Crossing the Presuppositional Divide: A Problematization and Comparative Analysis of the Inerrancy Debate in Evangelicalism

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ABSTRACT

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Gabriel A. Desjardins

The inerrancy debate in evangelicalism is highly contentious, and the growing political power of evangelicals makes understanding their hermeneutics a crucial issue. Inerrantists approach the Bible deductively, firmly upholding Scripture's veracity. By contrast, their critics approach the Bible inductively, arguing that hermeneutics should adapt based on modern findings in history, archaeology, textual studies, and science. The operative lenses on both sides—deductivism and inductivism—create an imposing presuppositional divide between inerrantists and their critics. Both sides fail to represent their opponents' views, constructing strawmen of their positions. In many cases, critics present solid arguments against inerrancy. But their arguments are only solid from an inductivist perspective, making it difficult for inerrantists to hear critiques. Moreover, there are many forms of inerrancy, some of which are easier to dialogue with than others. In my thesis, I present three case studies of the inerrancy debate, involving critics from philosophy, sociology, and biblical studies. I demonstrate the presuppositional divide in the inerrancy debate through these cases. Critics should argue from within deductivist presuppositional frameworks by being both non-confrontational and familiar with primary sources.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

Introduction

Statement of the Question

People are often curious when I tell them that I study theology. They ask why I study it and whether I am religious, and my answers to both questions are related. I study theology because I *was* religious. In fact, my whole purpose in studying theology at a secular institution was to equip myself with responses to secularism. At the time, I saw the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, without error in everything it claims. I firmly maintained this position, and there was nothing that could change my mind—but then I began taking courses in biblical studies, which taught me to be more critical.

Recently, I gave a small presentation on this paradigm shift and how studying theology at a secular university allowed me to abandon my past dogmatism. In the question period, a psychology professor asked me a simple question that has stayed with me ever since. She asked, "How did you change your mind?" I gave her an answer, but I knew that I could not fully answer that question, so it stayed with me.

When it came time to start my thesis, I immediately knew that I would research inerrancy, but I had to narrow my focus. After all, nearly a quarter of Americans believe that the Bible is the literal word of God, to be taken word-for-word.[1] This hermeneutic affects the religious worldview of many people, not only in America but throughout the world, making it a very important topic in theology. I thought about the various elements and questions surrounding inerrancy (i.e., whether it is historical, biblical, or relevant in the contemporary world), but I kept coming back to the question: how *did* I change my mind? What encouraged me to think critically about my dogmatic beliefs? These questions are very important, not only for understanding my transformation but also for promoting critical thinking among ultra-conservative ideologues.

Biblical inerrancy plays a crucial role in evangelical political involvement, particularly for minority rights (i.e., LGBTQ+ communities and racial minorities), women's rights, climate change, and immigration. For many inerrantists (those who believe in biblical inerrancy), the Bible is a divine code of conduct and manual for legislation. All kinds of positions are either conceived of or defended. However, it is vital to recognize that many conservative evangelicals do not derive their political convictions directly from Scripture.

According to sociologist Lydia Bean, "political conflict can also shape the contents of religious morality."[2] She cites the example of abortion, stating that according to James Hunter, evangelicals are not anti-abortion based solely on their "commitments to a high view of biblical authority."[3] Though many Christians—including Christian politicians[4]—claim that their pro-life

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[1] Lydia Saad, "Record Few Americans Believe Bible Is Literal Word of God." Gallup.com. Gallup, May 15, 2015. https://news.gallup.com/poll/210704/record-few-americans-believe-bible-literal-word-god.aspx

[2] Lydia Bean, *The Politics of Evangelical Identity: Local Churches and Partisan Divides in the United States and Canada,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 8.

[3] Bean, 8.

[4] Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, "Ending a Life That Has Not Begun—Abortion in the Bible," *The Bible in Political Debate*, Ed. Frances Flannery & Rodney A. Werline, (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 48.

positions stem from Scripture, the Bible has very little to say about abortion.[5] Regardless, many Christians claim to take their political positions directly from the Bible. As a result, understanding evangelical and fundamentalist hermeneutics is essential.

In 2016, 81% of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump, signifying the Christian Right's growing political power.[6] Since the election of Donald Trump in 2016, evangelical political power has steadily increased, with many evangelicals joining the Trump caucus. Their influence has resulted in the increasing invocation of the Bible as justification for political actions.[7] This has also been in the case in other countries. For example, in 2019, a Christian fascist named Luis Fernando Camacho seized control of the Bolivian government in a staged coup, all the while holding a Bible and proclaiming "Bolivia belongs to Christ."[8] In 2018, 70% of Christians supported the election of right-wing leader Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. In Canada, the Christian Right expresses its influence by supporting groups like Campaign Life Coalition and Right Now!, which encourage Christian voters to support specific candidates, such as Doug Ford in Ontario and Jason Kenny in Alberta.[9] And in 2020, where a pandemic threatens many aspects of daily life throughout the world, certain evangelicals perceive government lockdowns and efforts to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 as a direct affront to their faith. In some cases, evangelicals ignored government directives to keep churches closed.[10]

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[5] Peerbolte, 58. Certainly, many Biblical passages condemn child sacrifice (i.e. Deut. 12:31; 18:10; 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17; Psalm 106:37, to name a few). However, some passages blur the lines of when life begins (Exodus 21:22-25) or even encourage abortion-like practices in cases of adultery (Numbers 5:11-31).

[6] Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2017), 636. It should be highlighted, however, that though many white evangelicals voted for Trump, there were many evangelicals who did not vote for Trump. Additionally, according to Philip Gorski, many evangelicals who voted for Trump are white Christian nationalists. See Philip Gorski, "Why evangelicals voted for Trump: A critical cultural sociology," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5, no. 3 (10, 2017): 338-354.

[7] For example, Jeff Sessions invoked Romans 13 to justify the separation of families at the Mexican/US border in 2018. See Julie Zauzmer and Keith McMillan, "Sessions cites Bible passage used to defend slavery in defense of separating immigrant families," *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/06/14/jeff-sessions-points-to-the-bible-in-defense-of-separating-immigrant-families/

[8] See Michael Stone, "Christian Fascist Luis Fernando Camacho Leads 'Racist Coup' In Bolivia." *Progressive Secular Humanist*., November 12, 2019. https://www.patheos.com/blogs/progressivesecularhumanist/2019/11/christian-fascist-luis-fernando-camacho-leads-racist-coup-in-bolivia/

[9] André Gagné and Andréa Febres-Gagné, "From America to Ontario: The Political Impact of the Christian Right." *The Conversation*, December 4, 2018. http://theconversation.com/from-america-to-ontario-the-political-impact-of-the-christian-right-107400.

[10] See André Gagné, "Coronavirus: Trump and religious right rely on faith, not science," *The Conversation*, March 29, 2020, https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-trump-and-religious-right-rely-on-faith-not-science-134508; Alejandra Molina, "Attorneys for John MacArthur denounce headlines reporting a church outbreak of COVID-19 cases," *Religion News Service*,

Whether we like it or not, the divide between church and state is virtually nonexistent. Some might ask why there should be any opposition to the mingling of church and state. After all, religious individuals are voters just as much as anyone else, and like other voters, they vote based on their values. However, the issue is not with the right to vote but with a desire to impose religiously motivated policies on a democratic and pluralistic society.

The attempted imposition of religious law takes on extreme forms in evangelicalism through an influential political theology known as dominionism. Such Christians seek to dominate every area of society, including the government. Christian reconstructionism is an example of dominionism. Reconstructionists seek to impose antiquated laws from the Hebrew Bible, like stoning LGBTQ+ persons and adulterers.[11] Comparatively, few evangelicals adhere to Christian reconstructionism. However, dominionist theology remains influential through neo-charismatics.[12] For example, Donald Trump's spiritual advisor, Paula White Cain, is a neo-charismatic leader who rallies evangelicals by demonizing democrats (literally describing democrats as controlled by demonic forces), worsening the deeply polarized context of American politics.[13] Dialoguing with individuals who adhere to such ideologies is crucial.

Dialogue is, in fact, the primary goal of this thesis. According to Peter A. Huff, the final frontier of interfaith work is fundamentalism.[14] Arguably, contemporary biblical inerrancy is rooted in evangelical fundamentalism, so to dialogue with inerrantists is to dialogue with fundamentalists. In many cases, this dialogue concerns those who refuse to dialogue, except to convert people to their cause. This thesis aims to encourage discussion where it appears impossible—a crucial goal given the current political climate and the increasing political power of evangelicals.

Religious individuals, scholars, and everyday people have attempted to debate inerrantists, each to varying degrees of success. In this thesis, I focus on critiques by self-professed Christians (mostly evangelicals), illustrating strengths and weaknesses and offering ways forward. However, before providing my full argument, I will first explain fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and biblical inerrancy.

October 23, 2020. https://religionnews.com/2020/10/23/attorneys-for-john-macarthur-denounce-headlines-reporting-a-church-outbreak-of-covid-19-cases/

[11] For more on Christian reconstructionism, see Michael D. Gabbert, "An Historical Overview of Christian Reconstructionism." *Criswell Theological Review* 6 (Spring 1993): 281–301; Julie J. Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstructionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Michael J. McVicar, *Christian Reconstructionism: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015); André Gagné*, Ces évangeliques derrière Trump* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2020), 43-46.

[12] For more on neo-charismatic dominionism and the New Apostolic Reformation, see Gagné*, Ces évangeliques,* 46-81.

[13] Gagné*, Ces évangeliques,* 84-91.

[14] Peter A. Huff, *What are They Saying About Fundamentalisms?* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2008), 8-9. Fundamentalism will be clearly defined and discussed in the proceeding pages.

Evangelicalism & Fundamentalism

Historically speaking, the label "evangelical" referred to Protestants in the early Reformation. Lutherans used this label to refer to Protestantism. Thus, historically, an evangelical was simply a Protestant. The word itself originates from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, meaning "good news" or "gospel." Before the 20th century, most American Protestants considered themselves evangelicals, especially those affected by the two Great Awakenings.[15] More recently, however, the taxonomy of evangelicals has dramatically shifted. To understand this shift, we must first explain fundamentalism.

The label "fundamentalist" is a recent word that was coined in 1920 by a self-proclaimed fundamentalist named Curtis Lee Laws, who used the term as a rallying cry for Protestants seeking to defend Christianity's fundamentals. At its core, the term originates from the word "fundamental" and the Latin root *fundus,* meaning "bottom." In this sense, a fundamental is at the foundation of the thing in question.[16] Fundamentalists see themselves as defenders of Christianity's fundamental doctrines, defending the faith from liberal Christianity, modernism, Darwinian evolution, and biblical criticism. Many fundamentalists considered the following five items as the foundational elements of Christianity: Christ's virgin birth, bodily resurrection, the veracity of biblical miracles, substitutionary atonement, and biblical inerrancy.[17] Thus, historically speaking, fundamentalists are also inerrantists; however, not all inerrantists are fundamentalists, and there are reasons for this, as will soon become apparent.

Fundamentalism has not always been pejorative. The term began as a rallying cry for conservative Christianity. It *became* pejorative after the Scopes "Monkey" Trial, which convicted John T. Scopes of teaching evolution at a school in Daytona, Tennessee. Clarence Darrow led the defense, while William Jennings Bryan (an influential fundamentalist) led the prosecution. Towards the end of the trial, Darrow put Jennings Bryan on the stand and questioned him about the Bible. Jennings Bryan was unable to answer many of Darrow's questions, and due to the heavy media presence during this trial, journalists labeled fundamentalism a backward and bigoted form of Christianity.[18] This stigma has since remained a linguistic element of the term, which now includes religions beyond Protestant Christianity. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, scholars then connected fundamentalism to all anti-modernist faiths and not just Protestantism, affectively widening the taxonomical implications of fundamentalism and propagating a pejorative beyond its original meaning.[19]

After the cultural defeat of fundamentalism, the taxonomy of evangelicalism began to shift, due to the loss of fundamentalist intellectual credibility, where fundamentalists became cultural outsiders.[20] Their new status promoted neo-evangelicalism and its attempt to redeem

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[15] Fitzgerald, 2. Various groups of fundamentalists formulated different lists of fundamentals.
[16] I have written on the lexical and taxonomical development of "fundamentalism" in another work. See Gabriel A. Desjardins "From Rallying Cry to Pejorative: The Taxonomical and Lexical Development of 'Fundamentalism'", in *Arc, The Journal of the School of Religious Studies McGill University*, Vol. 45 (2017).
[17] Fitzgerald, 96.
[18] Desjardins, 128.
[19] Desjardins, 131.
[20] Fitzgerald, 140.

fundamentalist positions, including biblical inerrancy. After the Scopes Trial, fundamentalists needed a new guise, and that new guise became neo-evangelicalism and then later evangelicalism itself.[21]

For some scholars, evangelicalism is too broad a category. For example, Darryl G. Hart argues that evangelicalism does not exist,[22] because evangelicalism has become synonymous with conservative Christianity.[23] Despite Hart's conclusions, many Christians describe themselves as evangelicals. Thus, for this thesis, I follow the Bebbington quadrilateral[24] as a means of categorizing evangelicals, seeing that my goal is to explore evangelical hermeneutics and not to provide a taxonomical study of evangelicalism.

According to David Bebbington, four elements comprise evangelicalism: conversionism, activism, crucicentrism, and biblicism.[25] Conversionism refers to the experience of being born again. To be born again often refers to a specific moment in one's life where one repented and turned to God.[26] Activism refers to the evangelical mission and goal to spread the gospel at whatever expense.[27] After their conversion, evangelicals seek to convert others, and according to Jonathan Edwards, the converted individual seeks to save others even at the cost of their own life.[28] Crucicentrism refers to the cross's centrality and its associated doctrines in evangelical faith, such as the atonement and related soteriological theories. At its core, atonement refers to the *at-one-ment*, or reconciliation, of humanity to God. Perhaps the most significant atonement theory for evangelicals is substitutionary atonement—the Anselmian theory that Christ's death satisfied God's wrath.[29] Finally, biblicism refers to evangelical devotion towards the Bible. According to Bebbington, evangelicals believe that "all spiritual truth is to be found in [the Bible's] pages."[30] Though evangelicals typically regard the Bible as the inspired Word of God,

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[21] Darryl G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 23.
[22] Hart, 16.
[23] Hart, 24.
[24] There are problems with the Bebbington quadrilateral. Since evangelicalism is such a large umbrella category with many variations, not all evangelicals identify their theology and faith in the quadrilateral. Moreover, evangelicalism is a social movement and not an official denomination. See Gagné*, Ces évangeliques*, 11.
[25] D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989), 2.
[26] Bebbington, 7.
[27] According to Bebbington, evangelical activism decreases desire for theological education, apart from skills related to preaching. See Bebbington, 11-12. This decreased desire for theological education has perhaps contributed to what Mark Noll refers to as the "scandal of the evangelical mind," or the claim that evangelicals have contributed little to intellectual advancement in the 20th century. See Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 3-28.
[28] Bebbington, 10.
[29] Bebbington, 15.
[30] Bebbington, 12.

the exact definition of inspiration causes contention among evangelicals.[31] Nonetheless, many perceive the Bible as true, infallible,[32] and inerrant.[33]

Biblicism and Inerrancy

A sociologist named Christian Smith provides a more detailed explanation of biblicism in his text *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture.* In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I explore Smith and his text in depth, but I thought it necessary to discuss Smith's definition of biblicism in the introductory chapter to situate inerrancy within evangelical biblical authority. Biblicism, I should note, is a scholar's category. Most evangelicals are unfamiliar with the term or how it describes their beliefs about the Bible.[34] This term is an umbrella category encompassing biblical inerrancy, along with various other viewpoints related to the Bible. According to Smith, biblicism is a "constellation of related assumptions and beliefs about the Bible's nature, purpose, and function."[35] This constellation consists of ten assumptions: divine writing, total representation, complete coverage, democratic perspicuity, common sense hermeneutics, solo (sic.) scriptura, internal harmony, universal applicability, inductive method, and the handbook model.

Divine writing is related to inerrancy, claiming that the "Bible down to the details of its words, consists of and is identical with God's very own words…"[36] *Total representation* assumes that the Bible is God's complete revelation to humanity, containing everything God wanted and needed to say. *Complete coverage* is similar to total representation since it states that Scripture has everything believers' need for Christian belief, life, and practice. *Democratic perspicuity* assumes that any intelligent person can understand the Bible's "plain meaning" in their language.[37] Similarly, *common sense hermeneutics* assumes that Christians should interpret Scripture through the literal sense of the text, which does not necessarily imply the original "literary, cultural, and historical contexts."[38] *Solo scriptura* is not a typo for sola scriptura. Smith describes this as the assumption that interpreting the Bible requires only the Bible itself and not creeds, traditions, external sources, or particular hermeneutics. *Internal harmony* presents the Bible as *one* unified and harmonious whole, noting that any discrepancies can be fitted together like pieces to a puzzle. *Universal applicability* assumes that whatever is stated or claimed in the Bible remains applicable to our contemporary situations, outside its original, historical contexts. The *inductive method* is the proper and preferred manner of reading the Bible. It implies that careful study can elucidate "matters of Christian belief and practice."[39] Finally, the *handbook*

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[31] The various theories of inspiration will be discussed further in Chapter 1.
[32] I discuss the differences between infallibility and inerrancy later in the thesis. Though the two terms were once synonymous, a lexical distinction has since developed.
[33] Bebbington, 13.
[34] Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 3.
[35] Smith, 4.
[36] Smith, 4.
[37] Smith, 4.
[38] Smith, 4.
[39] Smith, 5. It should be noted, however, that inerrantist inductivism is not true inductivism; it is deductivism masked as inductivism, since the Bible is read through the lens of inerrancy.

model assumes Christians should read the Bible like an instruction manual that helps with everyday topics like "science, economics, health, politics, and romance."[40]

Biblicism contributes to evangelical political positions by presenting the Bible as an authoritative source of instructions related to every imaginable topic. This constellation of hermeneutical assumptions connects to biblical authority. Inerrancy, however, is but one outlook on biblical authority. Two other hermeneutical frameworks in evangelicalism are literalism and infallibilism. Though once interchangeable and synonymous, these frameworks have developed into separate hermeneutics related to biblical authority.

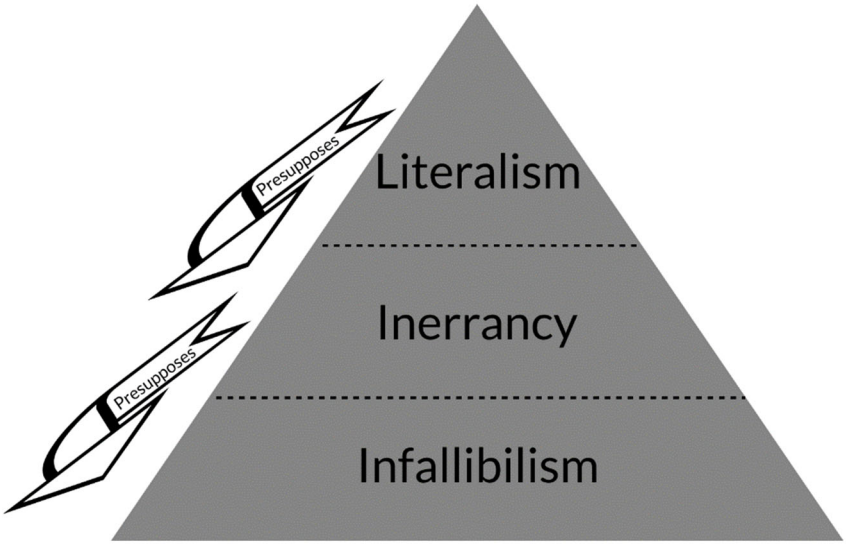

Figure 1 – Pyramid of Evangelical Hermeneutics

One way to explain these frameworks is through a pyramid (see Figure 1). Infallibilism stands at the base, followed by inerrancy, and then literalism. Infallibilism typically concerns the Bible's inability to fail—and this ties with its mission, which is salvific; it will not fail in saving those for whom Christ died.[41] Infallibilism, however, does not necessitate an inerrant Bible. Some infallibilists relate this category strictly to matters of faith and religion, meaning that the Bible can err in terms of science and history without failing its mission.[42] Inerrancy, the second level, describes the Bible as errorless in all its claims, including claims related to science and history. Inerrancy presupposes infallibility. Literalism, the third level, presupposes inerrancy and infallibilism while taking biblical authority a step further.[43] For literalists, the Bible will not fail

[40] Smith, 5.

[41] Each of these hermeneutics are complex, and often debated in evangelical circles. For instance, infallibilism is often directly tied to inerrancy, meaning the Bible cannot fail because the Bible cannot err. See, for example, Article XI of "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." Danielakin.com, accessed December 19, 2019, http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/old/Resource_545/Book%202,%20Sec%2023.pdf

[42] Ted G. Jelen, "Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: Does the Difference Make a Difference?" *Sociological Analysis* 49, no. 4 (1989): 421-429.

[43] Genesis 1 provides an excellent example for differentiating each position. Infallibilists read Genesis 1 and believe that God created the world. Inerrantists agree that God created the world,

in its mission; it is without error in all its claims; and it is the literal word of God.[44] This framework, however, does not represent the hermeneutical complexity of evangelicalism. I present this framework nonetheless to situate the reader before further elucidating the complexity of evangelical hermeneutics.

It is also important to note that these ideas are not peripheral forms of evangelical hermeneutics. According to a 2017 Gallup poll, 24% of the American population believes the Bible is "the actual word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word."[45] Beyond literalism, 47% of Americans believe the Bible is the "inspired word of God" but is not always literal. There is, however, a downward trend in Americans who hold to literalism. The 24% of literalists in 2017 represents a decline from the previous 38% of Americans who identified with literalism in 1976. There is also an upward trend of people perceiving the Bible as "a book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man."[46] In 2017, 26% of Americans held to this view, up from 13% in 1976. Intriguingly, people with a college degree are less likely to associate with literalism. Instead, they are more likely to view the Bible as either inspired or a collection of fables.[47]

A Brief History of Inerrancy

I now turn to the origins of biblical inerrancy and its place in evangelicalism. Many scholars depict inerrancy as a recent conception of biblical authority, developed at Princeton Theological Seminary in the 19th century. By contrast, inerrantists argue for a much earlier development, with some tracing it all way to the roots of Christianity itself. In *The Battle for the Bible*, Harold Lindsell makes such an argument. As is typical with inerrantists, Lindsell argues that the Bible describes itself as inerrant. The verse most used for inerrancy is 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which reads (NRSV),[48] "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." The word translated as "inspired" is θεόπνευστος, which translates to "God-breathed." The debate surrounding this word centers on what inspiration means. For some inerrantists, inspiration is mechanical—in which case the authors acted merely as vessels who wrote God's dictations word for word. Another important passage is 1 Peter 1:20-21, which reads, "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Inerrantists also cite passages that say, "Thus says the Lord," along with verses where prophets claim to speak on behalf of God, such as Exodus

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but they also argue that the events recorded in Genesis 1 are somehow in line with history. However, unlike the literalists, inerrantists would not be concerned with a word-for-word, or literal, interpretation of Genesis 1. For inerrantists, it is quite possible that each day of creation corresponds to a much larger period of time, perhaps even billions of years.

[44] According to James Barr, literalists are not true literalists, since it is impossible to take a fully literal approach to the Bible. He says that most literalists are inerrantists, who slip in and out of literalism. See James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 40.

[45] Saad, "Record Few Americans Believe Bible Is Literal Word of God."

[46] Saad, "Record Few Americans Believe Bible Is Literal Word of God."

[47] Saad, "Record Few Americans Believe Bible Is Literal Word of God."

[48] All passages used in this thesis come from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise stated.

4:30, Deuteronomy 31:19-22, 2 Samuel 23:2, 1 Kings 22:13-14, Jeremiah 1:9, Ezekiel 2:7. Other passages used to bolster inerrancy and inspiration include John 12:47-50, Hebrews 3:7 and 4:7, 1 Corinthians 2:13, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Matthew 4:7, Galatians 3:8, and Romans 9:17, to name a few.[49]

Concerning an early origin of biblical inerrancy, Lindsell presents several cases where Church fathers and reformers seemingly claim that the Bible is without error. Examples of such cases occur with Clement, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.[50] Lindsell, however, takes these issues in isolation. For instance, he quotes from Augustine, who says,

> Freely do I admit to you, my friend, that I have learnt to ascribe to those Books which are of Canonical rank, and only to them, such reverence and honour, that I firmly believe that no single error due to the author is found in any of them. And when I am confronted in these Books with anything that seems at variance with truth, I do not hesitate to put it down either to the use of an incorrect text, or to the failure of a commentator rightly to explain the words, or to my own mistaken understanding of the passage.[51]

Lindsell fails to mention the prominent use of accommodation theory by many of the Christians mentioned above. According to Kenton Sparks, accommodation theory claims that God did not correct the mistaken worldviews of the biblical authors. He accommodated their worldviews into the Bible. As a result, the Bible need not present correct, error-free science or history.[52] If the biblical authors believed that there was a world-wide flood, God accommodated this worldview. Sparks provides several examples of church fathers who adhere to accommodation theory or something similar, including Augustine. Concerning the different moral precepts between the Old and New Testaments, Augustine says,

> If the trouble is that the moral precepts under the old law are lower and in the Gospel Higher, and that therefore both cannot come from the same God, whoever thinks in this way may find difficulty in explaining how a single physician prescribes one medicine to weaker patients through his assistants, and another by himself to stronger patients, all to restore health.[53]

With that said, the case for historical inerrancy is not so clear. Indeed, most Christians do not ascribe error to God, but many have used notions like accommodation to explain apparent discrepancies.[54] And this practice has continued until contemporary conceptions of inerrancy.

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[49] Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 54.
[50] Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1976), 45-62.
[51] Lindsell, 54.
[52] Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*: *An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 230-231.
[53] Sparks, 240. The original quote is from Augustine*, Of True Religion* 17, in *Earlier Writings*, ed. John H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 241.
[54] Both Luther and Calvin admitted to various errors and discrepancies in Scripture. Luther also contested the canonicity of certain texts long considered canonical, such as James and

However, contemporary inerrancy did not emerge until the latter part of the 19th century. This modern form is aware of and responding to biblical criticism.[55] It arose out of Princeton Theological Seminary, mainly through Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander Hodge, and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. For Charles Hodge, the Bible is "free from all error," a claim that Frances Fitzgerald says was a "theologically eccentric stance" for his time.[56] Princeton theology was a response not only to biblical criticism but also to deist philosophies and Darwinian evolution.

Charles Hodge's conception of the Bible was heavily influenced by Scottish common-sense realism (SCSR), a position in the philosophy of perception (i.e., how human beings perceive the world and its objects). This branch of philosophy is rooted in René Descartes' theory of ideas, according to which our knowledge of things is limited to the ideas we form about them.[57] There are two central positions connected to this philosophy: realism and idealism. Idealism follows Descartes' theory to its logical conclusion, positing that perception shares little, if any, basis in reality. Some forms of idealism question whether the outside world exists, especially how we perceive it. This rather extreme form leads to skepticism, which was pioneered by David Hume. Skepticism argues that we cannot know whether anything exists outside of our minds. In response, realists take a firm stance in the opposite direction, affirming that we *can* perceive objects as they are, and our perception is not dependent on ideas. SCSR is a form of realism, arguing that the world exists independent of human perception and beliefs. According to the Scottish realists, we know the world through common sense, which, according to Thomas Reid, is a God-given capacity to understand the world as it is.[58]

Influenced by SCSR, Charles Hodge and his successors claimed to take an inductive approach to Scripture. However, if we look at their methods and their commitment to inerrancy, they were deductivist. For Hodge in particular, Scripture is a repository of facts. A theologian obtains theological truth by studying the Bible just as a geologist obtains geological truth by

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Revelation. See Fitzgerald, 77; see also, Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 19.

[55] Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1986), 11. Ernest Sandeen says that biblical inerrancy did not develop until the 1850s. See Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 106.

[56] Fitzgerald, 77.

[57] Peimin Ni, *On Reid*, (Belmon: Wadsworth Thomas Learning, 2002), 8.

[58] By common sense, however, proponents of SCSR are not referring to a simple, straightforward concept of common truth. According to James Beattie—one of the prominent thinkers in SCSR—common sense is "that power of the mind which perceives truth, or commands belief, not by progressive argumentation, but by an instantaneous, instinctive, and irresistible impulse; derived neither from education nor from habit, but from nature; acting independently on our will, whenever its object is presented, according to an established law, and therefore properly called *Sense* [author's emphasis]; and acting in a similar manner upon all, or at least upon a great majority of mankind, and therefore properly called Common Sense." See John C. Vander Stelt, *Philosophy & Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton: Mack Publishing Company, 1978), 33.

studying the earth.[59] This outlook necessitated inerrancy. If the Bible is an object of study, and theology is a science akin to geology or astronomy, Scripture must be without error. Otherwise, Christians cannot trust the Bible as an object of study.

Still, Archibald Alexander Hodge (the son of Charles Hodge) and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield took a strategic retreat after several exchanges with biblical scholars, altering their understanding of inerrancy.[60] In a later publication, the two claimed that it is the original autographs that are inerrant and not modern translations of the Bible. Original autographs refer to the first writing of each biblical text as written by the original authors. By doing so, the Princeton theologians created an ideal, perfect, and unverifiable text. Since we do not have these autographs and likely never will have them (or even prove that they are, in fact, *original* autographs), we have no means of unequivocally denouncing this theory. For the Princeton theologians, scribal errors could explain potential discrepancies and problems.[61]

This conceptualization of inerrancy found its way safely into the heart of American fundamentalism.[62] Inerrancy was conducive to early fundamentalist Bible-study groups, which treated biblical texts as troves of perfect information providing inerrant truth about the past, present, and future. During the First World War, fundamentalists searched the Bible for inerrant, prophetic words to inform them about the ongoing war.[63] After the humiliation of the Scope's Trial in 1925, fundamentalism went into cultural exile. During this time, debates about the Bible and its alleged inerrancy occurred in academic settings, as seminaries and schools of theology adopted or rejected the historical-critical method.

