In memory of
Dr. J. Barton Payne, whose inspiration, scholarship, and pioneer efforts helped evangelicals focus on the importance of the inerrant Word.
THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God’s written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God’s own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God’s grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God’s Word we shall be grateful.
A SHORT STATEMENT

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.

ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

Article I

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

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

Article II

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

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

Article III

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Article IV

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Article V

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

Article VI

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article VII

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

Article IX

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaran-
ted true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or falleness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God’s Word.

**Article X**

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

**Article XI**

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

**Article XII**

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

**Article XIII**

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

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

**Article XIV**

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

**Article XV**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus’ teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

**Article XVI**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church’s faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

**Article XVII**

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God’s written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

**Article XVIII**

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

**Article XIX**

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.
EXPOSITION

Our understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy must be set in the context of the broader teachings of the Scripture concerning itself. This exposition gives an account of the outline of doctrine from which our summary statement and articles are drawn.

Creation, Revelation, and Inspiration

The Triune God, who formed all things by his creative utterances and governs all things by His Word of decree, made mankind in His own image for a life of communion with Himself, on the model of the eternal fellowship of loving communication within the Godhead. As God’s image-bearer, man was to hear God’s Word addressed to him and to respond in the joy of adoring obedience. Over and above God’s self-disclosure in the created order and the sequence of events within it, human beings from Adam on have received verbal messages from Him, either directly, as stated in Scripture, or indirectly in the form of part or all of Scripture itself.

When Adam fell, the Creator did not abandon mankind to final judgment but promised salvation and began to reveal Himself as Redeemer in a sequence of historical events centering on Abraham’s family and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, present heavenly ministry, and promised return of Jesus Christ. Within this frame God has from time to time spoken specific words of judgment and mercy, promise and command, to sinful human beings so drawing them into a covenant relation of mutual commitment between Him and them in which He blesses them with gifts of grace and they bless Him in responsive adoration. Moses, whom God used as mediator to carry His words to His people at the time of the Exodus, stands at the head of a long line of prophets in whose mouths and writings God put His words for delivery to Israel. God’s purpose in this succession of messages was to maintain His covenant by causing His people to know His Name—that is, His nature—and His will both of precept and purpose in the present and for the future. This line of prophetic spokesmen from God came to completion in Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Word, who was Himself a prophet—more than a prophet, but not less—and in the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation. When God’s final and climactic message, His word to the world concerning Jesus Christ, had been spoken and elucidated by those in the apostolic circle, the sequence of revealed messages ceased. Henceforth the Church was to live and know God by what He had already said, and said for all time.

At Sinai God wrote the terms of His covenant on tables of stone, as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility, and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation He prompted men to write the messages given to and through them, along with celebratory rec-

ords of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy. The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: although the human writers’ personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. Thus, what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author, having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in freedom and faithfulness “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (1 Peter 1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin.

Authority: Christ and the Bible

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is the Word made flesh, our Prophet, Priest, and King, is the ultimate Mediator of God’s communication to man, as He is of all God’s gifts of grace. The revelation He gave was more than verbal; He revealed the Father by His presence and His deeds as well. Yet His words were crucially important; for He was God, He spoke from the Father, and His words will judge all men at the last day.

As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture. The Old Testament looked ahead to Him; the New Testament looks back to His first coming and on to His second. Canonical Scripture is the divinely inspired and therefore normative witness to Christ. No hermeneutic, therefore, of which the historical Christ is not the focal point is acceptable. Holy Scripture must be treated as what it essentially is—the witness of the Father to the incarnate Son.

It appears that the Old Testament canon had been fixed by the time of Jesus. The New Testament canon is likewise now closed inasmuch as no new apostolic witness to the historical Christ can now be borne. No new revelation (as distinct from Spirit-given understanding of existing revelation) will be given until Christ comes again. The canon was created in principle by divine inspiration. The Church’s part was to discern the canon which God had created, not to devise one of its own.

The word canon, signifying a rule or standard, is a pointer to authority, which means the right to rule and control. Authority in Christianity belongs to God in His revelation, which means, on the one hand, Jesus Christ, the living Word, and, on the other hand, Holy Scripture, the written Word. But the authority of Christ and that of Scripture are one. As our Prophet, Christ testified that Scripture cannot be broken. As our Priest and King, He devoted His earthly life to fulfilling the law and the prophets, even dying in obedience to the words of Messianic prophecy. Thus, as He saw Scripture attesting Him and His authority, so by His
own submission to Scripture He attested its authority. As He bowed to His Father’s instruction given in His Bible (our Old Testament), so He requires His disciples to do—not, however, in isolation but in conjunction with the apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit. So Christians show themselves faithful servants of their Lord by bowing to the divine instruction given in the prophetic and apostolic writings which together make up our Bible.

By authenticating each other’s authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority. The Biblically-interpreted Christ and the Christ-centered, Christ-proclaiming Bible are from this standpoint one. As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says, so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.

**Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation**

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called infallible and inerrant. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths.

Infallible signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

Similarly, inerrant signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.

We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of his penman’s milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.

The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (e.g., the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called “phenomena” of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions.

Inasmuch as all Scripture is the product of a single divine mind, interpretation must stay within the bounds of the analogy of Scripture and eschew hypotheses that would correct one Biblical passage by another, whether in the name of progressive revelation or of the imperfect enlightenment of the inspired writer’s mind.

Although Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional view of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action.

**Skepticism and Criticism**

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world-views have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism which denies that God is knowable, the rationalism which denies that He is comprehensible, the idealism which denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism which denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-biblical principles seep into men’s theologies at presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.

**Transmission and Translation**

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well
preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autographa. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit’s constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

Inerrancy and Authority

In our affirmation of the authority of Scripture as involving its total truth, we are consciously standing with Christ and His apostles, indeed with the whole Bible and with the main stream of church history from the first days until very recently. We are concerned at the casual, inadvertent, and seemingly thoughtless way in which a belief of such far-reaching importance has been given up by so many in our day.

We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave loses its authority, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one’s critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started. This means that at bottom independent reason now has authority, as opposed to Scriptural teaching. If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrines are still held, persons denying the full truth of Scripture may claim an evangelical identity while methodologically they have moved away from the evangelical principle of knowledge to an unstable subjectivism, and will find it hard not to move further.

We affirm that what Scripture says, God says. May He be glorified. Amen and Amen.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

Higher criticism is the art of seeing literature exactly as it is and of estimating it accordingly. It becomes negative criticism, often described as "the historical-critical method," when it assumes the right to pass rationalistic judgment on Scripture's own claims about its composition and historicity. Such a method necessarily presupposes that the Bible's claims are not inerrant. It thus disqualifies itself as truly scientific criticism, since it refuses to view the object being analyzed according to its proper (divine) character. Examples are provided, both of valid and of invalid criticism, together with an evaluation of present-day attempts by negative critics to infiltrate evangelicalism with views that subordinate the authority of Christ and of Scripture to the judgments of men.

4 J. Barton Payne

HIGHER CRITICISM AND BIBLICAL INERRANCY

At the heart of today's trend among some conservative Christians to give up belief in the full, inerrant authority of Scripture lies negative higher criticism. Christ's followers need the Bible, and they know it; they do not want to lose its infallible word. But certain former evangelicals have decided that, though it means opposing Jesus' own teachings about the validity of Scripture, they must accept negative higher criticism. It is as simple as that.

Definition

Are you a higher critic? Am I? It all depends. It depends on who is asking the question and how it is asked. Under the proper circumstances evangelicals will reply, "Yes, of course I am"; under others, they will bristle at the very suggestion—while, it is hoped, preserving love toward the questioner.

Just what is "higher criticism," and, in particular, "negative higher criticism"? Its three word elements may be considered in reverse order.

Criticism

Stemming from the Greek root krinō, "to cut," and thus "to judge," the term criticism derives specifically from the adjectival form, kritikos, which means "fit for judging," and thus critical, in
the sense of being “decisive.” An illness has reached its “critical” stage at the point where its outcome is being determined.

Criticism relates to literature in a special way. The *Oxford English Dictionary* presents this definition: “The art of estimating the qualities and character of literary artistic work.” The goal of criticism is to see a writing exactly as it is and to estimate it accordingly. It is not capacious faultfinding, and truly great art has nothing to fear from the critic. Honest criticism will only enhance its inherent value.

*Higher Criticism*

In order to see a given writing exactly as it is, investigators are involved first of all in “the search for the original wording of the text,” which is the discipline of lower criticism—now often designated as textual criticism. Its primary concern is with manuscripts and textual transmission; its goal is to recover, as far as possible, the original wording of the biblical writings. It is preliminary, and fundamental to all further investigation—hence its designation as “lower” (in the sense of foundational). Its sequel, then, is the discipline of higher criticism, which investigates the source of the original texts. Higher criticism asks about the circumstances of composition, including such matters as date, place, authorship, unity, purpose, literal style, and the influence the different books may have had. It also considers how their inspiration came to be recognized and how all the books were gathered together (canon formation). When a person asks, “Who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews?” he is a higher critic!

Inquiry characterizes both of these divisions of criticism. Whether lower or higher, they employ a common method, that of asking questions. As Harry Boer puts it: “Both were conceived in, and have issued from, the same womb. This womb is the rational human mind.” In his historical survey of the theological shift that has occurred at Fuller Seminary, William LaSor allies himself with the essence of higher criticism when he says: “Many of the tensions of the early days of the Seminary developed because some of us were willing to explore the implications of modern scholarship, whereas others tended to retreat to the defense of nineteenth-century viewpoints.” Did LaSor’s interest in modern scholarship go no further than to “explore” it? Did his opponents who defended traditional biblical orthodoxy even “tend” to retreat from this kind of exploration? The publications of Gleason Archer (a former Fuller faculty member), for example, hardly exemplify reticence toward interaction with the implications of liberal higher criticism. But LaSor’s sympathies generally correspond to our basic definition of criticism, that it is “the science of inquiry.” The real question, then, concerns the kind of inquiry it is.

*Negative Higher Criticism*

In his defining of terms, Boer grants that the above-cited quotation from the *Oxford Dictionary* is actually its second definition for criticism and that the first is this: “The action of passing judgment upon the qualities or merits of anything, especially the passing of an unfavorable judgment. . . . censure.” Boer is vehement in his repudiation of this negative aspect; he calls it, “wholly erroneous . . . not in any sense the meaning of the term ‘biblical criticism.’ ” Yet historically, biblical criticism has become the domain of liberalism. As James M. Robinson points out in *The New Hermeneutic*, “Liberalism and conservatism tended to divide criticism and hermeneutics between them. This in part explains why hermeneutics as a discipline has survived in conservative circles even down to the present.” It also explains why “higher critic” has often come to mean simply “skeptic.”

A phrase now often used, especially in liberal circles, in place of “higher criticism” is “the historical-critical method.” In theory, this too, is a good term. Evangelicals are as much committed to *history* as are their opponents, in fact, they should be more fully committed to it (cf. 1 Cor. 15:14). As already discussed, evangelicals are also committed to criticism (in the sense of seeking to see Scripture exactly as it is). But the phrase historical-critical method has become so identified with rationalistic skepticism (see Soulen’s quote on page 93 and related note) that it would seem no longer to be salvageable for use by Bible believers.

In theory, higher criticism need not be negative. Its avowed goal is objective description. Criticism becomes warped—that is, it “goes wrong” and fails to see a worthy object for what it really is—only when coupled with presuppositions that turn it into dishonest, unobjective criticism. The question, of course, then arises, What constitutes a warping presupposition? Liberalism and evangelicalism come up with diametrically opposed answers, and these in turn determine their respective judgments of Scripture.
Liberalism demands freedom. George Ladd, returning from a sabbatical on the Continent, declared that he did not like what he had seen. He put it this way: "German theology is . . . an adventure of inquiring minds which refuse to be in bondage to the traditions of the past. . . . It insists that only when the scholar approaches the Scripture free from all presuppositions can he really understand the Bible as an historical book." Such an approach forbids one to come to the Word knowing in advance that it is true. Kasemann says bluntly, "Scripture to which one surrenders . . . uncritically, leads . . . to indistinguishability between faith and superstition." The purpose, therefore, of Boer's book Above the Battle? The Bible and Its Critics is to pronounce a resounding "No!" to the question, Is Scripture above the battle? The Bible is not and, he says, must not be kept exempt from attack. Liberalism insists that no other approach can be tolerated. As H. H. Rowley once explained:

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. For 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.

Yet—and this is a fact that has to be noted—Rowley's exclusivistic stress on freedom is itself a presupposition. Thus, when the crisis at Concordia Seminary was approaching in the fall of 1973 and the denominational president, J. A. O. Preus, offered the liberal element under John Tietjen a compromise solution—by which twenty conservative professors would be hired at the seminary—it became a matter of principle that "the proposal was received with disdain." Liberalism simply cannot be liberal with those who threaten its methodology and its own presuppositions through "biased" criticism, that is, criticism that assumes biblical inerrancy.

Rowley's explanation also bears witness to the fact that "most of the conclusions" produced by his school of criticism are negative and end up being rejected by conservatives. Furthermore, in its very theory, the presupposition of critical freedom has to assume "in advance" an unfavorable judgment against Scripture. Norman Gottwald does not hesitate to go on record in this regard. He says, "The only presupposition common to all Old Testament critics is the necessity of questioning tradition, examining a religious literature as we would examine any other writings in order to determine authorship, date, sources, and historical background. This at once sounds the death knell for verbal inspiration." He recognizes that the Old Testament claims verbal inspiration for itself; but, he replies, "value judgments are inescapable. We all come to the Old Testament with some ultimate perspective, even if it is to deny the ultimacy of the Hebrew claim."12

Conservatism, on the other hand, demands commitment. The Protestant E. J. Young follows the example of Catholic Wilhelm Moeller in citing Exodus 3:5 in the preface to his Old Testament Introduction: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."13 After looking into the positions both of Young and of Gottwald, Samuel Schultz concludes:

Basic among all these questions is the presupposition of the critics regarding the trustworthiness of the Bible. This is the watershed that ultimately divides them into two camps. One group regards the Bible at face value—reliable, trustworthy, and inerrant. The other group may presuppose various other positions except the recognition that the Bible is reliable throughout. . . . [Instead, it is] treated on the purely human level.14

His objection to Gottwald's liberalism is that "for the latter [the liberal] the value judgment of the critic is imposed on Scripture, while for the former [the evangelical] the Scripture is accepted as the standard to which all value judgments are subjected."15 Schultz's position is that the only way to criticize Scripture—the only way really to see it as it is in history—is to refrain from imposing negative human judgments on it. This position obviously demands commitment. At the very least it means that the Bible text should be considered innocent until proven guilty. Legitimate, honest criticism takes the text on its own terms first, before attempting (if it ever has the right to do so) to impose modern categories on it. It also means, incidentally, that the evangelical often finds himself in a bind semantically. The moment he opens his mouth in complaint against some aspect of modern biblical criticism, someone always seems to jump to his feet in defense of criticism, as such. The Bible
believer must then stop and explain that he is all for honest inquiry and that what he is against is negative higher criticism (see the opening sentence of this chapter).

LIMITS

Which presupposition, then, is proper—that of freedom, which produces negative higher criticism, or that of commitment, accompanied by criticism that affirms Scripture? The question becomes one of limits—of deciding just how far the critic can or should go. May he carry his task beyond that of objective description into one of sifting textual ideas so as to establish or modify their truth? The liberal says yes. Without the right to sift, and to reject what seems unworthy, he says, the critic cannot be true to himself, and criticism is a farce. The evangelical says no. By claiming the right to sift, he declares, the critic cannot be true to the divinely inerrant nature of the biblical literature that is under scrutiny, and criticism is misapplied. If, therefore, a proper decision is to be reached, the limits that are at issue must be accurately defined.

