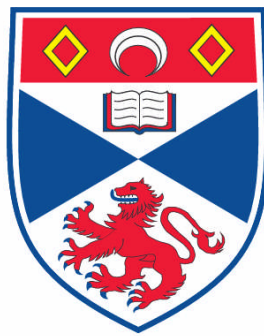


**THE WORD BECAME TEXT AND DWELLS AMONG US? AN  
EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY**

**Jeffery Steven Oldfield**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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**University of St Andrews**

**THE WORD BECAME TEXT AND DWELLS AMONG US?  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY**

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Divinity  
in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**JEFFERY STEVEN OLDFIELD**

**St Mary's College  
St Andrews, Scotland  
January 2007**

## Abstract

In 1978 a group of evangelical philosophers and theologians held a meeting to decide what the definitive statement on the doctrine of inerrancy would be. Drawing on the thought of B.B. Warfield and others this group came up with a statement comprising of a short statement, nineteen articles including both statements of affirmation and denial, as well as, an exposition of these articles. Taken in its entirety, this statement is intended to be *the* Evangelical statement determining all subsequent information about the doctrine of inerrancy. Leading evangelicals, including Carl F.H. Henry signed this document in order to establish a consensus on what one meant when using the term inerrancy.

Almost three decades later this term is still used with a sense of confusion and the doctrine is no less controversial. In fact, it still is responsible for the division of departments in many evangelical institutions of higher education in North America. The following thesis hopes to help loosen this doctrine from its theological ‘stronghold’ and place it in a position where it will be less likely to cause division amongst evangelicals.

By examining the thought of both B.B. Warfield, who helped create the doctrine, and Carl F.H. Henry, who played a contemporary role in the formation of the Chicago Statement and who might rightly be considered *the* evangelical theologian of the twentieth century, this thesis brings to light certain presuppositions of the doctrine of inerrancy that allow it take a position that undergirds other theological doctrines.

By identifying the nature of truth and authority as the main tenants of the inerrantist position, the thesis examines these terms in light of the thought of both Warfield and Henry. Their thought is found to be remarkably similar to certain principles and concerns raised by Enlightenment philosophers and it is concluded that the understandings of truth and authority presupposed by the doctrine of inerrancy ultimately are biased by Enlightenment philosophy and so are an inadequate representation of the terms as used in Scripture and tradition.

The thesis suggests that an adequate understanding of truth would be primarily Christological in nature and, therefore, a larger category than the one presupposed by the doctrine of inerrancy. Also, an adequate understanding of authority would presuppose the contemporary work of the Holy Spirit, which again makes for a much larger pneumatological category than the one presupposed by the doctrine of inerrancy as it is currently defined.

Enlarging these categories in no way necessitates the denial of inerrancy altogether. Rather it removes the doctrine of inerrancy from its theological pedestal and places it amongst other beliefs that might support the truth and authority of Scripture but by no means establish them. The concluding chapter ends with a statement of what this new doctrine of inerrancy might look like.

## Declarations

(i) I, Jeffery Steven Oldfield, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 18/10/07

Signature of Candidate

(ii) I was admitted as a research student in September 2003 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in April 2004; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out beginning at King's College, London and completed at the University of St Andrews between September 2003 and December 2006.

Date 18/10/07

Signature of Candidate

(iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions for the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date

Signature of Supervisor

## Copyright Declaration

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker.

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# Acknowledgments

The process by which I have come to the point of submitting a PhD thesis has been complex. Therefore, by extension, the task of writing something acknowledging those who have helped me get this far is complicated. So, I apologize to those who do not get a specific mention, for if I tried to mention everyone by name I fear the acknowledgment ‘page’ might swiftly turn into the acknowledgment ‘book’!

With this preface in place I would first like to thank all those involved with the small church plant called Promise Christian Fellowship. And although no longer in communion, this little community of Christian people will always have a special place in my heart. Without their influence and wisdom I would have never considered moving to another country in order to do postgraduate study.

Upon moving to the UK I met a number of welcoming faces, two of whom I would like to specifically thank. Moira Langston and Tim Ditchfield at King’s College, London were invaluable friends to me at a time when I found myself alone in one of the world’s largest capital cities. London is a very large place and finding a community with which one is able to identify can be an arduous task. However, by the grace of God I was led to Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church. There are too many people to name but without their financial and spiritual support I know that I would not be where I am today. They offered my wife and I help in so many ways and when we left London to go to St Andrews, leaving this community was one of the hardest things I have ever done. Words cannot express the gratitude in my heart for these Christian brothers and sisters. I am eternally grateful to them for their Christ-likeness towards me, and wish that God would continue to pour out His wonderful blessings upon them as they continue to seek to do His will.

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Finally, and most importantly, I must thank my wife and chief copy editor, Meigan. Her support knows no bounds. She has offered hours upon hours of proofreading. She has a way of making me sound much more intelligent than I really am and because of this the thesis has been much improved. It would take a lifetime to thank her for all the ways in which she has supported me and made sacrifices for me, and hopefully I will have a lifetime to do just this. There is no doubt in my mind that without her none of this would have been possible. She deserves much more than I will ever be able to offer her. Thank you, Meigan.

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# Introduction

A great battle rages today around biblical infallibility among evangelicals. To ignore the battle is perilous. To come to grips with it is necessary. To fail to speak is more than cowardice; it is sinful. There comes a time when Christians must not keep silent, when to do so is far worse than to speak and risk being misunderstood or disagreed with.<sup>1</sup>

Harold Lindsell wrote these words over three decades ago. In his controversial book, *The Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell identifies the doctrine of inerrancy as *the* watershed issue for American evangelicals in the late twentieth century. Thirty years later, the doctrine of inerrancy still takes precedence in faith statements of many American evangelical institutions and although this ‘battle’ has died down to some extent since Lindsell’s time, it still is being fought, particularly amongst North American evangelicals. To many of these evangelicals it is a defining doctrine and it is what differentiates them from their Christian brothers and sisters.

So to write a PhD thesis examining some of the theological implications that are implied by the doctrine of inerrancy would seem to be a fruitful way to engage with some of the concerns of the contemporary evangelical church. I say ‘some’ because although the concerns of the contemporary evangelical church are larger than just the doctrine of inerrancy, the doctrine of inerrancy is still a doctrine that most American evangelicals see a

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<sup>1</sup> Lindsell, Harold. *The Battle for the Bible*. Zondervan: Edinburgh, 1976, p. 26.

need to confirm, but are not quite sure of what philosophical and theological presuppositions are involved in such a confirmation. Hence the motivation for the work that follows.

Using the ‘Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy’ as the definitive statement of the doctrine of inerrancy, chapter one sets out to define the claims of the doctrine of inerrancy as established in this ‘statement.’ This is a foundational chapter in that it establishes what is meant by the term inerrancy when it is used in the rest of the thesis. It addresses the scriptural and historical evidences that are used to support inerrancy, discusses the model of inspiration used by inerrantists, and then discusses the appeal to ‘original autographs’ that is fundamental to the inerrantist claim. The chapter closes with an account of why inerrantists believe that continuing to uphold the doctrine of inerrancy is crucial to making other theological assertions.

This leads directly into the two main parts of the thesis: Truth and Authority. Chapters two and three deal specifically with the nature of truth. We might label this the Christological side of the thesis. Chapters four and five deal specifically with nature of biblical authority. We might label this the Pneumatological side of the thesis. Overall, the thesis resembles the Irenaean conception of the two hands of God, i.e., Christology and Pneumatology, as being the two key ways to examine the doctrine of inerrancy.

The two main dialogue partners for this thesis are B.B. Warfield and Carl F.H. Henry. Both of these thinkers were very involved in their own ways in the development of the contemporary understanding of inerrancy. The way in which the Chicago Statement defines inerrancy is remarkably similar to the way in which Warfield argues and it is obvious that he is a seminal thinker for the Chicago Statement. Carl Henry is contemporary with the writing

of the statement and possibly *the* evangelical theologian of the twentieth century, and so it would seem strange not to have his input into the debate over inerrancy.