This period of the debate saw the emergence of several conservative and fundamentalist theological colleges. After Warfield died in 1921, Princeton Theological Seminary moved away from its inerrantist roots toward modernist approaches to theology and biblical studies. This change resulted in several conservative faculty members, including John Gresham Machen, departing from Princeton and founding Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. This new institution's purpose was to maintain and adhere to the traditional, inerrantist teachings of Princeton Theological Seminary.[64] For a while, many conservative scholars conducted their work at Westminster Theological Seminary.[65] Evangelicals later founded other theological seminaries, such as Fuller Theological Seminary (est. 1947) and Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary (est. 1969). According to Lindsell, seminary debates impacted denominations and seminaries that adopted the historical-critical method, causing many to turn away from inerrancy.[66]

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[59] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 1872 (Reprint. Greenwood: The Attic Press Inc., 1960), 1, 10.
[60] Fitzgerald, 78
[61] A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield, "Inspiration," in *The Princeton Theology*: 1812-1921, ed. by Mark Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 229, 232.
[62] According to Sandeen, pre-millennialism and biblical inerrancy were two driving components of the early fundamentalist movement. See Sandeen, 104, 107, 114.
[63] Fitzgerald, 102-104.
[64] See Dorrien, 40. More will be said about Machen's departure and the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
[65] Noll, *Faith and Criticism*, 93.
[66] See Lindsell, 185-199.

As mentioned above, fundamentalist hermeneutics infiltrated broader evangelicalism through the neo-evangelical movement. The neo-evangelicals attempted to retain fundamentalist hermeneutics without keeping fundamentalist negativity and defensiveness.[67] After World War II, inerrancy became much more critical to evangelicalism, to the point of seeming synonymous with the movement.[68] In fact, by the 1970s, Lindsell could boldly claim that those who reject inerrancy are not evangelical. He argues that inerrancy should be an official component of evangelicalism.[69]

The inerrancy debates of the 20th century culminated with the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter CSBI), where hundreds of evangelicals signed an agreement affirming the inerrancy of Scripture. It was signed by prominent evangelical leaders, like John F. MacArthur, R.C. Sproul, Harold Lindsell, Harold J. Ockenga, Paige Patterson,[70] Francis Schaeffer, and J. I. Packer. The statement consists of 25 affirmations and denials related to the Bible, some of which uphold Princeton theology, such as the inerrancy of the original autographs and Scripture's verbal plenary inspiration.[71] This statement is now often cited in contemporary debates surrounding inerrancy, and to this day the question of inerrancy remains important for evangelicals across the globe.

The Presuppositional Divide

At this point, it should be apparent that inerrancy is a presupposition, a pre-held belief applied to Scripture. Much of conservative evangelicalism hinges on maintaining this presupposition. Thus, understanding presuppositions is vital for comprehending the inerrancy debate and the differences between inerrantists and their critics.

Presuppositions function on various levels. Linguistically, presuppositions occur in everyday speech. When meeting a stranger, if I say, "My wife likes that color," the stranger presupposes that I am married. I have not emphatically stated that I am married, yet conversational exchange dictates that interlocutors presuppose certain things based on conversation.[72] The word "wife" presupposes that I am married. Presuppositions, however, function at deeper levels. Everyone has presuppositions; we all have ideas and notions we unquestionably accept as true, based on social/economic status, education,

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[67] Hart, 148.
[68] Hart, 132.
[69] Lindsell, 138-139.
[70] Patterson was recently involved in controversy with the "me too" movement, which sparked the "church too" movement. Patterson made questionable comments regarding women in abusive marriages, essentially telling them to tough it out. See Alex Johnson, "Seminary fires prominent Southern Baptist leader over remarks about women and sexual abuse." *NBC News*, May 31, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/seminary-fires-prominent-southern-baptist-leader-over-remarks-about-women-n879006
[71] See Articles VII to IX of the CSBI.
[72] Concerning the linguistic aspects of presuppositions, see Tim Kenyon, *Clear Thinking in a Blurry World*, (Toronto: Nelson Education Ltd., 2008), 63-64. 115; B. L. Bunch, "Presupposition: An Alternative Approach." *Notre Dame J. Formal Logic* 20, no. 2 (1979): 341–54.

political/religious/ideological affiliations, traditions, geographical backgrounds, and many other factors.

At this deeper level, presuppositions affect every area of life and research, including the sciences. We might prefer our scientists be devoid of presupposition and bias, entirely objective in their conclusions. But this is simply not the case. Presuppositions exist in all sciences, from the natural sciences to the social sciences,[73] to the human sciences. According to past theories, the natural sciences were thought to be objective and free from the effects of presuppositions; however, scholars challenge this view since historical, cultural, economic, and social contexts affect scholars from all fields. Nevertheless, experts rely on tools, instruments, and tested methodologies to root out bias and presupposition to the best of their ability, thereby achieving objectivity as much as possible.[74]

Presuppositions also exist quite clearly and overtly in political, ideological, and religious dogmas. What separates the presuppositions of sciences and dogmas (at least what *should* separate them) is an underlying willingness in the sciences to re-evaluate and reorient presuppositions if necessary. In this sense, the sciences take an inductive research approach, whereas many dogmas—in our case, inerrantists—prefer a deductive approach, even if they claim to be inductivists. Inductivism derives knowledge from research and study. Contrastly, deductivism applies pre-held conclusions to objects of study.[75] Critics of inerrancy take an inductive approach, urging Christians to re-evaluate their theologies of Scripture based on contemporary biblical, historical, archeological, philosophical, and scientific research. Many inerrantists rigidly defend their theology (namely, inerrancy) in light of all modern research.[76] In this clear distinction, we see an operative presuppositional divide. Both sides maintain distinctly different presuppositions, and this difference hinders effective dialogue. As a result, many arguments on both sides serve only to bolster their own communities.

Inerrancy's forcefulness takes a stricter stance in presuppositionalism, a school of Christian apologetics influenced by Presbyterian and Princeton theology, along with the realist philosophy of SCSR. This form of apologetics was developed by Cornelius Van Til and has heavily influenced Christian reconstructionists and their impact on American and global

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[73] Concerning the effects of presuppositions in the social sciences, see Barth Landheer, "Presupposition in the Social Sciences." *American Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 4 (1932): 539–46.

[74] For more on the impact of presuppositions in all forms of research, see Sydney Ratner, "Presupposition and Objectivity in History," *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 7, no. 4 (Oct. 1940): 499-505.

[75] For more on inductivism and deductivism, see T.S. Vernon and L. A. Nissen, *Reflective Thinking: The Fundamentals of Logic* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1963), 91-114; Tim Kenyon, 39-42.

[76] Norman Geisler attributes the switch from deductive research to inductivism to Francis Bacon. See Norman Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," *Inerrancy*, ed by Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1980), 312.

politics.[77] Presuppositionalism argues that the foundations of all knowledge and human rationalism derive from unprovable premises: i.e., the Bible's veracity and God's existence. Presuppositionalists argue that knowledge claims stem from the Bible and that claims made contrary to the Bible (the standard for truth) are invalid. According to Julie Ingersoll, presuppositionalists do not see any common ground between believers and unbelievers, since "All presuppositions not derived from God (i.e., from the Bible) are derived from human beings' desire to be gods unto themselves, determining for themselves what is good and what is evil."[78]

Dialogue is clearly more complicated and seemingly impossible with certain forms of inerrancy. While not every inerrantist is a presuppositionalist, it is vital to understand the extent to which the presuppositional divide exists between some inerrantists and their critics. Notwithstanding, presuppositionalism has made an imprint on evangelical theology. For example, Tim Lahaye, author of the famous religious fiction series *Left Behind*, refers to presuppositionalism and Christian reconstructionists in his works *The Battle for the Mind* (1980), *The Battle for the Family* (1982), and *The Battle for the Public Schools* (1983). In these texts, LaHaye portrays humanism as an ever-present enemy that Christians must fight.[79] When confronting the presuppositional divide between inerrantists and their critics, scholars should not ignore presuppositionalism's influence.[80] Nonetheless, as will be made apparent in the proceeding chapters, there are many forms of inerrancy, and some forms are easier to dialogue with than others.

Thesis Statement

Evangelicalism is a complex and problematic category, and the same is true of inerrancy. The above descriptions illustrate the problem explored in this thesis: the simplification and misrepresentation of positions from all sides of the inerrancy debate. Inerrantists misrepresent their critics, and at times critics misrepresent inarrantists. I contend that this failure of representation results from the presuppositional divide between inerrantists, who take a deductivist approach to Scripture, and their critics, who take an inductivist approach.

I begin by problematizing the debate and demonstrating the complexity of inerrancy, which I argue falls on a spectrum from highly conservative to highly liberal variations. Dialogue is much more difficult with highly traditional forms, which dogmatically and deductively defend the Bible as errorless in all its claims.

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[77] For more on Cornelius Van Til and the historical development of presuppositionalism, see Vander Stelt, 220-270.
[78] Ingersoll, 21.
[79] Ingersoll, 22-23.
[80] Greg L. Bahnsen (a Christian reconstructionist) provides an apologetic for the concept of original inerrancy (i.e. that inerrancy pertains to the original autographs) from a presuppositionalist perspective in Greg. L. Bahnsen "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," *Inerrancy*, ed by Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1980), 151-193. Bahnsen elsewhere discusses the relationship between presuppositionalism and inerrancy in Greg L. Bahnsen, "Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 4 (December 1977): 289–305.

After problematizing the debate, I explore three case studies through the works of Stephen T. Davis, Christian Smith, and Peter Enns—three critics of inerrancy, or anti-inerrantist Christians.[81] I then discuss reviews of these three authors from Christian scholars, many of whom are inerrantists. These case studies represent various disciplines and approaches to the inerrancy debate: Davis is a philosopher; Smith is a sociologist; and Enns is a biblical scholar. These authors provide pointed critical arguments that most would find convincing, that is unless you represent a staunch form of inerrancy. Highly conservative reviewers often respond by claiming that the author has misrepresented inerrancy and created a strawman argument, even when this is clearly not the case.[82] These false charges, I argue, result from the presuppositional divide and enable inerrantists to dismiss well-crafted arguments.

According to Tim Kenyon, author of *Clear Thinking in a Blurry World*, a strawman[83] is a "fallacy of misrepresenting an argument or a view in order to refute a dumbed-down version of it."[84] The image behind this fallacy is that a critic or interlocutor constructs a man of straw (like a scarecrow) out of an opponent's arguments to make it easier to defeat them and their positions. Kenyon notes that this fallacy results from "ignoring the importance of charity in reconstructing or interpreting the arguments of one's fellow discussant."[85] Charity for Kenyon refers to a concerted effort to represent your opponent's views as best as possible. Kenyon also notes that this fallacy is often committed unintentionally and results from "thinking the worst of one's opponent."[86] If committed unintentionally, the strawman fallacy is a sign of poor scholarship. If committed intentionally, it is merely a sign of bad faith.[87]

Douglas Walton argues that "the exact words of a speaker (quoted in proper context), should be the ultimate evidence and guideline used to determine the arguer's position."[88] Moreover, Walton describes the strawman fallacy as a case of "overgeneralization."[89] According to Walton, committing the strawman fallacy is antithetical to the aims and goals of "conversational exchange"[90] and defeats the very purpose of argumentation. Additionally, he

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[81] Note that I use to term anti-inerrantist merely as a nominal form of "critics of inerrancy." My purpose in using anti-inerrantists is not a rhetorical tool to paint such Christians in a negative light.

[82] Beyond exaggerating the use of strawman arguments in their critics, inerrantists often misrepresent biblical scholarship, and this, according to Kenton Sparks, is caused by their desperate attempts to find support for inerrancy. See Kenton Sparks, 155.

[83] Douglas Walton notes that the strawman fallacy is new, although kernels of this fallacy can be found in works by earlier philosophers, such as Aristotle. See Douglas Walton, "The straw man fallacy", in *Logic and Argumentation*, ed. by Johan van Benthan, Frans H van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst and Frank Veltman (Amsterdam: Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1996), 115-116.

[84] Kenyon, 110.

[85] Kenyon, 110.

[86] Kenyon, 110.

[87] Kenyon, 110.

[88] Walton, 118.

[89] Walton, 118.

[90] Walton, 125.

argues that creating a strawman makes a conflict appear resolved when, in fact, it is *not*.[91] Quoting from T.S. Vernon and L.A. Nissen, Walton highlights the usefulness of demonstrating the most robust and representative version of an opponent's position; after all, failure to do so is entirely unpragmatic. Vernon and Nissen's quote argues that committing the strawman fallacy is tantamount to underestimating one's opponent. They state that the "real issues" of an opponent's views can only be found when their position's strongest version has been represented.[92]

Walton, Vernon, and Nissen note the importance of adequately representing an opponent's views; but I go a step further and argue that one must cross the presuppositional divide and, in effect, enter the opponents' frameworks and paradigms to effectively understand the world as they see it and thereby highlight the real issues from within their presuppositions. This approach requires familiarity with an opponent's primary sources and the roots of their positions. Thus, my goal in the three case studies is to examine the debate from both sides of the presuppositional divide between inerrantists and their critics. By the end, I argue that critics of inerrancy should use specific examples of inerrantist positions; they should avoid being confrontational; and most of all, they should argue from within inerrantist paradigms rather than resorting to generalizations.

Methodology

This thesis takes a qualitative approach, intending to problematize the inerrancy debate through a comparative analysis. According to Nicholas Walliman, author of *Social Research Methods*, qualitative research—contrasted with quantitative research—is "based… on information expressed in words – descriptions, accounts, opinions, feelings, etc."[93] This form of research focuses on people, groups, or "on more general beliefs and customs."[94] My thesis centers on both people and general beliefs. I examine the views of various forms of inerrancy and compare three case studies.

Problematization originates from Michel Foucault and permeates much of his work. According to Anna Terwiel, problematization is "a style of philosophy that allows individuals to engage in ethical practices of self-transformation."[95] Terwiel describes the aim of

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[91] Walton, 121.

[92] Walton, 120-121. The full quote from Vernon and Nissen as quoted by Walton states: "This kind of reasoning [strawman argumentation] is not only fallacious and unfair but may also be very unwise from a purely pragmatic point of view. The latter can be the case where political ideologies, for example, are concerned. If you base your opinion of an opposing ideology on an oversimplified and distorted version of that ideology which can easily be made to look ridiculous, then you are making the serious mistake of underestimating your opponent. Any ideology or program with a large following over a period of years must have some merit in order to attract and hold such a following. One cannot hope to argue effectively against such a doctrine unless he understands it well enough to be able to state it in its strongest form, for the real issues will be found only at that level." The original quote is taken from Vernon and Nissen, 160.

[93] Nicholas Walliman, "Qualitative Data Analysis." In *Social Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, Ltd, 2006), 129.

[94] Walliman, 129.

[95] Anna Terwiel, "Problematization as an Activist Practice: Reconsidering Foucault." *Theory & Event,* Vol. 23, 1 (Jan. 2020): 67.

problematization as "to disrupt how problems and solutions alike are perceived."[96] Foucault likewise describes problematization as a reflexive process to alter one's perception and uncover new ways of exploring problems and their solutions.[97] Biblical inerrancy is the focus of this thesis. While I have already demonstrated that inerrancy is a problem deserving attention, the central problem explored in this thesis is the failure to recognize inerrancy's complexity and the many variations of this pervasive evangelical hermeneutic. Thus, my first chapter aims to problematize the inerrancy debate by demonstrating the complexity of evangelical hermeneutics.

My problematization is conducted through a comparative analysis, first of various forms of biblical inerrancy and then of its critics. I will begin by describing *analysis* and then I will explain the distinguishing factors of *comparative* analysis. According to Christopher G. Pickvance, analysis refers to "any attempt to identify causal relations."[98] Pickvance notes that analysis can also refer to "the discovery of patterns…"[99] And it is this latter understanding of analysis that is used in this thesis. Pickvance later states that all analysis is in someway comparative. According to him, however, comparative analysis meets two conditions: 1) "Data must be gathered on two or more cases…" and 2) "There must be an attempt to explain rather than only to describe."[100] To meet these requirements, I have chosen three cases of the debate from different fields—i.e., philosophy, sociology, and biblical studies. I also compare several variations in the inerrancy debate, and with each case study, I aim to explain and not just to describe. In my thesis, I explain that the strawman critique in the three case studies is mostly unfounded and thus illustrates the presuppositional divide between inerrantists and their critics.

Pickvance later describes four types of comparative analyses: individualizing, universalising, variation-finding, and encompassing. For the sake of space, I will discuss the second and third types, universalizing and variation-finding,[101] which are the methods of comparison used in my thesis.[102]According to Charles Tilly, universalizing comparative analysis establishes "that every instance of a phenomenon follows essentially the same rule."[103] I apply this form of comparative analysis in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, where I contrast various attempts by anti-inerrantists to critique biblical inerrancy, demonstrating that each instance results in a breakdown of communication, where reviewers charge critics with constructing strawman arguments, when in fact critics have more or less faithfully explained inerrancy and its complexity. The second type of comparative analysis is variation-finding, which Tilly describes as "a principle of variation in the character or intensity of a phenomenon by examining

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[96] Terwiel, 67.
[97] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 11.
[98] Christopher G. Pickvance, "Four Varieties of Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 16, no. 1 (2001): 8.
[99] Pickvance, 26.
[100] Pickvance, 11.
[101] Pickvance notes that universalising and variation finding comparative analyses are the two "fundamental types of comparative analysis…" See Pickvance, 16.
[102] According to Charles Tilly, the various forms of comparative analysis can be used in combination with each other. See Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1984), 83-84.
[103] Tilly, 82.

systematic differences among instances."[104] I use this form in Chapter 1, where I demonstrate the variations of inerrancy and argue that anti-inerrantists should consider these variations in their rhetoric in order to illustrate the complexity of biblical inerrancy.

Chapters

In Chapter 1, I focus on the work of David S. Dockery, particularly his articles "Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?" and "Variations on Inerrancy," both of which complexify biblical inerrancy by demonstrating the various groups and positions in the debate. In the first article, Dockery presents four groups—fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals, each with their own forms of scriptural authority and inspiration. In the second article, Dockery presents nine variations within the inerrancy debate, illustrating that inerrancy functions on a spectrum, from highly conservative to highly liberal. I conclude that Dockery's groups and variations, though imperfect, provide anti-inerrantists with an invaluable tool for understanding and explaining the complexity of biblical inerrancy.

In Chapter 2, I focus on Stephen T. Davis, a philosopher who deconstructs inerrancy in his work *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility*. Before examining Davis and his text, however, I briefly discuss the philosophical presuppositions dividing inerrantists and their critics from the perspective of Norman Geisler, a conservative evangelical scholar and self-professed inerrantist. Geisler demonstrates the presuppositional divide and the apparent philosophical roots of anti-inerrantists. Davis provides a counterweight to Geisler's perspectives by comparing two inerrantist positions—full inerrancy and limited inerrancy. Though Davis focusses on philosophical arguments strictly against full inerrancy, his contribution to the debate demonstrates the impact of philosophy in the inerrancy debate. In response to Davis, reviewers incorrectly charge him with constructing strawman arguments.

In Chapter 3, I explore the work of Christian Smith, a sociologist who critiques biblicism and inerrancy in his work *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*. Smith focusses on pervasive interpretive pluralism, the argument that inerrancy and biblicism create countless interpretations and subgroups within evangelicalism. Smith also provides various insights from a sociological perspective. Like with Davis, Smith's reviewers charge him with constructing strawman arguments, which is perhaps even less the case with Smith than it is with Davis.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the work of Peter Enns, a biblical scholar, and self-professed evangelical. As a biblical scholar, Enns is keenly aware of Scripture's phenomena and how research discredits many forms of biblical inerrancy, which he demonstrates in his text *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament.* I also contextualize Enns' text, describing the controversy that concluded with Enns departing from his tenured position at Westminster Theological Seminary. After examining responses to Enns' text, I argue that biblical scholarship is paradoxically both capable and impaired when critiquing biblical inerrantists due to the virtually incompatible presuppositions of many biblical scholars and inerrantists.

In the concluding chapter, I re-emphasize the importance of this topic and of properly critiquing biblical inerrancy. Specificity is critical to thoroughly engaging inerrantists, and I

[104] Tilly, 82.

encourage future critics to adopt this approach. I also suggest ways forward through the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas. Crossing the presuppositional divide requires arguing from within an interlocutor's paradigmatic framework, and scholars achieve this goal when they familiarize themselves with their interlocutor's position and primary sources.

Crossing the Divide

Dogmatic individuals are challenging to dialogue with since many of them refuse to see alternative perspectives. I know firsthand the difficulty of dialoguing with fundamentalists, seeing that I had often refused to budge on my *own* convictions. This makes me understand the difficulty not only from the perspective of critics but also from the perspective of dogmatic individuals—I understand just how much they want to maintain their convictions. Yet, I am living proof that dialoguing is possible. With incremental efforts, scholars can improve dialogue, and this thesis represents one increment towards improving an area where fruitful exchange seems impossible.

Chapter 1

Problematizing the Inerrancy Debate

This chapter problematizes the inerrancy debate by exploring various forms of biblical authority in evangelical theology. One could easily talk about inerrancies (plural), rather than inerrancy (singular). As mentioned earlier, there are various hermeneutics of biblical authority in evangelicalism—i.e., infallibilism, inerrancy, and literalism. There are, however, variations of these hermeneutics and their associated theologies. Thus, my goal in this chapter is to demonstrate the complexity of inerrancy and encourage its critics to define and explain inerrancy and its variations adequately. I illustrate this complexity by first discussing two typologies of inerrantists and then exploring the categories proposed by David S. Dockery (the Chancellor of Trinity International University) in two of his works: a brief article entitled "Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?" where Dockery describes four groups concerning the inerrancy debate, and an article entitled "Variations on Inerrancy," where he describes nine different positions, illustrating a spectrum of convictions related to biblical authority (See Figure 2, page 20).

The nine positions described by Dockery are (1) mechanical dictation, (2) absolute inerrancy, (3) critical inerrancy, (4) limited inerrancy, (5) qualified inerrancy, (6) nuanced inerrancy, (7) functional inerrancy, (8) inerrancy is irrelevant, and (9) biblical authority. The nine positions connect with the four groups—fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals. As we will see, fundamentalists and evangelicals are deductivists, virtually rejecting discoveries by researchers and critical scholars; and moderates and liberals are inductivist, accepting of new data and willing to adapt their theology as a result. Position 1 is a fundamentalist position; positions 2 and 3 are evangelical; positions 4-6 are moderate; and positions 8 and 9 are liberal. The dividing line between deductivism and inductivism complicates dialogue in the inerrancy debate. Communication failures occur from all sides, and their presuppositional commitments make it challenging to conduct a meaningful dialogue. This complexity, however, should be illustrated by anti-inerrantists in their contributions to the debate.

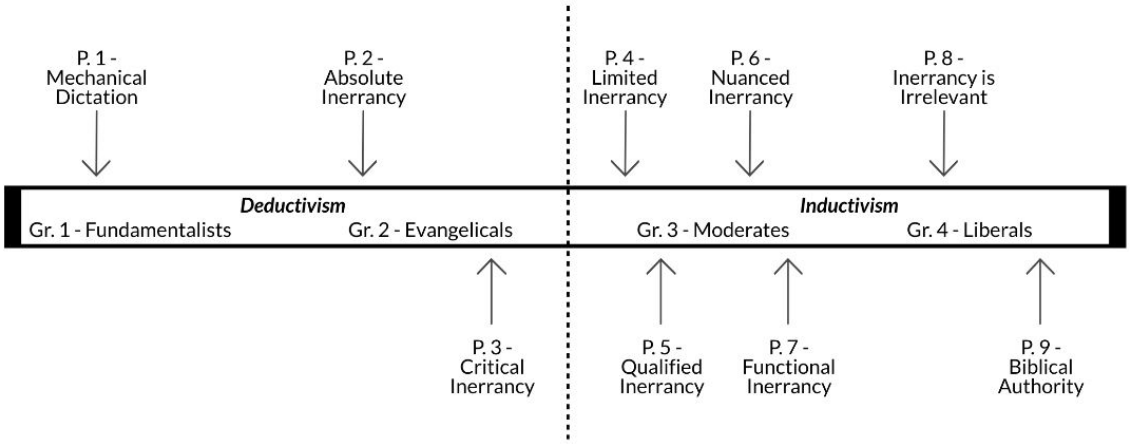

Figure 2 – The Spectrum of Inerrancy

Typologies of Inerrancy

There are several typologies of inerrancy outside of Dockery's groups and positions. In the 18th century, J. Paterson Smyth presented a typology through four roles associated with inerrancy, which for him surrounded the disquieting of Christian minds. Smyth's four roles are the (1) disquieted thinker, (2) the secularist, (3) the biblical scholar, and (4) the orthodox controversialist.[1] The disquieted thinker is a believer disturbed by the secularist (critics of religion) and the biblical scholar.[2] His or her disturbance is made worse by the orthodox controversialist, a staunch inerrantist enforcing the importance of biblical inerrancy.[3] According to Smyth, some orthodox controversialists describe the disquieted thinker's doubts as attacks from Satan to be warded off through prayer. Other orthodox controversialists "pleasantly slip out of the difficulties"[4] of Scripture when faced with troublesome passages. Some ignore problematic passages and spend little time investigating the problematic elements of Scripture. To them, questioning any part of the Bible, including its claims regarding science and history, is tantamount to questioning the entirety of Christianity. According to Smyth, this final form is "the chief cause of disquiet, and the chief cause of the discredit of the Bible."[5] Disquieted thinkers who may have otherwise passed through periods of doubting give up the faith entirely due to the orthodox controversialist's unabashed certainty. These roles provide a glimpse of the early debates and typologies surrounding inerrancy when it was first defined and defended. However, inerrancy positions have since become far more nuanced and complicated, making Smyth's roles somewhat outdated.

A more nuanced typology is given by Mark A. Noll, who discusses the relationship between evangelicals and critical scholarship in *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible in America*. He distinguishes between fundamentalists and evangelicals, with evangelicals being more open to critical scholarship than fundamentalists, who tend to be anti-intellectual.[6] Noll acknowledges that despite shared theological commitments, there are many variations of evangelicals, especially with how they view critical scholarship and its conclusions. He describes two such variations: critical anti-criticism and believing criticism. Critical anti-critics maintain inerrancy and a high view of biblical authority. For them, critical scholarship should be studied to defend the Bible. Some critical anti-critics avoid secular critical scholarship almost entirely, focussing strictly on scholarship by like-minded believers.[7] This perspective is highly deductive, compared to the second major division, which Noll calls believing critics. These Christian scholars approach critical scholarship inductively. For them, data in history, archaeology, textual studies, and science can overturn accepted, traditional conclusions about the Bible. According to Noll, believing critics are not necessarily anti-inerrantists; some maintain inerrancy while accepting scholarly findings and

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[1] J. Paterson Smyth, *How God Inspired the Bible: Thoughts for the Present Disquiet*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ld., 1892), 5-7.
[2] Smyth, 8.
[3] Smyth, 11-13.
[4] Smyth, 13.
[5] Smyth, 14.
[6] Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 154.
[7] Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 156-158.

adapting their theologies accordingly.[8] However, I should note that there are several variations of critical anti-critics and believing critics, some of which I demonstrate through Dockery's typological contributions.

David S. Dockery and Variations on Inerrancy

In the 1970s, debates surrounding inerrancy intensified in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and throughout evangelicalism in general. In 1978, many evangelical leaders drafted the influential Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI), thereby galvanizing inerrantists. Despite the CSBI and efforts of inerrantist evangelicals, there were many diverging forms of inerrancy and many positions within the debate. Moreover, the SBC did not take an official stance regarding the debate until 1979, during the Houston Convention, where the controversy over inerrancy came to a seeming conclusion. During and after this controversy, Dockery proposed nine variations and four different groups related to the debate, representing the nuance and complexity that developed throughout evangelicalism during the 20th century.[9]

The four groups described in Dockery's "Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?"[10] are fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals. After briefly describing each of these groups, I turn to Dockery's article "Variations on Inerrancy," written for the magazine SBC Today in May 1986.[11] I reference examples of each position, some of which are provided by Dockery and others of which are from my own research. I should note that, like all typologies, Dockery's groups and positions are not without problems. As will become apparent, limited inerrancy, qualified inerrancy, nuanced inerrancy, and functional inerrancy are quite similar, and at times it is difficult to understand the distinctions described by Dockery. Additionally, the two anti-inerrantist positions proffered by Dockery exemplify the limitations of his variations since there are many forms of anti-inerrancy held by sincere evangelicals. Unfortunately, Dockery's "Variations on Inerrancy" is also relatively short, and thus his definitions are brief, yet Dockery's variations help problematize the inerrancy debate, and fortunately, the examples provide a certain level of distinction where it is difficult to distinguish certain positions from others.

Group 1: Fundamentalists

Dockery begins with the far-right position of fundamentalists. By fundamentalism, Dockery is referencing the historical fundamentalist movement that developed in the late 19th and early 20th century in American Protestantism, as mentioned in my introduction. This form of Protestantism is a defensive, militant, and reactionary form of evangelicalism that opposes liberal theology,

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[8] Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 158.

[9] For more on the controversy of inerrancy in the SBC, see David S. Dockery, "The Crisis of Scripture in Southern Baptist Life: Reflections on the Past, Looking to the Future." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Spr 2005): 36–53.

[10] Dockery, David S, and Philip D. Wise. "Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?" *The Theological Educator* 37 (Spr 1988). Note that this article is split into two halves, one half written by Dockery and the other half written by Philip D. Wise. In my thesis, I only refer to the half written by Dockery.