The Nature of the Limits

When Rowley contends for his freedom, as a biblical scholar, to follow wherever the evidence “might naturally lead,” and when Gottwald decries anyone’s imposing different limits (on his treatment of religious literature) from the way he would “examine any other writings,” both men thereby limit Scripture to a naturalistic category. Gerhard Maier observes, “the concept that the Bible must be treated like any other book has plunged theology into an endless chain of perplexities and inner contradictions.”16 The reason goes back to the kind of limits the former two scholars impose. As George Ladd says, in following up his description of the adventurous Germans who were seeking to understand the Bible as a historical book:

They interpret the Bible from within the presuppositions of the contemporary scientific world view. Such a world view assumes that all historical events are capable of being explained by other known historical events. In other words, what we call the supernatural is not the immediate activity of the living God; for it belongs to the area of legend and myth and not to the area of historical reality.17

Which will we choose: to limit the Bible, and thus also the

HIGHER CRITICISM AND BIBLICAL INERRANCY

Christian faith, along with God Himself, or to limit the critic? Although Peter Stuhlmacher bitterly opposes the “anticritical” stance of his former protegé, Maier, he concedes the truth of the latter’s insistence that negative criticism damages theology. He acknowledges that, “a historical criticism of the biblical tradition which is unchecked can allow irreconcilable fronts to emerge between scientific insight on the one hand and vital Christian faith on the other” (italics mine).18

The pattern that exists between “checks” and today’s higher criticism can be laid out by means of the following charts. Their goal, if we assume a proposition that “X did Y,” is to plot the legitimacy of both affirmative and negative evaluations of this proposition, in a variety of literary contexts.

1. In a noninspired book:

   EVALUATION of “X did Y”  LEGITIMACY
   (possible responses that one can give to this proposition)
   I know it is true  A man CAN say this
   I know it is NOT true  He CAN say this, too
   (Liberalism takes this approach toward the Bible.)

2. In a supposedly inspired book, which would contain both natural and supernatural matter:

   EVALUATION  LEGITIMACY
   natural matter and supernatural
   I know it is true  He CAN say this  He CANNOT tell
   I know it is NOT true  He CAN say this  He CANNOT tell

(As an example of a natural matter in a supposedly inspired book, let us say that X = Joseph Smith and Y = his translating of a Roman-period Egyptian funerary text on Osiris, which he converts into words of Abraham about Isaac. With our present knowledge of Egyptian literature, anyone can judge this assertion, that “X did Y,” and say it either is true or is not.19 But neither the liberal nor the evangelical is in a position, in himself, to make judgments if the category is supernatural. Let us say further that X = an angel called Moroni and Y = his speaking to Mr. Smith. Who am I to
say whether there really was an X that did or did not do Y? Only another supernatural source can guide me; and He may! So when a liberal claims he can judge the supernatural, he actually brings it down to his own natural level and thus denies in advance, its reality. Criticism has “gone wrong” by adopting a presupposition that opposes the potential character of the object being judged.)

3. In Scripture, with its content, both natural and supernatural:

**EVALUATION**

I know it is true

**LEGITIMACY**

natural

He can say this,

and supernatural

He can say this,

too (because another supernatural source, Christ, validates Scripture)

I know it is not true

He cannot say this

(because Christ has said Scripture cannot be broken, John 10:35)²⁰

(Further, the evangelical says he cannot negatively judge even the natural elements in Scripture. Let us say, for example, that X = Matthew and Y = his quoting (27:9–10) words from Zechariah 11:12–13 [with possible allusions to Jer. 18:2 and 19:2], ascribing them to Jeremiah the prophet.²¹ When the believer says he cannot deny this, he does so on the basis of a presupposition. As a starting point he holds that the claims of the book itself to be words of God are to be accepted as a working hypothesis and ultimately, that all Scripture is inerrant [see Christ’s statement in John 10:35 again]. This presupposition does not destroy legitimate criticism. For, rather than eliminating or even claiming to have answered the few seeming discrepancies that do occur, the evangelical simply transfers these to the supernaturalistic column. He places them where man is not to judge for himself, and where God [who is the only One in a position to know] denies him the privilege of saying, “It’s not true,” because God tells him that Scripture is inerrant.)

**HIGHER CRITICISM AND BIBLICAL INERRANCY**

For every critic—the liberal just as much as the evangelical—establishing limits is a matter of faith, either in one’s own, internal competence or in another’s (Christ’s) external authority.

The Scientific Approach

Without the least hesitancy, Rowley equates the practice of negative higher criticism with what is done “amongst scientific scholars.” By scientific he means, as pointed out by Ladd, being faithful to the contemporary world view that explains all events on the basis of other known events. Stuhlmacher classifies this “rationalistic notion of history and reality” as an outworking of “the principle of analogy . . . . All historical experiences which resist rationalism [as it observes analogous incidents] are subject to skepticism.”²³ His classification is a legitimate one, being accepted, for example, in R. N. Soulen’s current Handbook of Biblical Criticism, which explains:

The term Historical Critical Method refers to that principle of historical reasoning . . . that reality is uniform and universal, that it is accessible to human reason and investigation, that all events historical and natural occurring within it are in principle comparable by analogy, and that man’s contemporary experience of reality can provide the objective criteria by which what could or could not have happened in the past is to be determined.²⁴

But is criticism of Scripture that is based on analogy truly scientific? Gerhard Maier immediately raises philosophical objections: “How can the pure historian without further ado reject something just because it happens only once? What can be experienced and what has analogies can certainly not be declared synonymous.”²⁵ E. J. Young goes further and raises the following theological objection against

the so-called “scientific” method, which assumes that man can approach the facts of the universe, including the Bible, with a neutral mind, and pronounce a just judgment upon them. It is time that we cease to call such a method scientific. It is not scientific, for it does not take into consideration all the facts, and the basic fact it overlooks is that of God and His relation to the world which He has created.²⁶

On these same grounds Maier has entitled his most recent study The End of the Historical-Critical Method; and he concludes, “Because this method is not suited to the subject, in fact even opposes its obvious tendency, we must reject it.”²⁷
In place of the “analogy” method, N. H. Ridderbos refers to some of the oldest portions of Scripture and proposes: “In order to come to a proper historical understanding of the events of Moses’ time, we must take reckoning of the personal intervention of Yahweh, of which the sources bear witness, and work out a scholarly historical method that takes account of this intervention.”

What then constitutes a truly scientific approach? If biblical revelation cannot be placed in the analogist’s test tube for repeatable experimentation, so to make “natural” evaluations—as in certain fields of the physical sciences—what course should one follow? It would appear that proper biblical criticism can be conducted only on the basis of the testimony of competent witnesses—as is the procedure in any other historical discipline. We cannot infer from analogous events today what must have transpired centuries ago. In respect to religious phenomena, Soulé goes so far as to conclude: “If in fact every event in history is in some sense unique, of what value is the principle of analogy?”

Accepting, then, the principle of “testimony of competent witnesses,” we find that God Himself, through Christ (John 1:18), becomes the only authority who can really tell us about His own writing.

This principle, moreover, admits of no compromise. There are those today—ranging from certain of the more thoroughgoing critics, such as Stuhlmacher or Boer, down to some more neoevangelical opponents of biblical inerrancy, such as Maier or Davis—who appeal for a genuine openness to transcendence and who repudiate the use of the historical-critical method when it binds itself totally to antisupernaturalistic philosophical presuppositions (such as underlie Bultmann’s demythologizing of the New Testament), but who still employ negative higher criticism to reject those lesser aspects of Scripture that they happen to find objectionable, either historically or theologically (such as Joshua’s religiously based destruction of the Canaanites).

While Stuhlmacher therefore pleads for a “hermeneutics of consent”—by which he means an openness to hearing the Word of God—he is in fact only calling for historical criticism’s being willing to engage in “critical dialogue with the tradition” of Scripture. Human rationalism still sits in judgment over the results. The principle of the analogy of modern secular thought retains at least partial control, and methodologically it might as well be total! A truly open-minded scientist, on the contrary, must be willing to operate entirely within whatever methods are appropriate to the object of his criticism; otherwise his conclusions will inevitably go wrong.

The alternative method, which is both self-consistent and also scientifically congruous to its subject matter, has been forthrightly defined by Maier: “The correlation or counterpart to revelation is not critique but obedience.” This principle is what made James Orr’s inductive attempt to construct a doctrine of inspiration on the basis of his own evaluation of the observable phenomena of Scripture, with all its various difficulties, basically illegitimate. It is what made B. B. Warfield’s approach of deductively deriving biblical inerrancy from the revealed teaching of Christ and His apostles sound. Evangelicals, in other words, do not support Warfield as one who is immune to criticism (as those who resist inerrancy sometimes insinuate) but simply as one whose methodology is consistent with the object of his investigation.

It is important at this juncture to distinguish rationalism from rationality. While evangelicals reject the former, they do not minimize the latter, namely, the God-given significance and place of human intelligence. They do not wish to inhibit those areas of thought pertinent to man’s Spirit-directed exercise of his intellectual responsibility. We are responsible for examining the historical (especially the resurrection) data that lead to acceptance of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–11). We are responsible for seeking an exact understanding of what our Lord taught, specifically concerning Scripture (Luke 24:45). Lastly, we are responsible for interpreting with diligence all the truths of Scripture (2 Tim. 2:15). But evangelicals deny the right of anyone to contradict what God says He has said. In doing this, he in effect, establishes a criterion above God Himself, which amounts to nothing less than idolatry.

What, then, was the teaching of Christ and His apostles? Simply that what Scripture says, God says. Scripture therefore cannot be broken; it cannot be made subject to negative criticism.

**Standards:**

Having established, philosophically, that the truly scientific approach to biblical criticism is the way of obedience—indeed,
of total obedience—to the witness of Jesus Christ, the evangelical is still obligated to formulate, hermeneutically, definite standards for marking off the limits between critical procedures that are legitimate and those that are not.\textsuperscript{37} At the outset, as an extension of the descriptive task of biblical introduction, it may be assumed that for a given portion of Scripture any theory about the circumstances of literary origin is acceptable if it adequately incorporates the biblical data and proceeds to develop its conclusions from them. Stuhlmacher thus appears to have some basis for opposing Maier’s strictures against form criticism, except for permitting its analysis of canonical hymns and parables.\textsuperscript{38} After all, the form-critical study of Deuteronomy as a 1400 B.C. Hittite type of suzerainty testament has done much both for the understanding of the book and for its authentication to this very period.\textsuperscript{39} But once theory moves away from description into evaluation and begins to adopt a negative stance toward the data that it is supposed to be explaining—by seeking to sift out the erroneous from the valid, the false from the true, and the superstitious from the divine—at that moment it has gone beyond its tether and placed itself in opposition to the standards of Jesus. It has decided, in essence, that the Bible is not divine. This is not to say that the liberal may not believe, in a measure, in revelation in the sense of divine “speaking.” But he does not believe in inspiration, as this is theologically understood, as divine writing. The Bible, skeptics insist, is at best a human book about God, and, as such, may be criticized like other human books. The evangelical, too, believes that the Bible is a human book, but that it is also, and more fundamentally, a divine book and is to be so treated. The two approaches therefore end up poles apart.

As we come to Scripture, accepting it as the Book authored by God, to be understood in ways that He directs, we find that His teachings touch on the following two categories: (1) biblical statements about its own composition and (2) the historicity of the biblical content.

\textit{Biblical statements about its own composition.} Who wrote the book of Job? I don’t know! In light of his other wisdom writings, a case can be made for Solomon, but neither the words of Christ nor the words of Scripture in general contain statements that bear on this aspect of higher criticism.\textsuperscript{40} The evangelical scholar is left to his own resources. The same holds true for the subject of textual transmission, a division of lower criticism. As Maier puts it, there is only one course: “The comparison of variants must be carried out critically, that is, with reasonable and intelligent standards.”\textsuperscript{41} Advocates of negative criticism have claimed that this “lets the cat out of the bag.” Barth’s more left-wing colleague, the neoorthodox theologian Emil Brunner, argued, “Once textual criticism had been accepted it was soon discovered that the text might need to face a far more searching criticism, [involving] . . . inconsistencies or contradictions in the Bible.”\textsuperscript{42} Boer’s chief argument supporting freedom for higher criticism is its inseparability from lower criticism: “The two . . . are so interrelated . . . that it is impossible to use the one properly without acknowledging the legitimacy and necessity of the other.” He asks, “If the consistent use of lower criticism is . . . praiseworthy and even necessary, why is the consistent [i.e., negative] use of higher criticism regarded with suspicion and antipathy?”\textsuperscript{43}

The answer, of course, lies in the need to conform to the Bible’s own statements about itself. Maier says, “Textual criticism does not infer [imply?] criticism of the text but refers to critically \textit{finding} the text.” Stated concretely, when we ask whether one should follow MSS A, B, C, and D in omitting the “Amen” at the end of Matthew (28:20, stating the Great Commission) or MSS E, F, G, and H in adding it, we are simply engaging in the legitimate endeavor to recover, as closely as possible, the text of Matthew’s autograph. Neither he nor any of the other apostles included within their inspired statements directives (predictions) about which manuscripts should be copied four centuries or so later. We are free to engage in such criticism as best we can.

If, however, we follow redaction criticism concerning the Great Commission’s formula for baptism (“in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” (28:19) and conclude “that at some point the tradition of Matthew expanded an original monadic formula . . . to make Jesus’ teachings meaningful to their own \textit{Sitz im Leben} rather than to present them unedited,”\textsuperscript{44} we indulge in illegitimate negative higher criticism, especially if we raise questions against the reliability of Matthew’s autograph. The apostle specifies in his inspired statements that Jesus spoke this baptismal formula (28:18) and gives the circumstances of its verbal composition: It was uttered in Galilee,
on a mountain, to the eleven disciples who had witnessed Jesus' resurrection (28:17). We are therefore committed to the validity of God's inerrant Word.

This example from the first Gospel raises a crucial issue that seems to be emerging among conservative scholars today. Some interpreters consider themselves advocates of inerrancy, but are willing, nevertheless, to grant the existence of erroneous statements in Scripture about the circumstances of the origin of a given passage. The errors are due to the literary genre, or form (namely, the Gospels) in which the statements occur. Since the Bible contains such literary figures as hyperbole and parable, both of which are fictional, could it not be, they argue, that the Gospels form a particular type of Christian literary genre, in which a redactor, in the interests of his theological message, reshapes the historical tradition he has received? The message is thus said to prevail over historical accuracy, with no attempt to deceive being intended by the author/redactor. In other words, the question is simply one of exegesis and hermeneutics, not of errancy.

While such a reconstruction is theoretically possible, it would seem to be highly inappropriate for at least the narrative portions of the Gospels. An author who intends to use a fictional form should make this fact, as well as his reason for using such a form, clear to his readers. The four Gospels, however, contain no clues that they are fictional in the sense claimed by those using the methods of current redaction criticism. They assert just the opposite (Luke 1:1–4), and for 1900 years readers have been impressed by their form as one that intends and assumes historicity.

Two areas of biblical introduction are especially involved regarding this standard of upholding Scripture's statements about its own composition: its claims of authorship and its claims of integrity. A significant question relating to the former appears in the concession made by a critical expositor of a previous generation. In asserting that the latter part of the Book of Isaiah was not authored by that prophet, George Adam Smith observed that if Christ had made use of Isaiah's name in His citations from chapters 40–66, "as, for instance, is the case of David's name in the quotation made from Psalm 110, then those who deny the unity of the Book of Isaiah would be face to face with a very serious problem indeed." Departing for a moment from

our discussion of the Isaianic problem, we should observe that for those who are committed to Christ and to what the Bible says about its own composition, denial of the Davidic authorship of the 110th Psalm ceases to be a viable option, even as a theoretical possibility.