In each of the two main sections on Truth and Authority their thought is examined in light of the doctrine of inerrancy. Chapter two establishes how they understand the nature of truth and chapter four, similarly, establishes their understanding of the nature of biblical authority. We find that both theologians have a strong commitment to a certain type of foundationalism and understand the nature of truth in a particular way. Also, their understanding of biblical authority is linked heavily to the past act of inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the biblical texts. Neither of them seem too concerned about the contemporary role of the Spirit within the life of the church and what role, if any, the Spirit has in establishing biblical authority for the church now.

After discussing the thought of both Warfield and Henry in chapter two, chapter three lays out a detailed account of truth from a Scriptural perspective. It shows that the notion of truth presented in Scripture is fully comprehended only Christologically. It then reflects on the theological implications for this understanding of truth and asks whether the notion of truth in inerrancy is adequate in light of this Christological emphasis.

Chapter five continues the theme of biblical authority started in chapter four and lays out alternative understandings of biblical authority. This chapter is crucial to the overall thesis because it shows the ‘pneumatological’ nature of an alternative account of biblical authority. The first account of biblical authority presented in this chapter (Barthian) has little need to establish an account of inerrancy. We meet the thought of Abraham Kuyper briefly in chapter four but in chapter five his doctrine of Scripture is more fully presented. Kuyper’s

thought is perhaps the most important for our purposes because he probably would have considered himself an inerrantist (if one could have existed at his time) and yet his doctrine of Scripture is developed on a foundation independent of whether there are errors in the original autographs.

Kuyper's thought leads us directly into the concluding chapter of this thesis. It is in this chapter where we will seek to point to a way forward for the doctrine of inerrancy which allows it a place amongst other church doctrines but not the primal place. We conclude by stating that the doctrine of inerrancy does not adequately account for truth or authority and so should not be foundational to our doctrine of Scripture. It may be seen as analogous to Calvin's *indicia* as a doctrine that supports the faith one has in the verity of Scripture but it ought not be used as the foundation by which one establishes and maintains this verity. The doctrine of inerrancy, as defined by the Chicago Statement, makes it necessary for one to say the following: "I believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead because Scripture is true." This thesis does not seek to deny either of these claims, i.e., the truth of Scripture or the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather it hopes to reverse the order of the claim being made so that the statement affirmed looks like this: "I believe that Scripture is true because Jesus Christ rose from the dead." When one makes this claim it is not based on an inerrant scriptural foundation. Rather, it is *Θεοῦ τό δῶρον*, through the contemporary work of the Spirit of truth.

## The Claims of Inerrancy

### Introduction

As with any discussion of the doctrine of inerrancy there are inevitable disagreements on what exactly one means when using the term inerrant. This may be because of the sheer volume of texts dealing with the subject, or it may be because scholars find that they agree with each other on the major premises offered but end up coming to different conclusions and so therefore end up in disagreement. Because of this the task of trying to write a chapter on the “claims” of inerrancy seems a daunting one at first sight.

However, with all of the intricate disagreements that are found among inerrantists there are certain foundational claims upon which all inerrantists agree. This chapter has a twofold purpose. 1) to present these foundational claims as clearly and concisely as possible, being faithful to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy<sup>2</sup> where these claims are found, and 2) to present inerrancy in such a way as to give the reader a clear understanding of what is meant when the term is used in subsequent chapters.

Nowhere in the following pages have I tried to argue for or against the claims of inerrancy. I have only tried to present the claims that seem to be common among scholars who uphold the inerrancy doctrine. As a result, there may be arguments in this chapter that seem very unconvincing and others that seem secure. In some sense it is my intention for this to happen

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<sup>2</sup> After extensive research on the subject of inerrancy I have yet to find an inerrantist who has argued against the Chicago Statement. For this reason I have used the Chicago Statement as the definitive statement concerning inerrancy.

as at the end I offer no conclusion about the claims of inerrancy but only a concluding comment in order that the debate might remain open for the time being.

It will be useful at this stage to offer some definitions given by inerrantists for the terms inerrancy and infallibility. In so doing, the reader will be able to easily comprehend the passages in which these terms occur. Paul D. Feinberg in his essay “The Meaning of Inerrancy” writes, “Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical or life sciences.”<sup>3</sup>

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy says that inerrancy “signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake.” In so doing the term inerrant safeguards the truth that the Bible is “entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.”<sup>4</sup> The term inerrancy is closely linked to notions about truth and trustworthiness so that when inerrancy is affirmed the Bible is affirmed as wholly true and trustworthy.

The term infallible is often confused with the term inerrant and so also needs to be clearly defined. J.I. Packer writes, “*Infallibility* is the Latin *infallibilitas*, signifying the quality of neither deceiving nor being deceived.”<sup>5</sup> This term denotes the quality of never misleading and so means wholly trustworthy and reliable. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy says, “‘Infallible’ signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so

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<sup>3</sup> Geisler, Norman L. ed. *Inerrancy*. Zondervan Publishing House: Michigan, 1979, p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, III. C.

<sup>5</sup> Packer, J.I. *God Has Spoken*. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1979. p. 111.

safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe and reliable rule and guide in all matters.”<sup>6</sup>

Both doctrines lead to the same outcome. They provide a safeguard for the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture. One does so by denying error to the text, the other by denying deception in the text. Inerrantists claim that one cannot hold one without the other and that for Scripture to be entirely truthful and trustworthy it must be both inerrant and infallible.

Inerrantists argue that these two doctrines are clearly supported by Scripture and Church history. The first section of this chapter presents the inerrantists’ claim that both the Old and New Testaments support their doctrine. Appeals are made to Christ and to the Apostles as sources for support of inerrancy. Proof texts including II Timothy 3:16 are offered as evidence that Scripture ultimately claims inerrancy for itself. This is a common claim among inerrantists and so is addressed below.

The second section discusses the claim found in the Chicago Statement regarding the history of the Church’s doctrine of inerrancy. Although it is readily admitted that the actual term is not used by the Church until the nineteenth century, appeals are made to Augustine, some Orthodox Fathers, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin as implicitly supporting the inerrancy doctrine. It is argued that none of these theologians could have possibly imagined error in the text of Scripture, and so things that they have written regarding Scripture are cited for support.

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<sup>6</sup> Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, III. C.

If the Scriptures are inerrant then inerrantists must come to some conclusion about how the authors were inspired. Inerrantists deny all forms of dictation as well as any understanding of Scripture that would only affirm the human authorship of the text. So in the third section I have briefly discussed these denials. Most inerrantists adopt B.B. Warfield's understanding of *concurus* as the best way to explain the inspiration of Scripture. Because of this consensus we will spend some time exploring how Warfield understands *concurus* to take place.

With an understanding of *concurus* in place we move next to what inerrantists claim is inspired. An important point often missed is that inerrantists only claim that the original autographs were without error. This is primarily a theological point, and in this section we will discuss some of the theological concerns that inerrantists have in claiming the inerrancy of the original autographs.

With this in mind we spend a final section discussing what is at stake with the doctrine of inerrancy. Most inerrantists believe that there is a lot at stake in denying the doctrine of inerrancy. In fact, some would say that the entire foundation of Christianity is disrupted and ultimately demolished with the denial of inerrancy. Issues of epistemological certainty and biblical authority will inevitably arise in the discussion of what is at stake if one denies inerrancy of the original autographs.

The goal of this chapter is to give a clear indication of the claims of the doctrine of inerrancy. It is my hope that the reader will have a better understanding of the claims of inerrancy so that when the term inerrancy is used later there will be a clearer idea of what is meant by that



term. With this in mind we turn to the first main section of this chapter: what does Scripture have to say?

