

THE
SCRIPTURE
CANNOT BE
BROKEN



Twentieth Century Writings on
the Doctrine of Inerrancy

— EDITED BY —

JOHN MACARTHUR

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The Scripture Cannot Be Broken: Twentieth Century Writings on the Doctrine of Inerrancy

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1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy
"A Short Statement"

Introduction

JOHN MACARTHUR

The most important lessons we ought to learn from church history seem fairly obvious. For example, in the two-thousand-year record of Christianity, no leader, movement, or idea that has questioned the authority or inspiration of Scripture has ever been good for the church. Congregations, denominations, and evangelical academic institutions that embrace a low view of Scripture invariably liberalize, secularize, move off mission, decline spiritually, and either lose their core membership or morph into some kind of political, social, or religious monstrosity. That downhill trajectory (what Charles H. Spurgeon referred to as “the Down Grade”) is distinct and predictable. The spiritual disaster looming at the bottom is inevitable. And those who decide to test their skill on the gradient *always* lose control and seldom recover.

Nevertheless, for more than two centuries, an assault on the reliability of Scripture has come in relentless waves from influential voices on the margins of the evangelical movement. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, German *rationalism* gave large precincts of Protestant Christianity a hard push onto the downhill track. Several once-trendy movements have followed the same familiar course. *Modernism* in the nineteenth century, *neoorthodoxy* in the early twentieth century, and *postmodernism* (branded as “Emergent religion”) for the past two or three decades have all proved to be high-occupancy on-ramps for the Down Grade. The leaders and cheerleaders in those movements have all employed essentially the same fundamental strategy and tried to make the same basic arguments. They have all claimed that because human authors were involved in the writing of Scripture, we can expect to find errors in what the Bible teaches. They view the historical data of Scripture with suspicion. They regard the ever-shifting opinions of current scientific theory as more trustworthy than divine revelation. Many are perfectly willing to adjust both the moral standards and doctrinal content of Scripture to harmonize with whatever is currently deemed acceptable in secular society.

Those ideas are typically broached subtly, often accompanied by highly nuanced statements that may initially sound like orthodox affirmations of biblical authority. The purveyors of this kind of skepticism are highly skilled at rhetorical sleight of hand. They will often claim, “I firmly believe in biblical inerrancy, *but . . .*”

Whatever follows that conjunction is usually the true indicator of the person’s actual view on the authority and reliability of Scripture. Some try to obscure their doubts about inerrancy with a carefully nuanced distinction between “infallibility” and “inerrancy.” Others claim they just want to refine and clarify how inerrancy is explained—but what they really want is to soften or dismantle a position they have never really owned. One professor at a leading evangelical seminary wrote an essay arguing that while he personally believes in biblical inerrancy, he thinks evangelicals ought to minimize their emphasis on that article of faith, because the doctrine of inerrancy has sometimes been a stumbling block for seminarians. He feared his students’ faith might be shaken when they encounter hard texts, parallel passages that are difficult to harmonize, or biblical claims that are disputed by critical scholars. Another academic author who says he believes the Bible is inerrant recently wrote a similar article, suggesting that evangelical scholars should regard their belief in the truthfulness of Scripture as “provisional.”

Lately, some have proposed redefining the word *inerrancy* in a novel way purposely designed to take the teeth out of the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. That is the definitive document on the subject. It is a careful, thorough series of affirmations and denials written in defense of historic evangelicalism’s commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The document was designed to be both thorough and precise, eliminating whatever wiggle room scholars on the evangelical fringe had staked out as a platform from which to challenge biblical inerrancy. The Chicago Statement was drafted and unanimously agreed upon by the founding members of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI). It came at the peak of a controversy that had arisen in the wake of Harold Lindsell’s eye-opening 1976 book *The Battle for the Bible*.

Jay Grimstead, one of ICBI’s primary founders, says the Chicago Statement is

a landmark church document . . . created in 1978 by the then largest, broadest, group of evangelical protestant scholars that ever came together to create a common, theological document in the 20th century. It is probably the first systematically comprehensive, broadly based,

scholarly, creed-like statement on the inspiration and authority of Scripture in the history of the church.¹

The members of ICBI could see clearly that a significant erosion of confidence in the authority and accuracy of Scripture had infected mainstream evangelicalism. That trend, they believed, posed a serious threat to the health of every evangelical church and academic institution. It severely clouded the testimony of the gospel, and it directly undermined faith itself. They carefully analyzed the controversy and made a list of fourteen specific points of debate that required definitive answers. They commissioned a series of white papers and sponsored a large number of books aimed at a wide spectrum of readers—ranging from simple material written for lay-people to highly technical textbooks for scholars. Within a decade, they had produced a large body of work, most of which was never rebutted by the skeptics. In fact, most of the voices that had been arguing so aggressively against such a high view of Scripture fell silent. In Grimstead’s words: “There was deathly silence from the liberal side for several years. Inerrancy was once again popular and respected as the historic, orthodox, and scholarly viewpoint.”²

In 1987, its work complete and its goals all accomplished, ICBI formally disbanded.

At the time, many seemed to think the bleeding had been permanently stanchd. Subsequent history has shown that was not the case. Having won a major skirmish in the conflict over inerrancy, evangelicals quickly turned away from the issue. The next two decades saw the evangelical movement carelessly cede the ground won in the inerrancy battle by capitulating to a more pragmatic philosophy of ministry in which the inerrant truth and authority of Scripture were deliberately downplayed (or completely set aside) under the rubric of “seeker sensitive ministry.” Meanwhile, the charismatic movement was making great gains among evangelicals by stirring up an unorthodox interest in private, extrabiblical revelations. Christian publishers produced far more books promoting private, fallible prophecies in the 1990s than on the sufficiency, inerrancy, inspiration, and authority of Scripture. Evangelicals, having decisively won the decade-long debate on biblical inerrancy, seemed to lose interest in Scripture anyway.

Large numbers of today’s evangelical leaders are too young to remem-

¹Jay Grimstead, “How the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy Began,” http://www.reformation.net/Pages/ICBI_Background.htm, accessed Aug. 10, 2014.

²Ibid.

ber *The Battle for the Bible* and the work of ICBI. And many of them are susceptible (if not outright sympathetic) to the same destructive arguments that prompted the inerrancy debate in the 1970s.

Why is the Down Grade so seductive? Why does a low view of Scripture seem so appealing to men whose job is supposed to be the defense and propagation of “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3)?³ How do old, already-answered arguments, shopworn rhetoric, and failed philosophies continually fool each succeeding generation?

One answer, clearly, is that Christians have never been particularly good at learning the lessons of church history. The church, like Old Testament Israel, seems more prone to repeat the sins of our ancestors than to learn from them. We also have to contend with the noetic effects of sin. Sin so clouds the human heart and intellect that we simply cannot think straight or discern truth clearly if our minds are not governed by both the Word and the Spirit. To those who doubt the truth and authority of Scripture, that poses an insoluble dilemma.

But perhaps the most persistent influence that steers otherwise sound Christians onto the Down Grade is a stubborn craving for approval and esteem from academic elitists. Too many Christian leaders wish the wise men, scribes, and debaters of this world would admire them (cf. 1 Cor. 1:20). That, of course, is a vain and foolish hope. Jesus said, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (John 15:19). He further said, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way” (Luke 6:26).

For my part, I have no wish to be thought more sophisticated than Jesus, who said, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35); “Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18); “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Matt. 24:35); “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:17).

To His opponents, our Lord said, “Have you not even read [the] Scripture . . . ?” (Mark 12:10); “Have you not read in the book of Moses . . . ?” (v. 26); “Have you never read . . . ?” (2:25; Matt. 21:16); “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me” (John 5:46); “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from

³ All Scripture quotations in the introduction are from *The New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

the dead” (Luke 16:31); and “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?” (Mark 12:24).