Concerning the integrity of the biblical books, we refer to Samuel Sandmel's denial of the authenticity of the conclusion to the Book of Amos. He says,

'It has come to be accepted among free biblical scholars... that the section is an addition.... Of course, religious conservatives reject entirely any supposition that there are such additions... on the premise that the initial words of a biblical book, in this case, "The words of Amos," are a complete guarantee of its authenticity.'

Yet what other premise could one entertain about the intention of the compiler of this book in its final form? And here we must remember the status of the compiler (presumably Amos himself), who, in any event, was the ultimate instrument through whom God's Holy Spirit worked in inspiring this biblical writing. Sandmel's "of course" testifies to his awareness of this consideration, but he simply is not committed to the truth of what he recognizes to be Scripture's own claim.

The historicity of the biblical content. A closely related standard, which sets further limits to the degree to which the critic is left free to exercise his own rational resources, is this: No theory of literary origins may be considered legitimate that calls into question the historicity of the biblical content it is seeking to explain. The following three examples apply to successive portions of the Book of Genesis, analyzed in increasing detail; they also concern three different subcategories found within present-day higher criticism: form, tradition-history, and literary. All three illustrate how critical methods that are supposed to provide students with clearer insights into the nature of the biblical literature conclude by creating historical discrepancies where the biblical text itself suggests none.

1. Genesis 1–11 is a record of the origin and early history of the world, preliminary to the accounts of the patriarchs. Form criticism seeks to discern various blocks of material that, often having existed as oral traditions, may underlie this record. Gene Tucker's handbook distinguishes one such form as "saga," which he defines in this way: "Saga frequently reports things which are
incredible, while history reports the credible. Saga may speak of
the direct intervention of God in the affairs of men, but when
history speaks of God it is only as the ultimate cause of every-
things.” He concludes, “Genesis is for the most part a collection
of sagas.” By assigning the first book of Moses to this form
category, he automatically downgrades the historicity of its con-
tent. (One may even wonder if he might not already have ent-
tained certain presuppositions about the nature of history before
he defined his forms!) He acknowledges that
the results of such analysis often are taken to be entirely negative,
and in certain cases they are, in the sense that the historical
reliability of some material has been called into question. But
such an analysis can lead to a positive reassessment. (In)saga . . .
primitive peoples ask questions about the world and produce
answers which, though incorrect, are interesting.49

2. Genesis 28 is the record of a theophany granted to the
patriarch Jacob at Bethel. Tradition-history seeks to trace out how
various elements or forms were brought together to produce the
present narrative. Walter Rast explains, “Tradition historians
propose that these episodes . . . reflect localized cult legends”;
and he proposes that the pillar “may have had a prehistory of
Canaanite worship” and the heavenly ladder “was probably a
ziggurat.” Yet “at some point the tradition of the Bethel
theophany has interpreted it as . . . underscoring God’s special
care for the patriarch . . . But even this is not the end . . . the
latest meaning of the tradition becomes part of a pledge which
embraces the descendants of the patriarch as well.”50 What
Scripture says about the Bethel incident is almost totally di-
verted from what may “really” have happened.

3. Genesis 37:28, in its present Hebrew text, is a record of
Joseph and his brothers: “So when the Midianite merchants
came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and
sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took
him to Egypt.” Literary criticism seeks to recreate certain written
sources that supposedly underlie the present text. Long ago S. R.
Driver applied Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis (a form of
literary criticism) to this passage. Unwilling to grant that the
Midianites could be included under Ishmaelites (cf. Judg. 8:24),
he divided up verse 28 and assigned the first part—“There
passed by Midianites . . . and they lifted Joseph up out of the
pit” (ASV)—to an assumed “E” document, separate from the “J”
matter that precedes and follows it. By so dividing the verse,
however, he created discrepancies. First is that of positing two
different groups, corresponding to the two sources, to whom
Joseph would have been sold. Also, by removing the brothers
from this part of E’s record, the “they” is made to “refer to the
Midianite merchants passing by, who drew up Joseph from the
pit without his brothers’ knowledge.”51 What then really hap-
penned? Was Joseph lifted up and sold by his brothers, or was he
lifted up and kidnapped by the merchants? Who can say—
except that, as the result of this process of literary dissection, the
historicity of one part (and perhaps both parts) of the verse has
been denied. Higher criticism ends up rejecting the truth of the
biblical content it is supposed to clarify.

True criticism should, on the contrary, serve as a tool that
assists readers of Scripture to gain deeper appreciation for the
historicity of its contents. Thus when apparent discrepancies
arise—for example, between parallel statements in the synoptic
Gospels—critical principles such as the following may be in-
voked. (1) Discrepancies between quotations should not be con-
considered contradictions when each may be a fair translation (in
Greek) of an original statement in another language (as Aramaic).
(2) Variations in statement are not contradictions
when they arise either from recording different parts of some
common event or from assigning different emphases or degrees of
importance to the same part. (3) Incidents are not to be
identified with each other simply because of similarities of cir-
cumstance or description.52

Examples

The following section approaches five questions that are most
discussed today within Old Testament and New Testament
criticism. Its purpose is not to present a comprehensive treat-
ment, but rather to apply the standards that have been proposed
(see “Standards,” pp. 95ff.) and to suggest limits within which a
truly scientific critic, who respects the nature of his divinely
93ff.), may freely exercise rational judgment.

1. Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch

Basic to all Old Testament study is Pentateuchal criticism. Of
special concern is the Mosaicity of these “five books of Moses.”
Scripture suggests three ways in which the concept may be understood. (1) If by Mosaicity we mean those portions that were inscripturated, written down, by the hand of Moses himself, such a concept would embrace the following sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Wellhausen’s “document”</th>
<th>Biblical Claim of Mosaicity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exod. 17:8–13</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Exod. 17:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exod. 20:22–23:33</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Exod. 24:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exod. 34:10–26</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>Exod. 34:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev. 18:5</td>
<td>H (in P)</td>
<td>Rom. 10:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. 33:3–49</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Num. 33:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut. 5–30</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Deut. 31:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut. 32:1–42</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Deut. 31:22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These sections amount to fewer than 32 chapters out of the total of 187; for the remaining five-sixths of the Pentateuch, scholars who are committed to the truthfulness of the record are not bound to hypotheses of Mosaic inscripturation. Yet this tabulation demonstrates that Moses wrote sections that appear in all of Wellhausen’s various “documents,” each of which is supposed to have had its own author (or authors) and distinctive style. The very fact that the New Testament states that Moses wrote down Leviticus 18:5, even though this truth is not indicated in the text of the Pentateuch, suggests that Moses may have authored considerably more than Scripture specifically indicates.

(2) The term Mosaicity may refer to those parts composed by Moses—whether actually written down by him or not—such as the address in Deuteronomy 1:6–4:40 or the song in 33:2–29. Assuming the inspiration and accuracy of those who finally compiled the books of Scripture, we realize that this category is, for all practical purposes, equivalent to the first. Still, it means that the rest of the words, which Scripture does not specifically assign to Moses, need not be attributed to him. These include such difficult passages as the observation that Moses was the most humble man on earth (Num. 12:3) or the description of his death (Deut. 34).

(3) Later Scripture teaches a generally Mosaic character that marks the Pentateuch as a whole. Jesus equated the Old Testament with “Moses and the Prophets” (Luke 16:29; cf. 24:44 or Mark 12:26), and the Chronicler speaks of “the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses [literally, by the hand of Moses]” (2 Chron. 34:14). The Pentateuch, therefore, including Genesis (which makes no internal claim about its authorship), must be seen, in a very real sense, as constituting “the five books of Moses”—datable to his time and produced under his direction, perhaps with the aid of the seventy elders (see Num. 11:16–17, 24–25) or of Joshua (see Josh. 27:18–20).

The critical theory of a small Mosaic “core” of writings, supplemented over the centuries by various redactors, is specifically refuted by Pentateuchal laws forbidding just such additions (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). Old Testament scholars are thus free to speculate about pre-Mosaic “forms” or documents to their hearts’ content, provided they do not thereby bring into question the historical claims of the biblical contents—as through proposals of disharmonious double recordings or of contradictory strata (so that “J,” for example, teaches a 40-day flood and “P” one of 150 days). Most exegetes, however, seem to lose their interest in higher criticism when confronted by these divinely imposed limits. Yet our Lord Himself insisted that Moses wrote about Him and added, “But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” (John 5:46–47).

2. Authorship of Isaiah 40–66

One of the so-called “assured results of modern criticism” is the denial that Isaiah wrote chapters 40–66 of the book that bears his name. Without going into the internal arguments, about which a great deal could be said both pro and con, suffice it at this point to summarize the external (New Testament) argument. The recorded words of Jesus remain silent as far as assigning the material of these chapters to Isaiah is concerned; but His apostles clearly assign it to the eighth-century prophet. Have we then a limit imposed on critical speculation at this point? An evangelical such as Clark Pinnock says no. He writes:

Spokesmen such as Schaeffer and Lindsell tend to confuse the high view of Scripture with their own interpretations of it . . . [e.g., making] a good deal out of the fact that the NT is accustomed to citing the whole book of Isaiah under the prophet’s name, thus settling definitively the question of its authorship. . . . They apparently have assumed the right to foreclose on the
exegetical options available as if they could somehow dictate to all other evangelicals, including those trained in biblical studies, the interpretation they must accept. Enough of that!\footnote{55}

In regard to passages where the Book of Isaiah is simply generally cited under the prophet's name, as in Mark 1:2, and perhaps in 7:6, evangelicals must meticulously avoid imposing personal interpretations on others. But in a passage such as John 12:41, where both parts of Isaiah are cited and the apostle testifies, “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him,”\footnote{56} is denial of Isaiah's personal authorship to be considered “interpretation,” or is it a violation of the apostolic meaning?\footnote{57} The issue is clear: he who is open-minded about accepting the divinity of Isaiah’s prophecy is already close-minded against accepting the inerrant authority of John’s Gospel, and therefore of Scripture as a whole.

3. Authenticity of Daniel’s Predictions

A third area of Old Testament criticism where current differences between the free (negative) and the committed (positive) approaches to the subject become most apparent is that of Daniel’s predictions. Representing the former approach, R. H. Pfeiffer was candid in expressing himself about both of the standards that have been proposed above for establishing the limits appropriate to biblical criticism. Concerning historicity of content, he asserted flatly: “Such miracles as the revelation to Daniel of the details of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and their meaning (2:19), the divine deliverance of ... Daniel from the lions (6:22–24), and a hand without a body writing a message on a wall (5:5), lie outside the realm of historical facts.” Concerning the book’s own statements about its sixth-century, exilic composition, he adds, “The historical background of Daniel, as was discovered immediately after its publication, is not that of the sixth but the second century ... In dating an apocalypse such as Daniel, the period in which the seer is said to have received the revelations is entirely irrelevant.”\footnote{58}

Pfeiffer, with almost all of today’s negative critics, relegates the book’s author to legend and its predictions to the time of the Maccabean revolt, specifically 165 B.C. Yet Christ’s words in Matthew 24:15 (“When you see ... the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel . . .”) testify to His belief not only in the historicity of the seer but also in a fulfillment of his predictions that was still future in A.D. 30.\footnote{59} To this day I can recall my shock when I mentioned these facts to a critically minded friend and he replied, “I know more about Daniel than Jesus did.” It dramatizes how the lines are to be drawn concerning appropriate biblical criticism.

If one were to select similarly crucial areas in New Testament studies, he would probably turn to the matter of the historicity of all the accounts in John’s Gospel, with its preincarnate divine Logos, or even to that of the synoptic stories, with their Son of man Christology. Harry Boer, for example, comments: “All that we know of ... the words of Jesus in which he expressed his teaching we know through reports of the four evangelists ... the same kind of human medium through which the rest of the Bible comes to us” (italics his). Boer eventually salvages enough facts to conclude that “Jesus again and again accommodated himself to existing beliefs which we no longer accept.”\footnote{60} For the purpose, however, of illustrating legitimate boundaries to higher criticism, reference to the authorships of the following two books may prove to be particularly instructive.

4. Authorship of Ephesians

Ephesians has suffered more consistent criticism than any other Epistle in the Pauline corpus, except for the Pastorals. Not all of the criticism, however, has necessarily been negative. The question, To whom was it written? is a matter belonging to lower criticism. Most MSS (including A, D, and G) insert within 1:1 the qualifier “in Ephesus”; but the earliest and best MSS (including \( \delta \), B, and P\footnote{46}) omit these two words. That is to say, Paul’s inspired autograph, as well as we can reconstruct it, was silent at this point. Critics are thus free to consider Ephesians as an encyclical letter, perhaps (if it happened to be directed, among other churches, to the group at Laodicea) as the letter referred to in Colossians 4:16.\footnote{61}

The question, however, By whom was it written? belongs to higher criticism. All the MSS give the author as Paul (1:1; 3:1; cf. the apostle’s personal references in 3:2–8). There is thus no question among critics about what the inspired autograph said, only about whether or not it is true. Many scholars today, through the application of rationalistic induction to the style and content of Ephesians, have judged it to be spurious and have assigned it a date near the close of the first century, a generation after the
apostle’s death—a conclusion obviously impossible for those committed to Scripture’s divine trustworthiness.

5. Authorship of 2 Peter

The single “most assured” denial made by modern New Testament criticism concerns the apostolic authorship of 2 Peter. Even such moderate critics as B. M. Metzger relegate this Epistle to the second century, “long after Peter’s lifetime.” Here again, however, we are not able to go into the pros and cons of the argument. Suffice it to note that this book does not simply claim to be the words of “Peter, . . . apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1) and allude to the writer’s personal experiences with Jesus (1:12–14). It explicitly bases the authority of its teaching on the reality of its author’s having been one of the three human eyewitnesses to Christ’s transfiguration (1:16–18). One’s choice between Petrine authenticity and pseudepigraphic fraud rests once again on the limits that are recognized as legitimate for criticism of the inerrant Word of God.

EVALUATION

In light of the relationship between higher criticism and biblical inerrancy, as this has been outlined above, Christians will ask, “How should we then live?” (Ezek. 33:10 KJV). Four particular factors, moreover, seem to demand the practical attention of those who would live in conformity to Jesus Christ.

Tension

Evangelicals need to be aware first of all of the intransigence of negative higher criticism and the seriousness of its conflict with biblical orthodoxy. The problem is not about to go away. Gerhard Maier may argue “till the cows come home,” alleging, as he does the end of the historical-critical method. He may show how those who reject part of the Bible on higher critical grounds are unable to agree on a stopping place, so as to preserve some “canon in the canon” and how instead, as in the words of H. Braun, “man, who began critically to analyze revelation and to discover for himself what is normative, found at the end of the road: himself.” But his evidence and his logic falls on deaf ears (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). Stuhlmann retorts, on behalf of the critical consensus: “No contemporary theologian can forego the results . . . of this biblical criticism. . . . Any scientific alternative to the historical-critical method is out of the question.”

Evangelicals not infrequently seek encouragement from current “Reversals of Old Testament Criticism,” and call attention to the modern shift in Homeric criticism toward acceptance of Homeric authorship. One might note, for example, a recent reversal in the critical position concerning the order of Ezra and Nehemiah. Where once only conservative interpreters, such as J. S. Wright, maintained the traditional order, this view has regained the support of a number of important scholars within the last decade, including Morton Smith, F.M. Cross, H. Tadmor, Y. Aharoni, M. Avi-Yonah, and B. Mazar. Yet the mood and basic positions of negative higher criticism as a whole remain unchanged. Johannes Botterweck has inaugurated his massive project, the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, with this justifying explanation: “The form-critical and tradition-historical methods have been refined to such a point that one can expect rather certain results.” The articles in the dictionary indicate an almost total commitment to this belief.

Where revisions in the critical stance have occurred, the shift has seldom moved all the way back to full acceptance of the scriptural text. Antievangelicals such as James Barr have been quick to censure conservatives for their inconsistency in adopting the new stance themselves. And when an important archaeological discovery, such as D. J. Wiseman’s Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, has completely overthrown a particular theory of negative criticism, its disciples nonetheless exhibit phenomenal ability to maintain their skepticism, even when having to furnish new reasons for their “faith.”