### **What does Scripture have to say?**

*We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration. We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.<sup>7</sup>*

Perhaps the main claim of inerrancy is that its understanding of Holy Scripture is supported by Holy Scripture itself. When inerrancy is argued there is always a discussion about the ways in which both the Apostles, corporately, and Jesus Christ, particularly, support an inerrant Old Testament. B.B. Warfield, who is among the most able expositors of this position, writes,

We believe this doctrine of the plenary inspiration<sup>8</sup> of the Scriptures primarily because it is the doctrine which Christ and his apostles believed, and which they have taught us. It may sometimes seem difficult to take our stand frankly by the side of Christ and his apostles. It will always be found safe.<sup>9</sup>

Along with Warfield are many other conservative scholars who would agree wholeheartedly with this statement. In the following pages we shall consider the argument made by inerrantists about the claims of Scripture.

When considering Jesus' claims about Scripture, two main passages which are regularly cited by inerrantists are: John 10:34-35 and Luke 16:17. John 10:34-35 says, "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law, "I said, you are gods?" If he called them gods to whom the word of God came – and Scripture cannot be broken – do you say of him whom the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Article XV.

<sup>8</sup> Although Warfield used the phrase 'plenary inspiration' it is clear that this phrase is synonymous with the term 'inerrancy.'

<sup>9</sup> Craig, Samuel G. ed. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, 1948. p. 128

Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’”<sup>10</sup> Again Warfield comments,

But Our Lord, determined to drive His appeal to Scripture home, sharpens the point to the utmost by adding with the highest emphasis: “and the scripture cannot be broken.” This is the reason why it is worth while to appeal to what is “written in the law,” because “the scripture cannot be broken.” The word “broken” here is the common one for breaking the law, or the Sabbath, or the like (Jn. v. 18; vii. 23; Mt. v. 19), and the meaning of the declaration is that it is impossible for the Scripture to be annulled, its authority to be withstood, or denied. The movement of thought is to the effect that, because it is impossible for the Scripture - the term is perfectly general and witnesses to the unitary character of Scripture (it is all, for the purpose in hand, of a piece) - to be withstood, therefore this particular Scripture which is cited must be taken as of irrefragable authority.<sup>11</sup>

John 10:34-35 is one occasion in the New Testament where Christ characterizes an Old Testament passage as both the word of God and as Scripture “that cannot be broken.”

Because of this characterization Jesus is said to be claiming for Scripture divine authority.

Only God’s Word cannot be broken.

God’s Word also cannot pass away. Jesus says, “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void” (Luke 16:17). Robert Lightner writes,

In the clearest and strongest language possible Christ said, “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17). This comparison of Scripture with the continuance of the physical creation elevates the Scriptures to such an extent that they cannot be accounted for apart from a supernatural origin.<sup>12</sup>

The two passages of Scripture quoted above are used as definitive statements from Jesus about the nature of Scripture. However, most inerrantists will agree that Christ does not discuss the nature of Scripture very often. Because of this an appeal is made to *how* Christ

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<sup>10</sup> Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

<sup>11</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> Lightner, Robert, P. *A Biblical Case for Total Inerrancy: How Jesus Viewed the Old Testament*. Kregel Publication: Michigan, 1998, p. 15.

uses the Old Testament. By examining how Christ uses the Scriptures, inerrancy's claim about Scripture seems to gain strength.

The Gospels record many of Jesus' sayings. There is a particular interest in the "It is written" or "It stands written" phrases of Jesus in the New Testament. When Jesus uses this phrase he is referring to a specific passage in the Hebrew Scriptures. For the inerrantist, what is quoted is not primarily of interest. What is of interest is the specific word used. The word in Greek is γεγραπται (gegraptai) and is usually translated "It is written." It is in the perfect tense, passive voice and indicative mood. Lightner writes, "Matthew here presents Christ as one who believed in the finality and irrevocable nature of the Old Testament revelation."<sup>13</sup>

John W. Wenham expounds this understanding,

There is a grand and solid objectivity about the perfect tense, γεγραπται (*gegraptai*, "It stands written"). "Here," Jesus was saying, "is permanent, unchanging witness of the eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction."<sup>14</sup>

And later he writes,

Divine authority is clearly implied in the expression γεγραπται (*gegraptai*, "it is written"), already mentioned in connection with the temptations, but used often at other times (Matt 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mark 9:12, 13; 11:17; 14:21, 27; Luke 7:27; 19:46). The inspiration and authority implied by these various phrases is applied not only to oracular, prophetic utterances but to all parts of Scripture without discrimination – to history, to laws, to psalms, to prophecies.<sup>15</sup>

Christ also quotes the Old Testament and attributes certain things that are clearly not spoken by God in the Old Testament to Him. One such example is Matthew 19:4-5. In this passage Christ attributes to God what is actually spoken and recorded by Moses. "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'?" Here Christ is quoting Genesis 2:24 which was clearly a saying

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>14</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 21.

not attributed to God, but in Christ's statement He refers to the Creator as the one who speaks these things. John Wenham writes,

There is a remarkable interchangeability of the terms *God* and *scripture* in certain New Testament passages. We find that "scripture" is sometimes used where one might expect "God," and "God" is used where one might expect "scripture."<sup>16</sup>

This passage and others like Romans 9:17 and Galatians 3:8 are instances where Wenham sees support for the inerrantists' claim that Christ and the New Testament writers so regarded the Scriptures as being the very words of God that they were able to exchange "God says" with "Scripture says," and vice versa with relative ease.<sup>17</sup>

Matthew 19:4-5 seems to suggest that Christ traced the origin of Scripture beyond man to God Himself. Robert Lightner is convinced that this is so and that because Christ used the Old Testament in many circumstances of His life it is evidence that He believed it to be trustworthy and able to be relied upon.<sup>18</sup> Scripture was trustworthy in Christ's mind and because of its trustworthiness He staked his life on it; it must be no less than His Father's Word. In a similar vein, J.I. Packer concludes, "And by His very assertions that the Old Testament bears authoritative divine witness to Him, our Lord bears authoritative divine witness to it."<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, with regard to Christ, inerrantists note that the way in which Christ quotes Scripture assumes an inerrant text. One such example of this is Matthew 22:43-45: "He said to them, 'How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?"' If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"' Strictly speaking, if it is not the case that David did say these things

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> See below for a continued discussion on B.B. Warfield's analysis of this occurrence in Scripture.

<sup>18</sup> Lightner, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Packer, J.I. "*Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Michigan, 1958, p. 58.

then Christ's point is not made. If the statement was inspired, as the inerrantist will argue, then it is fully trustworthy. Furthermore, it must be inspired since Christ understands the statement to be trustworthy. Paul D. Feinberg says,

First there are those instances where the whole argument rests on a single word... Second, there is an instance where the entire argument depends on the tense of a verb... Third, in Galatians 3:16, we have an argument where the point depends on the singular number, *seed*, as opposed to the plural, *seeds*... Now if the text of Scripture is not inerrant, it is difficult to see the point in these arguments.<sup>20</sup>

But not only Christ thought this about the Old Testament. It is common among inerrantists to also claim these beliefs for the New Testament writers. Edwin A. Blum writes,

The views of Jesus on the Old Testament are also the views of the Gospel writers. These men depict Jesus and His views with obvious approval, and an examination of their own use of Scripture reveals the same reverence and submission to its authority as He showed.<sup>21</sup>

Gordon Lewis argues,

Because God is true and faithful, it was unthinkable to the biblical authors that He could breathe out (inspire) any error through them. They rejoiced in the faithfulness of His words (Jer 23:28), His commandments (Ps. 119:86), and His testimonies (Ps. 119:138). In their human tongues they declared His "faithful sayings" (2 Tim. 2:11, 13, Titus 3:8).<sup>22</sup>

Because of this it is argued that with the New Testament authors there is an equation between the phrases "God says" and "Scripture says." Warfield has argued this idea extensively and other scholars have joined him. Henry Krabbendam writes,

Scripture passages of the Old Testament that are quoted, referred to, or alluded to in the New Testament are introduced as spoken by God either explicitly or implicitly (see Matt. 19:4ff.; Mark 10:5ff.; Acts 13:34ff.; Rom. 15:9ff.; 1 Cor. 6:16; 2 Cor. 6:2; Gal 3:16; Eph. 4:8; 5:14; Heb. 1:5ff.; 8:8). At times the human instrumentality is mentioned (see Matt. 1:22; 2:15).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 268.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 243.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 419.

