58]

Nevertheless, a Princetonian at hand turned out to be more persuasive than a Scott afar. It was almost inevitable that American fundamentalism would come to be characterized by an unswerving adherence to a Princeton-influenced understanding of inerrancy. At the height of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy in the 1920s, the fundamentalists rallied around modified versions of the Warfield-influenced five-point declaration of "essential" doctrines adopted by the Presbyterian General Council in 1910, the first of which was an affirmation of biblical inerrancy.[59] Soon adherence to this doctrine became a central feature of the entire fundamentalist coalition.

The Princeton legacy and the new evangelicalism. In the 1940s, a new movement coalesced out of fundamentalism, which, thanks to one of its guiding lights, Harold Ockenga, came to be known as "the new evangelicalism,"[60] or neo-evangelicalism, a designation that was later simplified to "evangelicalism." The new evangelicalism began as a protest by several younger fundamentalists against the internal division, anti-intellectualism, departmentalization of life and social irrelevance that had come to characterize the older movement.[61] At the same time, the architects of the new coalition desired to remain true to the basic doctrines of Christian orthodoxy in the face of the accommodationist tendencies of theological liberalism. Ock-

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[58]Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration,* 217-18.

[59]Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 117.

[60]George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 3, 146. Harold J. Ockenga later claimed that he coined the term in 1947; see Ockenga, "From Fundamentalism, Through New Evangelicalism, to Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Roots,* ed. Kenneth Kantzer (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 38. Millard J. Erickson, in contrast, attributes the first public use of the term to Carl F. H. Henry; see Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1997), 23 n. 22.

[61]Daniel B. Stevick, *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1964), 28. Significant early expressions of that protest included Ockenga's "Can Fundamentalism Win America?" *Christian Life and Times,* June 1947. The author's answer to the query lodged in the title of the article was a resounding *no!* Fundamentalism was hampered by its divisive spirit, aloofness from social problems and unethical practices, he asserted. The poignancy of Ockenga's short piece was echoed in the publication of a book-length critique, Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1947). Like Ockenga, Henry chastised his fellow fundamentalists for their aloofness from society and their lack of a social vision.

enga spoke for his colleagues when he declared, "Doctrinally, the fundamentalists are right, and I wish to be always classified as one."[62]

The appropriation of the label *evangelical* by the post-fundamentalist conservative Protestants—or what Marsden calls the "card-carrying evangelicals"[63]—was a masterful move. In so doing, they claimed for themselves the heritage of evangelicalism that had emerged over two hundred years earlier as well as the legacy of the Reformation churches' claim to be the carriers of the true "evangel." The tactic was an overwhelming success.[64] Although the "card-carrying evangelicals" shared with their eighteenth-century forebears the commitment to convertive piety that stands at the heart of evangelicalism in all its forms and permutations, the new evangelicals looked more immediately to fundamentalism for their identity. The result was the introduction of the Warfield-styled view of Scripture into the variety of groups that aligned themselves with the new coalition. Joel Carpenter cites one significant example: "Many holiness Wesleyans came to accept the doctrine of biblical inerrancy even though that belief is not a Wesleyan way of understanding the Bible's inspiration and authority."[65]

In this manner, the fundamentalists' acceptance of the Princeton understanding of inspiration in general and Warfield's formulation of inerrancy in particular gave a nineteenth-century cast to the emphasis on biblical authority that neo-evangelicalism inherited from the Reformation via the eighteenth-century Awakening evangelicalism. Neo-evangelicalism's acceptance of the fundamentalist struggle against liberalism as waged on the terms set out by the Princeton theology oriented the new evangelical theology to questions of propositional truth, in contrast to the interest in the person's relationship with God that had characterized evangelicalism until the late nineteenth century.

As an extension of the scholastic legacy, neo-evangelical theologians viewed the Bible primarily (albeit not exclusively) as propositional revela-

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[62]Ockenga, "From Fundamentalism," 40.

[63]George M. Marsden, "Contemporary American Evangelicalism," in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals,* ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 30; George M. Marsden, ed., introduction to *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), xv.

[64]Ellingsen, *Evangelical Movement,* 101.

[65]Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 237-38.

tion from God.[66] According to Carl F. H. Henry, for example, Scripture is divine revelation that takes the form of "rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form."[67] Furthermore, Henry declared that God is revealed "in the whole canon of Scripture which objectively communicates in propositional-verbal form the content and meaning of all God's revelation."[68]

The focus on propositional revelation led evangelical theologians to view the Bible as above all the source for religious teachings. Although these teachings also included precepts for living, the central, foundational and most significant dimension was that of doctrine. As Richard Mouw points out, the Bible became fundamentally a doctrinal resource.[69] In this stance, twentieth century evangelicals stood in the lineage of Hodge, who declared,

> Revelation is the communication of truth by God to the understandings of men. It makes known doctrines. For example, it makes known . . . that Christ is the Son of God; that he assumed our nature; that he died for our sins, &c. These are logical propositions.[70]

In this way, the authoritative aspect of the Bible came to be linked to its "stateable content" (to cite David Kelsey's characterization), linked more specifically, albeit not exclusively, to the doctrines it teaches.[71] "Believing the Bible," in turn, came to be connected most importantly with believing the doctrines that evangelical theologians concluded the Bible itself teaches. Kelsey offers a clue as to why this became so important. Speaking about Warfield, he writes,

> This fits with his view of the nature of saving faith. Saving faith necessarily includes belief that certain doctrines are true. Since it is important that the belief be utterly confident, the truths must be utterly trustworthy. That cre-

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[66]For example, Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963), 150; Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 92-93; Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 66.

[67]Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority,* 6 vols. (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1976-1983), 2:12; cf. 3:455.

[68]Ibid., 2:87.

[69]Mouw, "The Bible," 143.

[70]Charles Hodge, "The Theology of the Intellect and That of Feelings," in *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1857), 609-10.

[71]David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 29.

> ates the need for an utterly trustworthy authority determining what those doctrines are. And scripture is, for the Protestant, that authority.[72]

Viewing the Bible as primarily a storehouse of theological facts,[73] evangelical theologians set out to complete the task of amassing the true statements or factual propositions they believed were taught in the pages of Scripture.[74] To this end, they crisscrossed the documents so as to compile what they concluded the Bible "teaches" about any given topic.[75] By bringing these biblical teachings together in a systematic whole, their goal became that of compiling the one, complete, timeless body of right doctrines, which they assumed constituted "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27 KJV).

In short, the trajectory through fundamentalism had the effect of transforming the ethos of the theological tradition of the purveyors of convertive piety from that of a gospel-focused endeavor that viewed the Bible as the vehicle of the Spirit's working in transforming the heart and sustaining the soul to that of a Bible-focused task intent on maintaining the gospel of doctrinal orthodoxy. Although the new evangelical theology never lost the concern for facilitating the evangelical church in its mission to convert the world, the impulse it assimilated from fundamentalism's attachment to the Princeton theology marked at least a partial victory of Protestant scholasticism over the Puritan-Pietist legacy.

So significant was this victory that in the opinion of many neo-evangelical theologians inerrancy came to be a central—if not *the* central—hallmark of evangelicalism,[76] and adherence to inerrancy emerged as the litmus test for full participation in the evangelical movement. In the words of Harold Lindsell, "It is my conviction that a host of those evangelicals who no longer hold to inerrancy are still relatively evangelical. I do not for one moment concede, however, that in a technical sense anyone can claim the evangelical badge once he has abandoned inerrancy."[77] Similarly, in

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[72]Ibid., 21.

[73]For example, Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 1:18.

[74]See, e.g., Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology,* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), 1:25-27.

[75]Hence, Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 21.

[76]See, e.g., the cautious statement to this effect by R. C. Sproul, "*Sola Scriptura*: Crucial to Evangelicalism," in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority,* ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 116.

[77]Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 210. See also Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1984), 57, 64.

1984, Francis Schaeffer equated evangelicalism with adherence to an all-encompassing view of inerrancy. He lambasted those who "call themselves evangelicals" but who "hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches—truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality."[78] Like Lindsell, Schaeffer declared categorically that "evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical *unless there is a line drawn* between those who take a full view of Scripture and those who do not."[79]

The Future of the Scripture Principle

When a Vancouver-area Baptist church invited me to fill their pulpit on Pentecost Sunday, 2000, I immediately knew that I would preach on revival. Using the experience of the disciples in the upper room during the days prior to Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 1, I would draw insight as to what must characterize us if God would visit the church today with an awakening. After delivering the sermon, I offered an opportunity for those who had been challenged by the Holy Spirit to commit themselves to being catalysts for revival in their congregation to stand and thereby give public evidence of their decision. I expected that one or perhaps two of those in attendance would heed my call. But when the number of people standing swelled to eighteen, I was moved nearly to tears, so much so, that I could not offer the promised dedicatory prayer. I had to call on the interim pastor to replace me on the platform and pray in my stead.

This incident was a vivid reminder to me of how steeped I am in the Pietistic conception of the Christian faith in general and the role of Scripture in particular that imbued me as a child in the churches my father served, a stance linking me to a long trajectory that dates at least to the eighteenth-century Great Awakening. At the same time, I am a systematic theologian schooled in neo-evangelical scholastic theology with its focus on formulating right doctrine. In a sense, my personal situation mirrors that of many evangelicals and even of evangelicalism itself.[80]

As the preceding historical sketch suggests, two quite different concerns have fed into the evangelical movement. The confluence of Puritan-

[78]Schaeffer, *Great Evangelical Disaster,* 37.
[79]Ibid., 51.
[80]For a further development of this theme, see Stanley J. Grenz, "Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 58-76.

ism in England and Pietism on the European continent that lies at the genesis of eighteenth-century Awakening evangelicalism generated the concern for the gospel of the transformed heart. In addition, however, contemporary evangelicalism has been heir to an interest in right doctrine that was initially bequeathed to it by Protestant scholasticism but that took form in the crucible of early twentieth-century fundamentalism. Two strands—the Pietistic and the scholastic, the warm-hearted and the right-headed, the experimental and the doctrinal—inhabit the evangelical psyche. As a result, some evangelicals view the Bible primarily as the means by which the soul is nourished, whereas others elevate its role in the process of determining right doctrine.

Being indebted to both trajectories, I find myself unwilling to choose one view of the Bible at the loss of the other. I would contend that the concern with viewing Scripture as the source both of spiritual sustenance and of sound doctrine is not misguided as such, for the purpose of the Bible is to nurture the soul *and* to inform the mind. In fact, the latter is a crucial aspect of the former. Sound doctrine is a servant of the Spirit's work in the new birth and the transformed life. Every experience is necessarily tied to an understanding of reality, an interpretive framework, that both facilitates it and emerges from it. So also the saving encounter with God in Christ through the Spirit, both at conversion as the beginning of the faith journey as well as in the ongoing life of faithful discipleship, is cradled by the constellation of beliefs, arising from the Bible, that constitute the Christian interpretive framework. For this reason, doctrine—the informing of the mind—is crucial, even though it is by its very nature subservient to the dynamic of spiritual transformation.

Although acknowledging that the doctrinal side of evangelicalism is not misguided per se, I would question the ongoing appropriateness of remaining wedded to the approach to Scripture that finds its genesis in the nineteenth-century attempt to come to terms with a culture enamored with the empirical scientific method. Remaining true to the legacy left to us by the theologians of the nineteenth century—or even the twentieth—does not demand that we follow their lead by continuing in our context the particular program that they launched in theirs, but that we seek to accomplish in our context what they intended to bring about in theirs. For all its benefits—and these are impressive—the specific manner in which the concern for biblical doctrine has predominated in evangelical theology since

the mid-twentieth century has brought certain detrimental side effects. Two of these are especially serious.

First, in addition to, and perhaps even more significant than, the seeming inability of the received view to take seriously the human aspect of Scripture—a difficulty that emerged in the "battle for the Bible" waged in the 1970s—the reigning approach to the Bible is out of sync with recent developments in philosophy of science. Scholars in this field have called into question the understanding of the scientific method that reigned in the nineteenth century and formed the basis of the Princeton program that has been so influential first in fundamentalist and more recently in neo-evangelical theological circles. Philosophers of science are no longer agreed as to what "the scientific method" in fact entails. Hence, John Polkinghorne notes,

> It has proved impossible to distil the essence of the scientific method. Proposals such as making refutable conjectures (Popper), pursuing progressive research programmes (Lakatos), attaining empirical adequacy (van Fraassen) or pragmatic success (Rorty), capture aspects of the complex practice of science, but each falls far short of an adequate account.[81]

Furthermore, in the process of paying homage to empirical science, theologians may be guilty of too readily conceding the autonomy of a particularly Western understanding of human rationality, at a time when thinkers are becoming aware of the local, rather than universal, nature of both theology and science. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen notes this well: " 'Theology' and 'science' never exist in such a generalized, abstract sense, but always only in quite specific social, historical, and intellectual contexts."[82] Polkinghorne goes so far as to conclude that "the study of science encourages the recognition that there is no universal epistemology."[83]

Even more grievous is the second outworking. The approach to the Bible that treats it as a compendium of theological (and ethical) truths launches the theologian on the quest to unearth the one true set of doctrines (together with the corresponding set of ethical principles or rules) that supposedly lies within (or behind) the texts of Scripture. The resultant

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[81]John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 105-6.
[82]J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Duet or Duel? Theology and Science in a Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1998), 163.
[83]Polkinghorne, *Belief in God*, 108.

purpose of studying the Scriptures becomes that of attempting to read *through* the texts to the underlying doctrinal system and eventually to the publication of the skilled theologian's *magnum opus*. If the goal of theological inquiry is to extrapolate the system of propositions the divine Communicator supposedly inscripturated in the pages of the text, the ultimate result of systematic theology is to render the Bible superfluous! Why should sincere believers continue to read the Bible, when all that Scripture intends to communicate—namely, correct doctrine found within its pages—is more readily at hand in the systematic compilation offered by the skilled theologian? Why read, that is, for any reason except to confirm that the debonair specialist had finally captured the one, true biblical system of doctrine?

Against the intent of evangelical theologians themselves, therefore, the reigning approach has actually contributed to the silence of the Bible in the church and thereby undermined the primary role of Scripture as the source of spiritual sustenance. In this manner, contrary to their own intent, well-meaning evangelicals have served unwittingly to undermine the evangelical Scripture principle itself.

The detrimental side effects of the reigning bibliology suggest that the time has come for evangelical theologians to understand and articulate anew the Scripture principle that forms such an important hallmark of the evangelical trajectory. For being a people of one book—that is, upholding the centrality of the Bible in the Spirit's work of both nurturing the soul and informing the mind—is one of the good gifts that evangelicals offer to the church of Jesus Christ.

2

Inerrancy as Inheritance?

Competing Genealogies of Biblical Authority

THOMAS BUCHAN

The focus of this essay is an examination of three books that presented historical perspectives on the doctrine of biblical authority and were written by and for American evangelicals in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Taken together, Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible,* Jack Rogers and Donald McKim's *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* and John Woodbridge's *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal,* all published in the span of six years, present an interesting example of the shared assumptions that informed the thinking of American evangelicals who affirmed biblical inerrancy as well as those who denied it.[1] The selection of these three sources is not arbitrary, but is based on the fact that the works are closely related to one another. Rogers and McKim had Lindsell clearly in view as they were writing, mentioning him in their introduction for the purpose of positioning themselves and citing his viewpoint as one they intended to call into question. In turn, Woodbridge's book stands in a similar relationship to that of Rogers and McKim, which is clearly indicated by his subtitle.

In addition to this network of relationships, the three works manifest at least two other highly significant common features, which demonstrate that there is a sense in which the works have as much in common with one another as they do not. First of all, the authors of each work identify themselves and recognize one another as evangelicals. This fact might be easily overlooked, but it is an important aspect of the works insofar as it indicates

[1]Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976); Jack B. Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); and John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982).

that the dispute at hand is one internal to evangelicalism. As such, the debate has important political undertones concerning who does and who does not hold the authentically evangelical doctrine of Scripture as historically conceived and confessed. What is perceived and presented to be at stake is nothing less than evangelical identity. The second significant common feature of these three works is the manner in which the arguments in the primarily theological, yet highly politicized, dispute mentioned above are constructed and presented. Of paramount importance here is that all of the authors place a premium on establishing the historical priority of their competing views of biblical authority. On the one hand, this leads to an unavoidable similarity in the structures of the accounts, which reveals a surprising and strong methodological agreement among the authors. Each account begins with a conception of biblical authority that is deemed normative; it then conducts a survey of the history of the church for evidence to support the claim that the view the author or authors hold is the "central Christian tradition" concerning the authority of Scripture.[2] On the other hand, deep disagreements as to the authentically evangelical definition of biblical authority ensure that the competing historical perspectives or genealogies of biblical authority, though remarkably congruent with respect to the sources amassed and cited, nevertheless diverge radically in their interpretations of those sources. These real and significant disagreements must be taken seriously, yet it is imperative to note that the disagreements are possible—are indeed unavoidable—precisely because the authors share a basic set of assumptions concerning biblical authority.

Biblical Inerrancy and Evangelical Identity

The relationship between biblical inerrancy and evangelical identity was clearly stated even in the foreword to Lindsell's book, *The Battle for the Bible,* written by Harold Ockenga:

> Dr. Lindsell mentions that acceptance of inerrancy is the watershed of modern theological controversy. He is right in declaring that the attitude we have toward the trustworthiness of Scripture determines our later position, not only on faith, but also on practice. The evidence that those who surrender the doctrine of inerrancy inevitably move away from orthodoxy is indisputable. It is apparent that those who give up an authoritative, dependable, authen-

[2]Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation,* xvii.

> tic, trustworthy, and infallible Scripture must yield the right to the use of the name "evangelical."[3]

Lindsell himself described *The Battle for the Bible* as especially needed, given what he considered the perilous trend concerning articulations of the doctrine of Scripture within American neo-evangelicalism after World War II:

> Fundamentalists and evangelicals (both of whom have been traditionally committed to an infallible or inerrant Scripture) have long been noted for their propagation and defense of an infallible Bible. But more recently, among those who call themselves evangelicals, there has been a marked departure from the viewpoint held by them for so long. More and more organizations and individuals historically committed to an infallible Scripture have been embracing and propagating the view that the Bible has errors in it. This movement away from the historic standpoint has been most noticeable among those often labeled neo-evangelicals.[4]

While he allowed that "belief in an infallible Scripture is not necessary to salvation,"[5] Lindsell was nevertheless careful to point out that the importance of holding to Scripture's infallibility was paramount for those who wished to avoid straying from the historic doctrines of the Christian faith. Lindsell allowed that there were differences of degree among those who held what he called "the errancy view,"[6] confessing that "some . . . do not go beyond errors of science and history."[7] Others, however, "have extended the principle and rejected basic doctrines of the Christian faith deeply rooted in Scripture and the heritage of the church."[8] For all these reasons, Lindsell viewed the question of Scripture's infallibility or inerrancy as a watershed:[9] those who had to part company as a result of differ-

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[3]Harold Ockenga, foreword to Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible,* xii.
[4]Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 20.
[5]Ibid.
[6]Ibid., 21.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Ibid.
[9]Ibid., 27 n. 1: "A word needs to be said about the use of the words *infallible* and *inerrant*. There are some who try to distinguish between these words as though there is a difference. I do not know of any standard dictionary that does not use these two words interchangeably. All of them use them synonymously. Thus the synonym for *infallible* is *inerrant,* and vice versa. For some strange reason people gag at the use of the word *inerrant* but do not seem concerned about the use of the word *infallible*. I shall use these words interchangeably and even speak about the Bible as trustworthy, authoritative, etc. Whatever particular word I use, it is to be understood that I have in mind the view that the Bible is free from error in the whole and in the part. Of this more shall be said later."

ences of opinion on this matter also inevitably had to move away from one another in sharply divergent directions.

The politics of equating evangelical identity and biblical inerrancy was of no less significance for Rogers and McKim, authors of *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. Denying the necessity of inerrancy as the *sine qua non* of evangelical faith and practice, they argued that the conception of biblical authority espoused by Lindsell and the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was not an expression of the view espoused by John Calvin and the early church, but was instead a product of the old Princeton theology derived from the work of the post-Reformation Protestant scholastic Francis Turretin. During the period of ecclesiastical tumult that overtook the Presbyterian Church in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the heresy trial of Charles Briggs and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy catapulted the old Princeton view of biblical authority as inerrancy into prominence as the "conservative" or "traditional" position. Rogers and McKim reported that these "peculiar twists of American history" had broad and lasting effects not only for American Presbyterians, but also for other evangelical Christians.[10]

> These evangelicals include[d] people from a wide variety of theological traditions—Pentecostal (such as the Assemblies of God), Wesleyan, Anabaptist, Roman Catholic—in addition to those with a post-Reformation scholastic heritage such as the Presbyterians and Lutherans. But because of the powerful image projected by the old Princeton theologians as defenders of the authority of the Bible, groups with otherwise antithetical theological backgrounds, such as neo-Pentecostals, have adopted the old Princeton definition of inerrancy as part of their dogma.[11]

The story told by Rogers and McKim had a number of politically suggestive features. First of all, they argued that construals of biblical authority as inerrancy were relatively new and could not be traced back even to the Reformers, much less to the fathers of the church. Second, Rogers and McKim also pointed out that the historical heritage of biblical inerrancy suggested that it was best understood as a particularly Reformed or Presbyterian doctrine, and as such it was not necessarily normative for or historically compatible with other forms of American evangelicalism. These claims allowed for a diversity of authentically evangelical positions on the

[10]Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, xi.
[11]Ibid., xix-xx.

authority of the Bible, an argument regarding evangelical identity that stood in stark contrast to Lindsell's.

The political dimension of Woodbridge's argument in *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* was, in some ways, more muted than those found in the works by Lindsell and by Rogers and McKim. Nevertheless, Woodbridge's motivation for writing was revealed in his stated intent to "evaluate the Rogers and McKim proposal" in a manner designed to challenge its basic structure and import.[12] Woodbridge decided to undertake this task as a result of his own interaction with Rogers and McKim's work:

> My own interest in Rogers and McKim's volume was piqued by the authors' stout claim that they were "setting the record straight." For seven or eight years I had been studying the theories about the Bible's authority entertained by Richard Simon, Jean LeClerc, Baruch Spinoza, and other seventeenth and eighteenth century biblical critics. I could understand Rogers and McKim's desire to moderate several assertions by Evangelicals who had not been sufficiently judicious in their own claims about "the central tradition of the church." Nonetheless, I found the authors' presentation regarding the issues of biblical infallibility in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be unreliable. I had also studied the beliefs of nineteenth century American Evangelicals about biblical authority. Rogers and McKim's commentary on these viewpoints appeared to be deficient as well.[13]

Finding Rogers and McKim's treatment of conceptions of biblical authority in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lacking was only the tip of the iceberg, however. Woodbridge noted, "The more I analyzed Rogers and McKim's volume, the more I became uncomfortable not only with the methodological problems that hovered behind it, but with the book's central proposal."[14] Woodbridge wrote that he hoped the challenges he presented to the Rogers-McKim proposal

> will serve to encourage many Americans who already affirm the Bible's complete infallibility. They should know that they are not the proponents of a quirkish new doctrine. At the same time I hope that those Christians who have abandoned their commitments to complete biblical infallibility because they have come to the honest conviction that it was a "scholastic" innovation of rather recent vintage will reconsider their understanding of this important question.[15]

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[12]Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority,* 17.
[13]Ibid., 15.
[14]Ibid., 17.
[15]Ibid., 18.

In contrast to Lindsell and to Rogers and McKim, Woodbridge's political dimension was negative, not positive. Whereas the first two books presented conceptions of biblical authority that had explicit import for evangelical identity, Woodbridge's work was focused merely on the criticism and negation of the view set forth by Rogers and McKim. As such, it did not appear as an overt vindication of Lindsell's work by design, but it did seek to affirm the identity of a particular evangelical conception of biblical inerrancy with a lineage of historic Christian conceptions of biblical authority.

In addition to their common concern with defining the relationship between biblical inerrancy and evangelical identity outlined above, the discussions of biblical authority authored by Lindsell, Rogers and McKim, and Woodbridge all shared the conviction that the lineage of an authentically evangelical doctrine of Scripture, whether defined as inerrancy or otherwise, could be demonstrated by means of an appeal to the history of Christian doctrine. As noted above, despite deep differences in the definitions of biblical authority proposed by the authors under consideration, two aspects of the resulting genealogies of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture are especially noteworthy. These are their common intent to identify a "central Christian tradition,"[16] and their common method of assembling sources (in many cases the same sources) from Christian history to buttress their claims.

Biblical Inerrancy and the "Central Christian Tradition" on Scripture

Confident that the "central Christian tradition" on Scripture would be identical with an authentically evangelical doctrine of biblical authority, Lindsell identified the view that "the Bible . . . can be trusted as truthful in all its parts" as normative.[17] He clarified what this meant as follows:

> By this I mean that the Bible is infallible or inerrant. It communicates religious truth, not religious error. But there is more. Whatever it communicates is to be trusted and can be relied upon as being true. The Bible is not a textbook on chemistry, astronomy, philosophy, or medicine. But when it speaks on matters having to do with these or any other subjects, the Bible does not lie to us. It does not contain error of any kind. Thus, the Bible, if true in all its

[16]Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, xvii.
[17]Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 18.

> parts, cannot possibly teach that the earth is flat, that two and two make five, or that events happened at times other than we know they did.[18]

Lindsell's discussion of biblical inerrancy required the identification of several supporting terms: *"revelation, inspiration, illumination, authority,* and *interpretation*."[19] Among these key terms, *inspiration* held the position of greatest importance for Lindsell in that it was the means by which "God got written what he wanted."[20] Inspiration was "the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of chosen men who then wrote the Scriptures."[21] Because of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the human authors of the Scriptures "were preserved from making factual, historical, scientific, or other errors."[22] Inspiration was the guarantee that the Bible is infallible because God himself, who "cannot lie or be the author of untruth,"[23] "superintended" the writing of the human authors in such a manner that every word was selected under the influence of the Spirit.

Over against Lindsell's definition of biblical authority, Rogers and McKim presented their own. It was their intent to clarify the historical record in order to demonstrate that a view of biblical authority conceived of as inerrancy did not have historical precedence over an older, non-inerrantist conception. They began, as did Lindsell, by defining the parameters of what they deemed an authentically evangelical conception of biblical authority, which, like Lindsell's conception, was indebted to Reformed theology buttressed by claims to historical precedence.[24] Unlike Lindsell, their definition entailed a rejection of inerrancy language, which they associated with post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism. According to Rogers and McKim, the central church tradition concerning the authority and interpretation of Scripture was well represented in

> Calvin [who] in common with the early church fathers held that the authority of Scripture resided in its function of bringing people into a saving rela-

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[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid., 28.
[20]Ibid., 30.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid., 31.
[23]Ibid.
[24]It must be noted that whereas Lindsell was straightforward in setting out his definition of biblical authority in detail before attempting to locate it in historical sources, Rogers and McKim spend less time defining their conception up front, preferring instead to unveil it in their treatment of the sources. It cannot be denied, however, that Rogers and McKim go looking for their conception of biblical authority in their sources just as Lindsell does.

> tionship with God through Jesus Christ. The Bible was to be interpreted as a document in which God had accommodated his ways and thoughts to our limited, human ways of thinking and speaking. Thus the historical, cultural period in which the writing occurred had to be taken into account in order to arrive at the natural meaning of the author. It was this natural meaning, the gospel message—not the cultural context—that was normative for contemporary hearers of the Word.[25]

For Rogers and McKim, then, the distinction between biblical authority conceived of as inerrancy and biblical authority conceived of as "not-inerrancy" is a distinction between a *textual* flawlessness and an inspired *message* conveyed by means of accommodated divine language. It is a distinction between form and function.

While the view espoused by Rogers and McKim was certainly opposed to Lindsell's, it must be noted that it was not entirely successful in breaking free from the conception of biblical authority as inerrancy. Instead, Rogers and McKim presented a definition of biblical authority that had been carefully shaped as a response to inerrancy and that addressed the same types of concerns as inerrancy, but in reverse. It was, one might say, a photo-negative version of inerrancy, but not yet a distinct conception in itself, which helps to account for the fact that Rogers and McKim were willing to admit "technical errors" in the text.

Woodbridge's conception of the evangelical doctrine of biblical authority was in basic agreement with the position held by Lindsell and in basic opposition to Rogers and McKim. With Lindsell he could affirm that

> 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 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. Evangelicals have generally affirmed that this perspective represents the historic position of the church. Moreover, Evangelicals have consistently asserted that their stance reflects Christ's teaching about the Bible's authority.[26]

Over against Rogers and McKim's attempt to define Scripture as an in-

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[25]Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, xvii.
[26]Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 20.

fallible but not inerrant authority, Woodbridge argued (again, much like Lindsell) that the distinction posited by his opponents was untenable:

> For Rogers and McKim, it is the Bible's saving function that is infallible, not its words (or form). The authors offer to us an "infallible" but "technically errant" Bible. "Errors" crop up especially in its historical, geographical, and scientific domains. How an infallible "message" (delimited to "faith and practice" issues) is carried by an errant text, Rogers and McKim never fully explain. In our study it will be important to determine if the Christian spokespersons whom they cite as representatives of the "central church tradition" did define infallibility in the way the authors propose, or whether these individuals propounded the view that the Bible does not wander from the truth in anything it affirms or says (biblical inerrancy).[27]

Thus, Woodbridge argued that no legitimate distinction could be drawn between the terms *infallibility* and *inerrancy*, compressing the difference that Rogers and McKim regarded as essential. For Woodbridge, the claim of an infallible message had to be grounded in the church's possession of an inerrant text.

Biblical Inerrancy and Church History

While Lindsell, Rogers and McKim, and Woodbridge disagreed strongly concerning what they would consider an authentically evangelical doctrine of biblical authority, they were no less strongly agreed that the appropriate mode of determining the legitimacy of a doctrine of biblical authority was the historical investigation of prior sources for the purpose of constructing a historical lineage or genealogy. With his "statement of what biblical infallibility means" in place,[28] Lindsell turned to survey church history in an attempt to determine whether the church "has *(a)* accepted and propagated a view of infallibility as I have defined it, *(b)* entertained and promoted some other view, or *(c)* accepted and supported diverse views."[29] At the outset, Lindsell admitted that "when we look at infallibility in church history, one fact stands out in sharp focus. The dogma of biblical inerrancy never was an acute issue in the church until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[30] Similarly, "At the time of the Reformation, as

[27]Ibid., 27-28.
[28]Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 41.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.

we shall see, biblical inerrancy was not a top-priority item."[31] The church's long silence on the issue notwithstanding, Lindsell wrote,

> Now if it is true that the question of biblical infallibility was not an important one until the nineteenth century, did the church believe and teach it through the ages? It is my contention that, apart from a few exceptions, the church through the ages has consistently believed that the entire Bible is the inerrant or infallible Word of God.[32]

Lindsell then assembled a genealogy for the view of biblical infallibility as he had defined it. Rogers and McKim pursued a similar course. Their account differed from Lindsell's in accordance with the manner in which their definition of the "central Christian tradition" of biblical authority differed from his, but they followed Lindsell's lead in seeking to assemble a historical lineage for their view. Their argument, in its briefest form, is found in their introduction:

> One of the most important and least known facts of American church history is that the principal textbook in systematic theology at Princeton Seminary from its founding in 1812 until 1872 was the *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae* of Francis Turretin. In 1872 Charles Hodge's famous *Systematic Theology* replaced Turretin's Latin tome as the text, but continued Turretin's theological method. For over one hundred years professors at Princeton vowed to "receive and subscribe" to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. They thought of themselves as followers of Calvin. But in actuality they believed and taught a theological method regarding the authority and interpretation of the Bible that was rooted in a post-Reformation scholasticism, an approach almost exactly the opposite of Calvin's own. More importantly, certain features of the central church tradition regarding the authority and interpretation of Scripture, which had been retained from the early church down through the Reformation, were lost in the post-Reformation reaction to the rise of scientific criticism of the Bible.[33]

Rogers and McKim saw and presented themselves as setting the historical record straight by means of retrieving an older and also more authentically evangelical conception of biblical authority through an examination of the works of key figures in the history of the church.

In taking Rogers and McKim to task, Woodbridge also embarked on a

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[31]Ibid., 42.
[32]Ibid., 42-43.
[33]Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, xvii.

quest for the historical position on biblical authority. As a result of his stated intent to challenge "the basic structure and import of Rogers and McKim's proposal,"[34] Woodbridge was particularly, though not exclusively, concerned with pointing out and correcting those pieces of the historical genealogy of biblical authority that his opponents had misinterpreted. Woodbridge's project was not merely critical and corrective, however: he also included material from his own research in seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources. Woodbridge, then, no less than Lindsell or Rogers and McKim, believed that the legitimacy of a doctrine of biblical authority could be secured by means of the historical investigation of prior sources for the purpose of constructing a lineage or genealogy.

In our discussion of the manner in which the establishment of historical precedence was of paramount importance for Lindsell, Rogers and McKim, and Woodbridge, we should also note that even the core sources deemed appropriate to the investigation were themselves generally agreed on among the authors in question. Despite variations and additions that reflect their theological disagreements, all identified a common lineage for their competing conceptions of biblical authority. The works of Origen, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther and Calvin and the Westminster Confession of Faith were depicted *in all three accounts* as representative figures of the "central Christian tradition" concerning biblical authority. In each account, these representatives were presented as advocates for the conception of biblical authority held by the contemporary authors. Just as interestingly, Thomas Aquinas and the Princeton theologians—Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield—were included in the historical analysis of the authors of each book but were treated differently according to the demands of the interpretive presuppositions of the authors. In Lindsell and Woodbridge's accounts, Aquinas and the Princeton theologians also serve as representatives of the perennially orthodox position of biblical inerrancy. For Rogers and McKim, however, these figures represent perspectives (scholasticism in the case of Aquinas, biblical inerrancy in the case of the Princetonians) that are not authentically evangelical or, one presumes, "centrally Christian." The degree of overlap in the figures and texts cited, despite diametric opposition concerning the meaning of the sources, can be seen as evidence of

[34]Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 17.

a more fundamental agreement that indicates again the degree to which this argument is native to a particular variety of evangelicalism.

Appraisal and Conclusion

At this point, I would like to present a few words of appraisal and conclusion. First, I would like to point out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the competing genealogies of biblical authority offered by Lindsell, Rogers and McKim, and Woodbridge. Lindsell's work, in my opinion, correctly identified the fact that the issue of biblical inerrancy did not become a matter of contention until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, by incorrectly forcing the issue back into earlier periods, Lindsell pressed the history of the church into the service of his polemic for the sake of constructing a historical lineage for the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as he had defined it. Furthermore, though Lindsell generally succeeded in maintaining an irenic tone toward his opponents on the surface of things, his book was by far the most overtly political of the three, urging "evangelical lay people in the pews" to "make it known in every way possible and exert all the pressure they can bring to bear to see that churches, institutions, and groups they have an interest in are committed to this viewpoint."[35] In opposition to Lindsell, Rogers and McKim argued correctly that biblical inerrancy as he conceived of it could not be found in the earlier periods of church history. Unfortunately, their proposed corrective involved the implementation of several dichotomies that served principally not to illuminate the historical diversity of perspectives on Scripture held by prominent figures in the history of the church, but to locate their own conception of biblical authority conceived of as non-inerrancy. Woodbridge correctly registered his dissatisfaction with a number of the features of Rogers and McKim's account, including what he called their "historical disjunctions."[36] Unfortunately, Woodbridge was as guilty as the others—not of espousing a view of biblical authority as inerrancy, but of reading his late-twentieth-century evangelical conception of biblical authority back into the historical sources.

Second, it is important to note that in each of these evangelical histories of the doctrine of biblical authority, the definitions presented and the historical research engaged in were all monopolized by the concept of iner-

[35]Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 13-14.
[36]Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 25.

rancy. As a result, each of the competing historical genealogies reflected certain basic inadequacies. The sources employed were distorted by the apologetic aims of the authors who failed, therefore, to present a convincing portrayal of the "central Christian tradition." Neither the inerrancy of Lindsell and Woodbridge nor the "technical errancy" of Rogers and McKim can be successfully demonstrated to have been the doctrine of Scripture of the patristic, medieval or Reformation periods.

These three works sought to settle the question of the status of biblical inerrancy as the authentically evangelical doctrine of Scripture by means of accounting for its historical lineage. Our consideration of them, however, raises another question: does the project of writing the history of biblical authority conceived of as inerrancy need to be re-envisioned? We must face the possibility that Lindsell was right when he observed that the inerrancy of the Bible has only become a controversial issue within the recent history of the church. If this is so, we ought not be surprised if we fail to find inerrancy as it has been articulated in twentieth-century evangelicalism in the theology of the patristic, medieval or Reformation periods. Accordingly, it may be that the goal of determining a "central Christian tradition" of biblical authority is not ultimately feasible. None of this rules out an evangelical commitment to biblical inerrancy as a theology of Scripture, but it does call into question the perceived weight of the claim that an evangelical conception of biblical authority is historically normative. This in itself is not cause for despair, however. It may be that evangelicals might better understand the history, value and influence of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy were they to acknowledge the historical contours and limits of this way of speaking about the authority of Scripture. It is possible that inerrancy might be better conceived, defended and employed as an interpretive strategy, a theological hermeneutic that called for the suspension of disbelief in favor of faith in what Scripture reveals and that was developed as a strategy of resistance to the pressures of the historical-critical method, rather than as a polemic in the service of ecclesial or doctrinal purity or as an apologetic argument for a supposed generically verifiable epistemological soundness of the sacred text.

3

The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming

Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism

BRUCE L. McCORMACK

The statement that the Bible is God's Word is a confession of faith, a statement of the faith that hears God himself speak through the biblical word of humankind. To be sure it is a statement which, when venturing it in faith, we accept as true even apart from our faith and beyond all our faith and even in face of our lack of faith. We do not accept it as a description of our experience of the Bible. We accept it as a description of God's action in the Bible, whatever may be the experiences we have or do not have in this connexion. But this is precisely the faith that in this way sees and reaches beyond itself and all related or unrelated experiences to God's action, namely, to the fact that God's action on man has become an event, and not therefore that man has grasped at the Bible but that the Bible has grasped at man. The Bible, then, becomes God's Word in this event, and in the statement that the Bible is God's Word, the little word "is" refers to its being in this becoming. It does not become God's Word because we accord it faith but in the fact that it becomes revelation to us.

KARL BARTH, *CHURCH DOGMATICS* I/1, 110

My goal in this essay is not to provide a comprehensive account of Karl Barth's doctrine of Holy Scripture. Such a thing would not be possible within the limits of this brief essay. What I am going to do is focus somewhat narrowly on the idea that the being of the Bible as the Word of God, as Holy Scripture, is a *being in becoming*. I have chosen this as my focus primarily for two reasons. First, it has long been my sense that the American evangelical reception of Barth's doctrine of Scripture has ultimately foun-

dered on this one point, namely, the claim that the Bible *becomes* God's Word. Surely—or so the evangelical complaint might run—such a claim must open the door wide to subjectivism in theology, to the belief that the Bible may be God's Word for us but, if it is, it is so not because it is so in itself but only because it has been the occasion for some kind of spiritual experience. Thus, a question is raised about the relation between what the Bible is *objectively*, apart from any human experience of it, and what it becomes *subjectively* when read and appropriated by human interpreters for their own use.

Now there is, admittedly, another word from Barth's vocabulary that I could have chosen to take as the central focus of this essay, and that is the word *witness*. The Bible is, according to Barth, the primary witness to revelation but not revelation *as such*. American evangelicals have often worried that such claims would erode a much-needed distinction between the prophets and apostles and the rest of us who come after them. After all, we also bear witness to Christ. But we are not prophets and apostles. We could articulate this particular concern most concretely if we were to ask Barth, On which side of the great divide that distinguishes God from all things human do the prophets and the apostles stand? Do they stand on the divine side, with the Word of God that founds the church? Or do they stand on the human side, over against the Word of God and, therefore, with the church, as merely the first in a historical series of later witnesses that also includes ourselves? Now these are very important questions to ask, it seems to me, and I do want to address them in the course of my reflections here. But it seems to me that we will be most faithful to Barth if we understand his answer as a function of his larger preoccupation with the being-in-becoming of Holy Scripture. A rightly ordered understanding of the relation of the "there and then" of the apostles and prophets to the "here and now" of the interpreter is, for Barth, a function of a rightly ordered understanding of the event that is the Word of God in all of its dimensions. And this leads quite naturally to my second reason for choosing the focus that I have in this lecture.

My second reason has to do with my conviction that much of American evangelical criticism of Barth's doctrine of Scripture has failed to hit its target because it has taken some of Barth's more striking statements out of their proper context. Any attempt to understand what is meant and what is not meant by Barth's basic claim (namely, that Holy Scripture has its be-

ing in becoming) places upon us the requirement that we attend closely to the material theological framework in which such a claim does its work. And when we do that, we discover that the proper context for an adequate comprehension of any of the things Barth says about Scripture, any particular statement, is provided finally by his theological ontology. In other words, the context out of which I will seek to interpret Barth's doctrine of Scripture here will not simply be literary (i.e., what a statement or series of statements might mean when seen in the context of the flow of the particular argument in which they are found). That, too, is important, obviously. But much more important, I will argue, is the context provided by Barth's theological ontology. Where that is missed, we may understand the meaning of a particular statement and completely miss its significance.

In what follows, I am going to begin with an overview of the structure of Barth's doctrine of the Word of God, focused in the notion of the "threefold form of the Word." I will then turn more directly to the being-in-becoming of Holy Scripture as the Word of God, seeking to comprehend it within the framework of Barth's theological ontology. And, last, I will draw some conclusions from this study for the future of evangelical engagement with Barth.

The Threefold Form of the Word of God

Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture was elaborated over a period of roughly thirteen years, stretching from 1924 to 1937. From the very beginning (i.e., in the lectures given on the prolegomena to dogmatics in Göttingen in the summer semester of 1924), Barth structured his presentation of the doctrine of the Word of God by means of his concept of the "threefold form of the Word": the Word of God is one Word in the three forms of Revelation, Holy Scripture and a preaching that is derived from Holy Scripture.

Barth repeated his prolegomena lectures twice, first in Münster during the winter semester of 1926-1927 and then, at much greater length, in the lectures given in Bonn and Basel, which became *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2.[1] Each time, no matter how much material expansion took place from one version to the next, the concept of a threefold form of the Word provided the organizing principle, thus testifying to the high degree of continuity in the material vision that informed both Barth's doctrine of the

[1]The Göttingen lectures were not published during Barth's lifetime. The lectures given at Münster were published in 1927 with the title *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*.

Word of God and his doctrine of Holy Scripture as one aspect of that more comprehensive doctrine of the Word.

Now already the distinction of revelation from Holy Scripture, as the first two of the "forms" under consideration, may arouse suspicion among evangelicals. So let us pause for a moment. From the first time he articulated this in Göttingen, Barth made it very clear that what he had in view was a *unity*-in-differentiation whose only possible analogue was to be found in the very triunity of God.

> I distinguish: the Word of God in a first, original address, in which God Himself, God alone, is the One who speaks; in a second address in which there will be added to the Word a very definite category of human beings, the prophets and apostles; and, in a third address, in which the number of these His human bearers or proclaimers will be theoretically unlimited. But "the Word of God abides forever." It is no other, it becomes no other, in that it is now the first, now the second, now the third; and always, when it is one of the three, it is in some sense also the other two. The Word of God on which dogmatics reflects is . . . one in *three*, three in *one*: Revelation, Scripture, preaching; Word of God the Revelation, Word of God the Scripture, Word of God preaching, not to be confused and not to be separated. *One* Word of God, *one* authority, *one* truth, *one* power—and yet not one, but *three* addresses. *Three* addresses of God, in the revelation, in the Scripture, in preaching—and not three Words of God, authorities, truths, powers, but one. Scripture is not the Revelation but is out of the Revelation; preaching is neither Revelation nor Scripture but rather *out of* both. But Scripture is the Word of God no less than Revelation and preaching no less than Scripture. The Revelation is *out of* God alone; the Scripture out of Revelation, preaching out of Revelation and Scripture. But no "prius" or "posterius," [and] therefore, no "maius" or "minus"; the Word of God in the same majesty, the first, the second, the third: "*unitas* in trinitate" and "*trinitas* in unitate."[2]

The analogy drawn here is a very tight one indeed—so tight that even the *filioque* doctrine of the Western church is mirrored in Barth's description of Holy Scripture proceeding from revelation but preaching proceeding from *both* revelation and Holy Scripture. But the crucial thing to point out at this stage is that Barth really does intend his doctrine of the Word to be understood as one Word with three forms and not three distinct Words

[2]Karl Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion Erster Band: Prolegomena, 1924,* ed. Hannelotte Reiffen (Zürich: TVZ, 1985), 18-19 (translation mine).

that might somehow be hierarchically related to one another. So it is not correct to say that Barth distinguishes revelation from Scripture and to leave the matter there. He distinguishes them as forms, yes, but he distinguishes them only then to insist on their *unity*-in-differentiation. However true it may be to say of Barth's view that Scripture is not revelation, the point will be understood correctly only where it is added that both are the Word of God and that a move from the original form to the derivative form of Scripture entails no lessening of value.

I should point out, before proceeding, that this lengthy passage that I just quoted from the Göttingen prolegomena is repeated almost verbatim in the Münster version of the same.[3] In the *Church Dogmatics,* the rather effusive prose by means of which Barth has established the analogy between the unity of the three forms of the Word of God and the triunity of God has been suppressed to some extent. But the point remains in force:

> We have been speaking of three different forms of the Word of God and not three different Words of God. In this threefold form and not otherwise—but also as the one Word only in this threefold form—the Word of God is given to us and we must try to understand it conceptually. It is one and the same whether we understand it as revelation, Bible, or proclamation. There is no distinction of degree or value between the three forms. [4]

And,

> There is only one analogy to this doctrine of the Word of God. Or, more accurately, the doctrine of the Word of God is itself the only analogy to the doctrine which will be one of our fundamental concerns as we develop the concept of revelation. This is the doctrine of the triunity of God. In the fact that we can substitute for revelation, Scripture and proclamation the names of the divine persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit and vice versa, that in the one case as in the other we shall encounter the same basic determinations and mutual relationships, that the decisive difficulty and also the decisive clarity is the same in both—in all this one may see specific support for the inner necessity and correctness of our present exposition of the Word of God.[5]

Thus, there was no retreat from the strong emphasis on the unity of the Word of God in its three forms in the *Church Dogmatics.*

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[3]Karl Barth, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf: I. Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes, Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik, 1927*, ed. Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: TVZ, 1982), 68-69.
[4]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter *CD*) I/1, 120.
[5]Ibid., 121.

But why distinguish revelation from Scripture at all, even if only as different *forms* of the one Word of God? What is at stake for Barth in making this distinction? It would help to clarify the answer to this question if we took a sidelong glance at the understanding of revelation found in the writings of an older contemporary of Barth, B. B. Warfield. In an essay entitled "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," written just nine years before Barth's Göttingen prolegomena, Warfield distinguished three modes of revelation: external manifestations (or theophanies), internal suggestion and concursive operation.[6] These differing modes are found in "three generally successive stages of revelation"; that is, there is a historical progression to them, starting with the Patriarchal Age, moving through the Prophetic Age and concluding with the New Testament period.[7] The meaning of theophany ought to be clear. In describing the mode of the divine revelation to the prophets in terms of "internal suggestion," Warfield had in mind the experience of the prophet in being given an oracle, a divine Word to speak—an experience in which the prophet was so "borne by the Holy Spirit" as to be passive in the reception of the divine Word. The experience of the authors of the New Testament writings seems to differ from this in that, in their case, their "total personality" is made to be the "organ of revelation." The contrast between the experience of the prophet and the apostle seems to be given even greater specificity when Warfield says of the Old Testament prophet that "to be 'borne' is not the same as to be led, much less to be guided or directed: he that is 'borne' contributes nothing to the movement induced, but is the object to be moved."[8] The apostle on the other hand, is led, guided, superintended. God works with the apostle "confluently," implying a degree of cooperation, albeit a cooperation in the mode of sheer obedience.[9]

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[6]B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), 83.