Scholarly conformity often extends even to the details of the higher critical system. As R. K. Harrison once remarked:

Driver’s work established the “standard of orthodoxy” in Old Testament liberal circles. While minor variations were permitted, an individual’s academic respectability depended to a large extent upon the closeness with which he adhered to the pattern set forth by Driver. Thus there sprang up a curious liberal-conservatism which is still in evidence today in British scholarship.

But whether in detail or in essence, the commitment demanded by positive (evangelical) higher criticism simply cannot coexist with the freedom, and skepticism, demanded by negative (liberal) higher criticism. The tension is irresolvable.
Temptation

Evangelicals, furthermore, must be aware of the resultant, perennial temptations confronting their theologians the moment they undertake—as stated by LaSor at the outset of this study—“to explore the implications of modern scholarship.”

Boer, for example, grants that conservative denominations such as the Christian Reformed Church, of which he is a member, “have traditionally adhered to the view that the Bible as God’s word cannot contain inconsistencies of any kind. . . . The words infallibility and inerrancy are usually applied to Scripture.” He then declares, “The evangelical scholar cannot ignore this. But he also has his [internal] academic conscience and the general [external] theological community to live with.”

By his allusion to the theological “community,” Boer underlines the pressure toward conformity that Harrison mentions in his reference to British scholars.

Evangelical graduate students have sometimes sold their souls for a Ph.D. degree. Those who survive this hurdle find that when they have secured a professorship, their participation in research and in scholarly meetings subjects them to even more persistent temptations. Confronted by the ridicule, direct or indirect, of academic leaders like James Barr, who insist that “where the fundamentalist takes revelation to be identical with the propositions of the biblical text . . . he is in direct contradiction with modern science; and his position can be maintained only on the ground of simple credulity, defying everything that is thought and known. . . .” Is it any wonder that younger scholars, especially, should develop second thoughts about inerrancy?

We should remember that what “is thought and known” by the unbelieving academic world is based on an uninhibited criticism that renders itself unscientific by perverting rationality into rationalism. It refuses to view its biblical subject within a supernaturalistic framework, which alone is appropriate to its divine nature.

Boer’s allusion to the internal “academic conscience” pinpoints what probably constitutes the most basic danger of all: personal pride. Soulen’s Handbook defines biblical criticism as “that approach to the study of Scripture which consciously searches for and applies the canons of reason to its investigation.”

S. T. David frankly admits: “It is true that no Christian who believes that the Bible errs can hold that the Bible alone is his authority for faith and practice. He must hold to some other authority or criterion as well. That authority, I am not embarrassed to say, is his own mind, his own ability to reason.” Here, in fact, is the supreme appeal of negative higher criticism. As Davis bluntly sums it up, “I am the final judge of what I will believe or not believe.”

The scholar, whose work is constantly one of critical evaluation, faces the peculiar attraction of the built-in “occupational hazard” of pride. It is not without reason that time after time Christian organizations have found their educational institutions to be the initiators and leaders in apostasy from Scripture and the most resistant to the biblical demand of “casting down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). As long as seminary professorships are filled by human beings, the church must be forever reminding itself that eternal vigilance is the price, not of liberty (pride), but of Christian commitment (= humility—a quality that our race has ever found to be in such short supply!).

Results

Yet a most sobering antidote to the temptation of assuming critical autonomy is to look at its results, to consider the dilemmas that have been created by today’s lapse into negative higher criticism. It is a heresy that affects our attitudes toward life, toward revelation, and toward Jesus Christ Himself. Biblical theologians like Otto Baab, who rejoiced that “the breakdown of medieval authoritarianism permitted the mind of the individual biblical scholar to examine freely and critically the documents which were the foundation of his faith,” and who conceded that “an educated churchman finds it impossible to follow the ultraconservatives, to whom the unquestioned Bible is the very word of life,” must face the uncertainties and the vacuum in life that result. Baab continues:

Modern man’s dilemma is created by this failure to find a source of authority possessing ultimate validity and capable of giving him lasting peace in his personal and collective life . . . [and] for the creation of this dilemma . . . the biblical scholar of the modern school must accept a large measure of responsibility.

Concerning God’s revelation, the problem with which negative critics must wrestle is the inconsistency of their views with
the very faith they claim to follow. S. T. Davis, for example, is honest enough to admit that “there is never any tendency in the New Testament to deny, question, or criticize the Old Testament.” Instead, he finds an attitude not only of faith in general truths but also of commitment to specific facts: “The historicity of events and figures described in the Old Testament is taken for granted.” He proceeds to list such “unlikely happenings” as the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Flood, Lot’s wife, Jonah and the great fish, and so on. It is not at all easy to demonstrate consistent and practical devotion to a “revelation” with which you are in disagreement.

Most serious of all, the historicity of the events just listed is not simply the teaching of the New Testament, it is the teaching of Jesus Christ directly. Harry Boer expresses a concern that “appeal to the authority of Jesus is sometimes made to deprive higher critical study of the Bible of its legitimate place.” But, as his theological ancestor Abraham Kuyper put it, “If Christ attributed absolute authority to the Old Covenant . . . then the matter is settled for everyone who worships Him.” It seems to boil down to this: either human criticism gains the place of honor or Jesus does. Some critics are forthright enough to document their hesitations toward the latter. Boer speaks of Jesus’ accommodating Himself to popular beliefs that He knew were wrong. Davis seems to represent a more widely held view and speaks of Jesus’ ignorance: “Perhaps he shared with the people of his day certain false beliefs.” Was His “ignorance” limited just to certain such beliefs? Sigmund Mowinckel says flatly, “He 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 concerning history . . . geography, or the history of biblical literature.”

Where, then, do such views leave the worship of Jesus? J. I. Packer’s dictum seems valid: “Any view that subjects the written word of God to the opinions and pronouncements of men involves unbelief and disloyalty toward Christ.”

**Strategy**

Confronted by today’s anti-Christian higher criticism and by its pervasive dominance within the academic community—including educational institutions, learned societies, and scholarly publications—evangelicals must be aware of what can, and what cannot, be achieved. In regard to liberalism and its disciplines, who lead the negative critical movement, the battle must be fought in the area of preunderstanding. In the words of R. K. Harrison, “It seems abundantly clear that all future scholarship must adopt a more critical attitude toward its theoretical presuppositions.” Parts I and II of Gerhard Maier’s *End of the Historical-Critical Method* serve as noteworthy examples of essentially philosophical refutation of the assumption of rationalistic autonomy. Such refutation must precede any positive presentation of what Maier styles the historical-biblical method—more often called the grammatico-historical method.

Put more concretely, until a scholar becomes willing to accept the lordship of Jesus Christ over his life and thought, it is futile to try to argue him out of Wellhausen’s literary analysis of the Pentateuch, which, to the naturalistic mind set, is the only viable option. We may occasionally twist the lion’s tail by shoving, for example, how Daniel’s third empire has the fourfold character of Greece (7:6; 8:22) and not the twofold character of Persia (7:5; 8:3, 20), with which liberalism identifies it. We should labor under no illusions, however, that such facts will perhaps persuade a negative critic to give up his Maccabean (antisupernaturalistic) understanding of Daniel in favor of a Roman (supernaturalistic) one.

For evangelicals the words that the Old Testament scholar N. H. Ridderbos spoke twenty years ago still bear repeating:

Two dangers especially are present. The first is that [evangelicalism] may fall short in its regard for the authority of God’s Word [the very point stressed in the second evaluation, “Temptation,” pp. 108ff. above]. But another danger is that orthodox Old Testament scholarship exists in too great a degree on the reaction against Old Testament criticism. Even though the critic often presents analysis of the books of the Bible in an unacceptable manner, this does not necessarily mean that every analysis thereof must be rejected. How can evangelicals keep from overreacting?

Our strategy must, first of all, involve awareness. Both advanced students and lay people need to be fully informed about the nature and potentialities of higher criticism. We must then be prepared either for guarded acceptance or for categorical rejection of a given position, depending on circumstances. As indicated above (see “Standards,” pp. 95ff.), thorough biblical
criticism is not only permissible but desirable and, indeed, necessary, provided it studiously refrains from violating the Bible's statements about its own composition and from rejecting its factual reliability. Provisos of this sort are, of course, anathema to the proponents of uninhibited criticism, for they equate such restrictiveness with "the exclusion of any serious critical study of the Bible." Boer complains, "The historical evangelical view of Scripture takes no serious account of the findings of higher criticism except insofar as these are compatible with its basic presuppositions." How right he is! If Romans 5:12-14 says that through one man, Adam, "sin entered the world, ... and death through sin," then so long as evangelicals remain committed to apostolic authority, they cannot be "open-minded" to critical theories that suggest the contrary. It is high time that believers behave more consistently in their rejection of negative criticism. Enough of those book reviews that seek to have it both ways, acknowledging the inerrancy of Scripture and yet courting academic prestige by extolling each new treatment of the myth of Adam's sin as more "stimulating," more "intriguing," and more of a "scholarly feast" than the last!

A final element that is becoming more and more crucial within evangelical strategy concerns equivocation. The battle for the Bible, as Harold Lindsell reminds us, is no longer limited to a conflict between the advocates of negative higher criticism "out there" in institutionalized liberalism and the advocates of biblical inerrancy "in here" among professing evangelicals. Those who sign annual teaching contracts or Evangelical Theological Society membership statements affirming the inerrancy of the scriptural autographs are among those subject to the insidious temptations of the rationalistic critical method. Harry Boer therefore puts his finger on "the evangelical scholar ... [who] resolves the conflict by bowing verbally in both directions." If Boer detests such ambiguity as "conducive neither to theological clarity nor to theological integrity," how much more should those evangelicals who have a higher view of Scripture rise to the defense of their Christian heritage.

One must be careful, of course, to distinguish between a person who is simply uninformed or improperly taught or who has temporary doubts or unresolved questions and one who is a convinced and crusading critic. But if an advocate of negative higher criticism raises his head in a pulpit, classroom, publishing

house, or board chamber in which the committed Christian has a God-given voice or vote, the latter must speak out boldly and vigorously against any effort to make the Scriptures anything less than the inerrant Word of God.

It may be that some former evangelical has come to feel that he has to accept the dictates of today's criticism. That is a tragedy. It is an error from which we must protect the people of God for whom we happen to be responsible. It is a challenge for us to pray for the erring one and with tears, with words, and with love to seek to woo him back to a view of the Scriptures that is compatible with the God of truth, who inspired their writing.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

The defense of the term and doctrine of inerrancy presupposes a clear definition. The aim of this paper is to specify the meaning of the doctrine. To this end a study of the methodology of theology is undertaken. The author concludes that the method of abduction or retroduction is most appropriate to theology as a whole and should be used in formulating a doctrine of inerrancy. Thus the phenomena of Scripture are examined, and a definition of the doctrine is formulated in terms of truth, or truthfulness. Finally, there is a discussion of qualifications, misunderstandings, and objections.

THE MEANING OF INERRANCY

It appears to me that in Ethics, as in all other philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagreements, of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very simple cause: namely to the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely what question it is which you desire to answer.

G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica, vii.

While Moore undoubtedly overstates the case for discovering the precise question, he is nevertheless onto something very important. Without a proper understanding of a question, one has little hope of arriving at the right answer. Moreover, at the heart of clear and precise understanding is careful definition of the terms that make up the question. This is particularly true in theological contexts where words and dogma have a long and hoary history. The danger is always that emotions will be aroused unduly, with resultant failure to communicate the desired information adequately. All of this is to say that, without precise definition of the word inerrancy and of the related doctrine of inerrancy, it is difficult to answer the question as to whether or not the Bible is inerrant. That such clear and careful definition is necessary can be seen even by a superficial reading of the literature of this debate. On both sides there have been attacks on straw men and failure to engage one another on the genuine issues. Therefore, the task of this chapter is to define both the term and the doctrine of inerrancy as precisely as possible so that debate may genuinely proceed.¹

267
Before turning to this task, however, it seems to me that some preliminary considerations are in order. First, I do not intend to defend all who have ever sought to advance a doctrine of inerrancy. Such is both impossible and unnecessary. Yet this fact needs to be emphasized, since there are some who have sought in the past, and some who are now seeking, to formulate the doctrine in an indefensible manner. Such attempts are often held up to ridicule and scorn, and all who hold to inerrancy are then tarred with the same brush. This is not to say that inerrantists have not done similar things but to emphasize a basic tenet of debate or argumentation—namely, that excessive or even false claims by some or even all defenders of a position do not prove that position to be false. To put it another way, a view may be poorly or incorrectly argued and yet be true. In order to disprove inerrancy, therefore, it must be shown that this doctrine in its most defensible formulation is false or at least that it is not as plausible as some other position.

Second, it is often claimed by those who support an inerrant Bible that they alone hold a high view of Scripture. This claim elicits the following response from Davis:

I will criticize inerrancy, but my purpose is to strengthen—not weaken—the evangelical Christian cause by making a clear and, I hope, convincing case for an evangelical attitude toward the Bible that does not involve inerrancy. The "all or nothing" arguments of many defenders of inerrancy give the impression that there is no middle ground between inerrancy, on the one hand, and neo-orthodoxy, liberal, or atheistic attitudes toward the Bible, on the other.2

Davis's quote explicitly or implicitly raises at least three distinct but related questions. (1) Are there only two possible positions on Scripture? Must one hold either to (a) inerrancy, or (b) neo-orthodoxy, liberal, or atheistic attitudes toward the Bible? The answer to this question is easy. There are many possible attitudes toward Scripture. (2) What is the criterion for a high view of Scripture? Specifically, is inerrancy a necessary or sufficient condition, or both, for a high view of Scripture? The answer to this question is not easy. I would guess that there is disagreement on the answer among evangelicals. It is not within the scope of this chapter to answer this question. (3) Given a satisfactory criterion for a high view of Scripture, which of the many possibilities mentioned in question 1 qualify? Obviously, the answer to this question awaits a definitive answer to question 2, which we have not attempted to give. Thus we cannot give an answer to question 3. But again this is not the issue before us.

Third, it is claimed by some who defend the inerrancy of the Bible that the doctrine of inerrancy leads inevitably to the denial of other doctrines that are central to the Christian faith. This, of course, is not necessarily true, though there are numerous examples that can be cited where this has in fact taken place. Likewise, an orthodox doctrine of Scripture is not an absolute hedge against heterodoxy in other theological matters. Some cults, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, have as a part of their doctrinal statement an excellent position on Scripture. On the other hand, many who have vigorously opposed belief in the inerrancy of the Bible have remained orthodox elsewhere in doctrine.

Having said this, we have not settled the matter, since it would surely seem that the first step toward doctrinal purity would be a correct doctrine of Scripture. Nevertheless, there are many, even among the highly educated, who hold views for which they cannot give adequate justification. Thus the question to which we are addressing ourselves is not unimportant or insignificant. It cuts to the heart and foundation of Christian theology. It is the question of theological consistency.

The aim, then, of this chapter is to discuss methodology for formulating and justifying the doctrine of inerrancy and then to define the term inerrancy. I will begin with a general discussion of the method by which a doctrine is constructed and justified. Then the exegetical evidence of Scripture that bears on the doctrine will be examined. This will be followed by a search for proper terminology and for a doctrine that best suits the scriptural phenomena, with special attention being given to qualifications and misunderstandings. Finally, I will reply to some important objections that might be raised against the doctrine of inerrancy but have not been treated in the course of the study.