There are also instances where words that are spoken in the Old Testament by God are introduced as spoken by Scripture (See Romans 9:17 and Galatians 3:18). Warfield concludes on the basis of these passages that “we may perceive how close the identification of the two [“God says” and “Scripture says”] was in the minds of the writers of the New Testament.”<sup>24</sup>

Warfield sees Paul’s writings as the primary support for his claim that the New Testament writers used the terms “God says” and “Scripture says” synonymously. “The emphasis on the written Scriptures as themselves the product of a divine activity, making them as such the divine voice to us, is characteristic of the whole treatment of Scripture by Paul (I Cor. x. 11, Rom. xv. 4, iv. 23, I Cor. ix. 10, iv. 6).”<sup>25</sup> What this implies (and this is the important thing for Warfield and others) is that the whole of Scripture is the creative act of God. Because of this all areas of Scripture are able to be given the title “Word of God.” Warfield writes,

Here we have passages in which God is the speaker and passages in which God is not the speaker, but is addressed or spoken of, indiscriminately assigned to God, because they all have it in common that they are words of Scripture, and as words of Scripture are words of God.<sup>26</sup>

Another support of this claim is II Timothy 3:16. Much time is spent discussing the implications of this verse for the doctrine of inerrancy, and it would seem that if one wanted a single proof text that demonstrated that the entirety of Scripture is from God this would be the text. II Timothy 3:16-17 states, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 146. my brackets

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 318.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

<sup>27</sup> There is an important textual variant within this verse that ought to be mentioned here. In some of the earliest Latin manuscripts καὶ is omitted. Therefore, the verse reads, “All God-breathed Scripture is useful...” Metzger claims that the καὶ is actually a disturbance in the verse’s construction; as a result “several versions and Fathers” omitted the word. Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*.

The word that is translated above as “breathed out by God” has been heavily studied and its translation even more heavily debated. The Greek word is θεοπνευστος (theopneustos) which for centuries had been translated as *inspired* because the Latin word, *inspiratus*, was chosen to convey the meaning of θεοπνευστος in the Latin Vulgate. Warfield argues convincingly that the English word *inspired*, although almost a transliteration of the Latin is an unfortunate replacement for θεοπνευστος. He concludes that the best English translation for this word is *God-breathed*.<sup>28</sup>

The theological consequences of claiming the Scriptures to be God-breathed is very significant. One recalls the significance of the creative breath of God in the Old Testament and the parallels are drawn automatically. Warfield writes,

To a Hebrew, at all events, the “breath of God” would seem self-evidently creative; and no locution would more readily suggest itself to him as expressive of the Divine act of “making” than just that by which it would be affirmed that He breathed things into existence.<sup>29</sup>

Because the text of Scripture is *God-breathed* the writers of the New Testament are able to claim certain things. Paul says that the Scriptures are God’s speech (Galatians 3:8, 22; Romans 9:17) and the entirety of Scripture is the oracle of God (Romans 3:2). Edwin Blum asks,

Could Paul have conceived of a command of the Lord with error in it? Could he have said, “Christ is speaking through me” (2 Cor. 13:3) and thought of that speaking as erroneous or imperfect? Certainly Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3) and who is truth Himself (John 14:6) could not err.<sup>30</sup>

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UBS: New York, 1975, p. 648. However, there does not appear to be any early Greek variants and so the traditional translation is used above. For an informative discussion on this text see: Mounce, William D. *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 46*. Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 2000, pp. 565-570.

<sup>28</sup> Space does not permit the exploring of Warfield’s argument. To see his argument in full see *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* chapter 6.

<sup>29</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 285.

<sup>30</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 52.

This move from the clear assertion of the divine origin of the text to the presumption of its inerrancy is common among inerrantists.

And these things are not just applied to the Old Testament. On the basis of 2 Peter 3:16 we can assume these things about the writings of the New Testament as well. Warfield writes,

We need to note in modification of the broad statement, therefore, only that it is apparent from 2 Pet. iii. 16 (cf. 1 Tim. 5. 18) that the NT writers were well aware that the category ‘Scripture,’ in the high sense, included also the writings they were producing, as along with the books of the OT constituting the complete ‘Scripture’ or authoritative Word of God.<sup>31</sup>

So the inerrantist is able to claim that both the Old and New Testament Scriptures are breathed out by God. I. Howard Marshall confirms this when he says,

Finally, we have the stage where the author of 2 Peter can place the writings of Paul alongside what he calls ‘the other scriptures’, and this implicitly affirms their status as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). All this suggests a growing realisation that the New Testament writers were composing works comparable in character and authority with the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>32</sup>

Because there is identification in the mind of the Apostles between their writings and the Old Testament, there are times when the Old Testament and New Testament are quoted in the same context and are seen as having the same authority. For instance, I Timothy 5:18 says, “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out in grain,’ and, ‘The labourer deserves his wages.’” Both these sayings are considered Scripture. One of them comes from Deuteronomy 25:4 and the other is a saying of Christ.<sup>33</sup> The significant thing is that Paul considers both phrases as being from Scripture. Henry Krabbendam says that they are able to do this because: 1) Their authority comes from God (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 4:2,

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<sup>31</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 232.

<sup>32</sup> Marshall, I. Howard. *Biblical Inspiration*. Regent College Publishing: British Columbia, 2004, p.30.

<sup>33</sup> This phrase is a commonly identified with Christ among New Testament commentators. The saying of Christ is found in Luke 10:7 and a similar reference is found in Matthew 10:10. Scholars debate whether Paul is quoting Luke or whether this is a statement found in Q and known by Paul through oral tradition. See the following commentators for further information: Leaney, A.R.C. *The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*. SCM Press Ltd: London, 1960; Hanson, A.T. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1982; Houlden, J.L. *The Pastoral Epistles*. SCM Press: London, 1989; Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*. Doubleday: New York, 2001.



15) and 2) All this is possible because they are instruments of the Spirit of God (I Cor. 2:13; I Peter 1:13).<sup>34</sup>

One is able to speak of the entirety of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, as being *God-breathed* because, on this interpretation, the authors regarded them as no less than this. We are able to recognize the Scriptures as not merely containing the words of God here and there but as themselves are in their entirety the Word of God written. Because of this the Bible has complete authority for us. Warfield writes,

The conception of Scripture thrown up into such clear view here supplies the ground of all Jesus' appeals to Scripture, and of all the appeals of the New Testament writers as well. Everywhere, to Him and to them alike, an appeal to Scripture is an appeal to an indefectible authority whose determination is final.<sup>35</sup>

Christ who says that there is no appeal against Scripture, for “the Scripture cannot be broken” evidences this final determination. This is because it is the very Word of God. Both Jesus and the Apostles confirm this by their synonymous use of “Scripture says” and “God says” as well as their explicit admission that *all* of Scripture is God-breathed. Jesus also affirms this when he uses the phrase “It is written.” By using this phrase Jesus has designated Scripture as an authoritative divine word that, as he explicitly states, cannot be broken.

Of course, if all of this is in fact the case, we would expect other people besides modern inerrantists to argue in the same fashion and come to some similar conclusions. The second important claim of inerrantists is that theologians in the Church throughout its history support the doctrine. It is to a brief section on the role of inerrancy in Church history to which we turn next.

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<sup>34</sup> *Inerrancy*, p 420.

<sup>35</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 140.