[7]Ibid., 82.

[8]Ibid., 91.

[9]Ibid., 95. Warfield was not entirely happy with the distinctions he had just elaborated, noting that 2 Pet 1:21-22 was intended by its author to apply to all the Scriptures (including those found in the New Testament). Such a reading of the Petrine passage would, if taken strictly, nullify the distinctions altogether. And that is a shame, for distinctions drawn between the experience of a prophet in receiving an oracle from God and the experience of the apostle writing letters to Christian communities or gathering data for the composition of a Gospel can be made very fruitful for distinguishing literary genres found in the canon of Holy Scripture. And it is very unlikely that Peter had in mind anything other than the prophetic experience in the statement found in 2 Peter. Warfield came very close to providing the grounds for

Conspicuous by its absence from Warfield's taxonomy of modes of revelation is any attention to Jesus Christ. One might well be forgiven for wondering how it is possible (in the light of passages like Jn 1:1-2, 14; Heb 1:1-2; 1 Jn 1:1-3) to omit consideration of the Word made flesh from any consideration of the nature and modes of revelation. And, in fact, Warfield does address the question. He acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the "culminating revelation" toward which all the other modes are finally directed. But as revelation, Christ differs qualitatively from these other modes. Jesus Christ *is* the revelation of God: "He rises above all classification and is *sui generis*." The revelation that he is "stands outside all the diverse portions and divers manners in which otherwise revelation has been given and sums up in itself all that has been or can be made known of God and of His redemption."[10] He does not merely disclose God's redemptive purposes but accomplishes them. But the fact that Jesus Christ *is* revelation in a sense that is not true of other modes of revelation constitutes at most, for Warfield, a reason not to bring it into a conceptual relationship with these other modes. He does not try to bring Jesus Christ as the (admittedly) definitive mode of God's revelation into a positive relationship to the other alleged modes. He contents himself with noting the qualitative difference and, on that basis, decides against granting to Jesus Christ a place in his taxonomy of modes of revelation. Warfield further defends this decision by noting that even though Jesus Christ sums up all revelation in himself, he is not yet revelation merely by virtue of being what he is. In himself, he is a mere "fact" like any other whose meaning can only be known through a revealed word of explanation.

> …though all revelation is thus summed up in Him, we should not fail to note very carefully that it would also be all sealed up in Him—*so little is revelation conveyed by fact alone, without the word*—had it not been thus taken by the Spirit of truth and declared unto men. The entirety of the New Testament is but the explanatory word accompanying and giving *its effect* to the fact of Christ. And when this fact was in all its meaning made the possession of men, revelation was completed and in that sense ceased. Jesus Christ is no less the end of revelation than He is the end of the Law.[11]

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a healthy criticism of a practice common in the history of evangelical reflection on the problem of "inspiration," namely, that of making the experience of the prophet to be paradigmatic for understanding what is happening everywhere under the impress of divine "inspiration." But at the last moment, Warfield drew back from the full implications of his insight.

[10]Ibid., 96.

[11]Ibid. (emphasis mine).

There are several features in this remarkable passage that help to clarify Barth's concerns by way of the contrast they provide. That Jesus Christ is not *directly and immediately* revelatory in his facticity as a human being, standing on the plane of human history, is something Barth, too, could say (and often did). But what "completes" the circle of revelation differs in each case. For Warfield, what completes the revelation that Jesus Christ is, is the accompanying explanatory word. Once that word was written (i.e., once the last of the writings found in the New Testament canon was finished), revelation was complete. As complete, it was—from that point on—the secure "possession" of men. The Spirit's work is, apparently, limited to inspiration. Illumination gets short shrift here. Presupposed is a commitment to a very strong understanding of the perspicuity of Scripture—the clarity of its teaching in and for itself without respect to the problems created by the fallenness of its interpreters. For Barth, by contrast, what completes the circle of revelation is the creation of the human subject who hears and receives the Word of God in faith and obedience, which means that the work of the Spirit in revelation is not complete once the Scriptures have been written. To use the traditional language, illumination is just as decisive a moment in the process of revelation as is inspiration. No full account of the meaning of the statement "the Bible is the Word of God" can be given where the relationship between the *there and then* of what took place in Jesus Christ and the *here and now* of what happens to and in the believer who hears the Word in the church is not set forth in a carefully ordered way. And this leads us to an even more fundamental difference of opinion.

Barth could never speak of revelation as in any sense the possession of men and women (for reasons we shall consider momentarily). The fact that he could not was not simply a function of his desire, understandable though it was, to locate revelation in a "place" that would make it immune to domestication by humans (with all the horrific consequences, political and otherwise, that such domestication brought in its wake). This was also a motivation, but it was not decisive. What was decisive was his careful elaboration of the positive relationship that exists between the definitive mode of revelation and all other putative modes. You see, Barth was convinced that it is from Christology, the definitive mode of God's self-revelation, that we are to learn what we need to know

about the relationship of revelation to the various media through which God has chosen to make himself known. If it would be wrong to say of the humanity of Jesus Christ that it is, as such, the *direct* revelation of God (and on the soil of Reformed Christology, Barth had to refuse this possibility), then how can we say this of Scripture? Warfield says it because he believes that the written word is more clear than the Word made flesh. But does not hypostatic union give rise to a more intimate relationship between the Word of God (the Logos, the second person of the Trinity) and the human element to which it is united than does the uniting of the Word and Scripture that is brought about through the process of "inspiration"? In putting the question this way, Barth's procedure also has the effect of reversing Warfield's priorities. The revelation that Jesus Christ is, is brought by Warfield into relation to the taxonomy he has elaborated without its help—with the consequence that Jesus Christ cannot find a place in his taxonomy at all. Barth's procedure is exactly the reverse. He starts with Christology (the problem of the ontological constitution of the Mediator) and allows the conclusions drawn there to control what can and should be said subsequently about Holy Scripture as the second form of the one Word of God. Everything that he has to say about Holy Scripture is thought out from a center in Christology. With this methodological observation in place, we are now ready to undertake a closer examination of the being-in-becoming of the Bible as the Word of God (i.e., as Holy Scripture).

The Ontology of Holy Scripture in Barth's Theology

That Holy Scripture has its being in becoming does not make it unique in Barth's view. For him, everything that is has its being in becoming. The significance of such a claim for the problem before us can be put initially as follows. It is not as though, confronted by the history of "scientific" investigation of the Bible over the course of the previous century and a half, Barth found it necessary to retreat to the view that "the Bible becomes the Word of God" rather than holding fast to the more traditional formulation "the Bible is the Word of God." It is not as though, having gone in search of "errors" in the Bible (however they might be defined), Barth had indeed found some and was now forced to elaborate his view of the Bible becoming the Word of God as an alternative to the older con-

ception. In truth, these were not alternatives for him at all (as we shall see momentarily). But the crucial point to be made here is that there was nothing defensive about the move he was making in the least. No, Barth's understanding of the being-in-becoming of Holy Scripture was a function of his commitment to the being-in-becoming of the God-human, his actualizing of the doctrine of the incarnation, which brought in its wake the necessity of affirming the being-in-becoming of the Trinity, of human beings and, ultimately, of everything that is.[12] It was a function of thinking out of a center in Christology about Trinity, election, theological anthropology and, yes, Scripture as well. So Barth is not in retreat when he elaborates his conception of Scripture.

Everything that is has its being in becoming. *But not everything becomes what it is under the same set of conditions.* For Barth (and here I can only just summarize conclusions that I have argued for at great length elsewhere) the being of God is *self*-determined being in an absolute sense. The divine aseity means that, in the "primal decision" that is the eternal election of grace, God gives to himself, appoints for himself, decides himself for a be-

[12]In *CD* IV/2, Barth discusses the doctrine of the incarnation for a good hundred pages in terms of the traditional terms *unio hypostatica, communicatio idiomatum,* and *communio naturarum.* Throughout, he is at pains to uncover the truth in these traditional terms, which must be preserved in any doctrine of the incarnation. But then, suddenly, he takes a step outside the rhetoric he has been using and puts to himself the question, what is it that I have been doing throughout my critical appropriation of the doctrine of Chalcedonian orthodoxy? And the answer he gives is this: "We have 'actualized' the doctrine of the incarnation. . . . What has happened is that we have left no place for anything static at the broad centre of the traditional doctrine of the person of Christ—its development of the concepts of *unio*, *communio* and *communicatio*—or in the traditional doctrine of the two states. We have, in a sense, kept company with the older dogmatics in each of the three concepts, as in those of *exinanitio* and *exaltatio*, to the extent, that is, that they are all terms which speak of actions, *operationes*, events. But—thinking and speaking in pure concepts of movement—we have re-translated that whole phenomenology into the sphere of a history. And we have done this because originally the theme of it, which here concerns us, is not a phenomenon, or a complex of phenomena, but a history. It is the history of God in his mode of existence as Son, in whom He humbles Himself and becomes also the Son of Man Jesus of Nazareth" (Barth, *CD* IV/2, 195-6). This emphasis on the "becoming" of the hypostatic union is characteristic of Barth's theology in all of its phases, from the Göttingen Dogmatics right through the end of the *Church Dogmatics* and counts rightly as the most decisive element of continuity throughout Barth's theological development. It is intended to supplant a conception of the hypostatic union by means of a traditional ontology of being that is controlled by the category of "substance." It was attachment to the category of "substance" that, historically, caused the terms brought into relation in Christology (viz., "God" and the "human") to be defined in static terms rather than in terms appropriate to the lived actuality of their union.

ing that he will have for all eternity to come.[13] The human, too, is a self-determining subject but is so merely in a relative sense, not absolutely. The human being is elected by God in eternity to be God's partner in the covenant of grace. This eternal divine decision is itself determinative of all the self-determining activities of human individuals. The eternal divine decision encompasses and surrounds human self-determination, limiting it and giving to it its true character. The gift of freedom that God has freely bestowed on human beings is, thus, a relative freedom only. Human beings can choose to live as covenant-breakers, as those who refuse to act as the covenant-partners God has appointed them to be. But even where this occurs, the human cannot really cease to be what he or she is.

Thus, the being of God as a being in becoming and the being of the human as a being in becoming differ in two fundamental ways. The first is a function of the ontological chasm that separates the being of the Creator from the being of the creature. God alone gives being *to himself* in eternal election; the human can only *receive* his being from God in the same election. That is the content-specific meaning in the *Church Dogmatics* of a famous phrase from Barth's early years: the "infinite qualitative difference" that distinguishes God and the human.[14] The second way the being of God and the being of the human differ has to do with the presence of sin in hu-

[13]On the divine election as the ground of the being-in-becoming of Jesus Christ as both the subject and the object of that election (i.e., as both God and human), see my article "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth,* ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92-110; and Eberhard Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden: Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth, Eine Paraphrase* 4th ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986); translated as *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976). It is worth noting, before taking our leave of the being-in-becoming of the triune God, that such a conception lies very far indeed from process theology. The statement is that God's being is in becoming, not that it "becomes." God's being is not reciprocally related to the world he created such that events that occur in the latter should exercise an influence on his being. God's being does not undergo change, growth or development of any kind as a consequence of his interactions with the world. To speak of God's being-in-becoming is not intended in any way to suggest this. It is merely, as Jüngel says, to affirm that God's being is "ontologically localized"; it is to understand the being of God in the concreteness of the event in which he gives himself the being he is and has. See Jüngel, *Gottes Sein,* vi; *Doctrine of the Trinity,* vii.

[14]That this distinction does not simply disappear after the "dialectical" phase of Barth's development comes to an end, but rather is given greater specificity and concreteness, is demonstrated by the claim made in the context of his doctrine of *concursus* that the basis and constitution of God and the creature as "subjects" are "absolutely unlike" and "cannot even be compared." See Barth, *CD* III/3, 102-3.

man life. The being-in-becoming of God is a being-in-becoming that always remains faithful to the determination God gives to himself in his gracious election. The being-in-becoming of the human, on the other hand, is one in which the human is constantly threatening to become something that he or she is not. What the human subject is essentially is a relation; or, more concretely, it is the divine act of relating to him or her in election. In that the fallen sinner seeks to use his freedom to become something other than what he is essentially, a dissonance is introduced into his being-in-becoming. Essence and act fall apart, something that never takes place in God. God is his act. But we cannot say this of the human in the same sense. The human is her act only where her actions *conform* to what she is essentially, as defined by the electing grace of God. As sinful, however, essence and act fall apart. Only in the eschaton—and only for those who are finally redeemed—will the being-in-becoming of the creature become a true being-in-act in which essence and act stand in perfect conformity, each being the perfect expression of the other. So for this second reason, too, the being-in-becoming of the creature takes place under a different set of conditions than the being-in-becoming of God.

But the conditions under which Scripture becomes what it is differ from those that pertain in both of the cases we have just considered. The Bible is not a person, as God and human beings are persons. The Bible is a thing, an inanimate object. As such, it stands between two radically unequal but nevertheless competing wills: the will of God (which determines its true being as Word of God) and the will of the fallen human interpreter (which seeks to hear in and through the texts of which it is composed everything but the Word of God). Now, as I say, these two wills are radically unequal in strength. And this inequality has the following consequences. First, what the Bible *is*, is defined by the will of God as expressed in his act of giving it to the church. And this means that where and when the Bible *becomes* the Word of God, it is only becoming what it already is. But, second, where and when the Bible does *not* become the Word of God, there God has chosen provisionally, for the time being, not to bear witness to himself in and through its witness *to this particular reader or this particular set of readers of it*. This changes nothing whatsoever as to the true nature of the Bible as defined by the divine will which came to expression in the giving of the Bible to the church. It only means that God does not will, for the time being, that the Bible should *become* what it is for these readers.

Thus, the being-in-becoming of the Bible as Holy Scripture, as the Word of God, is a being-in-becoming that takes place under two conditions. The one is the relation of faith and obedience in which the would-be interpreter stands to the God whose Word the Bible is. And the other, truly decisive condition is that God is willing to grant faith and obedience to the would-be interpreter so that the first condition might be fulfilled.

I have just spoken of the will of God expressed in the giving of the Bible to the church. In so doing, I have introduced the subject matter that was traditionally handled under the heading of "inspiration." Where does Barth stand on inspiration? In taking up this question, we are turning more directly to Barth's doctrine of Scripture. As we do so, we will find it necessary to return to Barth's ontology of Scripture in order to avoid mistakes.

> Revelation engenders the Scripture which attests it: as the commission or burden laid on the prophets and apostles, as the object which introduces itself in distinction from them, as both the judge and guarantor of what they say, and as the event of inspiration in which they become speakers and writers of the Word of God. Because revelation engenders the Bible that attests it, because Jesus Christ has called the Old and New Testaments into existence, because Holy Scripture is the record of a unique hearing of a unique call and a unique obedience to a unique command, therefore, it could become the canon.[15]

What the prophets and the apostles have written, they have written in response to a commission. And so Barth can say that "what we have in the Bible are . . . human attempts to repeat and reproduce this Word of God in human words and thoughts and in specific situations."[16] But he does not mean to suggest that what we have in the Bible are *only* human attempts of this kind. For the witness of the prophets and apostles takes place in the fulfillment of an office to which they were not only called but for which they were also *empowered*.[17]

Now Barth is notoriously shy when it comes to speaking of religious experience. So it comes as no surprise that he has little or nothing positive to say about the experience of the human who has been so empowered. He simply notes that it is so and continues on his way. Of greater interest to him is the *effect* of this empowerment.

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[15]Barth, *CD* I/1, 115.
[16]Ibid., 113.
[17]Barth, *CD* I/2, 491.

As the Word of God in the sign of this prophetic-apostolic word of man, Holy Scripture is like the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. It is neither divine only nor human only. Nor is it a mixture of the two nor a *tertium quid* between them. But in its own way and degree, it is very God and very man, that is, a witness of revelation which itself belongs to revelation.[18]

Now, to be sure, the "union"[19] of the divine and the human in Scripture (of God's Word and human word) does not result in a divinization of the human element any more than it does in the case of Christ's humanity. If Christ's humanity is true humanity—and it is—then the hypostatic union may not be thought to result in a divinization of the human nature.[20] So, too, in this case, where something a good deal less intimate than hypostatic union is at work: the relation between the divine element and the human element is a relation that Barth describes by means of the metaphor of an "indirect identity." That is to say, it is an identity in which each term in the relationship remains what it is—the divine remains divine and the human remains human:

> It is quite impossible that there should be a direct identity between the human word of Holy Scripture and the Word of God, and therefore between the creaturely reality in itself and as such and the reality of the Creator. It is impossible that there should have been a transmutation of the one into the other or an admixture of the one with the other. That is not the case even in the person of Christ.[21]

But in the light of this indirect identity, it is perfectly legitimate to say (quite simply) that the Bible *is* the Word of God.[22] That the church is able to say anything at all about the event of the incarnation is

> only because something unique has taken place between God and these specific men, and because in what they wrote, or what was written by them, they confront us as living documents of that unique event. To try to ignore them is to ignore that unique event. The existence of these specific men is the existence of Jesus Christ for us and for all men [and women]. It is in this function that they are distinguished from us and from all other men [and women], whom they resemble in everything else.[23]

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[18]Ibid., 501.
[19]Barth, *CD* I/1, 113.
[20]Barth, *CD* IV/2, 60, 68, 71-72, 77-83, 87-90, 94, 100, 117.
[21]Barth, *CD* I/2, 499.
[22]Ibid., 500.
[23]Ibid., 486.

The prophets and the apostles, we might say with Paul in Ephesians, constitute the foundation on which the church is built *together* with Christ, who is the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). Or, as Barth would have it in the just-cited passage, the Bible *precisely in its humanness* stands on the divine side of the great divide that distinguishes God from all things human. The Bible and church proclamation may be similar as human phenomena, but they are dissimilar in that the former has "absolutely constitutive significance" for the latter.[24] Consistent with that claim, Barth holds further that the Bible is the canon, the norm that absolutely and materially judges proclamation in the church, because "it imposed itself upon the Church as such, and continually does so."[25]

The will of God, then, as expressed in the giving of the Bible to the church, is that it *be* Holy Scripture, the Word of God. And this will was and is realized in and through a union of God's Word with the human words of the prophets and apostles—a union that is not a hypostatic union but that stands in a certain analogy to it. We would not falsify Barth's understanding if we were to describe the union in question as a "sacramental union." The word "sacramental" can only be rightly employed here, however, where it is understood that the "participation" that results is not a quasi-perichoretic interpenetration of divine and human essences that are statically conceived. Essences are, for Barth, relations with an event-character. But when we keep this qualification in mind, it is perfectly legitimate to speak of a sacramental union of the divine Word with the sign that is the prophetic and apostolic witness.[26]

Now if all of this be true, what then can be the meaning of a statement like "the Bible is not in itself and as such God's past revelation"?[27] It is precisely at this point that a fuller understanding of Barth's theological ontology can offer important assistance. There are two reasons why such a statement must be made. First, Barth wants to say something about the intrinsic limitations of human language. Human language has no capacity in and of itself to be the bearer of the Word of God. Nor does it acquire such a capacity through the inspiration of the prophets and apostles. Inspiration is the experience of the prophets and apostles; it is not something that

[24]Barth, *CD* I/1, 102.
[25]Ibid., 107.
[26]Barth, *CD* I/2, 500-501.
[27]Barth, *CD* I/1, 111.

perdures beyond the immediate experience, becoming a permanent attribute of the texts they write. If the word *inspiration* were tied to a fixed state of affairs—something alleged to be true of the Bible *apart from the relation to God* that it acquires through God's use of it—then what one would really be saying is that the Bible has the Word of God as its predicate. But the Word of God is God, and God cannot be made the predicate of anything creaturely. "God is not an attribute of something else, even if this something else is the Bible."[28] And, at this point, it has to be frankly acknowledged that Barth's denial that the Bible has either an intrinsic or a permanently bestowed capacity to be an adequate bearer of the Word of God is, in large measure, simply a function of the Reformed character of his Christology. If there was a constant in Reformed treatments of the person of Christ, it was that the divine and human natures of Christ remain distinct and unimpaired in their original integrity *after* their union in one Person. The writers of the Reformed confessions insisted on this point in order to render impossible the Lutheran affirmation of a communication of the attributes of the "divine majesty" (divine attributes like omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence) to the human nature of Christ, resulting in a "divinization" of the human nature. If the human nature of Christ is not divinized through the hypostatic union, how much less are the human words of the prophets and apostles divinized through the sacramental union by which God joins them to the Word of God. So when evangelical Christians stumble over the claim that human language has no capacity in itself for bearing adequate witness to the Word of God, my suspicion is that they are stumbling not because they are evangelicals but because they are not *Reformed* evangelicals. I may be wrong about this, but that is my suspicion.

But, second, the phrase "in itself and as such" in the statement "the Bible is not in itself and as such past revelation" also points us in a second direction. Here we are no longer concerned with the ontological chasm that distinguishes the being of God from the being of the creature, but with interaction of God and his people in history. To speak of the Bible "in itself and as such" is to speak of the Bible *in abstraction from* the relation that makes it to be what it is "essentially," namely, the Word of God. It is the divine will and act that make the Bible to be what it is "essentially." There-

[28]Barth, *CD* I/2, 513.

fore, if a process of abstraction from this relation occurs, who is responsible? The "proximate cause" is obviously the sinfulness of the interpreter (or interpreters). Biblical exegetes abstract what they are interpreting from the relation in which the Bible is what it is, and they do so with a high degree of consistency. In fact, I would go so far as to say that such a process of abstraction has been made a methodological norm by groups like the Society of Biblical Literature and imposed on its members as a criterion for a hearing within the guild. Hence, it is not all that surprising to find even evangelical biblical scholars making such mental adjustments before undertaking the work of exegesis. Where the acceptance of one's work as "scholarly" is made to rest on such a process of abstraction, the pressure to conform is tremendous. So the proximate cause of treating the Bible "in itself and as such" lies on the human side.

But the ultimate cause must finally be found in the divine will, which determines *in this particular historical situation and in relation to this particular interpreter or set of interpreters* not to override their sinfulness. That God does this at all is an expression of his judgment on sin—a judgment that may, at some later date, be transcended in a gracious self-speaking in and through the Bible but that, for now, leaves the interpreters confronted by an utterly opaque wall. The Bible *for this person or this set of persons* is not, in that moment, the Word of God. But, again (and this is crucial), such provisional judgments do nothing to set aside or mitigate what the Bible is "essentially." The will of God expressed in his giving of the Bible to the church is that it be the Word of God. But this was a will that had reference (in the act of giving) to the totality of those for whom Christ died. It is not yet a will that had in view particular individuals; or it had in view particular individuals only "in Christ" and not as individuals considered as ends in themselves. For particular individuals, God must first make the Bible to be what it is. The Bible must *become* what it is. And this is a becoming whose actualization rests solely at the divine discretion. The being-in-becoming of the Bible as Word of God that took place *there and then* under the experience of inspiration must take place *here and now,* so that the being-in-becoming of the Bible here and now is made to correspond to the originating being-in-becoming. And, therefore, the sacramental union of divine Word and human word is a union that must always be realized in relation to particular individuals if what is true of the Bible "essentially" is to be known as true by them. So when Barth says that "the Bible becomes

the Word of God," he is not speaking of what the Bible is so much as he is making a statement about the divine decision with respect to particular interpreters of it in a definite place and time.

The emphasis that falls here on the divine decision is also the answer to evangelical concerns over "subjectivism," and with this we come full circle, back to one of our original concerns. It is not our belief that the Bible is the Word of God that makes it to be so. Only God's decision makes it to be the Word of God—a decision originally expressed in the calling and equipping of the prophets and the apostles to be the primary witnesses to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and repeated whenever and wherever God speaks through it to the church and to individuals in the church.

> The inspiration of the Bible cannot be reduced to our faith in it, even though we understand this faith as a gift and work of God in us. . . . We have thought of the divine inspiration of the Bible as an actual decision which takes place in the mystery of God as His work and miracle, and which has to be recollected and expected in faith and obedience and in faithful exegesis. But there is an obvious doubt whether this really does sufficient justice to the objectivity of the truth that the Bible is the Word of God, whether this description is not at least exposed to the danger and may be taken to imply that our faith makes the Bible into the Word of God, that its inspiration is ultimately a matter of our own estimation or mood or feeling. We must not blind ourselves to this danger. But we must ask ourselves how we are to meet it, how we can in fact do justice to the objectivity of the inspiration of the Bible. Yet obviously we can do justice to it only by refraining from even imagining that we can do so. We do justice to it by believing and resting on the fact that the action of God in the founding and maintaining of His Church, with which we have to do in the inspiration of the Bible, is objective enough to emerge victorious from all the inbreaks and outbreaks of man's subjectivity. To believe in the inspiration of the Bible means, because of and in accordance with its witness, to believe in the God whose witness it is. If we do not, how are we helped by even the strongest assurance of the divinity of its witness? And if we do, how can we ask for any special assurance of it? Is it not to believe without believing, if we want to make such an assurance indispensable?[29]

Only God is finally adequate to the problem posed by the human tendency toward subjectivism. We will not overcome subjectivism by means of an attempt to demonstrate or prove that the Bible is the Word of God.

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[29]Ibid., 534.

Even if we were capable of such a thing (and we are not), a "proof" would amount to nothing more than an assurance that we give to ourselves. That would not eliminate subjectivism. The answer to subjectivism is the objectivity of the God who gave Scripture to the church and who, subsequently, has continuously given himself to the church in Scripture and through it.

Conclusion

Had the audience for which this paper was written not been evangelical, this paper would have had to address a quite different set of questions and to issue warnings against misunderstandings and misuse of Barth's doctrine of Scripture on the liberal side. In that liberal theologians and pastors sometimes seek to find in Barth a justification for the thought that human faith grants to the Bible its status as Word of God, we already encounter a misuse. The liturgical formulation "listen for the Word of God" as an alternative to "this is the Word of the Lord" also constitutes a flattening out of Barth's doctrine. But, as I say, I have spelled out the content of Barth's doctrine here with specifically evangelical objections in mind.

I do not wish to leave you with the impression that it is my view that if we only understood Barth better, we would find that he was an evangelical. He was not—not in the American sense of that term, at least. But I do believe that Barth's doctrine of Scripture has more in common with what is usually called the "evangelical doctrine of Scripture" than is often realized. They are compatible doctrines, even if they are not identical. You could summarize the difference by saying simply that where "inerrancy" appears in the American evangelical doctrine, the concept of a "dynamic infallibilism" appears in Barth's doctrine.[30] Both doctrines give rise to a very high view of the authority of the Bible.[31] And this, finally, is my reason for saying

[30]The phrase "dynamic infallibilism" is an interpretive tool of my coining. It is not language that can be found, so far as I can recall, in Barth.

[31]Stanley J. Grenz and Roger Olson have suggested that there is a "tension" between "Barth's theory of Scripture and his use of it." They note that "Barth treats Scripture *as if* it were an absolute authority in theology" (emphasis mine). But they seem to think that Barth's theory should not have allowed him to treat Scripture in this way. See Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 76. Against this, we need only point to the fact that Barth does not merely treat Scripture *as if* it were "an absolute authority in theology"; his theory itself affirms that it is so. Holy Scripture alone, he says, as the Word of God, has "direct and absolute and material authority" (see Barth, *CD* I/2, 538). I hope that my exposition of Barth's "theory" of Scripture in this paper has been sufficient to show that there is no tension between it and his use of the Bible in his theology. The "theory" is everywhere borne out by the practice.

that these views are compatible. Still, the essentialism embodied in the term *inerrancy* and the actualism embodied in "dynamic infallibilism" are not saying precisely the same thing, nor can they, since they presuppose very different philosophical outlooks. To put it this way is to suggest that such differences as remain were a function, finally, of differing philosophical commitments—and that necessitates a comment by way of conclusion.

The employment of philosophy within the bounds of theology, Barth often said, is only legitimate where the philosophy in question is made to be a tool for the explication of a theological subject matter. We subvert the integrity of theological subject matters where we allow a philosophy to flesh out the central meaning of the concepts to be employed in advance of the doing of theology and then force theology to conform to a content brought to it from without. No doubt, many evangelicals who are not accustomed to thinking in terms of ontologies that are relational and actualistic (as Barth's ontology certainly is) suspect that something like this may have occurred in Barth's own theology. Surely Barth has so wed his theology to some form of Kantian philosophy that his theology has been made the servant of the interests of that philosophy. My own judgment, after years of intensive study of Barth, is that that is not the case. The red thread that runs through the whole of Barth's theology—and that gives to his theological ontology its character as relational and actualistic—is the strictly theological problem of the meaning of divine immutability in relation to the fact of the incarnation. How is it possible for God to "become" human without undergoing some kind of profoundly ontological change? Put another way, Barth's concern is with the Godness of God in the mode of his self-revelation in time. His concern is with the coherence of our confession that the Lord is Jesus.[32] His basic conviction, from very early on,

[32]Karl Barth, *Erklärung des Philipperbriefes* (Zürich-Zollikon: EVZ, 1947), 66. It should be noted that Barth's translation is exegetically justified by the syntax found in Phil 2:11. On this point, cf. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 222-24. In spite of Fee's acknowledgment that the confession of all creation on the day of judgment takes the form, syntactically, of "the Lord is Jesus Christ," he nevertheless decides the translation in favor of the more traditional "that Jesus Christ is Lord." I think myself that what is finally determinative of the decisions of translators is not exegetical considerations alone but what they are able to make or not make dogmatically of the thought that "the Lord is Jesus Christ." If translators are unable to make any sense of the thought that "the Lord is Jesus Christ," then they opt to reverse the order.

The theological concern registered in Barth's translation is this: If Jesus Christ is the Word that was in the beginning with the Father, if it is that Word which was made flesh in

was that the early church's commitment to the Greek philosophical category of "substance" must finally undermine the coherence of its confession of the deity of Jesus Christ.[33] It was for this reason that he felt compelled to actualize the doctrine of the incarnation. He turned to post-Kantian philosophies in order to help him explicate what he understood to be a genuinely theological state-of-affairs.

In view of this, it seems to me that the question we evangelicals must ask ourselves is the one Barth asked himself: did the creation of the ancient trinitarian and christological formulations depend on an attachment to forms of Greek philosophy that intended to use philosophy only to explicate a theological subject matter? If yes, then the translation of these ancient philosophical categories into modes of reflection that are more congruent with what philosophers think today is not something we could possibly be opposed to as a matter of principle. We would then be in a position to consider concretely the question of whether the meaning of the gospel was made relatively more clear through the use of ancient philosophies than it was through the use of the modern ones Barth employed or, alternatively, whether the ancient philosophies contributed to a greater darkening of the true meaning of the gospel. And that, it seems to me, is the point at which an evangelical engagement with Barth must focus in the future—not on his doctrine of Scripture or even on his alleged universalism but on his exposition of election, Trinity and Christology in actualistic terms. Should this occur, the engagement would truly become serious, for it would have moved from a quibbling with matters that stand on the periphery on Barth's concerns to matters that stand, for him, at the very center. And should this occur, I am confident that evangelicals will find in Barth an ally and not a competitor.

Palestine in A.D. 1-30, then the content of revelation must be God himself, and indeed, God complete, whole and entire. For if God were not fully God in his self-revelation in Jesus Christ, then what would have been revealed in Jesus Christ would have necessarily been something other than God. Barth will not give any room to a kenosis by subtraction. The "self-emptying" spoken of in Phil 2 is a kenosis by addition, not by subtraction. In becoming incarnate, God does not leave behind anything that is proper to him as God. What is laid aside is the "form" of God, "all recognizability of His being," through the addition of the "form" of a servant, i.e., through the assumption of human "nature." Veiled in human flesh, the divine incognito can only be broken where God sovereignly wills that it should be so, for "flesh and blood" alone can never reveal to us who this person is. See Barth, *Erklärung des Philipperbriefes*, 60-62.

[33]See above, n. 13.

4

The Pietist Theological Critique of Biblical Inerrancy

DONALD W. DAYTON

In the 1940s there emerged a party from fundamentalism that came to be called "neo-evangelicalism," though the "neo-" was soon dropped. Within this party, a key role was played by those who came to be known as the "Harvard evangelicals"—a group of young scholars who had studied in Cambridge (and at Boston University). Many of them were under the influence of Harold John Ockenga, the pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, a major figure in the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals, later the president of both Fuller and Gordon-Conwell seminaries, and the major architect of the neo-evangelical platform. In a speech printed in *The Spire,* the Park Street Church's newsletter, he spelled out the platform's goals: to develop an intellectually respectable apologetic for orthodox Christianity, to move beyond the separatism of fundamentalism and regain control of the mainline churches, and to recover an "evangelical social conscience" (a theme that was echoed in the 1948 *programmschrift* of neo-evangelicalism by Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*).[1] In the face of fundamentalist reaction to this revisionist agenda, its defenders insisted on their "orthodoxy" by appeal to their continuing adherence to the doctrine of "the inerrancy of Scripture in the original autographs." They made it the litmus test of evangelical authenticity, most notably by making it the sole clause that one had to sign to become of member of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS).

In their articulation of this doctrine, the neo-evangelicals appealed to the "old Princeton theology" of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield. Though

[1]Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1947).

anticipated earlier, this doctrine of "inerrancy in the original autographs" received its definitive statement in a famous article (and later book) in 1881 on "inspiration" authored by A. A. Hodge (son of Charles) and Warfield.[2] The phrase *original autographs* reflects the willingness of the Princeton theologians, and of especially Warfield himself, to engage in the task of "lower criticism" (the establishing of the original text of the Bible that had been corrupted through its history of transmission) while rejecting "higher criticism" as inconsistent with their understanding of biblical authority. The timing of this article is striking. It appeared about the same time as the Catholic declaration of papal infallibility appeared, and it represents a classic declaration of a Protestant counterpart of biblical infallibility in opposition to church and papal infallibility, both over against the relativity of modern thought and the "acids of modernity."

This Princeton doctrine is actually a complex mosaic of theological claims, though not all elements have been at the center of the discussion. It involved an exegetical argument: Warfield claimed to be defending the "biblical idea of inspiration." It involved an historical argument: Warfield claimed that his doctrine was "the church doctrine of inspiration" until the rise of modern biblical criticism. It also involved, at least implicitly, a series of what might be called "philosophical" claims, many of which became the increasing preoccupation of the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy statements: that language, history, scientific concepts and so forth could not be understood to be so enmeshed in cultural relativity as to preclude the "inerrant" character of Scripture.

This position also made a series of theological moves that have become increasingly seen as problematic, at least by some. Though Warfield and others were careful to distinguish between revelation and inspiration and to understand the latter as a process of "recording" the revelation, there was a tendency of those working in this tradition to use inspiration as the primary mode of revelation and to speak of "biblical revelation." This tradition's answer to the question of how we know about God is found in the claim that "God wrote a book." Inspiration is the fundamental axis of this position, and it is used to answer many questions, including the limits of the canon (consisting of those documents that can be demonstrated to be inspired). This leads to a reductionism that fails to grasp the complexity of

[2]A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration," *Presbyterian Review* 2 (April 1881).

scriptural patterns of revelation. I have always wondered (since my teenage years!) why the first verses of Hebrews are not the *locus classicus* answering how we know about God: that God has revealed God's self in "many and diverse ways," culminating in these last days in a Son who is the very image of God. I am not able to avoid the impression that the Princetonians and neo-evangelicals saw 2 Timothy 3:16 as the *locus classicus* because they were already committed to the answer that "God wrote a book." The neo-evangelicals especially held firmly to the claim that "the Bible is the word of God" in the face of a Barthian claim to a Christological center of revelation. I remember an article in *Moody Monthly* about three decades ago on "How to Tell If Your Pastor Is Going Neo-Orthodox," with the suggestion that one should be very worried if one's pastor were to speak of Christ as the "living Word."

By this time the neo-evangelical consensus based on the Princeton theology had begun to fall apart. Most notable was Fuller Seminary's tendency to move away from this formulation in a new statement of faith. Several faculty members left Fuller, some of whom went to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, which claimed to be the carrier of the inerrancy tradition and the true evangelical tradition. In my tradition—which had reorganized its own institutions (the Christian Holiness Association and the Wesleyan Theological Society, founded because Wesleyan scholars did not feel entirely comfortable in the ETS) and in the process tended to adopt NAE and ETS "inerrancy" formulations—there was a movement away from these articulations to recover non-inerrancy traditions to be more inclusive of the variety of Wesleyan currents not accustomed to this language. In the midst of this ferment Harold Lindsell, former faculty member of Fuller and a board member of Wheaton College, published his book *The Battle for the Bible* and its sequel *The Bible in the Balance*.[3] In *The Battle for the Bible,* Lindsell painted a bleak picture of "decline" from the Princeton position, finding this "decline" where the position had never been held (at North Park Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Covenant) and also where it might more easily be documented (at Fuller, for example). I was caught in the middle of all this. I made Lindsell take out of later printings of *The Battle for the Bible* certain anonymous references to me, taken from unpublished correspondence, in his discussion of North

[3]Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), and *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1979).

Park. I was rewarded with a longer and friendlier discussion of my position in the sequel. In this period I was denied ordination in the Wesleyan church for my refusal to affirm the doctrine of inerrancy that had been written into our articles of religion only in the 1950s under the pressure of NAE affiliation.

The Battle for the Bible precipitated a debate about Warfield's historical claim that the Princeton articulation was the "Church doctrine," a position he had defended in interchanges with Charles Briggs, who had been accused of heresy over his denial that the Westminster Confession had intended inerrancy. This debate was repeated as Fuller Seminary released Jack Rogers from teaching to write *The Nature and Authority of the Bible* and expand the argument of his doctoral dissertation at the Free University of Amsterdam. In the context of political struggles in the Presbyterian Church over the proposed "Confession of 1967," Rogers had originally intended to argue Warfield's position, but after spending months in the British Museum reading the writings of figures of the Westminster Assembly, he reversed his position. Lindsell was then defended against Rogers and Donald McKim by Trinity Professor John Woodbridge in *Biblical Authority.*[4] I merited one minor footnote in the Woodbridge book for my exploration of the position of the Pietist movement on the question, and it is to that position that we must now turn.

The Pietists on Scripture

Warfield claimed that his doctrine of "inspiration" (and thus his understanding of "biblical authority") was the "church doctrine" until modern times. This claim has, of course, been debated without much consensus. We will leave behind the question of whether, as Warfield claimed, this was the doctrine of the early church, both east and west, as well as of medieval Christianity. John Calvin, who is bent most easily to this position, is ambiguous, with the scholarship almost evenly divided about whether his thought moves in this direction. Fewer have tried to make the case for Martin Luther, though Robert Preus and John Warwick Montgomery have made the claim. It is clear, however, that there are antecedents to the Princeton position in post-Reformation Protestant orthodoxy. One thinks particularly of Genevan Francis Turretin (and parallel Lutheran figures),

[4]John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982).

and Woodbridge makes much of Richard Simon who spoke of "original autographs."[5] It was, of course, the Latin edition of Turretin's *Institutes* that was used as a text for systematic theology in Princeton (until Hodge's three volumes replaced it), constituting the bridge to the American scene.

What has been little noticed in these historical debates is that Protestant orthodoxy, at least in the Lutheran context, precipitated a reaction in the Pietist movement that included a self-conscious rejection of the inerrancy articulation of the authority of Scripture. Fred Holmgren of North Park Theological Seminary and Jim Stein have argued that Pietism polemicized against the inerrancy formulation, and Pietist Philipp Jakob Spener advised his followers not to defend it, especially with regard to concerns such as history, science and geography. This fact constitutes a direct challenge to Warfield's claim about the church doctrine. In fact, it is quite striking that the debates about whether inerrancy is the church doctrine make no reference to Pietism. Rogers and McKim ignore Pietism, for example, and Woodbridge makes only a minor reference to my work without exploring the fact that it constitutes a rejection of the inerrancy tradition.

We are not accustomed in the English-speaking world to taking Pietism seriously. The English connotations of the word *piety* imply an otherworldliness, which is surprising given Paul Tillich's comment that the two great gifts of Pietism to modern Protestantism are the modern missionary movement and the concern for the poor and the oppressed. Nor are we conditioned to take Pietism seriously as a distinct theological tradition. There has been a tendency to think of Pietism as a practical movement that assumed orthodoxy and applied it more enthusiastically and perhaps "subjectively" to the Christian life and the shaping of the church. This has also been the case with Wesleyanism and Pentecostalism—neither of which have always been taken seriously theologically when measured by the more abstract, philosophical and systematic theologies of the dominant Reformed and orthodox traditions. But it is becoming increasingly clear that these traditions constitute alternative theologies that must be taken seriously as theology, especially in the wake of the rise of the systematic discipline of "practical theology" and a renewed appreciation for those

[5]Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority.*

ethnic and minority traditions that have entered a protest against the dominant patterns of doing theology.

There is another way in which this claim about Pietism is counterintuitive. There is no doubt that Pietism was "biblicistic." Its rejection of philosophical theology in favor of biblical theology, its cultivation of the study of the Bible formally in the Canstein Institute at Halle University and informally in small groups, its founding of the first Bible society that distributed millions of copies of the Scriptures, and its cultivation of personal and family patterns of biblical devotion have led many to assume that this would be an unlikely movement to enter a protest against the "inerrancy of Scripture." But it is clear that a radical biblicism need not imply a particular doctrine of Scripture. For example, in his rejection of natural and philosophical theology, Karl Barth is more radically dependent on the Bible and therefore "biblicistic" than his "evangelical" critics are, though he may not agree with them about the nature of Scripture.[6] Many of us learned a similar lesson in the 1970s in the Sojourners experience: we claimed to take the Bible more seriously on questions of poverty and justice than the normative tradition of evangelicalism did, without accepting its doctrine of Scripture. In fact, for many of us this experience was what broke the hold of evangelicalism on us and drove us to drink at other wells. Especially influential for many of us was John Howard Yoder, who seemed in many ways to take the Bible more seriously, in both the "hard sayings of Jesus" and in his theological method, while being more open to biblical criticism.

With these comments in mind, let us turn to some of those aspects of the Pietist understanding of Scripture that contributed to the rejection of the orthodox and inerrantist tradition. Not all of these themes always appear in each figure, and often it takes time to work out the implications of slight shifts in language (shifts that, to some extent, continue in such Pietist traditions as Pentecostalism), but the following factors seem relevant.

First, figures like Spener and later Francke of Halle were self-conscious about their rejection of a view of inspiration that was text oriented, and they argued that inspiration was given to persons who then spoke more

[6]One even wonders whether Pietism might not be a neglected source of Barth's thought at this and related points— in light of the large collection of Pietist writings found in his library, including three different editions of Bengel's *Gnomon,* the classic Pietist commentary on the New Testament.

naturally out of their own experience. This allowed them to avoid several problems of the orthodox tradition, especially their uneasiness with differences of style and possible contradictions in the biblical texts. The orthodox were horrified, for example, by what they saw as the "blasphemous" claim of the Pietists that God could be speaking bad Greek.

Second, some would argue that this move would allow the Pietists at Halle to become the pioneers of biblical criticism. Their rejection of the ahistorical subordination of the Scriptures to the creeds by the orthodox and a related tendency to deduce doctrine from small fragments of Scripture (Pietists argued for the use of large passages of Scripture to control this proof-text method) opened the way for a more historical and contextual method of studying Scripture. Pietists thus advocated the study of the original languages and cultivated some of the early forms of biblical criticism, especially textual criticism. Pietists were, therefore, more open to ideas of "progressive" revelation that implied historical development and to the idea of "degrees of inspiration." Our contemporary categories of thought make it hard to realize that at some points Pietists and Enlightenment figures were allied against orthodoxy.

Third, it is a commonplace of scholarship that the Pietists shifted in their soteriology from the forensic metaphors of the later Reformation and Protestant orthodoxy to "biological" images like *regeneration* or *new birth.* The point of Scripture was to communicate *life* in the first place rather than *truth,* though the latter was not ignored. But life can be communicated by imperfect instruments more easily than can truth, as is evidenced by effective preaching, the work of ministers, the witness of simple Christians and the life of the church. This position in a sense anticipated the critique of Warfield by contemporary James Orr in *Revelation and Inspiration*.[7]

Fourth, there is a sense in which the Pietists had a more complex doctrine of revelation that acknowledged the "many and diverse" ways in which God reveals God's self and that they saw a continuing process of revelation since biblical times. In a moderate sense the Pietists were more open than the orthodox to special experiences of revelation, dreams and prophecies. At its core Pietism was an effort to recover the dynamic and power of the early church, a concern that opened them up to the recovery

[7]James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (London: Duckworth, 1910).

of gifts of the Spirit. They maintained an emphasis on the gift of healing, and Bengel comments on James 5 that this gift was continued to remind the church of its unfaithfulness, which had led to the cessation of other gifts.

Fifth, this effort to reconnect with New Testament Christianity was one of the deep structures of Pietist thought that flew in the face of the orthodox tendency to draw a sharp line at the end of the biblical period, arguing that God acted in different ways before and after that line—with regard to both gifts and revelation. This is especially clear in the exegesis of 2 Timothy 3:16. For Warfield, *theopneustos* is to be understood only in the past tense, as the production of the text, something that does not take place in the present; this position parallels his position on spiritual gifts, which are relegated to the apostolic age and do not continue in the church. Bengel explicitly rejects this position in the *Gnomon,* arguing that the Greek word also has a present tense in that the Scriptures are "God-breathed" in the present as the instrument of God continuing to speak. This tendency to collapse inspiration and illumination in the face of the orthodox concern to keep them separate is fundamental to Pietism. And John Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament* (basically a translation and paraphrase of the *Gnomon*) include this comment as a matter of course in his treatment of 2 Timothy 3:16.

Sixth, one wonders whether Pietism was not pushing in the direction of a logic that would be worked out in Pentecostalism, as I argued in my presidential address for the Society of Pentecostal Studies. If God continues to inspire in the present age (in, e.g., the gift of prophecy), then the understanding of the canon must be rethought; it becomes less the depositum of all inspired texts and more the canon or measuring rod by which one judges contemporary claims of revelation.[8] Al Sundberg (originally from the pietist Evangelical Covenant Church) argued along these lines at North Park Theological Seminary, reflecting a school of scholarship at Harvard under the guidance of Krister Stendahl.[9] He argues, citing a large number of patristic texts, that the early church understood that the gift of inspiration was given to all Christians at Pentecost, that it continues in the church today and that it is not confined to the produc-

[8]This move seems to reclaim the original meaning of *canon* in the early church.

[9]Al Sundberg (originally from the pietist Evangelical Covenant Church) argued along these lines at North Park Theological Seminary March, 28, 1973.

tion of the biblical texts (contra Warfield).

Seventh, we should also notice the Pietist rejection of philosophical theology (a regular theme of Spener) in favor of practical and biblical theology. In fact, Leonard Woods, the president of Bowdoin College, translated in 1831 an early systematic of the Pietist tradition, *Christian Theology* by George Christian Knapp, as illustrative of the "biblical theology" school of Halle—apparently as an illustration of a position that was both more biblical and more open to methods of biblical criticism than orthodoxy was.

Finally, we should notice that the Pietist practical and concrete use of the Bible is a more natural reading of 2 Timothy 3:16. I remember John Weborg of North Park Theological Seminary commenting a quarter of a century ago that the orthodox and the Pietist differ in the place in which they discuss Scripture in the organization of their theologies. For the orthodox the treatment of Scripture is located in the "philosophical prolegomena" to theology as the epistemological principle on which systematic theology is erected—as a sort of biblical "foundationalism" that ensures the truth of theology. Weborg argued that for the Pietists, Scripture found its place in ecclesiology as a sort of "church constitution" that regulated the life of the church and the individual Christian. It may well be that the Pietist way of working is more congenial to a modern, postfoundationalist way of doing theology.