[11] This article was compiled into a collection known as *Southern Baptist Convention Controversy Collection, 1980-1995* that is currently held by the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee. The library was kind enough to send me a digital version of the article.

communism, and left-wing evangelicalism. Fundamentalists typically adhere to the *fundamentals* of Christian theology, or what they perceive as the crucial doctrines in the Christian faith. Though there are variations on what fundamentalists consider the fundamentals of Christianity to be, Dockery provides the following: "1) the inerrancy of scripture, 2) the deity of Christ, 3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ, 4) Christ's bodily resurrection, and 5) Christ's literal, imminent (now often viewed as premillennial) second coming."[12] Dockery also notes that many fundamentalists exhibit "characteristics of legalism, separatism and fighting spirits."[13]

According to Dockery, the fundamentalist conception of Scripture de-emphasizes the role of the human authors. He says that their theology borders on mechanical dictation, which again is a theory of inspiration where the writers acted merely as tools for God to write his word. For fundamentalists then, "Each sentence is dictated by God's Holy Spirit."[14] Moreover, fundamentalists "affirm the full and absolute inerrancy of scripture which stresses not only the truthfulness of scripture but its precise accuracy as well."[15] Dockery then notes several characteristics of fundamentalist hermeneutics. According to him, fundamentalists reject historical-critical methods, and they superimpose philosophical frameworks on Scripture, thereby reading the whole Bible "as a set of propositional statements."[16] To assuage supposed problem passages, fundamentalists employ harmonizations and appeal to the original autographs by relegating problem passages to copyist and textual deficiencies. Finally, fundamentalists stress "the overall unity of scripture" while virtually ignoring "the variety and development within the Bible."[17]

Group 2: Evangelicals

Dockery defines evangelicals[18] as distinct from fundamentalists. Dockery locates evangelicalism as a recent movement in European and American Protestantism, shaped by Billy Graham, Carl Henry, Harold Ockenga, J.I. Packer, and John Stott.[19] Though separate from fundamentalism, evangelicalism is itself a form of conservative Protestantism, which has been influenced by the Puritans and the two Great Awakenings in America. Dockery states that "contemporary evangelicalism believes in the inerrant word of God, the deity of Christ and the necessity of faith in the person and atoning work of Christ for the salvation of men and women."[20] While

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[12] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 17. The list provided in my introductory chapter is different, demonstrating that fundamentalists had different conceptions of the "fundamentals." The list in my introduction comes from Fitzgerald, 96.
[13] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 17.
[14] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 18.
[15] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 18.
[16] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 18.
[17] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 18.
[18] "Evangelicals" in this context does not refer to evangelicalism in general as defined in my introductory chapter, but rather to a specific group within evangelicalism that has its own unique conceptions of biblical authority, inspiration, and inerrancy.
[19] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 18.
[20] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 19.

fundamentalist beliefs are similar, evangelicalism differentiates itself by breaking from the fundamentalist traits of "separatism, legalism, social unconcern and anti-intellectualism."[21]

Evangelical doctrines of Scripture are also distinct from fundamentalism since evangelicals argue "that revelation is both personal and propositional."[22] Evangelicals realize that there are distinctive forms and genres in Scripture, noting passages that are not propositional. According to Dockery, "This recognition of literary diversity brings a healthy realization of the human aspect in scripture, thus balancing the divine-human authorship of the Bible."[23] Inspiration is typically defined as *concursive*, meaning that both human and divine authorship played a role in the Bible's composition. Their theologies of Scripture are also distinct from fundamentalism since evangelicals typically reject mechanical dictation. Dockery says that for evangelicals, "meaning is at the sentence level and beyond," rather than at the word-for-word level of many fundamentalists.[24] What is most important for evangelicals is that Scripture is inerrant in all its claims. Like fundamentalists, they employ harmonizations to defend the Bible's inerrancy; however, unlike fundamentalists, their use of harmonizations is not "at the expense of running roughshod over the context and forcing the Bible to say what it does not say."[25] Evangelicals are also willing to use historical-critical methods, so long as they are "employed with care and faith-oriented presuppositions."[26]

Group 3: Moderates

The third group, moderates, is found within various theological strands and traditions, including "neo-evangelicalism, neo-orthodoxy, and neo-liberalism as well as the new aesthetic and narrative theologies."[27] Dockery notes that moderates may or may not adhere to biblical inerrancy, and they follow theologians like Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. Their theologies of Scripture, however, lean more towards infallibility than towards inerrancy. If inerrancy is adhered to at all, it is usually applied strictly towards doctrine and not matters of history or science. Moderates share a dynamic view of inspiration, placing equal importance on the roles of the divine and human authors, not shying away from the role of each authors' distinctive personalities. Dockery also notes that moderates consider redactors and interpretive communities concerning the Bible's composition. What is central for most moderates is Scripture's function—the salvation of humanity.[28] Dockery concludes that "Scripture is thus understood as a functional and living instrument serving God for the proclamation of the salvation message to its readers."[29]

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[21] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 19.
[22] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 19.
[23] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 19.
[24] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 19.
[25] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 19.
[26] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 19.
[27] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 20.
[28] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 20-21.
[29] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 21.

Group 4: Liberals

Dockery describes the fourth group, liberals, as distinct from the classical understanding of liberalism.[30] Instead, the focus of liberalism is on "existentialism, process thought, and some liberation and feminist theologies."[31] Dockery also notes the seeming impossibility of characterizing, "a view of scripture among these diverse theologies."[32] However, in contrast to fundamentalists who emphasize the divine aspect of Scripture, liberals de-emphasize the Bible's divinity and emphasize its humanity. Liberals describe inspiration as an act of the Holy Spirit, who raised the human authors' imaginations and spirits so that they might "express themselves creatively."[33] Dockery concludes that liberals read the Bible subjectively and dismiss objective approaches and readings of Scripture.[34]

Group Dynamics

It would be helpful to briefly discuss how these groups relate to each other and differentiate between themselves. In defining these four groups, Dockery's primary concern is to explore the various sides of the inerrancy debate within the SBC. According to him, the SBC is comprised mostly of evangelicals and moderates and has very few fundamentalists and liberals. He further clarifies that conservative positions are found within the fundamentalist and evangelical groups, while more progressive positions are located within the moderates and the liberals.[35] Moreover, Dockery claims that SBC fundamentalists are not as "separatistic as the rest of American fundamentalism," and SBC liberals are not as "radical as most of American liberalism."[36] These extremes complicate matters since positions on different sides tend to caricature and label their opponents according to the most extreme forms—in this case, liberalism and fundamentalism. According to Dockery, this misrepresentation occurs in all groups—fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals alike.[37] These apparent and actual misrepresentations illustrate the importance of understanding an opponent's presuppositions and frameworks.

With an understanding of various typologies surrounding the inerrancy debate, we now turn to Dockery's "Variations on Inerrancy" to explore and discuss the different positions found within these groups. As noted for Dockery's groups, these positions do not and cannot fully represent the various positions in the debate, but they at least provide a way forward. In the end, what matters most is specificity. It is best to provide specific examples of an interlocutor's

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[30] According to the *Encyclopedia of Politics*, classical liberalism refers to a specific "political and economic school of thought." This school of thought was based on the assumed rationality and individuality of human beings and the creation of a social contract with the government and other members of society. This unwritten contract includes the unassailable and natural rights of every person for "life, liberty, and the right to own property." Elizabeth Purdy, "'Liberalism' in the Left", edited by Rodney P. Carlisle, Vol. 1 of *Encyclopedia of Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2005), 278-281.
[31] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 21.
[32] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 21.
[33] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 21.
[34] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 21.
[35] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 21.
[36] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 21.
[37] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 22.

positions rather than to lump one's opponents into one generic strawman. To counter generalizations and misrepresentations, Dockery provides examples of key figures in each position.

Position 1: Mechanical Dictation

The first position is mechanical dictation. As mentioned earlier, mechanical dictation posits that God, as the actual author of Scripture, used the human authors merely as tools to convey his words. This position downplays human involvement in Scripture's composition, virtually ignoring the role of human personalities, writing styles, and historical contexts. Nonetheless, Dockery notes that for him, the strength of this position is that it "gives proper credit to God as the author of the Bible."[38]

Scholars commonly use mechanical dictation to describe and critique inerrantists, yet very few evangelical scholars believe in mechanical inspiration. According to some inerrantists, such as J.I. Packer, mechanical dictation is entirely a strawman construction that has no basis in evangelicalism. He claims that "It is safe to say that no Protestant theologian, from the Reformation till now, has ever held [mechanical dictation theory]; and certainly modern Evangelicals do not hold it."[39] Packer adds that when theologians employ the term "dictation," it is usually figurative. He also claims that dictation describes the result of Scripture and not the "method or psychology of God's guidance of [the human authors] ..."[40] Regardless, Dockery provides at least one example of mechanical dictation, that of John R. Rice and his short text entitled *Our God-Breathed Book—The Bible*.[41]

Rice's views surprisingly correspond with mechanical dictation. He begins with firm statements regarding the authority of the Bible, claiming that God's word is "more accurate than any scientific book in the world" and that "It is the only absolutely reliable book ever written…"[42] According to Rice, the nature of God's inspiration is the reason for the Bible's absolute perfection. For Rice, inspiration was total. God used writers to record his *exact* words. Rice provides several biblical passages to illustrate mechanical dictation, such as 2 Timothy 3:16, Luke 1:69-70, 2 Samuel 23:2, and Matthew 4:4. For example, Matthew 4:4 records Jesus' response to Satan's temptations in the wilderness, where Jesus tells Satan that Scripture comes from the mouth of God.[43] Rice then downplays the human authors' role even further by arguing that even their distinctive styles were the result of God's inspiration; it was God who inspired

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[38] David S. Dockery, "Variations on Inerrancy", *SBC Today* (May 1986), 10.
[39] J. I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 79; while not denying that some evangelicals believe in mechanical dictation, Dockery notes that mechanical dictation has often been mistakenly used as the primary definition of inerrantist theories of inspiration. See Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 22.
[40] Packer, 79.
[41] John R. Rice, *Our God Breathed Book—The Bible* (Murfreesboro: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1958).
[42] Rice, 3.
[43] Rice, 5-6.

them to use their particular writing styles.[44] For Rice, inspiration is absolute, right down to the exact spelling of the biblical texts.[45] Ultimately, according to Rice, the role of the human authors "was to be simply the guided instruments in writing down exactly what God said to write."[46]

Indeed, mechanical dictation is a rare position for inerrantists, yet Rice's example shows that it is a position taken by some, despite Packer's claim to the contrary. Nonetheless, Rice wrote *Our God-Breathed Book* in 1958, so there may be even fewer mechanical dictation adherents today. However, this strict fundamentalist position should be explained and demonstrated as a marginal view in the inerrancy debate.

Position 2: Absolute Inerrancy

According to Dockery, position two affirms the Bible's truthfulness in all its claims, including those made concerning science and history. However, he notes that absolute inerrantists differentiate themselves from adherents of mechanical dictation by adopting a verbal-plenary theory of inspiration. This alternate theory attests to God's authorship of the Bible while accommodating the Bible's human authors. Regardless, Dockery claims that absolute inerrantists at times fail "to take seriously the human aspect of scripture and its historical contexts in [their] attempt[s] to harmonize the apparent differences within the biblical text."[47]

Dockery provides Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* as an example of this position. For Lindsell, inerrancy is "the most important theological topic of this age."[48] Lindsell encourages evangelicals to make a firm stand regarding biblical inerrancy by convincing their churches and institutions to take firm positions in the debate. He states that inerrancy concerns the foundational document of Christianity, and as such, it deserves serious attention.[49]

According to Lindsell, inspiration involves an "inward work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds" of the human authors.[50] Further, the result of inspiration is that the Bible is inerrant in its original autographs. Lindsell notes that biblical authors may have erred in life, but they could not err while writing Scripture. He argues that biblical authors "were preserved from making factual, historical, scientific, or other errors."[51] For Lindsell, Scripture is true in all its claims. Even though Scripture is not primarily a textbook for science and history, it does not err when it makes claims concerning such matters. Inspiration, for Lindsell, affected every word

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[44] Rice, 11. A few pages later, Rice uses 2 Corinthians 10:10, which makes a comment regarding Paul's weak bodily presence and speaking abilities, to claim that God is responsible for Paul's effective use of language in Paul's epistles, since Paul was apparently not a great speaker in person. Rice claims that "Surely the difference was in divine inspiration, and in [Paul's] letters the words were God's words, the style was God's style." See Rice, 18. It is also worth noting the stark contrast between Rice's position and what would later be written down in the CSBI, which did not deny the influence of each author's personalities. See CSBI*,* Article VIII.

[45] Rice quotes from Matthew 5:17-18 arguing that God inspired every part of Scripture, even the exact spelling. See Rice, 13.

[46] Rice, 15.

[47] Dockery, "Variations," 10.

[48] Lindsell, 14.

[49] Lindsell, 15.

[50] Lindsell, 30.

[51] Lindsell, 31.

chosen by the human authors. Nevertheless, Lindsell affirms both the divine and human aspects of Scripture, arguing that the human authors "retained their own styles of writing and the Holy Spirit, operating within this human context, superintended the writing of the Word of God that the end product was God's."[52] Moreover, Lindsell argues that inspiration and inerrancy must be total, covering the entire Bible; otherwise, none of Scripture is inspired and inerrant.[53]

Another example of absolute inerrancy is Packer in *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles*. According to Packer, God's act of inspiration as described in 2 Timothy 3:16 makes him the actual author of Scripture. Still, Packer notes that inspiration did not "involve any obliterating or overriding of [the author's] personality."[54] Instead, God used the human authors' personalities and styles to convey his word in the way he desired it to be written.[55] For Packer, inspiration did not involve any altered states of mind or trances; God inspired the human authors through his providential orchestration.[56]

I should further note that position two closely resembles the CSBI, which affirms absolute inerrancy for all of Scripture's claims. The CSBI also accommodates the human authors. Moreover, both Lindsell and Packer signed and supported the statement, along with hundreds of other influential evangelical leaders. In its opening statement, the document affirms that the Bible is "of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches…"[57] The Bible according to the CSBI is inerrant not only in its teaching and in matters of salvation but also in matters concerning "God's acts in creation… the events of world history… and its own literary origins under God."[58] Nonetheless, the CSBI affirms that inspiration did not override the personalities of the human authors; according to the CSBI, God "utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared."[59]

Position 3: Critical Inerrancy

Position three is similar to absolute inerrancy, yet with its own distinctions. Like absolute inerrancy, this position views the Bible as true in all its claims; however, it recognizes that there are distinctive claims intended by the biblical authors. Historical texts are not scientific texts, and theological treatises are not scientific or historical. According to Dockery, critical inerrantists do not "seek to harmonize every detail of scripture," resulting from their recognition that each author had "different purposes."[60] Critical inerrantists also use and accept critical methodologies like form criticism and redaction criticism. Nevertheless, critical inerrantists defend the Bible by regarding scientific claims as phenomenological. They also argue that the Bible's historical

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[52] Lindsell, 31.
[53] Lindsell, 32.
[54] Packer, 78.
[55] This position is also found in Article VIII of the CSBI**.** See CSBI*,* Article VIII.
[56] Packer, 78; this view of inspiration is also found in Article VII of the CSBI, which denies "that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind." Instead, Article VII presents inerrancy as "largely a mystery…" See CSBI, Article VII.
[57] See CSBI*,* 2.
[58] CSBI, 2.
[59] CSBI, Article VIII.
[60] Dockery, "Variations," 10.

claims are "faithful representations of the way events described took place, although the accuracy is understood in general and not precise terms."[61]

Dockery lists Roger Nicole, J. Ramsey Michaels, D. A. Carson, and John Woodbridge as critical inerrantists. In the preface of the edited volume *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, Woodbridge asserts the trustworthiness of biblical narratives, claiming that they "correspond to what happened in real time and in real places."[62] Woodbridge is critical of theological proposals like those presented by Kenton Sparks in *God's Word in Human Words*. Sparks believes that inerrancy is an incorrect approach towards Scripture and that evangelicals should embrace the fact that Scripture contains errors. They should thus not allow this fact to hinder their faith. For Woodbridge, positions like Sparks' should be opposed. According to him, Sparks' view of accommodation is false since, for Sparks, God accommodated his message to the faulty worldviews of biblical authors. Woodbridge argues that this form of accommodation is counter to Christian history, and Woodbridge lists Augustine as an example of an allegedly biblical form of accommodation.[63] In this alternate and supposedly biblical form, God accommodated himself to believers' "weaknesses," particularly concerning their mistaken understandings of the Bible. Woodbridge claims that "Scripture is written in the language of appearance—the way we see things to be."[64]

D. A. Carson is another prominent critical inerrantist. He is a biblical scholar of the New Testament, whereas John Woodbridge is an evangelical scholar of church history. As such, Carson is no stranger to critical methodologies. If an inerrantist engages in biblical studies while maintaining their convictions, critical inerrancy allows this type of combination. This combination is why the position is called *critical* inerrancy; adherents believe in a variation of inerrancy that allows critical methodologies to a certain extent. In Carson's case, he uses form, source, tradition, and even redaction criticism.[65] The critical inerrantist adopts methods so long as they do not challenge their central conviction that the Bible is inerrant.

In "Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?", Dockery provides his own definition of inerrancy. Dockery affirms both the human and divine aspects of the Bible and its inspiration. He also insists that God's inspiration did no override the human authors' personalities and styles.[66] Dockery then argues that Christians should study the Bible as a literary document; he claims that to deny this is to "treat the Bible as less than human, less than historical and less than literature."[67] He further argues that critical methodologies are limited and should be approached

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[61] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[62] John D. Woodbridge, "Preface," *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, Ed. by James K Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, Crossway, 2012), 13.
[63] Woodbridge, 13-16.
[64] Woodbridge, 16.
[65] For an example of Carson's work in biblical studies see his commentary on the Gospel of John. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).
[66] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 23.
[67] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 24.

and practiced "from the viewpoint of faith in the trustworthiness of the biblical text…"[68] Thus, according to Dockery,

> Inerrancy means when all the facts are known, the Bible (in its autographs) properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its composition will be shown to be completely true (and therefore not false) in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and his creation.[69]

This definition goes beyond the ethereal notion of original autographs by arguing that inerrancy will only be proven in the *future*. In other words, inerrancy cannot presently be established, yet according to Dockery, Christians should believe it nonetheless as a statement of faith regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Critical scholarship cannot argue against an affirmation like this. Nevertheless, Dockery's definition of inerrancy creates an opportunity for conservative evangelical scholars to honestly approach critical scholarship while maintaining faith in the inerrancy of the Bible. Thus, compared to adherents of mechanical dictation and absolute inerrantists, critical inerrantists are at least willing to study critical scholarship, despite their commitment to deductivism.

Position 4: Limited Inerrancy

According to Dockery, limited inerrancy[70] portrays the Bible as inerrant only in matters of faith, salvation, ethics, and "matters which can be empirically validated."[71] In terms of inspiration, limited inerrantists do not believe that God "raised the writers to an intellectual level above that of their contemporaries."[72] In other words, God did not inhibit the writers from making errors related to science and history. What matters most for limited inerrantists is the inerrancy of salvation, faith, and ethics.[73]

Dockery offers the example of I. Howard Marshall and his text *Biblical Inspiration.* Marshall describes the Bible as a book filled with "apparent contradictions between what is said in different parts."[74] Marshall also notes that the four Gospels portray Jesus differently. He further states that differences among Leviticus, Proverbs, and Philippians cause some people to conclude that these texts are "documents from three rather different religions."[75] According to Howard, a responsible believer weighs such problems; the interpreter "must face up to [the problems] honestly."[76] Howard is seemingly comfortable with problematic passages and still

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[68] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 24.
[69] Dockery, "Biblical Inerrancy," 25.
[70] According to Stephen T. Davis, advocates of "full inerrancy" (which is close to Dockery's position two, absolute inerrancy) use the term "limited inerrancy" in a pejorative sense so as to denigrate those who reject the complete inerrancy of Scripture. See Davis, 29. More will be said about Davis' contribution to the inerrancy debate in Chapter 2.
[71] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[72] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[73] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[74] I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (1982. Reprint, Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 16.
[75] Marshall, 16.
[76] Marshall, 17.

able to view the Bible as divinely inspired.[77] Howard also rejects mechanical dictation. What is vital for Howard is that God be represented as a personal God who deals directly with human beings.[78] Referring to 2 Timothy 3:15, Howard argues that the "stated purpose of the Scriptures is to provide the instruction that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."[79]

In *the Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell adamantly opposes limited inerrancy. He argues that as a term, it is "meaningless."[80] He claims that denying complete inerrancy portrays the Bible as just another book filled with truthful and fallible information. He further argues that limited inerrancy forces readers to determine which parts are correct and which are false, and such a process relies on an outside source to judge God's Word. For Lindsell, this cannot happen; nothing outside of God himself can judge the Bible.[81] Lindsell also claims that conceding inerrancy leads to other concessions and does not stop until the believer has reached full-blown "heresy."[82]

Position 5: Qualified Inerrancy

According to Dockery, qualified inerrancy is similar to limited inerrancy. He distinguishes between these two positions in their "philosophical starting points."[83] Dockery notes that limited inerrantists align with empiricism, while qualified inerrantists view inerrancy as a faith commitment. Qualified inerrantists do not deny errors within the Bible, at least when Scripture is studied inductively; but for them the Bible's veracity is maintained through a presupposition of faith. Dockery notes that this position is difficult to articulate "since it is a tension filled [position]."[84] Dockery notes that qualified inerrantists seek to balance their commitment to both the human and divine aspects of Scripture. Perhaps this balance is what Dockery sees as creating tension.

Dockery provides Donald Bloesch as an example of qualified inerrancy, which like limited inerrancy, focusses on the purpose of divine inspiration, which is to lead humanity to salvation in Christ and "to equip the people of God to bear witness to their faith…"[85] He further argues that Scripture does not give "exact knowledge of mathematics or biology or any other science," and neither does it accord with contemporary history standards.[86] For Bloesch, the Bible's inerrancy pertains strictly to the Holy Spirit's teachings, along with matters of faith and salvation.[87] But these truths require "spiritual discernment" to truly comprehend them.[88] And the believer must search out the Bible's truths, requiring divine illumination; the Bible's truths are

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[77] Marshall, 13.
[78] Marshall, 33.
[79] Marshall, 53.
[80] Lindsell, 203.
[81] Lindsell, 203.
[82] Lindsell, 204.
[83] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[84] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[85] Donald G. Bloesch, "The Sword of the Spirit: The Meaning of Inspiration." *Themelios* 5, no. 3 (May 1980): 14.
[86] Bloesch, 14.
[87] Bloesch, 15.
[88] Bloesch, 15.

not evident in and of themselves but only when seen through the lens of faith.[89] Bloesch notes that biblical interpretation is "a work of faith…"[90] For Bloesch, Christians must not examine the Bible based on external sources. He states that the Bible is not persuasive because of its "logical force or rational coherence," a statement that distinguishes Bloesch from limited inerrantists who often argue—according to Dockery—for the Bible's limited inerrancy not as a statement of faith but as a statement of fact.[91]

Position 6: Nuanced Inerrancy

Nuanced inerrancy, according to Dockery, applies inerrancy differently depending on the given biblical text, which is where the term nuanced inerrancy derives its meaning. For example, nuanced inerrantists apply mechanical dictation to certain parts of Scripture, such as the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-17). In other cases, like historical and epistolary literature, verbal inspiration[92] is applied. Further, in cases like poetry, proverbs, and stories, a dynamic form of inspiration is more relevant, where the human authors are free to express themselves. In any case, for nuanced inerrantists, "one position of inspiration (and its corollary inerrancy viewpoint) is not adequate to deal with the various types of literature represented in the Bible."[93] However, Dockery notes that this position can be problematic due to the difficulty of determining which form of inspiration and inerrancy to apply to given biblical texts.[94]

Dockery offers the example of Clark Pinnock, who adheres to "spirit-hermeneutics", which discerns not just what "God said to people long ago in the scriptures, but what the Spirit is saying to the churches now."[95] The Holy Spirit's communication with present-day believers is dynamic and changes throughout history.[96] Pinnock discredits interpretation based on rational-propositionalism, where interpreters examine the text in "'cut and dried'" terms while relying on prooftexts related to biblical inspiration; this reliance on prooftexts and forms of interpretation arises out of fear of falling into "uncontrolled subjectivity."[97] For Pinnock, the prooftexts for inspiration cannot deal with every form, genre, and style of Scripture.[98] A better alternative is

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[89] Bloesch, 16.
[90] Bloesch, 15.
[91] Bloesch, 16.
[92] According to Lindsell, verbal inspiration means that "inspiration extends to the words… as well as to the thoughts" of the human authors. See Lindsell, 33.
[93] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[94] Dockery, "Variations," 10.
[95] Clark H. Pinnock, "The Work of the Spirit in the Interpretation of Holy Scripture from the Perspective of a Charismatic Biblical Theologian." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18, no. 2 (2009): 158.
[96] Pinnock, 162.
[97] Pinnock, 158.
[98] Pinnock notes that 2 Timothy 3:15-16 "says nothing about inerrancy." Instead it focusses on "the practical benefits which the scriptures offer." Likewise, 2 Peter 1:20-21 presents prophecies as dictated by God, yet it says nothing concerning the non-prophetic passages of the Bible. Moreover, Pinnock argues that other prooftexts like John 10:35 and Matthew 5:17 are similarly ambiguous when compared to our supposedly firm doctrines of Scripture. For example, though Jesus says that nothing will be removed from the law until everything is fulfilled, Jesus himself

examining how Jesus and the Apostles interpreted Scripture and learning from their example.[99] Jesus did not consider every text binding, and neither did the Apostles.[100] The Bible's truth for Pinnock is "balanced and nuanced."[101] Taking this approach towards Scripture makes believers attentive to God's dynamic and unique message for the present-day church.

Moreover, the Bible is a "record of a developing historical revelation" and is thus conducive to dynamic interpretations.[102] This approach enables Pinnock to contextualize specific problem texts like those that support slavery or denigrate women and their place in the church. Since Scripture is dynamic, and the Holy Spirit communicates anew to the church, Christians can relegate problematic passages to an ancient culture and era.[103]

Position 7: Functional Inerrancy

Functional inerrancy exemplifies one difficulty with Dockery's variations. According to Dockery, functional inerrantists are primarily concerned with Scripture's function—that of leading believers to salvation and helping them grow in godliness. For functional inerrantists, Scripture's inerrancy relates to its purpose. Dockery then notes that functional inerrancy generally "refuses to relate inerrancy to matters of factuality."[104] This viewpoint is comparable to both limited inerrancy and qualified inerrancy. Yet, whereas Dockery distinguishes between limited inerrancy and qualified inerrancy, he does not provide an exact distinguishing factor for functional inerrantists. Nevertheless, functional inerrancy appears to be characterized by its view that function need not include matters of ethics and morality. For functional inerrantists, Scripture's function is purely salvific.

Dockery provides G.C. Berkouwer, Jack Rogers, and Donald McKim as functional inerrantists. Beginning with Berkouwer, faith in Scripture is "connected with the testimony of the Holy Spirit."[105] For Berkouwer, faith and Scripture's message are intrinsically connected.[106] Berkouwer discusses pneumatic exegesis, where the interpreter has direct access to the Holy Spirit speaking through the text, which distinguishes their interpretation from those of critical scholars.[107] Berkouwer notes that "The message of salvation comes… in meaningful human language.[108] God has chosen the human language as the vessel of his salvific work through the Bible. Berkouwer also notes that God composed Scripture in the same way that any book is

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disregards certain laws from the Hebrew Bible, creating a tension with the intended meaning of Matthew 5:17. See Pinnock, 159.

[99] Pinnock, 158-159.

[100] Pinnock, 160.

[101] Pinnock, 161.

[102] Pinnock, 165.

[103] Pinnock, 167. Pinnock notes, however, that this hermeneutic does not mean that Christians adapt the Bible to their culture; instead, Pinnock advocates Christians to read contemporary context and reality in light of the Bible. See Pinnock, 170.

[104] Dockery, "Variations," 10.

[105] G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 105.

[106] Berkouwer, 106.

[107] Berkouwer, 111.

[108] Berkouwer, 112.

composed, and thus the same hermeneutical principles applied to all texts are just as applicable to the Bible.[109] In this sense, biblical scholars' work is of great value; however, according to Berkouwer, historical-critical methods are limited to the meaning intended by the human authors and not the meaning intended by God. Understanding God's intended meaning requires something more than hermeneutical methods.[110] God's intended meaning for Berkouwer relates strictly to salvation.[111] Berkouwer then discusses the work of Herman Bavinck, who argued that we should not expect the Bible to have scientific exactitude, and the same is true of biblical historiography, which at times is symbolic and not literal.[112] Ultimately, Berkouwer sees Scripture's truthfulness as related to its purpose "for teaching, for reproof, for correction…"[113]

In *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible,* Jack Rogers and Donald McKim provide an example of functional inerrancy. They argue that Charles Hodge's depiction of inspiration and biblical authority is antithetical to John Calvin and historic Reformed theology. According to them, Calvin relegated Scripture's veracity to its salvific function. God accommodated himself to the cultural and historical contexts of the human authors, and what mattered was the proper communication of the Gospel and not the correct conveyance of historical and scientific minutiae.[114] Rogers and McKim argue that the Church's historical position has been that "The function, or purpose, of the Bible, was to bring people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ."[115] This function was then distorted by Princeton theology and its conception of biblical authority, beginning with Francis Turretin and his foundational systematic theology textbook, which was later adopted and used in Princeton Theological Seminary. According to Rogers and McKim, Charles Hodge and his successors further developed this form of biblical authority that has since spread throughout much of evangelicalism.[116]

Position 8: Inerrancy is Irrelevant

Position eight is essentially an anti-inerrancy position. Dockery calls this position "inerrancy is irrelevant." For adherents of this position, the inerrancy debate distracts from "serious biblical research."[117] They also see inerrancy as causing disunity, where proponents of various positions argue about minor details. According to Dockery, the problem with this position is its failure to recognize biblical authority's foundational importance.[118]

Dockery provides David A. Hubbard as an example. Hubbard contributes to an edited volume entitled *Biblical Authority*, which was edited by Jack Rogers. Hubbard's article is called

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[109] Berkouwer, 112.
[110] Berkouwer, 113.
[111] Berkouwer, 125.
[112] Berkouwer notes that this interpretation must be shielded from arbitrariness and relativeness through what he calls a "leveling view", where interpreters judge Scripture through Scripture itself or interpret one passage based on other passages. See Berkouwer, 126-127.
[113] Berkouwer, 140.
[114] Jack Rogers & Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), xvii.
[115] Rogers & McKim, xxii.
[116] Rogers & McKim, xvii - xxiii.
[117] Dockery, "Variations," 11.
[118] Dockery, "Variations," 11.