## What does history have to say?

*We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history. We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.*<sup>36</sup>

Inerrantists are often criticized as holding to a doctrine that was created in response to the Enlightenment disregard for the authority of Scripture. They maintain, as can be seen from the statement above, that this criticism could not be farther from the truth. In fact, they claim that the doctrine of the complete truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture, i.e. inerrancy, can be traced historically from Christ and His apostles to Augustine and the early Church. Furthermore, this doctrine can be seen to be supported by theologians of the Medieval and Reformation periods. Robert Preus writes,

That the Bible is the Word of God, inerrant and of supreme divine authority, was a conviction held by all Christians and Christian teachers through the first 1,700 years of church history. Except in the case of certain free-thinking scholastics, such as Abelard, this fact has not really been contested by many scholars.<sup>37</sup>

It is the inerrantists' claim that they are, in fact, affirming what has been supported by the Church for almost its entire history.

Preus is quick to note, however, that many of the early church fathers and medieval theologians did not directly address these issues but rather assumed the doctrine of biblical authority on the basis of what Scripture taught (see section above). However, with this in mind, Preus argues that “we can clearly delineate the doctrine concerning Scripture held by the Christian church and its theological leaders from post-apostolic times through the Reformation era.”<sup>38</sup> This can be done by looking at what is assumed in these thinkers rather

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<sup>36</sup> Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article XVI

<sup>37</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 357.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 358.

than what is explicitly taught by them. Furthermore, this has been done repeatedly by eminent scholars during the last two hundred years.<sup>39</sup>

It is impossible to go through at this stage all of the Church Fathers and comment upon their doctrine of Scripture. However, there are a few Church Fathers that will help substantiate the inerrantists' claim. To quote Robert Preus,

Irenaeus himself, in his *Adversus Haereses*, cites Scripture no fewer than 1,200 times. As a matter of principle he states, "We must believe God, who has given us the right understanding, since the Holy Scriptures are perfect, because they are spoken by the Word of God and the Spirit of God."<sup>40</sup>

Here we see an indication of Irenaeus' understanding of Scripture. There is a perfection that comes with Scripture precisely because it is the Word of God. God is the author. Irenaeus is not the only church Father to which the inerrantist may turn, however.

Augustine and Ambrose also seem to indicate their support of this understanding of Scripture. When arguing against the Manicheans they explicitly call God the author of Scripture. What does this mean?

By the term *author* they meant one who produces or effects something. This is precisely what God did in respect to Scripture; in this sense God authored all the Scriptures. And in precisely this sense the Scriptures are unique, differing from all other writings and possessing qualities and attributes (such as authority and truthfulness) which are unique by virtue of the Scripture's origin and nature.<sup>41</sup>

Augustine fully acknowledged difficulties in the text but refused to get around these difficulties by admitting error in the Scriptures. In fact, Preus admits,

He was far from successful in solving these problems. But never in those days was a difficulty of Scripture solved by charging Scripture with error or untruth.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See footnote 1 of chapter 12 in *Inerrancy* for further information about these studies.

<sup>40</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 360.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 362.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*.

Of course, this kind of thinking is very much in line with how modern day inerrantists continue to argue. J.I. Packer is fully aware of the “problems” scholars encounter with the text of Scripture, but he is unwilling to “solve” these “problems” by admitting error in the original text itself.

Inerrantists claim that even though Scripture contains obscurities, this does not mean that there is error in Scripture. They point to the fact that for the church Fathers everything in Scripture was considered inspired. Because of this any notion of error was excluded from the text. J.N.D. Kelly’s work on early Christian doctrines is often appealed to at this point.

Kelly writes,

Irenaeus, for example, is not surprised at its frequent obscurity, ‘seeing it as spiritual in its entirety’; while Gregory of Nyssa understands St. Paul to imply that everything contained in Scripture is the deliverance of the Holy Spirit... Origen, indeed, and Gregory of Nazianzus after him, thought they could perceive the activity of the divine wisdom in the most trifling verbal minutiae, even in the solecisms, of the sacred books. This attitude was fairly widespread, and although some of the fathers elaborated it more than others, their general view was that Scripture was not only exempt from error but contained nothing that was superfluous.<sup>43</sup>

Of Augustine, Rodney Petersen writes,

Augustine's concern is to defend the complete reliability of Scripture, grounding its infallibility or inerrancy upon the fidelity of God. His interests are clearly pastoral; his desire is for the edification of the body in doing this. This moves the question of verbal discrepancies, differences in the narrative, and other problems into the realm of interpretation, away from questioning the truth of the Bible, as was the case with the Manichaeans.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. Harper & Brothers Publishers: New York, 1958. p. 61.

Kelly’s claim might be a little sweeping. One is surprised to see Origen’s work included in the list of the early theologians to support inerrancy.

<sup>44</sup>Petersen, Rodney L. ‘To Behold and Inhabit the Blessed Country: Inspiration, Scripture, and Infallibility- An Introductory Guide to Augustine Studies, 1945-1980’ in Moo, Douglas. Ed. *Biblical Authority and Conservative Perspectives*. Kregel Publications: Michigan, 1997, p. 97.

This, of course, is what many inerrantists claim of their own work. When one challenges inerrancy, they primarily challenge the fidelity of God. The inerrantist is convinced that he or she is supported by the early church Fathers when making this claim.

We move from the early church to the medieval theologians. Between these time periods inerrantists find explicit support harder to come by. Furthermore, “One may range through thousands of pages of scholastic theology before finding any explicit or direct word concerning the divine origin, authority, or truthfulness of scripture.”<sup>45</sup> With this in mind, inerrantists will often point to general attitudes toward Scripture rather than specific treatises on the matter.

For example, one might appeal to the *modus theologiae est certior certitudine experientiae* (the method of theology is more certain than a certitude drawn from experience) of Alexander of Hales as pointing to an implicit understanding that Scripture offers a knowledge that is absolute or perhaps, a divine certainty. Or maybe, as Robert Preus does, one might look to what he calls the “scripture principle” in Anselm, and in so doing, see the relationship between faith and understanding as ultimately being founded on the divine revelation in Scripture.<sup>46</sup>

Lastly come the writings of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>47</sup> Here, Preus claims that Aquinas has a more explicit view of Scripture than his predecessors. This view is found in his prolegomena on

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<sup>45</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 366.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 367.

<sup>47</sup> It must be stated here that many medieval works are largely overlooked by Preus and other inerrantists. Theologians like Boethius and Gregory the Great, Maximus the Confessor, Bede, and John of Damascus are often not considered. Also, Lombard’s *Sentences* and Bonaventure’s commentary on them are left out of the discussion. Duns Scotus, John Wycliff, Thomas a Kempis, John Hus and Meister Eckhard are all medieval scholars which seem to be disregarded. This raises the obvious question of why more attention is not paid to these theologians.

the nature of *sacra doctrina*. In Aquinas there is a notion that man needed revelation from God apart from reason because the truth about God from the latter would be mixed with error. This implies that the former would not be. Preus quotes Aquinas saying,

It was necessary for man's salvation that there be a certain doctrine according to divine revelation, truths which exceed human reason. Even regarding those truths which human reason can investigate it was necessary that man be taught by divine revelation. For the truth about God which is learned through reason would be known only by a few after a long time and with an admixture of errors; but the salvation of man depends upon his knowledge of this truth which is in God. Therefore, in order that salvation might the easier be brought to man and be more certain it was necessary that men be instructed concerning divine matters through divine revelation.<sup>48</sup>

Inerrantists largely appeal to the statement of Thomas Aquinas for support amongst the medieval theologians.<sup>49</sup> This is largely to do with his understanding of the need for *divine* revelation and the fact that if this revelation was not divine, man could not depend on it as a source for the truth concerning salvation. This is remarkably similar to the inerrantists' concern regarding Scripture.

Aquinas also writes, "It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture."<sup>50</sup> This quote, in the mind of the inerrantist, stops any debate against their claim that Aquinas supported the full inerrancy of Scripture. With his detailed doctrine of divine revelation added to this brief quote about the nature of Scripture, Aquinas is a continued source of confirmation for the inerrancy position.

With the admission that there is no dogmatic doctrine of Scripture within the above-mentioned medieval theologians, we move to the next major point within Church history: the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 368.