The Great Puzzle of Evangelical Historiography

If this analysis of Pietism is correct, it raises some very interesting questions, not only about Warfield's claims about the church doctrine of inspiration, but also about the very nature of contemporary evangelicalism. A substantial case can be made that contemporary evangelicalism—even in the neo-evangelical sense—is more a child of Pietism than of Protestant orthodoxy. This is becoming increasingly clear in recent scholarship. Mark Noll of Wheaton is now arguing (in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, for example) that evangelicalism in the modern sense did not exist before the eighteenth century, that it is a product of the post-Reformation "conversionism," which was born in Pietism and Puritanism and which came to its fruition in the Evangelical Revival in England and the Great Awakening in New England. Certainly the missionary movement, so central to evangelicalism, was carried by Anabaptism and Pietism—both seeing Christendom as a missionary field—and not by the magisterial Reformation

with its commitment to national Christendoms. And the Bible societies and practices of piety that were born in Pietism would appear to be the heart and soul of modern evangelicalism. If this is so, we are left with a very great puzzle: how did modern evangelicals and even neo-evangelicals come to think of themselves as the children of orthodoxy and of the magisterial Reformation rather than of Pietism? I would like to conclude this paper with a few reflections on this issue.

On one level, successive generations of Pietists did not always work out the logic of their position. Pietism was often carried by currents outside the academic traditions and did not always maintain its self-conscious opposition to orthodoxy, and it even on occasion fell back into the apparent logic of its own biblicism and into the hands of the orthodox. Ulrich Zwingli scholar Robert Walton, one of the few Americans to be appointed to a German university, once pointed out to me in a walk around Münster that after the French Revolution, Pietism and Protestant orthodoxy were forced into a new coalition in response to the increasing radicalism of the enlightenment and biblical criticism. Some such alliance is clear in the *neuPietismus* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which is more like modern American fundamentalism. And finally, the Anglo-Saxon world differs from the German in that these themes were often mediated through Puritanism and the English Presbyterian tradition, where the polarization of the German scene was not as strong. The direct mediation of German Pietism was often through marginal movements in ethnic and linguistic enclaves without wide cultural impact, and indirect influence was through Methodism, which was a carrier of this tradition but in a diluted and non self-conscious way.

But I would still argue that most forms of what we usually call "American evangelicalism" derive ultimately from Pietism. This became increasingly clear to me as I worked on the book *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, for almost all the themes of Pentecostalism (conversionism, perfectionist and higher-life themes, healing and eschatology) led me in that direction.[10] Pentecostalism is, of course, now the tail that

[10]Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991). When I finished this study, I discovered that I had an "alternative historiography" of evangelicalism that made more sense to me—a feeling that is often confirmed to me by German and Scandinavian scholars (living and working in countries where evangelicalism is still understood in the line of Pietism) who tell me that they find my work more useful than that of the neo-evangelical historians.

demographically wags the dog of evangelicalism—by itself constituting worldwide a majority of evangelicals that clearly stands in the line of Pietism. When one adds other currents, like the various Wesleyan bodies of the holiness traditions and other Scandinavian and European groups more directly rooted in Pietism, one could make a case that a vast majority of American evangelicalism may be seen in the Pietist line. My friends who count such things tell me that 75 to 80 percent of NAE membership would be in these lines; and, if anything, this is clearer when one looks at the evangelical culture of the Christian College Coalition.

But even more interesting is the extent to which other institutions that would identify themselves as in the line of the Protestant orthodoxy actually have roots that are more Pietist. This dynamic is perhaps clearest in the educational institutions of modern American evangelicalism. The most interesting case might be the institutions of A. J. Gordon: Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Gordon was a Pietist/holiness Baptist figure who was in many ways "proto-Pentecostal" in his advocacy of faith healing and other themes that shaped Pentecostalism. Gordon College has absorbed Barrington College, which has roots in Providence Bible College and ultimately in Faith College and other institutions of the New England holiness movement. Even the leaders of New England evangelicalism associated with the Gordon institutions reveal this history: Harold John Ockenga came originally out of the holiness movement in the Midwest, attended Taylor University, was a young holiness preacher in college and died with a picture of John Wesley over his desk as a testimony to that abiding influence; J. Elwin Wright, of the New England Fellowship of Churches that birthed the NAE, came out of Pentecostalism. Gordon himself was a major target of the polemics of Warfield, who objected to the Pietistic shape of Gordon's spirituality and his claims of miracles of divine healing.[11] The irony is that today one cannot teach at Gordon-Conwell without standing in the line of Warfield, the old Princeton theology, and the Protestant orthodox doctrine of Scripture. The historiographical problem becomes how to explain this phenomenon—one of the great puzzles in understanding modern American evangelicalism.

[11]See Warfield's essays on perfectionism and his book *Counterfeit Miracles.*

The phenomenon is wider than the doctrine of Scripture and themes discussed above, which fed more directly into such Pietistic movements as Pentecostalism and the holiness movement. One thinks of the claims that the evangelical doctrine of the atonement has always been the "penal substitutionary" view. I believe this is demonstrably false in a demographic sense; I would argue that the predominant view of American revivalism (and thus of modern evangelicalism) has been the "moral government" view of Grotius mediated through various traditions of "moral government" in the nineteenth century. It is little noticed that one of the most clearly Pietistic churches in the United States and Scandinavia, the Evangelical Covenant Church, was born precisely in a Pietist attack on the Protestant orthodox doctrine of the atonement. Yet such facts have been so suppressed in American evangelicalism that even candidates for the Covenant ministry are surprised to discover that the theological conditioning they have received at the hands of the neo-evangelicals makes them unfit for the Covenant ministry. Such phenomena scream for some explanation—one that is difficult to provide.

Any explanation must be multidimensional and complex. There is first of all the strong influence of the Presbyterian tradition on American evangelicalism. It has been a particular gift of that tradition to be a carrier of theological work that has had wide impact. The theological influence of Princeton (both old and new) has been profound and set the tone for groups that would not identify the tradition. Hodge's three volumes of theology have become the model for other traditions: the Baptists have to change the ecclesiology, and the holiness folk have to change the soteriology, but the model shines through nonetheless. And historians of other traditions have flocked to Princeton (both old and new), where they have absorbed the narrative line of the struggles of Protestant orthodoxy and told their own stories within the categories of that narrative. And one must notice the influence of Westminster Seminary (founded to preserve the old "Princeton theology") in the shaping of the intellectual agenda of neo-evangelicalism.

Other levels point in this same direction. Claude Welch describes how "conservative revivalists" sought refuge in Princeton, as the only seaworthy craft in the storms of biblical criticism in the late nineteenth century.[12] They lived aboard this craft and became so accustomed to its luxu-

[12]Claude Welch, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Hartford, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999).

rious intellectual staterooms that they forgot that they did not belong there. Such forces were given additional impetus by various sociological impulses. I believe that it is possible to trace a rising social mobility, at places like Wheaton, that has taken a correlated theological pilgrimage from holiness and proto-Pentecostal piety, through a Baptist piety, then a Presbyterian piety and finally an Anglican-style piety. Historiography and theological interpretation have followed this trajectory by suppressing the actual theological history for traditions more serviceable in this sociological trajectory. Thus the kind of phenomenon that one finds at Gordon-Conwell.

I have become more and more convinced that the neo-evangelical theological self-understanding and its appeal to the Protestant orthodox doctrine of Scripture, for example, must be interpreted in the light of these dynamics. This is most obvious in Bernard Ramm's *The Evangelical Heritage*.[13] This book is perhaps the clearest expression of the (often implicit) self-understanding of neo-evangelicalism. It traces evangelicalism through a Pauline reading of the New Testament and Augustine into the (Calvinist) Reformation and Protestant orthodoxy, and it sees evangelicalism as the intellectual effort to preserve that tradition against the "acids of modernity" through Princeton and Westminster. I have not been able to make this perspective work in interpreting larger currents of evangelicalism whose actual roots (Anabaptism, Pietism, Methodism, Revivalism, etc.) are often not even mentioned in the book. It doesn't help me to explain either evangelicalism or the personal trajectory of Ramm himself, who is an "evangelical Baptist" who taught for a while at Christian and Missionary Alliance Simpson College. I was once helped by a student who commented that Ramm's book seemed more like a "prescription" for the ills of fundamentalism than a description of its history. It was what Ramm wanted fundamentalism to become. It was, in other words (taken from more modern conceptualities), a "constructed identity" adopted to support the theological and sociological aspirations of neo-evangelicalism.

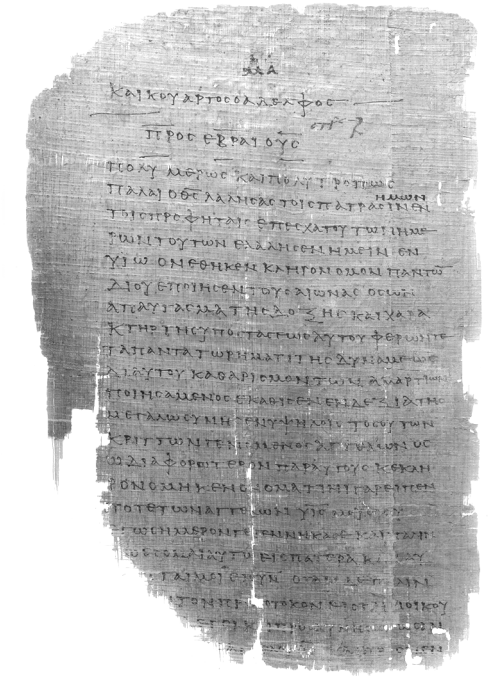
Wouldn't it be ironic if it should turn out that the despised and suppressed traditions of Pietism and its successors turned out to provide the clues one needs to escape the impasses of the orthodox doctrine of Scrip-

[13]Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1986).

ture and to find a better way to a more adequate doctrine of Scripture? I believe that to be a real possibility and commend to you the neglected tradition of Pietism and its suppressed doctrine of Scripture.

PART TWO

Scripture and Evangelical Exegesis



5

Can I Have Your Autograph?

Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture

JOHN J. BROGAN

Since the earliest days of the church's existence, Christians have debated issues of biblical text, canon and interpretation.[1] In this paper, I will briefly examine the intersection of New Testament textual criticism and the evangelical doctrine of Scripture. I have limited my remarks primarily to the New Testament, since I am most familiar with that field. The questions and problems that New Testament textual criticism raises concerning the doctrine of Scripture could be easily extended to and probably enlarged by Old Testament textual criticism, but I will leave the exploration of that field to more competent hands. Most of the following comments are not new; other scholars have raised similar points. My hope is that by once again raising these issues and questions, we will work toward a more adequate doctrine of Scripture.

I begin by retracing the history of the interaction between textual criticism and the church's doctrine of Scripture. I then discuss the influence that modern textual criticism has had on the doctrine of Scripture. Following that, I critique some recent uses of the tools and results of textual criticism by certain evangelicals who have defended the doctrine of inerrancy. In concluding, I end with a plea for a more comprehensive evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

The Patristic and Medieval Periods

In the doctrinal debates that took place between the second and fifth centu-

[1]The author of 2 Peter complains that "the ignorant and unstable twist" the letters of Paul "to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures" (2 Pet 3:15-16 NRSV).

ries C.E., authors frequently accused their opponents of altering and falsifying their biblical texts in order to support their theologies. Marcion is perhaps the most famous example of an early leader of the church who not only limited his canon, but also changed the wording of his biblical texts. In the Gospel of Luke and the letters of Paul, Marcion removed any material that equated Christ with the God of the Old Testament.[2] But heretical church fathers were not the only ones guilty of "corrupting" their biblical texts. Bart Ehrman's monumental study, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture,* has demonstrated that (proto-)orthodox scribes modified their biblical texts to make the texts *say* what the scribes already knew them to *mean*. Thus, people on all sides of the theological debates were making changes in their biblical texts, and textual variants quickly became widespread. By the third century C.E., variants had become so widely attested and known that Origen was compelled to discuss important textual variants in his commentaries on Scripture.[3] Although Origen complained that "the differences among manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others,"[4] he was often able to find "spiritual significance" in each of the alternate readings.[5] Similarly, both Jerome and Augustine discussed variant forms of the biblical texts in their writings. The existence of textual variants did not cause a crisis concerning the early church's understanding or use of Scripture.

Throughout the patristic and medieval periods, there seems to have been little concern over the effect that textual variants had on the doctrine of Scripture itself. While church theologians discussed variant readings on the basis of theological issues such as the doctrine of the Trinity, salvation

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[2]Marcion's views and treatment of the Scriptures were thoroughly critiqued by Tertullian (see his *Against Marcion*) and Irenaeus of Lyons (his see *Against Heresies*). Marcion was not the only person criticized for changing and misusing Scripture. Bart Ehrman states that, like Irenaeus and Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, Origen and Eusebius also accused their "heretical" opponents of changing the biblical text. See Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 26-27.

[3]Bruce Metzger discusses two dozen passages in which Origen mentions textual variants in his essay "Explicit References in the Works of Origen to Variant Readings in New Testament Manuscripts," in *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of Robert Pierce Casey,* ed. J. N. Birdsall and R. W. Thompson (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), 78-95.

[4]See Origen *Commentarii in evangelium Matthaei* 15.14; in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* 40, ed. E. Klostermann and E. Benz (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1935).

[5]Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 152.

and the church, no one argued that the presence of these variants seriously damaged the authority of the Scripture itself. Surprisingly, even throughout the church's polemical confrontations with Islam—which claimed that the Qur'an represented the verbatim, dictated words of God—Christian apologists offered very little defense of the accuracy and authority of its Scripture. It seems as if the church was comfortable with the fact that the transmission of the text, although flawed by the errors and changes introduced in its transcription, preserved the truthfulness of Scripture.

The Rise of Modern Textual Criticism

The advent of the printing press had a significant impact on the transmission of the biblical text. Printed copies of the Bible could be reproduced more cheaply and with fewer mistakes than handwritten copies could. For the first time in history, the biblical text could be fixed with certainty. The question that remained was what form of the biblical text would be "fixed" in printing.

The story surrounding Erasmus's printing and publication of the Greek New Testament is well known. Erasmus had relatively few, and primarily late, Greek manuscripts from which to prepare his printed edition. He used about a half-dozen manuscripts, all of them dating from the tenth century and later. It is well-known that his only manuscript of the book of Revelation lacked the final six verses, forcing Erasmus to translate the Vulgate back into Greek and producing readings that are not found in *any* Greek manuscript. Furthermore, in his earliest printed editions, Erasmus refused to include the infamous *Comma Johanneum,* the trinitarian statement found in 1 John 5:7-8 in the KJV, because he could not find the verse in any Greek manuscript. Around 1520, a handwritten Greek manuscript was produced that contained the passage in question. On being presented with this Greek manuscript, Erasmus was forced to include the passage in his third and later editions.

Erasmus's printed edition became very popular on account of its smaller size and lower cost and, as a result, it became the basis of subsequent printed editions. Stephanus published four editions of the Greek New Testament between 1546-1551, based largely on Erasmus's edition. Stephanus's fourth edition was the first to use chapter and verse divisions (which are still used today). Shortly after this period, Theodore Beza published nine editions of the Greek New Testament (1565-1604). His editions

differed little in wording from Erasmus's and Stephanus's texts. The translators of the King James Version (1611) used both Stephanus's third edition and Beza's later editions when they produced the Authorized English Version. In 1624, the Elzevir brothers produced a small edition of the Greek New Testament using Beza's text. In the forward of their second edition (1633), the Elzevirs claimed that they were providing their readers "the text which is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted." This text became known as the *Textus Receptus* (TR).[6] This "received text" became the standard Greek text used throughout Protestant circles in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries and eventually attained the status (at least in some Christian circles) as the text "received from God."

The period of the Enlightenment (the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and the accompanying growth of rationalism raised serious questions concerning the authority of Scripture. As scholars began to apply various historical and literary criticisms to the Bible, questions were raised about the divine origin and truthfulness of scripture. "Truth" became something that must be deduced rationally, not merely revealed. According to rational, enlightened thinking, the truth of revelation should not—and indeed, could not—contain anything that disagreed with reason.

The discipline of textual criticism developed during this period. More and more New Testament manuscripts were discovered and collated. The number of known textual variants increased dramatically. Text-critical principles were established in order to determine which variant most likely reflected the original. As the discipline of textual criticism was refined, many conservative Christians viewed it as just another scholarly weapon in the many-sided attack against Scripture.

Despite these developments, the TR remained the published Greek text accepted and used by the church (and it served as the basis for various translations into modern languages). Variants from the TR found in ancient manuscripts were relegated to critical apparatuses. Yet many readings found in the TR became increasingly suspect in the eyes of textual scholars. Eventually, in 1881, two British scholars, B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, produced a critical edition of the New Testament that overthrew the predominance of the TR. In the accompanying *Introduction,* Hort system-

[6] "Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum," as cited in Metzger, *Text of the New Testament,* 106 n. 2.

atically applied text-critical principles to demonstrate the lateness and textual inferiority of the Syrian (Byzantine) text represented in the TR.[7] On the basis of their investigations, Westcott and Hort concluded that the "Neutral" text represented in Codex Vaticanus (B) was the most ancient text and closest to the original.

The Influences of Textual Criticism on the Doctrine of Scripture

Two extreme responses to the findings of textual criticism emerged. At one end of the spectrum, those who had already abandoned scriptural authority on the grounds of "reason" or higher biblical criticisms received the textual evidence as further support of their view. According to this view, the overwhelming number and tremendous variety of textual variants challenged the church's long-held belief in the accuracy, reliability and authority of Scripture. Since God either could not or did not care to preserve the purity of the text through its transmission, then the text presently used by the church was irretrievably corrupt due to errors in the transmission of the text. Therefore, it made no sense to speak about biblical authority or inerrant "originals" because the true original could never be recovered.

At the other end of the spectrum, the presence of textual variants caused some conservative Christians to contend for a "God-protected" text. These Christians argued that since the autographs were inspired and without error, then God must have faithfully preserved these autographs throughout the history of the church and that the original text could be found in the TR. The most famous defender of the TR in the late nineteenth century was John Burgon, Dean of Chicester.[8] Burgon and his followers protested that the manuscripts considered to be the most ancient and most

[7]B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (New York: Harper, 1882; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988).

[8]See John Burgon and E. Miller, *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896); and John Burgon and E. Miller, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896). See the short discussion of Burgon in Metzger, *Text of the New Testament,* 135-36, where Metzger summarizes the view of Burgon as follows: "As an ardent high-churchman he could not imagine that, if the words of Scripture had been dictated by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God would not have providentially prevented them from being seriously corrupted during the course of their transmission. Consequently it is inconceivable to Burgon that the *Textus Receptus,* which had been used by the Church for centuries, could be in need of [such] drastic revision."

textually reliable by text critics such as Westcott and Hort were actually (in the words of Burgon)

> *the most scandalously* corrupt copies extant:—exhibit *the most shamefully mutilated* texts which are anywhere to be met with:—have become, by whatever process (for their history is wholly unknown), the depositories of the largest amount of *fabricated readings,* ancient *blunders,* and *intentional perversions of Truth,*—which are discoverable in any known copies of the Word of God.[9]

Supporters of the TR still exist today.[10] They continue to be vocal critics of both the modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament as well as of any English translations based on these editions. These people often describe themselves as "King James only" Christians. Modern-day supporters of the TR and the KJV are not truly text critics. By supporting one *printed edition* of the Greek text, these Christians basically assert that textual criticism is theologically suspect and completely unnecessary.[11]

A more nuanced version of the TR/KJV argument has gained momentum in recent years among proponents of the "Majority Text." According to this view, the original text of the New Testament has been preserved in the text found in *the majority* of extant manuscripts.[12] 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). Erasmus's printed edition was made primarily from manuscripts that contained a Byzantine text-type and,

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[9]John Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (London: John Murray, 1883), 16; as quoted in Metzger, *Text of the New Testament,* 136.

[10]The Trinitarian Bible Society (Great Britain) has been in existence since 1831 and remains a vocal advocate of the TR. In the U.S., the Dean Burgon Society was formed in 1978 with the primary purpose of defending the TR; see Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research,* ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 297-320; esp. 297 n. 4. Edward Hills was also a strong proponent of the TR and KJV; see Edward Hills, *The King James Version Defended!* 4th ed. (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research, 1984). Additional TR supporters include D. A. Waite, D. O. Fuller and T. P. Letis; see the bibliography in Wallace, "Majority Text Theory," 316-20.

[11]One should note that the arguments and views of TR/KJV advocates are usually either ignored or ridiculed by most reputable text critics.

[12]For an overview of the history and methods of the Majority Text theory, as well as a critique of this view, see Wallace, "Majority Text." Key figures in the Majority Text movement include Zane Hodges, Jakob van Bruggen, Wilbur Pickering, Russell Hills and Willem Wisselink; see the bibliography in Wallace, "Majority Text Theory," 316-20.

thus, the TR has close textual affinities to the Majority Text.[13] Much like their TR cousins, Majority Text proponents argue that if God inerrantly inspired the biblical authors, then God would also have preserved that inerrant text throughout the history of the church.[14] 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.[15] None of the manuscripts from the second through fourth centuries display this type of text.[16] 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*.

The Evangelical Dilemma

Ironically, the very text that Burgon labeled as "scandalously corrupt" has gained wide acceptance among evangelical and liberal scholars alike. The critical edition published today by the United Bible Societies is remarkably similar to the Westcott-Hort edition. This text has been used as the basis of most recent English translations (e.g., NIV, NRSV, NLT, etc.). It continues to be the standard Greek text used by Bible translators such as Wycliffe. Most evangelicals have accepted, either implicitly or explicitly, both the methodology and the results of modern textual criticism.

The acceptance of text-critical findings by evangelicals has created a dilemma. How can evangelicals acknowledge the reality of textual corruption on the one hand while maintaining a doctrine of inerrancy on the

[13]It should be noted that most Majority Text/Byzantine text-type people wish to distance themselves from the TR/KJV crowd. Wallace points out that the printed version of the Majority Text (see Zane Hodges and A. Farstad, eds., *The Greek Text According to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed. [Nashville: Nelson, 1985]) differs from the TR in over eighteen hundred places; Wallace, "Majority Text Theory," 302 n. 28.

[14]Wallace states that both Burgon and the Majority Text proponents argue for Divine preservation ("Majority Text Theory," 299, 305-7).

[15]For a full critique of the Majority Text theory, see the writings of D. A. Carson, Bart Ehrman, Gordon Fee, Michael Holmes, H. J. de Jonge, J. Lewis, R. Omanson, T. Ralston, H. Scanlon, D. Shields, R. Taylor and Daniel Wallace that are cited in Wallace's bibliography in "Majority Text Theory," 316-20.

[16]Supporters of the Majority Text (as well as if the TR) argue that no Byzantine text-type manuscripts survived because the early church used them so heavily that they eventually wore out. The worn-out scraps of these manuscripts were either reused or destroyed. On the other hand, these same people argue that the early church recognized that the non-Byzantine manuscripts were aberrant and thus did not use them. Since these manuscripts did not wear out, they remain extant today.

other? Dewey Beegle described the resolution of this dilemma as follows:

> When it became clear to lovers of Scripture that copies of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament contained some errors, it was quite natural to transfer the quality of accuracy or inerrancy to the original writings. Obviously one reason for this new emphasis was to protect the honor and perfection of God. The basis for this assumption was the syllogism: God is perfect, God revealed himself in the autographs, therefore the autographs had to be inerrant. . . . A closely related reason for this doctrine was to guarantee the value and authority of extant Bibles. . . . In brief, even though our Bibles are an approximation of the original manuscripts, their value and authority are ensured, so it is claimed, by the assumption of inerrant autographs.[17]

Thus, according to inerrantists, the Bible is completely without error in the original autographs, but inerrancy cannot (and should not) be attributed to any existing copy or translation. Inerrantists maintain that the "inscripturation" of God's revelation (i.e., putting God's revelation into written form) helps preserve it from the "various kinds of corrupting influences that stem from man's imperfect abilities and sinful nature" that oral tradition is prone to.[18] On the other hand, inerrantists admit that inscripturation creates the possibility that errors (defined as variance between the original form and secondary forms) could be introduced during the transmission and translation of the text. When faced with the question, does inerrancy (or infallibility, inspiration) pertain to the original writings (autographa), to copies of them, or to both? the inerrantist is forced to the view that has persisted throughout the centuries and is common among evangelicals today: that the inerrancy of the Scriptures pertains only to the text of the original autographa.[19]

Inerrantists produce a long list of people who they claim have supported this view, including such notable figures as Augustine, John Calvin, Martin Luther, B. B. Warfield, A. A. Hodge, Abraham Kuyper, J. H. Bavinck, J. Gresham Machen, Loraine Boettner, J. I. Packer, John Stott and Carl F. H. Henry.[20]

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[17]Dewey Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), 156.

[18]Ibid., 155. According to Greg Bahnsen, Abraham Kuyper taught that "God cast His word into written form—thereby achieving greater durability, fixity, purity, and catholicity." Greg Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," in *Inerrancy,* ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1979), 155.

[19]Ibid., 155-56.

[20]Ibid., 156-57.

What then can one say about the accuracy and authority of the printed Greek editions and translations available today? Inerrantists turn to the results of textual criticism in order to argue that the text we have today is substantially identical with the autographs. Over a century ago, Warfield asserted that the autographic text was available among the copies in circulation and that the restoration of the original was not impossible.[21] Warfield was so confident in textual criticism's ability to recover the original text from the extant copies that he claimed,

> The divergence of its [i.e., the New Testament's] current text from the autograph may shock a modern printer of modern books; its wonderful approximation to its autograph is the undisguised envy of every modern reader of ancient books. The great mass of the New Testament, in other words, has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation; and even in the most corrupt form in which it has ever appeared, to use the oft-quoted words of Richard Bentley, "the real text of the sacred writers is competently exact; . . . nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost . . . choose as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump of readings." The autographic text of the New Testament is distinctly within reach of criticism. . . . We cannot despair of restoring to ourselves and the Church of God, His book, word for word, as He gave it by inspiration to men.[22]

For all intents and purposes, according to inerrantists, we have the autographs in our present critical editions of the Greek New Testament thanks to the diligent work of text critics.

This inerrantist view of the inerrancy of the autographs and the reliability of our modern editions is summarized in article 10 of the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy:

> 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

[21]B. B. Warfield, "Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973), 2:583-84.
[22]B. B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1887), 12-15.

absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.[23]

CRITIQUE

As an evangelical, I applaud efforts to take seriously the findings of textual criticism and to incorporate those results into an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. On the other hand, I criticize some evangelicals for misusing the methods and results of textual criticism in order to bolster untenable theological positions. I see three major weaknesses in their approach. The first major weakness is that evangelicals often overstate the certainty of recovering the "autographs." The basic problem is that evangelicals continue to rely on the conclusions of textual scholars that are now extremely outdated. The discovery of most of the papyruses, our earliest textual witnesses, has taken place in the past century, after the grandiose claims of nineteen-century textual critics (such as Warfield's assertion cited above) were made. Indeed, the papyruses indicate that the text of the New Testament was much more fluid during the first two hundred years of transmission than originally thought.[24] A wide variety of textual critics affirm the fluidity of the New Testament text in the first two centuries. This is confirmed by research, which has demonstrated that both orthodox and heretical scribes made deliberate, theological alterations to their biblical texts.[25]

In my opinion, evangelicals tend to ignore or minimize the extent of textual fluidity in the early church. Evangelicals who claim we have the exact words of the autographs in one of our current critical editions (such as UBS^4 or NA^{27}) or, worse yet, in an uncritical text (the TR) tend to ignore the opinions of textual critics who argue that in some cases *none* of our extant Greek manuscripts contain the original wording. A minority of textual

[23]For a full statement of the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy, see Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1979), 4:211-19.

[24]See Eldon J. Epp, "The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Transmission," in *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text and Transmission,* ed. W. Petersen, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 3:1-32; reprinted in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism,* ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon Fee, Studies and Documents (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 45:274-98.

[25]In addition to the works cited in nn. 2, 3 and 24 above, see Bart Ehrman, "The Text as Window: New Testament Manuscripts and the Social History of Early Christianity," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research,* ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 361-79.

critics argues that we must conjecturally emend the text if we hope to recover the original wording.[26] Other textual critics continue to argue that the original wording is to be found in one of the ancient versions or in one of the citations by the church fathers.[27] The number and variety of textual variants has increased dramatically in the past century. Even evangelicals are beginning to acknowledge that we do not possess the original text in our critical texts and that much work still needs to be done.[28]

Furthermore, textual critics have recently been examining the question as to what we mean by recovering the "original text" or whether there is even such a thing as a single autograph and whether it is recoverable.[29] Building on the evidence produced by source and redaction critics, textual critics affirm that many New Testament writings were redacted and expanded at later times. In some cases, it is extremely difficult and problematic to define what exactly an autograph *is*. For example, according to most textual critics, the autograph of Mark did not contain the longer ending (Mk 16:9-20), and the autograph of John did not contain the story of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 7:53—8:11). With a doctrine of the "inerrancy of the autographs," what should we do with such passages? Are these passages not inspired and therefore errant because they were not part of the autograph? In attempting to identify the inspired, inerrant word of God, do we excise these passages, or can a case be made for the

[26]See Michael Holmes, "Reasoned Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research,* ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 336-60, esp. 348-49; and J. Strugnell, "A Plea for Conjectural Emendation in the New Testament, with a Coda on 1 Cor. 4:6," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 543-48. The vast majority of textual critics would argue that the "original" text has been preserved in some form of textual witness, whether actual Greek manuscripts, ancient versions or patristic citations. J. Keith Elliott claims, "On a positive note the thoroughgoing method of textual criticism assumes that the original reading has been preserved somewhere among the extant MSS and that conjectural emendations are unnecessary." J. Keith Elliott, "Thoroughgoing Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research,* ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 322.

[27]See W. Peterson, ed., *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text and Transmission,* Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 3 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

[28]See 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, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 283-96, esp. 290-91.

[29]See Eldon J. Epp, "The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text' in New Testament Textual Criticism," *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (1999): 245-81; and Holmes, "Reasoned Eclecticism," esp. 353-54.

inspiration and authority of the longer, canonical form of the text?

The second major weakness is the way in which some evangelicals misuse textual criticism to deny the validity of well-established and widely accepted text-critical methods. For example, in a 1982 article that appeared in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* James Borland argued that text-critical methods have been used "improperly" and have produced a New Testament text that contains "incontrovertible mistakes."[30] Borland protests that "the prevalent textual methodology can be and is being used to deny the inerrancy of the original autographs."[31] Borland discusses two particular cases: first, Matthew 1:7, 10, concerning the names in the genealogy of Jesus (Asaph and Amos in UBS[4]; Asa and Amon in TR)[32] and, second, Luke 23:45, concerning the eclipse of the sun ("the sun was eclipsed" in UBS[4]; "and the sun was darkened" in TR).[33] In both cases, Borland argues that the text-critical methodology employed creates a text that appears to be in error. In his conclusion, Borland states,

> If we accept the inerrancy of the Scriptures and yet countenance a textual criticism that voids inerrancy, something is amiss—and I would suggest that it is not the Word of God that needs reconsideration but rather our principles of textual criticism. . . . We must re-examine and divorce ourselves from a biased, narrow and settled view of the field.[34]

Borland seems to argue that text critics must sacrifice their well-established and long-held text-critical methods on the altar of inerrancy. Basically, Borland offers a thinly veiled attempt to re-assert the prominence of the Majority Text. His arguments are typical of many inerrantists. Starting with the a priori theological presupposition that the autographs are inerrant, some inerrantists argue that any methodology or evidence (whether textual, historical, scientific, literary, etc.) that challenges the inerrancy of the autographs must necessarily be dismissed. While it is true that textual critics must continue to discuss, refine and, hopefully, improve text-critical methodologies, I find it neither academically scrupulous nor even ad-

[30]James Borland, "Re-Examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (December 1982): 499-506; reprinted in *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate,* ed. T. P. Letis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987).
[31]Borland, "Re-Examining," 501.
[32]Ibid., 501-3.
[33]Ibid., 503-6.
[34]Ibid., 506.

vantageous to exclude certain methods or conclusion for purely theological reasons.

The third major weakness in the way some evangelicals have used textual criticism is their appeal to textual corruption when no evidence of corruption exists. As an example, Gleason Archer attempted to defend the inerrancy of the autographs against the challenges made by William LaSor and Dewey Beegle.[35] Previously, LaSor and Beegle had both pointed to specific biblical examples that they thought contained contradictory or inaccurate information.[36] In his response, Archer used text-critical arguments to resolve these difficulties. For example, when trying to explain the differences in 2 Samuel 10:18, where it states that David slew seven *hundred* men, and 1 Chronicles 19:18, where its states that David slew seven *thousand* men, Archer asserts that "there is nothing to prove that this discrepancy existed in the original manuscripts of Samuel and Chronicles."[37] Archer proceeds to claim that this discrepancy was caused by a scribal error due to "the difficulty of making out numerals when copying from worn-out or smudged *vorlage.* . . . It is very easy to leave off or inadvertently add a 'zero' when copying down a number in round figures."[38] Archer offers no textual evidence to support his claims: he offers no manuscripts or versions that contain the "correct" wording, he offers no parallel examples where extant textual witnesses demonstrate that such mistakes occur, nor does he offer an explanation how numbers were written. (Let alone how an ancient scribes might "move a decimal point"!) Furthermore, Archer never explains why the existence of "smudged" originals affects only the transmission of numerals and not the rest of the text. Archer uses the same type of argument to resolve a historical difficulty in 2 Kings 18:13, which states that Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, attacked all the fortified cities of Judah "in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign" (NIV). Archer admits that historical evidence proves that this number should be "*twenty-fourth* year." How should we handle this alleged error in 2 Kings? Once again, Archer pulls out his text-critical "fix-it bag" and

[35]Gleason Archer, "Alleged Errors and Discrepancies in the Original Manuscripts of the Bible," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1979), 55-82.
[36]William LaSor, "Life Under Tension: Fuller Theological Seminary and the Battle for the Bible," in *Authority of Scripture at Fuller* (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary Alumni, 1976), 5-10, 23-28; Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition,* 175-97.
[37]Archer, "Alleged Errors," 60.
[38]Ibid.

states, "Obviously a scribal error was made in the transmission of the decade number."[39] Once again, the glaring weakness of Archer's defense is that no textual evidence exists to support his claim.

In summary, the results of textual criticism during the past two centuries have caused evangelicals to reformulate their doctrine of Scripture in several ways. First, the very existence of textual variants in the manuscript tradition forced most evangelicals to abandon their arguments for the inerrancy of any particular text (e.g., the TR) or translation (e.g., the KJV). Instead, evangelicals were obliged to locate inerrancy in the autographs. But placing the weight of the authority of Scripture on the autographs created questions concerning the authority of the Bibles currently used by the church. Once again, evangelicals used text-critical methods to defend the reliability of their current Greek texts and translations. A minority of evangelicals argued that God had providentially preserved the "original text" in a particular ancient text-type, in the text preserved by the majority of manuscripts or in a particular printed edition (e.g., the TR). Others argued that the tremendous textual discoveries and advancements in methodology in the past two centuries have allowed us to reconstruct a text (e.g., the UBS^4 or NA^{27}) that is virtually identical to the autographs.[40] Either way, evangelicals could then uphold the authority of currently used Bibles because their wording is identical or in proximity to the autographs. In those few places where the reconstructed text appears to be in error, some evangelicals would argue that the apparent error would not be found in the autograph. According to their analysis, the error is the result of either faulty transmission of the text or faulty reconstruction of the original text because of improper use of text-critical methods. 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.

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[39]Ibid., 71-72. Overall, I find the other types of defenses offered by Archer to be as weak as his use of text-critical principles.

[40]Note Silva's warning against viewing UBS^4/NA^{27} as a new *textus receptus* or as a "standard/definitive" text. Silva states, "We can hardly afford to encourage the view that the work of NT textual criticism is for all practical purposes complete. . . . The UBS reflects a broad consensus and it thus provides a convenient starting point for further work. Far from considering this text as definitive, therefore, we ought to do all we can to improve it." Silva, "Modern Critical Editions," 290.

The Problem

As I examine the biblical texts and the findings of critical scholarship, I am not persuaded that the "inerrant in the autographs" position is an adequate view of the Scripture. First, this position is inadequate because I agree with the view that *inerrant* is not a biblical word or concept. I would argue that inerrancy is a modern construct that is somewhat alien to the biblical world. The biblical authors and church fathers spoke in terms of the *trustworthiness* of Scripture rather than its inerrancy.[41] The New Testament authors extended this concept of truthfulness and accuracy to their *extant copies* of the Scripture (the Old Testament), not just to the autographs. In other words, when the New Testament authors made statements concerning the origin, nature and authority of Scripture, they had in mind the extant copies available to them (not some long-lost autographs).[42]

Second, the inerrantist position is inadequate because it does not take into account the entire phenomena of Scripture. By "phenomena of Scripture" I mean not only the initial "inspiration" of the author, but also these four events: the subsequent editing/redacting of the biblical material, the gathering together and recognition of Scripture as authoritative (canonization), the transmission of the text and the translation of the text into other

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[41]See Beegle, *Scripture,* 156. In ancient cultures, truth was not limited to the notion "without historical/scientific error." The concepts of history, science and empirical truth were not fully developed until the Enlightenment.

[42]Beegle discusses (in ibid., 155) the passages where Paul (2 Tim 3:14-17), Jesus (Jn 10:34-36) and Peter (2 Pet 1:19-21) speak about the origin and authority of Scripture. He concludes that in neither these key passages "nor in the rest of the New Testament passages that refer to the inspiration of the Old Testament are there any explicit statements that single out the autographs as being different in kind from copies." Beegle claims, "In all likelihood Paul never thought in terms of the technical distinction between the autographs and copies of Scripture. . . . He never makes any claims nor proposes any definitions that would set the original writings apart as a special group to be clearly distinguished from copies of Scripture"(154).

Bahnsen vehemently denies the suggestion that the NT makes no distinction between autographs and copies (Bahnsen, 150-93, especially 159-71). Bahnsen argues that the biblical authors *did* distinguish between the autographs and copies (169), that the biblical authors made use of copies acknowledging that the copies' authority was tied to the original text (164), and that adequacy of a copy was proportionate to its accurate reflection of the original (167). Thus according to Bahnsen's interpretation, the NT authors affirm both the inerrant inspiration of the autographs and "God's providential preservation of the copies and translations" (161). I found Bahnsen's arguments on this matter completely unconvincing. He 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. Furthermore, he fails to recognize that his distinctions between autograph and copy are purely modern constructs. The base of his argument is that his theological presuppositions and his categorical distinctions are implied, but never actually stated, by the biblical authors.

languages. 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?

Third, the inerrantist position 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. By presupposing that the Bible is inerrant *in every detail* (whether historical, scientific or theological), one is forced to either ignore or explain away *every* challenge that is made about the Bible's accuracy. Thus, according to the inerrantist view, if another historical document or archaeological find challenges a detail of the biblical record, then the finding (no matter how certain and convincing) must be in error. Even well-established scientific hypotheses must be abandoned if they in some way suggest that biblical statements are inaccurate. By the nature of their doctrine, inerrantists are forced to argue that each book of the Bible had a single author so that they can speak of an inerrant autograph (in the singular). As a result, the findings of source, form, redaction and even textual criticisms that demonstrate how many of the biblical books went through long and sometimes complicated editorial processes are either ignored or hastily brushed aside. Furthermore, according to inerrantists, any internal discrepancies within the biblical record (e.g., differences in numbers, names, places, order of events, etc.) must be due to the faulty transmission of the text, to our present lack of understanding, or to both. The possibility that there might be "mistakes" in the way information is presented or inaccuracies in details or discrepancies between accounts is not even an option open to an inerrantist. Inerrantists force the biblical authors to comply with modern standards of history and science concerning "truth" and "error," although these categories are completely foreign to the cultural and contextual worlds of the biblical authors. Inerrantists are guilty of removing the biblical authors from their social, cultural, historical and literary contexts and then transporting them to the twenty-first century, where they must perform to the satisfaction of post-Enlightenment inerrantists.

Finally, the inerrantist position is inadequate because it is not helpful pastorally. When scholars speak only of the "inerrant autographs," people are not told anything about the Bibles they actually use. Why should

people have confidence in a Bible that was once—long ago and far away—inerrant, when all that they have before them is an imperfect translation of an imperfect copy? At best, the theological construct of an inerrant autograph is only a semantic chimera that defends an indefensible position. At worst, it is an intellectually dishonest escape from critical thinking.

A Plea

My plea is that we develop a more positive doctrine of Scripture that affirms a number of realities. First, our doctrine of Scripture must adequately explain the origin of Scripture and affirm that God, through the Holy Spirit, spoke his word to humanity through the human authors of Scripture (Acts 1:16; 2 Pet 1:21). Our doctrine of Scripture must also affirm that the product of this divine interaction with human authors resulted in the biblical writings being "God-breathed" *(theopneustos)* and that these writings are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16-17 RSV). Thus, our doctrine of Scripture must affirm *both* the divine and the human origins of the Bible, explaining how the writings of the Bible represent the unique, inspired Word of God.

Second, our doctrine of Scripture must adequately explain the entire "phenomena of Scripture." It must address not only the historical nature of the writing of Scripture, but also the editing, transmission, canonization and translation of Scripture. Our doctrine of Scripture must allow the Bible to speak truth as ancient (not modern) people might communicate truth.[43] Our doctrine of Scripture must allow for the editorial development of certain biblical texts, affirming that the writing was "God's Word" at every stage of the process.[44] It must acknowledge that the scribes who copied the

[43]This would permit the discussion of "accommodated revelation," the idea that God chose to accommodate his revelation to the limitations of human thought and writing in that particular historical setting.

[44]In this way, questions concerning multiple authorship (as in the case of Isaiah) or the editing/redacting of the Gospels can be seriously discussed without the threat of charges of "heresy" being made. This would permit discussions about the origin of the *Pericope Adulterae* (Jn 7:53—8:11) and its appearance in manuscripts of both John and Luke without having to raise questions of whether the passage was part of the "inerrant autograph." Similar discussions could be made concerning the endings (or lack thereof) of the Gospel of Mark without denying the inspiration and authority of Mark. (As a side note, it should be noted that the rather obscure practice of "snake-handling" rests on Mk 16:18, in the disputed longer ending of Mark. It might be helpful to realize the dangers of creating a theology or practice based on an isolated—and in this case, textually suspect—passage.)

texts had other interests and motives in addition to copying the text.[45] It must affirm that the people of God have never had access to the "inerrant autograph," but that they have always had access to the authoritative Word of God.[46] It must affirm, on the one hand, that the church has possessed dramatically different forms of the Bible throughout history. [47] But, on the other hand, it must also affirm that the church has always possessed God's authoritative Word.[48]

As we look throughout the history of the church, God's Word has come to God's people sometimes through quite exact copies of the text and sometimes through inferior copies that contained unintentional and intentional errors; sometimes through complete copies that contained all sixty-six books and sometimes through only portions of the Bible or even copies that contained additional, non-canonical writings; sometimes through very literal translations of the original languages and sometimes through translations of translations of translations. God is able to communicate through, and despite of, the frailties of human spoken and written language. God communicated to the original authors through the Holy Spirit, and he continues to communicate to us today through the Holy Spirit by

[45]In this way, manuscripts could be viewed as "windows" into the theological world of the scribe.

[46]Copies of the Bible represent God's Word as it encounters that particular people at that particular time.

[47]For example, the book of Jeremiah in the Septuagint (the oldest translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek) is around 12 percent shorter than the Hebrew version. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine which form (if either) was "original." Yet both were truly Scripture—God's inspired Word. The Septuagint (not the Hebrew) was the Bible cited by most of the New Testament authors. It was *the* Scripture for the earliest Gentile churches (before the New Testament writings had been gathered or recognized as authoritative), and it remained the Old Testament Scripture for the church for a long period. Only around the time of the Reformation did the Hebrew text become the standard for Protestant churches. For a brief discussion of the text of Jeremiah and its effect on our understanding of Scripture, see Douglas Stuart, "Inerrancy and Textual Criticism," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense,* ed. Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1980), 106-8.

[48]In this way Christians could affirm the authority of the great variety of translations throughout history and throughout various cultures and languages—from the Latin Vulgate (the "official" Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries), to John Wycliffe's translation of the Vulgate into English, to Luther's translation of the Vulgate into German, to William Tyndale's translation from Hebrew and Greek, to the KJV, to the prolific number of current English translations, to the thousands of translations into vernacular languages that exist today, to the current and future Bible translators who create written languages and translate the Bible in culturally understandable and sensitive ways—and affirm that all of these translations actually *are* God's authoritative Word.

means of that written record. Perhaps our doctrine of Scripture has made too sharp of a demarcation between ancient inspiration and contemporary illumination (and the many stages in between). Any adequate doctrine of Scripture must be able to make positive claims about the entire phenomena of Scripture, not just the original autographs.

6

The Sun Also Rises

Accommodation in Inscripturation and Interpretation

KENT SPARKS

The theological diversity of Scripture constitutes a major problem in the history of its interpretation, and this problem is compounded by the diversity we face when Scripture is read alongside the results of historical, scientific and social-scientific inquiry. This diversity—with its literary, historical, ethical and philosophical dimensions—does not easily yield to standard evangelical approaches to the text, nor is it expected in a text that we take to be the divine speech of a perfect deity. My purpose here is not to outline these problems or debate them. I simply take them for granted. Whether and to what extent such diversity is compatible with conventional evangelical ideas about the Scriptures is a legitimate question. Perhaps we can pursue this question by examining the kinds of solutions that are needed to explain the supposed diversity.[1]

In the course of church history, one important solution that has often been proffered in the face of theological diversity is the notion of accommodation. Accommodation is God's adoption in inscripturation of the human audience's finite and fallen perspective. Although historically speaking the concept has not played an important and explicit role in evangelical hermeneutics, recent developments in the Open Theism debate have brought accommodation yet again to the fore of evangelical interpretation. Open Theists aver that the various biblical texts that portray the deity as changing his mind or repenting are accurate depictions of the

[1]I am grateful to numerous colleagues who either read this manuscript or discussed with me its substance: Stephen Boyer, Phil Cary, Steve Gatlin, Chris Hall, Gary Jenkins, Dwight Peterson, Margaret Peterson and Ray Van Leeuwen (all of Eastern University), as well as Peter Enns (Westminster Theological Seminary), Tremper Longman (Westmont College) and Laura Miguélez (Wheaton College).

divine nature. The traditionalists argue, to the contrary, that these texts are anthropomorphic accommodations to our human viewpoint, that is, *that God is not changing his mind when the text says that he is changing his mind*. While I tend to agree with this last conclusion, it appears that we are only beginning to appreciate the theological implications of such assertions. In light of these developments, which presume the larger problem of Scripture's theological diversity, I would suggest along with D. A. Carson that a contemporary restatement of accommodation "would be salutary today."[2] Our discussion of accommodation requires at the outset, however, a brief foray into the problems of human epistemology.

The inflated sense of epistemic certainty by which human beings live is often well beyond the more sober estimates that our finitude and moral fallenness should dictate. If we could see ourselves through the eyes of the omniscient God, or even through the finite eyes of future generations, I suppose that we would become more aware of our myopia. I suspect, moreover, that we would be surprised to discover that some of the things about which we err are among the things that we hold with the most certainty. Of course this is only hypothetical, for we cannot step out of our own skulls into some different and more transcendent vantage point. But perhaps we can approximate this experience by examining how Christians of the past have struggled with their finite interpretive horizons and with the fallenness of their moral perspectives. In this respect, the theological debates surrounding the Copernican revolution are fascinating for students of biblical interpretation and philosophical hermeneutics.[3]

When Copernicus (1473-1543) proffered his heliocentric theory in the sixteenth century, it met with sharp resistance both within the Catholic church and among the Reformers.[4] The responses of Martin Luther, Phil-

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[2]D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 130.

[3]For a dated but standard discussion, see T. S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957). See also related comments regarding Galileo and the church in J. J. Langford, *Galileo, Science and the Church,* 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971).

[4]Early Christian interpretations of the Genesis cosmologies followed two paths. One paradigm attempted to correlate Scripture with contemporary cosmological ideas (e.g., St. Basil, John Philiponus of Alexandria), while the other attempted to build a cosmology on Scripture alone (e.g., the Antiochene school, i.e., Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and Diodorus of Tarsus). This second paradigm resulted in a two-story square cosmology where the first heaven was in the upper part of the lower story and the second heaven was a vaulted upper

ipp Melanchthon and John Calvin are good examples. Luther (1483-1546) referred to Copernicus as an "upstart astrologer" and as a "fool [who] wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth."[5] Luther's associate Melanchthon (1497-1560) added,

> The eyes are witnesses that the heavens revolve in the space of twenty-four hours. But certain men, either from the love of novelty, or to make a display of ingenuity, have concluded that the earth moves. . . . Now, it is a want of honesty and decency to assert such notions publicly, and the example is pernicious. It is the part of a good mind to accept the truth as revealed by God and to acquiesce in it.[6]

Melanchthon believed that wise governments ought to "repress" the views of Copernicus because "public proclamation of absurd opinions is indecent and sets a harmful example."[7] In support of this opinion, he could cite biblical texts such as Ecclesiastes 1:5 (RSV): "The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises."