It is the solemn duty of everyone in any kind of ministry to “guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to [us]” (2 Tim. 1:14). That was Paul’s admonition to Timothy. It echoes what he said at the end of his first epistle to the young pastor: “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’—which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith” (1 Tim. 6:20–21). It is clear from the context of both verses that the “treasure” entrusted to Timothy (the deposit that he was commanded to guard) is the full revelation of the gospel, and more specifically, the truth that is recorded for us in Scripture, encompassing both Old and New Testaments. Paul speaks of this treasure as “the standard of sound words which you have heard from me” (2 Tim. 1:13).

That admonition is a plain statement of the central proposition that runs like an unbroken thread through 2 Timothy. Paul is writing his final message to Timothy, and he urges him again and again to stay faithful to the Word of God, handle it carefully, and proclaim it faithfully—because Scripture is God’s Word, and it is the only infallible record of the only legitimate message the church has been commissioned to preach. Paul was not speaking to Timothy about some ethereal body of oral traditions; he wanted Timothy to remain faithful to *the written Word of God*.

In other words, Scripture, and Scripture alone, establishes for all eternity “the standard of sound words.”

Paul’s repeated admonitions on this one central point in 2 Timothy are all familiar: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2:2); “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (v. 15); “Continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (3:14–17); and “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the

word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (4:1–2).

One thing is certain: none of the troubles that currently threaten the strength and solidarity of historic evangelicalism can be dealt with apart from a return to the movement’s historic conviction that Scripture is the infallible Word of God—verbally inspired, totally inerrant, fully sufficient, and absolutely authoritative. We must recover our spiritual forefathers’ confidence in the Bible, as well as their unshakable belief that the Bible is the final test of every truth claim. God’s Word is not subject to human revision. It needs no amendment to suit anyone’s cultural preferences. It has one true interpretation, and because it proclaims its truth with the full authority of God, the Bible also emphatically declares that all alternative opinions are wrong.

Scripture is therefore not to be handled carelessly, studied halfheartedly, listened to apathetically, or read flippantly. Earlier, we saw that Paul exhorted Timothy to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). That, of course, is the solemn and particular duty of every pastor and teacher (James 3:1). But every believer is likewise obliged to study Scripture with the utmost care and diligence.

It is simply not possible to handle Scripture faithfully apart from the unshakable conviction that it is true. How can anyone claim to believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God yet assert that it might contain factual or historical inaccuracies—or regard any other source as more reliable or more authoritative? To suggest that Scripture is God’s Word yet possibly in error is to cast doubt on the omniscience, truthfulness, or wisdom of God. The suggestion is filled with mischief, and all who have ever pursued that course to its inevitable end have “suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith” (1 Tim. 1:19).

With the aim of explaining and defending these principles, we have collected this anthology of articles, chosen for their clarity, readability, and relevance to the current discussion. Most of these essays were written and first published a quarter century ago or more. The fact that the same arguments answered in these chapters have resurfaced and need to be answered again today reflects the tenacity of anti-scriptural skepticism. Sadly, it also reveals the failure of evangelicals to learn from their own history and hold tightly to their core convictions. These answers are timeless.

May you understand that Scripture is the very Word of God; may that conviction be strengthened; and may you be equipped to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3).

Part 1

Historical Perspective

"An Historian Looks at Inerrancy"

HAROLD LINDSELL

Evangelicals and Inerrancy

Previously published as "An Historian Looks at Inerrancy," in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy: Selections from the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 49–58.

During the summer of 1964, *Christianity Today* polled the membership of the Evangelical Theological Society. Its members were asked to designate the major areas of conflict in the theological arena. Two-thirds of the 112 responders to the poll said that biblical authority is the main theological theme now under review in conservative circles in America. The replies left this writer with the definite impression that the overall theological viewpoint of any man will ultimately be a reflection of his answer to the question, "What is the nature of inspiration and authority?"

Now I am not a theologian in the formal sense of that term. However, this does not disqualify me from speaking on the subject of biblical authority, for I shall deal with it in a perspective consonant with my formal training. Just as a judge must be familiar with the law and make decisions about matters outside the realm of his intimate knowledge, so the historian can come to conclusions about men and movements that operate within complex disciplines outside his own competence but that can be subjected to historical scrutiny competently. I speak therefore as an historian, and as a member of that craft I wish to take a hard look at the inerrancy of the Bible, a subject that is intrinsic to the question of biblical authority.

One of the historian's first conclusions is that in every period in the history of man, some central issue has dominated that age. This is true both

for profane and sacred history. We are concerned here with sacred history, and to that area I will limit myself.

Any serious study of the Old and New Testaments will show that the writers devoted little space to the careful formulation of a doctrine of revelation, inspiration, and inerrancy. Nowhere in Scripture is there any reasoned argument along this line such as will be found for justification by faith alone in Romans and for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead in 1 Corinthians. This may appear strange at first until we recognize that this is true for many of the key doctrines of the Christian faith. There is no great apologetic for the existence of God or for the Trinity. Everywhere these truths are enunciated and taken for granted, however. Yet they are not the subject of formal treatment in the same sense that justification by faith and the resurrection from the dead are dealt with.

Search the Gospels and you will find little that deals directly with this question of the Scriptures. Jesus Christ constantly refers to the Old Testament Scriptures, but nowhere does he speak with the view to defend them. Rather, he takes it for granted that the Scriptures are inspired, authoritative, and inerrant, and on the basis of this assumption he interprets the Scriptures and instructs friend and foe alike. He assumes that they, like himself, are controlled by a view similar to his own. Thus when Jesus addresses himself to the Jews concerning his relationship to God, he defends himself and his claim to deity by using the expression, "Scripture cannot be broken." It was this claim that the Jews would not and could not deny. They believed it. What they did not believe was the claim of Jesus to be God. This they held to be blasphemy.

Read the Acts of the Apostles. What do you find there? Surely there is nothing that deals decisively with the phenomena of Scripture. Central to the Acts of the Apostles is their witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, not to that of an inerrant record. Later when Paul deals with the truth or the falsity of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, he never makes reference to the authority, inspiration, or inerrancy of Scripture. But he does state that the faith rises or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

One can read the balance of the New Testament, and search in vain he must, for anything that suggests that the writers sought to formulate a carefully defined doctrine of an inspired, authoritative, and inerrant revelation. There is adequate material dealing with this subject, but not in the context of a disputed issue and not with the intention of forging an apologetic to answer the opponents of such a viewpoint. Indeed there was no need for

the writers of the New Testament to spend much time dealing with this subject. They embraced the common view of the Old Testament held by the Jews of every age. There is a sense in which it may be said that the New Testament deals with the inerrancy of the Scriptures much the same way that it deals with the virgin birth. Both are stated and affirmed. But neither one is the object of real definitive treatment. Both are taken for granted.

In the early centuries of the church, the theologians and church councils faced grave problems. But none of them devoted much time to the question of an inspired and inerrant Bible. The question of Christology agitated every fishmonger in the Eastern church. The philosophically minded Greek world wrestled with the question of the preincarnate Christ. The Arian controversy symbolized this struggle, and from it came decisions that firmly imbedded into the theology of Christendom the teaching that Jesus Christ is coeternal with the Father, of one substance in essence and yet distinct in person.

The Christological controversy did not stop with the preincarnate Christ. It continued as the church sought answers to the questions raised by the incarnation. If Christ is God, is he also true man? Or is his appearance as man simply an appearance and nothing more? Under the guise of docetism, the humanity of Christ was obscured and the church had to fight its way through that miasma of speculation until the formula was devised of one person in two natures, with a human nature and a divine nature, separate and distinct without fusion or confusion. And then it was declared that Christ had both a human and a divine will as over against the teaching of the monothelites.

Still later the church was gripped by the anthropological controversy, better known under the label of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. There, as in the other controversies, the problem was not one that involved the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. It was a matter of interpretation. Augustine, of course, was part and parcel of this period of strife, and lines he laid down influenced John Calvin, as any reading of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* will demonstrate.