<sup>49</sup> Although this statement is often appealed to for support the question is raised about whether Aquinas' use of the term 'doctrine' in this statement ought to be identified with the term Scripture. This implicit identification is made often by inerrantists.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted by Preus in *Inerrancy*, p. 370.

Reformation. Within the last century, the debate over whether John Calvin and Martin Luther supported the complete inerrancy of Scripture has been a very hot topic. Both the supporters and non-supporters of inerrancy seem to have a desire to prove their respective positions as having the support of Calvin and Luther.

Inerrantists clearly regard the theology of Calvin and Luther as supporting their understanding of Scripture. John D Woodbridge writes,

For Luther, no inconsistency existed between affirming that the Bible communicates the good news of salvation and holding the belief that the Bible is completely infallible. Nor did he distinguish between the Bible's infallibility for matters of faith and practice and its supposed capacity to err in historical, geographical, and scientific matters.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, he cites Paul Althaus, a distinguished Lutheran scholar, as giving support to this reading of Luther. Althaus writes concerning Luther's statements about biblical infallibility,

We may trust unconditionally only in the Word of God and not on the teaching of the fathers; for the teachers of the church can err and have erred. Scripture never errs. Therefore it alone has unconditional authority.<sup>52</sup>

Eugene F. Klug makes this point concerning Althaus' work on Luther:

But even the redoubtable Paul Althaus, whose preeminence in Luther studies is generally acknowledged, is frank to admit that this is correct. "Although Luther criticized the Bible in specific details," says Althaus, the Reformer was nevertheless committed to viewing Scripture "as inspired in its entire content by the Holy Spirit," for which reason "it is therefore the Word of God", or "the book written by the Holy Spirit."<sup>53</sup>

Eugene Klug makes us aware of the fact that theologically Althaus does not agree with Luther at this point. Nevertheless, he concedes that for Luther it was the "text itself that was inspired and, therefore, was the Word of God in its very ontological being by virtue of this inspiration."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Biblical Authority and Conservative Perspectives*, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

Along with Luther is the appeal to John Calvin. Calvin's writings are extensive and he is sometimes just as difficult to pin down as Luther is. Because of this there have been dozens of articles published debating whether Calvin was an inerrantist.<sup>55</sup> Below, we will rehearse the standard inerrantist argument affirming Calvin's support of inerrancy.

The first and most obvious place to turn in Calvin's writing is his Commentary on 2 Timothy. Inerrantists are quick to quote his statement regarding chapter three verse sixteen of Paul's second letter to Timothy. Calvin writes,

This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare.<sup>56</sup>

The *Commentaries* are not the only place where one can turn to understand Calvin's doctrine of Scripture. The *Institutes* are another spring from which information may be gathered. Fundamental to any understanding of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture is his statement concerning its origin, nature and authority. Calvin writes,

Before I go any further, it is worth-while to say something about the authority of Scripture, not only to prepare our hearts to reverence it, but to banish all doubt. When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the Word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent – unless devoid also both of common sense and of humanity itself – as to dare impugn

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<sup>55</sup> Entering this argument is not relevant to my thesis, but in an attempt to represent the claims of inerrancy it is necessary to present this particular aspect of the inerrantists' historical claim. I recognize that what is presented above is a one-sided reading of Calvin and have listed texts below which explore a variety of different understandings of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture. For texts published on the debate see: Rogers, Jack B. and McKim, Donald K. *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. Harper & Row Publishers: New York, 1979; Moo, Douglas ed. *Biblical Authority and Conservative Perspectives*. Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, 1997; Reid, John K.S. *The Authority of Scripture*. Methuen & Co.: London, 1957; Palmer, Ian S. 'The Authority and Doctrine of Scripture in the thought of John Calvin,' *The Evangelical Quarterly*. Volume XLIX, 1977; Prust, Richard C. 'Was Calvin a Biblical Literalist,' *Scottish Journal of Theology*. Volume XX, 1967; Thompson, Mark D. 'Reformation Perspectives on Scripture: The Written Word of God,' *The Reformed Theological Review*. Volume LVII, December, 1998, No. 3; Nicolle, Roger. 'John Calvin and Inerrancy,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. Volume XXV, December 1982, No. 4; McNeill, John T. 'The Significance of the Word of God for Calvin,' *Church History*. June 28, 1959.

<sup>56</sup> Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*. Electronic text downloaded from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <<http://ccel.wheaton.edu>>. Formatted and hypertexted by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.5. Part of the Accordance Bible suite for Mac.



the credibility of Him who speaks. Now daily oracles are not sent from heaven, for it pleased the Lord to hallow his truth to everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures alone [cf. John 5:39]. Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.<sup>57</sup>

Commenting on this passage Thompson writes,

However, there can be little doubt the point he is making here in the *Institutes* is that the written words of Scripture are to be treated with precisely the same respect as words from the mouth of God himself. It is Scripture which ‘is acknowledged to be the Word of God’.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear to Thompson that for Calvin the term “Scriptures” and the phrase “Word of God” are interchangeable. He sees this pattern being consistent throughout Calvin’s works.

Even though this identification of “Scriptures” and “Word of God” can be seen in the Bible itself, in Augustine and now in Calvin there are many scholars who would adamantly oppose reading Calvin as an inerrantist. What about the places where it seems at first sight Calvin has admitted error? J.I. Packer writes, “The handful of passages in his commentaries which have on occasion been taken as affirming or implying that he thought particular biblical writers had gone astray prove on inspection to fall into the following categories.”<sup>59</sup> And here he lists four particular categories.

The first category deals with God’s accommodation. Some of Calvin’s writings that are seen as affirmations of error in the Bible are

reminders of points where God has accommodated Himself to rough-and-ready forms of human speech, and tell us only that in such cases God is evidently not concerned to speak with a kind or degree of accuracy which goes beyond what these forms of speech

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<sup>57</sup> McNeill, John T. ed. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume I*. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1960, p. 74.

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, Mark D. ‘Reformation Perspectives on Scripture: The Written Word of God.’ *The Reformed Theological Review*. Vol. 57, December, 1998, No. 3, p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> Montgomery, John Warwick. Ed. *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*. Bethany Fellowship, Inc.: Minnesota, 1974, p.105.

would naturally convey.<sup>60</sup>

A particular instance may possibly be found in Calvin's commentary on the Genesis 1 passage. Here Calvin warns that we must not expect to learn astronomy from this text. An important note to make at this point is that a misunderstanding often occurs when one speaks of accommodation. Some scholars use accommodation as if to say that because God accommodated himself there must be error in the revelation. However, there is no necessary connection between accommodation and error, and we must not be too quick to make this connection.<sup>61</sup> Because of this, even though Calvin sees God as accommodating Himself to his creation there is no need for Calvin to admit to error in that revelation.

The second category refers to texts that have received error through transmission. Examples of this in Calvin are his comments on Matthew 27:9 and also Acts 7:14-16. Calvin tells us that "by mistake" Jeremiah's name has "crept in" in Matthew 27:9. The word he uses here is *obrepserit* which Packer says is his "regular word for unauthentic textual intrusions."<sup>62</sup> Also, Acts 7: 14-16 has a similar copyist error when it mentions seventy-five people in contrast to Genesis 46:27 which only mentions seventy. Warfield writes, "His assurance that it cannot be the Biblical writer who stumbles leads him similarly to attribute what seems to him a manifest error to the copyists."<sup>63</sup>

Other comments that might be seen as supporting a non-inerrantist view in Calvin are passages that deal with cases where apostolic writers quote Old Testament texts loosely.

Packer suggests,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>61</sup> John Gerstner labels this the "accommodation non sequitur." He says that it does not follow that because God accommodates himself to human language he must accommodate himself to human error. For further explication of accommodation see section below on the "Model of Inspiration" in inerrancy.

<sup>62</sup> *God's Inerrant Word*, p.106.

<sup>63</sup> Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield. Volume V: Calvin and Calvinism*. 10 vols. Baker Books: Michigan, 2003 p. 59.