The response of Calvin (1509-1564) to Copernicus was a bit more complicated. His commentaries and sermons uniformly ignored the Polish astronomer, averring the traditional geocentric view at every turn, sometimes in great detail.[8] But there is a considerable debate about whether this means that Calvin should be viewed as anti-Copernican or merely as pre-Copernican. In support of the pre-Copernican view, we should note that Calvin embraced a very flexible theology of biblical inspiration that allowed for the easy assimilation of new astronomical data, as this excerpt from his Genesis commentary shows:

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story. See the brief but insightful discussion of C. Scholten, "Weshalb wird die Schöpfungsgeschichte zum naturwissenschaftlichen Bericht?" *Theologische Quartalschrift* 177 (1997): 1-15.

[5]Martin Luther *Tischreden* 1.419; quoted by Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom,* 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1896), 1:126.

[6]Philipp Melanchthon *Initia Doctrinae Physicae;* quoted by White, *History of the Warfare,* 1:126-27.

[7]Philipp Melanchthon *Corpus reformatum* 4.679, 13.217. Quotations are taken from Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution,* 191-92.

[8]For instance, see the following: John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis,* 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1947-1950), 1:61; *Commentary on the Book of Psalms,* 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1945-1949), 1:315, 3:186, 4:6-7, 148-149, 469; *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations,* 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850-1855), 2:34; *Two and Twentie Sermons* (London: T. Dawson, 1580), 99.

> Astronomers . . . investigate with great labor whatever keenness of man's intellect is able to discover. Such study is certainly not to be disapproved, nor this science condemned, because some frantic persons are wont boldly to reject whatever is unknown to them. . . . Therefore, clever men who expend their labor upon it are to be praised and those who have ability and leisure ought not to neglect work of that kind. Nor did Moses wish to withdraw us from this pursuit by omitting such things as are peculiar to the art; but because he was ordained a teacher of the unlearned and ignorant as well of the learned, he could not fulfill his office unless he descended to this more elementary method of instruction.[9]

When Calvin's Ptolemaic cosmology is viewed through the lens of his appreciation for astronomy, it might be concluded that the Reformer did not know of Copernicus, and this is precisely the conclusion that has been drawn by E. Rosen.[10] On the other hand, it seems rather unlikely that a man of Calvin's erudition and broad interests wrote in ignorance of the important debates surrounding Copernicus.[11] Moreover, there is a tradition that Calvin once criticized the astronomer for contradicting the Bible's geocentric view, saying, "Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?"[12] Whether Calvin ever posed this question will likely remain a mystery until the eschaton, but it seems probable that Calvin's lengthy discussions of Ptolemaic cosmology were pointed, at least in part, at the new system being proffered by Copernicus. Calvin, Luther and Melanchthon are merely representative of general trends in the sixteenth century, in which clergymen feverishly searched the Bible line by line for new passages that might confirm the traditional Ptolemaic view.[13]

It is easy to see why the Reformers and others took this hard-line position against Copernicus. First, the Ptolemaic view was matched step for step by the long-standing traditions of the church. Second, the Ptolemaic

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[9]Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses,* 1:86-87. I have modernized this quotation.

[10]E. Rosen, "Calvin's Attitude Toward Copernicus," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960): 431-41.

[11]See J. Ratner's response to Rosen and Rosen's rejoinder: J. Ratner, "Some Comments on Rosen's 'Calvin's Attitude Toward Copernicus,' " *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961): 382-85; E. Rosen, "A Reply to Dr. Ratner," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961): 386-88.

[12]For a discussion of the problems with this quotation, see the articles of Rosen and Ratner cited above.

[13]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution,* 192.

view corresponded rather precisely to the usual experiences of human life—that the sun is moving and we are not. And third, as we have just seen, the geocentric view had Scripture on its side. Tradition, common sense and the voice of Scripture joined together to create a coherent understanding of the world against which the Copernican viewpoint seemed senseless, even heretical. Ultimately, however, the Copernican viewpoint would win the day. The reason, of course, was that the scientific evidence finally coalesced into a consensus against which tradition, Scripture and common sense could no longer prevail. Why had some of the greatest theological minds in church history failed to recognize their error? Why did they speak so maliciously and arrogantly against Copernicus, only to be, in the end, on the wrong side of the debate? *In nuce,* we could say that the Reformers suffered from finitude, hence, they did not realize what they did not know, and that they suffered from moral fallenness, hence, their arrogant and malicious spirit. But in the case of Calvin, it is worth exploring his more measured response in some detail.

It is certainly true that Calvin and others had placed too much confidence in common sense and had either overestimated their understanding of the science or, more likely, had trusted too exclusively others who claimed to know the science. But it was the interpretation of Scripture that played a pivotal role in Calvin's perspective. At every turn of the page, he, and others like him, could show how God's Word reflected the Ptolemaic perspective over and against the Copernican view. It was no coincidence that Calvin found the geocentric view in the Scriptures. Prior to Copernicus, only a few Greek philosophers—so far as we know—seriously advocated a heliocentric view.[14] In the days of ancient Israel, all of the data we have would suggest that the ancients viewed the Earth as a flat and level surface placed on a foundation of some sort and assumed the sun moved through the sky during the day and then into the underworld each

[14]The Greeks knew the Earth was spherical by the fifth century B.C.E. (Parmenides), and there is also evidence that a few of them toyed with the heliocentric theory (Aristarchus of Samos, c. 310-230 B.C.E.; Archimedes, d. 212 B.C.E.). However, it is clear that these unusual ideas were not widely known; even very educated writers, such as Thucydides, were unfamiliar with them. This explains the long-standing prominence of the geocentric view espoused by Aristotle (fourth century B.C.E.) and Ptolemy (second century C.E.). For a discussion of the Greek viewpoints, see G. J. Toomer, "Astronomy," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary,* 3rd ed., ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 196-98.

evening.[15] Such was the common understanding of things in antiquity, and the Scriptures simply reflect this cosmological status quo. A common evangelical answer to these observations is that Genesis—and the rest of the Old Testament with it—is not a book of science. But it would be quite strange if there were no connection between the flat Earth depicted in Scripture and the ancient view that the Earth was flat. Whether Scripture's cosmologies are science, myth or something else altogether, there is little doubt that they reflect an ancient and errant viewpoint.

Although the Reformers and many others—to the misfortune of Copernicus—failed to recognize the potential role of accommodation in the astronomical debates of the time, this does not mean that Calvin was unaware, in principle, that accommodation played an important role in the Bible's description of the cosmos. His work is well known for its rather clear enunciation of accommodation, even in his Genesis commentary.[16] For instance, Calvin wrote concerning the reference to "waters above the firmament *(raqia)*" in Genesis 1:

> For, to my mind, this is a certain principle: that nothing is here treated but the visible form of the world. He who wishes to learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere. . . . The things, therefore, which he [i.e., Moses] relates, serve as the garniture of that theatre which he places before our eyes. Whence I conclude, that the waters here meant are such as the rude and unlearned may perceive. The assertion of some, that they embrace by faith what they have read concerning the waters above the heavens, notwithstanding their ignorance respecting them, is not in accordance with the design of Moses. And truly a longer inquiry into a matter open and manifest is superfluous.[17]

One should not, Calvin says, believe "by faith" that there are waters above

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[15]For a discussion of the Genesis cosmology, see P. H. Seely, "The Geographical Meaning of 'Earth' and 'Seas' in Genesis 1:10," *Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997): 231-55. For a good example of the ancient Jewish viewpoint during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., see 1 Enoch 17—36 (the "Book of Watchers") and 1 Enoch 27—82 (the "Astronomical Book"). Here the Earth is depicted as a flat disk with extreme edges to the east and west, and the stars and heavenly bodies are thought to pass into the heavens through portals at the extreme eastern edge of the Earth.

[16]For discussions of Calvin's accommodation theology, see F. L. Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 19-38; D. F. Wright, "Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart and Divine Accommodation in the Mosaic Harmony Commentary," *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 33-50.

[17]Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 79-80.

the firmament when one knows good and well that this is not the case. Genesis merely accommodates itself to the ancient view that such waters existed. Calvin similarly argued that accommodation was at work in the chronological system used to enumerate the various creation days of Genesis 1. Because the text reflects an accommodation to the ancient view of time, says Calvin, "it is to no purpose to dispute whether this be the best and legitimate order or not."[18] In other words, for Calvin, accommodation was a useful interpretive tool because it made irrelevant in such cases any questions about the Bible's correctness. Whenever the Bible appears to speak "falsely," this reflects an accommodation to the false views of humanity. In this sense, accommodation was for Calvin what allegory was for the church fathers: a ready-made hermeneutical tool for solving the problem of diversity in the Scriptures. If Calvin's principle of accommodation is a legitimate and important aspect of interpretation, then we may suspect that it was not his innovation so much as a long-standing principle of interpretation within the church.

Accommodation in Early Christian Interpretation

Calvin was preceded by a long line of Bible readers who recognized the nature and necessity of accommodation in revelation and used the concept to solve the conundrums of theological diversity in Scripture.[19] Among the most important of these conundrums was that raised by Marcion, as well as by other early critics, that the Old and New Testaments ostensibly provide quite different pictures of God and his relationship to humanity. While one answer to this has always been *oikonomia,* God's salvation plan as it unfolds in various dispensations, this begs the question of why these dispensations were necessary. Church interpreters have rather consistently attributed these differences in the old and new spiritual economies to the necessity and presence of accommodation. An early example from the second century is provided by Justin, who explained to Trypho why God gave the Jews primitive rituals like sabbath keeping, circumcision and sacrifice:

> We, too, would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the Sabbaths, and in short all your festivals, if we did not know why they were ordained, namely,

[18]Ibid., 77.

[19]The "spadework" for my discussion in this section was provided in the excellent volume of S. D. Benin, *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

> because of your sins and the hardness of your hearts. . . . God enjoined you to keep the Sabbath and imposed on you other precepts for a sign, as I have already said, on account of your unrighteousness, and that of your fathers.[20]

Justin found confirmation of this viewpoint in Ezekiel's word that God gave the Jews "statutes that were not good" (Ezek 20:25 RSV). But why would God do this? According to Justin, God did so because in the days of Moses the Israelites were "wicked and ungrateful to God, and fashioned a calf in the desert. Therefore, the Lord accommodating *(harmosamenos)* Himself to that people, commanded that sacrifices be brought in his Name lest you practice idolatry."[21]

Justin found the dictates of Jewish law far from ideal, but they were nonetheless necessary accommodations in light of human frailty. As a result, he suggested that the various Jewish laws could be attributed to three underlying motives: piety and righteousness; prophetic and christological teaching; and accommodation to the hardness of the human heart.[22] Irenaeus much agreed with this perspective, adding that "even in the New Testament, the apostles are found granting certain precepts in consideration of human infirmity, because of the incontinence of some, lest such persons, having grown obdurate, and despairing altogether of their salvation, should become apostates from God."[23]

Another important problem for early Christian apologists was the anthropomorphic presentation of God in the Hebrew Bible, both because this seemed to contradict other texts in the Old and New Testaments and because these anthropomorphisms reflected, in the eyes of some pagans, a rather low view of divinity. In his third-century response to the pagan philosopher Celsus, Origen of Alexandria offered this explanation for the biblical anthropomorphisms:

> 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 dis-

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[20]Justin *Dialogue with Trypho* 18, 21. (Here and elsewhere in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the church fathers are taken from *The Writings of the Church Fathers*, 38 vols. [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994]). Compare discussion in Benin, *Footprints of God*, 1-4.
[21]Justin *Dialogue with Trypho* 19.
[22]Ibid., 44.
[23]Benin, *Footprints of God*, 6.

> posed the things which were written, adapting the suitable parts of his message to the capacity of his hearers and to their ultimate profit.[24]

Origen offered similar explanations for the Old Testament texts in which God seems to repent or change his mind, and he pleaded accommodation extensively elsewhere in his work. His pedagogical metaphor that compares accommodation in the Scriptures to "baby talk" became standard fare in later Christian theologies. For Origen, accommodation was necessary because it was unsuitable for God to address a fallen and sinful human audience in a manner that truly suited his own majesty. However, for the more spiritual and insightful reader who recognized the resulting accommodations, there was yet a truer and more accurate meaning of the text opened to them. In essence, Origen believed that the best interpreters were those who recognized and accounted for accommodation in the text.

In the fourth century, the use of accommodation in the work of Athanasius (c. 296-373) is comparable to that found in second- and third-century theologies. He viewed the sacrificial system of Judaism as primitive and considered its rituals a later addition to the Mosaic law, necessary accommodations in the face of the idolatry and ignorance of the people.[25] Athanasius's work against Arianism is perhaps better known, and here accommodation was used extensively in his christological explications of the incarnation. Christ did not struggle to earn a reward as the Arians suggested; such depictions in the New Testament were accommodations to Christ's humanity and the human audience. In fact, for many ancient theologians the incarnation was not only the highest and best form of revelation but also the quintessential example of divine accommodation.

The Cappadocian fathers also embraced accommodation theology, as shown in examples from the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395), Basil the Great (c. 330-379) and Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330-390). For instance, Gregory of Nyssa took up Origen's "baby talk" metaphor to explain to the heretic, Eunomius, why human qualities are ascribed to God in the Scriptures:

> For as by divine dispensation . . . like a tender mother who joins in the inarticulate utterances of her babe, [God] gives to our human nature what it is

[24]Origen *Against Celsus* 4.71 (cf. 5.17).
[25]Athanasius *Letters* 19.4; cf. Benin, *Footprints of God*, 27-28.

> capable of receiving; and thus in the various manifestations of God to man He both adapts Himself to man and speaks in human language, and assumes wrath, and pity, and such-like emotions, so that through feelings corresponding to our own infantile life might be led as by the hand, and lay hold of the Divine nature by means of words which his foresight has given. For it is irreverent to imagine that God is subject to any passion such as we see in respect to pleasure, pity, or anger. This no one will deny who has thought at all about the truth of things.[26]

Basil similarly argued that much in the Old Testament was given—in accordance with divine dispensation—in accommodative language. Hence, in the Old Testament the nature of divinity was frequently represented "by rough and shadowy outlines." This theological imprecision prompted numerous attacks against Basil,[27] but in his view accommodation was a necessary feature of progressive revelation, in which God revealed himself to human beings by "gradually accustoming us to see first the shadows of objects, and to look at the sun in water, to save us from dashing against the spectacle of pure unadulterated light, and being blinded." The third man in the trio, Gregory of Nazianzus, addressed yet again the familiar theme among accommodationists, that the Old Testament cult reflects God's appropriation of primitive religious behavior:

> And therefore like a Tutor or Physician [God] partly removes and partly condones ancestral habits, conceding some little of what tended to pleasure, just as medical men do with their patients, that their medicine may be taken, being artfully blended with what is nice. . . . For instance, the first [dispensation] cut off the idol, but left the sacrifices; the second, while it destroyed sacrifices did not forbid circumcision. Then, when once men had submitted to the curtailment, they also yielded that which had been conceded to them; in the first instance the sacrifices, in the second circumcision; and became instead of Gentiles, Jews, and instead of Jews, Christians, being beguiled into the Gospel by gradual changes.[28]

For Gregory of Nazianzus, the Hebrew sacrifices were only one step removed from the evils of idolatry and, hence, represented a base and fleshly element of human religion that would eventually be rejected. Nonetheless,

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[26]Basil *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book,* in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* series 2, ed. Philip Schaff (reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 5:292.
[27]Benin, *Footprints of God,* 33-34.
[28]Gregory Nazianzus *Orations* 5.24 (Oration 35).

sacrificial practices—and others like them—were condoned in revelation because of human fallenness. These examples cohere nicely with S. D. Benin's more thorough analysis of the church fathers, which revealed that the idea of accommodation took root and flourished among the fourth-century Cappadocian fathers.

We can add to this list of fourth-century accommodationists the Antiochene voice of Chrysostom. With respect to accommodation, he is perhaps best known for his view that marriage was a divine concession *(synkatabasis)* to the more ideal state of virginity, but his treatise *The Incomprehensibility of God* was also rich in accommodative theology.[29] Here, like others before him, Chrysostom tackled the problem of anthropomorphism in the Old Testament. Although Isaiah 6 surely depicts God as a physical presence seated on a throne, says Chrysostom, God neither has a body nor sits on thrones. Such a revelation of God is a product of accommodation, a term that Chrysostom then proceeded to explain more precisely: "What is condescension? It is when God appears and makes himself known *not as he is,* but in the way one incapable of beholding him is able to look upon him. In this way God reveals himself proportionally to the weakness of those who behold him."[30]

Here Chrysostom vividly presented the true nature of accommodation: accommodated revelation provides greater access to the divine truth by depicting some things as other than they are. But how, in this case, did Chrysostom know that anthropomorphic presentations of God depict God as other than he is? Clearly, Chrysostom knew this because the Bible said elsewhere that God is Spirit and has no physical body: that is, accommodation became visible to Chrysostom when theological diversity appeared in Scripture. One can plainly see that in such cases accommodation becomes an indispensable aspect of interpretation, for it is the rationale that allows us to choose one text over another without charging the implied errors to God. If the diversity of Scripture is a reality, as this and other examples suggest, then we cannot help but agree with Gregory of Nyssa, who warned that our failure to account for accommodation in the text can easily lead to theological error.[31]

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[29]Benin, *Footprints of God*, 60-64.
[30]John Chrysostom *On the Incomprehensibility of God* 3.15, as translated by Benin, *Footprints of God,* 186.
[31]Compare Benin, *Footprints of God,* 51.

From the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the North African voice of Augustine remains the strongest influence in modern theology and, therefore, a suitable exemplar for our inquiry. Like those who preceded him, Augustine was concerned with the apparent diversity in Scripture, especially the differences between the Old and New Testaments. Using his Platonic hermeneutic of types and antitypes, he was able to imagine a system within which the old and new dispensations were essentially alike in all respects, as he indicated in his *Retractions*: "For what is now called the Christian religion existed of old and was never absent from the beginning of the human race until Christ came in the flesh."[32] Because of this, unlike many earlier fathers, Augustine suffered no theological embarrassment from the Jewish sacrificial system:

> There are some who suppose that these visible sacrifices are suitable for other gods, but that for the one God, as he is the invisible, greatest, and best, only the invisible—the greatest and best sacrifices—are proper; and such sacrifices are the services of a pure mind and a good will. But such people evidently do not realize that the visible sacrifices are symbols of the invisible offerings, just as spoken words are the symbols of things.[33]

However, even within this system of rigorous theological continuity, Augustine recognized that the diversity between the two testaments required an explanation. He attributed this theological diversity to the mystery of God, and he also stressed that God was free to change his commands to human beings as he wished.[34] But, like his theological predecessors, Augustine acknowledged the role of accommodation in revelation, particularly in comparisons of the Old and New Testaments:

> If the trouble is that the moral precepts under the old law are lower and in the Gospel higher, and that therefore both cannot come from the same God, whoever thinks in this way may find difficulty in explaining how a single physician prescribes one medicine to weaker patients through his assistants, and another by himself to stronger patients, all to restore health.[35]

Augustine's use of a medical metaphor to explain accommodation consti-

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[32]Benin, *Footprints of God,* 96; quoting Augustine *Retractions*.
[33]Augustine *City of God* 10:19.
[34]Benin, *Footprints of God,* 101-4.
[35]Augustine *De vera religione* 17. Quotations from this work are taken from *Augustine: Earlier Writings,* ed. J. H. S. Burleigh, Library of Christian Classics 6 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 241.

tuted one of the two common paradigms used in the early church to articulate its theology of God's condescension to human beings—the other being the pedagogical metaphor. These two metaphors are comparable and teach the same point: God conforms his revelation to human weaknesses, to our fallenness and finiteness. This theology allowed Augustine to explain how the diversity between the moral prescriptions of the two testaments could stem from the one and consistent God. However, it is clear that Augustine's theological effort to protect God from the charge of inconsistency was accomplished at the expense of consistency in the Scripture.

The examples cited above demonstrate that accommodation is not a modern theological innovation as much as a long-standing principle of theology and revelation. It is likely that many evangelicals could follow the fathers and Calvin in applying this idea in certain instances, especially in matters of science and in the related matters of human finiteness. There will be more reluctance, I suspect, to extend accommodation from science to theology and from human finiteness to human fallenness. To do so might imply that Scripture rhetorically presumes the mistaken theological ideas of its human authors (or audience) and then communicates these ideas in the text. Nonetheless, I would argue that theological accommodations of this sort seem as necessary in Scripture as those of the scientific type.

Among the interpreters who have advocated accommodation to both human finiteness and fallenness in the Scriptures is a very important voice that we have not yet mentioned. The text of Matthew 19:1-9 (RSV) reads as follows:

> Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.
>
> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery."

The Pharisees raised their question about divorce, no doubt, because they sensed a subtle diversity within the sacred text. Jesus addressed this diversity, like many interpreters after him would, by attributing it to accommodation. In this case, God had accommodated his revealed law to the cultural and ideological perspectives of the ancient Near East, which permitted divorce and which reflected the fallenness and hardness of the human heart. But Jesus pointed to another theology affirmed in the Scriptures, that husband and wife should permanently become one flesh. In this instance, faced with two differing theologies, Jesus rejected the legal prescription that allowed divorce in favor of the creation ordinance that forbade it. In the language of our modern discussion, I would argue that Jesus not only allowed for, but explicitly testified to, the presence of theological and ethical accommodations in Scripture and the associated accommodations to human fallenness. In light of this, it should be no surprise that the church fathers appear to have agreed with Jesus on this point, for it appears that their accommodation theology was in some measure derived from this Gospel text.[36]

Reflections on Accommodation in Contemporary and Evangelical Theology

Many of the issues reflected in this discussion of accommodation have been addressed more vigorously in the recent philosophical work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, entitled *Divine Discourse*. Wolterstorff argues that God speaks in the Scriptures by appropriating the human inscriptions of the biblical authors as his own. God in essence says of Paul and the other writers of Scripture, "He speaks for me." This approach has the advantage of allowing for special revelation—that is, God truly speaks—while at the same time it can attribute the diversity of Scripture to the diverse perspectives of the human authors. In such cases, says Wolterstorff, interpretation requires a first and second hermeneutic. In the first instance, our focus is on the text and what it says. In the second instance, our focus is on what God intends to say through the text. How do we distinguish the two? According to Wolterstorff,

> We do our interpreting for divine discourse with convictions in two hands;

[36]For brief but fascinating discussions of this text, see Tertullian *On Monogamy* 14 and John Chrysostom *Homily on Matthew* 17.4.

> in one hand, our convictions as to the stance and content of the appropriated discourse and the meanings of the sentences used; in the other, our convictions concerning the probabilities and improbabilities of what God would have been intending to say by appropriating this particular discourse-by-inscription.[37]

While the complexity and depth of Wolterstorff's arguments are perhaps new in comparison to earlier discussions, in the essentials Wolterstorff reflects much of what we see in the church fathers. There is a substantive distinction between what God *ultimately* says through all combinations of special and natural revelation and what he has said in discrete instances to particular audiences. When God's word in these particular instances is at variance with what seems to be the case within the larger revelatory context, then this difference may reflect God's appropriation in the Scriptures of the fallen and finite perspectives of the human author and audience.

As readers may surmise from the previous discussion, I am suggesting that accommodation is necessary on two related levels. First, accommodation is necessary because the utter transcendence of God can only be expressed to the finitude of humanity through condescension to our perspective. And second, accommodation is a necessary product of revelation when this revelation comes to us through the finiteness and fallenness of a human author. This second assertion is lent additional support by recent developments in hermeneutics and postmodern philosophy, which show that the finite and partially fictive horizons of human understanding always color our viewpoints. Although the biblical authors were privy to special revelation in a way that we are not, and although the texts that they wrote are God's inspired Word, the authors were nonetheless subject, like all of us, to their own finite and fallen interpretive horizons. That this is the case seems to be confirmed by the literary, historical, ethical and theological diversity of Scripture.

What issues does accommodative theology, as I have presented it, raise for evangelicals? Let me quickly address two key points. At first glance it may appear that accommodation introduces error into the Scripture, but I would suggest that this is certainly not the case. The doctrine of accommodation as presented here—and as often understood by interpreters through

[37]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 204.

church history—does not *introduce* human error into the Scriptures. Rather, accommodation is the *explanation* for the errors one observes in the text. Accommodation tells us that any errant views in Scripture stem not from the character of God, but from his adoption in revelation of the finite and fallen perspectives of the human author and audience. This explanation is an effort to answer the charge that God speaks errantly in the Scriptures, and the voices of accommodationists from the first century to the present are on this point unanimous: God does not err in the Bible when he accommodates the errant views of Scripture's authors and audiences.

A second concern that might be raised is interpretive. In the hands of an accommodationist, what prevents Scripture from becoming a "wax nose" that one can shape and mold as one wishes? Could one not eliminate the testimony of any text one chooses simply by labeling it as "accommodation"? My answer to this question is straightforward. Every serious reader of the Bible manages to pursue theological coherence by strategically picking and choosing the texts that speak with greatest authority. We set aside one text that allows us to beat slaves (Ex 21:20) in preference for another text that enjoins us to love others, even our enemies (Lk 6:27). We subordinate the texts in which God changes his mind or has a physical body to those texts that present God as immutable and impassible. In doing so, we are navigating in an implicit and sometimes unconscious way through the very real diversity of Scripture. Accommodation is simply an explicit theological rationale for what we already do. It explains why the texts that we subordinate as less accurate—such as those that permit slavery and those in which God is mutable—ended up in God's Word. These texts are, as I have suggested, accommodations to our human context and viewpoint. For the serious student of God's Word, this does not make the Scriptures a wax nose. We are guided by the conviction that our theology must present the most coherent view of things that is possible, and in the pursuit of coherence our misinterpretations become visible precisely because of their incoherence.[38] Put simply, when we adopt poor readings of Scripture, we start bumping into reality. Moreover (and here I would stress something seldom appreciated by evangelicals) authentic Christian interpretations of

[38]I am not advocating *coherentism* as an epistemic model, given that my own preference is for a kind of *soft foundationalism*. Nevertheless, coherence is a requirement of all epistemologies. For a lucid discussion of these issues, see W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

Scripture are shaped and circumscribed by the great ecclesiastical councils and their statements, especially the Nicene Creed. Certainly these classic statements of doctrine will not prevent readings of Scripture that cross the creedal frontier, but they do mark those readings as non-Christian.

To summarize, the theological diversity in the Scripture constitutes an important problem for its interpreters. Among the tools that can help us negotiate these issues is accommodation, which has enjoyed a long and venerable history in the theology and hermeneutics of the church. Its loss to evangelical interpreters is perhaps, as Roland Frye has suggested, "one of the gravest calamities in the intellectual history of Christianity."[39] Accommodation is theologically and philosophically necessary, it carries a long-standing historical pedigree, and it can help us provide better answers for many of the problems we face in the sacred text. To be sure, the explicit recognition of theological diversity in the Scriptures might at first appear as a theological dusk, a setting sun on evangelical hermeneutics. But the sun also rises—for accommodation is among the important interpretive principles that can help us negotiate this diversity while holding, at the same time, to the authentic and special revelation given to us in God's Word. Accommodation is not a threat to evangelical theology; it is, as the church fathers have told us, God's wise *oikonomia* that leads human beings back to himself.

Excursus: About Inerrancy

By way of excursus, I should like to add a few remarks regarding that doctrine so near and dear to evangelical tradition—inerrancy. And in doing so I should furthermore like to begin with the theology of Calvin. Calvin firmly believed that God could not err and that, by implication, God's utterances in Scripture could not err. How, then, could he explain that the Scriptures sometimes reflect errant human viewpoints? Calvin concluded that "the Holy Spirit would rather speak childishly than unintelligibly to the humble and unlearned," and from this he reasoned that God does not err when he accommodates his speech to humanity, thereby adopting the errant viewpoints of his human audience.[40] On this score I quite agree with

[39]Roland M. Frye, "A Literary Perspective for the Criticism of the Gospels," in *Jesus and Man's Hope,* 2 vols., ed. D. G. Miller and D. Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1970-1971), 2:204.

[40]Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms,* 5:184.

Calvin and could sign my name to the list of those who argue, in a similar way, that inerrancy is a theologically important concept implied by the nature and character of God. On the other hand, any notion of inerrancy that denies the presence of a flawed human perspective in the text is bound to be found wanting, both because of philosophical necessity (accommodation and progressive revelation imply otherwise) and because the theological diversity of Scripture is so transparent.

There is one point at which I would differ with Calvin. The Reformer imagined Moses and God to be colluding partners in accommodation, that in such matters the mind of Scripture's human author was coterminous with the mind of God. However, the epistemic limits that necessitate accommodation in the case of the human audience would apply as well to the human author of Scripture. It is quite sensible to suggest that God's accommodation to a broader human audience is effected through the agency of his human author, whose perspective, personality, vocabulary and literary competence are adopted by God in revelation. This fits well with the common evangelical notion that Scripture reflects the personalities of its human authors. In terms of modern hermeneutical theory, this approach corresponds generally with the theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer, for whom a genuine exchange of meaning is possible (in this case, between God and the human author of Scripture) but never perfect (because of the human author's finite and fallen interpretive horizons).

It is perhaps useful to address the strategies by which some evangelicals have attempted to "protect" Scripture from the finiteness of the human author. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (1982), which sought to provide a hermeneutic in keeping with its notion of inerrancy, seems to attempt such an explanation in its second article. The denial offered in article 2 reads as follows: "We deny that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in His humiliation, entails sin."[41]

If by this one means that God commits no error in Scripture, then I have no quarrel. However, as near as I can tell, the point made here is a different one. This statement denies the influence of the finite and fallen human authors on the content of Scripture, and it does so by comparing the joining of humanity and divinity in the Scriptures to the supposedly similar hypo-

[41]This quotation is taken from E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), 881-87.

static union of deity and humanity in Jesus Christ. Is this not an obvious non sequitur? The Son incarnate is one person, both sinless humanity and infinite divinity. But the Scriptures speak divine revelation through the perspectives of finite and sinful human authors. If there is going to be an argument that frees the personalities, ideas and temperaments of Scripture's human authors from sin and finiteness, it will need to take a different path. Some will aver, nonetheless, that God *could* easily have freed his written Word from its finite and fallen human elements. I suppose that this is so, given that an omnipotent God can doing anything he wills. However, the question is not "could God" but rather "did God." God *could* make our behaviors perfect when we become Christians, but he evidently does not. Similarly, the theological and ideological diversity of Scripture suggests that God did not rid his text of fallible human elements. This coheres nicely with the philosophical and theological expectations raised by our present, postmodern interpretive milieu.

What I am suggesting regarding inerrancy—that its focus is God, not the human author—is hardly new. Although he was a contributor to *The Fundamentals*, our evangelical forefather James Orr warned long ago that it is quite dangerous to transfer our faith in the God who does not err to a human author who does:

> One may plead, indeed, for "a supernatural providential guidance" which has for its aim to exclude all, even the least, error or discrepancy in statement. . . . But this is a violent assumption which there is nothing in the Bible really to support. It is perilous, therefore, to seek to pin down faith to it as a matter of vital importance.[42]

How "violent" and "perilous" is this theological path? The litany of souls who have surrendered their faith in graduate study tells the tale. While these apostasies might be chalked up to the deceptive influences of naturalistic, enlightenment rationalism, evangelical tradition is at least as culpable; too often it has equipped its students with a view of Scripture that could never endure rigorous academic scrutiny.

If we admit that errant human perspectives sometimes appear in the pages of Scripture, does this not imply that our biblical interpretations lack something solid on which to find theological traction? I think not. In the first place, it is clear enough that a doctrine of Scripture like that enshrined

[42]James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Scribner's, 1910), 213-14.

in the Chicago Statement offers no stable interpretive parameters: it neither guarantees a correct interpretation of Scripture nor precludes interpretive buffoonery. In the second place, admitting the humanity of Scripture's authors does not negate the objective and authoritative voice of Scripture; rather, it means that the authoritative voice of Scripture is best understood when we account for the frailty of its human authors. In other words, our readings of Scripture find their theological traction in a God who never errs rather than in human authors who do. To make God out as errant is heresy; to make the human authors of Scripture inerrant is docetism.

Excursus: Interpretive Control and Accommodation

I have argued in this paper that accommodation does not make Scripture a wax nose because, as I stated above, we are guided by the conviction that our theology must present the most coherent view of things that is possible, and in the pursuit of coherence our misinterpretations become visible precisely because of their incoherence. Responses to this comment suggest that there is some initial confusion about what I mean here, so we shall briefly pursue this line of inquiry further.

What is a correct interpretation? A perfectly correct interpretation of anything is the one that matches the "god's eye" view, the divine vantage point from which all things appear as a coherent whole. As we have said, human finiteness and fallenness prevent us from seeing the world from this pristine perspective, and hence, all of our interpretations are in some respects mistaken. However, it is important to aver that this does not prevent us from succeeding as interpreters. Our perceptions of reality are clearly partial and warped, but they also overlap with reality in such a way that our interpretations can be reasonably accurate. The real question is this: how can we explicitly and intentionally pursue better interpretations of texts and, more generally, of things human and divine?

The "meaning" of something is visible only in its relationship to other things (i.e., to a context). For instance, suppose that I am asked, "Would you like a cup of coffee?" and I respond, "That would keep me awake." Have I said yes or no? The answer depends a great deal on whether I am on a late-night drive in the car or in my pajamas before bedtime. On a grander scale, our effort to properly understand anything will entail an attempt to situate it in the *context of the whole*. This takes us back to the idea

of a "god's eye" view, the omniscient viewpoint that sees the totality of things in their interrelatedness. Good interpretation seeks to understand each individual thing—each text—in terms of its relationship to the context of the whole, for in doing so we move toward the ultimate goal of any thoughtful believer: to see reality as God sees it. It follows that the best interpretation is one that accounts for all of the data in the most coherent way. This implies, of course, that incoherence is a chief indicator of when our interpretations are wrong. To be sure, our epistemologies can and do ignore incoherence, either because we have overlooked it or because we fear its implications, but in neither case should God or Scripture be faulted. The problem is ours alone.

7

Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy

Just What Exactly Do We Mean by the "Original Autographs"?

J. DANIEL HAYS

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate evangelical discussion and dialogue concerning a question that lies at the intersection of Old Testament textual criticism, canonicity and the doctrines of inerrancy and inspiration. My observation is that there is little cross-pollination or exchange of ideas between those who struggle with the details of the textual problems of a book like Jeremiah (i.e., the text critics) and those who spend time hammering out the details of inerrancy or inspiration (primarily systematic theologians). Thus on the one hand, those evangelical scholars who write on textual criticism (Bruce Waltke, Ellis Brotzman, etc.) rarely draw out the implications that their conclusions have for inerrancy and inspiration. And on the other hand, the systematic theologians who write on inerrancy and inspiration seem almost oblivious to the particularities of the Old Testament textual problem.

Composition and Literary Development

Certainly, in the discussion of inerrancy and inspiration, evangelical theologians *do* reflect an awareness of the broad textual transmission problem. However, most writers are much more familiar with New Testament textual criticism than they are with textual criticism of the Old. Most make the incorrect assumption that the issues are the same in each half of the Scriptures. Therefore, the traditional evangelical answer to textual variants is to limit the act of inspiration (and thus inerrancy) to the creation of the "original autographs." Inspiration and inerrancy, therefore, are lim-

ited to the original composition of the text and not to the scribal activity that transmitted the text. This concept seems to work fine in the New Testament, where we can envision Paul writing a letter to one of the new Christian churches. We view the document that he writes as inspired and thus inerrant. Likewise, textual mistakes made later in copying and transmitting this letter are not inspired and can contain errors. The job of the text critic, then, is to recover the original text or to get as close to the original text as possible.[1]

The Old Testament textual situation, however, is quite different from that of the New. First of all, in the New Testament the textual witnesses exhibit a wider range of textual variants in the later manuscripts than in the earlier manuscripts. This fits well with our concept of original autographs followed by mistakes made in copying. The closer we get to the original, the fewer variants we find. In the Old Testament, however, we find the reverse. At the latter end of the manuscript transmission process, the text is quite standardized, with very few textual variants. Closer to the beginning of the process, however, as the texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate, we find a wide range of textual variants, grouped around at least three (and perhaps five) distinctive textual traditions.[2]

Related to this difference in the nature of the textual witnesses is the stark contrast in the production of critical editions of the New Testament versus critical editions of the Old Testament. Since Wescott-Hort, the predominant critical editions of the Greek New Testament, whether the Nestle-Aland (NA^{27}) text or the United Bible Society (UBS^{4}) text, have been eclectic texts. That is, the editors have selected the textual reading for each variant situation that they felt was more likely to be the original. So the critical text itself is their best determination at what the original autograph looked like. The Old Testament critical editions, however, are quite different. Both the *Biblia Hebraica (BHK)* and the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS),* as well as some of the newer projects, simply use one of the medieval manuscripts—usually the Leningrad Codex—as the text, relegating

[1]I might add, however, that studies relating to Paul's use of a secretary suggest that Paul's letters were not produced in quite so simple a manner and that the New Testament situation may not be so simple after all, either. See, e.g., E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul,* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 42 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1991).

[2]Bruce K. Waltke, "Old Testament Textual Criticism," in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation,* ed. David Dockery et al. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 157, 162-63.

all textual variants to the apparatus at the bottom. The Hebrew Old Testament critical editions are not eclectic and do not reflect the "older is better" move toward the original autographs that the Greek critical texts do.

The greatest difference, however, relates to our understanding of how the text was produced. Although most evangelical Old Testament scholars reject standard thorough-going Wellhausian source criticism and are likewise skeptical of the many elaborate theories of literary development in the Prophets, many, nonetheless, do acknowledge a degree of literary development in many Old Testament books. Waltke, for example, writes that a scribe prior to around A.D. 100 functioned

> not merely as a transmitter of the text but as a publishing editor, striving to keep the Scriptures clear and relevant to successive generations. Too long critics have seen scribes as culprits responsible for separating later audiences from the original when in fact they should be seen as helpful publishers, making the text accessible, intelligible, and sometimes even freshly relevant to their immediate audiences. This understanding of early scribal practices ameliorates the unfortunate tendency to call all "secondary" readings "spurious." To the extent that these "improvements" communicate truth they are "genuine" readings. In fact, modernized readings may be even more "genuine" than an early one that no longer communicates the original meaning.[3]

Earle Ellis, in his book *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, notes that there must have been widespread recopying of the Hebrew Bible after the destruction of so many texts by Antiochus Epiphanes in 169 B.C. Ellis notes that this scribal activity involved not only the updating of orthography and terminology, but also the contemporizing of the text. Ellis, unlike many others, does not dodge the inspiration issue; instead he states clearly that he views this scribal updating and contemporization as part of the inspiration process.[4] The comments of Waltke and Ellis obviously challenge to some degree our traditional concept of original autographs, and I will address their views, especially Waltke's, later in this article. However, I cite them here as examples of evangelical scholars who have observed evidence of some literary development in the Old Testament text between the time that portions of it first appeared in writing and the time of the fi-

[3]Bruce K. Waltke, "Aims of OT Textual Criticism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989): 100.

[4]E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992), 43-44.

nal canonical form (whatever that is, and we will discuss this later as well).

Indeed, several of the Old Testament prophetic books appear to be collections or anthologies put together by editors other than the prophets themselves.[5] In general, the prevailing evangelical view relating to inspiration and inerrancy for these books would be that the final form of the text is what would be considered as inspired. For example, assume that one of the prophets wrote down many of the oracles that he delivered. A disciple of his then collected these written oracles, added some historical events from the prophet's life and then shaped this material into the form that we have today. Most of us would maintain that God also spoke through this disciple and that the final literary work he produced—not any possible literary documents that he may have used in his revision—is the "original autograph." We are therefore comfortable with viewing his work as inspired, inerrant Scripture. We are, however, not as comfortable with assigning inspiration to scribal activity that occurred several hundred years later. Nonetheless, such activity is an issue that we need to face.[6]

THE JEREMIAH PROBLEM

The book of Jeremiah lies at the heart of this problem. Indeed, perhaps more than any other Old Testament book, Jeremiah presents us with text critical data that does not fit cleanly into our traditional notion of original autographs. The problem is as follows.

The Greek Septuagint translation (LXX) of Jeremiah differs significantly from the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT). The LXX is approximately 2,700 words

[5]Even C. Hassell Bullock, writing from a very conservative viewpoint, states, "In other cases, however, the task of editing must have fallen to their [the prophets'] close associates or disciples." C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 34.

[6]Daniel I. Block raises this issue in an excellent, thought-provoking article on literary development in Deuteronomy. He writes, "Is the task of textual criticism to establish the text as it stood at the time the canon was closed, or as it stood when the book of Deuteronomy as a unitary literary work was composed and accepted as normative for Israel's faith, cult, and conduct? On the other hand, even if autographs are defined as 'the first or original copies of the Biblical documents,' what do we mean by 'Biblical documents'? Does the expression refer to the individual speeches of Moses transcribed on separate parchment scrolls by Moses' own hand and recognized immediately to be canonical? Or the collection of the three speeches on one scroll? Or the edited edition version of the book of Deuteronomy, complete with its narratorial stitching? Or the grammatically updated version of the book? Or the Pentateuch as we have it, with Deuteronomy as the last book?" Daniel I. Block, "Recovering the Voice of Moses: The Genesis of Deuteronomy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 406.

shorter, or about one-eighth shorter, than the MT. The LXX omits numerous words, phrases, sentences and even longer passages that the MT contains. For example, some of the longer passages that the LXX omits are Jeremiah 33:14-26; 39:4-13; 51:44-49; 52:27-30. In addition, the LXX differs significantly in the order of several chapters. Thus in the LXX the chapters that we traditionally label as Jeremiah 46—51, the oracles against the nations, appear right after Jeremiah 25:13. Furthermore, the specific order of the oracles in these six chapters is different in the LXX than in the MT.[7] The sheer size of the differences, coupled with the rearrangement of the material, suggests that the different reading of the LXX is not due merely to poor translation. As Emmanuel Tov points out, the LXX Jeremiah is rather literal in its translation and is not a "free" translation, so it is unlikely that a translator introduced these changes.[8] Furthermore, these variations are simply not the kind of differences that a translator would produce.[9] The evidence suggests that the LXX translators were not making numerous errors of translation or deleting material from the text, but rather working off of a different Hebrew edition of Jeremiah than the one reflected in the MT.

Confirming this hypothesis are the two Dead Sea Scrolls fragments 4QJer^{b} (4Q71) and 4QJer^{d} (4Q72a) from cave 4. These two fragments are from passages of Jeremiah in which the LXX differs from the MT. The two fragments, written in Hebrew, both reflect the reading that is found in the LXX and not in the MT. For most scholars, this is overwhelming evidence that the differences in the LXX are due not to translation problems, but to the fact that the translators of the LXX were working off of a Hebrew manuscript that was significantly different than the manuscript that led to the MT.

However, there are other fragments of Jeremiah among the Dead Sea Scrolls that do reflect the readings of the MT. This evidence strongly sug-

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[7]J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 117-18. For a good discussion of the differences see Emanuel Tov, "The Book of Jeremiah: A Work in Process," *Bible Review* 16 (June 2000): 35-38, 45. F. B. Huey notes that the 2,700-word-shortage count comes from F. Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremiah* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907), xxv. The shortage is 3,097 words as reckoned by Y.-J. Min, *The Minuses and Pluses of the LXX Translation of Jeremiah as Compared with the Masoretic Text: Their Classification and Possible Origin* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1977), 255. See F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah-Lamentations*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 30.

[8]Contra Charles L. Feinberg, who writes, "The LXX is quite free and does not always grasp the meaning of the Hebrew text." Charles L. Feinberg, "Jeremiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986), 6:372.

[9]Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 318, 321.

gests that at the time of the Qumran community (and thus into the early New Testament era), there were two quite different Hebrew editions of Jeremiah that circulated within Judaism. This is currently the consensus view of Old Testament scholarship, evangelical and non-evangelical alike.[10]

Due to some common misuse of terminology that appears occasionally in articles about inspiration and inerrancy, permit me to re-clarify the general situation of the MT and the LXX. The Hebrew MT text that we have today is based on tenth-century A.D. documents. It is not the original Hebrew text. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which are a thousand years older, have verified that the MT reflects a fairly accurate transmission of one of the text types that was in circulation in Palestine from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 100. The LXX, on the other hand, is a translation from Hebrew into Greek made around 200 B.C. It is not a translation of the MT, but a translation of a different Hebrew text family, which likewise circulated in Palestine from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 100. Many scholars have concluded that both the MT and the LXX reflect ancient Hebrew texts that in turn had developed from one original Hebrew text or *Vorlage*. The job of textual criticism under this scenario is to use the MT and the LXX, along with other witnesses such as the Samaritan Pentateuch, to try to get as close as possible to this *Vorlage,* i.e., the original autographs.

A Proposed Solution: Seek the Original *Edition* Instead of the Original Autograph

The situation in Jeremiah, however, seems to be different. The serious shift in the arrangement of material and the difference in length argue against the concept of separate developing text families arising from copying and transmission in separate locales. Tov, a leading Old Testament text critic—and without doubt the most prolific writer on the textual problems in Jeremiah—presents an alternative view. He writes, "Large-scale differences displaying a certain coherence were created at the level of the literary growth of the books by persons who considered themselves actively involved in the literary process of composition."[11] Therefore the differences between the LXX and MT of Jeremiah cannot be explained by mere scribal transmission. "Rather," Tov writes, "they must be attributed to different

[10]Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva, however, are just a bit tentative on these conclusions. See Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 176.

[11]Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 314.

authors or editors who worked on the text at a very early stage."[12] Thus Tov advances the theory that the LXX and the MT versions of Jeremiah reflect two different stages in the literary development of the book.

In textual criticism there is an adage: The shorter text is the better one. This statement reflects the assumption that editors would be much more likely to add material to a text than they would be to delete material. Tov therefore concludes, "All of these details (and others) indicate that the shorter text is earlier, and therefore 'more original.' "[13] He calls the Hebrew behind the LXX "Edition I" and the Hebrew behind the MT "Edition II." The textual diversity is not parallel in development (the traditional view) but rather linear. The Hebrew text behind the MT was developed from the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX.

Yet if the LXX is merely an earlier stage in the literary development of Jeremiah, why were copies still being circulated? Tov postulates that when the early edition was first written it was then circulated. The later revisions were made with the intention of replacing the early edition, but geographical and sociological influences could keep the first edition alive.[14] Thus even after the MT edition was made, the LXX edition continued to circulate and be used. So, according to Tov, the MT reflects a later, major editorial literary revision of the Hebrew text behind the LXX.

Tov, however, suggests that because of its continued use, the earlier edition did not lose its status as Scripture or become obsolete.[15] On the other hand, Tov draws a sharp distinction between literary criticism and textual criticism. Textual criticism, Tov states, arises from variants produced by copyists. Literary criticism refers to differences that arose during the literary growth of the book. The text critic, he concludes, should not try to push back into the realm of literary development. The text that the critic should try to recover is that of the final stage of literary development. Thus, according to Tov, in the book of Jeremiah we should not try to use the LXX to move back to the earlier literary stage behind the MT.[16]

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[12]Tov, "Book of Jeremiah," 37. Disagreeing with the conclusion that the shorter Septuagint implies a superior *Vorlage* Hebrew text is Sven Soderlund, *The Greek Text of Jeremiah: A Revised Hypothesis*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 47:246-48.

[13]Tov, "Book of Jeremiah," 34.

[14]Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 316.

[15]Tov, "Book of Jeremiah," 45.

[16]Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 314.