The Problem of Method

Where do theologians begin in their efforts to set forth the meaning of inerrancy? One possible answer might be a good dictionary, such as the Oxford English Dictionary. If we were merely trying to define the word inerrancy, that suggestion would not be without merit. However, we are attempting to do more
than merely define a term; we are seeking to define or formulate a doctrine. This task takes us to a most fundamental inquiry, a discussion of theological method. That is, how does the theologian go about formulating or constructing a doctrine? How does the theologian theologize? Indeed, it has not been uncommon to set the whole inerrancy conflict in the context of a debate over method. Just such a case in point is Beegle’s treatment in *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility.*

Beegle begins by distinguishing between deductive and inductive methodology. While every argument involves the claim that its premises provide evidence for the truth of its conclusion, deduction and induction differ in the nature of their premises and the relationship between the premises and the conclusion. In deduction the premises may be general assumptions or propositions from which particular conclusions are derived. The distinctive characteristic of deduction, however, is its demonstration of relationship between two or more propositions. Furthermore, a deductive argument involves the claim that its premises guarantee the truth of its conclusion. Where the premises are both the necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of the conclusion, the argument is said to be valid. Where the premises fail to provide such evidence, the argument is said to be invalid.

With induction, on the other hand, the relationship between premises and conclusion is much more modest. The premises only provide some evidence for the conclusion. Inductive arguments are not valid or invalid. They are better or worse, depending on the degree of probability that their premises confer on their conclusions. Moreover, in induction the premises are particulars, and the conclusions are generalizations, the data being organized under the most general categories possible.

Which of these methodologies is correct? Well, Beegle says that they are complementary. That is, both are needed. However, this is not the end of the matter. There is, he thinks, a priority to the inductive. To illustrate this contention he discusses the way in which an archaeologist goes about excavating a tell. The primary task is to dig down through the strata and to label each item that is found, indicating its stratum. After thoroughly excavating and labeling the items, the archaeologist examines a group of objects, such as pottery, from a single stratum. As he correlates the characteristics of a level, he finds that the pottery has certain forms and other features that distinguish it from pottery in other strata. Thus he finds that each stratum has its own type or class of pottery. This classification procedure is called stratigraphy. Now when the archaeologist goes to the next tell, especially if it is nearby, he does not follow quite the same process. Having already derived from the previously discovered phenomena a classification system, he immediately assigns a piece of pottery to a period and type on the basis of its characteristics. However, even here induction has a part. If, for instance, other factors begin to call into question the original classification, there is then need for revision. Beegle therefore concludes, “The best results are obtained when induction precedes deduction.”

Beegle now applies this discussion to the problem of inerrancy. Those who defend inerrancy are deductivists pure and simple. They begin with certain assumptions about God and the Scriptures, namely, that God cannot lie and the Scriptures are the Word of God. From these assumptions inerrantists deduce that the Bible is without error. This approach leads to an a priori determined conclusion, to dogmatism, and to disregard for the phenomena of Scripture. Regardless of the problems of the phenomena, the inerrantist stubbornly maintains his stance on Scripture.

On the other hand, the inductivist cannot accept inerrancy. He begins with the phenomena of Scripture. There he finds errors of differing kinds. He comes across historical inaccuracies. Further, there is reflected in the Bible a view of the world that is scientifically unacceptable today. And this is just the beginning. Thus, as the inductivist seeks to build a doctrine of Scripture, he must be true to the facts of the case. Therefore, try as he may, he cannot accept the idea of an inerrant Bible.

Is this picture fair to the methodology of all defenders of inerrancy? I think not. There is no single methodology employed by inerrantists. In R. C. Sproul’s excellent study, “The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis,” he describes at least three general approaches to the problem of method. First, he cites the confessional method, by which the Bible is confessed to be the Word of God and is so recognized by faith alone. An exponent of this method is G. C. Berkouwer. Second, there is the presuppositional method of Cornelius Van Til. In this method defending the authority and inerrancy of the Bible includes accepting the absolute authority and inerrancy of Scripture as a
foundational premise. The Bible is self-attesting. Third, there is the classical method, which is both inductive and deductive, interested in external as well as internal evidence.\textsuperscript{10}

Given that there are at least these three general approaches, Beegle is first of all wrong in lumping all defenders of inerrancy into the deductivist camp. Some, as we have seen, are more than deductivists. Moreover, even those that advocate a deductive methodology should not be so easily charged with dogmatism and closemindedness. For some, their theological a priori is justified indirectly. Their proof is much like that used to justify the axioms of a geometric system. Since axioms are so basic, it is claimed they cannot be proven in terms of anything more primitive. Thus axioms are justified indirectly in terms of the theorems and propositions they generate and of the solutions they make possible. At any rate, while it is a priori, such methodology is concerned with the facts in some sense and, as such, should not be called dogmatic.

That is not the end of the matter, however. The question still remains as to the correct method of formulating and testing a doctrine (i.e., of giving the meaning of the doctrine). It seems that the question of methodology with respect to inerrancy cannot be divorced from the broader considerations of a general methodology for theology.\textsuperscript{11} Unfortunately, evangelicals do not usually discuss the matter of methodology, since they are generally more interested in the content of theology. There are, however, two very helpful articles by evangelicals on theological methodology. They are Arthur F. Holmes’s “Ordinary Language Analysis and Theological Method,”\textsuperscript{13} and John Warwick Montgomery’s “Theologian’s Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology.”\textsuperscript{14} Interestingly enough, there is a good measure of agreement between the two men. Both deny that either deduction or induction alone is the method of the theologian. Holmes is quite critical of the independent use of either methodology. Deduction is the logic of mathematics. If theology were circumscribed by this logic, (1) theological thought would have to be formalized into a deductive argument; (2) the historical narratives would merely be illustrative; (3) analogy, metaphor, symbol, and poetry in the Bible would all have to be restated in logical, univocal, universal form; and (4) all events in redemptive history, as well as their application of grace, would become logically necessary.\textsuperscript{16}

Induction, on the other hand, is formulated in three differing ways. First, there is Aristotelian induction, which sought, through intuitive abstraction of familiar categorized data, to arrive at universal principles. Such a method presupposes, and would tie theology to, an Aristotelian view of nature and man. Second, there is the induction of Francis Bacon and John Stuart Mill, which is concerned with experimental identification of causes. This approach is hardly suited to theology. There is also the induction that uses a loose approximation of Aristotle’s search for general concepts, based on observation of empirical data. This approach is rejected on two grounds: complete induction is impossible, and, in practice, this is not the way the theologian proceeds.\textsuperscript{15}

Theological method is best described by a third and more informal approach. For Montgomery this is called abduction or retroduction, after Peirce’s terminology,\textsuperscript{16} although the idea can be found as early as Aristotle.\textsuperscript{17} On the other hand, Holmes calls his method adduction.\textsuperscript{18} The difference in terminology notwithstanding, both men expound a similar methodology. While both induction and deduction are employed, no easy formula is suggested for combining the two. A paradigm, or conceptual model, is formulated through an informed and creative thinking process, generally involving the data to be explained, and is then brought back, adduced, or tested against the data for “fit,” or accuracy. The method is found in theory formulation and justification in science. The theory is not created strictly by induction from data or phenomena nor by deduction from first principles. Yet both induction and deduction operate in the imagination of the scientist so that a theory is born. The same general method is true in theology. The theologian may deal with the relationship between certain propositions, leading him to make deductive inferences. At the same time, he develops doctrine from his understanding of the scriptural phenomena. But it should be noted that neither deduction nor induction operates in any formal sense.\textsuperscript{19}

Montgomery gives a helpful example of the operation of abduction or retroduction in science. He cites the story of James Watson and Francis Crick, who discovered the molecular structure of DNA. Watson was convinced by reasons based on genetics that the structure of DNA had to be built around two spirals. The key question was the arrangement of the spirals. Watson
and Crick built a model and tirelessly sought to rearrange the spirals in such a way as to get it to work. One night Crick had an intuitive revelation: the two spirals had to be symmetrical—they coiled in opposite directions, one top to bottom and the other bottom to top. This theory seemed to reflect certain laws of crystallography. It turned out to be true! The thing that is noteworthy is that both induction and deduction were at work but, as said before, in a very informal way.  

The one point of difference between Montgomery and Holmes is that Montgomery says nothing about a doctrine of Scripture being formulated by this method. As a matter of fact, he seems to think that such a doctrine is a part of the data, outside of or before theologizing.  

On the other hand, Holmes is explicit that a doctrine of inerrancy is a product of this methodology. In about one page at the end of his article he sketches his view. In a reply to Holmes, Norman Geisler objects to Holmes’s treatment of the doctrine of inerrancy on two grounds: (1) the inadequacy of the bases for rejecting induction and deduction and (2) a discomfort with abduction as outlined by Holmes. Geisler concludes by arguing for a methodology that proceeds inductively to premises about the inspiration of the Bible guaranteeing that what it teaches is true and about the fact that the Bible teaches historical, factual material. From these premises one deduces that the Scripture is without error in matters of history and so on.  

I suspect that there is greater agreement between Holmes and Geisler than a first reading of the exchange might indicate. I think that a good deal of Geisler’s concern is motivated by Holmes’s unfortunate use of such terms as “extrapolation to round out the doctrine of Scripture,” “a model,” “a word game,” and the unhappy characterization of the doctrine of inerrancy as a “second-order theological construct.” Theologizing is all based on the text of Scripture and is not identical with it; so in this sense, all doctrine is “second order.” In my judgment there is Scripture and there is theologizing on it. On the other hand, I guess that Holmes’s objection to Geisler’s suggestion is that in Holmes’s judgment, Geisler cannot derive his conclusion without equivocation—due to the fact that the propositions from which inerrancy is deduced must be so loaded that the fallacy of equivocation is inevitable. While one might be able to derive the proposition “the Bible is inerrant,” this is far short of what theologians mean when they formulate the doctrine of inerrancy.  

There is, however, a deep point of agreement between Geisler (and those who defend the classical method) and Holmes and Montgomery. This point of agreement is the need for the combined methods of induction and deduction, although admittedly these men would not relate the methods in the same way.  

There are, in my judgment, a number of advantages in formulating the doctrine of inerrancy by abduction or retrodiction. (1) Retroduction retains a methodological continuity with the rest of theology. If Holmes and Montgomery are right about retroduction being the correct method for theology in general, it is difficult, without some argument, to see why the specific doctrine of inerrancy should be methodologically different. (2) It retains both induction and deduction, albeit in an informal way, so that neither logic of the classical method is lost. (3) It places justification of the doctrine of inerrancy on a broader evidential base. In the next section I will examine the exegetical evidence of Scripture that serves as evidential justification for the doctrine of inerrancy. These considerations are more numerous than an inductive argument to two premises from which inerrancy is deducted. (4) The conclusion of a retroductive argument is much more difficult to disconfirm than that of the classical argument. This point can be illustrated in the distinction made by N. R. Hanson between pattern statements (the results of abduction) and detail statements (the results of induction alone):  

Pattern statements are different from detail statements. They are not inductive summaries of detail statements. Still the statement: “It is a bird” is truly empirical. Had birds been different, or had the bird-antelope been drawn differently, “It is a bird” might not have been true. In some sense it is true. If the detail statements are empirical, the pattern statements which give them sense are also empirical—though not in the same way. To deny a detail statement is to do something within the pattern. To deny a pattern statement is to attack the conceptually framework itself, and this denial cannot function in the same way . . . (italics mine).  

If Hanson is correct—and I think he is—then concern about the certainty of the conclusion in retroduction is unnecessary. It should be remembered that the first steps in the logic of the
classical method are inductive, so that the conclusion that is deduced is only from probable premises. (5) It gives a rationale as to why a defender of inerrancy might be justified in holding and defending the doctrine of inerrancy in spite of problems with some of the phenomena. A helpful analogue can be drawn from theory justification in science. No scientific theory is without anomalies. However, these anomalies do not necessarily disconfirm the theory if that theory fits most of the data. Rather, they show that the phenomena are not fully understood or that the theory needs further amplification. The same is true with the defender of inerrancy. Because the doctrine makes intelligible so much of the phenomena, the theologian works both with phenomena and doctrine to resolve the conflict. Such a procedure removes the doctrine of inerrancy from what some have called the “Maginot-line mentality.” The inerrantist can live with difficulties, knowing that one anomaly will not disconfirm or falsify his doctrine. This is as it should be, since the inerrantist claims only that when all things are known there will be no conflict between doctrine and data. (6) It retains an important distinction between the Scripture and interpretations of (hermeneutics/exegesis) and theologizing (biblical and systematic theology) on it. It is the Bible that is inerrant; neither our interpretations nor our theologizing are infallible. (7) Finally, if point 6 is correct, it leaves open the possibility that a better formulation of a doctrine may be made. This is not to deny that the phenomena and norms or models are primarily found in the Scripture. However, retranslation allows that some better way of setting forth the biblical data may be possible and can be sought. It does not mean that subjectivism and relativism are the rule of the day.

In closing the discussion of method, one final word is in order. I am not unduly optimistic that there will be agreement on methodology. This discussion too deeply touches theological and apologetical concerns where evangelicals differ widely in approach. However, it is important to notice that, while there is diversity in method, there is unity with respect to the place and importance of Scripture.

THE EXEGETICAL EVIDENCE FROM SCRIPTURE

In my judgment, the doctrine of inerrancy is built on five scriptural phenomena.

1. The Biblical Teaching on Inspiration

The importance of the doctrine of inspiration to inerrancy cannot be overstated. As a matter of fact, until the last century one was thought to be identical with the other. To deny inerrancy was to deny inspiration. Clearly the central passage for consideration here is 2 Timothy 3:16. While all parties to the debate recognize the importance of this verse to the doctrine, it is amazing how few actually exegete it carefully.

The interpretation of this passage involves four distinct but not unrelated questions. The first has to do with the meaning of *pān graphē* (πᾶν γράφη). Pān may be translated either by “all” or by “every.” The distinction between “all Scripture” and “every Scripture” is the difference between reference to the whole body of the Old Testament (see Gal. 3:8) and particular passages of Scripture (see Acts 8:35). It is the distinction between Scripture viewed collectively and Scripture taken distributively. Some argue emphatically for “every” on the ground that the article is absent. Others point to analogous cases where *pà* is used in a technical or semitechnical phrase and where “every” cannot possibly be meant (Acts 2:36; Eph. 2:21; 3:15; Col. 4:12). It may be, however, that in these exceptions attention is being drawn to the partitive aspect of the expression. If so, then “every” would be preferable, and the phrase would indicate that each separate part of the *graphē* in view.

There are three possible meanings here for *graphē*. It could mean any writing whatsoever, since the basic word simply means “writing”; it may refer to the Old Testament, *in toto* or in part; or it may be construed to include even recent Christian literature. It is highly unlikely that the first possibility is correct. The word *graphē* is found over fifty times in the New Testament and always means one thing—the sacred writings. Some have concluded that it has become a kind of *terminus technicus* for the sacred writings. Thus, if this occurrence refers only to some writing, it constitutes the sole exception. It might be objected, however, that such an exception is justified, since every other use of *graphē* has the definite article (hē *graphē*, hē *graphai*). The answer to that objection is that the absence of the article is due to the fact that the word has attained the status of a specialized term. With only one specific meaning it (*graphē*) can be used without the article, and the absence of the article here indicates this.

The second question has to do with the meaning of *theopneustos*
(θεόπνευστος). In my judgment, the importance of this word to any discussion of Scripture is decisive. *Theopneustos* is a member of a special class of adjectives called verbal adjectives. A group of these is formed by suffixing -*tos*. Further, this particular word is a compound of *theos* ("god") and *pneus* ("breath"). The usual translation of the term is "inspired" or "inspiration." "Inspiration" may be somewhat misleading, since it could convey the idea of God's breath being infused into the Word—that is, energizing it. God does energize His Word, but that is not the point here. Adjectives of this class either (1) have the meaning of a perfect passive participle or (2) express possibility. An example of the former is *agapetos* (ἀγαπητός, "beloved"); the latter can be seen in *anektos* (ἀνεκτός, "bearable, endurable"). The passive sense is far more common. Warfield, whose exhaustive and often bypassed analysis has not been matched, has concluded—after a thorough examination of eighty-six words ending in *tos* and compounded with *theos*—that *theopneustos* has nothing to do with in-spiring, but relates to the production of sacred, authoritative Scripture. The Scriptures are the spirated breath of God. For this reason, Paul can say that the Scriptures are God's speech (Gal. 3:8, 22; Rom. 9:17). God is the author of what is recorded (Acts 13:32-35), and the entirety of Scripture is the oracle of God (Rom. 3:2). Even if it could be shown that the active idea of God's breathing His breath into the Scriptures is preferable, a strong view of inspiration would not be hindered, so long as this inspiring took place once for all at the time of the writing of the text. The main thought then would be that the *graphe* is thoroughly permeated with the breath of God.