Calvin's point in this group of comments is invariable that the apostles quote paraphrastically precisely in order to bring out the true sense and application – a contention strikingly supported by the modern discovery that this was standard practice among the rabbis at that time.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, there is a selection of comments made by Calvin which deal with what might be called the formal inaccuracy of the text by suggesting that in these cases no assertion was intended and therefore no error can fairly be said to have been made. An example of this class of passage might be Calvin's denial that the evangelists meant at any point to write narratives which were chronologically ordered, leading to the claim that since they did not intend to connect everything chronologically, but on occasion preferred to follow a topical or theological principle of arrangement, they therefore cannot be held to contradict each other when they narrate the same events in a different sequence.

All of the statements that fall into the four above-mentioned categories are statements that may be seen as allowing for error in the Biblical text. Packer insists that these statements are not Calvin's way of showing error in Scripture. He cites Rupert Davies' conclusion about questionable passages in Calvin's writings, "The most they can possibly prove is that Homer may have nodded – in other words, that in the course of thirty years of theological writing so prolific as to fill fifty-nine large volumes of the *Corpus Reformatorum* Calvin may on three or four occasions have broached a suggestion about a text which did not fit his doctrine of Scripture quite as well as he thought it did."<sup>65</sup>

In the same vein, Packer concludes that the few passages in Calvin that seem contrary to inerrancy should not be assumed to be significant for Calvin's doctrine of the Bible. He writes,

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<sup>64</sup> *God's Inerrant Word*, p. 106.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

At most, they merely show even Calvin could on occasion fail to be quite consistent with himself. And even this may be thought to concede too much. It might be rash to affirm that Calvin's handling of all four groups of texts which we mentioned was right in every particular, but it is not at all hard to maintain that it does involve not the least inconsistency with his doctrine of inspiration.<sup>66</sup>

And it is to the doctrine of inspiration which we now turn. If it is the case, as inerrantists claim, that the doctrine of inerrancy was implicitly held by Jesus Christ and the Apostles as well as the early, medieval and reformation Church than the question of how this inerrant text was brought about immediately comes to mind. Inerrantists are constantly critiqued as having a dictation model of inspiration and so we turn now to the claim of inerrantists regarding inspiration and their refutation of the "inspiration-by-dictation" label.

### **Model of Inspiration**

*We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us. We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.*

*We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.*

*We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We deny that the finitude or falseness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.<sup>67</sup>*

There are many different understandings of inspiration that one meets when researching the topic. When speaking about the doctrine of inspiration one generally finds three models identified. The first model concerns the particular *author* of the given biblical text. This model relates inspiration to the author in such a way that it is said that the author is inspired. The second relates inspiration to the biblical *text*. This model of inspiration generally

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Articles VII – IX of the Chicago Statement.

downplays any role of the human writer of the biblical text and sees the final product being that which ought to be labelled as inspired. Paul Achtemeier writes,

To say that the Bible is “inspired” means at least that in some special way the literature in that book owes its origin to God himself, and to the events behind which he has stood, which are reported in its pages, and that therefore the Bible occupies a central and irreplaceable position within the Christian faith.<sup>68</sup>

The final model sees inspiration neither in terms of the author nor of the text but of the *reader*. The reader is said to be inspired because of the experience of coming into contact with the biblical text.

The inerrancy understanding of inspiration is found somewhere in between the first two models mentioned above but cannot be completely identified with either of them. The reason for this is that, according to inerrancy, inspiration has to do with the transmission of knowledge from God to writing. Because of this, there is a tension between the divine and human in the inspiration and we shall explore this tension below. But first it seems appropriate to mention what the inerrancy doctrine of inspiration is not. 1) The inerrancy doctrine of inspiration is not inspiration by dictation. Gordon Lewis writes,

The supernatural aspect of inspiration is not dictation apart from human means but the extraordinary use of human means such as research (Luke 1:1-4), memory (of events in Christ’s life), and judgment (1 Cor. 7:25), so that what was written conformed to God’s mind on the subject and did not teach error of fact, doctrine, or judgment.<sup>69</sup>

2) The inerrancy doctrine of inspiration is not deistic. B.B. Warfield writes that it is common in theories about the origin and nature of the Scriptures to exclude the divine factor altogether and make them purely human in both origin and character. He attributes this to

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<sup>68</sup> Achtemeier, Paul J. *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals*. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1980, p. 14.

<sup>69</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 256.

the influence of Hegelianism and Deism.<sup>70</sup> But this understanding of inspiration (or lack of it) has no room in the inerrancy doctrine.

Henry Krabbendam writes,

Although Warfield rejects the dictation theory, he is just as critical of the opposite extreme, which in his opinion is the more common error, namely the exclusion of the divine factor from the origin and nature of Scripture. While Scripture is fully man's word, it is not a purely human book.<sup>71</sup>

He continues to remark that the concept, in which the Bible is regarded as both a human product in every part and every word and a divine product to the smallest detail, was called by Warfield *concursum*.<sup>72</sup> It is Warfield's doctrine of *concursum* that the majority of inerrantists hold. For example, Gordon Lewis writes,

More often, however, there seems to have been *concursum* inspiration, in which the prophet or apostle actively wrote and the Holy Spirit moved along with the speaking and writing in such a manner that the thing spoken or written was also the Word of God.<sup>73</sup>

And similarly, J.I. Packer remarks,

We are to think of the Spirit's inspiring activity, and, for that matter, of all His regular operations in and upon human personality, as (to use an old but valuable technical term) *concursum*; that is, as exercised in, through and by means of the writers' own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was *both* free and spontaneous on their part *and* divinely elicited and controlled, and what they wrote was not only their own work but also God's work.<sup>74</sup>

*Concursum* is a term so widely used by inerrantists that Warfield's name is rarely mentioned as the person who coined the term with respect to inspiration. It has been accepted as the term which most adequately portrays the way in which the divine and human co-existed in the production of the Scriptures.

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<sup>70</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *Selected Shorter Writings: Volume 2*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: New Jersey, 2001, p 544.

<sup>71</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 427.

<sup>72</sup> *Concursum* is a technical term and has normally been used by the Church in discussions of providence. "For any contingent being to act in a free, a contingent, or a necessary manner, the divine will which supports all contingent being must concur this act. This *concursum* is, therefore, *generalis*, or general, i.e., it belongs to the order of creation and providence rather than to the order of grace or evil." See Muller, Richard. *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 1985, for complete definition.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 259.

<sup>74</sup> "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God, p. 80.

Warfield defines *concursum* as follows:

By “concursum operation” may be meant that form of revelation illustrated in an inspired psalm or epistle or history, in which no human activity - not even the control of the will is superseded, but the Holy Spirit works in, with and through them all in such a manner as to communicate to the product qualities distinctly superhuman.<sup>75</sup>

He also writes,

When we consider the promises of supernatural guidance which Christ made to his apostles (Matt. x. 19, 20; Mark xiii. 11; Luke xxi. 14; John xiv and xvi), in connection with their claim to speak with divine authority even when writing (1 Cor. xiv. 37; 2 Thess. iii. 6) and their conjunction of their writings with the Old Testament Scriptures as equally divine with them, we cannot fail to perceive that the apostles claim to be attended in their work of giving law to God’s Church by prevailing superintending grace from the Holy Spirit. This is what is called inspiration. It does not set aside the human authorship of the books. But it puts behind the human also a divine authorship. It ascribes to the authors such an attending influence of the Spirit in the process of writing, that the words they set down become also the words of God...<sup>76</sup>

According to Warfield the doctrine of *concursum* is the only model which conceives of the Bible as a divine-human book, in which every word is at once divine and human. The philosophical basis he finds for this doctrine is the Christian idea of God as immanent as well as transcendent in His modes of activity. The tension between the divine and human in the writing of the Scriptures is mirrored in the inherent tension found in the Church’s understanding of the immanent and economic Trinity.