The Reformation period did nothing to change the picture materially relative to inspiration and inerrancy. It is true that the Reformation involved the Scriptures, but never was it a question of either the authority or the inspiration of the Scriptures. Both Romanists and Reformers alike held firmly to an inerrant Word of God. The problem did center in the addition of tradition as a source of belief and authority, which addition the Reformers repudiated vehemently. *Sola Scriptura* was the key phrase in the mouths of the Reformers. But it is also true that the question of *interpreting*

Scripture was central in the Reformation. Thus Luther's formula *sola fide*, or justification by faith alone, involved the problem of biblical interpretation, not biblical inspiration and inerrancy, which both Romanists and Reformers accepted cordially. The authority of the Bible alone and without anything else was the formal principle of the Reformers. Justification by faith alone, which repudiated the view that the Church's interpretation of Scripture must prevail, was the material principle of the Reformation.

It may be said without fear of contradiction that the Roman Catholic Church in its official position has always clung to an inerrant Scripture. And this church has constantly defended itself against any other teaching. Thus *The Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1910 (p. 48) says:

For the last three centuries there have been authors—theologians, exegetes, and especially apologists such as Holden, Rohling, Lenormant, di Bartolo, and others—who maintained, with more or less confidence, that inspiration was limited to moral and dogmatic teaching, excluding everything in the Bible relating to history and the natural sciences. They think that in this way a whole mass of difficulties against the inerrancy of the Bible would be removed. But the Church has never ceased to protest against this attempt to restrict the inspiration of the sacred books. This is what took place when Mgr. d'Hulst, Rector of the Institut Catholique of Paris, gave a sympathetic account of this opinion in "Le Correspondant" of 25 Jan. 1893. The reply was quickly forthcoming in the Encyclical "Providentissimus Deus" of the same year. In that Encyclical Leo XIII said: "It will never be lawful to restrict inspiration to certain parts of the Holy Scriptures, or to grant that the sacred writer could have made a mistake. Nor may the opinion of those be tolerated, who, in order to get out of these difficulties, do not hesitate to suppose that Divine inspiration extends only to what touches faith and morals, on the false plea that the true meaning is sought for less in what God has said than in the motive for which He has said it." In fact, a limited inspiration contradicts Christian tradition and theological teaching.

As for the inerrancy of the inspired text it is to the Inspirer that it must finally be attributed, and it matters little if God has insured the truth of His scripture by the grace of inspiration itself, as the adherents of verbal inspiration teach, rather than by a providential assistance!¹

¹It should be noted here that the question of the means by which an inerrant Scripture came into being is not the subject of discussion. One can honestly disagree with the person who believes in the mechanical dictation theory as over against the view that God by his Spirit allowed the writers to speak consonant with their linguistic talents and peculiarities. Yet whatever the means were, the end product is the same: an inerrant Scripture.

Luther and Calvin both accepted and taught the doctrine of an inerrant Scripture. This has been documented and is beyond denial.² Curiously enough, some of the followers of Luther went beyond anything taught by him and formulated a view that few if any conservative theologians would accept today. I quote: "The Lutherans who devoted themselves to composing the Protestant theory of inspiration were Melancthon, Chemnitz, Quenstadt, Calov. Soon, to the inspiration of the words was added that of the vowel points of the present Hebrew text. This was not a mere opinion held by the two Buxtorfs, but a doctrine defined, and imposed under pain of fine, imprisonment and exile, by the Confession of the Swiss Churches, promulgated in 1675. These dispositions were abrogated in 1724" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 48).

The eighteenth century witnessed no radical departure from the view of Scripture that had been normative through the centuries. Indeed in 1729 the Westminster Confession of Faith was adopted. When propounding a doctrine of Scripture, the Confession spoke of "the consent of all the parts . . . and the entire perfection thereof" (chap. 1, sec. 5). The Westminster Confession was used as the basis for the Savoy Declaration of 1658, which became normative for the Congregational churches. And the Baptists in the United States in 1742 adopted what is generally known as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith based upon the Westminster Confession, for the most part, and retaining its statement on the Scriptures. A century later, in 1833, the New Hampshire Confession of Faith was adopted by Baptists in America and included a statement that the Word of God is "without any mixture of error" (Declaration 1).

²In *Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, Theodore Engelder adduces overwhelming evidence to support this assertion about Luther. Luther endorsed Augustine by saying: "The Scriptures have never erred"; "the Scriptures cannot err"; "it is certain that Scripture cannot disagree with itself." Augustine's famous statement is: "To those books which are already styled canonical, I have learned to pay such reverence and honour as most firmly to believe that none of their authors has committed any error in writing. If in that literature I meet with anything which seems contrary to truth, I will have no doubt that it is only the manuscript which is faulty, or the translator who has not hit the sense, or my own failure to understand" (*A Catholic Dictionary* [New York: Addis & Arnold, 1884], 450). In the case of Calvin there are those who have argued on both sides of the issue. In favor of inerrancy are H. Banke, *Das Problem der Theologie Calvins*; R. E. Davies, *The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers*; E. A. Downey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*; A. M. Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin*; J. Mackinnon, *Calvin and the Reformation*. Mackinnon senses as everyone must that Calvin the scholar over against Calvin the theologian has problems: "When he (the scholar) sees an obvious error in text before him, there is no indication that it makes any *theological* impression on him at all. . . . Again, why, if not because the error is a trivial copyist's blunder, not a misunderstanding of divine 'dictation' by an apostle or prophet?" In other words, Calvin would have been in agreement with Augustine. In both cases it means that they were looking to the autographs, not to copies that were in some measure defective due to copyists' mistakes. Ernest R. Sandeen, of North College, in his paper "The Princeton Theology," *CH* (September 1962), says that Hodge and Warfield "retreated" to "lost and completely useless original autographs" as though this was an innovation. He labels it "the Princeton argument." He failed to see that Hodge and Warfield followed both Augustine and Calvin. Thus the problem was not a new one, but it was "new" in the sense that for the first time in the history of the Church it was *the* central issue being discussed and fought.

Of course there always were dissenting voices that did not believe the Word of God to be infallible and inerrant. But these voices were neither normative nor dominant. They did not exercise a determinative voice in the historic churches at this moment in history. Following the Reformation there was a mighty struggle waged between the Arminians and the Calvinists that extended from the sixteenth well into the nineteenth century. The battle was not waged, however, over the nature of inspiration but over questions relating to a proper understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures.

The eighteenth century marked a definite point of departure on the subject of inspiration. Sparked by the writing of John Locke in the seventeenth century, the next two centuries were characterized by the rise of rationalism, romanticism, evolution, and higher criticism. Many great names are connected with this period of change: Hume, Paley, Paine, Hegel, Kant, Darwin, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Spencer, Comte, Marx, and the like. Included in this list should be scores of Germans popularly associated with higher criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not to mention the various schools of thought represented by university centers such as Berlin, Tübingen, and Heidelberg. Whereas earlier ages argued whether ultimate religious authority was to be found in the Bible alone, or the Bible through the teaching of the church, or the Bible through the pope, or by the addition of tradition, now there was a direct frontal assault on the Bible itself. Just about everything was questioned and discarded. The Bible under this attack ceased to be a book with the stamp of the divine upon it. It became to the critics a human document composed by men who were no more inspired than other literary figures and certainly not to be fully trusted for ultimate truth in theological or other areas of witness. The storm generated by the higher critics gathered in intensity and seemed to sweep everything before it. Citadels crumbled rapidly; seminaries capitulated; liberalism or modernism with all of its trappings became the order of the day in the twentieth century. In the battle, the fundamentals of the Christian faith that had stood for almost two millennia were discarded. Clifton Olmstead, in his *History of Religion in the United States*, speaks of the resistance forged against this attack on the Bible:

In the Protestant world the theses of liberal theologians went not unchallenged. Many a theological school, especially those in the Calvinist tradition, produced scholars who were sharply critical of the new currents in religion and clung rigidly to the doctrine of the plenary inspira-

tion of the Bible. Among the leaders in this camp were the Presbyterians A. A. Hodge, Francis L. Patton, and Benjamin B. Warfield, and the Baptists John A. Broadus and Asahel Kendrick. At the Niagara Bible Conference, which opened in 1876 and continued to meet annually until the end of the century, conservatives regrouped their forces for a frontal attack on the new theology. Their leaders were A. J. Gordon, Arthur Pierson, C. I. Scofield, and James Gray. At the meeting in 1895 the conference formulated its famous "five points of fundamentalism" or necessary standards of belief. They were the inerrancy of Scripture, the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ, the substitutionary theory of the atonement, the physical resurrection of Christ, and his imminent bodily return to earth. These doctrines were taught as essential at such conservative centers as Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and Los Angeles Bible Institute. In 1909 two wealthy Californians, Lyman and Milton Stewart, financed the publication of twelve small volumes entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth*, nearly three million copies of which were circulated among ministers and laymen in the United States and abroad. The effect was to stir up a militant antagonism toward liberalism which would reach its height in the decade which followed the First World War. By that time the new theology would have grown old and about to be replaced by theologies which dealt more positively with contemporary issues.