The third interpretative question has to do with the relationship between *graphe* and *theopneustos*. Our text says formally, or technically, that it is the Scriptures, not the writers, that are inspired or God-breathed. This point is important, since some who defend their belief that the Bible is not inerrant claim that it is false to assert that the writers of the sacred text never made errors of judgment. It seems quite clear that at least once one erred in what he did, for Paul tells us that he found it necessary to withstand Peter to his face (Gal. 2:11ff.). Furthermore, it is clear that at least three letters, possibly four, were written by the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. However, only two (possibly three, depending on whether the "severe letter" was a separate letter or whether it is a part of 2 Corinthians) are preserved in our present canon. Thus, all that is required is that *Scripture* be inspired and that the extent of inspiration be identical with our present canon.

The fourth question has to do with whether *theopneustos* is to be understood as standing (1) predictively or (2) attributively to the subject *graphe*. If the former is the case, Paul says that "every Scripture is inspired." On the other hand, if the latter is correct, then the text should read, "Every inspired Scripture" or "Every Scripture that is inspired...." Both renderings are grammatically possible. It seems, however, that the predicative use of *theopneustos* is correct. These considerations are in its favor: (1) In the absence of a verb, it seems natural to construe the two adjectives (*theopneustos*, "God-breathed," and *opheleimos*, "profitable") in the same manner; (2) the construction of 2 Timothy 3:16 is identical to that of 1 Timothy 4:4, where the two adjectives are clearly predicative; (3) in an attributive construction we would expect the adjective, in this case *theopneustos*, to appear before *graphe*; (4) words joined by *kai* ("and") are usually understood as linked by this conjunction; and finally, (5) the attributive interpretation seems to leave open the possibility that there might be some uninspired *graphe*.

The primary argument in favor of the attributive construction is the supposed emphasis of the passage, which is said to lie not in the concept of inspiration but on the usefulness of Scripture. Even if one accepts this less-likely construction, it should be noted that the attributive sense does not necessarily lead to uninspired Scriptures, as Miller so clearly demonstrates:

At this point I should like to suggest that the implication (namely, that there are some Scriptures which are not inspired) is not necessarily in the passage at all. *Graphe* can mean only three things: If it means any writing in general (which, as we have seen, it seems never to mean in the New Testament), then it is clearly reasonable to assert that only those which are God-inspired are useful for instruction, etc. If it means the authoritative Old Testament and/or Christian literature, then it amounts to a kind of reminder that we are talking, after all, about the Scriptures, that is, the inspired writings. To speak, for example of *mortal* man is not necessarily to imply that there is any other kind (italics his).

What then are the implications of this passage for our concern at hand? First, inspiration is something that has to do with the text of Scripture, surely not with the subjective interiority of the
THE MEANING OF INERRANCY

unbeliever. You have just told me that the Bible has numerous inaccuracies of a historical, scientific, and possibly even ethical nature, but that it is absolutely without error in all of those wonderful, “unbelievable” things about God and heaven. Being a bit cynical, I would likely respond that you stretch the bounds of credulity in asking me to believe all these things that I have no possible way of confirming while at the same time allowing that there are numerous errors in areas that I can confirm. Can you blame me? It seems that our Lord sees more connection between the believability of earthly things and heavenly things (John 3:12) than do those who defend limited inspiration.

Before leaving this discussion of inspiration, let me point out that there seems to be at least one serious objection to our using this as such a strong datum in support of the doctrine of inerrancy. It has often been objected that a view such as the one I have been arguing is just too simple or one-sided. The objection is stated in a number of different ways. Sometimes it is argued that the inerrantist is guilty of an error analogous to the christological error of docetism (the denial that Christ had a human body). Others state it in terms of mechanical dictation. They argue that such a view of inspiration and inerrancy must of necessity involve not only the suspension of the abilities of the writers but also the word-by-word dictation of the graphé. Still others claim that this position overlooks the historical conditioning and human thought forms that must be used to convey the truth of God. Since each formulation of the objection requires a slightly different answer, I will reply to each in turn.

Does the doctrine of inerrancy lead to something like docetism? I cannot see how. Some among those who believe in inerrancy may believe that the Bible came down from heaven in a heavenly language inscribed without human hand, but they are both in the minority and wrong. The problem for those who oppose inerrancy arises because they fail to keep the biblical balance between the human and the divine. It should be remembered that it is just as wrong to overemphasize the human at the expense of the divine as it is to exalt the divine to the negation of the human. The former can be done straightforwardly by denying that the Bible is the Word of God. It may also be accomplished quite subtly, as when Bloesch suggests that the Bible is not the immediate Word of God but rather comes through the human medium.
The problem here, at its deepest level, is a misconception about the nature of humanity. Inerrantists often use the analogy of a sinless Christ and an errorless Bible. In Christ you have both the human and the divine without sin. In the Bible you have both the human and the divine without error. Beegle’s response to this is instructive. He begins by pointing out two reservations that Warfield gives in citing this analogy. Warfield says that the analogy must not be pressed too far, since (1) in Christ there is the hypostatic union, while in inerrancy there is nothing parallel to such union, and (2) in Christ the divine and the human unite to constitute a divine-human person, but in Scripture they only cooperate to produce a divine-human work. Then Beegle quotes Vawter approvingly to the effect that the analogy between sinlessness and errorlessness breaks down because sin is a disorder in man, and error is not.41 Furthermore, in another place Beegle declares that there is nothing more consistently human than to err.

But what both Beegle and Vawter do not realize is that their claim is not strong enough. For the human element in the Scripture to necessitate errors in the text of the Bible it must be shown that errancy is essential to humanity. If so, then Adam was not human until he erred, and we will not be human in the glorified state, since we will no longer sin or err. Thus, while care must be used in pressing the analogy between Christ and the Scripture, it does show the possibility of an inerrant Bible, given the essential nature of humanity. Inerrancy becomes necessary because of the divine element.

Does the doctrine of inerrancy demand mechanical dictation? Those who oppose the doctrine often seek to push inerrantists into this mold; but this is unnecessary and unfair. I think that the proper way to express the biblical teaching on the process that produced the inspired texts is concurrence. That is, God and man so cooperate that the product was God’s Word in human language. The author’s style and personality, as well as the distinctive characteristics of the language in which he wrote, are evident in the autographs. How could this be done? The closest that one can come to an answer is the statement found in 2 Peter 2:21, but beyond that it must be admitted that what took place was a miracle, just as was the virgin birth.

Finally, do historical conditioning or context and human thought forms count against inerrancy? Not unless historical conditioning and human thought forms and language necessarily falsify truth. I have not seen and do not expect to see such a proof. I will say more about this below.

2. The Biblical Teaching Concerning the Accreditation of God’s Message and Messenger

The second aspect of the biblical data to which the doctrine of inerrancy should appeal is the criteria set down in Scripture for the accreditation of the prophet and his message. I think this is second in importance only to the biblical teaching on inspiration and has not been used as fully as it should have been. There is a good parallel between the prophet and the Scripture. In regard to the one the communication was usually oral, although it could have been written down either at the time of reception or later; in the other the communication is written. Further, in both cases the communication has the human element as an essential part.

There are two passages in the book of Deuteronomy that bear on the subject (13:1–5 and 18:20–22). These passages contain three criteria for accreditation: (1) The prophet must not speak in the name of another god (Deut. 13:1, 2; 18:20). This criterion is obviously easy to check. The extremely serious nature of this type of false prophecy is seen in the imposition of capital punishment for the offender. Such a prophet was guilty of breaking the first commandment and was thus deserving of death. (2) The prophet must not speak a word that is not true (Deut. 13:1–5; 18:22). This and the following criterion are meant to distinguish what is God’s Word from what is merely human. In 18:22, “the word does not come true (Rsv)” is literally “the word is not.” The point is that the word has no substance or that it is not so. “That is, the word supposedly spoken by God through the prophet was not in accord with the word of God already revealed and it was therefore automatically suspect.”42 There is harmony within the revealed will of God. (3) The prophet must not speak what does not come to pass (Deut. 18:22). This criterion refers to the judgmental or predicative word of the prophet. The truth of his words would be demonstrated in their fulfillment or failure. The prophet is accredited by the total, absolute truthfulness of his words.

3. The Bible’s Teaching Concerning Its Own Authority

Evangelicals of all types are anxious to affirm the absolute
authority of Scripture, making this an important consideration. Obviously many more passages could be cited, but I will discuss only the two that, in my judgment, are most significant.

The first passage is Matthew 5:17–20. It is well known to those who have closely followed the debate over the Bible. Jesus is pointing out that a righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees is necessary for entrance into the kingdom (v. 20). In this context He talks about the authoritative and continuing nature of the law as a standard. He did not come to destroy it (v. 17). Moreover, until everything is fulfilled, heaven and earth will not pass away (v. 18). The Law’s authority can be seen in the fact that every minutia will be fulfilled.

The second passage is John 10:34, 35. In a disputation with the Jews, Jesus cites Psalm 82:6, after which He says that “Scripture cannot be broken” (v. 35). Our Lord here speaks of the absolutely binding nature of the authority of Scripture.

What kind of response do those who oppose inerrancy give? Hubbard’s reply is significant. With respect to Matthew 5:17–20, his answer is twofold. First, he says that the context does not support a definition of inerrancy that entails absolute accuracy down to the smallest details, namely, the “smallest letter” and the “least stroke of a pen.” “The heart of the argument, then, is... [the] binding, persevering quality of the divine commands that Jesus did not abolish but fulfilled.” Second, Hubbard maintains, much of the strong language in the Sermon on the Mount—such as “until heaven and earth disappear” and “smallest letter” and “least stroke of a pen”—is hyperbole. Of some of this language Hubbard says, “A literal interpretation would not only encourage self-maiming, it would surely limit the number of times that one could discipline himself in temptation.” Thus the binding or authoritative nature of the law is stressed.

While one may allow that there are some examples of hyperbole in the Sermon on the Mount, it is simply false to claim that everything is hyperbole. Hubbard must bear the burden of proof that the passage in question is hyperbole. I see no such proof.

Hubbard gives similar treatment to John 10:34, 35. Here the issue is authority, not inerrancy. Hubbard says:

Jesus’ argument seems to focus on the authority of his citation from Psalm 82:6. The statement “Scripture cannot be broken” is virtually an appeal on his part to what his Jewish opponents also believed. His aim was not to teach them new insights into the authority of Scripture, but rather to remind them of what they believed about the authority and applicability of the Scripture—an authority that made it lawful for him to be called the Son of God.

I grant that these passages do not explicitly teach inerrancy and that they do not specify what a definition of inerrancy must contain. For instance, inerrancy clearly does not demand statements about “smallest letters” and “least strokes of a pen.” However, Hubbard has left the ball park too early. The game is not yet over. To admit that these passages teach that the Bible is an absolute and binding authority is only to move the question one step backward. The question now before us is this: How can the Scriptures be such an authority? To what must we attribute this property? We could say that God just willed it so. However, is not a better explanation to be found in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible? To divorce inerrancy and authority is impossible. I have never been able to understand how one can be justified in claiming absolute authority for the Scriptures and at the same time deny their inerrancy. This seems to be the height of epistemological nonsense and confusion.

Let me try to illustrate the point. Suppose that I have an Amtrak railroad schedule. In describing its use to you, I tell you that it is filled with numerous errors but that it is absolutely authoritative and trustworthy. I think you would be extremely dubious. At least the schedule would have one thing going for it: it declares itself to be subject to change without notice. There is an objection to the point I am making, and it goes as follows: False in one thing does not make the Bible false in all it says. Of course this objection is valid, but it overlooks the significant fact that if what has been said to this point is true, the Bible claims itself to be absolutely true. The Amtrak schedule makes no such claim. Beegle is aware of this reply. Thus, he says that even if his wife claims to tell the truth but is wrong, that does not mean that everything that she says is false. Again, what Beegle says is true, but he has overlooked another important fact. The person speaking with respect to the Bible is not his wife but God. This is not some finite god but a God who has essential attributes that include omniscience, perfect goodness, and omnipotence. These make a big difference.
4. The Way in Which Scripture Is Used by Scripture

A fourth important phenomenon to observe is the way in which Scripture uses other Scripture in argumentation. The instances may be divided into three classes. First, there are those instances where the whole argument rests on a single word. In Matthew 22:43–45, the entire argument rests on the word Lord. Jesus cites Psalm 110:1 and appeals to the use of “Lord” as support for His claim to deity. In John 10:34, 35, Jesus’ argument rests on the use of the single word God in Psalm 82:6.

Second, there is an instance where the entire argument depends on the tense of a verb. In Matthew 22:32, Jesus uses the present tense of the verb to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection. He says, “‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

Third, in Galatians 3:16, we have an argument where the point depends on the singular number, seed, as opposed to the plural, seeds. Paul writes: “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person who is Christ.” Now, if the text of Scripture is not inerrant, it is difficult to see the point in these arguments. An easy rebuttal would be, “Well, the text may be wrong.”

There is an objection that might be made against the argument just given. One might argue that there are many uses of Scripture by Scripture where the precision that I have spoken of is not demonstrated. For instance, certain uses of the Old Testament by New Testament writers seems to be very imprecise. A totally satisfactory answer to this objection would take far more space than allowed in this chapter. However, a meticulous study of these uses of the Old Testament reveals that the writers do not quote the Old Testament cavalierly but with great care.

5. The Biblical Teaching Concerning the Character of God

More than once in Scripture we are told that God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Furthermore, in Romans 3:4 Paul emphatically declares that God is true and that His trustfulness cannot be changed by the lack of faith that some have. Jesus said to God, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). If the Scriptures are from God and His character is behind them, it seems that they cannot be in error.

Having surveyed the exegetical data of Scripture that support a doctrine of inerrancy, let us try to formulate a definition of inerrancy.

A Definition of Inerrancy

One of the factors that makes generalization about the biblical data concerning itself so difficult is the already-mentioned fact that Scripture makes no explicit statement on this matter. Although such a statement would not settle the matter decisively, as I have argued above, it would give us a running start. Lacking this, however, we must begin with a search for appropriate terminology. A number of terms have been suggested. The most common are: inspiration, indefectibility, infallibility, indecipherability, and inerrant, or without error. Let us now turn to an examination of these terms.

As has already been indicated, for at least a fair number of biblical and theological scholars of former days inspiration was synonymous with inerrancy. To say that the Bible is inspired was to say that it is absolutely accurate or inerrant. Two men among those who held such a view were B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge. Today such identification tends to be more confusing than helpful. Thus I think it wise to search for another, more appropriate, term.

A second possibility, suggested by Hans Kung, is indefectibility. Indefectibility means abiding or remaining in the truth in spite of errors that touch even on doctrine. One can hardly do better than the judgment of Bloesch on this matter: “This seems to call into question the absolute normativeness of Scripture in the church’s understanding of the truth of revelation.” This term is clearly at odds with the data presented above. We must find a better one.