"The current tensions: is there a way out?" In a separate piece, Hubbard discusses his motivation and purpose in contributing to Rogers's edited volume, which was to encourage evangelicals to unite over their "orthodox heritage."[119] As a former faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary, Hubbard was present during the inerrancy tensions at that institution during the 1960s and 70s, when several faculty members like Harold Lindsell were vying to create strict doctrinal expectations related to inerrancy. As such, Hubbard has experienced firsthand the disunity that inerrancy can cause. For Hubbard, evangelicalism and inerrancy are not "synonymous."[120] It is far more essential to determine how to interpret Scripture than it is to determine what Scripture is.[121]

Peter Enns, who I will explore extensively in Chapter 4, has also demonstrated this position in his recent works, notably in his contribution to *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy.* His chapter is entitled "Inerrancy, however defined, does not describe what the Bible does."[122] Enns' views have changed throughout his career, but currently his views appear more like position eight of Dockery's variations.[123] In his contribution to *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, Enns argues that inerrancy cannot "capture the Bible's varied character and complex dynamics."[124] Still, for Enns, Christians must grapple with the phenomena of Scripture and accommodate their theology accordingly.[125] For Enns, inerrancy is a theory, and Christians should be free to test this theory to see if it corresponds with the data and phenomena of Scripture. Theories should then be amended or discarded altogether. Ultimately, Enns would rather see inerrancy "scrapped" as a theory of what the Bible is and does.[126]

Position 9: Biblical Authority

Like position eight, position nine is an anti-inerrantist position that goes a step further by rejecting biblical revelation. Nevertheless, adherents of position nine still believe that readers can encounter God through the Bible. Though proponents affirm the presence of errors in the Bible, they do not think that error inhibits Scripture's principal function of leading people to God and salvation. Likewise, the presence of errors does not inhibit the Bible's authority as a sacred text. According to Dockery, "an existential or encounter view of truth" is central to this position as a

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[119] David A. Hubbard, "Evangelicals and Biblical Scholarship, 1945-1992: An Anecdotal Commentary." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3 (1993): 9.
[120] Hubbard, 9; This contrasts with the position of Lindsell, who firmly believes that inerrancy is a core component of evangelicalism itself. See Lindsell, 138-140.
[121] Hubbard, 10.
[122] Peter Enns, "Inerrancy, however defined, does not describe what the Bible does" *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy,* Ed. by Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 83-116.
[123] His text *Inspiration and Incarnation*, which features prominently in Chapter 4, was published in 2005. At the time, Enns' views resembled those of limited inerrancy and possibly functional inerrancy; however, his views have since changed and appear closer to position eight, inerrancy is irrelevant.
[124] Enns, "Inerrancy, however defined," 83.
[125] Enns, "Inerrancy, however defined," 84.
[126] Enns, "Inerrancy, however defined," 84.

means of God communicating with humanity. For Dockery, the main problem with position nine is its focus on the humanity of Scripture at the expense of its divinity.[127]

Dockery lists *Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny? Scripture and the Christian Pilgrimage* by William Countryman as an example of position nine.[128] As Countryman outlines, the Bible is an authority for many Christians, yet many disagree about what kind of authority it is.[129] Countryman nonetheless states that the Bible is authoritative and God's word. For him, it is central to Christianity, yet Christians should explore the Bible in relation to its function.[130] According to Countryman, "the greatest enemy of a true reading of Scripture is simply a false estimate of what the Bible really is."[131] Countryman accepts the Bible's errors in terms of history, science, and even "contradictions in matters of belief and morality."[132] Since humanity is "bound by time and space,"[133] the Bible's fallibility is an inevitable part of God's communication.

The Spectrum of Inerrancy

As we have seen, there are many variations of inerrancy, ranging from conservative to progressive. Dockery's groups and positions work together. Each group functions relative to its presuppositional commitments. While most Christians certainly believe in the Bible's truthfulness, they disagree in defining inerrancy and biblical authority. Some Christians are open to critical methodologies and to re-evaluating their conception of Scripture, relegating inerrancy to specific aspects of the Bible, such as salvation, ethics, morality, or particular genres. The variations exist on a spectrum (See TABLE 2 – The Spectrum of Inerrancy, page 21), with some evangelicals taking a deductive approach to Scripture and others taking an inductive approach.

Mechanical dictation is a fundamentalist position that takes a defensive stance towards biblical scholarship. As noted earlier, mechanical dictation is a rare position within evangelicalism, and it is the only position connected with the fundamentalist group. This position is perhaps the most hardline stance in the inerrancy debate. Though this form is rare, it is a real position within the debate, even if few evangelical leaders and scholars adhere to it.

Absolute inerrancy and critical inerrancy are evangelical positions. Though not as hardline as the fundamentalist group, the evangelical group is nonetheless a conservative form of Protestantism that maintains a high view of biblical authority. Two primary differences between fundamentalists and evangelicals (as understood by Dockery) are that evangelicals are neither separatist nor anti-intellectual. Unlike fundamentalists, evangelicals engage biblical scholarship, whereas fundamentalists typically reject it. Absolute inerrancy and critical inerrancy are quite similar; however, critical inerrantists are more open to biblical scholarship than absolute

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[127] Dockery, "Variations," 11.
[128] William Countryman, *Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny? Scripture and the Christian Pilgrimage* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
[129] Countryman, ix.
[130] Countryman, x.
[131] Countryman, 123.
[132] Countryman, 123.
[133] Countryman, 123; Countryman is perfectly comfortable with describing the worldview portrayed in the Bible as "quite wrong," stating that it is completely normal for us to admit the fallibility of the Bible. See Countryman, 3.

inerrantists. Regardless, both absolute and critical inerrantists approach the Bible deductively and are therefore difficult to dialogue with from an inductivist perspective.

Next, limited inerrancy, nuanced inerrancy, qualified inerrancy, and functional inerrancy are moderate positions. Moderates are more varied than the other three positions, containing four variations. Moderates relegate inerrancy to specific texts or themes in the Bible. For example, limited inerrantists relegate inerrancy to matters of faith, salvation, ethics, and things that can be empirically validated. Qualified inerrantists are similar, but they they maintain that inerrancy is a faith commitment not dependent on rational propositionalism. Nuanced inerrantists believe that only specific texts in the Bible are inerrant. Moreover, functional inerrantists relegate the Bible's inerrancy entirely to its function—that of salvation. While moderate positions can be somewhat challenging to distinguish, they reveal the complexity of inerrancy in evangelical Christianity. Compared to fundamentalist and evangelical positions, moderates typically approach the Bible inductively and are therefore easier for critical scholars to engage in dialogue.

Finally, position eight (inerrancy is irrelevant) and position nine (biblical authority) are liberal positions advocating a progressive understanding of Scripture. For Dockery, liberals are the far-left counterpart to fundamentalists, which he describes as far-right. Whereas fundamentalists focus on the divine aspects of Scripture to the detriment of its human elements, liberals do the opposite by concentrating on the humanity of Scripture and virtually ignoring its divinity. Liberals also favor subjective rather than objective readings of Scripture. Position eight rejects inerrancy, seeing it as irrelevant and a cause for disunity among evangelicals. Adherents of position eight believe that evangelicals should abandon inerrancy as a hermeneutic. Perhaps more strikingly, position nine rejects divine inspiration, taking an opposite view compared to mechanical dictation. For adherents of position nine, Christians encounter God through Scripture encountered. However, proponents of this position deny that God inspired Scripture, while upholding the Bible as authoritative for the Christian faith.

Concluding Thoughts

Dockery's variations of inerrancy are brief but immensely helpful. He illustrates the complexity of inerrancy and anti-inerrancy. Inerrantists and anti-inerrantists fall on a spectrum of those who adhere to conservative positions on one side and those who adhere to progressive positions on the other side. Nonetheless, Dockery's descriptions are not without problems. As briefly mentioned, it can be difficult to distinguish between the various nuances among proponents, especially with limited inerrancy, qualified inerrancy, nuanced inerrancy, and to a certain extent, functional inerrancy. Additionally, Dockery's variations only scratch the surface in terms of the inerrancy debate and its many positions. Yet, despite these issues, Dockery provides an invaluable source for demonstrating the complexity of inerrancy, which hopefully provides a way forward for critics by illuminating the importance of adequately defining an opponent and their positions.

Chapter 2

Philosophical Critiques of Inerrancy

As we have seen in the previous chapter, inerrancy is complex, and there are many variations of this pervasive evangelical hermeneutic. Some inerrantists are open to contemporary research and scholarship, willing to adapt their understanding of inerrancy and biblical authority. Such individuals take an inductive approach instead of the deductivism of stringent variations of inerrancy, like mechanical dictation, absolute inerrancy, and critical inerrancy. With this issue now problematized, I move to three case studies of the debate, beginning with philosophical critiques.

This chapter explores critiques from Stephen T. Davis. In his work, *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility,* Davis delineates between two forms of inerrancy: full inerrancy and limited inerrancy. He then provides philosophical arguments against full inerrancy. His own views align with limited inerrancy; however, he describes biblical authority through infallibilism, emphasizing Scripture's soteriological function and describing inerrancy as an irrelevant category for biblical authority. As such, we could perhaps describe Davis as an adherent of position eight (i.e., inerrancy is irrelevant). Along with his pointed critiques of inerrancy, Davis' work provides an excellent opportunity to compare the philosophical presuppositions undergirding inerrantists and their critics.

Comparing Presuppositions

To frame the case studies in the present chapter and Chapters 3 and 4, I will briefly examine an article by Norman Geisler, an evangelical systematic theologian and philosopher who made significant contributions to conservative evangelical scholarship.[1] In "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," Geisler describes the presuppositional divide between inductivists and deductivists within the context of the inerrancy debate. He begins with a quote from Davis concerning the philosophical presuppositions adopted by critics of inerrancy. The quote reads,

> What leads them [critics of inerrancy] to liberalism, apart from cultural and personal issues, is their acceptance of certain philosophical or scientific assumptions that are inimical to evangelical theology—e.g., assumptions about what is "believable to modern people," "consistent with modern science," "acceptable by twentieth-century canons of scholarship," and the like.[2]

Geisler then describes his own presuppositions. For him, inerrancy is the historical position of Christianity. What separates his views from anti-inerrantists are varying philosophical presuppositions. According to Geisler, philosophy is subtle; it frames the way we think, and it affects us unconsciously. He argues that many faithful inerrantists eventually and gradually departed from their convictions because presuppositions antithetical to evangelical theology gradually influenced them. These individuals react by re-writing Christian history and the

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[1] Geisler was also one the drafters and signers of the CSBI.

[2] See Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions", 307. The original quote comes from Davis, 139.

church's apparent historical commitment to biblical inerrancy. Geisler argues that such believers should acknowledge that they have departed from historical Christianity.[3]

Geisler then clarifies his aim, which is not to refute anti-inerrantist presuppositions but to "*expose* [author's emphasis] them…"[4] He does so through an exploration of the philosophical presuppositions at the heart of anti-inerrancy. According to Geisler, the core anti-inerrantist presuppositions are inductivism (Francis Bacon), materialism (Thomas Hobbes), rationalism (Baruch Spinoza), skeptical empiricism (David Hume), agnosticism (Immanuel Kant), and existentialism (Soren Kierkegaard). These presuppositions were developed and promoted by individuals who thought they were protecting Christianity, when—according to Geisler—their philosophical contributions undermined core Christian tenets.[5]

Beginning with inductivism, Geisler notes that Francis Bacon encouraged inductivism and discouraged deductivism. For Bacon, experience is the conduit for uncovering and determining truth.[6] According to Geisler, Bacon paved the way for future critics of the Bible to relegate its veracity strictly to spiritual matters. Geisler then describes Thomas Hobbes as the father of materialism, who, according to Geisler, "believed that all ideas in one's mind are reducible to sensations."[7] Hobbes views the world as material and corporeal, rejecting anything outside of the physical and material world.[8] Geisler then describes the introduction of rationalism to the study of the Bible through Baruch Spinoza, who argued that truth can be known mathematically and applied to the study of the Bible.[9] Next, Geisler explores David Hume and his skeptical empiricism, which established the importance of verifying statements according to the five senses. For Hume, statements that cannot be verified are meaningless, which according to Geisler, effectively disregards theological and spiritual statements.[10] Kant "synthesized rationalism and empiricism" by claiming that knowledge is a construct of the mind and its *a priori* (presupposed knowledge) commitments, which then interpret data through the senses.[11] These ideas led Kant to adopt an agnostic approach towards reality, where "One can know what *appears* [Geisler's emphasis] to him but not what really is."[12] Lastly, Kierkegaard's existentialism was influenced by Kant's agnosticism. For Kierkegaard, the spiritual realm (or the *noumenal*) cannot be studied or known rationally.[13] Geisler argues that together these

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[3] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 307-308.
[4] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 331.
[5] According to Geisler, some of these thinkers—namely, Bacon, Hobbes, and to a certain extent Spinoza—believed in something similar to inerrancy or at least held a high view of biblical authority, despite their criticisms and the alleged negative outcomes of their philosophical ideas for Christianity. See Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 332.
[6] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 313.
[7] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 314.
[8] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 314.
[9] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 316-320.
[10] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 320-321.
[11] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 322.
[12] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 323.
[13] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 327.

philosophical presuppositions have undermined biblical authority and are causing evangelicals to forsake essential evangelical convictions.

Geisler concludes that the inerrancy debate's real problem is not the raw biblical data and phenomena but the lenses through which the data and phenomena are interpreted. He claims that current research favours biblical inerrancy (without providing specific evidence for this claim), yet the adoption of philosophical presuppositions leads many evangelical scholars astray. According to Geisler, "The real problem is not factual but philosophical."[14] He claims that many evangelicals adopt premises "uncritically."[15] He then argues that there is no reason for evangelicals to adopt secular philosophical assumptions since many non-Christian philosophers have questioned and discredited secular philosophies. Ultimately, for Geisler, the task of believers is not to disprove anti-evangelical presuppositions but to demonstrate that they are "self-destructive" and "circular" philosophical positions.[16] Geisler ends his article by affirming the plurality of philosophical approaches to biblical authority; however, evangelical philosophical presuppositions should remain consistent with "biblical revelation" and should not undermine biblical authority.[17]

Stephen T. Davis: *The Debate About the Bible*

Now that we have explored the presuppositional divide from the perspective of an inerrantist, I turn to Davis and his philosophical arguments against inerrancy. In *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility,* Davis responds directly to Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible*. He challenges Lindsell's assertion that only inerrantists can be evangelicals. He does so by taking a philosophical approach to the debate and providing an alternate view of biblical authority—namely, infallibility. While some evangelicals, such as Lindsell, see infallibility as synonymous with inerrancy, for Davis, infallibility describes the Bible as "entirely trustworthy on matters of faith and practice."[18]

Throughout *The Debate About the Bible*, Davis examines and responds to three inerrantist claims. The first (1) is the biblical claim, which argues that the Bible claims its inerrancy. The second (2) is the epistemological claim, which argues that the Bible can only be God's Word if it is inerrant. And the third (3) is the slippery slope claim, which asserts that only inerrantists are evangelicals. Claims two and three, according to Davis, are philosophical, so Davis as a philosopher is more than capable of critiquing them. Though the first claim is best suited for biblical scholars, Davis tackles it nonetheless by approaching it philosophically.[19]

Davis begins by providing a complex and nuanced view of inerrancy. He notes the various conceptions and doctrines of inerrancy and that not all of them are stringent. Many nuances, according to Davis, stem from phenomenology. As a result, many inerrantists add qualifications to what constitutes an error, and five of these qualifications are explored by Davis.[20] The first (1) qualification disregards grammar, spelling, and style errors. According to

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[14] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 333.
[15] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 333.
[16] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 333.
[17] Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions," 334.
[18] Davis, 15.
[19] Davis, 17-21.
[20] Davis, 23.

Davis, inerrantists unanimously agree that the Bible "makes no false or misleading statements."[21] The second (2) qualification locates the *true,* inerrant Scripture in the original autographs and not in present-day translations.[22] The third (3) qualification demands that critics demonstrate errors in the author's intended meaning.[23] The fourth (4) qualification requires that harmonizations be established as impossible when comparing two versions of the same narrative. The fifth (5) qualification claims that errors must be demonstrated as false in any and every sense, where apparent errors cannot and will not be resolved both now and in the future.[24]

Davis argues that qualifications make inerrancy unfalsifiable. He notes, "It is hard to see how *any* [author's emphasis] purported error could pass all the tests."[25] For example, the third qualification (proving that the author's intended meaning is false) explains historical and geographical errors. The fourth qualification (demonstrating that harmonizations are impossible between two texts sharing the same narrative) explains internal inconsistencies. In fact, according to Davis, "any imaginable purported error can be excluded on condition 2 [that inerrancy pertains to the *original* autographs] or 5 [that errors must be absolutely and incontrovertibly false]."[26]

Davis then compares two definitions of inerrancy, those of Lindsell and Fuller. Lindsell represents a "full" view of inerrancy, and Fuller represents a "limited" view.[27] Lindsell believes that there is only one understanding of inerrancy: The Bible is fully and completely without error in everything it claims. Though Lindsell understands that the Bible is not a scientific text, he believes that it does not err when it discusses anything related to science. For him, inspiration necessitates inerrancy, and thus he is willing to defend inerrancy at all costs.[28] For example, Lindsell explains the missing one thousand soldiers between Numbers 25:9 and 1 Corinthians 10:8 by arguing that the Bible should not be judged according to contemporary standards of accuracy but according to what was standard during its composition. Through this qualification, Lindsell dismisses a legitimate discrepancy. According to Davis, this is inconsistent with Lindsell's claim that Scripture "does not contain error *of any kind* [Davis' emphasis] …"[29]

Davis then critiques Lindsell's unconventional harmonization of Peter's denials of Jesus. Matthew 26:34, Luke 22:34, and John 13:38 record Jesus saying that Peter will deny him three times before the rooster crows, while Mark 14:30 says that the roster will crow twice. For Lindsell, Peter denied Jesus six times; three times before the first rooster crow, and three times

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[21] Davis, 24.
[22] Davis, 24-25; Davis argues that this perspective seems "intellectually dishonest." He also notes that no scholar can truly argue against this point, since we lack the original autographs and are thus unable to study them and determine the veracity of the inerrantist claim. See Davis, 25.
[23] Davis, 25-27. Davis correlates this qualification strictly to the human authors. However, as we will see in Chapter 4, some inerrantists apply this qualification to God, since God is considered the *true* author of Scripture.
[24] Davis, 27.
[25] Davis, 28.
[26] Davis, 28,
[27] Davis, 30.
[28] Davis, 30-32.
[29] Davis, 33.

after the second crow. For Davis, this handling of Peter's denials is "an utter failure,"[30] even though it makes sense with Lindsell's inductive approach.[31]

In contrast to Lindsell, Fuller provides a nuanced understanding of inerrancy, allowing for limited inerrancy. Since the Bible is not strictly scientific or historical, it need not be without error in science and history.[32] This view is drastically different from that of Lindsell. Both Fuller and Lindsell use "inerrancy" to describe the Bible, yet they use this term in practically irreconcilable ways. For Lindsell, inerrancy is absolute and applies to every claim in Scripture, while for Fuller, inerrancy is limited and applies to specific aspects. According to Davis, the differences between Lindsell and Fuller amount to variant conceptions of error. To Lindsell, all forms of error threaten the Bible's veracity, while for Fuller, the only threats to biblical authority are errors in God's authorial intent (salvation). If God's intention is demonstrably erroneous, then the Bible has erred, which is a view that Fuller grounds in 2 Timothy 3:16—a passage describing the purpose of Scripture (i.e. "… teaching, rebuking, correction, and training in righteousness."). Nothing in 2 Timothy 3:16 indicates that Scripture must be without factual, historical, and scientific error to carry out its purpose. [33] Fuller's position further contrasts with that of Lindsell in its commitment to inductivism. For Fuller, Christians should alter theology based on discoveries and scholarship. By contrast, Lindsell approaches the Bible deductively, interpreting Scripture through inerrancy.[34]

After comparing Lindsell and Fuller, Davis critiques full inerrancy in chapters two, three, and four. In chapter two, Davis critiques the biblical claim (i.e., that the Bible claims its own inerrancy). He describes the argument through a syllogistic statement: (#1) *The Bible claims to be inerrant*; (#2) *Therefore, the Bible is inerrant*. According to Davis, this argument is formally invalid, requiring a third component that states: (#3) *All of the Bible's claims are true*. However, this full argument is circular and requires presupposing the Bible's complete veracity (i.e., #3).[35] Without this presupposition, the argument is unconvincing. Davis then demonstrates that Scripture alludes to inspiration, authority, and reliability but not to inerrancy.[36] Thus, for Davis, the real debate should center on what these notions entail and not on inerrancy.

In chapter three, Davis explores the epistemological argument or the claim that without inerrancy, there is no Christianity. He counters this argument by demonstrating three core beliefs in Christian doctrine: that humans are lost in sin and need salvation, that Christ rose bodily from the grave, and that persons must commit their lives to Christ. He argues that belief in inerrancy is inessential for maintaining these core beliefs.[37] Davis concedes, however, that just as inerrancy is inessential, so is Davis' own hermeneutical system (infallibility).[38] Christians should approach biblical authority inductively. If a theory proves false, Christians should abandon it.

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[30] Davis, 36.
[31] Davis, 34-37.
[32] Davis, 39-40.
[33] Davis, 38-40.
[34] Davis, 40-42.
[35] Davis, 49.
[36] Davis, 64-65.
[37] Davis, 68.
[38] Davis, 82.

In chapter four, Davis attacks the slippery slope argument or the notion that if evangelicals abandon inerrancy, they will also abandon Christianity. Davis frames this argument in several ways. One formulation is this: a Christian who denies Doctrine A (that the Bible is inerrant) must deny doctrines B, C, and D (Davis notes that doctrines B, C, and D can be substituted with any core Christian doctrine). According to Davis, this argument is logically invalid since Christians who deny inerrancy will not necessarily deny other doctrines.[39] While this might be true for some individuals, it is not true for everyone. After all, many Christians abandon inerrancy yet remain in the faith. Additionally, some inerrantists deny core Christian doctrines.[40] Some evangelicals, for example, do not consider Mormons as Christians, even though many Mormons believe in some form of inerrancy. Davis then critiques an alternate version of the slippery slope argument, which argues that any evangelical group or denomination that abandons inerrancy will eventually abandon core doctrines. This, Davis notes, is as unlikely as the previous formulation.[41] He concludes that this argument "confuses what one 'does' with what one 'might do.'"[42] While some people *might* abandon Christianity after abandoning inerrancy, this is certainly not the case for everyone.

In chapter five, Davis presents several additional arguments against inerrancy, such as (1) that the "phenomena of scripture do not support" inerrancy, (2) that the inerrantist appeal to the writer's intention creates more problems than it solves, (3) that inerrancy focuses on unimportant details, and (4) that inerrantists mistakenly hinge the survival of Christianity on inerrancy.[43] His final chapters then outline his support for infallibility and its implications. For Davis, the Bible is the product of both God and humanity, and as such, is susceptible to human error.[44] According to Davis, these errors concern science, history, and technical aspects; for Davis, the Bible will not fail in leading people to salvation.[45]

Responses to *The Debate About the Bible*

Davis realizes that he will not convince everyone, especially concerning the epistemological argument, since many Christians see biblical inerrancy as essential. For them, an inerrant Bible provides a sure epistemological base for Christian theology.[46] As such, many critics dismiss Davis' arguments and charge him with constructing a strawman of inerrancy. For example, in his response to *The Debate about the Bible,* Geisler claims that Davis fails to represent conservative evangelicals,[47] and Geisler is not the only reviewer to charge Davis with constructing strawmen.

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[39] Davis, 83-85.
[40] Davis, 86-87.
[41] Davis, 88.
[42] Davis, 90.
[43] Davis, 94.
[44] Davis, 114-115.
[45] Davis, 115-116.
[46] Davis, 77.
[47] Norman Geisler, "The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 3 (September 1978): 264.

John Barton Payne shares this criticism, stating that Davis is guilty of misrepresenting inerrancy and making all inerrantists seem like Lindsell.[48]

Other reviewers, like Mack F. Harrell, argue that Davis' arguments are entirely unconvincing. Harrell ends his scathing review by arguing that Davis' work has had the opposite of its intended effect. In fact, Harrell finds himself even more convinced of his inerrantist beliefs after reading and reviewing *The Debate about the Bible*.[49] He critiques Davis for arguing that the Bible must teach inerrancy overtly; otherwise, it is not a central doctrine. This argument, Harrell contends, is antithetical to the way that many Christian beliefs are maintained. For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity, though deduced from Scripture, is not clearly defined in the Bible. Harrell argues that such a criterion would result in the abandonment of core Christian doctrines.[50]

Harrell also defends the biblical argument, based on the notion that God does not and cannot lie. For Harrell, finding even one error in the Bible is equivalent to catching God in a lie. For him, "if God inspired the Bible, then God says every proposition in the Bible."[51] In other words, Harrell equates inspiration with verbal dictation. According to him, believers have two options: either they admit that God has lied, or they believe that the Bible contains no errors.[52]

According to Harrell, Davis fails to provide an alternative form of biblical authority. Davis affirms that the Bible is the authoritative word of God, but he fails to define how and why it is authoritative. For Harrell, the answer is simple: the Bible is authoritative because it is the Word of God, and as the Word of God, the Bible is without error.[53] I would argue that Davis does in fact provide an alternative form of biblical authority (i.e., his views related to infallibility), contrary to Harrell's claim. Regardless, critics of inerrancy should offer alternatives to inerrantists, especially alternative views of biblical authority. Inerrantists stand firm on the Bible as the authority for their faith; thus, failure to provide alternatives does little to move inerrantists away from their positions.

Like Geisler, Harrell concludes that Davis' arguments fail to accurately represent inerrancy. He reconstructs Davis' arguments to better represent inerrantist positions. According to Harrell, some of the inerrantist views presented in *The Debate About the Bible* provide formally valid yet unsound arguments.[54] Harrell argues that for an argument to be valid (i.e., an

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[48] John Barton Payne. "The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility." *Presbyterian* 4, no. 2 (1978): 104-106.
[49] Mack F. Harrell, "The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility." *Presbyterion* 5 no. 2 (Fall 1979): 131.
[50] Harrell, 121.
[51] Harrell, 122.
[52] Harrell, 123; for Harrell, if God were to speak falsely, God would cease to be God. See Harrell, 131; This, in my view, creates a false dichotomy and neglects more complex conceptions of inspiration, such as accommodation theory.
[53] Harrell, 124-125.
[54] Harrell, 124. According to Harrell, Davis fails to understand the slippery slope argument. He argues that Davis proves the slippery slope argument himself, since Davis apparently holds to an anti-Chalcedonian conception of Christology as it relates to *kenosis*, or the notion that Jesus forsook certain divine attributes in becoming human. Davis maintains that Jesus was possibly unaware of errors in his culture related to science and history, and thus if Jesus held to and

argument where true premises necessitate true conclusions), evidence is not required. In other words, the Bible and its phenomena need not definitively prove the inerrancy of the Bible.[55] Harrell concludes that Davis' arguments both fail to present inerrancy and use the rules of logic properly. In the end, the determining factor of whether someone adopts inerrancy is their acceptance or non-acceptance of inerrantist presuppositions (i.e., God does not lie; and when God speaks, the Bible speaks).[56]

John Barton Payne and Steven C. Dilsaver provide similar arguments in their respective reviews of *The Debate about the Bible*. They both argue that Davis' critiques of inerrancy are not the concerns of theology but of philosophy, stating that Davis bases his conclusions on his epistemological foundation. Davis is concerned with the phenomena of Scripture and not Scripture's self-attestations. According to Payne, Davis fails to examine explanations of apparent errors in the Bible.[57] Dilsaver goes further. He applauds Davis for his consistency as an inductivist since Davis accepts that his own views (infallibility) might be overturned through inductive reasoning. However, Dilsaver argues that Davis is inconsistent, given that infallibility acknowledges the truthfulness of spiritual and theological matters, even though spiritual and theological issues are inductively unverifiable. Since inductivists are first concerned with phenomena and data, their method denies inerrancy. Dilsaver admits that inductivism is incompatible with inerrancy since studying the Bible's phenomena reveals tensions and errors. He concludes that presuppositions are vital in overcoming the inductivist dilemma and charges Davis with supplanting sola scriptura with "fallen human reason."[58] He encourages readers to inform themselves of *The Debate about the Bible* to improve their apologetic methods.[59]

Concluding Thoughts on *The Debate about the Bible*

Davis begins *The Debate About the Bible* with solid arguments, and he sufficiently represents the complexity of biblical inerrancy. Davis, however, focusses on arguments made by Lindsell and thus on *one* form of inerrancy. Some critics note this issue in their critiques, arguing that Davis' representation of inerrancy is limited. However, if we use the typological framework presented in Chapter 1, Lindsell is an absolute inerrantist, which closely aligns with the CSBI and thus much of evangelicalism. Consequently, the claim that Davis constructed a strawman of inerrancy seems unfounded. Certainly, scholarly conceptions of inerrancy are more nuanced and complex than what Davis has presented, yet Davis *is* presenting real arguments held by real evangelicals. Still, Davis polarizes inerrancy by juxtaposing opposites—full inerrancy and limited inerrancy—when there are many other variations.

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propounded mistaken views, he was not lying. Harrell sees this view as akin to Bultmannian form critics, which he describes as unbiblical products of the enlightenment and "Satanic..." See Harrell, 129-131.

[55] Harrell, 121.

[56] Harrell, 125.

[57] According to Payne, the solution to this biblical error lies in Mark 4:31, where Jesus says that the mustard seed is the smallest of all "sown seeds," See Payne, 105.

[58] Steven C. Dilsaver, "The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility." *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 1 (1978): 100.

[59] Dilsaver, 97-100.