It hardly seems necessary to detail the contributions rendered in the defense of orthodoxy by the Princetonians Hodge, Warfield, and Green. They and others with them constructed an apologetic that has been neither equaled nor surpassed in the last generation. They worked out conservative Christianity's finest defense. Their writings are still the chief source of fact and fuel for contemporary conservative Christianity. The debt that is owed them is almost beyond estimation. It was their work that preserved the Presbyterian church from rapid and complete surrender to the claims of higher criticism. Other denominations were infiltrated and their walls breached, but the onslaughts were thrown back by the Presbyterians. Again Olmstead speaks a word from history about this:

In several of the major denominations the fundamentalist-modernist controversy grew to gigantic proportions. None was more shaken by the conflict than the Presbyterian, U.S.A. During the painful theological controversies of the late nineteenth century, the church had held to its official position of Biblical inerrancy. In 1910 when a complaint was made to the General Assembly that the New York Presbytery had

licensed three ministerial candidates whose theological views were somewhat suspect, the Assembly ruled the following articles of faith were necessary for ordination: the inerrancy of Scripture, the Virgin Birth of Christ, the miracles of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the Resurrection of Christ. No mention was made of premillennialism, a necessary article for fundamentalists. Though the Assembly of 1910 and the Assemblies of 1916 and 1923, which reiterated the five-point requirement, had no intention of reducing the church's theology to these five articles, the conservative element in the church tended to treat the articles in precisely that manner. The general effect was to increase tension and encourage heresy-hunting.

At last the Presbyterian church was breached. J. Gresham Machen and others continued their apologetic for a trustworthy Scripture from without the church. At no time during this struggle within the Presbyterian church could the defenders of an inerrant Scripture be called fundamentalists, nor would they themselves have desired the appellation. It was reserved for another group of theologically conservative people more largely connected with the Bible institute movement and with independent Bible churches throughout the land. It was the accretions to fundamentalism that gave it a bad name among so many people in America. And here one must make a distinction between theological fundamentalism and sociological fundamentalism. At no time could the Machen movement be called sociologically fundamentalist, but it certainly could be called theologically fundamentalist in the best sense of that term.

The Second World War saw the rise of what might be called the "new evangelicalism," which was keenly aware of the plight of a fundamentalism that majored on codes of conduct and defected to liberalism in the area of Christian social ethics. Earlier Carl F. H. Henry's contribution *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, brought some of this into sharp focus. The new evangelicals started with certain presuppositions in mind: (1) a desire to create a new and vigorous apologetic for the conservative position by raising a new generation of well-trained scholars with all of the badges of academic respectability who could speak to the current issues of the day, talk the language of the opposition, and present cogently and compellingly the viewpoint of historic Christianity in the present milieu; (2) a desire to move more vigorously into the area of social ethics and do something about the renovation of society from the vantage point of conservative theology; (3) a desire to meet and overcome the rise of neoortho-

doxy, which had replaced the decadent liberalism of the 1920s; (4) a desire to engage in dialogue with those with whom it was in disagreement, based upon the suppositions that the best defense is a good offense and that to man the walls behind barricades had led to nothing constructive in former years; and (5) a desire to move away from the negativism in personal conduct of the older fundamentalism.

This effort began to bear fruit. New and able exponents of the orthodox faith came on the scene. Their names are as familiar to you as they are to me. Books, monographs, and articles were written. Even a magazine like *Time* could conclude, as did its religion editor, that conservative Christianity had depth, strength, scholarship, and something to offer. The evangelistic ministry of Billy Graham, the establishment of *Christianity Today*, the opening of Fuller Theological Seminary, and other events evidenced the new trend. Moreover, the voices of evangelical spokesman were listened to and heard in places where they long had been silent. And all of this was accomplished within the context of a conservative theology that included a belief in an inerrant Scripture.

But now the scene is changing. In getting to the opponents of orthodox Christianity the opponents, in turn, have gotten to some of the new evangelicals. And this is no isolated phenomenon. With the new learning there had come new leaven. And the leaven is to be found in Christian colleges and theological seminaries, in books and articles, in Bible institutes and in conservative churches. The new leaven, as yet, has nothing to do with such vital questions as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the vicarious atonement, the physical resurrection from the dead, or the second advent. It involves what it has always involved in the first stages of its development—the nature of inspiration and authority. It could not be otherwise, for one's view of the Bible ultimately determines his theology in all of its ramifications. It is like the Continental Divide in the United States, which marks off the flow of waters either to the Atlantic or the Pacific Oceans depending on which side of the Divide the waters fall. Inexorably and inevitably the waters find their way to their ultimate destiny, just as one's view of the Bible determines ultimately what his theology will be. No man in good conscience or in sanity could hold to an inerrant Scripture after forsaking the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the vicarious atonement, the physical resurrection from the dead, and the second advent.

Today there are those who have been numbered among the new evangelicals, some of whom possess the keenest minds and have acquired the apparatus of scholarship, who have broken, or are in the process of break-

ing, with the doctrine of an inerrant Scripture. They have done so or are doing so because they think this view to be indefensible and because they do not regard it as a great divide. In order for them to be intellectually honest with themselves, they must do it. Logically, however, the same attitude, orientation, bent of mind, and approach to scholarship that makes the retention of an inerrant Scripture impossible also ultimately makes impossible the retention of the vicarious atonement, imputed guilt, the virgin birth, the physical resurrection, and miraculous supernaturalism.³ The mediating voices among the new evangelicals who have begun by forsaking inerrancy while retaining inspiration, revelation, authority, and the like still have this hard lesson to learn.

The new-school adherents often feel that those evangelicals who hold to an inerrant Scripture do so because they have “closed minds,” or are not truly “scholarly,” or are psychologically maladjusted with a defensive mechanism that precludes “openness.” What they fail to realize is that the very opinions they hold in regard to those who cling to inerrancy are applied to themselves by those who have not only scrapped inerrancy but also the basic doctrines to which these same people are still committed. Thus they cannot avoid wearing the same labels they apply to the people who adhere to inerrancy, and if they think that by their concession they have really advanced the cause of dialogue with those outside the conservative tradition, they are grossly mistaken.

Moreover the possession of the “closed mind,” and the failure to enjoy “openness,” and the problem of being truly “scholarly” does not haunt the conservative alone. Liberals are among those who have most thoroughly enjoyed and displayed the very traits they militate against in others. And the mind that is closed because it believes it possesses the truth cannot truly be unscholarly, since the pursuit of truth is the goal of scholarship; and “openness” is not a virtue when it allows for dilution and diminution of the truth one feels he possesses. Of course men may mistakenly but honestly hold to what is false, but unless there is something that is commonly held by all men, neither those who believe nor those who disbelieve can be sure of the rightness or wrongness of their positions unless they have some outside validating authority to which final reference can be made. And this the Word of God is.

³It is true that men do not always press their views to their logical conclusions. Thus one can hold to an errant Scripture while not forsaking other cardinal doctrines. It is for this reason that those who accept biblical inerrancy should not break with those who disagree with them unless the divergence includes a further departure from other major doctrines of orthodoxy. Perchance the continuance of closest contacts will convince those who reject inerrancy what the logical consequences of such rejection involve.