Another possibility is infallibility, which has a long history of theological use. Most likely the best place to begin a discussion of the term is with a definition from the Oxford English Dictionary. Infallibility means “the quality or fact of being infallible or exempt from liability to err” or “the quality of being unerring or not liable to fail; unerring certainty.” With the adjective infallible when predicated of things, this dictionary equates “not liable to fail, unerring,” “not liable to prove false, erroneous, or mistaken; that unerringly holds good,” or “not liable to fail in its action or operation.” Merely from the standpoint of definition,
it would be difficult to maintain a clear distinction between this term and inerrancy, although it would always be possible to stipulate a distinction.

However, when we turn to the question of usage, the picture is more complex. Within Roman Catholic theology, inerrant is normally used when discussing the Bible, while infallible is used to designate the authority of the church, particularly with respect to the teaching function of the pope and the magisterium. Protestants, of course, do not claim infallibility for the church, and, more and more, infallibility has become associated with the Scriptures. More recently, it has become a term championed by many who support what has been called limited inspiration, or what today might better be called limited inerrancy. That is, those who often advance this word to the exclusion of inerrancy would, at most, defend the inerrancy of the Scriptures in areas that are “revelational,” “soteriological,” or are “matters of faith and doctrine.” Because of the differing usages of infallibility, Stephen T. Davis in his recent book gives a stipulative definition reflecting this tendency. He says, “The Bible is infallible if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice.” At any rate, infallibility can and should properly be used of the Bible. In its lexical meaning it is not far from inerrancy.

Another candidate is indeceivability. It is questionable whether the term per se has been used to express the biblical attitude about itself. However, a long list of theologians—Briggs, Berkouwer, Rogers, Hubbard, and Bloesch—like to affirm that the Bible is without error in the sense suggested by this term. These men are evangelical in their theology and have a real love and respect for the Scriptures; but they think the Bible contains inaccuracies of various kinds and thus do not like the word inerrancy. They would rather stick with a designation such as “without error,” defined in terms of indeceivability.

Let us take a moment to examine their argument, since this position seems to be gaining wider acceptance within evangelical circles. Usually the starting place is displeasure with the word inerrancy, for various reasons that are discussed below. Theologians like those mentioned above prefer to speak of the Bible’s authority or even its infallibility. Some can live with a statement on Scripture like that found in the Lausanne Covenant, which states that the Bible is “without error in all that it affirms.”

There is a caveat. Error must be defined. Since it is such an important term, it is argued, we must not let just anyone specify its meaning. The place a definition must be sought is in the Scriptures themselves. The advantage, so it is claimed, is that we will not then be imposing an alien standard on the Bible. It is as though the imprecision of early historical writing is preserved in the meaning of the word error. For someone like Berkouwer, “without error” means free from lying and fraud. For Rogers, “error” means “willful deception,” and for Hubbard, “that which leads us astray from the will of God or the knowledge of his truth.” Thus, error becomes associated with (1) the intentionality of the writer or text and (2) the will of God, particularly as it has to do with religious or spiritual truth.

What shall we say about such a proposal? There are at least two commendatory things that can be said about this attempt to reflect the attitude of the Bible toward itself. First, it recognizes that errorlessness in some sense must be attributed to the Scriptures. Second, it seeks to deal seriously with the biblical data.

There are, in my judgment, however, three reasons—methodological, biblical, and motivational—for thinking that this approach is inadequate in the final analysis. First, there is a methodological reason. As I have already stated, there is no explicit statement in Scripture to the effect that it is without error. If there were, then it would certainly be appropriate to start our definition with a study of the etymology and usage of the Hebrew and Greek terms used in this connection, but such is not possible. Error or inerrancy are theological concepts; that is, they are used by the theologian to express what he thinks the biblical data demand. This fact, however, in no way counts as priori against any concept. For instance, trinity is in the same boat, since it is not to be found, as a term, anywhere in the Bible. As I have argued earlier, even biblical terms, when used in doctrinal or theological statements, are subject to the same constraints as are any formulations about inerrancy or error.

My second reason for rejecting the term indeceivability is biblical. It may be that some do not agree with the distinction between biblical and theological usage, but let us move to the level of the biblical for a moment. Let it be granted that Berkouwer, Rogers, et al., are methodologically right and I am wrong. I would still think that their conclusions are open to serious question. The reason is this: Any definition of error in terms of inde-
ceiveability as defined above appeals to too selective a sample of biblical vocabulary. To put it another way, indeceivability fails to reflect the polydimensionality of the biblical words for error. In both Hebrew and Greek the words may be classified into three groups: (1) errors where intentionality cannot possibly be involved; (2) errors where intentionality may or may not be involved; and (3) errors where intentionality must be involved. Let us take a quick look at each of these groups.

Clearly, the Bible teaches that some errors are made without intentionality.64 Old Testament words coming from דָּשָּׁה (šāgā) and דָּשָׁא (šāqā) are good examples. The idea is “to stray,” “to err,” even “to transgress inadvertently.”65 In Job 6:24, Job says, “Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong.” In view of Job’s contention that he was innocent he had to maintain that any error on his part was unintentional, since he was unaware of it. Again in Job 19:4 we read, “If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone.” One cannot, without doing violence to the text, maintain that Job is referring to intentional error. It might be argued that Scripture does not hold an individual responsible for inadvertent error. But this too is simply false. From the Hebrew roots mentioned above the Old Testament has words for sins of ignorance. Leviticus 5:18 says, “He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven.” The same is true of Greek. The word for this kind of error is ἀγνωνία (agnoíma). It means a “sin committed in ignorance.”66 In Hebrews 9:7 it is used of sins of ignorance: “But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.”

The second class of terms has to do with errors where intentionality may or may not be involved. This seems to be the largest group. In the Old Testament a good example from this classification is אָשָּׁה (shaḥ). It means “a fault” or “error,” and comes from the root אָשָּׁה (shălah, “to deceive” or “to be negligent”).67 It is used in 2 Samuel 6:7. Here it is difficult to tell if intentional deception or simply negligence is involved. The Greek ἀστερεύω (astereúō) means “to miss the mark.”68 The word is used three times in the New Testament (1 Tim. 1:6; 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:18). Here again, in my judgment, it is impossible to determine whether one misses the mark intentionally or unintentionally.

Finally, there is a group of words used for error that clearly includes the idea of intentionality. In the Old Testament יָפָּה (to āh) and יָפָּה (to “tu’im) are used. The first of these terms is used in the Hiphil and has as one of its meanings “to seduce,”69 while the latter means “a fraud.”70 In the New Testament there are also two words that fall within this class, ἀποπλαγεῖσθαι (apoplagēō) and πλαγεῖ (plaste). The former term can mean “to seduce,”71 the latter, “fraudulence.”72 Moreover, it is possible to cite at least two instances where lies are told with good intentions, but they are called lies nevertheless (Judg. 16:10). Authorial intention is indeed important, but its relevance is related to hermeneutics.

As should be noted from the discussion, greater emphasis has been placed on the first classification. This was done to show the inadequacy of the proposal before us. Fundamentally, the problem is that this proposal seeks to retain a good term but at too high a price—a decided weakening of meaning. For instance, if we accept Rogers’s understanding of error as “willful deception,” then most books ever written are inerrant.

The third reason that I find the proposal of indeceivability inadequate is motivational. In practice there is the retention of the idea of errorlessness that has a long and important history but it has been so diluted that it no longer retains its original meaning. The motivation behind this approach is not a more precise definition of error or inerrancy but ultimately the recognition of “unimportant” errors of history, science, and so forth. It is the first step in undermining the doctrine of inerrancy.

The final possibility that I have raised for an appropriate term is inerrant, that is “without error.” Inerrancy itself is a relatively young word in the English language. At first it appears as though it might be a transliteration of the Latin word inerrantia, a participle from the verb inerro. However, such is not the case. Inerrans is used of fixed stars by Cicero and Lactantius. Boethius, who lived in the latter part of the sixth century and the early part of the seventh, used the Latin term inerratum in the sense of “absence of error.”73 The Oxford English Dictionary says that it was not until 1837 that the English inerrant was used in the modern sense of “exempt from error, free from mistake, infalli-
ble.” Moreover, the noun *inerrancy* is said to have occurred for the first time in Thomas Hartwell Horne’s formidable four-volume *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (1780–1862). In part 2 of volume 2 of the seventh edition (1834) he states, “Absolute inerrancy is impracticable in any printed book.” It is, however, possible that the word appeared as early as the first edition in 1818.

In current usage the*Oxford English Dictionary* offers this definition of *inerrancy*: “the quality or condition of being inerrant or unerring; freedom from error.” For *inerrant* it gives “does not err; free from error; unerring.” On the other hand, *errant* is defined as follows: “the action or state of erring”; “the condition of erring in opinion, the holding of mistaken notions or beliefs”; or “something incorrectly done through ignorance or inadvertence; a mistake.” It is easy to see why some equate “without error” with “inerrant.”

As I have noted, not all evangelicals like the designation *inerrancy*. Why is this so? Obviously, there are many reasons, stated and otherwise.

LaSor says,

Those who defend the “inerrancy of the Bible” generally mean by that word that the Bible contains no error of any kind, whether religious, historical, geographical, geological, numerical, or of any other category. The term is not proper, for since it negates a negative idea, it does not leave room for a correct opposite. *Inerrancy* is unacceptable because it is essentially the negation of a negative concept. The consequence, LaSor goes on to say, is that the opposite of inerrancy is not errancy but the total infallibility of the Bible in matters of faith and practice. LaSor then points out what he thinks are scriptural problems, even inconsistencies, although he hesitates to call them outright errors. One sure may wonder at this use of logic and language. Inconsistencies most certainly are errors.

Riederbos and Piepkorn do not like the word *inerrancy* because it is not a biblical word. Piepkorn states the case clearly: “Lutheran clergymen and professors affirm everything that the Sacred Scriptures say about themselves and everything that the Lutheran symbols say about the Sacred Scriptures. It is significant therefore that the term *inerrancy* does not correspond to any vocation in the Lutheran symbols.” Riederbos thinks it is a theological concept. On the other hand, Piepkorn classifies it as “an ecclesiastical term subject to definition by use.”

By far the most extensive criticism of the term *inerrancy* that I have seen comes from Pinnock. It should be noted that he has been one of the most able defenders of the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible and even now continues to claim that this is a good term. His reasons for suggesting at least a moratorium on its use are as follows. First, he sees the word as needing major qualifications. Such words are a liability and should be avoided where possible. Second, the term does not describe any Bible that we in fact use. It refers only to the original autographs. Third, since it refers to a nonextant text, it does not assert forcibly the authority of the texts that we do have. Fourth, it misfocuses attention on the small or minor difficulties in the text rather than on the truth it intends to explain. Finally, it has become a slogan and as such is a term of “conflict and ill-feeling.” Thus Pinnock can conclude:

It seems to me, in view of the serious disadvantages the term *inerrancy* presents, that we ought to suspend it from the list of preferred terminology for stating the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, and let it appear only in the midst of the working out of the details. It is sufficient for us in our public statements to affirm the divine inspiration and final authority of the Bible.

One should not merely dismiss Pinnock’s concerns without consideration. However, one may also wonder why *inerrancy* does not forcibly enough assert the authority of the Bible. Possibly there is need to express the biblical view in more than just one term. Nevertheless, this should not count against the use of a word if indeed it is appropriate. And the fact that it may be a slogan or may misdirect the attention of some is unfortunate, but if the concept that it seeks to convey is correct, then we must use it or a better term. All of this is just to say that I do not have an inalienable affection for the word. It is the concept of a *wholly true* Bible for which I contend. If some better word can be found, then let us use it.

But what is needed, I think, is a more clear and precise definition of inerrancy rather than a new term. People surely accept or reject the word without agreeing with or even knowing what someone else means by it.

It seems to me that the key concept both in the Scriptures and in the minds of those who use the term is truthfulness. Inerrancy
has to do with truth. Hence, the positive side of the negative idea is that if the Bible is inerrant, it is wholly true. If this is the case, there are two ways in which the idea could be preserved. First, we could drop the term inerrant from the list of preferred terminology and substitute always true and never false. Rather than saying, “I believe the Bible is inerrant,” we could say, “I believe the Bible is always or wholly true and never false.” Second, we could continue using inerrant and clearly specify that it is always to be associated with truth.

Since the second is more likely to have widespread use, let me propose this definition of inerrancy. Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.

I would be willing to contend that inerrancy defined in terms of truth is a legitimate way of reflecting the biblical data. In Psalm 119, the most extended biblical statement on the Word of God, “truth” or “true” is used three times as a characterization: “Your law is true” (v. 142); “all your commands are true” (v. 151); and “all your words are true” (v. 160). Proverbs 30:5, 6 say that “every word of God has proven true” (Berkeley Version). In John 17:17 Jesus says, “Your word is truth.” It is this idea that is appropriate to the English word inerrancy. Such a definition has the advantage of defining a negative in terms of a positive concept. Conversely, it means that the Bible is never false.

Only half the job is now done. Truth or true must be defined. Although the Bible points to truth as an essential attribute of God, it does not give us a precise theological definition. We rather see the definition in the use of the word. However, truth is an abstract and possibly ambiguous term. There is always the danger that one will only move the debate from a discussion of error to a debate over the meaning of truth or true.

For pristine simplicity and clarity one can hardly beat Aristotle’s definitions of true and false. He said, “To say what is, is, and what is not, is not, is true. And to say what is, is not, and what is not, is, is false.”

More recently, the work of a Polish logician named Tarski has proved exceedingly helpful with regard to defining truth. Tarski reduced the notion of truth to certain other semantic notions that were clearly—or better, widely—acceptable. The characteristics of Tarski’s definition are as follows: (1) Truth is defined in terms of language; (2) truth is defined in terms of sentences (that is, truth is a property of sentences), not of individual words; and (3) truth is defined in terms of correspondence.

OBSERVATIONS, QUALIFICATIONS, AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Having defined the term inerrancy, now let me turn to its elaboration as a doctrine. This elaboration will take the form of some observations, some qualifications, and finally some misunderstandings of the doctrine of inerrancy. The purpose of these considerations is to guide us in the application of the doctrine to the remaining phenomena of Scripture.

Observations

First, let me make two observations.

1. No doctrine of inerrancy can determine in advance the solution to individual or specific problem passages. The doctrine of inerrancy only gives guidelines or parameters for the handling of individual passages. It gives us the kind of phenomena over which a doctrine of inerrancy can range. It tells us that there is some sense in which what is affirmed is true. This does not guarantee universal agreement as to how a problem passage should be treated and the difficulty dissolved. Undoubtedly there will be debate as to which interpretation is best.

2. Inerrancy is a doctrine that must be asserted, but which may not be demonstrated with respect to all the phenomena of Scripture. There is in this definition of inerrancy the explicit recognition of both the fallibility and the finiteness of the present state of human knowledge. There are really only these two choices: either the theologian will trust the word of an omnipotent, omniscient God, who says that He controlled human agents, making it necessary for the theologian to admit his fallibility as critic, or in some sense he will declare that the aforementioned control is restricted and will affirm at least his own relative and finite omniscience as critic. Since Christ exhibited total trust in the Scriptures, can we do less? All that is claimed is that there is no final conflict with truth.

It might be objected that such a doctrine is unfalsifiable and therefore, if one were to use old positivist jargon, meaningless. There is, however, a twofold response that can and should be made against such criticism. First, such a view of inerrancy is not
in principle unfalsifiable. There is no logical reason for our inability to gather all the facts. We can think of a world quite like ours but where we were actually in possession of all the facts. In such a world the Bible could be demonstrated as inerrant. Second, as a matter of fact, just such a world will be realized as the eschaton. In practice we will be in possession of all the facts, and then it will be shown that there is no final conflict.

Yet some might justifiably object that such a demonstration at the eschaton is of little help to them now. How is one to decide the question of the inerrancy of the Bible now? The answer is that there is evidence for inerrancy now, and that evidence is better than for any alternative view. First, there is the teaching of Scripture itself. Second, external evidence to the Bible (e.g., archaeology), while not without some problems, has confirmed the truthfulness of the Scripture over and over again.