I must still commend Davis for his use of clear examples. I also commend him for his promotion of infallibility as an alternate form of biblical authority. Infallibility is a viable option for Christians wanting substitute hermeneutics. Moreover, Davis' philosophical expertise is invaluable for anti-inerrantists; he aptly demonstrates the applicability of philosophically deconstructing inerrancy. Philosophers have much to contribute related to the epistemological foundations of biblical inerrancy. This area is where philosophers (or at least philosophically inclined scholars) have the edge over other fields in the inerrancy debate. Furthermore, as we saw in Geisler's discussion of philosophical presuppositions, there are deeply rooted differences between inerrantists and their critics, and philosophers are well suited for dealing with presuppositional divisions.

Chapter 3

Sociological Critiques of Inerrancy

Like philosophy, sociology has much to offer the inerrancy debate. It can elucidate differences between inerrantist communities and demonstrate motivating beliefs. Sociologists need not have biblical studies or theology expertise to research religious and inerrantist communities, though familiarity is important. Like with philosophical critiques, however, sociological analyses are rooted in divergent presuppositional frameworks, and inerrantists reply to sociological critiques by charging critics with constructing strawman arguments, just as they did with Davis.

This chapter focusses on the work of Christian Smith, a Catholic[1] sociologist who teaches at the University of Notre Dame. One of his primary research areas is American evangelicalism, and in *The Bible Made Impossible*, Smith critiques biblicism. Before discussing this work, however, it would be useful to briefly mention other sociologists and anthropologists studying evangelicalism and the Bible. For example, in *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Group Bible Study*, James S. Bielo takes an ethnographic approach to Bible study in American evangelicalism, focussing on various and diverse Christian communities and their Bible study groups. Bielo concludes that Bible study strengthens intimacy among participants and reinforces broader evangelical commitments, which are often political. Group Bible study also prepares participants for evangelism.

Another example is Ted G. Jelen and his contributions to the inerrancy debate. Through his research, Jelen demonstrates that lay evangelicals rarely differentiate between "literalism" and "inerrancy." Instead, when responding to questionnaires, lay evangelicals pick whichever option gives the most authority to Scripture.[2] Thus, the categories of literalism and inerrancy are important for conservative evangelical scholars and not necessarily for lay evangelicals. Nonetheless, insights from conservative evangelical scholarship tend to affect evangelical communities and reinforce norms surrounding biblical authority. Bielo's and Jelen's works are but two examples of many sociologists and anthropologists contributing to the inerrancy debate.[3]

Christian Smith: *The Bible Made Impossible*

In my thesis introduction, I briefly explored *The Bible Made Impossible.* Having already defined Smith's definition of biblicism as a constellation of assumptions towards the Bible, I now discuss

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[1] Note that Smith converted to Catholicism upon completing *The Bible Made Impossible.* He was previously an evangelical. See Smith, xiii.

[2] Ted G. Jelen, "Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: Does the Difference Make a Difference?" *Sociological Analysis* 49, no. 4 (1989): 421-429. See also Ted G. Jelen, Clyde Wilcox, and Corwin E. Smidt, "Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: A Methodological Investigation," *Sociological Analysis* 51, no. 3 (1990): 307-313.

[3] For more examples, see Nancy T. Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987); John Bartowski, "Beyond Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: Conservative Protestants and the Hermeneutic Interpretation of Scripture." *Sociology of Religion*. 57 (1996): 259-272; Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: New Press, 2000); Brian Malley, *How the Bible Works: An Anthropological Study of Evangelical Biblicism* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004).

his critique of biblicism, which—as already mentioned—incorporates inerrancy as one of biblicism's assumptions. I then look at Smith's proposed alternative hermeneutics. Like with Davis, I then discuss responses to Smith from scholars and inerrantists.

The Bible Made Impossible is separated into two parts: (1) The Impossibility of Biblicism and (2) Toward a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture. He divides both parts into four chapters. In Part 1, Smith explores biblicism from different angles, and then in Part 2 he proposes alternate forms of biblical authority. At the outset, Smith frames his book as a Christian response to inerrancy. His aim is not to reject biblical authority but to present an orientation towards the Bible that reflects reality.[4] His text is critical towards stringent biblicism, though he recognizes the need for tact. He notes that despite biblicism's pejorative connotations, he uses the term from a purely scholarly orientation as a means of identifying a particular form of biblical authority.[5] Still, he recognizes the existence of moderate and even academic forms of inerrancy, and as such, Smith alludes to the complexity of inerrancy.

Smith's argument has little to do with higher criticism or demonstrating contradictions in the Bible. Instead, Smith explores and critiques pervasive interpretive pluralism or the notion that there is little interpretive consensus despite shared assumptions among biblicists. Various subgroups of biblicists interpret the Bible differently.[6] This issue is evident with "problem passages"—verses in the Bible that are difficult to understand. Smith notes that biblicists frequently respond to problem passages in three ways: ignoring them, interpreting them unconventionally, and developing "elaborate contortions of highly unlikely scenarios and explanations."[7]

Part 1: The Impossibility of Biblicism (Smith, Ch. 1-4)

The first chapter begins by defining biblicism and illustrating its preponderance in contemporary evangelicalism. Biblicism is a constellation of ten related assumptions towards the Bible: (1) divine writing, (2) total representation, (3) complete coverage, (4) democratic perspicuity, (5) common-sense hermeneutics, (6) solo (sic.) scriptura, (7) internal harmony, (8) universal applicability, (9) inductive method, (10) and the handbook model.[8] This constellation of assumptions is found in both popular and formal evangelicalism. Smith provides examples of bumper stickers[9] and prominent evangelical books that promote biblicism. Moreover, countless evangelical books promote the Bible as a guidebook on virtually every aspect of daily life, ranging from romance, cooking, dieting, finances, and politics. In more formal evangelicalism, biblicism reveals itself in faith statements, such as the CSBI and the Westminster Confession, which promote and defend an error-free Bible. Furthermore, churches and seminaries promote

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[4] Smith, vii
[5] Smith, vii-viii.
[6] Smith, x-xi.
[7] Smith, xii.
[8] For a more detailed review of Smith's definition of biblicism, please see page 6 of my introduction.
[9] Examples of bumper stickers: "God said it, I believe it, that settles it!" "BIBLE—Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth"; Have Truth Decay? Brush Up on Your Bible." See Smith, 7-8.

biblicism, formalizing stringent views of biblical authority.[10] Many of these sources fit with the CSBI and thus with absolute inerrancy.

In the latter half of chapter one, Smith explains and demonstrates the problem of pervasive interpretive pluralism. He describes it like this: "The very same problem Bible—which biblicists insist is perspicuous and harmonious—gives rise to divergent understandings among intelligent, sincere, committed readers about what it says about most topics of interest."[11] Smith then explains that even if the Bible is inerrant, it does not matter since, in actuality, the Bible—whether inerrant or not—produces innumerable interpretations.[12] This problem then raises another issue; if the Bible is inerrant yet has numerous interpretations, how can evangelicals determine which interpretation is correct and therefore inerrant?[13] Though many evangelicals argue that Christians agree on essential matters and that differences typically concern minor doctrinal issues, Smith demonstrates—through a laundry list of evangelical books attesting to the contrary—that evangelicals disagree on critical issues. Areas of disagreement range from salvation to Christology, morality, and the very conception of God and the Trinity. According to Smith, there are more than five million diverse interpretations, with many—though not all—centering on minor topics.[14] Without a doubt, there is little consensus regarding the supposedly error-free Bible.

In the second chapter, Smith explores the extent and sources of pervasive interpretive pluralism. Varying and diverging evangelical interpretations are not only the result of denominational and doctrinal differences but also of the phenomena of Scripture. The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by many authors, who wrote in various contexts and perspectives. The result is a compendium of books with divergent views. As such, the Bible is not one voice; it is the collection of voices. It is a multi-vocal text that conveys polysemic meanings, and readers throughout history have interpreted the Bible differently. More specifically, the Bible, which already does not have one clear voice, speaks differently to different people.[15]

Notwithstanding, Christians—even beyond evangelicalism—often identify an overarching biblical narrative. One such narrative is "salvation history," or the history of God's unfolding redemptive act through Christ. However, as Smith notes, this is not the only overarching narrative. Other narratives include the notion of dispensations, the dynamic between covenant and election, and the process of divine liberation from oppression.[16] Christians of many stripes disagree about the overarching biblical narrative, and the Bible itself does not alleviate the situation, given its propensity for multi-vocality and polysemy.

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[10] Smith, 6-16.
[11] Smith, 17.
[12] Smith, 17.
[13] Smith, 18. Note that these arguments are not originally from Smith. They were also raised by biblical scholar Robert K. Johnston in the 1970s. Smith acknowledges that his arguments are not new, though they are effective. Similar sentiments have also been raised by Kevin Vanhoozer, John Nevin, Joseph Smith (the founder of Mormonism), William Blake, and Tertullian. See Smith, 17-21.
[14] Smith, 22-24.
[15] Smith, 43-48.
[16] Smith, 43.

To complicate matters even further, Christians read the Bible through secondary lenses, or what Smith terms "intermediate" paradigms.[17] Whether one is a Calvinist, an Arminian, a conservative, a liberal, a pessimist, an optimist, or a mix of positions and groups, many things color the lenses through which we read the Bible. One's secondary lenses are integral for determining the churches and groups with which one associates. Regardless, there are always biblical passages that do not fit one's conception of Scripture. The stark reality is that there are no perfect paradigms to read the Bible.[18] Smith aptly explains this problem using the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle, which can be arranged in many ways but never completed; there are always pieces that do not fit.[19] Regardless, evangelicals—and Christians in general—engage in never-ending attempts to make everything fit together.[20]

Consequently, the Bible does not fit the biblicist paradigm, yet biblicism persists. In chapter three, Smith explores several reasons and arguments for the persistence of biblicism. One reason is homophily, a sociological phenomenon where groups cluster together with like-minded individuals. People congregate with those similar to themselves.[21] Additionally, and as a result of clustering, people limit diversity among their social networks to "reduce the existential discomfort of having to deal with contradictory beliefs, values, and commitments…"[22]

Biblicism also persists through the practice of *othering*. By establishing who the *other* is, biblicists engage in identity formation and resource mobilization. Biblicists need rivals; without them, groups are vulnerable. Rivals perpetuate movements by providing an enemy to counter, which is a dynamic existing among different groups of biblicists who hold varying and contradictory paradigms and interpretations. The various groups perpetuate each other through their ongoing disagreements. As such, rather than disproving the biblicist worldview, differences contribute to biblicism's persistence. Additionally, conflicts keep biblicists from genuinely attempting to understand each other and their respective positions. Each side relegates opponents to caricatures, establishing strawman arguments to belittle and denigrate one another.[23] For these reasons, biblicists are rarely troubled by the notion of pervasive interpretive pluralism.

Another hypothesis is "cognitive transitivity," or the phenomenon of dismissing an idea due to its apparent association with something rejected by the group.[24] In this case, a proper dialogue is associated with ecumenism, and ecumenism is equated with liberalism. Overcoming

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[17] Smith, 43.
[18] Smith, 43-44.
[19] Smith, 45-46.
[20] Smith offers the example of Jesus's conversation with the woman at the well in John 4:1-42, a passage for which many distinct readings exist. Examples of different readings include Jesus being a feminist; Jesus being God; Jesus breaking down walls between homosexuals and heterosexuals; and Jesus confronting individuals about their sexual immorality. See Smith, 48-52.
[21] Smith, 60.
[22] Smith, 61.
[23] Smith, 62-63.
[24] Smith, 64.

such disagreements is thus akin to contaminating the group with liberal ideas, and maintaining distinctions is necessary to protect the group's apparent orthodoxy.[25]

In chapter four, Smith argues that even if inerrancy is true, it has led to countless interpretations and forms of biblicism to the point that inerrancy is virtually irrelevant.[26] In a footnote, Smith highlights the various forms of inerrancy among evangelicals, based on *Models for Scripture* by John Goldingay.[27] Smith demonstrates that many lay believers adhere to an unqualified and absolute form of inerrancy. For them, the Bible has no errors whatsoever, and they need not qualify this claim.[28] According to Smith, nuanced positions are typically held by scholars and not always easy for churchgoing believers to grasp. Smith sees examples of both sides within the CSBI. Moreover, inerrancy's common conceptions assure evangelical believers that the Bible is reliable and worthy of complete trust. Nuanced variations help conservative scholars navigate their research, make sense of supposed errors, and defend biblical inerrancy among peers.[29]

Smith then provides additional arguments against biblicism. First, he argues that biblicists are selective in the biblical commands they obey. Despite passages saying to greet each other with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26, 1 Peter 5:14), commanding women to be silent (1 Corinthians 14:34), or stating that Christians should not resist an evildoer (Matthew 5:39), Christians selectively pick which commands to obey and which to ignore.[30] Biblicists also selectively contextualize passages based on historical contexts. For instance, they contextualize a passage that suggests women remain silent in church (2 Timothy 2:12) while affirming passages that condemn homosexuality. Biblicists are rarely consistent.[31] Moreover, many biblical passages are merely strange and challenging for any interpreter, let alone biblicists. For example, Paul propagates prejudice against Cretans (Titus 1:12-13);[32] a Hebrew Bible judge offers his daughter as a sacrifice (Judges

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[25] According to Smith, this paradigm and the sociological factors perpetuating biblicism have resulted from the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 20th century, particularly fundamentalism's tendency towards separatism. Evangelicalism and its conception of biblical authority are direct results of the historical and sociological factors surrounding the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. See Smith, 64-65.

[26] Smith, 67. Smith reaffirms his intention in *The Bible Made Impossible,* which is not to attack inerrancy directly. He believes that directly attaching inerrancy is a fruitless endeavour. However, by critiquing biblicism, Smith indirectly attacks inerrancy. See Smith, 184.

[27] John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994; reprint, Toronto: Clements, 2004).

[28] Such as with the five qualifications mentioned by Davis in Chapter 2.

[29] Smith, 214-215.

[30] Smith, 68-69.

[31] Smith, 69-72.

[32] Note that Titus is considered a product of pseudo-Paul by many biblical scholars. For more on pseudepigrapha and pseudo-Paul please see Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011); Bart D. Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament,* 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 264-266; Gary Wills, *What Paul Meant* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 5.

11:29-40);[33] and Deuteronomy commands soldiers to take beautiful women captive (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). The Bible is an unusual document, and its many peculiar passages are problematic for the biblicist paradigm.[34]

Biblicists also rarely apply rigorous exegetical and hermeneutical strategies beyond those confirming their own presuppositions. Smith aptly describes this phenomenon through the following portrait of biblical belief: "I already believe, think, or feel Y; the Bible contains an idea that seems to relate to Y; therefore, my belief, thought, or feeling of Y is 'biblically' confirmed."[35] These problematic interpretive practices extend beyond individual interpreters and into communal interpretations. The result is that biblicism fails to work according to prescribed theories. Leaders and "experts'" opinions help establish collective understandings of Scripture, which are crucial in interpretive practices.[36] The cultural, political, and personal presuppositions of interpretive communities are far more determinative than guiding exegetical principles.[37]

Smith then examines the Bible's self-attestation regarding biblicism and inerrancy, or whether the Bible describes itself as inerrant. Certainly, defending biblical authority by appealing to the Bible is circular, but Smith argues that it is not completely circular, given the need for grounding principles and presuppositions. Still, according to Smith, the Bible does not represent itself as inerrant. Smith considers this issue a valid subsidiary critique. For him, biblicism is but one interpretation of the biblical texts.[38] The ambiguity of biblical data supports variations of both inerrancy and inspiration, despite a standard agreement that God inspired Scripture and does not lie. Smith mentions numerous inspiration theories and that mechanical dictation is often not held by "most thoughtful evangelicals…"[39]

Smith then explores certain tenets of Christianity not strictly found in the Bible. Along with the Trinity and biblical authority, the theological concepts of *homoousion* (the notion that Christ is of the same substance of God) and creation *ex-nihilo* (creation out of nothing) are not strictly and explicitly found in the Bible. Consistently throughout church history and in contemporary Christianity, believers have appealed to sources outside the Bible to confirm and

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[33] Whether his daughter was offered as a virgin or a literal blood sacrifice is not clear from the passage.
[34] Smith, 72-74.
[35] Smith, 75.
[36] Smith, 76.
[37] Smith, 76-78.
[38] Smith mentions five passages often used to defend inerrancy and biblicism, many of which were referenced in my introductory chapter. These are John 10:35, Romans 15:4, 1 Timothy 4:13, 2 Timothy 3:15-17, and 2 Peter 1:20-21. According to Smith, these passages do not amount to biblicist theory. At most, they indicate that Scripture is inspired by God, but for Smith this does not necessitate inerrancy or biblicism. See Smith, 78-82. Also, it should be noted that from a biblical studies point of view, the Bible cannot have a conception of itself, since the Bible as a completed document did not exist when the individual texts were being composed. The concept of the "Bible" as we have it is a third-to-fourth century concept, quite removed from the original composition of the texts. Nonetheless, like with the conception of the Trinity, Christians have scoured the Bible looking for passages hinting at a biblical conception of scriptural authority.
[39] Smith, 81. As demonstrated through Dockery in Chapter 1, mechanical dictation is typically held by fundamentalist forms of biblical inerrancy.

validate their doctrinal beliefs, demonstrating the incompatibility of biblicism with the Bible as it is. Smith highlights Bible-onlyism and the handbook model as particularly problematic when compared with the phenomena of Scripture. The Bible, it would appear, is insufficient for establishing and maintaining doctrine.[40]

Smith ends Part 1 by considering the dubious origins of Bible-onlyism, the lack of a consistent and cohesive evangelical social ethic, and the potential effects of biblicism for young believers. Just as the Bible lacks a guiding paradigm, it also lacks clear guiding ethical systems. The same is true for the various forms of Christianity and evangelicalism. From conservative and liberal evangelicals to liberation and dominionist theologies, there is no shortage of ethical systems among evangelical Christians. Since there are many ways of interpreting the Bible, there are many ethical frameworks.[41] Biblicists, and by extension inerrantists, sabotage themselves by promulgating their systems as the only possible hermeneutic for the Bible. This issue is particularly a problem with youth who go to college and university to discover issues not only with the Bible but with their hermeneutics. As a result, many young Christians abandon more than just inerrancy; they abandon their faith altogether.[42] One famous example is Bart D. Ehrman, a biblical scholar who was once an evangelical. After studying the Bible in an academic context, Ehrman abandoned both inerrancy and evangelicalism.[43]

Part 2: Towards a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture (Smith, Ch. 5-7)

In section two, Smith considers alternative forms of biblical authority. If biblicism and inerrancy are inconsistent with reality, how can evangelicals maintain biblical authority? Smith presents alternatives, which he claims are "truly evangelical."[44] He cautions, however, that his alternatives are not outright solutions but merely "promising ways forward" for evangelicals.[45]

In chapter five, Smith urges evangelicals to read Scripture Christocentrically, Christologically, and Christotellically.[46] What is most important in Christian hermeneutics is identifying Christ in Scripture, since it is Christ and not the Bible that is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15).[47] While this is undoubtedly not an exegetical hermeneutic, it is consistent with historical Christian hermeneutics. It also does not necessitate an errorless Bible, nor that Christians force a Christocentric reading.[48] Not all passages fit this hermeneutic, and not

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[40] Smith, 82-84.
[41] Smith, 86-87.
[42] Ibid, 88-89.
[43] Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 1-15.
[44] Smith, 93.
[45] Smith, 97.
[46] Smith, 98.
[47] Smith, 117.
[48] Smith, 99. Smith notes that this hermeneutic is often applied by liberal evangelicals, who typically reject inerrancy and opt for infallibility (such as with Davis). Smith also highlights that there are various forms of anti-inerrantist positions, just as there are various forms of inerrancy. See Smith, 102.

every verse is Christocentric.[49] According to Smith, this hermeneutic should nonetheless orient the interpretive strategies of practicing Christians. For Smith, the overarching biblical narrative is "the reality of Christ himself, the living, eternal Son through whom God reconciles the world to himself in love."[50]

Smith demonstrates the historicity of this hermeneutic and its prominence in contemporary Christianity. It was, in fact, one of the staples of Martin Luther's hermeneutics.[51] Christocentrism was also a determinative factor in the Bible's canonization,[52] making it a logical hermeneutic even for biblical scholars to study.[53] Contemporary evangelicals, even while maintaining biblicism and inerrancy, typically accept the Christocentric model.[54] Smith also highlights Karl Barth, a significant proponent of the Christocentric hermeneutic who rejected inerrancy. Nonetheless, Barth maintained a high view of biblical authority and demonstrated the applicability of Christocentrism as an alternative to biblical inerrancy.[55]

A common objection to Christocentrism is that interpreters must pick and choose which passages to accept and dismiss. Smith, however, argues that interpretation always entails decision. When believers stand *for* one interpretation, they stand *against* another. What separates Christian interpretive decisions is that Christians continuously refer back to their histories and traditions to inform their interpretive choices.[56] As Smith says, it is inevitable to form one's own canon of Scripture, and the Christocentric model is useful in this process.[57] Smith then urges believers to refrain from idolizing the Bible and placing it at the same level of authority as Jesus. The Bible is a mediator between Jesus and Christians; it reveals Jesus, but it is *not* Jesus. For Smith, making the Bible inerrant is akin to idolatry.[58]

In chapter six, Smith proposes his second alternative hermeneutic, which is to read the Bible inductively, requiring Believers to accept the Bible's ambiguities and complexities. It also requires acknowledging that nobody has all the answers. Christians, according to Smith, should take the Bible as God intended it to be.[59] If God wanted believers to have an inerrant Bible, the

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[49] Smith provides examples of passages that are difficult to reconcile with this hermeneutic—most notable any passage that promotes slavery. See Smith, 110.
[50] Smith, 107.
[51] Smith, 106.
[52] Smith, 107-108.
[53] Canonical criticism, for example, considers the biblical texts in their final form—the form in which they were received and interpreted by individual communities. In this light, biblical studies can explore the Christocentric hermeneutic. See Mary C. Callaway, "Canonical Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 142-143.
[54] Smith, 108-111.
[55] Smith, 121-126.
[56] Smith, 113.
[57] Smith, 116.
[58] Smith, 125-126.
[59] Smith, 127-128. Several pages later, Smith outlines one way for Christians to decide their canon, and that is by distinguishing between doctrines, dogmas, and opinions. Too often Christians, and this includes evangelicals, conflate their opinions with crucial doctrine, and much of this can be discarded. See Smith, 134-139.

phenomena of Scripture would not be what they are. Accepting biblical ambiguity and complexity is possible through accommodation, by which God did not correct mistaken assumptions of the biblical authors. As highlighted by Smith, there have been many proponents of accommodation theory throughout history, including Origen, Justin Martyr, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and John Calvin. Additionally, Kenton Sparks, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Peter Enns, and D.A. Carson are contemporary examples of proponents of accommodation theory.[60]

Christians throughout history have acknowledged the Bible's ambiguity and lack of clarity. Two notable examples are Augustine and Luther. For example, Luther was admittedly unsure whether he correctly interpreted Scripture, and Augustine saw ambiguity and difficulty as divinely ordained for developing humility.[61] Christians have reflected on the Bible's ambiguities for quite some time and have formulated theological reasons for their presence. As such, there is no need to resort to blind harmonization. Relying on unwarranted harmonizations is a common evangelical pitfall, and avoiding that temptation is counterintuitively a means of respecting the Bible for what it is. Indeed, some harmonizations are sensical and seemingly warranted, but there are many instances where harmonizations are excessive.[62] As Smith says, "If God did not feel the need to provide us, his church, with a fully harmonized version of biblical accounts, then we ought not to feel the need to impose one ourselves."[63]

In combination with a Christocentric hermeneutic, acceptance of mystery is a proper lens for reading the Bible. Scripture is clear on some issues, such as loving one's neighbour and being a generous giver; but it is ambiguous in other matters, like when/if the apocalypse will arrive and whether the gift of tongues is applicable for today. According to Smith, focusing on trivial issues causes Christians to ignore clear-yet-difficult directives to love people radically. Smith urges believers to embrace mystery and avoid arguing over insignificant things, focusing instead on clear mandates to love. Focusing on love is applicable for any and every sociological and historical context. Smith, however, is not suggesting that Christians dismantle theological diversity; rather, Christians should remain united under the goal of love despite their differences.[64]

In chapter seven, Smith encourages Christians to rethink conceptions of knowledge, authority, and understanding. Though many Christians oppose modernism and post-modernism, the notion of biblical inerrancy is part of those frameworks—one side of the same coin. Like modernism, inerrancy relies on epistemological foundationalism, the idea that all knowledge boils down to a single, unchanging source. For inerrantists, that source is an errorless Bible, which according to Smith, "must stand indubitably against all challenges, must be universally accessible to all rational people, and must unfailingly produce the kind of reliable knowledge sought after." Throughout history, thinkers have understood this source differently. For René

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[60] Smith, 129-130.
[61] Smith, 131-133.
[62] For example, Lindsell's forced effort to combine all of Peter's denials in the Gospels, as mentioned in Chapter 2.
[63] Smith, 134.
[64] Smith, 144-148.

Descartes, the source was the human mind, while David Hume saw the source as "empirical observation of external data."[65]

Epistemological foundationalism is a problematic philosophy, even though evangelicals—particularly inerrantists—cling to the Bible as the foundation of all knowledge. Many evangelicals maintain this philosophy out of fear of postmodern relativism. For Smith, however, postmodern relativism is not the inevitable outcome of abandoning inerrancy; one possible alternative is critical realism, a stance in the philosophy of perception that acknowledges human limitations without veering into complete relativism. Critical realism recognizes the influence of historical and cultural context and that people mediate between interpretations and objects of interpretation.[66] Though full objectivity is impossible, we approximate accurate interpretations through interpretive tools and methods. Instead of deductivism, critical realism encourages inductivism, where individuals interpret objects of study without imposing pre-established frameworks, such as inerrancy.[67] Human beings are not objective and inerrant interpreters, and intention often escapes us. This problem is compounded for the Bible, a compendium of texts written for an audience that no longer exists.[68] Interpreters must work diligently to understand the historical and cultural contexts of ancient words. Unfortunately, many interpreters are ill-equipped to do so.

Smith ends the chapter by considering different understandings of authority and the Gospel's unfolding nature throughout Christian history. An authority figure or document need not be perfect or inerrant. There are various models of authority, particularly the authority of the Bible. Smith presents two sociological understandings of authority—authority as legitimate power and authority as transformative capacity. Legitimate power, though a useful version of authority, is not fully applicable to the Bible. According to Smith, legitimate power is "authority that is potentially or actually exercised to get people to do things they might not want to do…"[69] For example, citizens might not enjoy paying taxes, but they do so because they recognize the legitimate power of governments to enforce taxation. The Bible, as a conglomerate of genres (histories, poetry, prophecies, narratives, etc.), is ill-suited for this model of authority since Scripture provides more than commands and decrees. Authority as transformative capacity, according to Smith, is far better as a model of biblical authority. Smith describes this model as "the ability as an agent to intervene in the world in some way that alters it."[70] In this sense, the Bible has the authority to facilitate change or to impact individual lives and Christian congregations. For it is not strictly a matter of obeying biblical decrees; it is also a matter of allowing the Bible to affect one's life, and for the Bible to have such an impact, it need not be without error.[71]

Smith concludes *The Bible Made Impossible* by reiterating the problem of pervasive interpretive pluralism. If the Bible were inerrant, as biblicists claim, it would not produce myriads of interpretations and hermeneutics. But this is not the case. Biblicism produces

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[65] Smith, 150.
[66] Smith, 151-153.
[67] Smith, 153-156.
[68] Smith, 156-163.
[69] Smith, 164.
[70] Smith, 165.
[71] Smith, 163-165.

countless forms of itself and numerous conceptions of inerrancy. The Bible is replete with polysemy and multi-vocality, written in and for specific historical and cultural contexts.[72] The Bible *can* say things for today, but Christians limit the Bible's relevancy by imposing inerrancy.

Responses to *The Bible Made Impossible*

Many reviewers of *The Bible Made Impossible* say that Smith constructs strawman arguments. Stephen D. Kovach notes that Smith portrays biblicists as narrow fundamentalists. He argues that many biblicists hold broad foundationalist perspectives that do not require the level of certainty required by fundamentalism.[73] Even Mark Noll, a non-fundamentalist evangelical, claims that Smith's definition of biblicism fails to represent all evangelicals.[74] Craig L. Blomberg argues that Smith describes untutored sections of evangelicalism and is unrepresentative of theologically and biblically educated evangelicals.[75] John D. Stark says that Smith fails to meet hyper-confessionalists[76] on their terms and that many of them will view Smith's work as a strawman construction. He also charges Smith with defining biblicism too broadly, making it hard to separate biblicists from non-biblicists.[77]

Some reviewers argue that Smith overstates the effects of pervasive interpretive pluralism.[78] According to Kovach, variable interpretations exist due to presuppositions, yet many Christians agree on core Christian doctrines. Noll and other critics make similar comments, arguing that there is far more agreement among evangelicals than disagreement. Noll's conclusion stems from a survey he conducted of doctrinal statements from "a wide range of evangelical groups."[79] He says that these groups agree on issues such as:

> that God exists as Trinity; that human nature is sinful and in need of redemption; that Christ was born of a virgin, was both human and divine, was sinless, died a substitutionary death for sinners, rose bodily from the tomb, mediates and advocates for

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[72] Smith, 173-178.
[73] Kovach, Stephen D. "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 1 (2012): 208-215.
[74] Mark A. Noll, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *First Things* 220 (February 2012): 62–64. Dan Epp-Tiessen makes a similar statement, noting that some evangelicals "interpret the Bible in much more thoughtful and nuanced ways than those reflected by [Smith's] definition." See Dan Epp-Tiessen, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *The Conrad Grebel Review* 31, no. 3 (2013): 309–311.
[75] Craig L. Blomberg, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*." Review of Biblical Literature* 15 (January 2013): 430–433.
[76] Stark seems to use the term "hyper-confessionalism" as a synonym for fundamentalism or hyper conservative forms of Christianity.
[77] J. David Stark, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15, no. 1, (2012): 120–121.
[78] Ronald T. Michener says that Smith belabours pervasive interpretive pluralism. He notes, however, that Smith's engaging style keeps the reader's attention, nonetheless. See Michener, Ronald T. "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *European Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (2012): 172–174.
[79] Noll, "The Bible Made Impossible", 63.