One can predict with almost fatalistic certainty that in due course of time the moderating evangelicals who deny inerrancy will adopt new positions such as belief in the multiple authorship of Isaiah, the late date of Daniel, the idea that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are myth and saga. And then these critical conclusions will spill over into the New Testament, and when the same principles of higher criticism are applied this can only lead to a scrapping of the facticity of the resurrection, etc. This has ever been the historical movement, and there is nothing to suppose that such a repetitive process will not follow.

Rarely does one hear of a journey from liberalism to orthodoxy, from an errant Scripture to an inerrant Scripture. For the most part it is a one-way street in the wrong direction. It is the opinion of this writer that the moderating proponents among the new evangelicals stand in mortal danger of defecting from the foundation on which the new evangelicalism was built, of evacuating that which it came into being to defend, of surrendering to an inclusive theology that it opposed, and of hiding its deception in a plethora of words, semantically disguised so as to curry favor with those who deny inerrancy and at the same time to retain the allegiance of those who cling to the old doctrine.

This is no obscurantist pose. Nor does it in any sense threaten or underestimate the good in the new evangelicalism. Nor is it intended to downgrade Christian scholarship of the highest order. Rather it is intended to make plain the fact that just as Christology, anthropology, and justification by faith were key issues in the theological struggle of bygone ages, so today the key theological issue is that of a wholly trustworthy or inerrant Scripture. Moreover it is designed to impress upon all that the most significant conservative movement of the twentieth century, labeled by many the new evangelicalism, has already been breached by some and is in the process of being breached by others. And the Evangelical Theological Society that has been such a vital part of the new evangelicalism had better be aware of the turn of events. It has been infected itself, and its own foundations need to be reexamined. For what this society does and how it reacts to this challenge may well determine the direction that churches, denominations, and institutions take in the years immediately before us.

"*Apeitheō*: Current Resistance to Biblical Inerrancy"

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Evangelicals and Inerrancy

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"The whole Bible?" If such an inquiry into their beliefs were to be directed to today's theologians, the response of the large majority would be, "*Apeitheō*: I am not persuaded, I disbelieve." Doubts about Scripture's veracity, moreover, are no longer limited to convinced doctrinal skeptics, whether of an unreconstructed sort of liberalism or of a more repentant kind of neoorthodoxy. They are being currently voiced among theologians generally classified as evangelical, among men who would look to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Furthermore their resistance to the authority of the entire written Word, which the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) designates as biblical inerrancy, is producing an effect in conservative institutions, conferences and denominations, especially among our more advanced students and younger scholars. But why should those who have been reared in Bible-believing environments now experience attraction to the posture of *apeitheō*? It is not too much to conclude that the very future of the ETS and of the biblical position that it represents lies at stake as we ask how, and why, some of our former colleagues have turned against us and what the Christian's approach to Scripture really ought to be.

The Nature of the Present Declension

Most modern skeptics prefer to cloak their opposition to the Bible beneath words of recognition, or even praise, for its authority. Except for communists and a few atheistic cranks, it is no longer the thing to ridicule scriptural inspiration. Among the more liberal this may be traced to a war-induced disenchantment with man's native capabilities and to an existentialistic yearning for a transcendent point of reference. Among the more conservative, whether they be Roman Catholic or ex-fundamental Protestant, vested interests seem to require their continued use of the term "inerrancy," either to uphold the dogmas of previous popes or to pacify an evangelical constituency that might reduce financial support should the term be discarded. As one of the latter group told me, his institution does not really accept inerrancy, but they keep using the term because otherwise supporters would think they were becoming liberal (!).

But despite this haze in the current theological atmosphere, certain criteria serve as genuine indications of where people stand. (1) Those who resist inerrancy tend to express themselves on the mode of inspiration rather than on its extent. They may protest, for example, that the Bible *is* God's word as well as man's, or that its teachings are ultimately authoritative. But so long as these declaimers refuse to indicate which portions constitute "teaching," their protests decide little or nothing. (2) The parties of resistance may tacitly restrict biblical truth to theological matters. Such delimitation is not infrequently camouflaged, as for example in last June's statement of the Wenham Conference on Inspiration, which affirmed: "The Scriptures are completely truthful and are authoritative as the only infallible rule of faith and practice." Splendid as this affirmation appears at first glance, could it be that the omission of a comma after "completely truthful"—so that this assertion likewise was limited by "as the only infallible rule of faith and practice"—provided the necessary restriction for those present at the conference who limit biblical truthfulness to matters of faith and practice? (3) The resistance likes to remain noncommittal at points where disagreements with other sources are likely to appear. To suggest, for example, that the Bible will not duplicate what can be discovered by scientific research becomes but a backhanded way of setting aside its authority at such points.

The persistent question in all such declension, moreover, concerns the total authority of the Bible. This is not a semantic debate over how one defines "inerrant." Several times during the past year I have received criti-

cal inquiries as to what the society means by saying, "The Bible is . . . inerrant," in its doctrinal affirmation. The not-so-veiled suggestion of the inquirers was that if the ETS would only adopt a more latitudinarian interpretation of inerrancy it could retrieve some of its errant colleagues. But this would only gloss over the real issue. Kenneth Kantzer's simple explanation at last year's meeting that an inerrant document "never wanders into false teaching" is quite clear. Could it be that those who oppose the use of the word "inerrancy" in stating their position on the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible are so keenly aware of its meaning that they purposely avoid it? Redefiners of inerrancy seem to contend for some form of partial inerrancy (*sic*), as opposed to the ETS affirmation that the biblical autographs are never errant but that they are authoritative at every point. It boils down to this: that there are some who will no longer believe what they admit that the Bible believes but subscribe rather to *apeitheō*, "not persuaded."

The Reason for Disbelief

When those who resist biblical inerrancy are asked for reasons why, forthrightness seems to come at even more of a premium. But answers are ascertainable. Originally, a rejection of Scripture was concomitant to an antsupernaturalistic opposition against Christianity. Of the disbelieving Pharisees Christ thus asked, "If ye believe not his [Moses'] writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:47). And to "the father of Old Testament criticism," Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (*Einleitung*, 1780–83), any miracle, including Christ's resurrection, had become absurd. But such is no longer necessarily the case. In the current English-speaking world, at least, the personal piety of Samuel R. Driver (*Introduction*, 1891) pioneered a widespread adoption of negative criticism by men who were otherwise sincerely Christian. Scripture itself, moreover, distinguishes between church membership—"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9)—and church leadership—"For the bishop must . . . hold to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9). There may therefore exist opponents of biblical inerrancy whom we could never recognize as legitimate church leaders—for example, by inviting them to share in our class platforms or pulpits—but who could still be brothers, even if inconsistent ones, in Christ.

Yet all resistance to Scripture, whether ant-supernaturalistic or not, possesses the common denominator of a subjective authority: an assumption on the part of the critic of his own right to judge, as opposed to the New Testament concept of “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Irrespective of Christ’s actual views on Scripture (see below), current Western thought remains irreconcilably antagonistic to the very idea of “captivity.” As observed by H. H. Rowley, Britain’s most outstanding present-day Old Testament scholar:

There were conservative writers who stood outside the general body of critical scholars and who rejected most of their conclusions, but they did not seriously affect the position. While many of them had considerable learning, they made little secret of the fact that they were employing their learning to defend positions which were dogmatically reached. Their work had little influence, therefore, amongst scientific scholars who were concerned only with the evidence, and the conclusions to which it might naturally lead.¹

“After all,” modern man inquires, “does not criticism go awry if subordinated to a presupposition? Do we not live by the scientific method of natural, uninhibited induction and free evaluation? Let the Bible speak for itself: open-minded investigation will surely come out vindicating the truth.”