In essence this is a form of canonical criticism, whereby the final form of the text as it was accepted by the community becomes the authoritative text and thus becomes the "original autograph" that the text critic seeks to recover—and no further.

Bruce Waltke, perhaps the leading evangelical Old Testament scholar who addresses this issue, has embraced Tov's theory and carried Tov's argument into evangelical discussions. In a 1994 article Waltke writes:

> Tov's theory best explains the data. The final edited text is the end of the literary process and, at the same time, the starting point of the transmission of the text. Tov has put a new twist on the meaning of the "original" text. It now means "original edition." Tov wisely stops the process with the proto-MT for socioreligious and historical reasons. That text, he argues, became the authoritative text within Judaism. In short, text critics should aim to recover the original edition behind the MT.
>
> Ecclesiastics as well as rabbis accepted the edition behind the MT as authoritative. Both Origin and Jerome conformed the LXX and the Vulgate respectively to proto-MT, so that the MT essentially became the standard text of the Old Testament within the church. Our English versions are based on the MT. That history should not be underestimated in deciding the question, what is the original text? The MT inherently commended itself to both the synagogue and the church. As the canon of the Old Testament emerged in the historical process, so also the MT surfaced as the best text of that canon.[17]

Waltke has substituted the term *original edition* for the term *original autographs,* and he has used the historical, canonical acceptance of the MT as a major proof of his thesis that textual criticism should not try to go back any further than the MT *Vorlage* of the first century A.D. And of course he is using the term *original edition* not to refer to the earliest edition, but to refer to the canonically accepted edition.

I confess that I am uncomfortable with the implications for the concept of inspiration that Waltke's position raises, especially due to his heavy reliance on the so-called canonization of the MT. Is Waltke's argument not similar to that raised by the proponents of the *Textus Receptus* in New Testament textual criticism? Is the authoritative text that we seek to recover merely that textual tradition embraced by the church/synagogue at some particular point in time, regardless of earlier manuscript evidence?

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[17]Waltke, "Old Testament," 175-76.

When and Why Did the Western Church Shift from the LXX to the MT?

At this point it would be helpful for us to revisit the canonization process relating to the LXX and the MT. The LXX was translated by Jewish scholars, apparently in Egypt around the year 200 B.C. In the pre-Christian era the LXX enjoyed a wide popularity in Jewish circles and was highly revered, especially among Jews of the Diaspora. Brook W. R. Pearson notes that there was even a tradition among the Jews at that time that the LXX translation was inspired. (Pearson references the Letter of Aristeas, Aristobulus, Ben Sira, Philo and Josephus.) The idea of divine inspiration seemed to grow with the tradition as time passed.[18]

When the New Testament writers began writing Scripture they often used the LXX. Ellis notes that the New Testament writers frequently followed the LXX because it was in wide use and because it fit their viewpoint. Occasionally, however, they also followed the MT, sometimes over against the LXX (Mt 2:15).[19] Paul, in particular, favored the LXX in his quotations. Ellis writes, "Fifty-one of Paul's citations are in absolute or virtual agreement with the LXX, twenty-two of these at variance with the Hebrew."[20]

However, it should be noted that the New Testament only quotes Jeremiah directly five times.[21] Paul quotes from Jeremiah 9:24 in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and in 2 Corinthians 10:17, following the LXX as usual in both cases.[22] Matthew quotes from Jeremiah 31:15 in the controversial passage found in Matthew 2:18. As is Matthew's custom, he quotes from the MT *Vorlage*.[23] The book of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31 twice, once in Hebrews 8:8-12 and once in Hebrews 10:16-17. In both of these texts there is no appreciable difference between the LXX and the MT. So numerically, New Testament ci-

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[18]Brook W. R. Pearson, "Remainderless Translations? Implications of the Tradition Concerning the Translation of the LXX for Modern Translational Theory," in *Translating the Bible: Problems and Prospects,* ed. Stanley E. Porter and Richard S. Hess, Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 173:61-74.

[19]Ellis, *Old Testament*, 78.

[20]E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1957), 12.

[21]Kurt Aland et al., eds., "Index of Quotations," in *The Greek New Testament,* 4th ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1993), 888.

[22]Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911), 28; Ralph Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1986), 325.

[23]W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 1:267.

tations of Jeremiah are tied—one from the LXX, one from the MT, and two that agree with both.

Pearson notes that as Christianity spread throughout the Mediterranean world, the LXX became the Old Testament of the church. Christian writers and apologists began finding christological proof-texts in the Greek of the LXX that are not clear in the Hebrew. The rabbinic literature thus began to reflect negative views of the LXX. Furthermore, during this time Judaism withdrew somewhat to itself, returning to Hebrew, and was not as concerned with engaging the larger culture.[24]

Within the Hebrew textual tradition, there were apparently at least three, and perhaps five, text families of the Old Testament in circulation at the beginning of the first century A.D. The traditional view identifies these three text types as a Babylonian recension, a Palestinian recension and an Egyptian recension. The Egyptian recension is the one generally associated with the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX. All three text types were among the Dead Sea Scrolls, implying that in the middle of the first century A.D. the Jews were still using a non-standardized text with considerable variety. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Diaspora connected with that event, Judaism then standardized their text of the Old Testament, accepting the Babylonian recension and rejecting the others. This recension becomes the basis for the MT.

Tov himself notes the somewhat arbitrary nature of this decision: "The preference of MT by a central stream in Judaism does not necessarily imply that it contains the best text of the Bible. Both the Hebrew parent text of the Septuagint and certain of the Qumran texts reflect excellent texts, often better than that of MT."[25] Tov states that the triumph of the MT over other streams of text was based more on sociopolitical aspects than on text-critical ones: the stream of Judaism that embraced the MT was the only stream to survive the destruction of A.D. 70.[26] Keep in mind that it is primarily a Pharisaic element that makes this decision. Whether or not the council of Jamnia had anything to do with the canonization of the Old Testament books,[27] I question our wisdom in using the decision of one particular

[24]Pearson, "Remainderless Translations," 74-76.
[25]Tov, *Textual Criticism,* 24.
[26]Ibid., 194-95.
[27]Sid Leiman argues that the Council of Jamnia did not close the canon. All that can be said for sure of Jamnia is that they decided that Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs "defile the hands." See Sid Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence,* Transactions (New Haven, Conn.: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991), 47:120-24.

branch of post-resurrection Judaism—the Pharisaic branch, of all branches—as the basis for our system of canonization and textual criticism. Waltke states that the MT commended itself to the *synagogue*, and he implies that this historical event is a strong argument for MT canonization. On what authority should we accept decisions of late-first-century Pharisees? Are they led by the Spirit of God? In regard to theological traditions and textual traditions we affirm that God spoke through the nation of Israel during the pre-Christian era. After the gospel splits Christianity away from Judaism, however, Jewish theological and textual traditions lose their basis of authority for Christians. The decision of Pharisaic Judaism around the year A.D. 100 to standardize their Scripture to the MT and to reject the LXX should not have any bearing on our approach to the text.

Meanwhile, throughout the first four centuries of Christian expansion, the LXX remained the primary Old Testament text of the church. However, issues of text and issues of canon began to intermingle. Ellis notes that the addition of certain Jewish apocryphal books to the Christian canon was the "outgrowth of a popular and unreflective use of these writings."[28] However, the issue of text must be kept separate from the issue of canon. Ellis writes that the ante-Nicene church did not adopt a LXX-based canon but did apparently consider the LXX "to be inspired and its text-forms to be superior to those of the Masoretic Bible."[29] During the fourth century, especially in the east (Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt), the scholarly judgment of Christian writers was that the LXX was a superior text.[30]

For the first four hundred years of the Christian Church, the LXX was the authoritative Old Testament text. What happened?

Toward the end of the fourth century, the scholar Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damascus I to produce a revision of the old Latin translation of the Bible. Jerome lived for many years in Bethlehem, where he studied Hebrew from a rabbi who lived nearby. Jerome kept the order of the books in his new translation of the Old Testament in accordance with the LXX, but for the text itself he based his translation on the rabbi's Hebrew manuscripts, that is, the forerunner of the MT. Jerome argued that the Hebrew text was superior to the LXX and, therefore, he based his Latin Vulgate on the Hebrew. His new translation was met with opposition at first, with

[28]Ellis, *Old Testament*, 7.
[29]Ibid., 35.
[30]Ibid., 23.

such influential Christians as Augustine opposing his Hebrew-based translation. Over time Augustine apparently was influenced by Jerome's arguments: he finally concluded that *both* the Hebrew texts that Jerome used and the Greek LXX were inspired. Yet Augustine never gave up his misgivings over the church's use of this Hebrew-based text.[31] Eventually the Vulgate gained in popularity in the Western church and became the standard text of the Roman Catholic Church.[32] However, the Eastern church never accepted the Vulgate, and "in Greek speaking Christendom it [the LXX] has continued to the present day as the official Old Testament."[33]

When the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers began translating the Bible into European languages, they followed Jerome and used the MT as a basis for their Old Testaments, probably in an attempt to get closer to the original text. Our English versions today continue in this tradition, but modern translators do feel free to employ textual criticism and occasionally follow the LXX reading over against the MT. Our English Bibles are really hybrids in the Old Testament—following the LXX for canonical order but following the MT primarily, but not always, for text.

Objections to the "Original Edition" Solution

The discussion above suggests that the appeal to the canonization of the MT made by Waltke is questionable. The LXX was the text quoted most frequently by the New Testament writers, and it was the universally accepted Old Testament of the Christian church for the first four hundred years. The Pharisaic branch of Judaism rejected the LXX along with other text traditions that differed from the MT *Vorlage.* Jerome introduced the same change into the Latin Vulgate, which eventually became the standard text of the Western church. To me this is hardly a valid reason to argue that the MT is the canonical version that reflects the inspired autographs or the inspired edition. Certainly the apostles did not view the LXX as a literary step along the way to the real inspired MT. The apostles viewed the LXX as the Word

[31]Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament,* 2nd ed., trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 95-99.

[32]See Pearson, "Remainderless Translations," 77-79; Albert C. Sundberg, *The Old Testament of the Early Church,* Harvard Theological Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 20:174-75; and James A. Sanders, "Canon," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 1:846-47.

[33]Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 353.

of God, as did the early church. Furthermore if New Testament scholarship followed this line of reasoning, we would still be using the *Textus Receptus* as our canonized, inspired edition.

Therefore, I question the conclusions of Tov and Waltke regarding the text of Jeremiah. Even if they establish that the MT is a later literary development of the LXX *Vorlage* (and I am not convinced that they have), this proves neither that the MT is the inspired edition nor that the LXX should not be used text-critically to move back in time toward a better, more original text.

Options for Solving the Jeremiah Problem

What other options are there for evaluating the two different versions of Jeremiah? What are the inspired autographs?

First of all we need to recognize that the majority of Old Testament scholarship agrees with Tov and Waltke that in Jeremiah the LXX was translated from a Hebrew text that is earlier than that reflected in the MT. At some time or another, and probably very early, the shorter Hebrew text behind the LXX was revised and expanded into the longer form reflected by the MT today. This view is held by J. G. Janzen, Robert Carroll, R. E. Clements, J. A. Thompson, William Holladay and W. A. McKane.[34] If this is correct, what are the options regarding inspiration, inerrancy and the original autographs?

1. The MT is the inspired autograph. This is Waltke and Tov's option, which holds that the MT reflects the final form of the text that ought to be viewed as the inspired original autograph or edition. As mentioned above, I find the "canonization" of the MT as problematic, and I do not see this position as a viable option.

2. The Vorlage behind the LXX is the inspired autograph. The LXX reflects a Hebrew text that is older and therefore closer to the original autographs than the MT does. Thus our best approximation of the original autograph would be the Hebrew *Vorlage* behind the LXX. As McKane reminds us, this does not mean we must abandon wholesale the MT for the readings of the LXX; but it does mean that where it appears that the MT has expanded or

[34]J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah,* Harvard Semitic Monographs 6 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah,* Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986); R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah,* Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988); Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah;* William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah,* vol. 1, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); W. A. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah,* vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986).

conflated a text, the shorter text is more reflective of the original.[35] This position would not view the changes in Jeremiah that lead to the longer MT as having been made by inspired editors; rather it would put these changes in the category of scribal transmission. The implications of this view would suggest that several of the longer passages in the MT that do not appear in the LXX should be relegated to appearing only in marginal notes, similar to the longer ending of Mark or the account of the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Indeed, the handling of the lengthened Jeremiah passages from the proto-LXX to the MT would be similar to that of these New Testament expansions.

3. Both versions are inspired. This view would acknowledge that the LXX *Vorlage* is earlier and inspired but would also claim that the additions and revisions to it by later editors were also inspired. Thus there were two linear versions of the original autographs. This position is implied by Huey's comment in his volume on Jeremiah in the *New American Commentary:* "Whether in the shorter or longer version, the book of Jeremiah still speaks to us with power and conviction."[36] However, this view leaves us with a very muddled view of inspiration. The whole point behind the concept of original autographs is to move behind the diversity of textual variants to one inspired text. If the *Vorlage* to the MT developed from the *Vorlage* of the LXX through expansion and conflation, then the MT cannot be the inspired text unless we extend inspiration to the entire scribal transmission process.

4. Both versions are original. This is similar to the third option in its conclusion, but it is very different in the route taken to that conclusion. This view suggests that there was a long and a short Hebrew version of Jeremiah from the beginning. Jeremiah is obviously an anthology—an edited collection of material from Jeremiah's life. Jeremiah 36:32 states that Baruch wrote down many of the words of Jeremiah, suggesting that everything in Jeremiah up to that time (604 B.C.) was re-recorded by Baruch after being burned by Jehoiakim.[37] The text also states that other similar words were added. However, obviously the book was *not* finalized prior to the devastating invasion by the Babylonians. It is possible that the chaos brought on by the Babylonian invasion was in some way responsible for the two variant versions of the final compilation of the book. Perhaps

[35]McKane, *Jeremiah,* xviii-xxi, l-li, clxxii.
[36]Huey, *Jeremiah-Lamentations,* 31.
[37]Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah,* 629.

when the Babylonians entered the city, Baruch had numerous scrolls of Jeremiah's material at different stages of editing and compilation. It is quite possible that the material was scattered among the exiles that went to Babylon, the Jews that remained in Palestine and the faction that eventually forced Jeremiah to accompany them to Egypt. It is possible that the final composition of the book took place in two different locales, producing two differing versions. Some new material—Jeremiah's trip to Egypt, for example—might have been written in Egypt and then exchanged through the limited literary contact that may have been available between the groups. Holladay suggests that Baruch added Jeremiah 37—44 to the existing scroll of Jeremiah 26—36 after he and the prophet arrived in Egypt.[38] This gives some credence to the thesis that one version at least approached its final form in Egypt. This scenario is not as far-fetched as it may seem at first glance. It is as plausible an explanation of the differences between the LXX and the MT as Tov's literary-development hypothesis. The edition compiled in Egypt (where Jeremiah apparently finished his life) would have become the *Vorlage* of the Hebrew text that produced the LXX. The other version, compiled in either Palestine or Babylonia, would have produced the version that led to the *Vorlage* of the MT. Note that three of the four large expansions found in the MT deal particularly with Babylonian issues: the capture and punishment of Zedekiah by the Babylonians (Jer 39:4-14), judgment on Babylon (Jer 51:44-49) and, most interesting, a count of the exiles who went to Babylon (Jer 52:27-30). In this scenario neither version was deviant, corrupted or inferior. Would it not be possible for both of these compilations to fall into the category of original, inspired autographs? Keep in mind that at Qumran both versions were present in their Hebrew *Vorlage* forms. And remember that the New Testament writers drew from both the MT *Vorlage* and the LXX. Finally, perhaps the existence of four different Gospels lends credence to the possibility of multiple and different, yet still inspired, editions of one basic account.

To summarize, we have four options regarding the inspiration and the original autographs in Jeremiah:

- The MT reflects an inspired literary development from the LXX *Vorlage*. Therefore, the MT, in its canonically accepted form, is the inspired autograph.

[38]Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2:24.

- The LXX reflects a Hebrew *Vorlage* that is earlier and closer to the inspired original autographs than the MT does, and thus it should be used in textual criticism to get back beyond the MT.
- The MT reflects a literary development from the Septuagint *Vorlage,* but both versions were inspired and thus reflect original autographs.
- Two versions of Jeremiah were produced in different locales, and both of them are inspired and thus original autographs.

As discussed above, the first and third options are both weak. If the MT does indeed reflect a later literary development of the LXX *Vorlage,* then the second option is the most plausible option: the LXX reflects a Hebrew text that is older and superior. (By "superior" I mean closer to the original autographs.) This conclusion doesn't necessarily lead to a wholesale abandonment of the MT and a reckless attempt to reconstruct a Hebrew text behind the Greek of the LXX. Nor does it infer that the LXX is superior to the MT in every other book of the Bible. In their book on the LXX, Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva caution against both of these extremes. They also reject the text-critical methodology that assigns equal value to the MT and the LXX. They argue that each variant should be analyzed on its own merit, and they present a list of criteria for this analysis. As part of that analysis, Jobes and Silva stress that one of the critical issues is the textual quality of the two versions (the LXX and the MT) in *the particular book being studied*. That is, they stress a book-specific approach, whereby one of the critical factors in the textual analysis is the overall superiority or inferiority of the MT and the LXX in each particular book.[39] So the problem in Jeremiah should be analyzed on the basis of the MT and the LXX readings in Jeremiah. Jobes and Silva acknowledge the problem in Jeremiah relating to the original autographs, but they do not come to any firm conclusions about Jeremiah.[40] They conduct a careful analysis of the two Jeremiah fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls, noting that this evidence is not exactly overwhelming. They do not directly disagree with the prevailing view that the LXX *Vorlage* is earlier than that of the MT, but they express caution and classify the prevailing view as tentative. However, they do not suggest an alternative view that explains the differences between the LXX and the MT in Jeremiah.[41] Ear-

[39]Jobes and Silva, *Invitation,* 151-56.
[40]Ibid., 123.

lier in their book they reject the general notion that the community-accepted canonical form is the original autograph, and they advocate the traditional text-critical aim of moving as close as possible to the original author.[42] But they dodge the issue of Jeremiah.

However, all that Jobes and Silva have added to the evaluation of the options above is a degree of uncertainty. Of course, we should all admit that text-critical decisions are rarely made with a high degree of certainty. Yet it is important to move off the fence and to make a decision concerning Jeremiah based on the best data available.

Conclusions

The most plausible option is to view the LXX as reflecting an earlier Hebrew *Vorlage* than does the MT. Thus in a text-critical attempt to get as close to the original autographs as possible, it is important to emphasize this fact. While each variant should be analyzed on its own merit (McKane points out a few instances where the MT might be preferred), the longer passages of the MT that are absent from the LXX must be viewed as questionable, and they should be placed in the marginal notes—as is the longer ending of Mark.

The fourth option, which suggests that the two versions developed side by side and that both are inspired autographs, is also plausible, perhaps equally plausible, and should be pursued in further study. To date scholars have paid scant attention to this suggested scenario.

What is *not* plausible, in my opinion, is the thesis that the MT alone reflects the original autographs. I think that the evangelical doctrines of inerrancy, inspiration and original autographs do not necessarily preclude inspired literary development, and I suspect that we will struggle with the implications of this in the years to come. However, I strongly reject the criteria of using late-first-century Judaism or fourth-century Roman Catholicism to determine which literary developments were inspired.

In Jeremiah, the LXX reflects a text that is closer to the original than the MT does. Let's use it that way.

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[41]Ibid., 173-77.
[42]Ibid., 120-24.

8

How Many Isaiahs Were There and What Does It Matter?

Prophetic Inspiration in Recent Evangelical Scholarship

RICHARD L. SCHULTZ

One of the primary threats today to a traditional understanding of biblical inspiration and inerrancy is the unrestricted employment of historical-critical tools by evangelical biblical scholars.[1] In this essay I will examine how some recent evangelical scholars have described the composition of the book of Isaiah because it vividly illustrates contemporary critical approaches and the implications that these can have for one's understanding of prophetic inspiration. It is not my purpose to mount a thorough defense of any particular theory regarding the origin of the canonical book of Isaiah. Rather, I will consider whether the scholars whose work will be examined below have undermined their theological foundation through their interpretation of Isaiah.

The Composition of Isaiah

The key question that emerges from the critical study of the book of Isaiah is, how many Isaiahs were there, and does the position that one takes on this issue really matter?

View 1. According to a typical contemporary historical-critical reconstruction, there were not merely two or three Isaiahs (i.e., the pre-exilic First Isaiah, the exilic Second Isaiah and the postexilic Third Isaiah).

[1] I would like to honor the memory of my colleague Tim Phillips in this essay by addressing several of the topics of his final lecture at Wheaton College and expressing our shared convictions regarding the vital importance of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture and our concern regarding its ongoing erosion.

Rather, as many as a dozen or more individuals might have had a part in producing the present canonical book.[2]

View 2. According to the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Baba Batra*, which states that "Hezekiah and his colleagues wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes," there might be no prophet Isaiah who functioned as author of the book of Isaiah.[3]

View 3. According to the traditional interpretation of 2 Peter 1:20-21, which states that "no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (NIV) presumably only one person stood in the divine council and then proclaimed to eighth-century Judah, "Thus says the Lord."

The New Evangelical Perspective

Not too many decades ago, the authorial unity of Isaiah—that is, that there was only one Isaiah—was considered an evangelical litmus test of biblical orthodoxy, as was the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the pre-Maccabean origin of Daniel. Today the theory that much, if not most, of the present book of Isaiah comprises contributions by a series of later authors, disciples and editors is considered by some evangelical textbook authors to be not merely a viable but even a preferable approach. According to William LaSor, David Hubbard and Frederic Bush, "the traditional view that Isaiah wrote the entire book is held today by exceedingly few scholars."[4]

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[2]See, e.g., Hermann Barth's theory of the "Assyrian redaction" of Isaiah 1—33 in *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit,* Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 48 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), which is adopted by Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1—39,* New Century Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980). According to Otto Kaiser, much of Isaiah 1—39 even stems from the Hellenistic period. Otto Kaiser, *Jesaja 1—12*, 5th ed., Das Alte Testament Deutsch 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); and *Isaiah 1—12,* Old Testament Library, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983).

[3]*The Babylonian Talmud, b. Baba Batra* 15a, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1935-1948). Joseph Blenkinsopp's recent claim that this text refers to copying rather than authoring or editing, viewing Hezekiah's courtiers as an eighth-century precursor of the modern copying machine, is quite unlikely. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1—39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 19:74-75.

[4]William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard and Frederic W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 281. Marvin E. Tate sees this view as facing a "marginalized future." Marvin E. Tate, "The Book of Isaiah in Recent Study," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. John W. Watts and Paul R. House, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 235:52.

They label the claim that there were four or more authors an "extreme" position, although this has, in fact, been the majority view in the academy since the publication of Bernhard Duhm's influential commentary in 1892.[5] Most scholars today ascribe to Isaiah of Jerusalem between 20 and 40 percent of the canonical book, with one leading German scholar claiming that Isaiah was responsible only for fragments of Isaiah 28—31![6]

Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman, although more reserved in their conclusions, apparently view the following prophetic scenario as acceptable:

> Isaiah 40—66 presumes an author living later in the Exile foresaw through divine inspiration what God was about to do through Cyrus, just as Isaiah foresaw through divine inspiration what God would soon do with Tiglath-Pileser III (Isa. 7). This later author saw in Isaiah's prophecies of exile and a remnant events that were transpiring in his own day, and he wrote to develop and apply Isaiah's preaching to his fellow exiles.[7]

Dillard and Longman conclude that authorship questions "should not be made a theological *shibboleth* or test for orthodoxy."[8] That is, they should not form an evangelical boundary.

However, if one therefore abandons the view that there was only one Isaiah, is something essential being lost? In his insightful essay "Evangelicals, Biblical Scholarship and the Politics of the Modern American Academy," Darryl G. Hart asserts that "what separates evangelical scholars from their liberal Protestant colleagues in the Society of Biblical Literature . . . is the belief that the Bible, though in the words of men, is a divine and direct revelation from the triune God of the universe."[9] Accordingly, it is evangelical scholars' doctrine of Scripture that has "pre-

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[5]Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

[6]LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey,* 281. See also Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel," in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues,* ed. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 80.

[7]Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 275. However, Dillard and Longman do not state a clear preference for this compositional theory.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Darryl G. Hart, "Evangelicals, Biblical Scholarship and the Politics of the Modern American Academy," in *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective,* ed. David N. Livingstone, Darryl G. Hart and Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 308.

vented their assimilation into the mainline academy."[10] Ironically, however, Hart points out,

> at the same time evangelicals have become more comfortable in the university, the evangelical consensus on Scripture that made the movement a distinct and definable community unraveled. . . . To make their way in the academy, evangelical biblical scholars increasingly approach the text from its human side and bracket out, for the sake of academic etiquette, the divine character and canonical nature of Scripture.[11]

Affirming more than one Isaiah today may in some cases make an evangelical approach to the book indistinguishable from any other. Given, first, the clear assertion in Isaiah 1:1 that what follows is "the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" and, second, the absence of any additional ascriptions of authorship within the book, the one-Isaiah position may be the only one that takes the book's own claims seriously.[12]

Non-evangelical Developments in Contemporary Old Testament Studies

Contemporary evangelical approaches to the book of Isaiah illustrate vividly how historical-critical approaches to the book entail a changing doctrine of Scripture. In order to put these evangelical contributions into their proper context, we must first summarize the remarkable developments that have taken place in recent decades within non-evangelical research on the book of Isaiah. Those familiar with the legacy of Duhm in Isaianic studies may be surprised to learn that, for nearly two decades, the dominant emphasis in the historical-critical study of Isaiah has been on the "unity" of the book. Marvin Tate calls this the new "one book" interpretation in contrast to the older "one author" interpretation. In the past, critical scholars have largely overlooked or undervalued the numerous intertextual connections and thematic continuities between Isaiah 1—39 and Isaiah 40—66. Recently, however, these striking features have led a growing number of scholars to posit an intentional relationship, even an interdependence or a mutual influence, between what is

[10]Ibid., 309.
[11]Ibid., 318.
[12]Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

popularly known as First and Second Isaiah.[13]

John Hayes and Stuart Irvine have offered a historical commentary on Isaiah 1—39 in which they claim that, except for chapters 34 and 35, nearly all of Isaiah 1—39 derives from the eighth-century B.C. prophet, since all of these speeches, which are generally arranged in chronological order, can be related to eighth-century B.C. events and conditions.[14] Furthermore, Christopher Seitz has argued the following three points: first, that the historical narrative of Isaiah 36—39 was originally at home among the Isaiah traditions and not in 1—2 Kings, as is frequently asserted; second, that there never was an exilic prophet in Babylon (Second Isaiah having composed his oracles in Palestine); and third, that one can dispense with the postulate of a postexilic Third Isaiah because it lacks an adequate textual basis. Second Isaiah, in his opinion, represents a deliberate extension of First Isaiah's promises regarding Zion into the period of the exile.[15] British scholar George W. Anderson has argued persuasively that there is no compelling evidence in support of the common claim that Isaiah 24—27 is apocalyptic and, hence, among the latest material in the book.[16] Although none of the scholars just mentioned would attribute the entire book to Isaiah of Jerusalem, support for the basic unity of the canonical book has been growing steadily within non-evangelical scholarship.

Recent Evangelical Publications

Ironically, while critical scholars are moving in a more conservative direction, there is also a growing trend among evangelicals to expand the concept of Isaianic authorship and to embrace views regarding Isaiah

[13]Tate, "Book of Isaiah," 235:43-50. As discussed by Tate, this unity is viewed either as editorial (Rolf Rendtorff, Odil Hannes Steck, Marvin Sweeney) or as thematic (Edgar G. Conrad, Peter Miscall, Ronald Clements) in nature. For a survey of recent work on the unity of Isaiah, see Jacques Vermeylen, "L'unité du livre d'Isaïe," in *Le Livre d'Isaïe: Les Oracles et leurs Relectures Unité et Complexité de l'Ouvrage,* ed. Jacques Vermeylen, Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 81:11-53; and chap. 1 of Hugh G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

[14]John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah: The Eighth-Century Prophet; His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987).

[15]Christopher R. Seitz, "Isaiah, Book of (First Isaiah), (Third Isaiah)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 3:472-88, 501-7; and *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah; A Reassessment of Isaiah 36—39* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). Seitz is not alone in claiming a Palestinian provenance for the entire book.

[16]George W. Anderson, "Isaiah XXIV—XXVII Reconsidered," in *Congress Volume: Bonn 1962,* Vetus Testamentum Supplements (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 9:118-26.

that some critical scholars are discarding. To the extent that they hold to evangelical views of Scripture, these scholars are also expanding the boundaries of the doctrine of inspiration. At the same time, we can observe the shrinking role or even the "disappearance" of Isaiah of Jerusalem. In examining the work of several scholars, my purpose is to compare how each of them understands the nature of prophetic inspiration and the role of Isaiah of Jerusalem with regard to the composition of the canonical book.[17]

1. LaSor, Hubbard and Bush: Disciples and the canonical process. The highly regarded *Old Testament Survey,* first published by Fuller Theological Seminary professors LaSor, Hubbard and Bush in 1982, offers an intriguing and sometimes confusing combination of traditional and historical-critical perspectives and conclusions. On the one hand, Isaiah's substantial contribution to the canonical book that bears his name is defended: "The view taken here . . . sees only one Isaiah, who was responsible for (although not necessarily the final author or editor of) the entire work."[18] On the other hand, they suggest there was not only a foundational *prophet* but also a lengthy, complex *process* that spanned more than two centuries: "Isaiah's messages were collected and preserved by his disciples and later edited and put into written form."[19] At this later time, other viewpoints (such as that of an exilic prophet, for example) were introduced using language that was more meaningful to a later readership (e.g., which directly addressed a people exiled to Babylon).[20]

These coauthors reflect the influence of Brevard Childs of Yale University in their description of the work of Isaiah's disciples, who carried out this canonical process within the context of the believing community. As a result of their editorial work, Isaiah of Jerusalem could speak directly to the specific circumstances of the exilic and postexilic communities. How do LaSor, Hubbard and Bush therefore understand the nature of the inspiration that imbues this human activity with divine authority? In their words, "The entire process may be attributed to the action of God's Spirit, as the ultimate Author, both on the prophet Isaiah and on his 'dis-

[17]It is not my intention to question either their evangelical convictions or the value of their work.

[18]William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard and Frederic W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 365.

[19]Ibid., 375-76.

[20]Ibid., 378.

ciples,' whoever they were and whenever and however they put the work in its canonical form."[21]

2. Schneider: Under authority of Isaiah. Dieter Schneider, a German evangelical and Lutheran pastor, offers a similarly nuanced understanding of the unity of Isaiah in his two-volume commentary, which was completed in 1990. In the forward to his first volume, he states that the entire prophecy is under the authority of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who should be regarded as the intellectual source *(geistiger Urheber)* of the various interdependent sections of which the book is composed. However, for Schneider, this claim regarding Isaiah's role does not exclude the independent but limited involvement of disciples who *continue* rather than *contradict* Isaiah of Jerusalem's original historical vision. Thus, according to Schneider, we can say with good conscience regarding each chapter that "Isaiah is speaking here."[22] Accordingly, we cannot deny to Isaiah of Jerusalem any particular verse and attribute it instead to a Deutero-Isaiah, even if the passage under consideration consists of an exilic addition by the prophet's circle of students.

Wherein lies the authority of such unmarked additions to Isaiah's words? Schneider, quoting Odil Hannes Steck, states, "They are legitimized by their inclusion in the book of Isaiah."[23] According to Schneider, later sayings are not simply being passed off as Isaiah's; to the contrary, Isaiah of Jerusalem is speaking through the words penned more than a century later! The transmitters of Isaiah's words so closely identify themselves with him in their self-understanding that they are simply expounding, clarifying, systematizing, extending and applying his message in terms of their own later setting. Thus, their creative new interpretations are correctly described as Isaianic. But are they inspired? Schneider affirms that they are indeed, for the prophet Isaiah is viewed as the bearer of a divine vision, a unique understanding of God *(eine Wahrnehmung Jahwes),* through which God continues to disclose himself and give meaning to his disciples' day as well. As stewards of the enduring truth that originated

[21]Ibid.; see also 13. Compare Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 328-33.

[22]Dieter Schneider, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 1—39,* Wuppertaler Studienbibel (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1988), 17-18.

[23]Ibid., 19 (author's translation), citing Odil Hannes Steck, *Bereitete Heimkehr—Jesaja 35 als redaktionelle Brücke zwischen dem Ersten und dem Zweiten Jesaja,* vol. 121, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1985), 88.

with Isaiah, they participate in the timeless relevance of God for the world and his people.[24]

3. Meade: Inspired reinterpretation. In 1986, while teaching at Houghton College, David Meade published his Nottingham dissertation under the title *Pseudonymity and Canon*.[25] In his thesis, Meade offers a theological argument for the presence of pseudonymous letters in the New Testament. In other words, he seeks a biblical justification for his claim that Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles and 2 Peter, though falsely attributed to an apostle, nevertheless merit their canonical status. He finds his strongest support in the attribution of later prophetic material to Isaiah of Jerusalem. Meade accepts all of the common historical-critical conclusions regarding Isaiah: the existence of a Second Isaiah as author of 40—55, Third Isaiah as a multiauthored collection, the later addition of chapters 36—39 from 1—2 Kings, the secondary insertion of promise oracles into First Isaiah, and the consistent reinterpretation of First Isaiah in the light of the Babylonian exile. How does Meade understand *inspiration* in Isaiah? According to his analysis, each of the individual prophetic figures who contributed to First, Second and Third Isaiah were equally conscious of inspiration and of participating in the council of Yahweh. Their legitimizing "call" narratives (found in Isaiah 6, 40 and 61, respectively) serve to affirm "their participation in an ongoing revelation and their dependence on previous revelation." Why do Second and Third Isaiah remain anonymous? Because they both claim to be "part of one revelation and one tradition, whose recognized head is Isaiah of Jerusalem."[26] Inspiration guarantees that their reinterpretations of Isaiah's words in order to actualize them (i.e., to make them apply to later audiences) will cause Isaiah of Jerusalem's prophecies to speak to future generations just as he originally had intended.

4. Watts: A half-millennium of Isaianic "drama." A more radical view of the origins of the book of Isaiah is found in J. D. W. Watts's 1987 two-volume contribution on Isaiah to the Word Biblical Commentary, a series that describes itself as representing the best in evangelical scholarship—evangelical "in its positive, historic sense of a commitment to scripture as divine

[24]Ibid., 19-20.
[25]David G. Meade, *Psedonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987).
[26]Ibid., 42-43.

revelation." Watts conceives of the book of Isaiah as the work of one writer-composer-editor living in Jerusalem around 435 B.C., a date late enough to include all of the historical references that Watts identifies in the book within a past or present perspective.[27]

In Watts's presentation, Isaiah of Jerusalem is not important as the inspired prophet; instead, Isaiah's prophecy and prophetic ministry inspired the book. That is, the locus of inspiration is not in the *prophet* but in the *book* as a postexilic work of literature. "The dramatic vision of Isaiah," as Watts terms it, spans twelve generations, providing "a divine perspective on the history of Israel and Judah through speeches by Yahweh himself and by his non-human representatives."[28] It is through this vision that "God calls on Jews to discover their place in his new order."[29]

Evaluation: Expanding the Boundaries of Biblical Inspiration

How should we evaluate these recent evangelical contributions to the study of Isaiah? To a greater or lesser extent, each of these scholars apparently either has embraced the use of historical-critical tools in analyzing Isaiah or has accepted the results of others employing those tools (literary, form, tradition and redaction criticism); and they have discovered a complexity, even a disarray, in Isaiah that they may not have discovered without the use of these tools. Indeed, in their assessment, there is hardly a textual photograph in the prophet's canonical album that has not been touched up by a later editorial artist! However, on the basis of my analysis of the scholarly literature devoted to the book of Isaiah, there is reason to suspect that many of these "blemishes" in the texts—like scratches on the camera's lens—are *produced* rather than *discovered* by using these critical tools. Since there are as many explanations of the complex composition of the book of Isaiah as there are those who seek to explain it, these evangelicals become very vague and cautious about specifying the extent of these later additions, corrections and revisions.[30] Then, maintaining their evangelical view of Scripture, they simply stretch the doctrine of inspiration to

[27]J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1—33,* Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985), 24:xxiv.
[28]Ibid., 24:xxviii.
[29]Ibid., 24:xliv.
[30]A good example of this, with regard to another Old Testament book, is Timothy R. Ashley's comments about Numbers in *The Book of Numbers,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 7.

cover what they have just proposed. One wonders, however, whether any and every historical-critical theory of the origin of biblical literature can be made evangelically acceptable as long as one affirms the "substantial participation" of the traditional author in the process.

To be sure, the book of Isaiah presents the interpreter with a tremendous challenge, but I remain unconvinced that intellectual honesty and the textual evidence demand that the evangelical acknowledge what most Old Testament scholars today claim about the complex compositional history of the book of Isaiah. Let us examine some of the issues that these recent evangelical publications raise.

Prophecy and Inspiration

Most evangelical treatments of the prophetic books have surprisingly little to say concerning the nature of prophetic inspiration. John Goldingay offers a helpful summary:

> Inspiration involves a providential oversight of the development of the person whom God will call to be a prophet and of the speaking and writing that that person will actually do. The result is that they speak and write as they are inclined to do, not necessarily aware of special divine prompting or authority, but with the effect being that exactly what God wants is said and written.[31]

This neglect is understandable because if one closely examines the prophetic literature itself, one finds only a few references in the classical prophets to their dependence on the activity of the Spirit (e.g., Is 59:21 and Mic 3:8). What is noticeably absent in these texts is any reference to the Spirit's involvement in inspiring the production of prophetic literature. Indeed, we know very little about the process involved in turning prophetic oracles into prophetic books, though presumably the same Spirit who revealed to the prophets the divine plan (Amos 3:7) would be concerned with guaranteeing the accurate preservation of such revelation for future generations of God's people.[32]

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[31]John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 248. However, Is 8:11 suggests that the prophet could be keenly aware of that oversight. For a fuller discussion, see Edward J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952), chap. 9, "The Prophets as Recipients of Revelation."

[32]See Walther Zimmerli's helpful article, "Vom Prophetenwort zum Prophetenbuch," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 104 (1979): 481-96; and the recent collection of essays in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy,* ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

However, as a result of more than a century of historical-critical analysis of the prophetic literature, most Old Testament scholars, including many evangelicals, have adopted a much broader understanding of inspiration and canonicity. In the second edition of their textbook, LaSor, Hubbard and Bush write:

> In fact, the production of prophetic books was a much more prolonged and complex process than the inspiration of a speaking prophet. It is now recognized that behind prophetic literature lies the work of editors and arrangers and circles who preserved oral traditions and presented them to later generations of God's people. . . . [I]t was within the community of Israel and in response to its successive needs that the books of the Old Testament gradually grew to their present form. Neither a single prophetic author nor a final redactor may be credited with a monopoly on inspiration.[33]

In the process of superintending the writing of the prophetic books, did God's Spirit inspire a series of editors, or even entire communities (as LaSor, Hubbard and Bush appear to suggest) or simply individual authors? Formerly, inspiration was viewed as primarily *vertical*—God's Spirit working in and through one individual. Today, it increasingly is being viewed as *horizontal*—God's Spirit continuing to work for generations, even centuries, through a series of anonymous individuals and groups.

Millard Erickson, in his *Christian Theology,* also speaks of the role of divine inspiration operating during the period when "the community of faith was transmitting, selecting, amplifying, and condensing the received tradition."[34] But do we really know that this actually occurred in the manner he describes it? Some scholars draw a distinction between *prophetic* and *editorial* inspiration. Goldingay states, in part quoting Paul Ricoeur,

> We must not "generalize in univocal fashion the concept of inspiration derived from the prophetic genre and assume that God spoke to the redactors of the sacred books just as he spoke to the prophets," any more than we should flatten the notion of inspiration so that the way it applies to such redactors determines the way it applies to prophets.[35]

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[33]LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey,* 2nd ed., 595.

[34]Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998), 205. In the 1983 edition, Erickson also describes the community as "modifying" the tradition (p. 205).

[35]Goldingay, *Models for Scripture,* 254; quoting Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," trans. David Pellauer, in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 77, 92. According to Goldingay (250), the Spirit of God *dwells in* the community but *inspires* individual prophets.

This raises a fundamental question: are the *words* or the *authors* inspired? The traditional evangelical doctrine of Scripture has emphasized the latter more than the former. Are the texts reliable because of a specific ability imparted to the authors, or does the Spirit's superintendence of the entire process of inscripturating divine revelation guarantee the intended results regardless of how many and which individuals are involved? There is no inherent reason why the Spirit of God could not have inspired any number of writers and editors who contributed to the composition of a given biblical book. In canonical books such as Psalms and Proverbs, this was clearly the case: the superscriptions in these books explicitly acknowledge the involvement of multiple authors. Some would argue that a prophetic book such as Isaiah is also an anthology, spanning several centuries, analogous to the book of the Twelve (the Minor Prophets).[36] However, the real issue here is not whether such an understanding of inspiration is consistent with an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Rather, the issue is whether we can legitimately posit a series of inspired authors or editors when the involvement of multiple prophets is *not* acknowledged in the text and when one of the reasons for positing such a complex compositional process is the claim that the Spirit of God *could not* (or at least probably *did* not) reveal the diversity of contents identified in the book of Isaiah to just one individual. In order to address this issue, we must briefly consider the basis and implications of the claim that there were, in fact, two or more Isaiahs.

Prophecy and Prediction

Nearly every discussion of Isaiah 1—39 and Isaiah 40—66 notes the differences between these two sections in their historical setting, their vocabulary and style, and their theological emphases; these differences, it is claimed, preclude authorial unity.[37] Numerous passages throughout the book are viewed as describing circumstances or upcoming events that an eighth-century B.C. prophet could not address in such detail. The most notable example is the defeat of Israel's captor, Babylon, by Cyrus the Persian, who is even mentioned twice by name (Is 44:28; 45:1). It usually is

[36]See Edgar G. Conrad, "Reading Isaiah and the Twelve as Prophetic Books," in *Writing and Reading the Book of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 70 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:3-17.

[37]Although Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah*, 82) also emphasizes the extensive diversity to be found within Is 1—39. For a helpful recent summary of the differences between Is 1—39 and Is 40—66, see Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 269-71.

claimed that prophets never made such specific predictions so far in advance.[38] (The name of Josiah in 1 Kings 13:2 is dismissed similarly as a later addition.) Robert Pfeiffer writes sarcastically, "Of course this anachronism offers no difficulty to those who believe that God predicted through Isaiah's pen what was to happen two centuries later."[39] Similarly, Tate claims that John Oswalt's "fundamental reason" for affirming the Isaianic authorship of the entire book is "theological and is postulated on the defense of specific prophetic prediction," and he criticizes Alec Motyer's "shopworn appeals to verbal inspiration."[40] Childs accuses conservatives of turning Isaiah into "a clairvoyant of the future."[41] More importantly, however, Childs claims that even if the prophetic prediction of such distant events actually occurred, "the coming of Cyrus is not presented as a future prediction, but rather as proof that the prediction of him has been fulfilled," that is, that Cyrus is already on the scene.[42]

The troublesome reference to Cyrus is probably a primary reason why many evangelical scholars have abandoned, or at least are questioning, the one-author interpretation. However, in Isaiah 41—42, the presentation of Cyrus is juxtaposed with that of the servant, both portraits using similar expressions.[43] If Cyrus is already on the scene, must the servant also be a

[38]See Ronald E. Manahan, "The Cyrus Notations of Deutero-Isaiah," *Grace Journal* 11 (1970): 22-33, for a critique of various approaches to this problem.

[39]Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1941), 25.

[40]Tate, "Book of Isaiah," 26-27. See John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1—39,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 17-29; and *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40—66,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 3-6; and Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 25-33; also "Three in One or One in Three: A Dipstick into the Isaianic Literature," *Churchman* 108 (1994): 22-36.

[41]Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary,* Old Testament Library (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 3-4.

[42]Ibid., 290. It is not uncommon, however, for prophecy to portray future events as if they already had or are occurring, as in the traditional interpretation of Is 9:1-7. As Oswalt correctly discerns, "the issue here is clearly not whether a transcendent deity could have revealed the deliverer's name many years in advance, as he would if Isaiah is the author of these words, but whether the book leads us to believe that he did." In Oswalt's assessment, the Cyrus predictions are "made the specific evidence that God can and does tell the future." Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40—66,* 196.

[43]Although Cyrus and the servant can be contrasted with regard to their use of force (Is 41:2, cf. 42:3), both are called in righteousness (Is 41:2; 42:6), called by name (Is 45:4; 49:1), grasped by the hand (Is 45:1; 42:6), and both accomplish the Lord's will (Is 44:28; 53:10; Heb. *chephetz,* lit. "pleasure"). See Richard L. Schultz, "The King in the Book of Isaiah," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts,* ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), 158-59.

contemporary of the posited prophet Second Isaiah? Since the latter passage is explicitly linked in the New Testament to the ministry of Jesus (cf. Is 42:1-3 with Mt 12:18), one must then ask, did any Old Testament prophet issue a genuinely messianic prophecy that found its primary focus and fulfillment in the coming of Jesus? Or is such future prediction ruled out a priori?[44] However, if it was possible for a prophet to speak of the coming of the spiritual deliverer, Jesus, seven centuries in the future, is it problematic to conceive of Isaiah of Jerusalem's speaking of Cyrus, his political precursor, merely two centuries in the future? The book of Isaiah repeatedly uses predictive prophecy as a proof of the unique sovereign power of Yahweh (Is 44:6-8, 25-28), and the prediction of Cyrus's conquest of Babylon would serve as a powerful example.[45]

In sharp contrast with this traditional interpretation of Isaiah, biblical criticism has reduced the Israelite prophets' abilities until they basically conform to Goldingay's description:

> They are people who can bring together what they read in the newspapers, what they see in worship and in society, and what they know from Israel's gospel story. When a Bishop of Liverpool warns a Prime Minister that calamity is imminent in his city because of the way in which local government is being exercised, he acts like a prophet insisting that nightmares be faced, without necessarily prescribing what is the detailed nature of the political action that needs to be taken.[46]

If that is the case, then any capable political science major at a Christian college could have been a good stand-in for Isaiah!

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[44]For a discussion of the historical-critical viewpoint, see Ronald E. Clements, "The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43 (1989): 3-19. For a more balanced presentation, see J. Gordon McConville, "Messianic Interpretation of the Old Testament in Modern Context," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts,* ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), 1-17.

[45]For example, Oswalt writes: "Isaiah claims that the evidence for the uniqueness of God, that he is the sole creator, rests on his ability to predict novel turns of history in advance, an ability the idols and their technicians do not have. Specifically those predictions included Assyria's all but total conquest of Israel and Judah, Assyria's failure to capture Jerusalem, the fall of Assyria, the fall of Jerusalem and Judah to Babylon, the exile, the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, Cyrus's proclamation of freedom and encouragement to rebuild, the return of a remnant, and the establishment of a messianic kingdom. . . . One must either accept the evidence as given and adopt the conclusion, or else admit that the evidence has been tampered with and deny the conclusion. One cannot accept the conclusion while denying the evidence." Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40—66,* 192.

[46]Goldingay, 369.

However, the problem goes beyond the mere mention of Cyrus (since one could simply eliminate the name as a late gloss, as many do).[47] According to Roger Whybray,

> It is a simple fact that the content of the prophet's message from start to finish is quite inappropriate to the circumstances of the eighth century B.C. . . . when the people of Jerusalem and Judah were still living at home under the rule of their own kings; when Babylon . . . merely was one of the cities of the Assyrian Empire.[48]

However, it must be remembered that during Isaiah's years of ministry, the inhabitants of Israel's northern kingdom were exiled by the Assyrians under Sargon II, and then Sennacherib claimed to have conquered forty-six walled cities in Judah and deported more than 200,000 of its citizens. Therefore, in Isaiah's day a significant percentage of his fellow countrymen were already in exile and appropriately could be addressed as such. Furthermore, Babylon already was a growing power and threat to Assyria.[49]

Prophecy and Prophetic Books

Despite the fact that scholars such as Avraham Gileadi, Craig Evans, Robert O'Connell and David Dorsey have identified elaborate overarching structural patterns in the book of Isaiah, many scholars have a much lower estimation of the book's design.[50] Joseph Blenkinsopp views the book of Isaiah "as a kind of deposit for miscellaneous prophecies dealing with the destiny of Jerusalem and Judah."[51] According to Richard Coggins, John Sawyer's book of Isaiah is "an enormous bran-tub, containing the most wonderful variety of goodies," while William McKane compares a pro-

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[47]This is Ronald K. Harrison's suggestion, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 794-95.