Qualifications

There are, I think, just three qualifications that must be made to the doctrine of inerrancy. They are as follows.

1. Inerrancy applies equally to all parts of the Scripture as originally written (autographa). The doctrine of inerrancy applies only to the autographs, not to any copy of Scripture. This qualification is often objected to on the grounds that it serves as a neat hedge against disproving the doctrine. That is, any time there is a difficulty, one can assign the problem to the copy, claiming it does not exist in the original. Indeed, such a qualification can be a hedge, but it need not be. The qualification simply grows out of the recognition that any copy will contain some errors due to transmission.

It might be argued that, if we no longer possess the autographs, the qualification is meaningless. Such an objection is only justified on one of two grounds, neither of which applies to the Bible. The first ground is the lack of an adequate discipline of textual criticism, which is hardly the case with Scripture. The second basis is a text so corrupt that even the canons of textual criticism could not make it intelligible. Again, such is not the case in regard to Scripture.

Still one might object that such a qualification is unnecessary, since the Spirit of God uses and blesses the existent, errant copies that we possess today. The reference to autographs is another example of evangelical overbelief. Again, I think the objection is false. Those who make this objection fail to recognize the difference between an original that is inerrant but to which errors have been added through transmission and an original that has substantive errors and has been further corrupted in transmission. With respect to the former, an inerrant text can be approached through textual criticism, while in the latter case, any attempt to discover an inerrant text would be hopeless. One can formulate a parallel objection with regard to a perfectly interpreted Bible, and a parallel answer can be given.

2. Inerrancy is intimately tied up with hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the science of biblical interpretation. Though another chapter covers this topic specifically, three short comments seem appropriate here. First, the common distinction between the Bible as given and as interpreted must be made. Though the Scriptures as given are completely true, no human interpretation of them is infallible. Second, inerrancy has as a precondition the proper application of hermeneutics. If one does not know the correct meaning of the text, he will never be justified in claiming that it is false. Third, a key principle in the application of hermeneutics is the analogy of faith as taught by the Reformers. This principle merely says that we should attempt to harmonize apparently contradictory statements in the Bible. That is, if there is a way of understanding a passage so that it is in harmony with the rest of Scripture and another way of understanding that conflicts with all other Scripture or parts of Scripture, the former is the correct interpretation. This often entails consideration of progress in God’s revelation—not in the sense that later revelation ever falsifies, but that it often supplements, earlier revelation. Only in this way can it be affirmed that the Bible is true in the whole and in its parts.

3. Inerrancy is related to Scripture’s intention. The point here has two aspects. First, Scripture accurately records many things that are false, for example, the falsehoods of Satan and of human beings. This point is often made in differing ways. Sometimes it is stated in terms of what the Bible approves as contrasted with what it merely affirms. Another way of putting it is to distinguish between historical or descriptive authority and normative authority.91 Historical or descriptive authority applies equally to every word of an inerrant Bible. It merely means that whatever was said or done was in fact said or done. No judgment is passed as to whether it should or should not have been said or done. Norma-
tive authority, on the other hand, not only means that what was said or done was actually so but also that it should or should not have been said or done.

It should be noted again that there will not always be universal agreement as to whether a given statement falls within historical authority or normative authority. Gerstner makes the point this way:

Suppose they [the biblical writers] did think of a three-storied universe, which was the common opinion in their day, the Bible does not err unless it teaches such as a divine revelation of truth. In fact, by showing that the writers may have personally entertained ideas now antiquated it reveals its own historical authenticity without its normative authenticity suffering.\(^{92}\)

Some may be a bit surprised at such a solution. Hence Pinnock’s word is in order:

The device is certainly a neat one, and gets us around some real difficulties. However, it conceals a hazardous principle. In admitting errors into the text itself, even into the body of teaching that text affords, the point is conceded to the critics of the Bible in every age; namely, that the actual teachings of Scripture may, or may not, be true.\(^{93}\)

The point to be made here is that we cannot preclude in advance the possibility that some of the historically or descriptively authoritative material may contain errors.\(^{94}\) This does not, however, admit errors into what I have called the teaching of Scripture. At the same time great caution must be used in invoking this solution, since it is fraught with hazards.

Second, Scripture’s intention is found in the meanings of the biblical sentences. I use the term Scripture’s rather than author’s intention to make it clear that the latter is contained in the former, or, to put it another way, the determination of intention is a hermeneutical, not psychological, task.

Misunderstandings

Finally, I think it is helpful to enumerate and discuss some misunderstandings of the doctrine of inerrancy. For some who criticize inerrancy, these would be considered qualifications. One of the grounds on which they reject the doctrine is that to be maintained it must be qualified in such a way that it becomes meaningless. I think the objection is false and specify why in the discussion below. The misunderstandings of which I speak are as follows.

1. **Inerrancy does not demand strict adherence to the rules of grammar.** One of the advantages of defining inerrancy in terms of truth and defining truth as a property of sentences is that the question of whether a grammatical error precludes an inerrant Bible is transcended. The answer is clearly no. This is as it should be. The rules of grammar are merely statements of normal usage of the language. Every day skilled writers break them in the interest of superior communication. Why should the writers of Scripture be denied this privilege?

2. **Inerrancy does not exclude the use either of figures of speech or of a given literary genre.** It is recognized by all that Scripture employs figures of speech. Some examples are meiosis (Gal. 5:14), hyperbole (Matt. 2:3), synecdoche (Gal. 1:16), personification (Gal. 3:8), and metonymy (Rom. 3:30). Figures of speech are common to ordinary communication and cannot be said to express falsehoods simply because they are not literal. While it may not always be easy to determine whether language is figurative or literal, there is nothing inherent in figurative language that prevents it from properly expressing truth and meaning.\(^{95}\)

Moreover, various literary genres are employed in Scripture. There is narrative, dramatic, and apocalyptic literature. The Psalms are poetic in form. The literary style or form has nothing to do with the truth or falsity of the content conveyed in that style. Understanding of the form does, however, help in interpretation. Much more could be said here, but the issue is properly within the domain of hermeneutics.

3. **Inerrancy does not demand historical or semantic precision.** It is often stated that the doctrine of inerrancy cannot be accepted because the Bible does not reflect the canons of historical and linguistic precision recognized and required in the modern world. Like so many words used in the debate between inerrants and errantists, precision is ambiguous. To some, imprecision has a connotation of error. This surely need not be so. As some of the divines of past ages put it, all that is necessary is that statements be adequate. I interpret this in terms of truth. Almost any statement is capable of greater precision. Any historiography, even a detailed chronic, is still only an approximation. Let me illustrate. If we record an event as having transpired in 1978, we could obviously have said it more precisely—in the month of
May, on the 15th day, at the hour of 10 p.m., and so on. But the original, simpler statement would still be true. The crucial point as I see it for inerrancy is this: Is a sentence as stated true? If so, there is no problem for the doctrine. Why should the modern criterion of precision be absolutized? Should we not expect Scripture to reflect the standards of its day? Is it not arrogant to think that our standards are right and theirs wrong?

4. Inerrancy does not demand the technical language of modern science. One should not expect the writers of Scripture to use the language of modern scientific empiricism. First, it was not their intention to provide a scientific explanation for all things. Second, popular or observational language is used even today by the common man. As a matter of fact, the modern scientist also uses it in certain contexts. We say, for example, that the sun “rises” and “sets.” This in no way entails a theory of solar revolution. I am not convinced that this is not the way in which we are to understand the so-called “three-storied” universe. Unless one takes the statements of Scripture in crass geographic terms, I do not see the inappropriateness of such language. I think that much of the concern comes from a presumed similarity to certain contemporary myths. But why should this presumption be made? My contention is that if there is a sense in which the “scientific” language of Scripture is true, then the doctrine of inerrancy is not threatened. Third, it must be noted that there are many philosophers of science who would hold that all scientific theories about the nature of reality are not descriptive but solely instrumental or operational. Thus, to absolutize the present language of science is to be out on a limb, with someone—perhaps even a scientist—sawing away at the branch!

Let me again state the possibility that certain alleged scientific problems may be accounted for in the distinction between descriptive or historical authority and normative authority.

5. Inerrancy does not require verbal exactness in the citation of the Old Testament by the New. In some ways this issue is obscured by discussing it in terms of the Old Testament quotations in the New. For this reason I have used what I hope is a more neutral word—citation. Quotation immediately gives one the picture of our present linguistic conventions of quotation marks, ellipses, brackets, and references. None of this was a part of the Hebrew and Greek of biblical times. When we quote today, we quote with verbal exactness, or we note that we have deviated from this

through one of the aforementioned conventions. However, we cite statements in many ways besides quotation. We use indirect discourse, general reference, and summary. When we recall a statement or event, we often give only the gist or general idea of what was exactly said or done. Such practice was common in the New Testament (as it has been throughout literary history), and there are no conventions to advise us which method of citation is being employed in a given passage. Furthermore, citation of any kind in the New Testament involved translation. Since the Old Testament was in Hebrew, it had to be translated into Greek, either by the New Testament writer himself or by someone else, such as a translator of the Septuagint.

6. Inerrancy does not demand that the Logia Jesu (the sayings of Jesus) contain the ipsissima verba (the exact words) of Jesus, only the ipsissima vox (the exact voice). This point is closely akin to the one just made. When a New Testament writer cites the sayings of Jesus, it need not be that Jesus said those exact words. Undoubtedly the exact words of Jesus are to be found in the New Testament, but they need not be so in every instance. For one thing, many of the sayings were spoken by our Lord in Aramaic and therefore had to be translated into Greek. Moreover, as was mentioned above, the writers of the New Testament did not have available to them the linguistic conventions that we have today. Thus it is impossible for us to know which of the sayings are direct quotes, which are indirect discourse, and which are even freer renderings. With regard to the sayings of Jesus what, in light of these facts, would count against inerrancy? If the sense of the words attributed to Jesus by the writers was not uttered by Jesus, or if the exact words of Jesus are so construed that they have a sense never intended by Jesus, then inerrancy would be threatened.

7. Inerrancy does not guarantee the exhaustive comprehensiveness of any single account or of combined accounts where those are involved. This point is somewhat related to the early statement on precision. It must be remembered that from the standpoint of any discipline, even theology, the Scriptures are partial. Often partial is misunderstood to mean incorrect or false. But this idea itself is false. The Bible is a complete revelation of all that man needs for faith and practice. That is, there are many things we might like to know but which God has not seen fit to reveal. It is also true that God has not seen fit to record every detail of every account.
I think that this point has implications in another direction also, namely, that of the Gospel accounts. The problems in the Gospels are well known and cannot possibly be dealt with in the limited space available here. However, a giant step forward in the quest to resolve the problems will be taken when one realizes that none of the evangelists is obligated to give an exhaustive account of any event. He has the right to record an event in light of his purposes. Moreover, it must be remembered that the accounts of all four Gospel writers together do not exhaust the details of any event mentioned. There may be some unknown bit of information that would resolve seeming conflicts. All that is required is that the sentences used by the writer be true.

8. Inerrancy does not demand the infallibility or inerrancy of the noninspired sources used by biblical writers. Form and redaction criticism of the biblical texts raised the question of sources as it had never been raised before. These forms of literary criticism make it necessary to face the possibility that the use of noninspired sources is much more widespread than was previously thought.99 Thus, two comments are in order. The definition and doctrine of inerrancy here advocated does not rule out a priori the possibility, or even probability, that sources are cited with historical and descriptive authority but not normative authority. That is, the errors that these noninspired sources contain are accurately recorded, since Scripture’s intention is not to approve those errors as true.100

SOME FINAL OBJECTIONS

Throughout the course of this chapter I have tried to deal at least with the major objections to the points made. Three additional objections are of sufficient weight to require some mention and answer. By far the most important is the first.

Has not your definition so qualified the concept of inerrancy that it is no longer meaningful? Pinnock thinks that the need for qualification is a liability and says, “This means that the discussion often has the air of unreality and even dishonesty about it.”101 Are we just avoiding the obvious fact that inerrancy is false? I do not believe so.

As a matter of fact, I seriously question whether these are qualifications at all. They are, as stated before, misunderstandings by those who reject inerrancy. If they were qualifications and they grew out of an ad hoc desire to prevent falsification of one’s doctrine, then indeed Pinnock’s and other such criticisms would be justified. However, since they are not, the picture is quite different. It must be remembered that words have more than one meaning. Thus it becomes necessary to specify which meaning is to be applied in a case in point. The more important the statement, the more precisely it needs to be specified. Notice the great care with which legal documents are prepared. What is important is the consistency of one’s own treatment of a doctrine, not whether it is consistent in light of certain views imposed on it by others. Clearly it is inconsistent to hold certain views and yet claim that the Bible is inerrant, but that is not the question here. The question here is this: Is this formulation inconsistent? Or, more generally, are all formulations inconsistent?

What would really constitute a qualified view of inerrancy? In my judgment, it would be a view that retains the word and develops a doctrine, but uses the word in a sense contrary to customary usage. Such an attempt would be a case of special pleading. As I see it, our definition does not do that. It seeks to employ the term inerrancy in connection with truth, and with the usual sense of truth. I do not think these are qualifications, only attempts to specify language more precisely.

Finally, if these are indeed qualifications, they are qualifications that apply to all books, particularly those of antiquity.102 A case of special pleading is not being advocated for the Bible. I only ask that the principle of charity, which should be used in interpreting any type of text, be applied to the Bible.

Does not the Bible itself distinguish between the authoritative Word of God and the fallible opinions of its human authors? Seeming ground for such an objection is found in 1 Corinthians 7:10 where Paul says, “To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord),” and in verse 12 he says, “To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord).” Is this not proof positive in the text of Scripture that the Word of God must be distinguished from the fallible opinions of its human authors? Although one may interpret what Paul has to say in this way, it is neither necessary nor best. In verse 10, Paul is pointing out that what he is saying has been said before by our Lord, while in verse 12 Paul is the vehicle of new revelation. That is, what he says has not been said before. Later, in 14:37, he says that what he wrote is the command of the Lord. Thus the distinction is not between revelation and nonrevelation, infallible and fallible, but is a distinction within revelation (the infallible) between what is repeated by Paul and what is original with him.
Does not the apostle Paul himself contradict inerrancy in 1 Corinthians 1:16? In this passage Paul says, "Beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else." How this is supposed to bear on errancy or inerrancy is not clear. Inerrancy merely demands that the Bible is all true; it does not require total recall. Gerstner puts it well: "If Paul remembered wrongly we would have an uninspired Paul; but a Paul who does not remember is a Paul who is inspired to record that very fact for instruction (presumably, concerning the nature of Inspiration, what it does and does not include, what it does and does not exclude)." 103

CONCLUSION

The task of this chapter has been to specify as clearly and precisely as possible what is meant by inerrancy—both the term and the doctrine. The approach used to achieve this goal was to examine the proper methodology whereby such a doctrine could be reached, then applying that method to the exegetical evidence or data. After examining a number of possible terms to express the attitude of the Bible toward itself, it was decided that among the words needed was a word to express the concept of "wholly true." It was suggested that this was the heart of the matter, whether one used inerrancy or not. There was, however, still a need to elaborate the way in which the doctrine functions in concrete instances. Finally, some previously unanswered objections were treated.

The conclusions of this paper concerning the doctrine of inerrancy may be summarized as follows: (1) the term inerrancy, like other words, is subject to misunderstanding and must be clearly defined; (2) inerrancy should be defined in terms of truth, making a number of the usual problems mute; (3) while inerrancy is not the only word that could express the concept here associated with it, it is a good word; and (4) inerrancy is not the only quality of the Bible that needs to be affirmed. After a study of the kind undertaken in this chapter, one cannot do better than to close with the words of Isaiah:

The grass withers and the flowers fall,
   because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.
The grass withers and the flowers fall,
   but the word of our God stands forever.
(Isa. 40:7, 8)