In practice, however, an appeal to the scientific analogy seems unjustifiable, for biblical revelation simply is not amenable to “natural” evaluation. It cannot be placed in a test tube for repeatable experimentation, like the data found in the natural sciences. It can only be appreciated through the testimony of competent witnesses, like the data found in the other historical disciplines. And God himself, through Christ (John 1:18), thus becomes the only authority who can really tell us about his own writing. Supernaturalism therefore replies to modern man: “A truly open-minded scientist must be willing to operate within those methods that are congruous to the object of his criticism, or his conclusions will inevitably go awry.” This principle was what made James Orr’s inductive attempt to construct a doctrine of inspiration upon the basis of his own evaluation of the observable phenomena of Scripture, with all its various difficulties, basically illegitimate, and it is what made B. B. Warfield’s approach of deductively deriving biblical inerrancy from the revealed teaching of

¹H. H. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (London: Oxford, 1961), xv.

Christ and his apostles sound. Evangelicals, in other words, do not insist upon Warfield as though this latter scholar were immune to criticism, as those who resist inerrancy sometimes insinuate, but simply as one whose methodology is consistent with the object of his investigation. Neither do evangelicals wish to minimize the God-given significance of human intelligence or to inhibit those areas of thought that are pertinent to man's Spirit-directed exercise of his own rational responsibility: first, in examining the historical (resurrection) data that lead him to an acceptance of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–11); then in seeking an exact understanding of what his Lord taught, specifically concerning Scripture (Luke 24:45); and, lastly, in interpreting with diligence the truths therein contained (2 Tim. 2:15). But evangelicals do deny the right of a man to contradict whatever it is that God may have said that he has said. If I were to do this, I would effectively establish some other criterion over God himself, which amounts to nothing more or less than idolatry. I would then also have to go on to accept the consequences of my rational subjectivism—namely, that doctrines such as the survival of my soul after death, or the atonement of my guilt through vicarious sacrifice, or the proofs for the very existence of my God, are apparently not supported by open-minded judgment in the light of natural evidence.

Yet have not our own Christian colleges, upon occasion, been guilty of conveying to some of their sharpest and most promising students the fallacy that a liberal arts education connotes an all-inclusive liberation with a corresponding responsibility on the part of the individual to reserve to himself the final verdict on any given issue and to insist on his right to say, with *Porgy and Bess*, "It ain't necessarily so"? Within this past year there have arisen cases in one of our evangelical denominations in which, when its assembly resolved to include in its statement of faith an affirmation of biblical inerrancy, some of its leading scholars and pastors indignantly withdrew from fellowship. Such infatuation with academic freedom produces the situation described in Acts 19:9, "Some were hardened and disobedient [*epēithoun*]" (ASV). Now it is true both that in theory the classical meaning of *apeitheō* is "to disobey" and that in practice a man's skepticism in respect to Scripture leads almost inevitably to overt acts of disobedience. But Arndt and Gingrich have searched more deeply and conclude:

Since, in the view of the early Christians, the supreme disobedience was a refusal to believe their gospel, *apeitheō* may be restricted in some passages to the meaning *disbelieve, be an unbeliever*. This sense . . . seems

most probable in John 3:36; Acts 14:2; 19:9; Romans 15:31, and only slightly less probable in Romans 2:8.²

The heart of the problem is thus an internal one, the primeval sin of pride, the prejudice of rebellious and fallen man, who refuses to go against his own “better judgment” and to take orders but who insists rather on his right to say, “*Apeitheō*, I am not persuaded, I disbelieve” (cf. Acts 19:9 KJV, RSV).

A paradoxical feature in all this is that we who are committed to biblical inerrancy may have contributed, albeit unwittingly, to the current resistance against the Bible’s authority. Certain overly zealous Sunday-school materials have invoked a number of subjectively rationalistic bases for belief in Scripture, such as vindications from archaeology or fulfilled prophecies. And, as a result, when our better students uncover similar evidences with the opposite implications, they are rendered an easy prey to rationalistic disbelief. Some of our finest biblical introductions, moreover, contain statements like the following:

If it [the Bible] presents such data as to compel an acknowledgment that it can only be of divine origin—and it does present such data in abundance—then the only reasonable course is to take seriously its own assertions of infallibility. . . . Human reason is competent to pass upon these evidences . . . in order to determine whether the texts themselves square with the claims of divine origin.³

The difficulty, however, is that most of today’s outstanding biblical scholars, those who are in the best position (humanly speaking) to know, fail to discover “such data in abundance.” On the contrary they tend toward conclusions like the following:

In the field of the physical sciences we find at once that many mistaken and outmoded conceptions appear in the Bible. . . . Much ink has been wasted also, and is still wasted, in the effort to prove the detailed historical accuracy of the biblical narratives. Archaeological research has not, as is often boldly asserted, resolved the difficulties or confirmed the narratives step by step. Actually they abound in errors, including many contradictory statements. . . . Even in matters of religious concern the Bible is by no means of uniform value throughout.⁴

² Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University Press, 1959), 82.

³ G. L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1964).

⁴ M. Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), 44–45, 47.

Moreover, even though most investigations do end up vindicating the Bible as far as inerrancy is concerned, one seeming discrepancy outweighs the significance of ninety-nine confirmations.

Others of our introductions have been more guarded about basing belief in Scripture upon inductive evaluations, cautioning, for example, that "unless we first think rightly about God we shall be in basic error about everything else" (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14 or 2 Cor. 4:3 on the blindness of the unregenerate mind). Yet this same source goes on to declare:

The Bible itself evidences its divinity so clearly that he is without excuse who disbelieves. . . . Its "incomparable excellencies" are without parallel in any other writing and show most convincingly that the Bible is in a unique sense the Word of God.⁵

But had it not been for New Testament evidence on the canon, could even regenerate Christians have perceived that a given verse in Proverbs or Jeremiah was inspired while similar material from Ecclesiasticus or the Epistle of Jeremy was not? On the other hand, what of Scripture's unexplained difficulties? Are we going too far to say that, on the basis of the evidences presently available, Joshua's asserted capture of Ai or Matthew's apparent attribution (27:9) of verses from Zechariah 11 to Jeremiah favor biblical errancy rather than inerrancy? Candor compels our admission of other cases too for which our harmonistic explanations are either weak or nonexistent. If therefore we once fall into the snare of subjectivism, whether liberal or evangelical, we also may conclude by saying, "Apeitheō, I have had it."

The Application of Christian Authority

Turning then to God's own objective testimony in respect to Scripture, what if anything do we find? For we must recognize at the outset that we do not have to find anything. The syllogism "God is perfect, and since the Bible stems from God, then the Bible must be perfect" contains a fallacy, as becomes apparent when we substitute the idea of church for Bible. God lay under no antecedent obligation to ordain inspiration along with his decree for revelation. Even as the church continues to serve as a medium for men's redemption despite its obvious imperfections, so too a Bible of purely human origin could conceivably have proven adequate for human deliverance. Peter, John, and Paul, for example, might have simply recorded their convictions about God's revealed plan of salvation in Christ,

⁵E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 7, 28–29.

just as modern preachers do, without claiming inspiration (though actually they did: 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; 2 Cor. 13:3). Herein, moreover, lies the answer to one of liberalism's more persuasive arguments—namely, that since we today do not need an inerrant KJV, and since the early church did not need an inerrant LXX (Rom. 15:4), therefore the biblical autographs need not have been inerrant either. For evangelicalism refuses to base its commitment to biblical autographic inerrancy upon “needs,” whether of God or man, except for that general need of maintaining the truthfulness of Jesus Christ. It is from this latter necessity that Christian authority comes historically into the picture. That is, until a man places his trust in Christ there appears to be no impelling reason why he should believe in the Bible or even in religious supernaturalism, for that matter. But once a man does commit himself to the apostolically recorded person of Jesus, declared to be the Son of God with messianic power by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4), then his supreme privilege as well as his obligation devolve into letting that mind be in him that was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5; cf. Col. 2:6; 1 John 2:6), and this includes Christ's mind toward Scripture. Specifically, how Christ's authority is to be applied may then be developed through the following two inquiries.