[48]Roger N. Whybray, *The Second Isaiah,* Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT, 1983), 4.

[49]See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 287-88. For a fuller discussion of this historical background, see Seth Erlandsson, "The Unity of Isaiah—A New Solution?" in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus,* ed. Kurt E. Marquart et al. (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1985), 33-39; and Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah,* 227-29.

[50]Avraham Gileadi, "A Holistic Structure of the Book of Isaiah" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1981); Craig A. Evans, "On the Unity and Parallel Structure of Isaiah," *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 129-47; Robert H. O'Connell, *Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 188 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis—Malachi* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999), 217-35.

[51]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah,* 73. He also describes Is 1—39 as "a collection of compilations" (82).

phetic book to a snowball, "which expands by picking up and incorporating new material into itself as it goes on its way."[52] Are we as evangelicals comfortable with such descriptions to characterize divine revelation and the product of divine inspiration?

As already noted, despite the type of internal diversity that has spawned the multiple-Isaiahs view, there is sufficient stylistic and thematic unity to lead to a one-book interpretation. The proponents of the one-book interpretation (such as Rolf Rendtorff) cite numerous themes, phrases and motifs that are repeated and developed throughout the book, such as the highway of the return and the accompanying blossoming of the desert.[53] Somewhat ironically, Dillard and Longman have noted that "arguments from conservatives for unity of authorship based on common themes and vocabulary have now in large part been taken over and pressed into service as arguments for a redactional unity in the book."[54] However, according to Blenkinsopp, even within what is commonly referred to as First Isaiah, the "degree of consistency of language, subject matter, and theme throughout 1—39" need not point to authorial unity. Rather this serves as an indication that the Isaian tradition was effectively "carried forward by means of a cumulative process of reinterpretation and reapplication."[55]

In fact, the dominant explanation today for the contents of the book of Isaiah is that an eighth-century B.C. core of prophetic oracles was repeatedly supplemented and reinterpreted for centuries in the light of new developments in Israel's history. According to Blenkinsopp, the prophet in Isaiah 1—39 "has been buried under an exegetical mountain."[56] Childs offers an explanation for this extensive growth: "The editors conceived of

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[52]Richard J. Coggins, "Do We Still Need Deutero-Isaiah?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 81 (1998): 91; referring to John F. A. Sawyer's presentation of Isaiah in *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).William McKane, vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah,* International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), as summarized by John Barton, *Isaiah 1—39,* Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 24.

[53]Rolf Rendtorff, "The Composition of the Book of Isaiah," in *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology,* ed. and trans. Margaret Kohl, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 146-69; and "The Book of Isaiah: A Complex Unity; Synchronic and Diachronic Reading," in *New Visions of Isaiah,* ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 214:32-49.

[54]Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament,* 274. See, e.g., Williamson, *Book Called Isaiah*.

[55]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah,* 74.

[56]Ibid., 90.

their task as forming a chorus of different voices and fresh interpretation, but all addressing in different ways, different issues, and different ages a part of the selfsame, truthful witness to God's salvific purpose for his people."[57] This sounds helpful, but should we not also expect a prophet with a fifty-year public ministry to reinterpret and reapply his own oracles to changing circumstances?[58] More problematic is James Crenshaw's suggestion that a primary reason for the later reinterpretation of prophetic oracles (or texts) was that "predictions that seemed to have gone awry, for some unknown reason, retained their power, making it necessary to wrest their hidden meaning by hook or crook,"[59] apparently thereby rescuing the prophet's (or God's) reputation!

Are there only two possible evangelical approaches for understanding the nature of inspiration in the book of Isaiah? Must one either defend the position that Isaiah penned every word in the book that bears his name, or allow that any number of authors or editors, disciples or dilettantes, commentators or committees over any period of time could have contributed any amount to the present book of Isaiah and still have their efforts labeled divinely "inspired" simply because they were ultimately canonized? One ancient tradition regarding the origin of the book of Isaiah already mentioned suggests a third option. The oft-cited Talmudic tractate *Baba Batra* 14b-15a claims that "Hezekiah and his men wrote Isaiah."[60] How are we to understand this statement? Is it possible that the same men who, according to the superscription in Proverbs 25:1, ordered the individual proverbs in Proverbs 25—29 were also the canonical editors of the prophetic speeches and narratives of Isaiah?[61] Certainly the claim of the superscription in Isaiah 1:1 does not preclude this possibility.

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[57]Childs, *Isaiah,* 4.

[58]This is a view espoused throughout Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel,* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979-1983), but it is generally rejected when applied to Isaiah.

[59]James L. Crenshaw, "Transmitting Prophecy Across Generations," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy,* ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 36-37.

[60]See n. 3 above. Evangelical introductions frequently quote this tractate when defending traditional views regarding the authorship of the Pentateuch, Psalms or 1—2 Samuel, but they seldom consider it when discussing Isaiah.

[61]See Michael Carasik, "Who Were the 'Men of Hezekiah'?" *Vetus Testamentum* 44 (1994): 289-300. Even John Calvin suggested that after Isaiah wrote, recorded and posted his oracles on the temple gates, a priest later took them down and preserved them (hence the seemingly disordered juxtaposition of individual texts). John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Volume First,* trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), xxxii.

Nothing in an evangelical doctrine of inspiration excludes the contribution of inspired, even if anonymous, authors and editors to a book such as Isaiah, for we probably are in their debt for the production of most, if not all, of the Old Testament historical books. Who were more directly involved in Isaiah of Jerusalem's promises and threats, were more concerned with the future of God's people and had a greater interest in preserving his prophetic teaching and testimony than Hezekiah and his contemporaries? However, this perspective is quite different from any of the recent evangelical proposals surveyed above!

Prophecy and Authority

A contemporary editor or group of editors could legitimately frame and order Isaiah's oracles, adding brief explanatory comments whenever they considered them to be necessary. But is there any inherent reason why "an unknown prophet of the exile" who chose not to identify himself should share in Isaiah of Jerusalem's divinely bestowed authority? A favorite approach of twentieth-century scholars has been to posit a continuing circle or "school" of disciples, possibly including Second and Third Isaiah, to whom was committed the task of carrying on the prophetic tradition. This could account for the elements of stylistic and thematic continuity between the various collections within the book of Isaiah and justify the claim of maintaining the "authentic Isaianic" tradition.

However, this theory, which originated with Sigmund Mowinckel in 1926, is rejected by an increasing number of leading Isaiah scholars today—including Ronald Clements, Christopher Seitz, Hugh Williamson, John Barton and Joseph Blenkinsopp—for several reasons:

- It lacks firm textual support, being based primarily on a questionable interpretation of Isaiah 8:16 and the description of Baruch in Jeremiah 36.
- It lacks logical cogency, since the existence of the group is deduced from the existence of the book.
- It lacks historical plausibility. What basis is there for assuming that an Isaianic school could exist for two centuries?[62]

[62]John Barton justifiably asks, "How and where might their members have lived? Were they in effect 'prophets' themselves, or 'laymen'?" Barton, *Isaiah,* 23. See also the critique of this theory in Richard L. Schultz, *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 180:77-82.

In the light of this general trend, it is rather ironic that this theory has been embraced recently by two of the evangelical scholars whose treatments of Isaiah I summarized above. According to Martti Nissinen, frequently prophetic oracles in the ancient Near East were immediately written down by a scribe and delivered to the addressee. If deemed worthy of preserving, the written record was then stored in an archive or was reinscribed, later being copied and compiled into collections of prophetic oracles and often quoted, paraphrased and reinterpreted according to the needs of the interpreters.[63] Why should the situation with regards to Israelite prophecy be radically different?

Some evangelical scholars suggest biblical analogies in support of their view of the book of Isaiah's compositional history. LaSor, Hubbard and Bush compare the book of Isaiah to the anonymous epistle to the Hebrews and to the Gospels, in which the teachings of Jesus were written down by his disciples.[64] However, this involves a confusion of categories and genres. No compelling reason can be made for positing the existence of anonymous prophecies in Isaiah, in contrast to Hebrews; and, unlike Isaiah, Mark does not claim that his book is simply a collection of the sayings of Jesus.[65] Similarly, Dillard and Longman compare the anonymous additions to Isaiah with the historical books or with Deuteronomy 34, which was added after Moses' death.[66] More problematic is Duhm's comparison of the book of Isaiah to the scroll of the Twelve Minor Prophets or his viewing Isaiah's association with the book that bears his name as similar to the traditional associations of Moses with the law, David with the psalms and Solomon with wisdom.[67] The book of the Twelve distinguishes twelve prophetic voices through its superscription; the book of Isaiah acknowledges only one prophetic voice. Furthermore, historical-critical scholars have concluded that Moses, David and Solomon contributed little if any literature to the collections to which they are linked, a claim that only the most radical Isaiah scholars, such as Otto Kaiser, make.

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[63]Martti Nissinen, "Spoken, Written, Quoted and Invented: Orality and Writtenness in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 268.

[64]LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, Old Testament Survey, 2nd ed., 282, 286-87.

[65]Perhaps it would be better to "stretch" our view of Isaiah of Jerusalem rather than to stretch our view of inspiration.

[66]Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 275.

[67]Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia*, 7.

After a century of dividing up the texts of Isaiah atomistically between three or more authors, many historical-critical scholars today have adopted, as a result of their compositional analyses of the book of Isaiah, a more holistic interpretive approach. Steck reminds us that the final editors intend for us to read Isaiah 1—66 as "a book concerned with Isaiah in its entirety," and Seitz has written a lengthy essay concerning the prophet Isaiah's "presence" in the latter half of the book.[68] Some critical scholars today admit that Second Isaiah, along with his supposed call narrative in Isaiah 40, is simply a scholarly invention intended to provide a proper historical context for the powerful poems of Isaiah 40—55, thus saving them from the onus of anonymity. And some have already announced the imminent funeral of Second or Third Isaiah.[69]

If we are to read the book of Isaiah on its own terms, it is necessary to take its superscriptions seriously. Isaiah 1:1 claims that all that follows does not simply *include* but rather *is* "the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah," a prophetic ministry spanning more than half a century. The use of the term *vision* (Heb. *hazon*) indicates that the origin of the prophecy is supernatural, not derived from human insight. The same term also occurs in Isaiah 2:1, introducing the familiar "swords into plowshares" passage. It thereby designates Isaiah's description of Jerusalem's future exaltation in Isaiah 2:2-4 as a divinely imparted vision and not simply the product of wishful thinking or political propaganda; and this prophetic height is not reached again in the book until Isaiah 60—62. Finally, it is used in Isaiah 13:1 to introduce Isaiah's oracle regarding Babylon's future in Isaiah 13—14, a passage that critical scholars almost universally deny as being written by Isaiah of Jerusalem.[70]

There is no reason to restrict this divinely imparted vision to just one section of the book, nor is there any justification for positing numerous helping hands who later confirmed the accuracy of this vision by adding historical

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[68]Odil Hannes Steck, *The Prophetic Books and their Theological Witness,* trans. James D. Nogalski (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 23; Christopher R. Seitz, "How Is the Prophet Isaiah Present in the Latter Half of the Book? The Logic of Chapters 40—66 Within the Book of Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996): 219-40.

[69]See esp. Coggins, "Do We Still," 77-92.

[70]For a defense of the Isaianic authorship of Isaiah 13—14, see Seth Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon: A Study of Isaiah 13:2—14:23,* trans. G. J. Houser, Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series 4 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1970); and Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah,* 220-34.

detail or even saving it by reinterpretation. Can we simply dismiss the claim of the very first verse of the book of Isaiah as being merely the misguided or misleading effort of a later editor to claim the authority of Isaiah of Jerusalem for the work of a host of later voices? Or must we see it as an inspired and trustworthy confirmation of the divine origin and compositional integrity of the book that bears Isaiah of Jerusalem's name?[71]

We return to our initial question, how many Isaiahs were there and what does it matter? Dillard and Longman assert that "in some respects the end results of the debate are somewhat moot."[72] On the contrary, I have sought to demonstrate that there are significant consequences of adopting historical-critical conclusions regarding the nature of prophetic inspiration, predictive prophecy, rhetorical coherence and theological development in the prophetic books—consequences that are ignored, downplayed or denied in the recent evangelical (and non-evangelical) literature that we have surveyed.

CONCLUSION

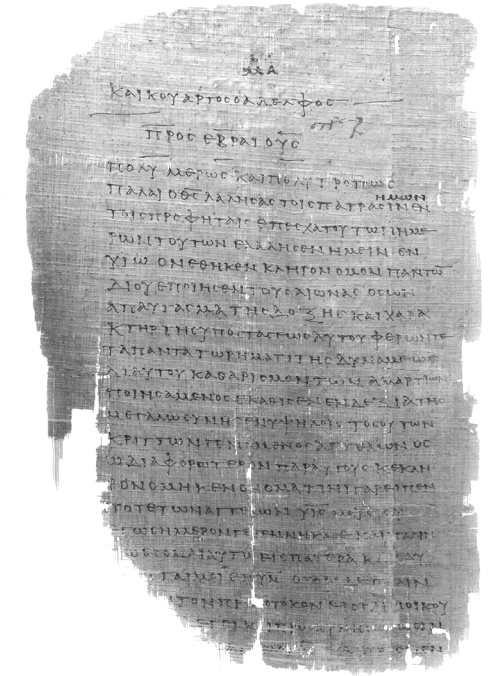
In this essay I have focused on just one book, but the examples could be multiplied. The gates have been opened wide, and applications of historical-critical methods and conclusions are flooding evangelical biblical studies. Such irrigation can foster growth initially, but ultimately it may cause destruction, and I believe that the prophet Isaiah is a potential victim. Evangelical biblical scholarship has come of age. We as evangelicals have been given a place at the table at the Society of Biblical Literature's annual meetings, and many of our publications are reviewed positively and used with benefit by our non-evangelical colleagues. But may we never yield to the temptation to sell our soul for a mess of academic respectability. Instead, let us heed the inspired warning of the prophet Isaiah: "To the teaching and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Is 8:20 NIV).

[71]To mount a full-length defense of the Isaianic authorship of Isaiah 40—66, or even of Isaiah 1—39 for that matter, is clearly beyond the scope of this essay. However, much has been written by non-evangelicals scholars during recent decades that offers further support for the one-author position. See especially the bibliography cited in nn. 12-15 above.

[72]Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 275.

PART THREE

Scripture and Evangelicals in the Postmodern Context



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"Now I Would Not Have You Ignorant"

Derrida, Gadamer, Hirsch and Husserl on Authors' Intentions

BRUCE ELLIS BENSON

I believe that there are authors, that they have intentions, that words express intentions and that readers and listeners are able to discern those intentions. Such is my credo, and my writing this paper is a strong piece of evidence for this belief—why else would I be trying to communicate my intentions to you? I assume that most (if not *all*) evangelicals share this credo and that it (or at least something akin to it) is a fundamental component of what we might call evangelical hermeneutics (which I won't attempt to define here). That is, we believe that biblical authors had intentions and that we today are capable of understanding those intentions.[1] Thus, when Paul says, "Now I would not have you ignorant," as the King James translation so elegantly renders *ou thelō de hymas agnoein* (Rom 1:13), he clearly *intends* to clear up that ignorance by communicating a meaning to us; as the NRSV puts it, Paul says, "I want you to know."[2] And I assume that by reading Paul's words, we are able to make Paul's wish come true.

Yet what exactly does it *mean* to say that Paul has an "intention" and that it can be understood? Just how *well* does this work in actual practice? Evangelicals have long argued over the views of such hermeneutical theorists as Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer and E. D. Hirsch. But these discussions tend to be theoretical and rhetorical. It is one thing to claim that we either can or cannot "know the intentions of the author," but it is quite another thing to be clear as to what that statement means or

[1]That Scripture has both human and divine authorship certainly complicates the question of author's intention, but that complication goes beyond the scope of this paper.

[2]See also Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13.

whether it is justified in actual practice. I am less interested here in defending or decrying any of these theorists than I am in clarifying (or at least making a little more clear) what it means to affirm the credo I proposed earlier. Thus I'd like to propose a very modest project: that we look at the phenomenon of communication and consider how it actually functions. Since Derrida, Gadamer and Hirsch are all deeply indebted to the philosopher Edmund Husserl for their respective theories, Husserl's phenomenology is a logical starting point. Indeed, Hirsch claims that "Husserl's views provide an excellent context for discussing the central problems of interpretation."[3] In what follows, I will set forth a simple analysis of how words work using Husserl as our guide, consider the complications of that theory raised by Derrida and Gadamer, make some comparisons between Hirsch's view and those of Derrida and Gadamer, and conclude with some observations on how my credo is affected.

Husserl on Meaning Intentions

Let's begin, then, with Husserl. Although Husserlian terminology may sound intimidating, the basics of Husserl's theory of perception, meaning and communication can be put in relatively simple terms.[4]

When I look outside of my window and see a tree, Husserl would say that I "intend" that tree. Thus perception is, for Husserl, an example of an "intentional act." Here *intentional* does not mean that when I look out my window "I *meant* to see the tree" (which is *why* I looked out the window). That may be true too, of course: perhaps I looked out my window *in order* to see the tree. In any case, there are two senses of intention at work in Husserl's account, and they are easily confused. One is the ordinary sense of *intention*, such as when I say, "My intention is to write a paper." The other is Husserl's use of the term in a more general sense: when I perceive an object or think a thought, I am "intending" that object or thought.[5] There are, of course, different ways of intending an object in this general sense. I may *perceive* a tree; I may *imagine* a tree; I may *remember* a tree in the backyard of my childhood home; or I may *judge* that the tree is beauti-

[3]E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 219.

[4]I am borrowing here from my much longer discussion of Husserl in *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida and Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

[5]Note that Paul's statement "Now I would not have you ignorant" exhibits both senses of *intention*. He wishes to correct the Romans' ignorance and, in so doing, he intends that ignorance and its correction (among other things).

ful. In all of those cases, I am intending a tree.

When I intend an object (in Husserl's general sense), that object is "present" to my mind. Although it might seem that Derrida's concern with "presence" is a Derridean aberration, it actually comes directly from Husserl. Depending on how "present" that object is to my mind, a meaning intention can be considered "empty" or "filled," "vague" or "distinct."[6] The more filled and distinct my intention, the more "present" an object or meaning (i.e., the "cognitive content" of my meaning intention) is to my mind. An extreme example of empty and vague intending would be that of reciting the first line from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky": "Twas brillig and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe." When I say those words, there is almost nothing "present" to my mind. Although the words *and* and *the* have some meaning (so, e.g., I know that it's *the* wabe and not just *a* wabe), there really isn't much of a meaning intention that accompanies the rest. A less extreme example of lack of presence is when, for example, I speak of the entity Westminster Abbey without having ever been there. If I've only heard the term and know that it's some sort of church-like thing, then Husserl would say that its presence to me is merely "signative" (in other words, the phrase *Westminster Abbey* is just a sign to me).[7] A step up from this is when I see a picture of the abbey; in such a case, it is "pictorically" present to my mind. Even better, were I to visit the abbey and tour the cloister and Poet's Corner, it would be considerably more present to me. A further step up is the experience of the abbey that my wife has had: at one time, she was an acolyte at the abbey, and she tells me that there are hundreds of side chapels and nooks that the public never sees. Clearly, her sense of presence of the entity Westminster Abbey is much greater than mine. It is both more "full" (i.e., there's just a whole lot more of it) and more "distinct" (i.e., her knowledge has more detail and clarity). Thus the entity Westminster Abbey is more "evident" to her mind.

It shouldn't be difficult to see that the ideal for intentionality is full and distinct presence. Husserl describes such a presence by saying that the object is "itself there," "immediately intuited."[8] It is the ideal summed up by

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[6]Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic,* trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 56-62.

[7]As Husserl puts it, "signitive acts 'possess no fullness whatever.' " Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations,* trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 2:761.

[8]Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations,* trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 57.

medieval philosophers as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, the "adequation" between the intentional object and intentional act. Yet note that there is a significant problem with this ideal of adequation. Husserl thinks that there is a limit to just how fully and distinctly a real object (i.e., an object composed of matter that occupies space), like a tree or Westminster Abbey, can be intended. On Husserl's account, I will *never* be able to have 100 percent presence of a real object. But why? One reason is that, the more complex an object is, the potentially more there is to know about it. Even if we take a relatively simple object, such as a tree, there is so much to know about it that one could study trees (or even one particular tree) all of one's life and still not know everything about trees. Perhaps one might be inclined to think that a *really* simple object (such as the tree I am perceiving) could be known in full, but even knowing that would require a complete understanding of molecular theory. Obviously, a rich entity like Westminster Abbey could never be known in a lifetime, even if one spent one's life as a tour guide there. But there is another reason why 100 percent presence isn't possible for real objects. Since real objects exist in time and space, I can never perceive all of their aspects *at once*. So I can see the tree from this particular angle or move around and see it from another angle, but I cannot see both angles at the same time. To put this complication another way, all perception is *perspectival*, according to Husserl. That is, we always "see" an object or "know" a meaning from a certain perspective. And I can only see something from *one* perspective at a given time. However interesting cubist paintings may be, the attempt to present to us multiple perspectives on one canvas certainly doesn't succeed in giving us all of the possible perspectives on an object at once.

The notion of perspective is already present in Husserl's early thought, but it becomes much more complex as his thought develops. Although Husserl originally held (in the *Logical Investigations*, 1900-1901) that the possibility of perceiving or knowing an object with complete presence is a regulative ideal that cannot be achieved, in his later thought (already in book 1 of *Ideas*, 1913) he became convinced that the very notion of non-perspectival perceiving and knowing simply made no sense. All human perceiving, knowing and communicating is perspectival. But there is a complication here too. For, in book 1 of *Ideas*, Husserl holds two theses that seem difficult to reconcile.

On the one hand, Husserl tells us that the guiding principle of phenom-

enology (what he calls the "principle of principles") is that all phenomena must be allowed to appear just as they are, without any presuppositions getting in the way. Earlier in *Logical Investigations,* Husserl had maintained that a "pure" phenomenology is one in which there is "freedom from metaphysical, scientific, and psychological presuppositions."[9] Thus all presuppositions—simply because they are presuppositions—are bad. Accordingly, in book 1 of *Ideas,* Husserl continues this insistence by saying that each phenomenon "is to be accepted simply as what it is" and "within the limits in which it is presented there."[10] On the other hand, Husserl insists that, when I perceive or think about a particular object, my perception or thinking is always from a particular horizon. He says that the perceived object is always "penetrated and surrounded by an *obscurely intended horizon*."[11] In order to preserve the object from contamination by this horizon, Husserl says we must "bracket" the horizon out (or "suspend" it, the famed doctrine of *epochē*).

Obviously, a major question here is whether Husserl can just will the horizon away. Can I simply exclude all metaphysical, scientific, religious, moral and other beliefs from my perception and cognition? But even if Husserl's suspension really works in practice, there is still, at the basis of perceiving and knowing, what Husserl calls the "transcendental ego." There is still the "I" at the foundation of all intention acts. Thus the "I" is the irreducible horizon for the appearance of the phenomena. It is difficult to reconcile this idea that there is some sort of horizon present in acts of perception and cognition with the ideal that the object appear free from anything that might affect it. No matter how much bracketing Husserl might do, the transcendental ego remains the horizon on which objects appear.

Having considered the basics of Husserl's theory of intending, how does all of this apply to communication? We have seen that although Husserl terms all mental acts "intentional" in the general sense, they can also be "intentional" in the specific sense (of "wanting to do something"). Thus when we talk about author's intentions, we can mean at least two things: the object or meaning the author intends at a given moment (e.g., a tree), and

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[9]Husserl, *Logical Investigations,* 1:265.

[10]Edmund Husserl, *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology,* bk. 1 of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy,* trans. Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), 44.

[11]Husserl, *General Introduction,* 52 (emphasis in original).

what the author intends to communicate to a reader (e.g., the experience of that tree). These two kinds of intentions may coincide (as when I describe the tree that I am viewing as I write), or they may diverge. Thus I may have a meaning in my mind but choose not to communicate that meaning to you. Or I may choose to communicate only a portion of that meaning to you. Or perhaps I simply *succeed* in communicating only a portion, when I had intended to communicate the entire object being intended.

Assuming I wish to communicate, how does that happen? Simply put, on Husserl's account of language, there are three basic components: minds, words and meanings. Human minds use words to express meanings. So if I have a meaning before my mind, I express that meaning to you by putting that meaning into words and either speaking or writing those words. Obviously, you have to understand the language I am speaking or writing in order to "get" that meaning. Moreover, in order for me to make that meaning "present" to your mind, Husserl thinks it must first be present in *my* mind.

The reason why meanings can be communicated at all is because they are, for Husserl, "ideal objects." That is, they are "spiritual" entities, which have no location in space. While that terminology may sound strange, Husserl thinks meanings are "ideal" precisely because they can be infinitely repeated and remain the same. Hirsch, who is clearly indebted to Husserl here, puts this as follows: "*An unlimited number of different intentional acts can intend the same verbal meaning*."[12] According to Husserl, words, sentences, texts, poems, symphonies, ideas, scientific formulae, mathematical theorems and meanings are all ideal objects. Thus a symphony can be performed again and again and still retain its identity. Unlike Plato, Husserl holds that ideal objects are created by way of intentional acts—in other words, they have an historical point of origin. Thus the phrase "to be or not to be" came into existence when William Shakespeare (or Christopher Marlowe or whoever) wrote it. And it has existed ever since and can be repeated by actors or printed on a T-shirt.

So if meanings are ideal objects that can be communicated by authors to their readers, how does this communication work in practice? Briefly put, Husserl thinks that there are three steps to the creation of ideal objects. First, one has an insight. Second, that insight passes into short-term

[12]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 38 (emphasis in original).

(and perhaps long-term) memory. Third, the insight is put into writing. In order to see how well all of this works in practice, we need to consider these steps in some detail and examine some of the problems Derrida raises with them.

Derrida and Ideal Objects

Even though Husserl describes the process of ideal object creation and transmission in a short essay entitled "The Origin of Geometry," the essay really isn't about geometry per se. Rather, it is about how ideal objects come into existence and how they can be passed along from one person to the next over a long period of time. Given that focus, what Husserl says is clearly relevant to biblical interpretation. In other words, how is a biblical author able to "encapsulate" a meaning in words, and how are we able to "recover" that meaning?

According to Husserl, an ideal object begins as an idea or as an experience. For instance, I get a thought (perhaps the solution to a philosophical problem), and it is present to my mind. Or else I have a direct experience. When the apostle Paul speaks of his conversion, it is on the basis of an experience that he *himself* had. Similarly, when he writes "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand" (Col 4:18 NRSV), he is narrating his own experience. (In this case, he writes about his experience of writing.) Husserl uses the example of the Pythagorean theorem. Although we don't know who first came up with this insight (and, for Husserl, it does not really matter), we know that someone originally thought this up.

But here is the crucial question: when one has this original insight or experience—at that very originary moment—just how "present" is it to one's mind? The answer, of course, is that it depends on what sort of insight or experience it is. Husserl's example of the Pythagorean theorem is a paradigmatic case. In other words, it's hard to imagine a case of *greater* presence than the knowledge of a geometric theorem. If I say to myself, *The square of the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle equals the sum of the squares of the lengths of the other two sides,* then that seems to be pretty well present to my mind. Or, if you like, try an even simpler example: $2 + 2 = 4$. Isn't that basically 100 percent present to my mind when I think that thought (and say those words)?

Derrida provides an even better example. At one point, Husserl says the following:

> It is certainly possible to think of oneself as speaking, and even as speaking to oneself, as, e.g., when someone says to himself "You have gone wrong, you can't go on like that." But in the genuine sense of communication, there is no speech in such cases, nor does one tell oneself anything.[13]

On Husserl's account, when I speak to myself, my inward speech is perfectly present to me. In fact, it only "seems" as if I am speaking to myself, because I am not communicating anything that I did not already know. Probably the best example of "not telling myself anything new" is when I say the word *I* to myself, for here the subject and the object are *one and the same*. It is the "I" referring to *itself*. But, asks Derrida, am I really present to myself? To put this personally, when I speak of "me," is the person "Bruce Benson" with his various facets—male, American/Canadian, philosopher, husband, citizen of Wheaton, professor at Wheaton College and so on—fully present to my mind? Given that the "I" is always multifaceted (something that Paul, for instance, clearly recognizes in Rom 7, in which he speaks of a kind of "war" between the "parts" of his being), can all of those aspects, in all of their fullness, be present to my mind? Earlier we noted that "real objects" can never be fully present to our minds. Derrida thinks that the "I," the self, is in a similar situation. And it's hard not to agree with Derrida here.

A distinction made by Husserl might help clarify this point. Husserl distinguishes between two ways in which words denote something: expression and indication. Expression is the direct expressing or revealing of the object intended. In such a case, I say the word, and the object to which it refers is immediately present to my mind. The other possibility is that of indication. In such a case, my saying the word points to something that is not present (or at least not *fully* present) to my mind. Using that distinction, Derrida argues that no words give us a full "expression" of meaning; instead, expression is always connected to indication. There are at least three reasons why Derrida thinks this is the case. First, Husserl himself says that the two are connected: "Meaning—in communicative speech—is always bound up with such an indicative relation."[14] Second, while words *do* make objects present to us, those objects (argues Derrida) are never *fully* present to us. That is not to say that there is no presence at all; in other

[13]Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 1:279-80.
[14]Ibid., 1:269.

words, there can certainly be "real" presences on Derrida's account. Borrowing from Emmanuel Lévinas,[15] Derrida speaks of presence in terms of the "trace": objects are present to us but are present as a kind of trace; they are not fully present. Thus, when Derrida makes a seemingly extravagant claim like "there never was any 'perception,' " he is specifically arguing against the notion of perception as full and direct presence.[16] Third, the very presence of objects *points to* something else.

There are different ways of working out this last aspect, that of pointing to something else. Basically, the issue here is one of *relation* between intended object and something other than it. The issue is simple to state; it is considerably more complex, however, to explain. Using Husserlian terminology, we might say that the intended object is always intended against a particular horizon. Put in more hermeneutical terms, we could say that objects, including texts, always go with contexts. Or, to use a distinction made by Hirsch, "meaning" is always connected to "significance." On Hirsch's account, meaning is "that which is represented by a text," and significance "names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable."[17] As far as I can see, Derrida would not disagree with Hirsch that such a distinction can and should be made. Meaning (whether that of an object or text) is not simply reducible to significance (i.e., its relation to a background or the context), nor is the reverse true. But just how closely are objects tied to their background? In other words, how *strongly* can this distinction be drawn? Going back to our earlier example, note that I never perceive a tree apart from a given background. Of course, I can extrapolate that tree (by Husserl's bracketing) from that background, at least to some extent. Yet how closely is the perception of the tree connected to the horizon? It's hard to see how they can be *completely* disconnected. Similarly, if I write a text (the meaning), how closely is that text connected to other texts or my own context (the significance)? We shall return to this question shortly.

So far, everything that we have said regarding the formation of ideal objects relates *only* to the first step. What we have questioned are the extent

[15] Emmanuel Lévinas, "La Trace de l'autre," in *Tijdschrift voor Filosophie* 25:3 (September 1963), 605-23.

[16] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena,* trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 103.

[17] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8.

to which an author has a clear and full meaning within her mind and the extent to which that meaning is tied to something *else* (a horizon or a context). Note that, already at this stage, there is at least the possibility (if not the likelihood) of a lack of full presence. But Husserl thinks that ideal objects go through two other stages of constitution.

The second stage, that of memory, is inevitable. I have an insight or an experience at a given moment, and then that moment is over. Thus each "now" moment passes into what Husserl calls "retention" (what we would call "short-term memory"). According to Husserl, none of these moments are ever lost. That is, Husserl assumes that all insights and experiences are still there, on file, ready to be retrieved at any moment. Oddly enough, Husserl's account of remembering completely forgets forgetting. But the possibility that the entirety of my past is at my disposal is clearly open to question. To what extent can even I as thinker re-think the thought that I thought just a moment ago? Am I thinking "the exact same thought," or am I thinking something that is only "almost" identical, that is, something "similar" but not fully "identical"? Is there no difference or change at all between the two thoughts? Moreover, is there any way for me to be *sure* of his identity? Note that here we are talking about the proverbial best-case scenario, in which I have an insight or experience and it remains sharply vivid in my mind. But it shouldn't be difficult to realize that many meaning intentions are less than ideal. For instance, it is not uncommon for students to raise their hands in class and, when called on, have only a dim reflection of the question or comment that prompted raising their hand. Indeed, those of us who speak before public audiences know what it is like to start a sentence and, before it is finished, to have lost one's train of thought. Long-term memory is hardly any better. Generally, memories become *less* vivid over time. (The exception being stories about catching fish, which grow in vividness. Of course, the only problem with this "vividness" is that it is actually an accretion, not a reflection of the originary moment.)

But let's assume here that I am able to have a reasonably clear insight or idea and that I can retain it long enough to put it into words and get it down on paper (i.e., the third step). What does putting that insight into writing entail? On Husserl's account, writing is absolutely necessary to making an ideal object truly ideal (i.e., repeatable). Speaking gives an ideal object a kind of permanence, but the permanence of writing is consider-

ably greater. Yet there are at least three complications that writing entails. First, Husserl assumes that putting an insight into writing is *merely* an act of placing it on deposit. On his view, writing in no way alters that insight or idea. But is the act of writing so neutral as that? Writing often has the effect of "clarifying" a thought. Yet then the thought as "thought" and the thought as "written" are not exactly the same. Second, putting a thought into words may preserve it, but language compromises the purity of my thought. How so? While it is true to say that I as author have intentions (in both the sense of having a meaning and wishing to communicate it), once I formulate my meaning intention into language, those intentions are only "mine" to a limited degree.[18] Right now, I am writing in English. I am using words that were not invented by me and over which I have only limited control. Those words aren't really "mine." True, I can take those words and formulate them into "my" sentence, but my "ownership" of those words is not exclusive. While there is no question that I can intend (again, in both senses) a particular meaning, the degree to which I can shape that personal intention into words that are not owned by me alone is limited by the universality of language—the fact that language is "co-owned" with many others. Third, once my insight has become an ideal object by way of writing, it can enter contexts that are substantially different from and even antithetical to mine. In other words, the meaning of my text may take on a different significance precisely because it is no longer related to me and to my horizon. Indeed, something as unthinkable as the sayings of Jesus being used by the Nazis for propaganda purposes becomes possible (and, indeed, actual).

One might conclude from Derrida's complication of Husserl's account that one ought not to worry about authors' intentions, or that they simply cannot be known, or even that there aren't such things. But such does not seem to be Derrida's position. First, Derrida clearly implies that authors have intentions, and that he is no exception. Derrida translates the word Husserl uses for meaning *(Bedeutung)* as *vouloir dire*, "wanting to say." One cannot help but think here of Paul's "I would not have you ignorant" or "I want you to know." Thus "to mean," for Derrida, is precisely the state of having a desire to say something. Note that Derrida frequently speaks and

[18]There is, of course, a much greater problem here. If intentions can only be formulated by way of language, then their inherent "mineness" is complicated from the start. I won't take this problem into consideration here.

writes in the first person.[19] He also accuses one of his critics (John Searle) of having "avoided reading *me* and trying to understand."[20] Here Derrida does not say that Searle has not read his *text;* instead he specifically says *me*. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that Derrida thinks that authors have intentions and that the point of his own texts is to communicate those intentions. Second, Derrida insists on the importance of what he terms a "doubling commentary," that is, the attempt to "repeat" as closely as possible what the author means. Such commentaries act as (to quote him) an "indispensable guardrail" to keep interpretation from "developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything." So texts demand our "respect" (Derrida's term).[21] Reading texts requires a knowledge of the proper techniques of interpretation. Derrida insists on the need to employ "all the instruments of traditional criticism."[22]

Of course, with these affirmations go two caveats. On the one hand, Derrida reminds us that good commentaries do not content themselves with *merely* repeating the text (which, at its most literal, would be simply "copying" the text); instead, they attempt to expand on the text and place it in both its original and a contemporary context. The more a commentary expands, the less it "doubles." Sometimes we want as "literal" an interpretation as possible; sometimes we want something that is more creative and that advances our thinking. Both of those—and everything in between—have their place. On the other hand, on Derrida's view, even "doubling commentaries" are never absolutely "pure" in the sense of being without *any* interpretative aspect at all, however much the commentator might try.[23]

Gadamer and Horizons

What we have seen so far should lead us to conclude that speakers and writers have intentions but that those intentions can be reasonably clear or considerably more vague. Such is—perhaps surprisingly—the position of

[19]For an example of some of Derrida's most personal writing, see "Circumfession: Fifty-Nine Periods and Periphrases," in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[20]Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.,* trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 113 (emphasis added).

[21]Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* corr. ed., trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 158.

[22]Ibid.

[23]For more on Derrida, see Benson, *Graven Ideologies*, chaps. 4-6.

Hirsch, who rightly points out that "it is not possible to mean what one does not mean, *though it is very possible to mean what one is not conscious of meaning*."[24] In other words, my meaning intention may not be fully known or understood to me. Interestingly enough, Hirsch thinks that this is not simply a rare occurrence, but the *norm*. As he puts it, "An author almost always means more than he is aware of meaning, since he cannot explicitly pay attention to all the aspects of his meaning."[25] With that statement, I think Derrida and Gadamer would both agree. Indeed, Hirsch quotes Gadamer (from *Truth and Method*) as saying something so similar that one might almost be tempted to accuse Hirsch of plagiarism. Thus, Hirsch says (as I just quoted), "an author almost always means more than he is aware of meaning," and Gadamer says, "the meaning of the text goes beyond its author not just sometimes but always."[26]

But, of course, there is a slight, yet very important, difference between these two passages. Whereas Gadamer speaks of the meaning of the *text*, Hirsch refers to that of the *author*. Supposedly, what separates Hirsch from Gadamer—or at least this seems to be a common assumption among evangelicals—is that Gadamer denies either that authors have intentions or that they can be known. Thus, when Hirsch affirms what he considers "the sensible belief that a text means what its author meant," such a statement is often read as against Gadamer's view.[27]

I think Hirsch is to be commended for defending the author's intention, though I have reservations with his *reason* for doing so. Hirsch claims that "it is preferable to agree that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning," though he affirms that *only* on the basis of what he calls "purely practical grounds."[28] Are the author and her intention so unimportant to Hirsch that meaning is the standard simply because it happens to be the most convenient? In sharp contrast to Hirsch, I would argue that we ought to be concerned about authors' intentions because we care about authors—that is, we respect other people and their thoughts. To be concerned about their intentions merely because it solves a problem of interpretation is likely to

[24]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* 22 (emphasis mine).
[25]Ibid., 48.
[26]The Gadamer quote is taken from "Gadamer's Theory of Interpretation," in *Validity in Interpretation,* 249. This is Hirsch's review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method,* first published in *The Review of Metaphysics* (March 1965).
[27]Ibid., 1.
[28]Ibid., 25.

be, in my view, a violation of the second formulation of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative that we avoid using people. Interestingly enough, evidently Hirsch himself came to realize these problems, for in *The Aims of Interpretation,* he gives us a very different rationale. There he puts this concern for authors' intentions in terms of ethics rather than practicality. In fact, he uses the same Kantian argument, arguing that "to treat an author's words merely as grist for one's own mill is ethically analogous to using another man merely for one's own purpose."[29]

But in any case, having affirmed the importance of the author's intention, we have in no way solved anything. First, even if we affirm that interpretation is directed toward the author's meaning, we have only designated a target, not hit it. In fact, as far as I can tell, the potential for diverging interpretations is only *slightly* diminished by designating the author's intention as our target. One can *still* argue for even seemingly outlandish meanings by saying, "But that's what I think the author really meant." And in the end, it is hard to demonstrate conclusively that such readings are incorrect (even if they seem implausible on the basis of textual evidence).

Second, in *Truth and Method,* Gadamer argues that the "romantic" hermeneutic of interpreters such as Friedrich Schleiermacher is "questionable." Briefly put, Gadamer reads Schleiermacher as saying that the aim of interpretation is to re-create the original thought an author had when he wrote a text. Gadamer characterizes this ideal as "a divinatory process" in which one attempts to place oneself within the mind of the author.[30] On this view, by reading a text, one can relive the author's meaning experiences. *Both* Gadamer and Hirsch criticize this view as impossible. But they differ on how to respond. Hirsch claims that readers are concerned not with private meaning "experiences" of authors but with meanings themselves.[31] Whereas the former can never be anything but private, the latter are potentially public. Precisely because of that public character of meanings, Gadamer shifts the focus from meaning of the author per se to "the meaning of the text itself."[32] The assumption is

[29]E. D. Hirsch Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 91.
[30]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 187.
[31]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* 16.
[32]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 372.

that, if the writer is any good, at least some of that meaning should have made its way into the text. [33]

Third, earlier I noted that while it is appropriate for Hirsch to draw a distinction between meaning and significance, the line between text and context is not so easy to draw. An example might help. When Paul says in Romans 9:18 that God "has mercy on whomever he chooses," that is the "text." Of course, this text is clearly "related" to its "context"—the verses surrounding it (Rom 9:17, 19), the discussion of God's choice throughout the book of Romans and so on. You can't understand the meaning of that one verse without understanding its relation to the rest of the text. But wait, aren't meaning and significance supposed to be separable? Perhaps we can solve this problem by saying that the whole of the book of Romans is itself a text. Yet immediately a new problem appears. Isn't the meaning of the book of Romans at least partially connected to the rest of the Pauline corpus? For instance, the meaning of Romans 9 seems to be bound up with its relation to the first chapter of Ephesians. This problem only gets more complicated the more one thinks about it: in order to understand Paul's letters, they must be placed within the wider context of the New Testament. And that can only be properly understood when read against the horizon of the Old Testament.

If we put this problem in Husserlian terms, we can say that the intentional object must be understood against the backdrop of the horizon. Yet just how far does this horizon or background go? Clearly, we recognize that Paul's writings must be read with the other New Testament writings as their horizon. But when New Testament scholars attempt to make sense of the book of Romans, they don't actually stop there. They make reference to what was going on in the church at Rome. They read books by contemporary authors to find out how words were used at the time. They dig up bits of pottery and other neat stuff to find out what life was like back then. All of that serves as the horizon for interpreting the text. Of course, technically speaking, these aspects merely concern the "significance" of the text, not its meaning. But how much is the situation, say, of the church at

[33]These respective emphases on authors' meanings and authors' texts lead—it seems to me—to two interesting hermeneutical circles. For the Gadamerian, followers of Hirsch claim to be interested in the "author's meaning" but can find this only by appealing to the text. For the Hirschian, followers of Gadamer may think they're simply explicating the text, but they're really still concerned with (and they even, as it turns out, still *talk about*) authors and their intentions.

Corinth bound up with the meaning of what Paul says in his letters? Can I really understand what Paul means if I don't know anything about Corinth (except what Paul says)? Further, to what extent does the use of terms by contemporaries like Josephus actually help me understand the meaning of what Paul says (as opposed to its mere significance)? I remember one of my Greek teachers pointed out that the adjective *adialeiptōs,* which Paul uses to modify *proseukesthe* in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (usually translated as "pray without ceasing") is used by a contemporary of Paul to describe a dog's barking. So I always think about "bark without ceasing" whenever I read that verse. Now did that reference to barking only help me with the significance of that passage? Or did it help me understand its meaning?

That meaning and significance seem to be very closely connected *practically*—even if they can be separated *theoretically*—is apparent from what Hirsch himself says. As the cultural literacy guru, he (quite rightly) stresses the importance of cultural literacy as the "necessary background" for proper understanding.[34] In his book *Cultural Literacy,* he quotes a text about baseball and goes on to say: "To understand this text, we don't have to know much about the particular topic in advance, but we do require quite a lot of vague knowledge about baseball to give us a sense *of the whole meaning*."[35] It would seem that what Hirsch calls "a lot of vague knowledge about baseball" would merely help us with the significance of the text on baseball. But such is not what Hirsch says. Instead, it helps us understand its meaning. As he elsewhere points out, "to understand what somebody is saying, we must understand more than the surface meanings of words; we have to understand the context as well."[36]

But these questions of meaning and significance become even more complex when we add history into the equation. Paul's letters—not to mention the rest of New Testament texts—were written over a period of time. To us, that period of time is pretty much all the same. But such would not have been the case to Paul and his contemporaries (any more than, say, the years that cover the transition from *Leave It to Beaver* to *Sex in the City*

[34]The term *background* is explicitly used by Hirsch. He says that "shared information is a necessary background to true literacy." E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 10.
[35]Ibid., 15 (emphasis mine).
[36]Ibid., 3.

would be "all the same" to us). Moreover, there have been a couple of changes since then. For instance, when Paul was writing, there was no clear doctrine of the Trinity. Orthodox believers (rightly) contend that it is *implicit* in Scripture, but it certainly was not *explicit*. We read the New Testament in light of the Nicene Creed, formulated more than two centuries after Paul was writing. So does the Nicene Creed simply help us with the significance of New Testament texts? Or does it actually clarify their meaning? Similarly, as Protestants, we read Paul's claim that "we are justified by faith" (Rom 5:1 NRSV) in light of Martin Luther. One can argue that Luther simply *brought out* the true meaning of that passage. But, at least for Protestants, that meaning is very strongly related to Luther's insight.

A complication with interpreting Scripture, then, is that it has its *own* horizon, we have *our* horizon, and there have been many, many horizons in between. Gadamer's way of explaining how these relate is by the notion of a "fusion" of these horizons.[37] When I read an ancient text, my horizon "fuses" with that of the author. Actually, even the way I've stated it here isn't quite complicated enough. For if truly understanding the meaning of references to the Trinity and justification by faith in the New Testament is related to the background of subsequent church history, then the fusion here involves various horizons. Knowing the author's horizon is undoubtedly important. On this point, I have no question that Gadamer would agree (despite the fact that some have read him as *implying* that the original horizon is unimportant). His affirmation that a text must be understood as an "answer" to a question that stands behind it clearly implies that the text's original horizon must be understood and taken seriously.[38] Understanding calls for as much knowledge of the past as possible.

But one cannot affirm the existence (and importance) of *one* horizon and not others. When *we*—as twenty-first century American evangelicals—understand Scripture, we do so on the basis of our own horizon. I take that point to be simply a logical extension of Husserl's notion of horizon. Gadamer points out that "the very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it."[39] We certainly *must* emphasize the importance of doing careful textual work and of being aware of the historical horizon of the New Testament writers and their contemporaries. But however much we

[37]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306.
[38]Ibid., 369-79.
[39]Ibid., 301.

work at understanding that horizon, it can never turn us into what we are not. *We* cannot read Paul as did Paul, nor can we read the book of Romans as did the ancient Romans (let alone the contemporary Romans, sipping their lattes and reading Paul in some sun-drenched Roman piazza).

On the other hand, *neither* is it the case that our understanding of Paul is anything even remotely like "completely different." In our day, it is fashionable for people to say things like, "When we read Paul, we read it completely differently than did those Romans or Corinthians." Completely differently? Perhaps a Martian could read a text *completely* differently, but we simply *cannot,* even if we wished to do so. Thus we *too* read the text *as* human beings, having rather similar experiences of, say, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22 NRSV). There is a kind of universality or "ideality" to these traits. We may have come up with a few more creative variations on such things as impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, strife, anger and envy (Gal 5:19-21), but our variants are nothing all that foreign to what was experienced by the churches in Rome or Corinth.