> humans in heaven, and will come again; that the Holy Spirit is active today; that Christian believers are to express their faith practically; that Christ established the church to continue his work in the world; that there will be a final judgment; and that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the be practiced.[80]

Along similar lines, Jeff Haanan notes that pervasive interpretive pluralism is not a uniquely evangelical problem. Even among Catholics, pluralism is a reality. It has been a staple of Christianity and virtually all religions throughout history.[81]

Noll and other critics imply that Smith's conversion from evangelicalism to Catholicism plays a crucial role in his conclusions, especially Smith's aversion to divergent interpretations.[82] Jack D. Kilcrease delves slightly further into this criticism, noting the influence of Smith's Catholic anthropology and theology, which present humans as minimally bound and corrupted by sin.[83] However, this criticism is somewhat odd since Smith converted to Catholicism *after* completing *The Bible Made Impossible.*[84] According to Kilcrease and other reviewers, the effects of sin help cause pervasive interpretive pluralism.[85] He further notes that for many Lutherans, correct interpretation results from operating in God's grace, while incorrect interpretation results from sin. According to Kilcrease, those without faith interpret Scripture through a veil over their hearts.[86]

Several reviewers comment on Smith's methodology. At the beginning of *The Bible Made Impossible*, Smith clearly states that he is neither a theologian nor a biblical scholar; he is a sociologist.[87] As such, some reviewers critique Smith for engaging in fields outside his expertise.[88] Still, Joel B. Green highlights Smith's lack of qualitative and quantitative research

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[80] Noll, "The Bible Made Impossible", 63. Blomberg provides a similar list, highlighting specifically the full divinity and humanity of Christ and the moral attributes of God. See Blomberg, 433.

[81] See Jeff Haanan, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *Denver Journal* 15 (January 2012): 34.

[82] Noll, "The Bible Made Impossible", 62-63; see also Jack D Kilcrease, "Is Soła Scriptura Obsolete?: An Examination and Critique of Christian Smith's The Bible Made Impossible." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 82, no. 3–4 (2018): 213–234. Robert H. Gundry notes a section where Smith recommends overcoming pervasive interpretive pluralism by appealing to a higher ecclesial authority. This, according to Gundry, calls into question Smith's insistence that his conversion to Catholicism has little to do with rejecting biblicism. See Robert H. Gundry, "Smithereens!" *Books & Culture*, 10 (2011), 9-11. Additionally, Kovach incorrectly charges Smith with failing to discuss his conversion to Catholicism, despite the fact that Smith discusses this in the Introduction of *The Bible Made Impossible* (Smith, xiii). See Kovach, 215.

[83] Kilcrease, 217.

[84] See Smith, xiii.

[85] See Smith, 218; Haanen, 34. Kovach notes that while presuppositions play a role in hermeneutics, human sinfulness distorts interpretation. See Kovach, 214.

[86] Kilcrease, 218-219.

[87] Smith, xii.

[88] See Andrew Thomson Blake McGowan, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *The Evangelical Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (2014): 254–

evidence, noting the problems of relying on book titles and websites as evidence of pervasive interpretive pluralism. Such evidence, according to Green, can prove almost anything. While Green shares Smith's conclusions, he finds *The Bible Made Impossible* methodologically lacking.[89] Similarly, Blomberg argues that book titles are often more reflective of marketing strategies than books' actual contents. Additionally, multiple-views books, like those cited in *The Bible Made Impossible*,[90] usually contain at least some fringe ideas, which hardly reflects evangelicalism as a whole.[91] According to Kilcrease, Smith describes Scripture's lack of clarity as "self-evident," Through this description, Kilcrease insinuates that Smith fails to provide adequate evidence of ambiguous Bible passages.[92] Moreover, Gundry highlights Smith's use of Baconian inductivism and common-sense realism, despite Smith's criticism of biblicists for using those same systems. He argues that Smith, like Baconian inductivists and common-sense realists, compiles a list of facts via webpages and book titles and then concludes that pervasive interpretive pluralism exists in evangelicalism. This similarity, argues Gundry, is an approach no different than the very biblicists that Smith critiques.[93]

Smith's apparent methodological missteps affect his proposed solutions.[94] According to Green, Smith fails to provide "the sort of theological sophistication needed to support theological engagement with the Scriptures within the church."[95] According to Green, Smith's proposed Christocentric model does not apply to the Old Testament.[96] Here Green is thinking mainly of Esther and Haggai, which he highlights as especially problematic for the Christocentric model. Instead of a Christocentric model, Green recommends a Trinitarian model.[97] Moreover, Andrew Thomas Blake McGowan highlights Smith's reliance on Barth's Christocentrism, which McGowan argues is problematic, despite its limited benefits.[98]

Several reviewers highlight the inability of Christocentrism to overcome pervasive interpretive pluralism. Rather than solving the problem, the Christocentric model exacerbates

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256. See also, Joel B. Green, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *Interpretation* 66, no. 4 (2012): 446–448.

[89] See Green, 446-447. Gundry likewise criticizes Smith for using book titles and websites as evidence, saying that Smith "treats these facts as self-evidently intelligible." See Gundry, 11.

[90] Multiple views books are a phenomenon in evangelicalism, where several evangelical scholars discuss a particular theological issue and debate it from their varying positions. For example, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*. See Stanley N. Gundry, K. Merrick, and Stephen M. Harrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grank Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). Other multiple views books explore evolution, original sin, and other controversial theological topics.

[91] Blomberg, 433.

[92] Kilcrease, 216.

[93] Gundry, 11.

[94] Haanan notes the pastoral impossibility of accepting scriptural ambiguities, arguing that certain theological decisions must be made for the sake of congregants. See Haanan, 34.

[95] Green, 446; McGowan makes a similar argument, stating that Smith should have left the solutions section to theologians. See McGowan, 255.

[96] While most biblical scholars refer to the "Hebrew Bible" and not the "Old Testament", I am repeating Green's use of "Old Testament" here.

[97] Green, 448.

[98] See McGowan, 255.

pluralistic readings. Haanan states that many evangelicals already focus their hermeneutics on Christ, yet this approach hardly keeps them from disagreeing. Haanan admits that pervasive interpretive pluralism is a problem for evangelicalism; however, it is a problem that *The Bible Made Impossible* cannot solve.[99] Dan Epp-Tiessen likewise notes "infant baptism versus believer's baptism, atonement theories, church structure, worship, or pacifism versus just war" as theological disagreements that Smith's Christocentric model cannot overcome.[100]

Finally, critics argue that *The Bible Made Impossible* is not convincing for biblicists. Blomberg states that the very audience Smith is writing to, who would most benefit from his book, are the least likely to read it due to Smith's insufficiently tactful approach. For instance, according to Blomberg, the title of the book is a "full-frontal assault" on biblicist errors.[101] Blomberg then states that Smith will likely "confirm many outsiders in their stereotypes about and prejudices against evangelicals in general."[102] A more nuanced approach, he contends, would have been more effective.[103] Moreover, according to Green, Smith's flawed methodology will impede biblicists from considering his arguments.[104] Intriguingly, one reviewer, Robert N. Wilkin, recommends that "new believers" stay away from the book, as if its contents will lead them astray.[105] Nevertheless, some reviewers state that biblical scholars and recovering biblicists are likely to benefit from Smith's arguments.[106]

Smith Responds

In the afterward of *The Bible Made Impossible*, Smith offers rebuttals to specific criticisms mentioned above. Smith amalgamates his critics into a few key points, rather than responding to individual critics one at a time. He highlights several common criticisms, such as attacks against his Christocentric model, Catholic conversion, and pervasive interpretive pluralism. Regarding his Christocentric model, Smith highlights disagreements among his critics, since some argue that evangelicals already practice this hermeneutic and others denounce it and its Barthian roots. He argues that such conflicts further illustrate pervasive interpretive pluralism.[107] While evangelicals certainly agree on core doctrinal issues, Smith argues that scratching beneath the surface reveals a slew of pluralistic contentions. He also reiterates his focus in *The Bible Made Impossible,* which is to highlight the problem of evangelical plurality. Smith also notes that his solutions are inconclusive, as repeated several times throughout the book. In response to the strawman accusation, he argues that he never labeled *all* evangelicals as biblicists or claimed

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[99] See Haanan, 34.
[100] See Epp-Tiessen, 11.
[101] Blomberg, 433.
[102] Blomberg, 433.
[103] Blomberg, 433.
[104] Green, 457.
[105] Robert N. Wilkin, "The Bible Made Impossible." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 27, no. 52 (2014): 125–126.
[106] Epp-Tiessen recommends *The Bible Made Impossible* for readers overcoming biblicism. See Epp-Tiessen, 311. Daniel Harrington recommends the text for biblical scholars, since they likely encounter biblicists frequently. See Daniel Harrington, "The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 3, (2013): 597–598.
[107] Smith, 190.

biblicists must completely fit his definition. Some evangelicals are closer to the full description than others.[108]

Concluding Thoughts on *The Bible Made Impossible*

The Bible Made Impossible is a crucial though imperfect contribution to the inerrancy debate. Smith's contention that pervasive interpretive pluralism reveals the impossibility of biblicism is a compelling argument. Nonetheless, Smith's method for arriving at this conclusion is certainly questionable, as noted by his critics. Like many of his reviewers, I agree with Smith's conclusion. Interpretive pluralism is rampant throughout evangelicalism and poses a problem for biblicism. However, Smith certainly lacks conclusive quantitative and qualitative evidence. The staggering number of book titles, church confessions, websites, and bumper stickers are quite revealing, yet his argument would benefit by including surveys and statistics.

Smith's contribution is also notable for its inclusion of potential alternatives to biblicist hermeneutics. His alternatives, however, are not without problems. Smith himself notes that his suggestions are inconclusive, illustrating an area for theologians and biblical scholars to provide critical hermeneutics that remain respectful of biblical authority. Alternative hermeneutical frameworks are vital. Critics cannot impede evangelical political incursions by tearing down their temple; evangelicals need a replacement for biblical inerrancy. Moreover, Smith's argument is not exactly tactful. Fundamentalists and extremists are less likely to heed arguments from critics who overtly threaten their worldview.

Despite arguments to the contrary, I commend Smith for his efforts to avoid creating a strawman. The contrast between Smith's text and the conclusions of reviewers is indicative of the presuppositional divide existing between inerrantists and their opponents. After all, Smith's definition is broad enough to encompass variations of evangelicalism that share a constellation of ideas. As noted repeatedly by Smith, biblicists need not fit the ten constellations to conform with the label. Still, perhaps Smith's definition is *too* broad, and a more pin-pointed description based on clear and specific examples is better. Still, I also commend Smith for recognizing the complexity of inerrancy and the existence of various positions and forms of this pervasive evangelical hermeneutic. Furthermore, from a purely sociological perspective, pervasive interpretive pluralism highlights an important question: why is inerrancy necessary if evangelicals arrive at differing interpretations of a supposedly inerrant text? For this solid argument, Smith deserves credit.

In the next chapter, I delve further into the phenomena of Scripture, an issue raised by Smith and Davis. Though philosophy and sociology are critical in debates concerning inerrancy, one would imagine that non are better suited for debating inerrantists than biblical scholars—experts thoroughly acquainted with the Bible and its phenomena. However, as we will see, there is a paradox in biblical scholars' contributions; their presuppositions and those of inerrantists make it difficult for meaningful exchanges to occur.

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[108] Smith, 186.

Chapter 4

The Phenomena of Scripture

Because Scripture's veracity has been questioned more and more by biblical scholars, beginning in the Enlightenment and continuing into Modernity, inerrantists have been forced to bolster their conception of Scripture as errorless. At the heart of this debate is the historical-critical approach to studying the Bible. This approach often threatens claims and assumptions about the Bible, such as whether the purported authors wrote the Bible, whether there are contradictions within and between the texts, whether certain events happened as reported, and whether the Bible's depiction of the natural world corresponds with reality and contemporary science.

As research and understanding of the biblical texts progresses, inerrantists have been motivated to add more interpretive techniques and redefine what constitutes an "error." In many ways, the nuances and various forms of inerrancy explored in Chapter 1 result from inerrantists reacting to biblical scholarship and consequently altering their conceptions of biblical inerrancy. Inerrantists employ harmonizations to assuage apparent contradictions; they use phenomenological arguments to explain errant views of the natural world; they appeal to God as the actual author of Scripture; and, often as a last resort, they appeal to human ignorance and the elusive original autographs. There are, however, evangelical biblical scholars who understand both the importance of biblical authority and the phenomena of Scripture. Such evangelicals encourage inerrantists to adopt forms of biblical authority compatible with contemporary scholarship.

There are multiple ways that biblical scholars, both evangelical and non-evangelical, attempt to dialogue with inerrantists. Some scholars provide alternate readings of key passages, thereby demonstrating scriptures that counteract stringent theological, ideological, and political views. Examples of this can be found in the edited volume *The Bible in Political Debate: What Does it Say?,* particularly the articles in Part I, dealing with the Bible and topics like family values, immigration, abortion, climate change, welfare, homosexuality, and evolution.[1] Other scholars demonstrate the compatibility of inerrancy and biblical scholarship, arguing for an adjusted understanding of inerrancy in light of historical-critical methods.[2] Moreover, in *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism*, Christopher M. Hays and Christopher B. Ansberry encourage evangelicals to embrace the historical-critical methods, or at least those that do not invalidate core doctrines, such as the resurrection of Jesus. Throughout their text, Hays and Ansberry ask readers to consider the biblical events needed for sustaining the Christian faith. They call for Christian interpreters to be critical and evangelical and maintain

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[1] See the chapters written by Andrew Klumpp, Jack Levison, Hector Avalos, Bert Jan Lietaert, Frances Flannery, Rodney A. Werline, Jonathan L. Jackson, Colleen Shantz, and Daniel K. Falk in *The Bible in Political Debate: What Does it Say?*, Ed. Frances Flannery & Rodney A. Werline, (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 19-124.

[2] For example, Randolph Terrance Mann argues that an adapted understanding of inerrancy is compatible with redaction criticism, which is often lauded as detrimental to scriptural authority. See Randolph Terrance Mann, "Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels: Its Role in the Inerrancy Debate Within North American Evangelicalism." PhD Diss., University of South Africa, 2007.

biblical authority through critical scholarship.[3] Kenton L. Sparks adopts a similar approach, combining his expertise in biblical scholarship with a rich understanding of philosophical hermeneutics in *God's Word in Human Words*, where he provides critical realism as an alternative to common-sense realism. This approach enables evangelicals to be both critical and reverent towards the Bible. According to Sparks, his critical methods arrive at similar conclusions about biblical passages and theology as those concluded by contemporary inerrantists.[4]

There are many examples of biblical scholars critiquing inerrantists; however, in this chapter I focus on the work of Peter Enns, specifically his text *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*. After a detailed summary of *Inspiration and Incarnation*, I explore the controversy that Enns unintentionally created among conservative evangelical scholars. I then survey and discuss the critical responses to Enns' text, comparing Enns and his reviewers' positions. This controversy provides an ample opportunity to explore key differences between mainstream biblical scholars' presuppositions and those of inerrantists.

Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* - Introduction

After completing an M. Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary and then an M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University, Enns began his teaching career at Westminster, which is known for its support of biblical inerrancy. Conflicted by his research in biblical studies and his institution's inerrantist convictions, Enns produced *Inspiration and Incarnation,* which resulted in his eventual departure from Westminster. Since that time, Enns has written several books and contributed to numerous volumes, most of which concern inerrancy and its importance in evangelicalism. Some notable works are *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (2012), *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (2014), and *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More than Our 'Correct' Beliefs* (2016),[5] along with his contribution to works like *Five Views On Biblical Inerrancy* (2013).

The crux of *Inspiration and Incarnation* is this: The Bible is inspired and the product of both God and humanity, and as a product of humanity, it is not without error. For Enns, an incarnational model, wherein interpreters recognize both the human and divine elements of Scripture, is far more apt than an inerrant model, which often describes the Bible as the absolute product and dictation of God.[6]

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[3] Christopher B. Ansberry and Christopher M. Hays, "Faithful criticism and a critical faith," *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism*, ed. Christopher B. Ansberry and Christopher M. Hays (London: SPCK, 2013), 207-211.

[4] See Sparks, 354-356.

[5] Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012); Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014); Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More than Our 'Correct' Beliefs* (New York: HarperOne, 2016).

[6] Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 17.

In the preface, Enns highlights his goals: to bring the research of biblical scholars to everyday evangelicals and discuss ways of interpreting the Bible in light of contemporary research.[7] For Enns, Christians should face difficult questions and be honest with themselves.[8] He argues that evangelicals must reconcile the "doctrinal implications" of modern archaeology, history, and textual studies.[9] To these aims, *Inspiration and Incarnation* explores three problems in the Bible. First, Enns compares the Hebrew Bible with other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature. Next, he examines the theological diversity throughout the Bible. And lastly, he explores the hermeneutics of New Testament (NT) authors, especially concerning the Hebrew Bible. These problems highlight issues in evangelical hermeneutics. For Enns, "In the same way that Jesus is—*must be* [Enns' emphasis]—both God and human, the Bible is also a divine and human book."[10] Thus, ignoring the human aspect of Scripture is equivalent to Scriptural Docetism, the ancient "heresy" where Christ was fully divine and only *appeared* to be human. According to Enns, many Christians unknowingly apply this misconception to Scripture, portraying the Bible as though it fell straight from heaven.[11]

Enns then presents five aspects of human involvement in Scripture. First (1), the Bible was written in human languages, namely Hebrew and Greek, with some Aramaic. He argues that these languages are anything but divine; they are products of other languages, such as Hebrew, which shares similarities with Phoenician. The human dimension of language, argues Enns, is an example of God condescending to humanity and adopting our means of communication. Second (2), Israel was not unique in its religious system of temples, priests, and sacrifices. Many ancient Mesopotamian societies shared this form of religion. Third (3), prophets were not unique to Israel. Fourth (4), since many ancient cultures had kings of their own, Israel was likely mimicking its neighbors' political practices. Fifth (5), Israel's legal system shares aspects of other ancient legal systems, most notably the Babylonian *Code of Hammurabi*. These five aspects and many like them are the conclusions of contemporary linguistic, historical, and archaeological research. For many Christians, accepting the human component of Scripture is akin to rejecting its divine origin. For Enns, however, Christians should reorient their understanding of Scripture in light of its situatedness in human cultures and contexts; rather than seeing these aspects as the death knell of Scripture, evangelicals should perceive them as the means through which God communicates to humanity, and for Enns that means is through incarnation.[12]

The Hebrew Bible (Enns, Ch. 2-3)

With his framework established, Enns begins by exploring the problem of ANE literature and its similarities to the Hebrew Bible. First, he discusses the Akkadian literature discovered between 1848-1876, during archaeological expeditions in the library of King Ashurbanipal. These

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[7] Enns, *Inspiration*, 9.
[8] Enns, *Inspiration*, 10.
[9] Enns, *Inspiration*, 13; Enns, however, does not deny that significant work has been done in these areas by evangelicals. Still, he argues that evangelicals have not finished working out the doctrinal implications.
[10] Enns, *Inspiration*, 17.
[11] Enns, *Inspiration*, 18.
[12] Enns, *Inspiration*, 19-21.

discoveries profoundly affected biblical studies due to parallels drawn between them and the Hebrew Bible. [13]

Concerning these discoveries, Enns explores ten specific ANE examples: *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis*, *Gilgamesh*, texts from Nuzi, the *Code of Hammurabi*, the *Hittite Suzerainty Treaties*, the Tel Dan Inscription, the Siloam Tunnel Inscription, the Mesha Inscription, and the *Instruction of Amenemope*. Enns separates these examples into three categories. *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis*, and *Gilgamesh* comprise the first category based on their similarities with the biblical creation and flood narratives. *The Code of Hammurabi*, the *Hittite Suzerainty Treaties*, and the *Inscription of Amenemope* form the second category based on their similarities with biblical customs, laws, and proverbs. Finally, the Tel Dan Inscription, the Siloam Tunnel Inscription, and the Mesha Inscription form the third category based on comparisons with biblical historiography.[14]

In the first category, Enns highlights the concept of myth. He distinguishes between critical scholars and conservative interpreters based on their approaches to comparing ANE texts and the Bible. While critical scholars often exaggerate similarities between ANE texts and the Bible, conservative interpreters downplay similarities entirely. For Enns, similarities should be seriously considered but not exaggerated.[15] To this end, he draws attention to the scholarly conception of myth. According to Enns, scholars understand myth as "an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories."[16] Such myths ask and answer the questions of "Who are we?" and "Where do we come from?" Since biblical authors had no access to scientific tools, they answered these questions through stories.[17]

Next, concerning similarities between ANE texts and biblical laws, customs, and proverbs, Enns discusses the importance of cultural expectations in shaping moral codes. The interrelation of biblical morality and that of Israel's neighbours raises questions regarding the Bible's divine origins and its ethical frameworks. In some cases, non-biblical texts appear to be sources for the Bible's moral systems, such as *Amenemope*. This similarity, according to Enns, calls into question the nature of revelation. Seemingly, revelation incorporates and uses cultural and historical context.[18]

Finally, similarities between biblical historiographies and ANE texts reveal crucial aspects of the Bible. Though historically reliable to a certain extent, biblical historiographies remain problematic. The Tel Dan, Siloam Tunnel, and Mesha inscriptions are external sources corroborating biblical accounts in the monarchic period. Historiographies at the time were not objective and unbiased history; they were histories with an agenda. For instance, of Israel's forty kings, only Josiah is given an entirely positive portrayal. Many accounts from surrounding cultures portray their kings very positively, which differs from the biblical accounts.

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[13] Enns, *Inspiration*, 23-24.
[14] Enns, *Inspiration*, 25-39.
[15] Enns, *Inspiration*, 39.
[16] Enns, *Inspiration*, 40.
[17] Enns, *Inspiration*, 40-41.
[18] Enns, *Inspiration*, 41-43.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that only one king receives so much praise in biblical historiographies.[19]

According to Enns, these categories create an impasse for liberal and conservative scholars. Liberal scholars prioritize historical context at the expense of doctrine, while conservative scholars prioritize doctrine over historical context. Without a doubt, Christians must reckon with the historical implications of similarities between ANE texts and the Bible. The question for Enns is to what degree should believers compare these texts at the expense of doctrine.[20] Enns answers this dilemma by highlighting two related assumptions. First, modern traditions must wrestle with historical evidence from archaeology, linguistics, and textual studies. Second, theologies of Scripture must adapt to emerging data. Hermeneutical systems should not be fixed in place, including Enns' own proposed incarnational model.[21] In any case, many biblical texts, especially the creation narratives and the moral treatises, reflect an ANE worldview. Since many interpreters consider the ANE worldview mythological—with its gods and fantastical conceptions of the cosmos and reality—they should extend this consideration to biblical accounts. After all, the ANE worldview is likely far older than biblical texts, even if we consider oral traditions.[22]

For Enns, God entered the biblical authors' contexts, which accounts for similarities between the Bible and ANE texts.[23] According to Enns, scholars can make comparisons due to Israel's association with the ANE world. Take Abraham, for example. According to Scripture, Abraham is from Canaan, a land imbued with the ANE worldview and its mythological elements. If Genesis has any basis in history, the ANE worldview of Canaan influenced Abraham.[24] In this context, the God of Israel was but one deity among many.[25] Theologically speaking, God revealed himself to Israel within the ANE worldview, which was ruled by competing tribal gods. The same is true of Israel's moral laws, which share many similarities with those of Israel's neighbours. For example, most ANE laws concern property rights, slavery, murder, theft, and dishonesty.

What is unique to Israel's laws are the motivations and the historical contexts in which they developed. Their laws developed after God rescued them from captivity, and the motivation behind them is God's demand for obedience from a liberated Israel.[26] The historical texts of the Bible are likewise products of the ANE world. Though biblical historiography is more historical than Genesis and Exodus, it is still historiography, and as such, it serves to shape one's understanding of history. In other words, biblical historiography does not merely state historical facts. The broad history of these texts is not in doubt; it is the historiographical nature, or how history is presented, which raises questions for many scholars.[27]

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[19] Enns, *Inspiration*, 43-44.
[20] Enns, *Inspiration*, 45-47.
[21] Enns, *Inspiration*, 48-49.
[22] Enns, *Inspiration*, 49-52.
[23] Enns, *Inspiration*, 56.
[24] Enns, *Inspiration*, 52-54.
[25] Enns, *Inspiration*, 55.
[26] Enns, *Inspiration*, 58.
[27] Enns, *Inspiration*, 59-60.

According to Enns, there are three interrelated elements of historiographies: the historical event, the purpose of recording the event, and the event's presentation (oral or written). Both the means of presenting the event and its purpose affect interpretation. As such, historiography is an interpretive practice, which is not unique to the Bible; all historiography is an interpretation, including contemporary histories and reports of current events.[28] Enns illustrates this point by looking at differences between the books of Kings and Chronicles, which in many cases, report the same historical events but with specific alterations. For example, in both Kings and Chronicles, Nathan promises David that his descendants will rule forever. However, there is a slight change in the wording in both accounts, emphasizing a theological point relevant to Post-Exilic Israel. Chronicles emphasizes God's rule over Israel, while Samuel-Kings emphasizes the rule of David and his descendants.[29] Cases like this raise a question: what did the biblical characters, such as Nathan, actually say? According to Enns, we cannot know the factual contents of what characters said, but Christians must wrestle with the Bible as it is and not with some ideal, inerrant form requiring endless harmonizations.[30]

Enns completes this chapter by considering three conclusions. First, theories of Scripture must reflect its phenomena. Second, one's understanding of Scripture should determine which passages are normative for today and which are not. Third, just as the Bible is a product of its cultural phenomena, current understandings and theologies are the product of contemporary cultures.[31] We can see this by comparing contemporary interpretations from around the world.[32]

In chapter three, Enns explores the theological diversity of the Hebrew Bible and its impacts on hermeneutics. The Bible's diversity is handled in different ways by different interpreters. For many Jews, diversity necessitates deeper reflection and creative interpretations, whereas for many evangelicals diversity necessitates solutions and harmonizations to remove and avoid apparent contradictions and errors.[33] Enns concludes that many evangelicals should accept the Bible they have and not the Bible they believe they should have.[34]

Enns then explores examples of diversity in the Bible's wisdom literature, its historical texts, and its law books. Beginning with wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job), Enns considers the diversity and tension among the various sayings in the book of Proverbs. On

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[28] Enns, *Inspiration*, 60-61.
[29] Enns, *Inspiration*, 64-66; for example, the various accounts of Jesus cleansing the temple. See Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, and John 2:13-16.
[30] Enns, *Inspiration*, 66.
[31] Enns, *Inspiration*, 67-68.
[32] For instance, inerrancy is not equally important around the world. Many evangelical communities outside of North America are less inclined towards inerrancy. See Michael F. Bird, "Inerrancy is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, Ed. Stanley N. Gundry, J. Merrick, and Stephen M. Garrett, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 160-165.
[33] In this distinction between common Jewish and evangelical hermeneutics, Enns creates a generalized claim concerning evangelical interpretive practices. He hints at several qualifications and methods used by inerrantists, such as removing or minimizing contradictions and claiming that solutions will be found in the future to remove problem passages. Still, his comparison lacks nuance.
[34] Enns, *Inspiration*, 71-73.

the one hand, Proverbs tells readers, "Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself" (Proverbs 26:4). While on the other hand, it says, "Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes" (Proverbs 26:5). According to Enns, this apparent contradiction signals that Proverbs is far more than a simple collection of dos' and do nots'; it is a text exploring wisdom and its uses in various contexts. For Enns, readers should "have the wisdom to read the *situation* [author's emphasis], to know whether a proverb is fitting."[35] According to Enns, these Proverbs are applicable in various situations, but this is not always the case. What matters is *when* they are correct and applicable.[36]

Ecclesiastes likewise exemplifies biblical diversity. Certainly, Ecclesiastes has its own passages that seemingly contradict each other;[37] however, it presents a view of wisdom different from Proverbs. For the author of Ecclesiastes—known as Qoheleth, or the Teacher—life is filled with contradictions. After all, there is a time for everything: "a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what was planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal…" (Ecclesiastes 3:2-3). For Proverbs, wisdom works unfailingly, while for Ecclesiastes, this is not always or necessarily the case. Wisdom does not guarantee prosperity, health, or happiness. Good things and bad things happen to the wise, the unwise, the just, and the unjust. Through this understanding, Ecclesiastes demonstrates biblical diversity, especially when contrasted with Proverbs and its perception of wisdom.[38]

The book of Job illustrates the theology of Ecclesiastes. Job is a righteous man who faces extreme suffering in practically every regard. His friends offer him theological explanations for his suffering. In theory, many of their theological conclusions cohere with Hebrew Bible theology. Enns says that "one would not blink if one were reading Deuteronomy and came across such statements [from Job's friends]."[39] According to Enns, Deuteronomy's theology and the Bible itself cannot be taken rigidly—like the wisdom statements in Proverbs, there is a context to Hebrew Bible theology, and Job exemplifies this.[40]

The historical texts demonstrate theological diversity as well. The Deuteronomistic history books (1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings) were written primarily for exilic audiences, partially to explain Israel's exile. However, the book of Chronicles was written for post-exilic audiences to explore what Israel should do and how Israel should behave considering her return from exile. Moreover, Enns highlights four different emphases in Chronicles, compared to Samuel-Kings. First, Chronicles fails to mention David's sin with Bathsheba. Second, it ignores Israel's political power struggles during David's reign, emphasizing unity among Israelites instead. Third, it focuses on Solomon's role in constructing the temple. Fourth, it stresses retribution for individual sins. As such, God will not punish post-exilic Israel for the sins of their pre-exilic forebears.[41]

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[35] Enns, *Inspiration*, 74.
[36] Enns, *Inspiration*, 76.
[37] Enns provides the example of Ecclesiastes 7:3 and 8:15, with verse 7:3 saying that sorrow is better than laughter and verse 8:15 commending people to enjoy life. See Enns, *Inspiration*, 77.
[38] Enns, *Inspiration*, 77-80.
[39] Enns, *Inspiration*, 82.
[40] Enns, *Inspiration*, 80-82.
[41] Enns, *Inspiration*, 83-65.