1. *Did Christ question the Bible?* Affirmative answers at this point seem more common than ever before. It is understandable, moreover, that professed Christians who have felt compelled on rationally subjective grounds to surrender their belief in biblical inerrancy should seek support for their skepticism from some analogy discoverable with Jesus, since nobody really enjoys an inconsistent allegiance. Most modern writers seem content to dismiss inerrancy with generalizations about its being a “sub-Christian” doctrine.⁶ Representative of a more straightforward analysis, however, is the Dutch neoorthodox biblical theologian T. C. Vriezen.⁷ While granting that “the Scriptures of the Old Testament were for Him as well as for His disciples the Word of God,” he adduces three areas in which Jesus “rises above the Holy Scriptures.”

Christ used the traditional text freely, and in doing so He showed Himself superior to all bondage to the letter: [yet the only evidence that Vriezen alleged is that] in Luke iv. 18ff., Isaiah lxi. 2 is quoted without the words “the day of vengeance of our God.”

⁶H. R. Mackintosh; cf. A. J. Ungersma, *Handbook for Christian Believers* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 80–81.

⁷T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Newton, MA: Charles T. Branford, 1960), 2–5.

The example is irrelevant. It is one of those not uncommon instances of successive prophecies in one context: The year of Yahweh's favor, 61:2a, received fulfillment during our Lord's first advent (cf. v. 1), but Christ apparently avoided reference to the day of vengeance described in verse 2b, which was not to achieve fulfillment until his second coming. Real textual freedom, moreover, such as the New Testament use of the LXX no more necessarily subverts inerrancy than does a modern believer's missionary employment of accepted vernacular versions. In John 10:34–35, however, Jesus seemingly went out of his way to associate genuine inerrancy not even with copied manuscripts of the original Hebrew but rather with the autographs themselves: "He [Yahweh] called them gods [judges (?) contemporary with the psalm writer Asaph] unto whom the word of God came [at that time, *egeneto*, aorist] . . . and the scripture cannot be broken." For similar associations of God's inspired words with their inscripturation in the original mss cf. Acts 1:16; 2 Peter 1:21.⁸

Vriezen next says of Jesus:

Because of His spiritual understanding of the law, He again and again contradicts the Judaic theology of His days derived from it ("them of old time," Matthew v; Mark vii), and even repeatedly contradicts certain words of the law (Matthew v. 38ff.; xix. lff.).

The question, however, revolves in each case about what Christ was really contradicting. In Matthew 19 his opposition was to Pharisaic moral travesty in authorizing a man "to put away his wife for every cause" (v. 2). For while he did go on to contrast Deuteronomic divorce for an *'erwat dābār*, "something indecent" (KB 735a), with Genesis' Edenic situation, he himself came out in favor of the Law because he too limited any absolute prohibition of divorce through his insertion of the words "except for fornication" (v. 9; cf. 5:32). Likewise in the Sermon on the Mount Christ's opposition was directed against Pharisaism. While this sect, moreover, claimed its derivation from the Law, Vriezen's assumption that the words given "to them of old time," which Christ contradicted, must mean the original words of the Law appears gratuitous. In the preceding context our Lord specifically affirmed the inviolability of the Law (5:17) while singling out for criticism only the latter portions of such syndromes as "Love thy neighbor, *and hate thine enemy*" (v. 44); and these latter words, far from

⁸ Cf. J. B. Payne, "The Plank Bridge: Inerrancy and the Biblical Autographs," *United Evangelical Action* 24/15 (December 1965): 16–18.

being drawn from the Law, reflected rather those postbiblical traditions that have been found among the self-righteous Qumran sectaries (1QS i 1–10). In the other alleged passages our Lord's opposition, for example, was directed against Pharisaic casuistry in the use of oaths (5:33–37; cf. 23:16–22)—he himself would accept an oath on proper occasion (Matt. 26:63; cf. Heb. 6:16–17)—and against their personally vindictive application of the *lex talionis* (Matt. 5:38–42).

This ties in closely with Vriezen's concluding allegation: "The negative datum that nowhere in the New Testament is mention made of Jesus offering sacrifices may be considered important." Or should it be? For a law to lack particular applicability need not entail its derogation. Vriezen seems, moreover, to have answered his own argument when he states: "In imitation of Christ St. Paul recognized that there were certain commandments of God that were significant only in a certain age and a certain situation."

Ultimately, Vriezen is forthright enough to admit that neither liberals nor conservatives agree with his hypothesis of a Bible-questioning Christ, for he concedes, "This view of Jesus' critical attitude toward the law is contested from both the right and left." Apparently only the neoorthodox, those with strongly vested loyalties toward both Christ and the critics, seem to have persuaded themselves of its validity, and even Vriezen cautions that he must not be understood "to mean that Jesus was 'critical of the Bible' in our sense of the word," or, as far as the present writer has been able to ascertain, in any other negative sense of the word either.

2. *Positively, then, did Jesus affirm the Bible as inerrantly authoritative?* Evangelicals seem at times to have failed to examine with sufficient rigor the exact biblical affirmations of our Lord or to consider with sufficient attention the neoorthodox claim that the Bible does not teach its own inerrancy. Basically such examination demands an attempt to distinguish, and then to interrelate, two differing types of relevant evidence.

(1) *Christ's general statements.* While it seems clear that the prophets and apostles held to an authority of Scripture that was plenary in extent and hence inerrant—cf. 2 Samuel 23:2; Jeremiah 25:13; or Acts 24:14, "believing all things . . . which are written in the prophets"; or 2 Timothy 3:16, "Every Scripture is *theopneustos*, God-breathed"—it remains possible for our Lord's own categorical statements to be so interpreted as to prove deficient, in themselves, of affirming infallibility for the whole Bible. Though they unmistakably teach its broad doctrinal authority, neoorthodox writers have been able to produce explanations that keep them from finally establishing its inerrancy. The five following classic proof texts may

serve as examples. In Matthew 5:18 (cf. Luke 16:16–17) the words, "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished," might be restricted to our Lord's inculcating of total obedience to the Law (cf. the next verse). In Luke 18:31 his affirmation that "all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man" may well be accepted at face value, without thereby promoting the prophets into anything more than uninspired reporters of valid revelations. The text of Luke 24:25 says, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken"; but the ASV margin reads ". . . *after* all that the prophets have spoken." In Luke 24:44 could Christ perhaps insist that "all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me," without necessarily including all things concerning other subjects? Finally John 10:35, "And the Scripture cannot be broken," might possibly be understood as an *ad hominem* argument: "If he called them gods . . . and if Scripture cannot be broken (as you believe, whether it actually be true or not), then . . ." The force of the above quotations, in other words, regarding inerrancy remains capable of evasion.

(2) *Christ's specific statements.* It is when our Lord discloses his mind over particular Old Testament incidents and utterances that recognition of his positive belief in the Bible becomes inescapable. At the outset, however, let it again be cautioned that not all of his citations carry equal weight. Christ's references, for example, to Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:24–27), even when one allows for his confirmation of such factual details as the three years and six months of famine, can yet be treated as mere literary allusions to well-known Old Testament stories, which he need not have considered as more than fictional, though possessed of inherent theological authority. Likewise his identifications of "the book of Moses" (Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29, 31; 24:44) might indicate nothing beyond an awareness of Moses as their central character, much like Samuel in the books of Samuel, without committing our Lord to fixed views on their Mosaic composition.