Let me close by briefly pointing out two implications of what we have considered. First, I think Hirsch is *almost* right when he says, "It is far more likely that an author and an interpreter can entertain identical meanings than that they cannot."[40] I agree that the probability of our understanding an author is greater than the probability of our not understanding. Moreover, Hirsch is likewise right in insisting that the issue here is *not* one of certainty. I cannot be *certain* that you are understanding my intentions expressed in this sentence or paper. In communication, as in many things, a high degree of probability is the best one ever gets—and, most of the time, that's enough.

Where Hirsch's position seems less convincing, however—and here we come to my second point—is when he says that "an author and an interpreter can entertain *identical* meanings" (emphasis mine). Perhaps we can. Perhaps the meaning present to my mind at the moment I am speaking these words can be *identical* to the one that you have before your mind at the moment. But Hirsch admits that "the author's meaning is only partially accessible to an interpreter."[41] So he himself seems to disallow the possibility of strict adequation. Further, if our understanding of a given

[40]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* 18.
[41]Ibid., 17.

meaning intention is always against the backdrop of a horizon that is at least partially constituted by our own location in space and time, then it is difficult to say that our understanding has full "adequation" with the meaning of a speaker or writer. *Were* meaning and significance fully separable, then meaning intentions *could* be identical (though that separability would not itself guarantee identity). Most likely, our understanding is, in some senses, the "same" as that of the author *and also*, in some senses, "different" from that of the author.[42] Which is which may not be fully specifiable. Of course, one must not forget that this problem of identity and difference (and their interconnection) is as old as philosophy itself. The ancient Greeks recognized and had various ways of trying to make sense of how something can be both same and yet different. Indeed, precisely this problem is behind Derrida's notion of *différance*.[43]

Having said all of this, I still think that Husserl's theory of meaning is fundamentally right and that it goes a long way toward explaining how meaning is communicated. But the complications that Derrida, Gadamer and even Hirsch raise must be taken seriously. Those complications should not lead us to conclude that understanding is impossible, but they should lead us to recognize that understanding is itself difficult to understand. I began this paper by saying, "I believe that there are authors, that they have intentions, that words express intentions and that readers and listeners are able to discern those intentions." Such is still my credo. Why words work is ultimately (to quote Gadamer) "the mystery of language."[44] But I am convinced they do.

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[42]Gadamer sums this up by saying, "It is enough to say that we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all*." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 297 (emphasis in original).

[43]See the essay *"Différance"* in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-27.

[44]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 378.

10

Scripture, Tradition and Authority

Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of Sola Scriptura

JOHN R. FRANKE

Evangelicals are particularly aware of the central role of Scripture in their lives and in the life of the church.[1] This commitment to the centrality of the Bible for faith and practice is captured in the sixteenth-century Reformation formula *sola scriptura*. At the same time, this commitment to the Reformation and to the principle of *sola scriptura* has nurtured a general suspicion concerning the significance of the Christian tradition. This concern is particularly evident in evangelical conceptions of biblical interpretation and the task of theology. In this context, the tradition of the church carries little or no authority for most of the evangelical community, and it is often viewed as little more than the historical record of the fallible human corruption of biblical faith, often associated with Roman Catholicism. As such, D. H. Williams observes that the Christian tradition is generally viewed as "antithetical to the absolute authority of the Bible."[2] He concludes that the "longstanding and prevalent conception" among evangelicals is that "*sola scriptura* is compromised by any acceptance of extracanonical authority."[3]

While acknowledging the significance of *sola scriptura* as establishing the principle that canonical Scripture is the *norma normans non normata*

[1]This essay draws on my contribution to chapter 4 of Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001). I extend my thanks to Westminster John Knox Press for granting permission to include previously published material here.

[2]D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 18.

[3]Ibid., 19.

(the norm with no norm over it), it is also true that in another sense Scripture is never *sola* in the task of interpretation and theological construction. Rather, Scripture functions in an ongoing and dynamic relationship with the Christian tradition in ways that are at odds with the common evangelical conception of *sola scriptura*. This essay will seek to explore the historical and theological relationship between Scripture and tradition and set forth an understanding of authority that preserves the "norming" status of Scripture for Christian faith and life while maintaining the significance of tradition as a necessary and crucial component in the theological task.

The Development of *Sola Scriptura*

The genesis of the debate between Catholics and Protestants about the relationship between Scripture and tradition is rooted in historical developments that took place well before the sixteenth century. The discussion of this issue in the later medieval period focused particularly on the question of the authority of *extrascriptural* tradition. Prior to Basil in the East and Augustine in the West, however, the concept of an extrascriptural tradition functioning authoritatively in the life of the church would have been viewed as highly problematic.

In the early church, Scripture and tradition were not seen as mutually exclusive but as coinherent.[4] Scripture and tradition completely coincide in the thinking of the early church. The church proclaims the gospel that is contained in written form in the canonical documents and is preserved and handed down in living form through the tradition of the church. The whole of the kerygma is found in both Scripture and tradition. From this perspective, tradition is viewed not as an addition to the message contained in Scripture but as the living, socially embodied expression of that message.

The conception of the coinherence of Scripture and tradition came as the result of the assumption that both issue from the common source of divine revelation. This understanding constitutes an explicit repudiation of an extrascriptural tradition on a par with Scripture as authoritative for the church. Writing in the latter half of the second century, Irenaeus set forth the most complete refutation of the appeal to traditions beyond Scripture

[4]George H. Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church: The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 22.

in his work *Against Heresies*.[5] He identified appeals to revelatory truth apart from Scripture as a form of heretical Gnostic practice and maintained that only the "tradition which is derived from the apostles" contained in Scripture and preserved in the church was to serve as authoritative for the faith and practice of the Christian community.[6]

Beginning with Basil the Great, a transition in how the understanding of tradition is to be formulated occurs. In his treatise *De Spiritu Sancto,* Basil states that some aspects of the Christian faith and practice are to be found not in Scripture, but in the tradition of the church.[7] Historian Heiko Oberman pinpoints the significance of this work for the Catholic understanding of tradition: "We find here for the first time explicitly the idea that the Christian owes equal respect and obedience to written and unwritten ecclesiastical traditions, whether contained in canonical writings or in a secret oral tradition handed down by the Apostles through their successors."[8]

Oberman also highlights the importance of Augustine in the establishment of this new conception of tradition. On the one hand, Augustine reflects the coinherence of Scripture and tradition characteristic of the early church, in that he repeatedly asserts the ultimate authority of Scripture, yet not in such a way as to oppose the authority of the church. On the other hand, Augustine also reflects the view evidenced in Basil. In Oberman's words, "In contrast to Irenaeus' condemnation of extrascriptural tradition, in Augustine we find mention of an *authoritative* extrascriptural oral tradition."[9] According to Augustine, the church "moves" the faithful to "discover the authority of Scripture," and Scripture in turn "refers the faithful back to the authority of the church with regard to a series of issues with which the Apostles did not deal in writing."[10] Oberman notes that Augustine appeals to this extrascriptural principle in his discussion of the baptism of heretics, and then he indicates the role that this theological move

[5]St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses,* ed. W. W. Harvey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1857); also see St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heresies,* bk. 1 (New York: Paulist, 1992).
[6]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, 100-600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 115.
[7]St. Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto,* in *Patrologia Graeca,* ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1857-1886), 32:188. See also *St. Basil the Great on the Holy Spirit* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 98-99.
[8]Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 369.
[9]Ibid., 370 (emphasis in original).
[10]Ibid., 370-71.

would play in subsequent history: "Abelard in the same manner would later treat Mariology, Bonaventura the *filioque* clause, and Thomas the form of the sacrament of confirmation."[11]

In the fourteenth century, Basil's statement on the legitimacy of extrascriptural tradition and the two aspects of Augustine's thought gave rise to two competing conceptions as to the authority of Scripture and tradition. Oberman labels these two understandings "Tradition I" and "Tradition II."[12] Tradition I represents the single-source understanding, which emphasizes the sufficiency of Scripture as the exclusive and final authority in the church. Oberman explains, "The horizontal concept of Tradition is by no means denied here, but rather understood as the mode of reception of the *fides* or *veritas* contained in Scripture."[13] With the rejection of any appeals to extrascriptural tradition, ecclesiastical tradition is not to be understood as "self-supporting," but rather it "depends on its relation to the faith handed down by God in Holy Scripture."[14]

Tradition II maintains a two-source conception of authority in which both the written *and* the unwritten oral components of the apostolic message, as approved by the church, are deemed to be equally authoritative. Here the emphasis shifts away from the interpreters, or doctors, of Scripture and toward the bishops, who determine the content of the authentic tradition. The church hierarchy is viewed as having its "own" oral tradition, which is, to cite Oberman's characterization, "to a certain undefined extent independent, not of the Apostles, but of what is recorded in the canonical books. Ecclesiastical traditions, including canon law, are invested with the same degree of authority as that of Holy Scripture."[15]

Prior to the fourteenth century, these two conceptions were held together without any conscious effort to distinguish between them or to integrate them. Nevertheless, a significant difference already existed between the theologians and the canon lawyers, a difference that was finally brought into relief during the fourteenth century. Throughout the early Middle Ages, canonists regularly refer to Basil's statement. In fact, the leading canon lawyer of the day, Ivo of Chartres, cites it in arguing for an

[11]Ibid., 371.
[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid., 372.
[14]Ibid.
[15]Ibid., 373.

equal standing for Scripture and extrascriptural oral tradition.[16] This argument, along with the Basilean passage from which it was derived, is included by Gratian of Bologna in his *Decretum*. From this highly influential source the passage and its interpretation were widely disseminated into the standard textbooks of theologians as well as canon lawyers.[17]

From the perspective of the canon lawyers, these developments were sufficient to establish the two-source theory with respect to canon law. Therefore, throughout the medieval period canon law stands on the foundations of Scripture and tradition, the latter of which is understood as approved extrascriptural oral tradition handed down from the apostles and preserved in the church. The medieval theologians, in contrast, did not adhere to this understanding. Because they conceived of theology as the science of Scripture, they elevated Scripture itself as the final authority for matters of faith, as indicated in the use of the term *sacra pagina* to denote theology. This is the case despite the increasing tendency of the medieval theologians to comment on previous interpretations in such a way as to appear to give them authority. Although their works reflect acceptance of a close connection between Scripture and its interpretation, the scholastic thinkers respected the distinction between text and gloss. They viewed the prior interpretive tradition as a vital and important component of theology without losing sight of the primacy of Scripture in the assessment of various interpretations. These thinkers were convinced that final authority in questions of interpretation resided in the text of canonical Scripture.[18]

In the fourteenth century, the prominence of canon lawyers resulted in a growing acceptance of the Basilean two-source theory in the church. Oberman points out that in the context of its historical circumstances, namely, the Great Schism and the final phase of the struggle between pope and emperor, canon lawyers were in high demand and perhaps even surpassed theologians in status at the papal *curia* and the royal courts. In his estimation, it is not surprising "that the canon-law tradition started to feed into the major theological stream in such a way that the Basilean passage became a genuinely theological argument, and the foundation of the posi-

[16]Ivo of Chartres, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1844-1864), 161:283.
[17]Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 369.
[18]For an outstanding study on biblical interpretation and the use of Scripture in the medieval period, see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952).

tion which we have called Tradition II."[19] The development and hardening of the position described by Tradition II in the later medieval period can be seen as a response to the increasing acceptance of the two-source theory that had its roots in Basil.

In the struggle between the curialists and the conciliarists to reform the church that arose in the aftermath of the Western schism, members of both groups supported the legitimacy of authoritative extrascriptural tradition. The two differed merely over the location of highest authority, pope or council, in determining and defining the extrascriptural tradition. With this development in the later Middle Ages, Tradition II increasingly came to be seen by the church as the more acceptable position. Those Reformers who supported Tradition I, such as Thomas Bradwardine, John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, were viewed as dangerous radicals by the church hierarchy, because they challenged the authority of the pope and the received church tradition.

By the sixteenth century the debate in the church regarding Scripture and tradition had undergone further development.[20] Three main schools of thought can be identified. The first, corresponding to Tradition I, maintained that all truth necessary for salvation could be found either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture. Tradition was required for the task of correctly interpreting Scripture, particularly those elements regarding salvation which were deemed to be merely implicit in the text. This is often referred to as the "classical" view. The second position, which corresponds to Tradition II, asserts that Christian revelation is only partly contained in the canonical text, with another part lodged in the oral traditions of the apostles passed down through their disciples. Finally, a third outlook, which came to prominence among curial canonists and theologians in the late Middle Ages, taught that the Holy Spirit abides constantly with the church and gives new inspiration or illumination to the church. In this view the teaching of popes and councils is binding on the faithful, even where such teaching is unsupported by Scripture or the oral traditions of the apostles.[21]

In response to the increasing emphasis on extrascriptural tradition and

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[19]Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 372.

[20]For an overview of the discussion on Scripture and tradition in the sixteenth century, see Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

[21]These three positions and their proponents are described in greater detail by Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church*, 47-66.

papal authority, the northern European humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries advocated a reformist agenda characterized by the slogan *ad fontes*, "back to the sources." This program gave clear priority to the teaching of Scripture as the source for Christian faith and was highly critical of the elevation of tradition in the practices of the medieval church.[22] The emphasis of the humanists on the sufficiency of Scripture and the related rejection of the distorting influence of the medieval tradition were adopted by the early Reformers, such as Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, and provided the basis for their appeal to the principle of *sola scriptura,* the claim that Scripture alone was normative for the faith and life of the church.[23] The elevation of *sola scriptura* effectively set the agenda for what became Protestant antitraditionalism, at least as it characterized the Protestant attitude toward the theological developments in the first fifteen hundred years of church history.[24] Predictably, the implications of *sola scriptura* were often applied against those who were committed to the principle by other Reformers who believed that one doctrine or another had been too greatly affected by tradition. Thus, Luther was so critiqued by Zwingli on the sacraments, Zwingli by the Zurich Anabaptists on the question of infant baptism, and John Calvin by Michael Servetus on the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Reformers did not intend to sever themselves entirely from the Christian past. Calvin's writings in particular contain numerous references to the church fathers, and he clearly attempts to align the program of the Reformation with Augustine.[25] The significance of Calvin in this regard is noted by Jaroslav Pelikan, who states that the Geneva Reformer became the one figure who "more than any other, enabled the leaders of the Reformation to claim that they were not throwing over the Christian past after all."[26] Yet in spite of attempts by some of the Reformers to maintain a place, albeit a limited one, for the tradition of the church, the *trajectory* of Protestantism coupled with its ongoing polemic against the Catholic Church inevitably served to diminish, if not eclipse, the significance of tradition for Protestant theology.

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[22]Tavard, *Holy Writ,* 67-79.

[23]For an account of the influence of humanism on the Reformation, see Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 32-68.

[24]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 11.

[25]On Calvin's use of the early church and medieval traditions, see A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Use of the Fathers and Medievals," *Calvin Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 149-205.

[26]Pelikan, *Vindication of Tradition,* 19.

The separation of Scripture and tradition occasioned by the Protestant insistence, *contra* the Catholic Church, on Scripture as the *sole* source for theology was intensified by the developments at the Council of Trent.[27] In addition to formulating and clarifying official Catholic doctrine, the council was also clearly concerned with the refutation of Protestantism. Thus, while the council engaged in lengthy deliberations about the precise nature of the relationship between Scripture and tradition, the participants were in fundamental agreement that the Protestant position was inadequate.[28]

The Catholic theologians at Trent almost unanimously agreed that the canonical Scriptures were not in themselves sufficient as a source of doctrine. The Tridentine formulation asserted that the Catholic Church "accepts and venerates" apostolic tradition with the same sense of "loyalty and reverence" with which it "accepts and venerates" all the writings of Scripture.[29] In short, although Trent did not formally speak of Scripture and tradition as two sources of revelation, it at least seemed to suggest such a construction. And it certainly held that the authority of tradition was not in any way less than that of Scripture, insofar as both came from God and therefore both carried divine authority.[30]

According to George Tavard, Catholic opposition to *sola scriptura* became so strong in the wake of Trent that despite the Council's careful attempt to set forth a doctrine of Scripture and tradition that did not move in the direction of suggesting two separate sources of revelation, the classical or traditional conception nearly vanished from the highly polemical theology of the Counter Reformation. Tavard goes so far as to suggest that a careful study "would show that the main post-Tridentine theologians misinterpreted the formula of the Council."[31] He maintains that for the most part, later Catholic theology followed these mistaken formulations and asserted that Scripture and tradition constitute two sources of revelation.[32] In addition, in response to the Protestant denial of the authority and

[27]For a brief commentary on the doctrinal position of Trent on tradition, see Joseph Ratzinger, "On the Interpretation of the Tridentine Decree on Tradition," in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 50-78.
[28]For a discussion of the council's deliberations on Scripture and tradition, see Tavard, *Holy Writ*, 195-209.
[29]H. Denzinger and A. Schonmetzer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 33rd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 1501.
[30]Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 89.
[31]Tavard, *Holy Writ*, 244.
[32]Ibid., 245.

infallibility of the Catholic hierarchy, Catholic polemical theologians placed great emphasis on this doctrine as an extension of the ongoing authority of the church's tradition.[33]

The post-Tridentine Catholic position on tradition that arose in due course as a response to *sola scriptura* occasioned, in turn, the hardening of the Protestant attitude toward tradition. The Reformers asserted that theology must be subject only to the direct authority of God, who has spoken through the Bible, and not to any merely human authority, such as the creeds and traditions of the church. They maintained that their teachings were based solely on Scripture apart from any other source.[34] Moreover, they developed hermeneutical principles, such as the perspicuity of Scripture and the idea that Scripture interprets Scripture, aimed at minimizing the need for human interpretation.[35] In accordance with these principles, Protestant thinkers rejected the Catholic claim to an infallible ecclesiastical magisterium, arguing instead that the only infallible interpretive authority for Scripture is Scripture itself. In this way, Protestant theologians believed that they had secured the sole authority of God in the church and that they could access divine commands and instructions in a relatively unmediated fashion through the Bible, without recourse to human traditions, which are subject to error.[36]

On the basis of loyalty to Scripture the Reformation mounted a serious theological challenge to tradition. Since the sixteenth century, Protestants have generally looked on tradition with considerable suspicion. The constant polemic against the Catholic position became, and continues to be in some contexts, a staple of Protestant theological exposition. In many respects, the denial of tradition as an authoritative source for theological construction has even constituted the Protestant raison d'être. This negative attitude toward tradition born in the Reformation came to maturation in three contexts: the elimination of tradition in Anabaptist theology, the devaluation of tradition in Protestant orthodoxy and the undercutting of tradition in the Enlightenment.[37] The influences of these three contexts on

[33]James P. Mackey, *Tradition and Change in the Church* (Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum, 1968), 138-39.
[34]Pelikan, *Vindication of Tradition,* 11-12.
[35]For a brief discussion of hermeneutics in the Reformed confessions, see Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 38-41.
[36]Ibid., 42-43.
[37]For a brief overview of these developments, see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* 102-5.

the formation of North American evangelicalism coupled with its own particular historical trajectory led to the virtual elimination of tradition in most evangelical thought.[38]

Reconstructing *Sola Scriptura*: Scripture and Tradition

Scripture must be interpreted, and this activity is always shaped by the theological and cultural context within which interpreters participate. It is simply not possible to step back from the influence of tradition in the act of interpretation or in the ascription of meaning. Interpretive communities that deny the reality of this situation and seek an interpretation unencumbered by the "distorting" influence of fallible "human traditions" are in fact enslaved by interpretive patterns that are allowed to function uncritically, precisely because they are unacknowledged. Such a mindset has been labeled by Richard Lints as "antitraditional traditionalism," in which the disdain for tradition becomes an ironic form of tradition.[39] Trevor Hart comments that the notion of a "pure" reading of the text "must be shown up for the self-deception that it is."[40]

While recent conversations between Catholics and Protestants about the relationship between Scripture and tradition have started to close the breach created in the sixteenth century, significant differences still remain, such as the question, which has priority, Scripture or the church? This fundamental difference still animates contemporary dialogues between Catholics and Protestants. However, posing the question in this manner is ultimately unhelpful in that it rests on foundationalist understandings of the derivation of knowledge. Shifting to a nonfoundationalist conception can assist in moving the discussion beyond this impasse.[41]

The Protestant principle of authority as articulated in the Westminster Confession embodies the classic Reformation link between Word and

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[38]Richard Lints notes three fundamental characteristics of contemporary evangelicalism that work against the appreciation and appropriation of tradition: the emphasis on inductive methods of Bible study, the pervasive parachurch or transdenominational orientation of the movement and its "ahistorical devotional piety." Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 92.

[39]Ibid., 91.

[40]Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 167.

[41]For an overview of theology from a nonfoundational perspective, see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 28-54.

Spirit.[42] The close connection that the Reformers sought to maintain between these two means that the authority of Scripture is not ultimately invested in any particular quality that inheres in the text itself, but that its authority is based on the work of the Spirit who speaks in and through the text.[43] Scripture is authoritative because it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. That is to say, the authority of the Bible is ultimately the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is.[44]

This Reformation understanding of the relationship between Word and Spirit suggests the possibility of a parallel connection between the Spirit and tradition. The pathway to such an understanding, however, proceeds indirectly, through ecclesiology. The same Spirit whose work accounts for the formation of the Christian community also guides that community in the production and authorization of the biblical texts. This characterization of the role of the Spirit points toward an appropriate pneumatological-ecclesiological understanding of tradition.

Crucial in the development of such an understanding is the observation of Catholic theologian Avery Dulles, who speaks about the process of "traditioning," which began before the composition of the inspired books and continues without interruption through the ages.[45] This stands as a reminder that the community precedes the production of the scriptural texts. In a certain sense, the faith community was responsible both for the content of the biblical books and for the identification of particular texts for inclusion in an authoritative canon to which the community has chosen to make itself accountable. Apart from the Christian community, the texts would not have taken their particular and distinctive shape. Apart from the authority of the Christian community, there would be no canon of authorized texts. In short, apart from the Christian community, the Christian Bible would not exist.

Viewed from the historical perspective, the Bible is the product of the community of faith that produced it. The compilation of Scripture occurred within the context of the faith community, and the biblical documents represent the self-understanding of the community in which they

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[42]*The Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.10, in *The Creeds of the Churches,* 3rd ed., ed. John H. Leith (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 196.
[43]Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1959), 28.
[44]On the use of Scripture in theology, see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* 57-92.
[45]Dulles, *Craft of Theology,* 96.

were developed. As Paul Achtemeier notes, the

> major significance of the Bible is not that it is a book, but rather that it reflects the life of the community of Israel and the primitive church, as those communities sought to come to terms with the central reality that God was present with them in ways that regularly outran their ability to understand or cope.[46]

The Scriptures witness to the claim that they are the final written deposit of a trajectory or a traditioning that incorporates a number of varied elements in their composition, including oral tradition and other source documents. The community of faith recognized these writings as authoritative materials, and these materials in turn were interpreted and reapplied to the various contemporary situations. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the community engaged in the task of preserving the canonical documents for the sake of the community's continuity. These writings contain the literary witness to the events that had given shape to the community, the prophetic interpretation of those events and the various context-sensitive instructions regarding the implications of these events to the community's ongoing life.

That same faith community has corporately confessed the Spirit-inspired character of the canonical texts as a distinctive collection of documents to which it makes itself accountable.[47] Our awareness of the role of the community in the production of the writings of Scripture, that is, to the process of traditioning present already within the biblical era, leads to a broader concept of inspiration. While inspiration includes the composition of particular writings produced by individuals, it also incorporates the work of the triune God in the midst of the Hebrew and early Christian communities, leading these people to participate in the process of bringing Scripture into being. By extension, the direction of the Spirit permeated the entire process that climaxed in the coming together of the canon as the book of the Christian community. Thus, although the church precedes Scripture chronologically and is responsible for its formation, it has nevertheless, by its own corporate affirmation in the establishment of the canon, made itself accountable to Scripture as the norming norm for its life, faith

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[46]Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 92.
[47]Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 19.

and practice. In this sense, the text produces the community.

What unifies this relationship between Scripture and communal tradition of the church is the work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who stands behind 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 as that community's authoritative texts. The community found these texts to be the vehicle through which they were addressed by the Spirit of God. The illuminating work of the Spirit brought forth these writings from the context of the community in accordance with the witness of that community. This work of illumination has not ceased with the closing of the canon. Rather, it continues as the Spirit attunes the contemporary community of faith to understand Scripture and apply it afresh to its own context in accordance with the intentions of the Spirit.

The contemporary process of illumination parallels that experienced by the ancient faith communities insofar as the Bible contains materials that represent the appropriation by the community of the writings and oral traditions of their heritage, some of which are rejected as being contrary to the established trajectory of the community. Hence, the Scriptures contain sharp critique and condemnation of some of the attitudes and actions of the ancient faith communities. At the same time, however, there is also a significant difference between the experience of the ancient faith communities and our relationship to Scripture. The people of Israel and the early Christian communities engaged in the interpretive task *within* the process of the formation of the canon. After the closure of the canon, the Christian community receives the illumination of the Spirit speaking through canonical Scripture. Thus, in terms of the basic character of the relationship between Scripture and the tradition of the church, canonical Scripture is, on the one hand, constitutive of the church, providing the primary narratives around which the life and faith of the Christian community is shaped and formed and, on the other hand, is itself derived from that community and its authority. In the divine economy Scripture and tradition are in this manner inseparably bound together through the work of the Spirit.

For this reason, to suggest that the Protestant slogan *sola scriptura* implies an authority apart from the tradition of the church, its creeds, its teachings and its liturgy is to transform the formula into an oxymoron.[48]

[48]Robert Jenson, *The Triune God,* vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 28.

Separating Scripture and church in such a manner was certainly not the intention of the Reformers. Indeed, Oberman contends that the issue of the Reformation was not Scripture *or* tradition but rather the struggle between two differing concepts of tradition.[49] Commenting on the role of the community in the process that led to the production and identification of Scripture, Achtemeier writes,

> If it is true, therefore, that the church, by its production of Scripture, created materials which stood over it in judgment and admonition, it is also true that Scripture would not have existed save for the community and its faith out of which Scripture grew. That means that church and Scripture are joint effects of the working out of the event of Christ.[50]

This "working out" is carried on under the guidance and illumination of the Spirit.

In this conception, the authority of both Scripture and tradition is ultimately an authority derived from the work of the Spirit.[51] 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, non-inferential and 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 central components within an interrelated web of beliefs that constitutes the Christian faith.[52] 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. A nonfoundational understanding of Scripture and tradition locates ultimate authority only in the action of the triune God. If we must 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 of the triune God who is disclosed in polyphonic fashion

[49]Heiko A. Oberman, "Quo Vadis? Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Generis," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16 (1963): 225-55.

[50]Achtemeier, *Inspiration of Scripture,* 116.

[51]For a treatment of Scripture in the context of the work of the Holy Spirit, see Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 494-527.

[52]On the use of a web as a metaphor for knowledge and the knowing process, see W. V. O. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (New York: Random House, 1970).

through Scripture, the church and even the world, albeit always in accordance with the normative divine self-disclosure through Scripture.[53]

TRADITION: THEOLOGY'S HERMENEUTICAL TRAJECTORY

The Spirit who guided the community in the process of the composition, compilation and canonization of Scripture continues to direct the contemporary embodiment of that community by speaking through Scripture. In this way, the Spirit enables the church to fulfill its task of living as the people of God in the various historical and cultural locations in which it is situated. This broader conception of the Spirit's illumination in the production of Scripture and the ongoing life of the community leads not only to a more adequate understanding of the process by which Scripture came into being, but also to a greater appreciation for the theological significance of the tradition of the Christian community.[54] A nonfoundationalist conception of tradition views the tradition of the church above all as the hermeneutical trajectory in the context of which the theological task of the community is pursued. What remains to be noted are the central characteristics of tradition when the concept is viewed from this perspective. The nonfoundationalist turn suggests that church tradition provides a hermeneutical trajectory for theology that is open-ended, eschatologically directed and performatively operative.

The first characteristic of tradition as hermeneutical trajectory emerges from the acknowledgment that all theological formulations are culturally embedded. This observation stands as a challenge to those Christian confessional bodies and denominations that ascribe the kind of defining authority to past confessional statements which demands complete subscription to these formulations as a prerequisite for participation in the fellowship. Such groups run the risk of transforming their creeds, even if unofficially or unintentionally, into de facto substitutes for Scripture. Furthermore, in the interest of securing an absolute and final authority in the church, this approach can actually hinder such a community from hearing the voice of the Spirit speaking in new ways through the biblical text.

A helpful distinction may be drawn between "open" and "closed" con-

[53]On the development of the notion of God as the foundation for theology in the thought of Karl Barth, see William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

[54]For a fuller account of the role of tradition in theology, see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* 112-29.

fessional traditions. Closed traditions hold a particular statement of beliefs to be adequate for all times and places. In contrast, an open tradition, in the words of Jack Stotts, "anticipates that what has been confessed in a formally adopted confession takes its place in a confessional lineup, preceded by statements from the past and expectant of more to come as times and circumstances change."[55] An open confessional tradition understands its obligation to develop and adopt new confessions in accordance with shifting circumstances. Although such confessions are "extraordinarily important" for the integrity, identity and faithfulness of the church, "they are also acknowledged to be relative to particular times and places."[56] A nonfoundational understanding of tradition is by its very nature "open." This openness, in turn, preserves the dynamic nature of tradition.

To understand the tradition of the church as providing a hermeneutical trajectory is to acknowledge the importance of tradition without elevating it to a position of final authority because of the ongoing life of the church as it moves toward its eschatological consummation. Throughout the course of the ebb and flow of church history, the Spirit is at work completing the divine program and bringing the people of God as a community into a fuller comprehension of the implications of the gospel. This activity of the Spirit will reach consummation only in the eschatological future. Until then the church must grapple with the meaning and implications of the biblical message for its context as it listens patiently and expectantly for the voice of the Spirit speaking afresh through Scripture and yet in continuity with the Spirit-guided trajectory of Christian tradition.

Gabriel Fackre describes the ongoing theological dynamic that characterizes the life of the church and contributes to the development of church tradition prior to the consummation:

> The circle of tradition is not closed, for the Spirit's ecclesial Work is not done. Traditional doctrine develops as Christ and the Gospel are viewed in ever fresh perspective. Old formulations are corrected, and what is passed on is enriched. The open-endedness, however, does not overthrow the ancient landmarks. As tradition is a gift of the Spirit, its trajectory moves in the right direction, although it has not arrived at its destination.[57]

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[55]Jack L. Stotts, "Introduction: Confessing After Barmen," in Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. by John Hoffmeyer (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), xi.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Fackre, *Christian Story*, 18-19.

In short, at the heart of tradition and of the role of tradition in theology is the eschatological directedness of the Spirit's work in guiding the community of faith into the purposes and intentions of God that constitute a divinely given telos which is ultimately realized only at the consummation. The eschatological-directedness of the community as a whole gives a similar character to the theological reflection that becomes church tradition.

One final aspect of the function of the hermeneutical trajectory in the task of theology remains to be noted. This dimension emerges through the metaphor of performance.[58] Tradition provides an interpretive context for the task of living out or "performing" the deepest intentions of an established, historical community. The ultimate purpose of theology is not simply to establish "right belief" but to assist the Christian community in its vocation to *live* as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated. The goal of theology is to facilitate and enable authentic "performance" of the Christian faith by the community in its various cultural locations. Tradition provides an essential component in this process.

Like a Mozart symphony that has only one score but many possible interpretations, so the text of Scripture has been subject to numerous interpretations over the centuries. While the score of the symphony is authoritative, it demands performance in order to realize the intention for which it was produced, and performance requires interpretation. However, not all interpretations of Mozart have equal integrity in the history of the performance of his works; some are too radical or idiosyncratic. Determinations as to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of particular interpretations and performances emerge in the context of tradition. Frances Young offers a helpful perspective on the performative metaphor. She writes,

> For classic performance, tradition is indispensable. A creative artist will certainly bring something inspired to the job, but an entirely novel performance would not be a rendering of the classic work. Traditions about appropriate speed and dynamics are passed from master (or mistress) to pupil, from one generation to another, and a radical performance will be deliberate reaction against those traditions if it violates them.[59]

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[58]For the development of the metaphor of performance with respect to Scripture, see Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990).

[59]Ibid., 45.

The tradition of the Christian community functions in much the same manner. It establishes a context for authentic interpretation and performance of the biblical message and its implications, which allows for creativity in addressing new situations while providing a basis for identifying interpretation that is not consonant with the historic position of the community.[60]

N. T. Wright suggests a model of biblical authority that moves along similar lines.[61] He uses the analogy of a five-act Shakespeare play in which the first four acts are extant but the fifth has been lost. In this model the performance of the fifth act would be facilitated not by the writing of a script that "would freeze the play into one form" but by the recruitment of "highly trained, sensitive, and experienced Shakespearean actors" who would immerse themselves in the first four acts and then be told "*to work out a fifth act for themselves.*"[62] The first four acts would serve as the "authority" for the play, but not in the sense of demanding that the actors "should repeat the earlier parts of the play over and over again." Instead, the authority of these extant acts would consist in the fact of an

> as yet unfinished drama, which contained its own impetus, its own forward movement, which demanded to be concluded in the proper manner but which required of the actors a responsible entering in to the story as it stood, in order to first understand how the threads could appropriately be drawn together, and then to put that understanding into effect by speaking and acting with both *innovation* and *consistency.*[63]

Wright then suggests that this model closely corresponds to the pattern of the biblical narratives. Such a model brings the role of Christian tradition in the task of theology into sharp relief. A key component of Wright's model, although not one he emphasizes, is the role of tradition. His actors were not only immersed in the first acts of the play, the textual authority, but also in the Shakespearean interpretive *tradition*, which also functions in an authoritative fashion in the performance of the final act.

In this conception, the Christian tradition provides a spiritually animated, historically extended and socially embodied context in which to interpret, apply and live out the communally formative narratives contained

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[60]Ibid., 45-65.
[61]N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative," *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.
[62]Ibid., 18 (emphasis in original).
[63]Ibid., 19 (emphasis in original).

in the canonical texts. The function of Scripture as the norming norm for Christian faith and life affirms the appropriateness and continuing usefulness of the formula *sola scriptura* by evangelical Protestants as a means of identifying the unique and particular centrality of the Bible for the Christian community. However, conceptions of *sola scriptura* that serve to marginalize or eclipse the significance of Christian tradition in the life of the church, either directly or indirectly, must be abandoned. As Williams concludes, "*sola scriptura* cannot be rightly and responsibly handled without reference to the historic Tradition of the church, and when it is, any heretical notion can arise taking sanction under a 'back to the Bible' platform."[64] Rather, Scripture and tradition must function together, each in its proper fashion, as coinherent aspects of the ongoing ministry of the Spirit. Viewed in this fashion, the Christian tradition provides a crucial, indispensable and authoritative hermeneutical context and trajectory for the life and witness of the church.

[64]Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 234.

11

Canonical Unity and Commensurable Language

On Divine Action and Doctrine

DANIEL J. TREIER

Either the bread turns to flesh, and the wine to blood, or it does not; it cannot do so in Rome, but not in Canterbury. Either Christ made Peter and his successors the foundation stone of faith, conferring on them all authority in matters spiritual, or he did not; Our Lord did not tell Peter he would have authority over all the world except for those parts of Europe which think differently.

ANTHONY WOOD, A CHARACTER IN *AN INSTANCE OF THE FINGERPOST* BY IAIN PEARS

Having forsworn "the scandal of the evangelical mind" in biblical studies and theology, evangelicals now wonder about faithfulness to their heritage. Does acknowledging the human authorship and cultural complexity of theological systems necessarily diminish biblical thinking and theological conviction? Must we, in other words, choose either a wooden propositionalism or the worst pitfalls of postmodernity?[1]

On that question, a recent evangelical conversation about theological method has interacted with George Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" view of doctrine.[2] This essay engages that conversation in tandem with the

[1]Thanks to Kevin Vanhoozer and Scott Swain for reading earlier versions of this essay. (The original fully developed and more defensible version is over twice as long.) Both of them think that faults remain, for which they should not be blamed. For many of its virtues they deserve the credit, especially since (to follow Mikhail Bakhtin) any utterance is a reply to prior utterances!

[2]John G. Stackhouse Jr., ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000); George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

question of Scripture's unity. Our subtext will be that evangelicals do not betray their heritage by acknowledging the human authorship and cultural complexity of biblical texts and theological systems. Rather, the evangelical heritage allows for this acknowledgment while making an important contribution to the wider theological world. By learning from our doctrine of Scripture that human authorship can be fostered, with cultural complexity superintended, by God, we can develop a doctrine of doctrine that forestalls any radical incommensurability of theological language across time and place.

In other words, the best of recent thinking about canonical unity furnishes systematic theologians with a model for understanding the adequacy and stability of doctrine as an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. This is significant because, to date, evangelical appropriations of a cultural-linguistic approach could leave us with "worlds" of theological language—either of the canon or of the eschatological Christian community—that are not sufficiently linked to the present worlds in which we speak.

Evangelical Theology and the Cultural-Linguistic Turn

What is linguistic incommensurability, and why is it actually a problem? On Lindbeck's view, the Christian religion is like a culture, having its language, which shapes thought and experience before reflecting and expressing them. Doctrine is the second-order grammar that sets the rules for proper, culturally literate first-order religious speech. His famous example concerned a Crusader claiming "Christus est Dominus"—"Christ is Lord"—while cleaving an infidel's skull: was the claim true or false? As a doctrine, the statement would be neither; it would be a grammatical rule, like "subjects and verbs must agree in number."[3] As religious speech, the statement would be assessed for its fit with life in the Christian culture (*intrasystematic* truth); then we would ask the true-or-false question of Christianity as a whole religion (*ontological* truth).

[3]An example from David K. Clark, "Relativism, Fideism and the Promise of Postliberalism," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation,* ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 113.

At least two arguments make a cultural-linguistic approach, with the resulting possibility that the Crusader's claim was simply false, quite appealing. Bruce Marshall, one of Lindbeck's ablest defenders (and, some might say, revisers), argues throughout his recent *Trinity and Truth* that an important implication of Christian practice lies in fixing the meaning of Christian beliefs.[4]

> This is not a mere pragmatism. Alternatively, to indulge the theological suspicion that because the world is arranged in such a way that Christ is the Lord, no one can ever say "Christus est Dominus" and have it come out false, is therefore to claim either that this sentence is true regardless of what it means (which is absurd) or that the practices of the people who speak it cannot make any important difference to what it means.[5]

If linguistic meanings are practice-ridden in this way, then a second point favoring the cultural-linguistic is that the practices of our lives are language-ridden. Some evangelical theologians, notably Kevin Vanhoozer and Stanley Grenz, are attracted to these two points.[6] Vanhoozer's view of doctrine, as instruction for proper participation in the drama of redemption, capitalizes especially on the first point, the practice-riddenness of linguistic meaning, replacing the merely scientific or technical knowledge of propositionalism with a full-orbed Christian wisdom. Grenz's view of doctrine, as the articulation of the Christian belief-mosaic, acknowledges especially the second point, the language-riddenness of Christian living. Grenz's theology engages cultural contexts with a particularity of the Spirit's speaking and sees our speech as the ongoing creation of the eschatological linguistic "world." Neither of these theologians uncritically embraces Lindbeck without remainder; nevertheless, both have apparently made the cultural-linguistic turn.

Once we have turned that corner, the question of linguistic commensu-

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[4]Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth,* Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 192.

[5]Ibid., 194.

[6]See the earlier evangelical-postliberal interaction in Phillips and Okholm, *Nature of Confession;* see also Stackhouse's *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* for essays by Kevin J. Vanhoozer ("The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal About the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 61-106) and Stanley J. Grenz ("Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method After the Demise of Foundationalism," 107-36).

rability arises: can different communities talk to each other so as to understand the other's truth claims, or are each community's speech and experience so laden with the structures of cultural practice that its use of language cannot be compared with the other's?[7] This question of linguistic commensurability is a problem in at least three ways.

First, Vanhoozer does not explain how we are linked to the linguistic world(s) of the Bible that we ought to indwell. If linguistic worlds are not commensurable because of particular cultural practice, then how can we appropriate the Bible's meaning? (Or, since he would insist that we can responsibly interpret the Bible, to what extent does he really embrace the significance of Christian practice for theological language?)[8] Second, Grenz emphasizes the Spirit's leading us to articulate Christian beliefs so that the eschatological world is constructed in the church. But if language use is not commensurable, then Grenz's view faces two problems. The first problem is that his caution about the Spirit not speaking against the Bible is moot, because we cannot actually check; that is, we do not know how to recognize when our world belongs to the eschatological world or how to falsify a world of our making that contradicts the Bible's world.[9] The sec-

[7]Aside from postmodern philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard who are relevant to this discussion, the theological questions may be illustrated in the criticisms of Lindbeck by David S. Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). Here Lindbeck is faulted for not attending *enough* to the particularities of context and commitment, thus failing to realize how the resulting linguistic equivocity and dynamism do not allow his rather Kantian doctrinal "rules" to come clear or to function like rules.

[8]See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), as well as his subsequent essays; in addition, see the representative collection of his work, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002). His *Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, forthcoming) seeks to address this.

[9]Grenz cautions that the Spirit's speaking "does not come as a speaking against the text," yet he describes its "specificity" as necessitating "conversation with culture and cultural context" (Grenz, "Articulating," 127-28). Here the culture is not simply the Christian culture but the larger (socially constructed, presumably) world; elsewhere in his use of speech-act philosophy, Grenz strongly prioritizes the perlocutionary act (the speech's effects) and may adopt a strange notion of the illocutionary (the force or act done in the propositional content) that downplays the text's role in the Spirit's speaking. (In his essay "The Spirit and the Word: The World-Creating Function of the Text," *Theology Today* 57 [October 2000]: 357-75, he speaks somewhat vaguely about the illocutionary act of "addressing us"; the charitable interpretation is that this obliquely refers to the traditional variety of illocutionary forces, not to a generalized illocutionary address.) In any case it seems that the text provides locutionary matter but not illocutionary form or force.

ond problem is this: how are world Christians—scattered across times and places—to interact with their various cultures and still construct one world?[10] If linguistic worlds are not commensurable due to particular cultural practice, and we remove the abstraction labeled "Christianity" in favor of the actual human agencies known as "Christians" and "churches," then we are left with many, many "Christian" worlds whose language use does not coordinate.

In other words, neither Vanhoozer nor Grenz has fully explained how we should relate the one world they prize—the canonical or the eschatological—to the many worlds in which we live. Additionally, this "world" problem hits closer to home in a third way. John Milbank has noted that each of us holds multiple subjectivities in our heads—we play multiple language games or indwell multiple cultures—as we traverse everyday life;[11] yet we also hold our lives and our selves somewhat together across these different worlds. While cultural-linguistic worlds shape experience, they do not so determine or particularize experience that none of our worlds can interact: at least they interact inside our heads. We therefore need some coherent vision to shape the different roles we play in life. In fact, if a culture's language shapes experience as Lindbeck thinks, then his ecumenical impulse regarding doctrine is only a mixed blessing: Do different conceptual articulations mask an underlying unity of cultural-linguistic practice (as he would often like to suppose), or do the different articulations actually prestructure different practice (in which case ecumenism is potentially disastrous, because someone might break the rules)? How would we know the difference? If doctrine is about rules but the flow of language is so particular, how can we even know what the second-order rules are? Is Christianity as religion a cultural-linguistic system, or is Christianity actually embodied and entangled in a host of such systems, both

[10]Grenz and his coauthor certainly think that Christian theology needs to be public, carrying with it "an implicit claim to be articulating a belief-mosaic that is 'for all' in the only way that any claim to universality can be made, namely, as the belief-mosaic of a particular believing community" (Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 26). If such is the only way to make a universal claim, nevertheless they have not fully explained whether or how such claims can cross cultural-linguistic boundaries in a meaningful fashion.

[11]John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 341-43.

linguistic-doctrinal and cultural-practical?[12]

Now if I have argued that linguistic incommensurability is a problem regarding the canonical-linguistic world(s), the eschatological world and worlds in between, it is not to criticize either Vanhoozer's or Grenz's emphases. It is, rather, to suggest that each of them holds up before us one end of a great chain, and each end of the chain is important. Yet there is entirely too much slack in the middle, and we should pick up that slack.

To link the worlds of this great chain, the church, truth must pass through our current language "between the times." Maintaining *both* the importance of practices in context *and* a certain stability of Christian identity requires that this passing through present language and practice involve the practice of passing on Christian doctrine. Here Reinhard Hütter's argument is helpful: he argues that the relative stability or permanence of doctrines—not just as rules but as rules in their linguistic expressions—should be seen as a present work of the Holy Spirit's mission. The Spirit presently works to create the church through particular practices, which are *"distinct, describable, and meaningful contexts of action that are cooperatively and implicitly ordered and regulated."*[13] Appropriate human action is either anticipation of or response to divine action, but "if God's action in principle has never nor will it ever tie itself to any human action, then God's actions can be conceived only as becoming evident as God's self-manifestation in the interiority of the believer."[14] So church practices are the *"mode of enactment"* for the

[12]Philip Kenneson comments on "misreadings of Wittgenstein's comments about language games and forms of life. Given the examples that Wittgenstein offers of the former, it's hard to imagine that his work could be used to sanction the idea that 'Christianity' would qualify as a language game" (Philip Kenneson, "The Alleged Incorrigibility of Postliberal Theology," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996], 273 n. 12). Miroslav Volf also suggests that "it would pay to study carefully the issue of agency in relation to religion as cultural-linguistic system in Lindbeck's proposal. Who or what is doing all these wonderful things Lindbeck says the Christian 'cultural-linguistic system' is doing?" (Miroslav Volf, "Theology, Meaning and Power," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation,* ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996], 264 n. 44). This points to church practices, discussed below.

[13]Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice,* trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 36 (emphasis in original). This is a theological use of Alasdair MacIntyre's now-famous concept.

[14]Ibid., esp. 109. Karl Barth is especially at issue, as a way beyond Lindbeck's formal preoccupation, which loses soteriology; yet Barth's pneumatology is not appropriately "related to or even distinguished from the salvific-economic mission of the Son." His actualism

Spirit's mission; in this way we are not left with the actions of the Spirit "seen and accessed everywhere and nowhere."[15] Doctrine therefore has particular linguistic expressions that "are appropriated by the Holy Spirit at certain times, acquiring thereby a form of permanence in the life of the church."[16]

"Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you . . . with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us," commands St. Paul (2 Tim 1:14 NIV). Yet how would this proposed permanence of doctrine as a church practice relate to *sola scriptura?* Knowing that the Spirit works through binding doctrine is important for the possibility of church identity and theological practice, but we still face the question of recognizing the Spirit's actual work.[17] "What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others," Paul also commands (2 Tim 2:2 NRSV). We know, in other words, that our recognition of the Spirit's work is tied to apostolic teaching (and thus to Scripture), but not simply as a modern epistemological enterprise. The permanence of doctrinal forms must be explained in relation to the church practice of teaching as well as theology.

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regarding the Holy Spirit and revelation engenders "spiritualistic individualism." Yet its opposite, a realism regarding what the church says dogmatically, could engender "ecclesiastical institutionalism." On the pneumatological issue at stake, see ibid., 112. Also, on the one side, see John Milbank, "The Second Difference," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 171-93; Rowan Williams, "Word and Spirit," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 107-27; and David H. Kelsey, "The Bible and Christian Theology," *JAAR* 48 (September 1980): 385-402. On the other side, see John Webster, "The Dogmatic Location of the Canon," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43, no. 1 (2001): 17-43; and Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

[15]Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things,* 127.

[16]Ibid., 156.

[17]Maurice Wiles has claimed, on the one hand, that "the concept of the Spirit's guidance *by itself* can be used to legitimate anything, which means that it can be used to legitimate nothing" (emphasis in original); but on the other hand, he has said that "we cannot lay down any rules about the relation of contemporary doctrine to the affirmations of the past which will not be so general as to offer no practical guidance at all" (Maurice Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978], 13-14). So he thinks that we must judge a doctrinal development as true or false based on "continuity of aim" (Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 173). Grenz and Franke, similarly, suggest that "it is the *intent* of the creeds, confessions, and formulations, and not the specific construction and order of their wording, that is significant" (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* 124, emphasis in original). Is this the most we can say?