We also see diversity in biblical laws. Even with the Ten Commandments, there are slight differences between two separate accounts—Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Granted, these differences are small and primarily relate to word changes, but the fact that any differences exist is notable. According to Enns, these differences imply that biblical laws are situational, depending on the context.[42] The same is true with other laws, such as the release of slaves,[43] Passover laws,[44] sacrificial practices,[45] and Gentile laws.[46]

Additionally, Hebrew Bible theology concerning God is anything but uniform, and the same is true of the New Testament. Some parts of the Hebrew Bible present God as the only true God,[47] while others present God as one among many *gods*.[48] According to Enns, Christians should interpret the Bible in light of "the context of the polytheistic cultures of the Ancient Near East."[49] At various times in the Hebrew Bible, God changes his mind. For example, in Genesis 6:5-8, God grieves that he made humankind, and in Exodus 33:15-17, Moses succeeds in changing God's mind, stopping God from wiping out Israel. According to Enns, these passages and others like them portray God in a human-like fashion, which is quite different from typical understandings of God. For Enns, Christians must look at the God that Scripture describes, even if that means looking at apparent contradictions and tensions.[50]

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[42] Enns, *Inspiration*, 85-89.
[43] In Exodus 21:4, 7, only male slaves may go free in the year of Jubilee, while in Deuteronomy 15:12 both male and female slaves may be released every seven years. See Enns, *Inspiration*, 90.
[44] Enns argues that while Exodus 12:12-13 states that the Passover lamb should not be boiled, the Hebrew term וּבִשַּׁלְתָּ in Deuteronomy 16:7 can be translated as "boiled." Thus, in contradiction with Exodus 12:12-13, Deuteronomy 16:7 says *to boil* the Passover Lamb. Additionally, Enns argues that 2 Chronicles 35:13 attempts to reconcile this apparent contradiction by saying that the meal was to be boiled in the fire, according to his translation. See Enns, *Inspiration*, 91-92.
[45] Enns says that sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible is situational. Different standards apply for different situations. For example, sacrifice is presented as an archaic practice required by Israel to display its faithfulness to God in many passages, such as Exodus 27:1-8, Leviticus 1-7, Genesis 4:4, and Genesis 15:9-10. However, later prophets question and critique the sacrificial practices of Israel, such as in Amos 5:21-27, Micah 6:6-8, Isaiah 1:11-14, and Jeremiah 7:22-23. Moreover, for Christians the practice of sacrifice is obsolete, given the final sacrifice of Jesus. See Enns, *Inspiration*, 93-95.
[46] The Hebrew Bible presents various perspectives related to Gentiles and Israel's association with them. In passages like Deuteronomy 23:3, Ezra 9, and Nehemiah 13:1-3, Israel's association with Gentiles is limited and at times prohibited. For example, Nehemiah 13:1-3 bans intermarriage between Israelites and Gentiles. At other times, however, these bans and prohibitions are ignored, such as with Ruth's (a Moabite) marriage to Boaz. See Enns, *Inspiration*, 95-97.
[47] Enns argues that God is presented as the only God in Isaiah, Jeremiah, 1 Kings, and certain Psalms, like Psalm 4:2, 40:4, and 106:28. See Enns, *Inspiration,* 99.
[48]Examples provided by Enns are Psalm 86:8, 95:3, 96:4, 97:9, 135:5, 136:2. See Enns, *Inspiration*, 98-99.
[49] Enns, *Inspiration*, 98.
[50] Enns, *Inspiration*, 103-107.

Enns concludes chapter three by reiterating that the Hebrew Bible should be accepted as it is and not how readers want it to be, which means accepting the prevalence of diversity in history, morality, wisdom, and theology. He also notes that modern interpreters are not the first to wrestle with Scripture's diversity—it has always been part of Scriptural interpretation.[51] As it is, Scripture lacks a "superficial unity"; instead, it is filled with tensions and seeming contradictions, providing Christians with a plethora of questions and potential problems. According to Enns, the unity of Scripture is subtle and profound. For him, "It is a unity that should ultimately be sought in Christ himself, the living word."[52] Enns' incarnational analogy further expresses this unity, where "the Bible is God's word in written form; Christ is God's word in human form."[53] As a product of humanity and God, the Bible for Enns is not devoid of flaws and diversity.[54]

The New Testament (Enns, Ch. 4-5)

In the fourth chapter, Enns discusses the hermeneutical practices of New Testament (NT) authors, particularly those relating to the Hebrew Bible. We cannot compare the hermeneutics of NT authors with contemporary biblical scholarship, where scholars apply rigorous methodologies to determine the most authentic interpretation, complete with contextualizations based on historical and cultural contexts. In response to apostolic (or NT) hermeneutics, evangelicals often react with apologetic explanations, arguing that the NT authors interpreted the Hebrew Bible correctly. According to Enns, others argue that NT authors had no intention of interpreting the Hebrew Bible based on its contexts; rather, they intended to interpret the texts in light of Jesus and his life. Moreover, other evangelicals argue that NT authors were inspired by God and could thus interpret as they pleased since their interpretations came straight from God.

In contrast, Enns argues that Christians must understand the NT authors in their cultural and historical contexts, including understanding the interpretive practices of apostolic hermeneutics. This approach will not solve all issues related to NT authors and their interpretations; but the goal is to understand the problems, not to remove them. According to Enns, the incarnational model provides a means of adequately understanding apostolic hermeneutics.[55]

The apostles and other NT authors wrote during Second Temple Judaism, a period spanning from the Second Temple's construction (circa. 516 BCE) to its destruction (circa. 70 CE). Understanding the culture and history of this period is vital for correctly understanding apostolic hermeneutics.[56] Two methods of grasping these hermeneutics are (1) looking at "innerbiblical"[57] interpretations and (2) looking at other Second Temple (ST) literature, such as apocryphal writings and the Dead Sea Scrolls. We can find the earliest examples of "innerbiblical" interpretation in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Chronicles is a re-interpretation of Samuel and Kings, where theology and Israel's current situation are the primary concern.

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[51] Enns, *Inspiration*, 107.
[52] Enns, *Inspiration*, 110.
[53] Enns, *Inspiration*, 110.
[54] Enns, *Inspiration*, 108-111.
[55] Enns, *Inspiration*, 116.
[56] Enns, *Inspiration*, 116-117.
[57] Enns, *Inspiration*, 19.

Another example is Daniel 9:2, which is an interpretation of Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10. In this particular example, an angel reveals to Daniel the deeper meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy; rather than being a literal seventy years (as mentioned in Jeremiah), the correct number of Jeremiah's original prophecy is seventy sevens of years (as mentioned in Daniel). According to Enns, a similar situation occurs in Luke 24:44-48, where Jesus reveals deeper meanings in the Hebrew Bible and his own fulfillment of the Law, the Prophets, and Psalms.[58] In these two examples, one sees the influence of revelation in ST hermeneutical practices.[59] Revelation is also essential in the Dead Sea Scrolls and their interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. Since the Qumran community saw themselves as living in the final days (or *eschaton*), everything written in the Hebrew Bible pertained to their situation. Despite their lack of awareness, the Hebrew Bible authors wrote for the Qumran community, for whom God revealed its true meaning.[60]

Apocryphal writings provide insight into ST hermeneutics. Through the example of the Wisdom of Solomon, Enns highlights accepted ancient interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. For instance, Wisdom 10:3-4 places blame for the global flood on Cain's murder of Abel, though Genesis does not specify this. Moreover, Wisdom 10:12 hints at a narrative in Jubilees, where Esau is killed after a battle between him and Jacob and their respective parties. This story is not found in the Hebrew Bible, even if Genesis 33 mentions an encounter between the two, albeit without bloodshed. Many stories and interpretations can be read into or deduced from the Hebrew Bible and were accepted as true by ST audiences.[61]

According to Enns, the New Testament, as a product of Second Temple Judaism, reflects similar hermeneutical practices.[62] Now that Enns has demonstrated ST hermeneutical practices, he illustrates them in NT hermeneutics. He does so by looking at interpretive methods and traditions used by NT authors. NT authors had varying goals, but their goals are different from contemporary evangelicals, who approach the Bible apologetically.[63] Enns provides Matthew 2:15, 2 Corinthians 6:2, Galatians 3:16, 29, Romans 11:26-27, and Hebrews 3:7-11 to illustrate how NT authors use and interpret the Hebrew Bible.[64] For example, Matthew 2:15 quotes from Hosea 11:1, using Hosea as a prophecy for Jesus' time in Egypt, even though the context of Hosea 11:1-3 concerns the past and not messianic prophecy. For Matthew, the real meaning of Hosea 11:1, unbeknownst to Hosea himself, is to predict Jesus' flight to Egypt and eventual return to Israel.[65] In other examples, NT authors employ interpretive methods to capitalize on linguistic ambiguities (i.e., Paul's use of "seed" from the Hebrew Bible in Galatians 3:16)[66] and to add words for theological purposes (such as Hebrews 3:7-11 and its use of Psalm 95:9-10).[67]

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[58] Enna, *Inspiration*, 118.
[59] Enns, *Inspiration*, 117-118.
[60] Enns, *Inspiration*, 128-131.
[61] Enns, *Inspiration*, 121-128.
[62] Enns, *Inspiration*, 131-132.
[63] This is another instance of Enns generalizing evangelical hermeneutics without providing specific examples.
[64] Enns, *Inspiration*, 132-142.
[65] Enns, *Inspiration*, 132-134.
[66] Enns, *Inspiration*, 136-138.
[67] Enns, *Inspiration*, 139-142.

According to Enns, NT authors employ interpretive traditions in their hermeneutics. By interpretive traditions, Enns refers to collective understandings of the Hebrew Bible, which at times go beyond the text and refer to understandings that became accepted among interpretive communities, such as in the example above related to Esau's battle with Jacob—a story not found directly in Genesis. Another famous example is Jude, verse 9, where the angel Michael disputes with the devil concerning Moses' body. This story is not in the Hebrew Bible, yet Jude mentions it as a seemingly well-known fact among his readers.[68] Elsewhere, Stephen comments on the Egyptian education of Moses, though this likewise not in the Hebrew Bible (Acts 7:21-22);[69] Paul mentions names found in Qumran texts absent from the Hebrew Bible (2 Timothy 3:8);[70] and Paul goes beyond Genesis by describing the moveable rock that followed Israel in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:4).[71]

Enns considers both the interpretive methods and traditions of the NT authors to be no different than other ST writings, many of which are considered non-canonical. For Enns, what makes apostolic hermeneutics unique is their re-interpretation of the Hebrew Bible based on the Christ event. For NT authors, Christ is the direction to which Israel, its history, and its writings were heading. Enns explains this phenomenon by saying that "the New Testament authors take the Old Testament out of *one* [Enns' emphasis] context, that of the original human author, and place it into *another* [Enns' emphasis] context, the one that represents the final goal to which Israel's story has been moving."[72] Enns describes this hermeneutical system as "christotelic," which he differentiates from Christocentric and Christological readings.[73] This hermeneutical system centers on the *telos*, or the end goal. To read the Bible "christotelically" is thus to read viewing Christ as the end and epitome of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, apostolic hermeneutics function "ecclesiotelically," or as the Church also being the end goal of the Hebrew Bible.[74]

According to Enns, the use of ST hermeneutics by NT authors creates a theological and interpretive conundrum. Should Christians follow the example of apostolic hermeneutics when interpreting the Hebrew Bible? Indeed, doing so would violate basic contemporary hermeneutical principles—specifically those related to contextualization and to understanding the author's original intent. If, however, NT authors were inspired by God, does this give them the authority to ignore contextualization? For Enns, it is vital to recognize the historical distance between ST and contemporary hermeneutics. He recommends creating a distinction between hermeneutical goals and methods. The goal of apostolic hermeneutics is "the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ."[75] Enns argues that contemporary evangelicals should share this

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[68] Enns, *Inspiration*, 144-145.
[69] Enns, *Inspiration*, 146-147.
[70] Enns, *Inspiration*, 143.
[71] Enns, *Inspiration*, 149-151.
[72] Enns, *Inspiration*, 153.
[73] Enns, *Inspiration*, 154.
[74] Enns, *Inspiration*, 154-155. Enns notes, however, that "christotelic" and "ecclesiotelic" hermeneutics are not the only lenses through which NT authors read and interpreted the Hebrew Bible. NT authors were nonetheless ST interpreters and were thus not centrally concerned with the original contexts of the Hebrew Bible like interpreters typically are today. See Enns, *Inspiration,* 155-156.
[75] Enns, *Inspiration*, 158.

goal.[76] For Enns, the grammatical-historical methods are the means of protecting hermeneutics from straying too far from the original contexts while maintaining the "christotelic" goal of apostolic hermeneutics.[77] Nonetheless, Enns argues that for evangelicals, hermeneutical goals should not be subservient to methods.[78]

Enns concludes chapter four by reflecting on contemporary readers and why they interpret the Bible. For Enns, interpretation is both a science and an art. While uncovering the original meaning is and should be the goal of interpretation, Enns believes that there are more profound levels of interpretation. Moreover, interpretation is not solely an individual act; it is also communal. Communities and groups have interpreted texts in unique ways throughout history and around the world. For Enns, what makes Christian interpretation unique is its focus on "The reality of the crucified and risen Christ…"[79]

In the final chapter, Enns reiterates the usefulness and relevance of the incarnational model. For Enns, this model allows contemporary interpreters to wrestle with archaeological, historical, and textual challenges while respecting and upholding a high view of biblical authority. This model is not subservient to the historical-critical method, though it reckons with scholarship seriously. Moreover, interpretation is not stagnant; it grows and changes as history progresses, and communities of interpretation evolve. Finally, Enns urges readers to avoid contention and to approach challenges to the Bible with an open mind. Christians should thoroughly consider new data, even when its implications challenge established traditions. And for Enns, all Christians should approach Scripture this way, no matter their theological affiliations.[80]

Responses to *Inspiration and Incarnation*

Many responded negatively to the authors discussed in the previous two chapters; however, with *Inspiration and Incarnation*, the responses fueled more than just critical reviews. As mentioned earlier, *Inspiration and Incarnation* led to Enns' departure from Westminster Theological Seminary three years after its publication. Right up to his departure, Enns' book created controversy. It caused division among the board and faculty of Westminster, resulting in several board members and one faculty member leaving the seminary.[81] According to one student, donors withheld funding until the seminary acted to remove Peter Enns.[82] The controversy also led to conservative scholars sending board members critiques of Enns with the hope of having him removed.[83]

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[76] Enns, *Inspiration*, 158.
[77] Enns, *Inspiration*, 159.
[78] Enns, *Inspiration*, 160.
[79] Enns, *Inspiration*, 160-163.
[80] Enns, *Inspiration*, 167-173.
[81] See Brandon Withrow, "How the Westminster Theological Seminary Came to Define Fundamentalism for Me" *The Huffington Post*, Last updated September 28, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-westminster-theologic_b_5624650
[82] Withrow, "How the Westminster Theological Seminary Came to Define Fundamentalism for Me."
[83] For example, an earlier version of James W. Scott's "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, With Special Reference to Peter Enns Part I: Inspiration and Its Implications" was

To understand the reasons for this controversy, I must briefly revisit Westminster's history and its stance on biblical inerrancy. Westminster was formed in 1929 by J. Gresham Machen, who left his teaching position at Princeton Theological Seminary. Machen and several other faculty members split from Princeton to found Westminster, believing that Princeton was straying from orthodox Christianity—which to them is Reformed Theology[84] and its theories of biblical inerrancy. Westminster, then, was established as a bastion of Reformed education, created to train students to defend the Bible from liberalism.[85]

In 1936, the seminary established an oath that faculty should not "inculcate, teach or insinuate anything" against the Westminster Confession of 1646. Amidst the Enns controversy, critics claimed that he had violated this oath, and they sought to remove him as a result.[86] However, historically, the removal of faculty at Westminster was a rare occurrence until the presidency of Peter A. Lillbeck, under whom three faculty were removed: Samuel T. Logan, Peter Enns, and Douglas Green. According to Brandon Withrow, Christian Right political movements in the United States support Lillbeck, and Withrow suspects that this support has caused the increase of faculty removal.[87]

Regardless, *Inspiration and Incarnation* is not controversial because of its actual content; rather it is controversial because its author is a faculty member of Westminster. According to James W. Scott, *Inspiration and Incarnation* would have been far less controversial had Enns taught at Fuller Theological Seminary, an evangelical school much more accepting of diverse theological positions. Indeed, Enns presents nothing new. His central analogy between the Bible and the incarnation is not unique.[88] Christians have highlighted this analogy for a very long time, and Enns' arguments concerning the phenomena of Scripture are equally not new.

This chapter can hardly exhaust the many critical responses to *Inspiration and Incarnation*. Nevertheless, the responses illustrate the presuppositional divide between biblical

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sent to voting members of the seminary in February 2008 with the hope of swaying their decisions. The seminary decided to suspend Enns in March 26, 2008 until May 23. See James W. Scott, "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns Part 1 Inspiration and Its Implications." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 71, No. 1, (2009), 130.

[84] Reformed theology refers to Calvinism and its associated theological tradition, despite the fact that John Calvin was one of various leaders in the Protestant Reformation. For more information, see Alasdair Heron, "Calvinism," *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology.* Ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 245-247.

[85] See "Our History," *Westminster Theological Seminary*, accessed July 31, 2020, https://www.wts.edu/history/

[86] See David O'Reilly, "Bible professor suspended over teachings," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 10, 2008, https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/homepage/20080710_Bible_professor_suspended_over_teachings.html

[87] See Withrow, "How the Westminster Theological Seminary Came to Define Fundamentalism for Me."

[88] In the "Further Readings" section listed in Chapter 1 of *Inspiration and Incarnation*, Enns lists the following as examples of Christians who promoted the incarnational analogy: James Orr, John Rogerson, J. Paterson Smythe, and B, B, Warfield. See Enns, *Inspiration,* 21-22.

scholarship and many inerrantists. They range from critiquing Enns' analogy, methodology, and doctrine to rebutting his proposed examples of errors in the Bible.[89] Since the purpose of my thesis is to examine the inerrancy debate, I focus primarily on critiques of Enns' analogy, methodology, and doctrine; however, when warranted, I appeal to specific examples of rebuttals towards problem passages in order to demonstrate the methods and tools of inerrantist apologetics.

I focus mainly on critiques from James W. Scott, whose position compares to critical inerrancy. Scott is quite accepting of critical methodologies, but only methodologies that do not undermine inerrancy. Like Dockery, Scott applies inerrancy to the original autographs and to God's intended meaning, which he argues may only be revealed in the future. I focus on Scott's work since he frames the issues rather well, not only issues in *Inspiration and Incarnation* but also issues between inerrantists and biblical scholars.[90] Nonetheless, I note instances where other critics make arguments and critiques similar to those of Scott. More than framing the problems well, Scott also provides a fair and accurate portrayal of Enns' work, despite his adamant disagreement with *Inspiration and Incarnation*. Scott believes that many critics failed to "get to the heart of the theological problem [in *Inspiration and Incarnation*], perhaps because it is endemic in modern biblical studies."[91] As Scott illustrates, there is a severe disconnect between contemporary, secular biblical studies and inerrancy.

Scott begins by explaining two methods for developing doctrines of Scripture. In the first method, scholars develop doctrines based on what the Bible claims about itself from passages describing divine inspiration (i.e., 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:16-21, among others). The second method develops a theory based on the phenomena of Scripture, or the data contained in and surrounding the Bible (i.e., historical contexts or whether there are discrepancies among the disparate biblical texts). The first method purports to examine what Scripture "claims to be," while the second method purports to examine what Scripture "actually is." If there is no distinction between what Scripture says about itself and the phenomena of Scripture, then there is no need for debate; however, inerrantists like Scott claim that Scripture describes itself as inerrant, creating a conflict between inerrantist and non-inerrantist biblical scholars. Herein also lies the primary contention between Enns and many of his evangelical critics: Enns focusses on the phenomena of Scripture, while his inerrantist critics focus on Scripture's self-attestations.[92]

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[89] One should note, however, that Enns does not specifically describe his examples as errors. Rather, he tactfully refers to them as diversity, as noted by Beale. See G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 40-44. For examples of Enns referring to apparent errors as diversity, see Enns, *Inspiration*, 80, 107, 108.

[90] To argue against Enns, Scott produces his critiques in two parts. In Part I, Scott develops his Reformed theory of inspiration and contrasts it with the views of Enns in *Inspiration and Incarnation*, and then in Part II he rebuts several problem passages mentioned by Enns, attempting to demonstrate reasonable explanations for apparent errors in the Bible. I mostly focus on Part I.

[91] Scott, "Part I," 130.

[92] Scott, "Part I," 131.

According to Scott, J. Paterson Smyth[93] proposed a middle road, arguing that perhaps it was not the claims of Scripture that were at odds with its phenomena but our understanding of them. As such, Scripture need not be without error to be divinely inspired. However, Scott argues that this position defies the historic Christian doctrine of Scripture and Scripture's self-attestation. According to Scott, Smyth "denies that Scripture has a doctrine of inspiration, that the church has a doctrine of inspiration, and that the former is the basis for the latter."[94] Scott then argues that there is no conflict between the Bible's self-attestation and its phenomena. If the data contradicts the Bible's self-attestation, Christians should reject biblical authority entirely.[95] For Scott, "We must either accept or reject the biblical doctrine of inspiration; the notion that doctrine can be modified to fit the data of Scripture is not only improper but nonsensical."[96]

According to Scott, Enns fails to investigate the Bible's self-attestation regarding inspiration. Enns, Scott argues, demonstrates his distrust and disbelief in Scripture by failing to discuss Scripture's claims about itself.[97] Scott says, "The proper way to proceed, contrary to Smyth and Enns, is first to determine what doctrine of inspiration is taught in Scripture about itself, and see what implications that doctrine has for our handling of Scripture."[98] In other words, one must first adopt the presupposition that Scripture's claims about itself are valid, which is allegedly a claim derived from Scripture. For Scott, Christians should accept this presupposition without reservation and conduct their interpretations based entirely on it. As a result, any supposed error cannot be an error; otherwise, Scripture's authority is undermined. To counteract supposed errors, Christians must determine whether seemingly erroneous passages "can be reasonably explained in a manner that is consistent with that doctrine [derived from Scripture]."[99] Scott says that this approach is "the only one that is consistent with a commitment to Scripture as the authoritative word of God."[100] Scott then critiques Enns' use of analogy for developing doctrines of Scripture. For Scott, the Bible demonstrates an imperfect analogy between the incarnation and Scripture through its didactic passages; however, Scott argues that we cannot ignore didactic passages and insist on a doctrine of Scripture developed directly from

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[93] This is the same J. Patterson Smyth that I mentioned in Chapter 1, related to early typologies in the inerrancy debate.
[94] Scott, "Part I," 132.
[95] Scott, "Part I," 132.
[96] Scott, "Part I," 133.
[97] Scott, "Part I," 134.
[98] Scott, "Part I," 137. One should note, however, that Scott provides four reasons why this approach is preferable to developing a theory of inspiration derived from data. First, he says that all literature should be approached by understanding the text based on what the author says, since it is important to understand the author's perspective. Second, he argues that there are many passages in the Bible dealing with the inspiration of Scripture. Third, for Scott, Scripture's teaching on its inspiration is "quite clear in its main outline." He then argues that the data of Scripture is open to interpretation. Fourth, Scott appeals to the "believer's 'intuitive' sense, from the internal testimony of the Spirit, that his Bible is the word of God and thus true." See Scott, "Part I," 137-138.
[99] Scott, "Part I," 137.
[100] Scott, "Part I," 138.

analogy, as Enns has done, where one emphasizes certain traits about inspiration based on analogy alone.[101]

Several other authors share these concerns, critiquing Enns for his focus on analogy. Many contend that Enns' incarnational analogy concerns biblical error and Christology.[102] If Christ is sinless yet fully God and fully human, what does that say about Scripture? Should it then be without error, just as Christ is without sin?[103] This dilemma begs pondering whether sin should be equated with error and whether all errors are also sins.[104] Indeed, the analogy is not without its problems, just as Enns himself admits.[105] For Scott, arguments from analogy "can only be suggestive," since philosophically speaking, analogies are invalid forms of argumentation. According to Scott, this is enough to conclude that "an analogy is inherently a precarious foundation upon which to build a doctrine of Scripture."[106]

Furthermore, Scott and several other critics note Enns' failure to provide a detailed explanation of both inspiration and incarnation. Scott says, "although 'inspiration' is the first word in the title of [Enns's] book, he offers no explanation of the divine act of inspiration…"[107] A common criticism is that Enns fails to explain how the Bible is divine—spending most of his time exploring the Bible's human dimension.[108] And this is true; apart from a brief section

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[101] Scott, "Part I," 139.

[102] See, for example, Ken Essau, "Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament." *Crux* 43, no. 1 (Spr 2007), 46–48; Leonard Coppes, "Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament." *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006), 291–292; Christopher Heard, "Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament." *Restoration Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2006), 119–20; Matthew R. Schlimm, "Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62, no. 2 (2009), 240–42; D. A. Carson, "Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review." *Trinity Journal* 27, no. 1 (Spr 2006): 32; Beale, 40.

[103] Coppes directly correlates error with sin by describing Enns' position as accepting that the "Bible is both divine and human, 'with sin.'" See Coppes, 292.

[104] Carlos R. Bovell notes in agreement with Cornelius Plantinga that sin is a theological and not a moral concept. He continues that "sin is an offense, a severing of relations, not only against another or oneself, but also, and especially, against God." On the other hand, Bovell defines error as failing to correspond to truth or to facts. In this light, he argues that sin does not equate with error. The two are only analogous in the sense of failing to live up to a standard, be it God's standard or the standard of truth. He then concludes that in comparison with the importance of Christ's sinlessness, "whether the Bible meets the standard of corresponding to reality does not have anywhere near the same urgency." However, for Bovell this demonstrates an even further problem with the entire analogy between the incarnation and Scripture. See Carlos C. Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals*, (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 2007), 75-79. Kenton Sparks makes a similar argument. See Sparks, 252-253.

[105] See Enns, *Inspiration,* 19-21; 168.

[106] See Scott, "Part I," 139-140.

[107] Scott, "Part I," 146.

[108] See, for example, Adam P. Groza, "Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2005), 86–87; Heard, 120; Schlimm, 241; Beale, 39-40. Using the theological controversies of Docetism and Arianism,

discussing the analogy, Enns lacks an in-depth description of his text's core concepts.[109] Indeed, we can argue that Enns should have spent more time explaining his understanding of inspiration and incarnation. After all, language is a crucial aspect of theology and religion.[110] Scott concludes that "Enns is so vague on… the very point of inspiration itself—that it is difficult to know what his view actually is."[111]

To fill the gap, Scott provides two alternate and prominent theories of inspiration, both of which he sees as competing with Enns' vague representation. The two theories are derived from the conviction that Scripture is both human and divine. Scott has no contention with this view, yet the theories he offers differ substantially from Enns' theories.[112] The first theory is verbal inspiration, which many critics portray as mechanical, where human authors acted merely as instruments or writing tools for God. However, according to this theory and others like it, God is the actual author of Scripture.[113] But verbal inspiration often entails that the Holy Spirit provided the words directly to the human authors, all the while "in a fashion that was appropriate in his [the author's] circumstances."[114] Some forms of this theory accommodate the authors' thoughts and vocabulary while ensuring the communication of God's own words and intentions. As we saw in Chapter 1, mechanical inspiration is a rare theory within evangelicalism, most typically held by evangelical fundamentalists, while more nuanced forms are held by absolute inerrantists and thus found within the CSBI.

The second theory is organic inspiration, which is a reaction to verbal inspiration and its failure to accommodate human authors.[115] This second theory presents inspiration as God directing the authors' life and situations to train and prepare them for the composition of Scripture. In this way, God formulated the authors' thoughts by leading and directing their lives in order to produce the Bible that God desired. This act of providence, according to Scott, makes God the actual author of Scripture without dismissing human authorship.[116] In contrast to Enns' apparent vagueness, Scott presents these two theories as demonstrating that "the words of the written text are the word of God."[117]

Carson argues that Enns spends a lot of time fighting scriptural Docetism and not enough time fighting scriptural Arianism. He continues that Enns focusses on the problems and dangers of the Right but not on the those of the Left. See Carson, "Three More Books on the Bible," 30-31. Additionally, Scott argues that "Enns has challenged the authority of Jesus…" by implying that even Jesus at times interpreted the Hebrew Bible incorrectly. See Scott, "Part I," 178-179.

[109] See Enns, *Inspiration*, 17-21.

[110] For more on the importance of language in religion, see the discussion on discourse in James S. Bielo, *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 14-16.

[111] Scott, "Part I," 147.

[112] Scott, "Part I," 140-142.

[113] Scott, "Part I," 143.

[114] Scott, "Part I," 143.

[115] Scott, "Part I," 143.

[116] Scott, "Part I," 144. Article VIII of the CSBI also affirms the uniqueness of the human authors and denies that God "overrode their personalities." See CSBI, 3.

[117] Scott, "Part I," 148.