Yet on the other hand Jesus specifically compared down-to-earth marriage problems of his own and of Moses' days with what was to him the apparently equally real situation of Adam and Eve "from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:6); he associated Abel with the undeniably historical Zechariah (Luke 11:47–51); he described in detail the catastrophic days of Noah and Lot as transpiring "after the same manner" as the day in which the Son of Man would be revealed (Luke 17:26–30); he lumped

Sodom and Gomorrah together with certain first-century Galilean towns, as subject to equally literal judgments (Matt. 10:15); and he connected the experiences of the Queen of Sheba, Jonah, and the Ninevites with real events in the lives of himself and his contemporaries (Matt. 12:39–41). He equated the narrative description of Genesis 2:24 with the very spoken word of God the Creator (Matt. 19:5). He said that God had uttered the words of Exodus 3:6 to the man Moses (Mark 12:26) and that Moses “gave” Israel the law of Leviticus 12 (John 7:22), “commanded” the law of Leviticus 14 (Matt. 8:4), “wrote” of the Messiah (John 5:46), and indeed “gave you the law” (John 7:19). He affirmed that an actual prophet named Daniel had predicted “the abomination of desolation” for a period still future to AD 30 (Matt. 25:15) and that David, “in the Holy Spirit,” composed the words of Psalm 110:1 (Mark 12:36; Matt. 22:43–45). Even if one allows for the sake of argument that the apostolic writers may not have reproduced Christ’s exact phraseology, the impressions that he left about his views on the origin of the Old Testament are still so unmistakable that George Adam Smith felt constrained to confess:

If the use of his [Isaiah’s] name [in the NT quotations] . . . were as involved in the arguments . . . as is the case with David’s name in the quotation made by our Lord from Psalm cx, then those who deny the unity of the Book of Isaiah would be face to face with a very serious problem indeed.⁹

But this is just the point. Suppose a man were to go no farther than to acknowledge: “I will, as a Christian, accept biblical authority in respect to those specific matters, and to those alone, which are affirmed by Jesus Christ.” He would still find the mind of his Lord so hopelessly opposed to the consensus of modern “scientific” (subjective) criticism that his rationalistic autonomy would suffer automatic forfeit as a principle for biblical research. He might then just as well accept the verdict of the apostles, whom Christ *did* authorize as his representatives (John 14:26; 16:13), on the unified authenticity of Isaiah as well (12:38–41). Furthermore, in the light of Christ’s known attitude toward Adam and Abel, it appears rather pointless to question his belief over the literal truth of Elijah and Elisha and of all the other Old Testament matters to which he refers.

(3) *Interrelationships*. In view of Christ’s specific statements, his general affirmations (1, above), previously identified as in themselves inconclusive,

⁹G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah*, *The Expositor’s Bible* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.), 2. 6.

now assume a more comprehensive significance. John 10:35, for example, no longer remains restricted at its ad hominem interpretation, for the unbreakableness of Scripture has been found to correspond to Christ's own beliefs. This Bible reference is therefore depicted on the seal of the Evangelical Theological Society, supported by the cross of Christ breaking in two the sword of criticism. Bernard's liberal International Critical Commentary on John states further that belief in

the verbal inspiration of the sacred books . . . emerges distinctively in the Fourth Gospel, the evangelist ascribing this conviction to Jesus Himself. We may recall here some Synoptic passages which show that the belief that "the Scripture cannot be broken" was shared by Matthew, Mark, and Luke and that all three speak of it as having the authority of their Master (1. clii).

Older critics such as William Sanday thus conceded:

When deductions have been made . . . there still remains evidence enough that our Lord while on earth did use the common language of His contemporaries in regard to the Old Testament.¹⁰

And modern liberals, such as F. C. Grant, freely admit that in the New Testament "it is everywhere taken for granted that Scripture is trustworthy, infallible, and inerrant."¹¹

Two concluding questions remain then to be asked. The first directly parallels that which Pilate addressed to the Jewish leaders of his day: "What then shall I do unto Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matt. 27:22). Are we going to recognize his authority, or are we going to take exception to it and deny his reliability by some theory of kenosis? Sigmund Mowinckel, a leading advocate of modern Scandinavian biblical criticism, seems more squarely than most to have faced up to the implications of his views when he concludes:

Jesus as a man was one of us except that he had no sin (Heb. 4:15). . . . He also shared our imperfect insight into all matters pertaining to the world of sense. . . . He knew neither more nor less than most people of his class in Galilee or Jerusalem concerning history . . . geography, or the history of biblical literature.¹²

¹⁰W. Sanday, *Inspiration* (London: Longmans, Green, 1893), 393.

¹¹F. C. Grant, *Introduction to New Testament Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 75; cf. J. Knox, *Jesus Lord and Christ* (New York: Harper, 1958).

¹²S. Mowinckel, *The Old Testament as Word of God* (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 74.

But can one then really maintain the belief in our Lord's sinlessness? This unreliability cannot be restricted to theoretical matters of incarnate omniscience, which few would wish to assert (cf. Mark 13:32), but it involves Christ's basic truthfulness in consciously committing himself to affirmations about Scriptures that he was under no antecedent obligation even to mention (cf. John 3:34).

In John 15 Jesus himself divided up his contemporaries between bondslaves and friends, distinguishing the latter on the basis of their participation in his own convictions: "For all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). What then is to be said of the man who is *apeitheō*, unpersuaded, about what Christ has made known? Is the man who rejects biblical inerrancy simply an inconsistent Christian, perhaps through lack of understanding relative to the mind of Christ? Or having confessed Christ as his Savior is he failing to integrate his scholarship with the teachings of Christ in a logical manner (cf. Col. 2:6)? God alone must judge. In either event, as J. I. Packer has so rightly observed, "any view that subjects the written word of God to the opinions and pronouncements of men involves unbelief and disloyalty toward Christ."¹³ It is like Ephraim's worship on the high places after Jehu's removal of Phoenician Baalism: An overt invocation of the name of Yahweh, while persisting in a life opposed to his revealed authority, can result only, as previously suggested, in idolatry. Scripture moreover leaves us all with the wonderful and yet terrible pronouncement: "He that believeth, *ho pisteuon*, in the Son hath eternal life; but he who will not believe, *ho pisteuon*, the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

But there is a second concluding question, which asks, "What are the implications for those who *are* willing to follow Jesus in his allegiance to Scripture?" Returning to John 15, one finds in verse 15 Christ's words: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Christ's love for us was demonstrated on Calvary, but if we have become "friends" of his, then we too should demonstrate our love as we commit our lives to identification with both him and his commitments. For example, this last summer the Committee of Fifteen [formerly N.A.E.-Christian Reformed] on Bible Translation adopted a resolution to require affirmations on biblical inerrancy from all who are to be associated with this major project. Their move took real courage in the face of current re-

¹³J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (London: InterVarsity, 1958), 21.

sistance to scriptural authority. Sacrifice, moreover, is entailed, for in verse 19 our Lord goes on to explain, "Because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." This committee, as a result of its stand, suffered attack and withdrawal of support. Indeed, we should all take to heart Paul's admonition, "Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from *tōn apeithountōn*" (Rom. 15:30–31), those who will not be persuaded. Yet in verse 27 Christ finished this discourse by observing: "And ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." We are persistently to proclaim submission to Christ, even as our Lord "in the spirit . . . went and preached unto them . . . that aforetime were *apeithēsin*, unpersuaded, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah" (1 Pet. 3:20). Should words themselves fail, we are to bear witness by lives of Christian love, so "that if any *apeithousin*, refuse to be persuaded, by the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of" (3:1) those who have experienced the power of lives yielded to Christ and to his Bible, the inerrant Scriptures.

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14 CLASSIC ESSAYS IN DEFENSE OF INERRANCY

Biblical inerrancy is under attack. Now more than ever, the church needs to carefully consider what it stands to lose should this crucial doctrine be surrendered.

Under the editorial oversight of John MacArthur, this anthology of essays in defense of inerrancy features contributions from a host of respected twentieth-century evangelical leaders:

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The Scripture Cannot Be Broken stands as a clarion call to all who love the Bible and want to see Christ's church thrive in our increasingly secular world. It is a call to stand alongside our spiritual forefathers with wisdom, clarity, and courage—resolute in our confidence that Scripture is the very Word of God.

JOHN MACARTHUR has served as the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, since 1969. Known for his verse-by-verse expository preaching, MacArthur's pulpit ministry has extended around the world via his daily radio program, *Grace to You*, and nearly four hundred books and study guides. He also serves as the president of The Master's College and Seminary, a four-year liberal arts Christian college. He and his wife, Patricia, live in Southern California and have four grown children.

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