So must a choice be made between a static doctrinal unity across time and place (which would deny the significance of practice for the meaning of Christian beliefs) and such a dynamic diversity of practice that doctrines' biblical and traditional formulations have no permanence? Colin Gunton rightly claims that apart from certain modern pathologies "for all their variations, for all their requirement of the exercise of theological judgment and discussion, [credal forms] are fundamentally *stable*."[18] If then we learn from Hütter to think of doctrinal formulations as one facet—one practice among others—of the Spirit's ongoing work in creating the church, still we must consider the question of their unity and diversity, their adequacy and stability, in connection with Spirit-inspired Scripture across time and place. The Spirit's lordship over the practice of teaching means that the linguistic expressions of Christian doctrine—as regulative beliefs—are not entirely left to church politics; they are regulative *because* they are recognized to teach the biblical truth of Christian practice adequately.[19] That requires us to address how the church's diverse cultural-linguistic worlds relate to one another and how they relate to the truth of Scripture.

Canonical Unity, Narrative Identity and the "Cultural-Linguistic" Turn

Such an account of doctrinal unity and diversity between the times may be developed on analogy with theological unity and diversity inside Scripture, thereby addressing both a (roughly) synchronic challenge (such as diversity within the New Testament) and diachronic challenges (such as the old-to-

[18]Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 15 (emphasis in original).

[19]Brian A. Gerrish, "The Nature of Doctrine," *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988): 87-92. A hard and fast distinction between first- and second-order language is troubling; second-order statements really would be "talk about talk" (Clark, "Relativism," 113). This does not seem a fitting paradigm for doctrine, since so many doctrinal statements can double as religious ones (as Lindbeck admits). That second-order statements somehow transcend particular frameworks also belies a hard and fast distinction; at the least, we would have to say that such statements imply indirect or intermediary first-order statements (ibid., 276 n. 26). David F. Ford relates Lindbeck's distinction to his use of three "ideal types" regarding doctrine, and he thinks that Lindbeck is thereby vulnerable to "one-sidedness and misinterpretation," which ignores the possibility of a "more thorough integration of rules, categories, and content" (David F. Ford, "System, Story, Performance: A Proposal about the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology,* ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones [reprint; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1997], 211). Doctrines are, it seems, not simply rules; they are regulative because they are claims about reality believed, claims by which the church not only regulates but passes on its identity.

new covenant transition). Evangelicals have tackled questions about the commensurability of linguistic "worlds" before, in defending our doctrine of Scripture; here we are not seeking to argue directly *for* some account, but *from* recent trends. If these trends are helpful in developing a model for doctrinal identity, then we might have discovered an indirect argument in their favor.

Divine action and diverse canonical voices. First let us consider the more synchronic issue of roughly contemporaneous, yet diverse, canonical voices. On that question, a three-point response is needed.

1. Genre, authority and "conceptual mimesis." We have to acknowledge the past evangelical tendency to move rather straightforwardly, by induction, from the Bible as "propositional revelation" (esp. the Pauline corpus) to doctrine in conceptual form. Thanks to John Goldingay, David Kelsey and others, we now acknowledge that the canon contains diverse genres and various speaking parts of the human authors vis-à-vis God, which suggest different nuances of authority.[20] Still, these diverse genres and forms of address are all treated as God-given; their authority comes in the mode of the Spirit ministering the Word to us in them.

If then the various models for Scripture and genres in Scripture must be related to a larger rubric such as God's communicative action, what does this mean for doing theology?[21] Vanhoozer has argued for the possibility

[20]See John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), and *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), although he may not account adequately for the notion of "divine discourse" being applied across genres in, e.g., Heb 4:4-5 (on this point, see esp. *Models for Scripture,* 219-21). Nor should the conclusions of David H. Kelsey be embraced *en toto,* but his analysis is quite helpful and his challenge only partly answered (see *Proving Doctrine* [reprint; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999] and his discussion of Warfield in particular). See Maarten Wisse's more recent work, "The Meaning of the Authority of the Bible," *Religious Studies* 36, no. 4 (2000): 473-87, which could profit from considering the Bible in terms of an author's communicative action.

[21]Paul Ricoeur and David Tracy have criticized the tie between divine "revelation" as a model for biblical authority and the dominance of conceptual form in theology (Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," trans. David Pellauer, in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* ed. Lewis S. Mudge [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], esp. 75, 90-91; David Tracy, "Literary Theory and the Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology," *Journal of Religion* 74 [Jul 1994]: 302-19). Moreover, Nicholas Wolterstorff has argued that "speaking" and "revealing" are not quite the same (*Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], esp. chap. 2). Kevin J. Vanhoozer has sought to address these challenges by preserving the "propositional" and "personal" dimensions of revelation under the more biblical heading of "speech" or "communicative action," an embracive notion that retains the unity of an authoritative canon but allows for greater diversity within (see esp. "God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture,* ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994], 178-81).

of "conceptual mimesis," an imaginative redescription of the theology in these genres, using conceptual forms without pretending to any absolute sameness in the redescription. In other words, genres speak theologically in ways that are not fully redescribable in concepts, without imaginative loss.[22] But that is not to say that the diversity is a matter of conflicting canonical voices or of voices that cannot talk with each other. Indeed, God speaks to us in all these voices put together; conceptual redescription helps to reach and teach a Christian vision of the whole, but it does not replace the irreducible role of biblical literary forms.

2. Judgment and "concept." As with genre, so also the conceptual patterns inside a genre can be diverse without forestalling biblical unity. David Yeago has demonstrated with Christology the possibility that similar theological judgments may take different conceptual forms.[23] Conversely, similar conceptual forms may be involved when the biblical voices are diverse. For instance, Paul and James use the same vocabulary of *faith,* and indeed the same Old Testament passages regarding Abraham, in markedly different ways. Yet considering the different questions each addresses, a plausible case can be argued that the biblical voices are complementary rather than contradictory. More importantly, we learn from this example that the practical concerns surrounding theological judgments do shape how words and concepts are used, what they mean and therefore their relevance as God's Word in later contexts.

3. "Dialogic" truth: On questioning and doctrine's "relative adequacy." Relatively synchronic considerations like these underlie recent interest in a "dialogic" notion of truth, which the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin found exemplified in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novels. Sometimes the dialogue appears to be a function of semantic relationships and at other times a function of subject-to-subject relationships.[24] The key ideas are that *any* utterance ulti-

[22]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 12 (autumn 1994): 96-124.

[23]David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings,* ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 87-100.

[24]On semantic relationships, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 118; on subject-to-subject relationships, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* Theory and History of Literature 8, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 183-84.

mately replies to a prior utterance,[25] because of the complex intermingling of language and life, and that some truths cannot be synthesized for comprehension all at once by a single consciousness.[26] Rather, truths are spoken by multiple voiced utterances that come together but also retain their integrity (as opposed to the fusion of dialectic).[27]

These three points suggest that while taking biblical texts seriously has led evangelicals to recognize their diversity, this diversity is an invitation, not an impediment, to systematic theology. By learning from biblical theology the possibilities of genre and the distinction between judgment and conceptual expression, we are learning how important are the questions of contextual practice for theological dialogue. But we also learn from biblical example that such dialogue can produce a true unity.

In fact, a definition of doctrine's "relative adequacy" emerges: Christian teaching has been adequately (not exclusively) stated so long as there are "no more relevant questions to answer."[28] Yet from this literary move we jump to historical concerns: we have to face the possibility that a doctrinal statement can be adequate for a time or can be adequate as one element in a larger whole, but new relevant questions may emerge. On this matter of doctrine's timing, evangelical theology is not so far along.

Divine action and the development of canonical history: Doctrine's "relative stability." How does the "relative adequacy" of doctrine relate to the evangelical claim that the unity of God's revelation "is itself a reflection of the unity of divine activity in history"?[29] The Bible authorizes the quest for a coherent theological vision because its theological framework is tied to a story of creation, fall and redemption, even if (as just noted) the story is told

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[25]Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 38; Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible and Dialogic Truth," *Journal of Religion* 76 (April 1996): 302.

[26]Newsom, "Bakhtin," 292; Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 77-79.

[27]Here the similarities between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Bakhtin would end; if each utterance is a reply because of tradition's givenness, nevertheless Bakhtin emphasizes authorial agency and creative consciousness, resisting the "fusion of horizons." This difference is clear enough, according to Barbara Green, who takes Gadamer's side (Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, Semeia 38 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000], 24).

[28]Developed from Bernard Lonergan by David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity," in *Theology After Liberalism: A Reader,* ed. John Webster and George P. Schner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 349; also Gerrish, "Nature of Doctrine," 88.

[29]Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 74.

in various ways, both its whole and its subplots.[30] Does the passage of time in this story preclude *all* Scripture being profitable for doctrine? The diachronic issue of how the New Testament uses the Old Testament generates specific challenges: Does the apparent creativity with which the Old Testament was read in the early church preclude concern with the "literal sense," perhaps over against traditional community readings? And does fulfillment of various Old Testament texts relativize Scripture's theological authority in relation to "what the Spirit is doing" in redemptive history?[31]

While our overarching claim cannot be that the early church always exegeted the Old Testament in accord with modern critical standards of "meaning" before appropriating its significance, we might claim that their dialogic appropriations of the Old Testament are consistent with its authorial actions and openness to the future of redemptive history. Underlying this claim would be a narrative concept of identity, *ipse* (personal constancy) rather than *idem* (exact numerical sameness) in Paul Ricoeur's terms.[32] That is, ap-

[30]The language of *framework* and *vision* comes from Lints. Philip Clayton, when discussing the possibility of a "pluralistic metaphysics" that would roughly parallel Vanhoozer's "pluralistic systematics," grants the reality that we must allow for multiple explanatory models, while pressing for a unity of thought—toward one model (see Clayton's *Explanation from Physics to Theology: An Essay in Rationality and Religion* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989]; *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000], chap. 1; cf. Vanhoozer, "Voice," 78-81). Whatever general theorists in metaphysics and philosophy of science will say (and there do seem to be problems with a radical incommensurability that some have taken from T. S. Kuhn et al.), a kind of coherence and commensurability in "systematic" theology follows from Christian beliefs about one true God revealing himself in the gospel. If we have learned a soteriological and eschatological reserve about a totally unified vision, nevertheless we must employ certain hierarchies of gospel truths, methods and sources in order to testify about what we have heard (Colin E. Gunton, "A Rose by Any Other Name? From 'Christian Doctrine' to 'Systematic Theology,' " *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 [March 1999]: 4-23). This is to say that disagreements with some of Grenz's present conclusions regarding philosophy of science (see *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000], chap. 7) would not force disagreements about doctrine.

[31]For an instance of how this claim might proceed, note the discussion of Acts 15, and church deliberation about inclusion of the Gentiles, as a possible analogy for church deliberation about inclusion of practicing homosexuals in Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 113-26; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment in the Early Church,* rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 68-108, 144-48. In contrast, Francis Watson's earlier work attempts a law-gospel hermeneutic to keep from pitting canonical texts entirely against one another; while also flawed, this effort seems headed in a more proper direction (Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994], esp. pt. 3).

[32]Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* trans. Kathleen McLaughlin Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

propriations of the Old Testament are speech actions, as are the Old Testament texts themselves. Just as one can look to a pattern of actions in order to discover the *ipse*-identity of the human self, so also one can look to the pattern of speech actions that constitute a text's performance and thereby infer the *ipse*-identity of the text's meaning (as communicative action).[33]

A narrative concept of identity has already been suggested by Vanhoozer, who links "translation" of texts to "tradition," in connection with meaning:

> *Like tradition, then, translation does not simply repeat the past but rather develops it*. Like tradition, interpretation helps the text survive the passing on of its original context in order to live on. The text does not preempt dialogue but opens it through an overture of meaning that invites a responsible response.[34]

But this promising start must be carried further in two ways. First, the New Testament's use of the Old suggests that the *ipse*-identity of personal constancy pertains not simply to translation but to performance. That is, one could narrate the identity of past communicative action not simply by how the humanly authored texts are translated, but also by how the faith community has appropriated or performed them in redemptive history. This is not to set the Spirit free of the human illocutionary actions he has previously superintended, but to recognize that such actions are extended into new contexts of practice under his lordship as well. And those extensions may in fact be the best way to tell the story of what God says in the texts.[35]

Second, at the heart of this essay's contribution is the extension of narrative identity to doctrine. Here the *ipse*-identity, of personal constancy over time rather than exact sameness, pertains not only to God's communicative action in the biblical canon, but to our communicative action in doctrine—"guar[ding] the good deposit that was entrusted to [us]" (2 Tim 1:14 NIV). From Hütter we have learned to think about this communicative action as part of the Holy Spirit's mission, which helps to justify the application of the biblical model to doctrine. We are the same community as

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[33]I take it that the way in which divine, canonical speech acts supervene on the Bible's human, particular speech acts remains the most challenging question for evangelicals concerning biblical authority, as evident lately in R. W. L. Moberly's review of Kevin J. Vanhoozer's *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* in *Expository Times* 110 (February 1999): 154.

[34]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 392 (emphasis in original).

[35]George Steiner's point remains that all understanding is at root a matter of translation (*After Babel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975], esp. 28), but the translation is often implied rather than explicit and not necessarily a discrete step in a methodical process.

those who first received the apostolic testimony, linked by the Holy Spirit's use of particular practices to shape our identity.

So doctrinal statements have a kind of permanence in extending Scripture's theological judgments, linking the Spirit's future goal and present mission to his past work. Still Scripture is the decisive means for recognizing which communicative action—a matter of culture and language—is truly the Spirit's work. It is appropriate in this manner to fill in the middle of the story, between the canonical-linguistic and eschatological worlds, because doctrine functions as a "social demarcator."[36] In narrating the church's theological judgments via its doctrinal statements, we are indeed narrating its identity vis-à-vis other publics.

Yet we are also narrating its identity as a divided church, a church of differing theological traditions.[37] For this reason it must be insisted that a doctrinal statement is relatively adequate when no more relevant questions emerge in a dialogic understanding of Scripture. From our model of canonical unity we have granted that various conceptual articulations might be relatively adequate on a theological question, or that together they might be relatively adequate even if separately they cannot say everything—and we have granted this because practice shapes meaning. However, in all this Scripture alone has not been denied final authority.

To explain doctrine's "relative stability" in terms of its narrative identity—in terms of the Holy Spirit's maintaining church constancy through particular practices—we must now define *concepts* carefully. Linguist Kathleen Callow suggests that to explain the phenomenon of translation we need "a mental correlate of words which is not language specific."[38]

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[36]Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 37-52.

[37]This problematic dimension of church division must be addressed (as highlighted poignantly by Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998]), especially by evangelicals rethinking their stance toward tradition (e.g., Alister E. McGrath, "Engaging the Great Tradition: Evangelical Theology and the Role of Tradition," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method,* ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000], 139-58; D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999]). But without some continuity between dogma and Scripture "there is no church" anyway (Robert W. Jenson, *The Works of God,* vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 281); doctrinal division must be another aspect of the church's remaining need for redemption.

[38]Kathleen Callow, *Man and Message: A Guide to Meaning-Based Text Analysis* (Lanham, Md.: Summer Institute of Linguistics and University Press of America, 1998), 20.

This correlate, the *concept*, she then defines as a "habitual event" that is acquired "by participation" in various activities.[39] Concepts have "firm cores" of meaning with vast amounts of detail,[40] some of which we draw on in any particular thinking event, in any action of referring.[41] So "concepts are not what we think about; they are what we think with."[42] Concepts are "instruments of understanding,"[43] understanding which consists of theological judgments that have "intersubjective availability" and are thus presentative-communicative.[44]

By seeing concepts as habits for thinking events, habits or "social skills" formed amidst practice,[45] both the permanent and the performative aspects of doctrinal statements may be understood. In using concepts, which make meaning transferable but are acquired through practice, doctrinal statements can teach relatively stable theological judgments. It is not that doctrine instantiates a theological judgment in the only way possible. But doctrine does instantiate a theological judgment with relative adequacy; and because its concepts form habits of Christian communicative action, doctrine is a way for the Spirit to maintain the church's relatively stable identity, to link the story of the church's theological judgments with the canonical rule of faith.

Merold Westphal is surely right to worry that Christian theology's fixation with propositions tied it too thoroughly to theoretical reason and assorted facts. Still, to fit the needed recovery of practical reason in theology,

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[39]Ibid., 53, 55.

[40]Paul L. Holmer has described concepts as "meaning-complexes" (*The Grammar of Faith* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978], 139).

[41]Callow, *Man and Message*, 57, 64.

[42]Ibid., 65.

[43]David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 169.

[44]Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 305, 334; cf. Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*.

[45]Hans W. Frei, "Barth and Schleiermacher: Divergence and Convergence," in *Barth and Schleiermacher: Beyond the Impasse*, ed. James O. Duke and Robert F. Streetman (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 73. I am inclined to say that concepts are social skills in terms of acquisition via the Spirit's mission, in Christian practices such as reading Scripture. With Wolterstorff, though, we may wish to preserve a realist notion that socially and practically acquired concepts enable discernment of universals in terms of patterns (Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Response to Trevor Hart," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Möller, Scripture and Hermeneutics 1 [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000], 338-39). A theology of wisdom, which this essay has had to forego, might undergird that move.

we must say both that practices "play a constitutive role in generating our meanings and truths . . . [and] that our cognitions feed back into our practices as well."[46] Linguistic contexts are particular, but responsible imagination prevents that particularity from degenerating into a host of private languages.[47] My goal here has been to see doctrinal development as part of the church's communicative praxis, with its concepts being some of the habits the Spirit forms in the church. These habits taught by the church nonetheless remain subject to Spirit-inspired Scripture, with which they should link our thinking and living.

"Worlds" Colliding: From Canonical Language to the Eschatological Culture

To recapitulate the argument then: the cultural-linguistic turn is helpful because of the connection between contextual Christian practices and the meaning of Christian truth claims. This "performative" emphasis, however, must not be taken so far that Christians become self-contained cultural-linguistic "worlds," set off from the canonical, the eschatological or, indeed, all the worlds each of us indwells here and now.

To keep the cultural-linguistic turn from leading evangelicals down the garden path, it has been highlighted that *the* canonical-linguistic world in fact contains many such worlds, worlds that are commensurable across time and place. Likewise the Spirit today can use multiple literary and conceptual forms for the church to actualize similar theological judgments. Moreover, the Spirit can guide the church to new concepts and new judgments that extend biblical truth to answer new questions. This suggests a narrative concept of identity, tied to the personal constancy of God's communicative action. Not only is that a needful supplement of biblical authority onto Grenz's "eschatological realism,"[48] but because doc-

[46]Merold Westphal, "Taking Plantinga Seriously: Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (April 1999): 179-80.

[47]Trevor Hart, "Imagination and Responsible Reading," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation,* ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Möller, Scripture and Hermeneutics 1 [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000], 313, 319; on Ludwig Wittgenstein's private language argument, see John S. Feinberg, "Rationality, Objectivity and Doing Theology: Review and Critique of Wentzel Van Huysteen's [sic] *Theology and the Justification of Faith*," *Trinity Journal* 10 NS (1989): 179-84.

[48]Grenz and Franke suggest that the "singularity" of the canon's voice "does not ultimately rest with the inherent singularity of voice the texts themselves supposedly display. Nor is it dependent on any supposed singularity of the church's decision as to which books are ca-

trine is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, the narrative concept of identity can *also* be applied to the personal constancy of *our* communicative action, supplying the missing links between our worlds and Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic world. The chain of the church must not be broken through failure to pass on its doctrinal identity, a practice using certain conceptual forms that gain some permanence.

Doctrinal "concepts," then, should be seen as habits used in thinking events. Through these habits of Christian practice, thinking and living are regulated and taught together.[49] Thus Vanhoozer and Grenz are quite right in their respective emphases about doctrine. All this essay has sought to add to their conversation is a middle—links in the chain to extend the biblical story that the church indwells, by the Spirit, to its desired end. The Spirit uses conceptual traditions, not as exclusively binding formulations but as habits that, in passing on Christian practice, gain a kind of permanence—relative stability tied to their relative adequacy.

A brief example might help to put flesh on these bones. It was mentioned earlier that Paul and James speak of justification by faith quite differently, but their theological judgments could be complementary rather than contradictory. This is particularly true if their concepts of faith (or their habits of using that word) are put in dialogue. Both draw on the Abraham story, but they do so from different angles: Paul emphasizes the divine verdict of Genesis 15:6 before Abraham's circumcision, whereas James emphasizes the fulfillment of Abraham's fidelity on Mount Moriah.

Why does being able to fix their similar use of the term/concept *justification* from the Old Testament matter? Because we gain thereby a sort of fulcrum to keep their dialogue from teetering into irreconcilable conflict or the impossibility of conversation and understanding. Does it matter that their term/concept *justification* be used as a habit for doctrinal dialogue today? It is certainly true that different Roman Catholic and Protestant lan-

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nonical. . . . Rather, the singularity of voice we claim for scripture is ultimately the singularity of the Spirit who speaks through the texts," in addition to their "embodying a unity of basic purpose" (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* 90). Obviously, the burden of this essay is to extend the unity of the canonical texts themselves beyond "basic purpose" to a stronger harmony of voices and to see that position connected with a view of doctrine.

[49] On the modern split between these in terms of love and virtue and theological knowledge, see Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); in terms of doctrine and ethics, see Stanley Hauerwas, "On Doctrine and Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine,* ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-40.

guages of justification do not preclude somewhat similar understandings of the gospel. Yet it is also true that recent gospel statements that agree on an initial verdict of acquittal do not resolve all underlying practical differences (on, e.g., the sacramental life of the church).

Here we are staking an evangelical Protestant claim to a kind of *sola scriptura* that links us to canonical judgments by narrating a complex identity of doctrine's conceptual habits. Some of these concepts stem rather directly from the canon itself, such as justification by faith. Others arise as the church is led by the Spirit to extend canonical teaching, for instance, in the trinitarian creeds (their concept of *homoousios,* let's say). To borrow language from Milbank, these are "goods which the circumstances gave us occasion to realize,"[50] as via practical reason biblical judgments are rendered on questions from a particular cultural-linguistic context. These conceptual "goods" are then instructive at other times and places. For evangelical theologians to take the cultural-linguistic turn, without finding a link between our concepts today and the habits of the Bible, is to trip up over postmodernity while seeking a detour from propositionalism. Biblical unity-in-diversity models another possibility for thinking about the Spirit's doctrinal work.

Theological judgments about similarities and differences in cultural-linguistic practice—about whether we are performing the drama rightly, to use the current analogy—need not only a script we are free to perform in our worlds, nor simply a commitment to reconstructing that script's self-enclosed world. Rather, an unfolding drama of prior performances links us to the script; in fact, the script sees that unfolding drama as part of the story it tells. The actors, after all, belong to the same company of witnesses, directed behind the scenes by the author. The demands of our audience do not, therefore, tell us how to act, but they do raise questions about how this act is unfolding. Judgments about our role in this performance, which is prior to the ending, are shaped by previous great performances not simply because they give us options for fleshing out the script, but because they link us to its first performers, who were there at the penultimate climax—as the curtain rose on the final act! Doctrine is one of the practices by which God's great theatre company, the church, passes on its gospel legacy and keeps its good name, whether in Rome, in Canterbury or in Wheaton.

[50]Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory,* 354.

12

Scripture, Truth and Our Postmodern Context

DAVID ALAN WILLIAMS

Perhaps nothing is more under attack in our postmodern context than the traditional understanding of truth. Friedrich Nietzsche asked, what is truth? and then answered, "A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people."[1] Richard Rorty suggests that truth is nothing more than whatever your colleagues let you get away with.[2] And on virtually every college campus you can hear someone say, "That may be true for you, but it is not true for me." In this paper I want to address some of the challenges we face as postmoderns talk about truth. I will argue that whereas postmodern talk about truth often seems ludicrous or perhaps even dangerous, it has much to teach us, especially about our own Scriptures.

In this essay, I will focus on changes in the ways we talk and think about truth. Of course, changes in our contemporary talk about *truth* are not in isolation from changes in related areas, such as talk about *rationality, knowledge* and even *reality* itself. Most people, including most evangelicals, find these changes disturbing. They leave us out of sorts, uncomfortable and disoriented. As Barry Harvey notes, postmodern talk "conjures up haunting images of nihilism, relativism, and linguistic idealism."[3] It is my

[1]Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche,* ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann, The Viking Portable Library (New York: Penguin, 1982), 46-47.
[2]Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 176.
[3]Barry Harvey, "Anti-Postmodernism," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation,* ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2000), 1-7.

conviction that if we want to respond faithfully to what is going on in our culture, and particularly if we want to respond faithfully to those with postmodern sensibilities, we need to understand what is happening in regard to truth; and to do that I want us to think more specifically about the language of truth.

We might be tempted to dismiss postmodern sensitivities, suggesting that they are not really concerned with truth at all. We might argue that rather than being concerned with truth, they are only concerned with avoiding truth. I think this is a mistake. I believe that the postmodern context is ripe for a renewed passion for truth. What postmoderns avoid are particular (inadequate) conceptions of truth, especially those that make a claim of totalizing proportions. What they offer us are different ways to talk and think about truth.

To get a handle on the language of truth, we begin by recognizing that for a great many philosophers in the history of Western thought, language in general was taken to be primarily concerned with describing reality.[4] That is, since at least as early as Plato and continuing up to this present time, many have believed that the primary function of language is to "represent" the world.[5] Such an understanding gives primacy to literal language over metaphorical language. It suggests that if you want to speak the truth, you will speak literally. Metaphorical language, as interesting as it is, hides rather than reveals truth. Such an understanding of language is tied together with a whole host of interrelated ideas: *reality* is equivalent to the way things are apart from any particular knower; *knowledge* is contained in linguistic descriptions of that reality, untainted by subjective features of any particular knower; and *truth* is what obtains when you have a correspondence between those linguistic descriptions and reality. In this system each component part reinforces each other part to construct a tightly knit intellectual framework: the realist metaphysic is underwritten by the correspondence theory of truth and a descriptivist theory of language, while the correspondence theory of truth is underwritten by the realist metaphysic and the descriptivist theory of language.

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[4]For a discussion of this and related issues in philosophy of language, see *The Philosophy of Language*, 3rd. ed., ed. A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[5]Perhaps the most thorough recent discussion and critique of this is Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

For the purposes of this paper, it is this framework that constitutes the intellectual structure I will call the modern mind.[6] I believe that it is this intellectual framework that gives the language of truth so much intuitive force. Yet on every front, these intellectual commitments are being seriously challenged. This is the postmodern context, the postmodern challenge. I want to interact with only a small part of this challenge. I will discuss the role of metaphor in language and thought and then in our conceptions of truth.

Metaphorical Concepts

This is not the place to do a thorough description of the history of how we have understood metaphor.[7] In brief, the traditional understanding of metaphor is that a metaphor is an elliptical simile, a way of comparing two things without the use of *like* or *as* in the comparison.[8] As such it is understood primarily as a linguistic device used for stylistic and ornamental affect. Since the metaphor is most fundamentally a comparison, metaphors are often thought to be able to be translated into a literal paraphrase without the loss of any cognitive content. It is this literal paraphrase that is used to assess the "truth" of a metaphor.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson provide a profound challenge to the traditional way that linguists and philosophers approach the significance

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[6]See Nancey Murphy and William McClendon Jr., "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5 (April 1989): 191-214; Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996); and Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism; Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

[7]For a good introductory article on metaphor, see Monroe C. Beardsley, "Metaphor," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 5:284-89. For a brief survey of the history of metaphor in the Western philosophical tradition, see Mark Johnson, "Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor,* ed. Mark Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 3-47. For a discussion of the traditional view and its impact on religious discourse, see Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

[8]As are most general claims in philosophy, this one has certainly been challenged in the literature. See, e.g., Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language,* 1-14. Since this is not a paper on the history of philosophical understandings of metaphor, suffice it to say that the traditional view has looked somewhat like the one I am describing. The accuracy of this formulation bears little on the overall argument of the paper. The claim that the "traditional view" presented here is a "straw" construction, in spite of its importance in another context, does not affect the evaluation or implications of the view I will discuss below.

of metaphor.[9] Far from being merely a linguistic device to denote similarities between two different things, metaphor is, Lakoff and Johnson argue, an essential part of our conceptual systems.[10] Metaphors actually structure much of our thinking. Lakoff and Johnson claim that "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature."[11] They argue that far from being a tool to embellish plain literal language, metaphors help us "understand and experience one thing in light of another."[12]

What they argue is that some of our concepts are understood by metaphors and that these metaphors structure our everyday activity. Take for example our concept of *argument*. Even a cursory analysis of the language used to talk about an argument displays that an argument is related to *war*. Think for a moment of the following examples: "Your claims are *indefensible*." "Your *attack* was right on *target*." "I've never *won* an argument with her." What Lakoff and Johnson argue is that the metaphor "argument is war" structures our very concept of an argument. This, however, isn't simply a matter of understanding, for we also *experience* arguments through these metaphorical concepts. For example, we do actually win and lose arguments; we actually go on the offensive and sometimes retreat when things are not going well. Our experiences of arguments will systematically follow the structure of war.[13] Thus, what we actually do when we argue is structured in a similar way to what we do when we carry out war.

This very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one thing structured by another will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. That is, the "argument is war" metaphor highlights the competitive aspect of an argument, while at the same time it hides the cooperative aspects of an argument. Anyone who has been in an argument in which the other person

[9]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999).

[10]Although Lakoff and Johnson present their view as somewhat new, there is evidence that it is not really all that new. Soskice calls their position the "strong metaphor" theory and suggests that it has adherents as diverse as Giambattista Vico, Bruno Snell, Owen Barfield and Jacques Derrida. For her discussion of the view, including a brief mention of Lakoff and Johnson, see Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language,* 74-83.

[11]Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors,* 3.

[12]Ibid., 5.

[13]We should note that this structuring is only a partial structuring. If it were a complete structuring, then it would not be a metaphor but the actual thing.

simply walks away or ignores what you are saying quickly recognizes that arguments require a significant amount of cooperation if they are actually going to be performed. So metaphorical concepts are inherently incomplete. They will always *hide* as well as *highlight*.

A second way in which metaphors can give structure to concepts is spatially. Such metaphors provide spatial orientations to concepts when none literally exist. For example, we might say that the temperature is lower today than it was yesterday or that she has a high IQ. Each of these concepts is governed by the metaphor "more is up, less is down." This is not literal description—large numbers are not spatially higher than small numbers—but rather a metaphorical orientation. There are a host of paired concepts that are conceptualized as being either up or down. For example, *conscious* is up, *unconscious* is down (as in "wake up" and "stop falling asleep"); *rational* is up, *emotional* is down (as in "the conversation fell to an emotional level, but I brought it back up to a rational plane"); *virtue* is up, *depravity* is down (as in "he usually has high standards, but today his mind is really in the gutter").[14] Orientation metaphors are not limited to up/down spatial relations. They can also involve in/out relations (as in "he got in a mess, but she got him out"), right/left relations (as in "he is theologically to the left of me"), center/periphery relations (as in "finding the center of God's will") and front/back relations (as in "put the past behind you and move on").[15]

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[14]Lakoff and Johnson argue, however, that these orientational metaphors are not randomly assigned but rather are grounded in our physical and cultural experience. For example, they suggest the metaphor "more is up, less is down" is grounded in our own physical experience of stacking things. The more blocks a child stacks up, the higher the stack becomes. The frequency of these types of experiences establishes a pattern in our thinking that we then use to understand things which are not literally stacked. We transfer the literal "more blocks make a higher stack" experience to the orientational metaphor "more is up."

[15]Consider the metaphor "future is ahead, past is behind." Physically this is grounded in how we generally move in the direction we are facing. The things ahead of us are moving toward us, or we are moving toward them. Thus, what we are moving toward is ahead of us: "future is ahead." Although this is grounded in our physical experiences of the world, it does not mean that it is necessary to think of the future as being ahead of us. There is evidence that this is not a universal metaphorical orientation. In *Philosophy in the Flesh,* Lakoff and Johnson note that in the Aymara language (a Chilean language of the Andes), the metaphorical orientation of time is reversed from that which is common to most languages. Rather than orienting time by the "future is ahead" metaphor, Aymara reflects the metaphor "future is behind." The Aymara word for time is *pacha*. Future time is *q'ipa pacha,* but *q'ipa* is "back" or "behind." *Maymara* means literally "eye year" or "front year" and is a reference to "last year." On the other-hand, *q'ipa marana* literally translates "back year-in" and means "in the coming year" (see La-

A third way in which metaphors structure concepts is ontologically. An ontological metaphor provides us with the resources to transform our experiences into different types of "things" in order that we might understand and deal rationally with them. "Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them."[16] Consider *inflation* as an entity. It is evidenced in statements such as these: "Inflation is lowering our standard of living." "Inflation is rising." "If there is any more inflation, we'll never survive." "Inflation is backing us into a corner." Metaphors like these are so common, we often fail to recognize that they are metaphors. Think of the way we conceptualize the mind metaphorically. For example, we might think that we speak literally when we say that someone is about to break under tremendous pressure. However, this is an instance of the metaphor "the mind is a brittle object." It is not literally true at all: the mind doesn't literally "break" or "shatter." "Ontological metaphors like this are necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with our experiences."[17]

What we have seen is that metaphors are a much larger part of our language than we might at first suspect. Not only do they provide comparisons, but they sometimes structure the way we understand and experience one thing in light of another. Such structuring affects our lives not only in regard to how we think about certain concepts but also in regard to how we actually experience everyday life. In this sense metaphors have a profound influence on both how we think and how we live.

Understanding Truth as a Metaphorical Concept

I call attention to the role of metaphors in our thinking and in our everyday life so that we can consider the way metaphors function in our thinking about truth. As I said above, I believe that the dominant understanding of truth in the modern intellectual framework, the one that is under such serious attack in recent days, is the correspondence theory of truth. What I want us to recognize is that this notion of truth is structured by a metaphor. To be more precise, the correspondence theory of truth is structured by a whole system of

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koff and Johnson, *Philosophy,* 141). This alternative metaphor is grounded in the physical experience of the future's being unknown to us and more in line with our experiences of things behind us, whereas the past is relatively well known to us and thus before our eyes.

[16]Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors,* 25.

[17]Ibid., 26.

metaphors in which it gains its intelligibility and its persuasive power.

The tagline that often appeared after the opening credits for the ever-popular TV serial *The X-Files* illustrates the dominant way in which our modern mind has come to understand truth: *The truth is out there.* Think for a minute of the metaphors involved in such a statement. Truth is a "thing." It is distant from us. It is hidden from us and hard to find. It must be pursued, searched for, chased after, like an elusive fox, lest it never be attained. When you think you find it, the task is to grasp it; but beware because too often it is not really truth that you have grasped but only an imitation, an appearance, a shadow of truth, perhaps only what you wanted to be true. Truth as a "thing" is part of what Michael Reddy calls the "conduit metaphor."[18]

In this system of metaphors, ideas are objects, linguistic expressions are containers, and communication is sending. This metaphor structures an understanding of the task of education, learning, reading and a whole host of intellectual activities. It shows us what it means to have knowledge. If the ideas are objects, the knowers are subjects. The intellectual task is for the knower, the subject, to grasp as many ideas as possible. Their value, like that of precious gems, is in possessing them. The risk, of course, is that the knower will in some way contaminate the ideas, that the subjective will tarnish the objective. To be educated is to obtain a particular set of these objects. In teaching we take the ideas we possess and put them into words and send them to our students. The students' task is to mine the ideas from our words and possess them for themselves, again without any contamination by the knower.

The metaphor "truth as an object" highlights many important things about truth, yet in our postmodern context we are now becoming more aware of aspects that are hidden by the metaphor. For example, emphasized in the metaphor is the static nature of truth, the distance between the knower and the known, and an independence between the ideas that are true.[19] Let me illustrate how this works. First, truth is static in that it never

[18]Michael J. Reddy, "The Conduit Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought,* ed. A. Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 284-324.

[19]Another way of demonstrating this is to draw on the ocular metaphors that are used for knowledge and truth: Knowledge is a way of seeing. When you see things "as they are," you see truthfully. You have the truth. For a discussion of this see Rorty, *Philosophy;* Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 49-52; and Philip Kenneson, "Can the Christian Faith Survive If Belief in Objective Truth Is Abandoned? A Reply to John Castelein," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 2 (spring 1999): 43-56.

changes. What is true is always true. We may change our perceptions of it, but that which is really true is forever true. Second, the subject must close that distance if the objects are ever going to be possessed. As we say, truth is hard to find. But in highlighting the distance between the knower and the known, the subject and the object, the inextricable link between the knower and the known is hidden.[20] It is the recognition of this link that is so important to postmodern sensibilities. Third, the individuality of the objects is highlighted. Each object is individual and can be grasped and possessed by a knower. Each object can be put into words and sent to another who can then pull the object out and then possess it for herself. But such an atomistic understanding is quite misleading. We are becoming more sensitive to a significant degree of interconnectedness between ideas. This connectedness leads us to believe that to have one is to have a connection with all the rest as well.

I believe that it is precisely this metaphorical conception of truth that is under such serious attack in a postmodern context. Postmoderns are more and more sensitive to the lack of distance between the knower and known, not as a "distortion" of truth or as something that is bad and must be eradicated, but as something that is good, appropriate, even a necessary aspect of truth and knowledge in the fullest sense. What postmoderns are drawn to are metaphors that highlight this interconnection among our ideas and between the knower and that which is known. Two conceptions of truth are gaining popularity in light of these postmodern concerns.

The first conception of truth is a coherence theory of truth. The coherence theory of truth is structured by the metaphor "truth as a web."[21] It highlights the interconnectedness of knowledge and the mutual relationships that develop between and among ideas. It helps us deal with changes in our noetic structure as adjustments while it helps us see how some claims can be the "center" or the "core" of that structure and protected from falsification. It highlights that truth is a matter of the whole rather than the parts by virtue of their relationships within a web. As

[20]For an explication of this link, see Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

[21]See, e.g., W. V. O. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief,* 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1978); and Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in *Relativism: Cognitive and Moral,* ed. Jack W. Meiland and Michael Kraus (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1982). For a general introduction to coherence theories of truth, see Alan R. White, *Truth* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 109-22.

important as this understanding of truth is, I want to focus our attention on the second metaphor that is gaining popularity.

The second alternative that is often attractive to those with postmodern sensitivities is pragmatism. Pragmatic conceptions of truth have for some time challenged this traditional understanding of truth. For example, William James, as early as 1907, argued that it was unhelpful to think of truth in terms of a static relationship between ideas and reality. What he suggested was a dynamic conception of truth where truth actually comes into being: "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events."[22] Pragmatism is governed by a metaphor of "truth is a process" rather than "truth is an object." Such metaphorical constructions produce different intellectual sensitivities. Pragmatism also provides a metaphorical conceptualization of truth that highlights the interconnection between the knower and the known.

Perhaps the best-known postmodern pragmatist is Rorty. Rorty has exerted tremendous intellectual energy pointing out the inadequacies of the correspondence theories of truth and the host of interrelated ideas associated with it. What he offers as an alternative is a concept of truth that focuses on solidarity rather than on objectivity. Rorty wants us to think about truth as an act of commitment to a community of thinkers, an act of solidarity. "Pragmatists would like to replace the desire for objectivity—the desire to be in touch with a reality which is more than some community with which we identity ourselves—with the desire for solidarity with that community."[23]

The metaphorical conception of "truth is solidarity" highlights the way in which believing that something is true is an act of identification with a particular community. For example, to say that Darwinian evolution is true is to tell us more about the communities with which we affirm solidarity than it is a description of how things really are. But such identification is not merely about alliances with particular communities. Such alliances form who we are. They are acts of identity formation. Claiming solidarity with this community becomes a part of who we are. We are

[22]See William James, *Pragmatism,* Great Books in Philosophy (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1991), 22-38.

[23]Richard Rorty, "Dismantling Truth: Solidarity Versus Objectivity," in *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, 4th ed., ed. Louis Pojman (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1999), 197-204.

who we are, in part, because of the communities with whom we identify, because of the ideas we believe to be true.

Highlighting this interconnection between what we believe to be true and who we are helps us explain why we often get so defensive when someone disagrees with us. We try to convince our opponents that we are not attacking them, only their ideas, yet they feel attacked. A pragmatic conception of truth helps us recognize that in a fundamental way we are what we think. We are helped by a metaphorical construction which helps us see that what we take as true is what forms who we are.

Pointing out that the "truth is an object" metaphor hides important things about truth that other metaphors highlight does not necessarily mean that we should discard it or not ever use it again or that we should even avoid it. What it suggests is that by itself, it is inadequate and in need of supplementation. It suggests that other metaphors, which highlight different aspects, are important lest we have an incomplete view of truth. The existence of conflicting aspects within a concept (e.g., that arguments have aspects of both competition and cooperation) is prima facie reason to use more than one metaphorical structure. The fact that truth requires both distance and interconnection between the knower and the known is evidence that we need more than one metaphor for truth.

In the history of philosophy, two rival theories of truth have competed with correspondence. Each of these, I have suggested, is structured by a different metaphor that highlights and hides different aspects of truth. I believe that a full account of truth requires each of them and that this is one of the reasons we find such a broad range of different metaphors related to truth in the Scriptures. It is to the Scriptures that we will now turn.

Scripture and Metaphors for Truth

In this section I will attend to the different metaphors we find in Scripture that relate to truth. I am not attempting to give an account of what truth "means" in Scripture. Such a task would be well beyond the scope of this paper.[24] Nevertheless, there will be connections between the metaphors we see below and the variety of meanings we find in Scripture. As we noticed in our earlier comments about metaphors, we are all too familiar with these pas-

[24]For those interested in such a survey, see Anthony C. Thiselton, "Truth," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 3:874-901.

sages and generally never consider the metaphorical nature of the language.

That Scripture uses the metaphor "truth is an object" which is to be searched for and possessed by the knower is found in a variety of passages:

> Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies. (Gen 42:16)[25]

> So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." (1 Kings 17:24)

> For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter with their tongues. (Ps 5:9)

> Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your ordinances. (Ps 119:43)

> Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth—so that I may pardon Jerusalem. (Jer 5:1)

> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 Jn 1:8)

Note that in each of these examples, truth is metaphorically conceived as a *thing* that can be *located:* it is "in you," "in your mouth" or "taken out of my mouth." It is a thing of value that is to be searched for and hopefully found. Proverbs 23:23 presses the metaphor in an economic direction characterizing "truth" as something which should be bought and not sold: "Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding."

Object metaphors do not always characterize truth as a "static" object. For example, John speaks of truth living in us. For example, "The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever" (2 Jn 1:1-2).

In contrast to this metaphorical construction, there are also metaphors that draw attention to truth being something you do: "truth is an action." Such metaphors strike us as unusual, but they are not uncommon.

> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are truth, and his ways are justice; and he is able to bring low those who walk in pride. (Dan 4:37)

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[25]All quotations are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. (Jn 3:21)
>
> If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true. (1 Jn 1:6)
>
> Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. (1 Jn 3:18)

On two occasions in the New Testament, we actually have a verbal form of truth (Eph 4:15; Gal 4:16). Both instances are participles and give a rather awkward literal reading of "truthing" or "doing the truth." The translation of "speaking the truth" is commonly accepted by translators and fits most appropriately in the Galatians passage. "Doing the truth" fits equally well in the Ephesians context.[26] If this reading is accepted, Paul would be exhorting his readers "Doing (performing) the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

Within this broad metaphor "truth is an action" is a host of metaphors that denote truth as a specific kind of action. In particular, "truth as walking along a path" or "truth as a journey."

> Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. (Ps 25:5)
>
> Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. (Ps 86:11)
>
> Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned. (2 Pet 2:2)
>
> I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. (2 Jn 1:4)
>
> I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (3 Jn 1:3-4)

This is reinforced by metaphors that talk about falsehood as not walking well: "stumbling on the way," "straying from the path" or "turning aside from the right path."

> Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stum-

[26]See, R. G. Bratcher and E. A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* (London: United Bible Societies, 1982), 105.

> bles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter. (Is 59:14)
>
> [Hymenaeus and Philetus] have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place. They are upsetting the faith of some. (2 Tim 2:18)
>
> [People] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. (2 Tim 4:4)
>
> My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. (Jas 5:19-20)

Of course the most important example of the connection between truth and the journey/path metaphor is Jesus' statement in John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Although we need not be in a position of choosing either the object metaphor or the path metaphor, evangelicals dare not deny the significance or the implications of the path metaphor. In fact, I suggest that this metaphorical concept is the one that will most effectively meet the concerns of a postmodern world. In a world that has deconstructed the distance between the knower and the known, Jesus' statement seems that much more apt. Jesus' central claim to *be the truth* demands of us that we follow that path: to know that Jesus is the truth is to walk this path (1 Jn 2:6). This metaphor highlights the reality that there is simply no room for the Christian to "possess" the truth without also being one who walks in the way.

Implications for Understanding Scripture as Truth

The dominant way in which we evangelicals have understood Scripture in relation to truth is through the "truth is an object" metaphor.[27] That is, for Scripture to be true means that (metaphorically) it is a container out of which one can extract ideas that correctly describe reality. The emphasis on inerrancy as an assurance that once one has exegeted the text properly (rather than one's having eisegeted the text), one can "know" that one has objective truth (rather than subjective truth) on whatever subject the author intended to teach, is but one example. Whereas I have no intention of denying the value of such an approach, I do think we need to recognize that the metaphor hides important aspects of biblical truth, so that it can

[27]See, e.g., Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism,* and Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism.*

be supplemented. In particular so that it can be supplemented by a pragmatic emphasis on "truth as an action."

A doctrine of Scripture that is framed by the understanding of "truth as an action" might focus attention on the "performance" or "embodiment" of the text—not as a second logical step (know first, then apply) but as inherent in the knowing. What is exciting to me is that there are a host of resources in Christian scholarship from which evangelicals might find help. For example, we find this kind of emphasis in the liturgical traditions, with their emphasis on the formative role of reading and reciting, as well as in the very structure of the worship service itself. We see this in narrative theology, in the recognition of the narrative structure of our lives and self-understanding. We also see this kind of emphasis in the rise of speech-act theory and in various reader-response theories of interpretation, with their emphasis on the performance and response. Evangelicals are certainly not alone or without resources in pursuing this sort of emphasis.

Perhaps the most interesting development of a kindred approach to the Scriptures by evangelical scholars is that proposed by Stanley Grenz and John Franke in their recent work *Beyond Foundationalism*.[28] In their work, which draws primarily on resources from speech-act theory, they suggest that the truth of Scripture necessarily involves the world-constructing act of the Spirit. As they put it, "This world-constructing act occurs as the Spirit creates a community of persons who live out in the present the paradigmatic narrative of the Bible."[29] This world, which the Spirit constructs here and now, is but a foretaste of that world that is coming and that will be here fully when Christ returns—when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:10-11). In my estimation, such an emphasis is exactly what is needed if we are to take seriously the language of Scripture in regard to how it displays notions of truth.

Regardless of whether one follows the proposal of Grenz and Franke or some other attempt to develop a doctrine of Scripture that takes seriously the importance of the "truth as an action" metaphor, what appears clear to me is that if we are going to take Scripture seriously, we must take this metaphor seriously by resisting the temptation to submit all conceptions of truth to the logic of "truth as an object."

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[28]For a full reference, see n. 6 above.
[29]Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* 83.

Conclusion

Given the importance of metaphors in providing structure to our understanding and experiences of the world—and in particular to our understanding of truth—perhaps Nietzsche was right when he suggested that truth was an army of metaphors which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory. In light of this and the range of different metaphors related to truth that we have seen in Scripture, I have argued that we must resist the temptation to give a "totalizing" definition which assures us that it has provided a complete account. We need to be committed to setting these metaphorical conceptions not in an either-or relationship with each other but rather in a both-and relationship. We need not be put in the situation as to have only one metaphor for truth. Scripture shows us differently. We can recognize the strength and weaknesses of each of these different metaphors by recognizing that *as metaphors* they each hide and highlight at the same time. The fact that Scripture provides a wide range of different metaphors ought not to be denied but rather exploited in addressing the concerns about truth in our postmodern context. Such recognition, I believe, has the potential to transform the life of the church as together we struggle to display Jesus, who is the Truth, for a world that so desperately needs to see him.

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