At the root of these two theories is the conviction that God cannot and does not lie. According to Scott, "God is omniscient, truthful, and immutable."[118] This means that God knows everything, and thus—for Scott and other inerrantists—God cannot say something is true when he knows it to be false, or vice versa. God is also immutable, making him eternally consistent. God's word should then likewise be consistent since his word is an extension of himself. For Scott, truth is "that which is real."[119] He says that "A statement of truth… corresponds to the reality of God and his creation,"[120] since God is the creator of all things and therefore of reality itself. This view then makes God the standard for objective truth and reality, and thus God's word is objective. Ultimately, the Bible—God's word—can *not* contain error. If the Bible appears to err, there *must* be a way to explain the apparent error through reasonable argumentation.[121]

According to Scott, Enns does not believe in the Bible's veracity. For Scott, Enns' Bible—at least Enns's perception of the Bible—can not be the word of God since Enns is comfortable with God speaking untruthfully.[122] Scott then demonstrates that Enns has moved from attempting to redefine inerrancy to a position akin to limited inerrancy, where the Bible is inerrant only in its teaching but not in its historical and scientific claims.[123] Scott concludes that "If Enns is correct about the Bible containing erroneous statements, then either it is not the word of God, or God is a liar."[124]

Understanding how some inerrantists defend the Bible from perceived errors requires knowing the relationship between God's mind and the minds of the human authors. Scott claims that Scripture provides a window into God's thoughts, albeit a window tinted by humanity's languages and limitations.[125] Still, for Scott, the biblical texts' cultural, historical, and natural contexts did not cause errors.[126] In response to supposed errors, then, inerrantists like Scott often employ various apologetical tools and methods to remove apparent and purported errors. Scott presents several examples, such as accommodation, harmonization, and appealing to ignorance. In Scott's understanding of accommodation, God can use words like σεληνιάζομαι in Matthew 4:24 and 17:15 to describe epileptic people without actually meaning that people are "moonstruck" as the Greek word implies.[127] Scott also argues that God accommodates himself by "speaking phenomenologically" and using language that describes the world as it appears to the human eye. For example, when the Bible speaks of the sun rising or setting, Scott argues that this language is not erroneous since it describes how the world appears. God, according to Scott, does not speak in error when he speaks phenomenologically.[128]

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[118] Scott, "Part I," 148.
[119] Scott, "Part I," 149.
[120] Scott, "Part I," 149.
[121] Scott, "Part I," 149.
[122] Scott, "Part I," 152.
[123] Scott, "Part I," 152-154.
[124] Scott, "Part I," 155.
[125] Scott, "Part I," 155.
[126] Scott, "Part I," 156.
[127] Scott, "Part I," 159.
[128] Scott, "Part I," 160.

Scott's understanding of accommodation differs drastically from that of Enns. For Enns, God accommodates himself to the human authors and their faulty worldviews, using their paradigms and myths to communicate spiritual and theological truth. Enns extends this understanding to Jesus, who he sees as being fully encultured, having emptied himself through *kenosis* by taking on the form of a man (Philippians 2:7).[129] At least two perspectives result from Jesus' kenosis and enculturation. Either Jesus was aware of the mistaken paradigms of Second Temple Judaism, or the process of kenosis removed his omniscience, which enabled Jesus to adopt mistaken Jewish beliefs, such as Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch—a belief of which many biblical scholars are highly suspicious.[130] The first option, for Scott, is tantamount to making Jesus "a liar and a sinner," whereas the second option merely shifts the blame to God, since Jesus is said to have spoken from God (Scott notes the following as examples: Luke 4:1, 18; 9:35; John 3:34; 8:26; Heb. 1:2).[131] Scott contrasts these views against Reformed orthodoxy. He says that Enns sacrifices "the integrity of God in order to preserve… a high view of Scripture."[132] For Scott, this view is worse than liberalism, which does the reverse by sacrificing a high view of Scripture to "preserve the integrity of God."

Furthermore, Scott critiques advanced notions of accommodation that separate teaching and theology from the claims of Scripture. For Scott, the teaching of a given passage cannot be separated from its claims, even if the claims concern history and science. If Scripture says God did something or created something in a certain way, we cannot separate God's action from the historical event—i.e., in the case of the Genesis creation story.[133]

Scott resolves the hermeneutical problems associated with apostolic interpretations by separating God's authorial intentions and those of human authors. Concerning the "Love your neighbour as yourself" passage (Matthew 22:34-40), Scott asks whether God and the human authors understand "neighbours" and "love" in the same way. He argues that God, by his very nature, has a deeper understanding of both concepts.[134] In this light, the human authors were not necessarily aware of God's authorial intention. Therefore, when biblical scholars search for original meanings and contexts, their search is restricted to human intentions and not the intention of the *actual* author, God.[135]

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[129] Scott, "Part I," 161.

[130] Though Baruch Spinoza popularized the doubting of Mosaic authorship, there were examples of doubters before him, such as Abraham Ibn Ezra. The doubts of modern scholars led to the formation of the documentary hypothesis instigated by Julius Wellhausen. This hypothesis posits authorship and composition by various sources and authors, commonly referred to as the Jahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P) sources. See Pauline A. Viviano, "Source Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 35-57.

[131] Scott, "Part I," 161-162.

[132] Scott, "Part I," 163.

[133] Scott, "Part I," 167.

[134] Scott, "Part I," 168.

[135] Scott, "Part I," 170. Nonetheless, Scott argues that grammatical-historical exegesis can help as a first approximation of God's intended meaning. See Scott, "Part I," 171.

To best approximate God's intended meaning, familiarity with ancient languages is vital; however, for Scott, interpreters must know God's use of ancient languages, which is only found in Scripture. Additionally, the Holy Spirit provides believers with interpretive illumination.[136] For Scott, interpreters can trust that seemingly erroneous passages only appear false because of the human author's limited perspectives. He cites, for example, the geocentric view conveyed in Psalms 93:1 and 104:5. Since the geocentric view is erroneous, we can be sure that God intended something deeper. And it is this deeper and divine meaning that is the *inerrant* word of God.[137]

God's intended meaning unfolds over time. According to Scott, Scripture's true meaning becomes apparent as discoveries alter our understanding of particular words and passages. He claims that authors were not aware of how God intended their words to be understood; however, future audiences will understand them since Scripture for Scott was authored by a being who exists outside time and is not bound by historical conventions.[138] Therefore, according to Scott, apostolic hermeneutics are correct since God intended the Christian meaning when he authored the Hebrew Bible. This view is fundamentally distinct from that of Enns and secular biblical scholars.[139] Scott views even the most stretched apostolic interpretations of the Hebrew Bible as part of their intended meaning, whereas for Enns some NT interpretations are patently false. According to Scott, Enns is "making God out to be a liar," since for Scott, what the Bible says is also what God says. If the NT authors incorrectly interpreted the Hebrew Bible, God inspired a false interpretation and is thus guilty of lying.[140]

Worse still for Scott, "Enns's [sic.] view of Christ, if carried through consistently, destroys the entire Christian faith."[141] Enns insists that Christ was fully encultured as a Palestinian Jew and was thus susceptible to cultural errors. This insistence, Scott argues, makes it possible that Christ also fell victim to the sins of his time and culture. According to Scott, Christ could only remain sinless if God controlled Christ's human nature, and if God was in control but allowed Christ to err, then God himself is guilty of lying. And this, for Scott, cannot be the case; what Christ says *must* be without error.[142]

Like with Davis and Smith, Enns is charged with failing to represent inerrantist views properly, and Scott is not alone in making this claim.[143] G. K. Beale spends much of his text, *The*

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[136] Scott, "Part I," 169; 171.
[137] Scott also applies this intention qualification to the Bible's original audiences. See Scott, "Part I," 170.
[138] Scott, "Part I," 171.
[139] Scott, "Part I," 171-172.
[140] Scott, "Part I," 173.
[141] Scott, "Part I," 181.
[142] Ibid, 180-181.
[143] According to K. L. Phillips, Enns' representation of inerrancy is "little more than a foil for Enns' own proposal." See K. L. Phillips, "Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 5 (June 2016): 13–14. Coppes notes that Enns's bibliography is a little lopsided with "non-evangelical, non-Reformed, and neo-evangelical writers…" He also notes that many evangelicals have already answered Enns' problem passages, yet Enns does not engage their work. See Coppes,

Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority, illustrating the breadth and depth of evangelical scholarship that counters Enns' proposed problem passages. Beale's text resulted from a prolonged exchange with Enns regarding *Inspiration and Incarnation*. Like Enns, Beal is a biblical scholar, albeit a conservative biblical scholar who adheres to inerrancy. Beale's response began with two articles arguing against Enns' problem passages and highlighting countervailing arguments from other scholars, many of whom are evangelicals. Seeing that his writings produced substantial responses from Enns and created a debate regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture, Beale decided to collate the discussion into a book.[144]

According to Beale, Enns does not cite significant conservative scholarship related to the Bible's supposed problem passages. For Beale, there is a distinction between caricaturized fundamentalism and genuine conservative scholarship, mostly ignored by Enns.[145] He charges Enns with constructing strawmen based on anecdotal experiences, possibly from lay interpreters and fringe scholars he has met. According to Beale, Enns repeats a pattern "where [he] erects the position of his opponents in such extreme form that no reputable conservative scholar in disagreement with his general views could identify him- or herself."[146] At other points, Enns describes specific conservative arguments as absurd, such as the view that Jesus cleansed the temple twice, without adequately exploring conservative scholars and their primary sources.[147]

In response to Beale, Enns reiterates that his audience is lay evangelicals, which accounts for his sparse use of footnotes. Enns mentions, however, that one of his purposes is to encourage dialogue among evangelical scholars, hoping that they will explore the issues of inspiration and biblical authority at a deeper level.[148] In any case, more than with the authors discussed in my previous two chapters, I believe Enns is guilty of misrepresenting and generalizing inerrantists, which does little to aid his attempts at dialogue.

Lastly, many critics mention the pastoral problems of *Inspiration and Incarnation*, by which critics are referring to the text's implications for lay Christians. Enns states early on that his audience is laypeople—everyday Christians who encounter challenges from biblical scholarship but want to maintain biblical authority. His critics, however, argue that Enns does little to assuage his readers' doubts. For them, Enns potentially increases lay evangelicals' doubts by highlighting problem texts that many Christians possibly never even considered.[149] Carson notes that while Enns claims to be comforting the disturbed, he seems instead to be disturbing the comfortable.[150] Moreover, John Frame insinuates that Enns begins with somewhat

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291-292. Carson notes that Enns fails to mention countervailing sources regarding his comparisons between the Hebrew Bible and ANE literature. See Carson, 34-35.

[144] See Beale, 21-24.

[145] Beale, 54.

[146] Beale, 51.

[147] Beale, 50.

[148] See Peter Enns, "Response to G. K. Beale's Review Article of Inspiration and Incarnation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 313-314.

[149] See Beale, 55; Carson, "Three More Books," 35; Bruce K. Waltke, "Revisiting Inspiration and Incarnation." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 1 (Spr 2009): 83.

[150] See Carson, "Three More Books," 29.

easy problem passages but sneaks in more challenging passages with the purpose of alarming readers. Frame would not recommend this book to "less mature" Christians or to the "seminary level reader," since the text fails at instilling "both humility and confidence in God's word."[151]

The Paradox of Biblical Scholarship in the Inerrancy Debate

Quite clearly, there is a divide between Enns and his opponents, an emphatic presuppositional divide. Westminster Theological Seminary saw the divide as insurmountable, leading to Enns' departure. After all, Enns is committed to biblical scholarship and the conclusions of textual, archaeological, historical, and scientific research, whereas his opponents, most notably Scott, are committed to biblical inerrancy. In Enns' work, we see a nuanced position that accepts error (or diversity as he calls it) while revering the Bible as an authoritative religious text. For Scott and others like him, error is unacceptable since it undermines God's authority and truthfulness.

This divide reveals an interesting paradox in biblical studies and its contribution to the inerrancy debate. In one sense, biblical scholars are the best equipped to engage inerrantists due to their expertise in biblical phenomena. Yet, presuppositional commitments impede biblical scholars from creating a fruitful exchange with dogmatic inerrantists. Scholars like Enns argue that presuppositions should be malleable based on data and research, whereas inerrantists like Scott say that Christians *must* interpret Scripture through inerrancy. For them, all data is to be interpreted through an inerrantist lens; doctrines of Scripture must likewise be defended and not altered. Seemingly, biblical scholars have no room to argue with inerrantists, at least not from within the presuppositions of biblical scholarship.

If there is no room for engagement, what should biblical scholars do? Arguably, biblical scholarship caused contemporary biblical inerrancy. When Princeton Theologians deliberated and described biblical inerrancy during the 19th and early 20th centuries, they reacted against perceived threats to Christianity, and one of the greatest threats was biblical scholarship. Thus, encounters with biblical scholars motivated Princeton Theologians to defend Scripture, but their exchanges then produced further nuance. The idea that inerrancy applies strictly to the original autographs resulted from interactions with biblical scholarship, and we saw in Chapter 1, the more accepting inerrantists are of biblical scholarship, the more nuanced their positions become. Arguably and despite the paradox, biblical scholars impact the inerrancy debate when they engage it.

Without a doubt, some inerrantists remain staunchly committed to inerrancy and its presuppositions, despite efforts from biblical scholars and other researchers. For example, there is little room for argument with inerrantists like Scott, who espouse that biblical scholars only study the human authors' intentions. Scholars have no means of engaging with the ethereal notion of God's intentions, nor with the idea of original autographs. To argue against positions like Scott's, biblical scholars must enter the presuppositional frameworks of their opponents. Indeed, attempting to argue with frameworks drastically different from your own is an arduous endeavour. As we saw in this chapter and the chapters prior, many inerrantists perceive nothing but strawman constructions in their opponents' critiques, even if the scholar in question has

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[151] See John Frame, "Review of Enns' Inspiration and Incarnation," *Poythress*, May 28, 2012, https://frame-poythress.org/review-of-enns-inspiration-and-incarnation/

provided a nuanced and thorough representation. Dogmatic inerrantists have difficulty hearing arguments from opposing presuppositional frameworks. Thus, adopting an opponent's presuppositional framework is essential in the inerrancy debate, especially with absolute inerrantists, adherents of mechanical dictation, and critical inerrantists.

Concluding Thoughts

Though Enns was seemingly unsuccessful in his attempt to dialogue with inerrantists, I must laud him for his efforts. As a biblical scholar, he explained the incompatibility of inerrancy and contemporary research. The doctrine of inerrancy, at least in the forms of mechanical dictation, absolute inerrancy, and critical inerrancy, is at odds with modern findings in textual studies, archaeology, history, and science. Enns is correct in his assessment that doctrines of Scripture should reflect data and research. However, he overlooks many evangelical scholars' efforts who provide alternate conceptions of inerrancy and biblical authority, like those explored in my first chapter. Enns likewise fails to provide a detailed description and explanation of inerrancy. Moreover, he does not present examples of inerrantists and their positions. His descriptions are seemingly constructed from his own experience and not from primary sources. As such, he misrepresents inerrancy by failing to provide specific examples, thereby failing to argue from within inerrantist presuppositional frameworks. Despite his critiques' seeming inefficacy, he demonstrates that many evangelicals neglect biblical scholarship, choosing instead to defend inerrancy despite countervailing data. Biblical scholars are vital due to their expertise in the phenomena of Scripture, yet efforts are also crucial from philosophy, sociology, and other fields. No field has a monopoly when it comes to critiquing inerrancy.

Conclusion

It is not for nothing that Peter A. Huff describes dialogue with fundamentalists as the final frontier of interfaith work; dialoguing across strong presuppositional divides is a formidable challenge. Attempts at dialogue often devolve into communication failures, which is, unfortunately, the case with the inerrancy debate. Complicating matters even further, there are numerous presuppositional divides within evangelicalism, as illustrated in Chapter 1 with the spectrum of inerrancy. According to Dockery's groups, fundamentalists and evangelicals are highly reticent towards critical scholarship. At the opposite are moderates and liberals, which are open to critical scholarship and inductive methodologies. They are willing to adapt their theology when faced with contemporary research in archaeology, history, biblical studies, and science.

The presuppositional divide between inerrantists and their critics is rooted in varying levels of commitment to deductivism and inductivism. As we saw in Chapter 2, Geisler locates the divide in the philosophical developments of inductivism, materialism, rationalism, skeptical empiricism, agnosticism, and existentialism, each of which he claims has undermined the authority of the Bible. Thus, according to Geisler, these philosophical presuppositions are antithetical to evangelical theology. For inerrantists like Geisler, evangelicals must adopt inerrancy based on the following syllogism:

1. God does not lie
2. God is the author of the Bible
3. Therefore, the Bible does not lie.

As we saw from Davis, Smith, and Enns' reviewers, inerrantists place this syllogistic understanding of Scripture ahead of contemporary research. For them, God cannot lie; and if Scripture has even the slightest error, God has lied. They thus perceive an urgent need to defend the Bible at all costs by qualifying what constitutes an error and assuaging apparent discrepancies through various methods and arguments. Some of these qualifications are motivated by variant forms of inerrancy that accommodate contemporary research, especially with critical inerrancy, limited inerrancy, qualified inerrancy, nuanced inerrancy, and functional inerrancy. These more balanced forms either limit inerrancy to specific aspects of Scripture or identify inerrancy with God's intended meaning. By separating God's intended meaning and that of the human authors, critical inerrantists are far more open to contemporary scholarship than absolute inerrantists and adherents of mechanical dictation since critical inerrantists relegate apparent errors to scribes, copyists, and the human authors.

Nonetheless, the central conviction of inerrantists, that at least some portion of Scripture is without error is a position of faith and is thus difficult for scholars to argue against. Geisler is correct that scholarly presuppositions are centered on material, rational, empirical, and inductive concerns, but he is wrong in assuming that this is necessarily a bad thing. These assumptions are inescapable, even though scholars question certain aspects of them.

Despite critical responses from their reviewers, Davis, Smith, and Ward provide compelling and pointed arguments against inerrancy. For example, Davis argues that the biblical claim of inerrantists (i.e., that the Bible claims its own inerrancy) is circular and only capable of convincing those who already believe in biblical inerrancy. He further argues that Scripture alludes to its own inspiration, authority, and reliability and that debates should center around these categories and not inerrancy. In his third chapter, he demonstrates that inerrancy is

inessential for maintaining Christian doctrine. Many Christians deny inerrancy and remain faithful believers, and other Christians adhere to Christianity but deny core doctrines. Moreover, he argues that believers are not logically forced to abandon Christianity if they abandon inerrancy. Thus, according to Davis, Christians *can* take an inductive approach to their theologies of Scripture and adapt them according to scholarship.

Smith likewise provides forceful arguments, particularly the notion of pervasive interpretive pluralism. This sharp challenge to evangelical biblicism is a problem for inerrantists. From a pragmatic standpoint, there is little use in describing the Bible as inerrant if this supposedly errorless text creates numerous interpretations and subgroups. Evangelicalism is permeated by biblicist assumptions (i.e., divine writing, total representation, complete coverage, democratic perspicuity, common-sense hermeneutics, solo [sic.] scriptura, internal harmony, universal applicability, inductive method, and the handbook model). Smith provides a plethora of examples, demonstrating the ubiquity of biblicism in evangelicalism. He also argues that secondary lenses, or hermeneutics, affect evangelical readings and determine the theologies and denominations with which Christians associate. According to the notion of homophily, individuals cluster with like-minded people and thus limit diversity among their groups. This process then feeds into the practice of *othering*, whereby communities denigrate and demonize countervailing views, which then fuels the group's identity and sense of unity. A common aspect of othering is the creation of strawmen and the resulting dismissal of an opponent's position, and as Smith illustrates biblicists rarely take the time to understand their opponents. Quite often, a biblicist's opponents are evangelicals from subgroups. Moreover, biblicists are reticent to engage in exegetical strategies that threaten their presuppositions. This reluctance is problematic for many younger evangelicals, who enter higher education and encounter difficulties with their biblicist paradigms. Smith argues that biblicists harm themselves by promulgating one, strict, hermeneutic.

Peter Enns also presents inerrantists with compelling arguments in his exploration of the phenomena of Scripture. According to Enns, Christians should take an inductive approach to their hermeneutics; they should re-evaluate their doctrines based on contemporary research and adopt models applicable in the modern world. His proposed hermeneutic involves an incarnational analogy. Just as Jesus is fully God and fully human, so is Scripture; therefore, Christians should not expect the Bible to be without error. Enns then provides numerous examples from biblical studies that fail to correspond with contemporary biblical inerrancy, such as similarities between ANE texts and the Hebrew Bible, textual and theological diversity throughout the Bible, and the ST hermeneutics of NT authors. Modern interpreters should not expect biblical authors to use contemporary interpretive and hermeneutical methods. Their texts were influenced by their historical, cultural, and geographical contexts and were thus susceptible to error. For Enns, God accommodated himself to human fallibility and communicated his word, nonetheless.

Davis, Smith, and Enns' arguments are solid, at least from a scholarly and inductive approach. Unless inerrantists are willing to relinquish their presuppositions, they remain largely unaffected by such arguments since they find ways of perpetuating their presuppositions despite clear and compelling countervailing evidence. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, inerrantists create an unverifiable defense by strategically reorienting inerrancy to the original autographs. Moreover, inerrantists employ various harmonization techniques, some of which are warranted and others of which border on interpretive gymnastics (i.e., Harold Lindsell's forced

harmonization of Peter's denials). Inerrantists also qualify what constitutes an error by discounting grammatical and lexical errors and formulating apologetical responses—i.e., that true errors must be shown in the author's original intention, that the impossibility of harmonization must be demonstrated, and that supposed errors must be categorically proven unresolvable for both now and the future.

In the example of Davis, reviewers like Mack F. Harrel embrace the circularity of inerrancy. Harrel admits that inerrantists must accept the presupposition of inerrancy, virtually dismissing Davis' pointed criticism regarding the circularity of the biblical argument. For him, there are only two options: either Christians admit that God is a liar, or they staunchly defend the inerrancy of the Bible. Two other reviewers, John Barton Payne and Steven C. Dilsaver, critique Davis for allowing his epistemological foundation to affect his conclusions. They argue that his concern is not theological but philosophical, echoing Geisler's arguments regarding differences between inerrantists and their critics. Dilsaver also critiques Davis for taking an inductivist approach to the Bible, which, according to Dilsaver, results in the rejection of biblical inerrancy.

In response to Smith, reviewers like Stephen D. Kovach, Mark Noll, Craig L. Blomberg, and Jeff Haanan argue that Smith exaggerates the effects of pervasive interpretive pluralism. For them, evangelical disagreement mostly centers on minute details and not on core doctrinal issues. Reviewers like Jack D. Kilcrease describe sin as the chief cause of pervasive interpretive pluralism, arguing that human sinfulness causes hermeneutical distortions and disunity among Christians. Kilcrease further differentiates between believing and non-believing interpreters, describing non-believers as reading Scripture with a veil over their eyes due to sin. This form of argumentation allows inerrantists to disregard the implications of pervasive interpretive pluralism. Many reviewers also disregard Smith's proposed solutions, particularly his Christocentric hermeneutic. They argue that Christocentrism is just as unlikely as biblicism to overcome pervasive interpretive pluralism.

Reviewers of Peter Enns were likewise critical of Enns' inductive approach. Through the critiques of James W. Scott, we saw a clear example of the presuppositional divide existing between inerrantists and their critics. The divide is heightened in biblical studies, which played a crucial role in the development of Princeton theology and contemporary biblical inerrancy. Scott is a critical inerrantist, who is accepting of critical scholarship but only to a point. To engage with critical scholarship, Scott employs the intention qualification by separating God's intention from that of the human authors. Scott thus creates a bulwark against biblical studies, relegating critical scholarship to the realm of human intentions. The true and inerrant meaning of Scripture is thus found in God's intention. This form of argumentation enables Scott to study the conclusions of biblical scholarship without abandoning biblical inerrancy, making it difficult for biblical scholars to dialogue with inerrantists like Scott. Faith considerations are beyond the purview of biblical studies, yet biblical scholars have been and continue to be a vital component of the inerrancy debate. Biblical studies' conclusions were arguably the primary motivating factor of contemporary inerrancy, and biblical scholars continue encouraging inerrantists to consider more complex and nuanced forms of inerrancy.

For at least the inerrantists explored in this thesis, the arguments made by Davis, Smith, and Enns seem to have little effect. The arguments certainly make sense from an inductivist perspective. All three authors advocate an inductive approach that adapts theology and hermeneutics according to data and phenomena. Their arguments make sense from that

perspective but not from the standpoint of inerrancy, which is particularly true with mechanical dictation, absolute inerrancy, and critical inerrancy. Such inerrantists are concerned with the defense of biblical inerrancy. For them, inerrancy is the proper lens for interpreting the data and phenomena of Scripture; more precisely, they read data and phenomena according to the inerrantist paradigm. To many inerrantists, God's truthfulness and the associated theories of inspiration are far more important than facing the difficulties of contemporary research in history, biblical studies, archaeology, and science. If critics of inerrancy wish to engage in effective dialogue, they must grapple with the inerrantist commitment to deductivism.

Facing this reality requires stepping across the presuppositional divide. It requires knowing the complexity of inerrancy and its variations and realizing the centrality of God's character for evangelicals. Critics should not expect inerrantists to abdicate their deductivist predispositions, even though contemporary research contradicts inerrantist hermeneutics. Arguments should be made from within the inerrantist paradigm, taking into consideration the importance of their theology. Such an approach is not easy; removing the presuppositional lenses through which one views the world is difficult. Despite this challenge, I believe crossing the divide is essential for relaying scholarship to those standing on the other side.

One way forward is through the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas. Throughout their careers, Gadamer and Habermas debated the role and tension between hermeneutics and critical dialogue. Gadamer stressed the prevalence of hermeneutics and presuppositions in all fields, particularly fields dependent on interpretation. He argued that historicism and positivism (i.e., that history and research can arrive at the actual truth of an event or object of study) predominate methodologies in the humanities due to the influence of science and its inductive approaches.[1] He sought to rehabilitate prejudice (or bias) in contemporary methodologies.[2] Habermas, while accepting Gadamer's overall conclusions, worried that Gadamer's respect for tradition would hinder critical reflection and dialogue with extremist ideologues,[3] who propagate societal pathologies and instances of systematically distorted communication.[4] Habermas encouraged critical dialogue through the social sciences despite the role of hermeneutics and presuppositions. While scholars in the humanities (and in certain social sciences) cannot arrive at truth to the same exactitude as natural science, they can get quite close, such as in the case of an author's original intent. We may be unable to determine an author's exact psychological state, but we can learn a great deal by studying their writings and their cultural, historical, and personal contexts.

To counter systematically distorted communication and societal pathologies, Habermas proposed three criteria for establishing the ideal speech situation and thereby improving dialogue with extremist ideologues. B. H. Mclean, who discusses Habermas' three criteria in relation to biblical studies, provides an apt example concerning a fundamentalist preacher's reinforcement

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 5-6, 18.
[2] Gadamer, 239-244.
[3] Robert J. Dostal "Gadamer: The Man and His Work," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* ed by Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 27; Jean Grondin, *Hans-George Gadamer: A Biography* (London: Yale University Press, 2003). 288; Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 170.
[4] Susan E. Shapiro, "Rhetoric as Ideology Critique: The Gadamer-Habermas Debate Reinvented," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 1 (1994): 128.

of patriarchal norms. First (1) is the evaluative criterion, whereby a critic of the preacher provides alternate verses that seemingly contradict the preacher's understanding of Scripture. For the preacher, verses like Genesis 3:5 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 demonstrate the Bible's support of antiquated patriarchal norms in the church; however, the critic provides countervailing verses like Galatians 3:28. This approach enables critics to argue from within the preacher's framework of biblical authority. Second (2) is the expressive criterion, whereby a critic questions the preacher's sincerity by demonstrating potential motivations concerning the subordination of women. Third (3) is the normative criterion, whereby a critic illustrates the historical and cultural distance between contemporary society and that of the biblical authors.[5]

Of the three criteria, the first is best suited for our context; it illustrates the potential for engaging inerrantists within their frameworks by demonstrating the complexity of Scripture and interpretation. Regardless, recognition of interpretive and methodological limits is the starting point for dialogue with staunch inerrantists. Thus, anti-inerrantists can adopt a hermeneutic of humility, or a hermeneutic that removes the sense of opposition typically seen in the inerrancy debate. Inerrantists and their critics are two sides of the same coin; they each see their own side as representing *the* truth, when *the* truth and what we can learn about it is far more complicated. For inerrantists, the Bible's truthfulness is a matter of fact, and for their critics, the findings of contemporary scholarship are likewise matters of fact.

More and more, when I reflect on my own experience and what enabled me to lower my defensiveness, it was not the *content* of my studies that affected me *per se*; it was the *way* my professors conveyed their material. In my first semester, I was determined to defend my faith at all costs. I saw my experience of taking theology in a secular institution as a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen my convictions. I often raised my hand during class, attempting to provide an alternate perspective, and through this, I defended my faith. But on one occasion, my professor told me that he was not there to convince us of anything; he was there to teach us the conclusions of scholarship. The rest was up to us. From that moment on, I no longer saw my courses as a threat and began seeing them as an opportunity to understand a new perspective, one that I disagreed with but was willing to learn, nonetheless. Whenever the psychology professor's question echoes in my thoughts (*"How did you change your mind?"*), my theology professors' understanding and non-threatening approach is the first thing I think of.

Ultimately, in the inerrancy debate and all dialogues, the goal is to ensure our perspective is heard. But to do that, we must first listen to the other side, showing them that we understand their position and can argue from within it. Doing so requires a non-confrontational orientation. Pejoratives (i.e., fundamentalist, extremist, etc.) should be qualified and described in scholarly terms, and we should avoid using them entirely when dialoguing directly with inerrantists and ideologues. Scholars should avoid being confrontational at all costs since fundamentalists and extremists thrive on dualistic *us-versus-them* frameworks, and confrontation does nothing but

[5] B.H. Mclean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 220-222.

fuel this mentality.[6] To get across the divide, we must present ourselves not as enemies but as allies, and doing so requires familiarity with their positions and their primary sources.

Moreover, crossing the presuppositional divide is not only applicable in the context of theology but also in other academic and even public contexts. The global political situation is polarizing rampantly. We see this especially in the American context, where during the 2020 elections, over 150 million+ votes were split almost in half, despite the highly criticized leadership of Donald Trump.[7] The political left demonizes the political right, and the political right demonizes the political left. Dialogue with opposing paradigms is growing more and more crucial. If dialogue is possible with fundamentalist and extremist forms of religion, it is possible in any context.

Joe Biden's 2020 acceptance speech applies to more than just the United States. As he said,

> It's time to put away the harsh rhetoric. To lower the temperature. To see each other again. To listen to each other again. To make progress, we must stop treating our opponents as our enemy. We are not enemies […][8]

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[6] See Martin E. Marty, "The Fundamentals of Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective* ed. by Lawrence Kaplan (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 18-19.

[7] For more on polarization in American politics, see Michael Dimock and Richard Wire, "America is exceptional in the nature of its political divide," *Pew Research Center*, November 13, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/13/america-is-exceptional-in-the-nature-of-its-political-divide/

[8] Joseph R. Biden, "Joe Biden Acceptance speech: Full transcript," *Aljazeera,* November 8, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/8/joe-biden-acceptance-speech-full-transcript

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