Of course, this is not the only divine-human parallel that can be made within the Christian story. Some inerrantists see a parallel with the incarnation. Just as Christ is both fully man and fully God but without sin, so in a similar fashion the Scriptures are viewed as being both divine and human but without error. J.I. Packer writes,

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<sup>75</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 83.

<sup>76</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings: Volume 2*, p. 540.

The mystery of the Word incarnate is at this point parallel to that of the Word written. And as we must see Jesus in His human, historical context, and study His recorded words as the sayings of a first century Jew, if we would fully grasp their message to us as words of God, so it is in interpreting all the words of the Bible.<sup>77</sup>

Warfield warns, however, that this parallel should not be taken too far. The primary reason for his unease is that there is no hypostatic union between the divine and human in Scripture only in Christ. So he dismisses this mode of thinking and sees the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity as being more helpful in our understanding of how God acts in producing the text without overwhelming the human writers' own personalities. He writes,

The fundamental principle of this conception is that the whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities which enter it, however, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluent with them; so that the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word and every particular.<sup>78</sup>

Fundamental to this understanding of inspiration is the deeply rooted understanding of divine providence and predestination that it entails. Gordon Lewis writes,

However, in God's eternal plans, He could guide in all such particular factors. The writing of Scripture was no last-minute emergency operation in which God had to use whatever He could find to work with. He who knew all things from the beginning graciously planned to communicate through the oral and written work of the prophets and the apostles. Jeremiah was set apart from before his birth (Jer 1:5), as was Paul (Gal. 1:15).<sup>79</sup>

God is seen to have providentially, before the foundations of the earth were created, prepared the writing of his revelation. Scripture indicates that God in His providence was from the beginning preparing the human vehicles of inspiration for their specific predestined tasks.

In a very revealing passage Warfield writes,

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<sup>77</sup> *God Has Spoken*, p. 91.

<sup>78</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings: Volume 2*, p. 547.

<sup>79</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 249.



But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the world given through it just the coloring which it gives it? What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them?<sup>80</sup>

According to Warfield even the personalities of the Biblical authors can be seen as prepared in eternity past for their role in revealing God to His creation. Undoubtedly, many inerrantists would not follow Warfield to this extent; however, there is no doubt that some type of Reformed doctrine of predestination is vital to the inerrantists' claim concerning the inspiration of Scripture. To summarize this idea Warfield writes, "If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters."<sup>81</sup>

With this understanding comes an implicit pneumatology. How did God prepare such a Paul? He did so by His Spirit. The Spirit's work is seen to make all of this possible.

The Spirit is not to be conceived as standing outside of the human powers employed for the effect in view, ready to supplement any inadequacies they may show and to supply any defects they may manifest, but as working confluent in with and by them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as His instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration do His work and reach His aim.<sup>82</sup>

I. Howard Marshall writes, "At the same time, however, on the divine level we can assert that the Spirit, who moved on the face of the waters at Creation (Gen 1:2), was active in the whole process so that the Bible can be regarded as both the words of men and the Word of God."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 156.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>83</sup> *Biblical Inspiration*, p. 42.

In a very real way the Spirit makes the authors who they are. He gives them their identity and guides them in their writing of the text. The humanness of the authors is not an embarrassment to God, any more than the distinctively human qualities of Jesus are. God has prepared these authors to do the task set before them and with the aid of the Spirit they are able to achieve this task. Warfield writes,

God is Himself the author of the instruments He employs for the communication of His messages to men and has framed them into precisely the instruments He desired for the exact communication of His message. There is just ground for the expectation that He will use all the instruments He employs according to their natures.<sup>84</sup>

There is a particular understanding of predestination and providence in this line of thinking. And yet there is still the desire within inerrancy to affirm the humanness of the Biblical text. This is seen as an affirmation of what the Biblical text requires of any doctrine of inspiration. Edwin Blum says, “The New Testament conception of ‘inspiration’ stresses divine origination but at the same time clearly involves human personality (see Rom 10:20; 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; 2 Peter 1:20-21).”<sup>85</sup>

For the inerrantist it is a non sequitur to speak of the Bible as being a human document and therefore fallible. Through the concursive action of the Holy Spirit and by the divine providence of the Father there is a document created that is both the Word of God and the word of man. In other words, what we find in Scripture is God’s word written in the language of man. There is a tension in our understanding of Scripture as both divine and human and this is recognized by inerrantists. But this tension is not greater than that which is found in the doctrine of the Incarnation.

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<sup>84</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 92.

<sup>85</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 48.

It would be a great mistake to assume that the Scriptures cannot be both divine and human at the same time. “We may be equally sure that the relation of the divine and human in inspiration and in the Bible are not properly conceived when they are thought of, as elements in the Bible, as lying over against each other, dividing the Bible between them; or, as factors in inspiration, as striving against and excluding each other, so that where one enters the other is pushed out.”<sup>86</sup> To do so would be a Platonic dichotomy not accepted by the Biblical witness or the doctrine of Inerrancy.

As we will find in the next section all of this inspiration does not strictly apply to the text that we call the Bible today. This divine inspiration was only given once. The errorless text that is the result of the Spirit’s guidance and the Father’s providence and the product of this inspiration may some day be reconstructed by textual criticism, but it does not exist in any one copy of the Scriptures available today. So we move to the claim by inerrancy that it is only the ‘original autographs’ which were kept inerrant by the hand of God.

### **Only the Autographs...**

*We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text<sup>87</sup> of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.*<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings*, 545.

<sup>87</sup> Autographic text does not mean autographic codex. Warfield is clear that we will never lay eyes upon the original codex of Scripture. He writes, “If our controversial brethren could only disabuse their minds of the phantom of an autographic *codex*, which their excitement has raised (and which, apart from their excited vision “no living man has ever seen”), they might possibly see with the church that genuine text of Scripture which is “by the singular care and providence of God” still preserved to us, and might agree with the Church that it is to it alone that authority and trustworthiness and utter truthfulness are to be ascribed.” Noll, Mark. ed. *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921*. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 272.

<sup>88</sup> Article X of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

So much misunderstanding often comes when one hears the Bible described as inerrant. Often, clear textual mistakes are pointed to in order to show that the Bible is not inerrant. There is need to clearly explain which text is actually being claimed to be inerrant by the doctrine of inerrancy. The fact that inerrantists only believe that the original autographs of Scripture are inerrant is sometimes missed and often overlooked by their critics. At other times one's pragmatic way of thinking arises as one questions whether there is any value in affirming inerrancy to something that does not exist anyway. The claim about the original autographs may, on the surface, be the hardest to accept, but inerrantists are vigilant to argue their case for three main reasons.

The three main reasons why one should and can only claim inerrancy for the original autographs are: 1) The truthfulness of God supports the inerrancy of the original autographs. 2) Man is sinful by nature and only God can reveal God. 3) God does not require the continued transmission of an errorless text to achieve His purposes. These three reasons seem to be the assumptions behind the inerrancy claim that only the original autographs were written without error. We shall now discuss each of these briefly.

As we have seen previously there is an equation between the words of Scripture and the words of God so that the terms "Scripture says" and "God says" are synonymous. With that premise granted and the premise that God cannot lie, the conclusion necessarily follows that neither can Scripture. So to question the inerrancy of Scripture is to question the very truthfulness of God. Greg Bahnsen writes,

The direct response to this perspective is that restricting inerrancy to the autographa *enables us to consistently confess the truthfulness of God* – and that is quite important indeed! Inability to do so would be quite theologically damaging. Only with an inerrant autograph can we avoid

attributing error to the God of truth.<sup>89</sup>

This is perhaps the thing that inerrantists worry about most. If some type of original autograph cannot be claimed to be without error *a priori*, then the very nature of God is challenged. Bahnsen continues,

The nature of God (who is truth Himself) and the nature of the biblical books (as the very words of God) require that we view the original manuscripts, produced under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit of truth, as wholly true and without error.<sup>90</sup>

If it is the case that what ‘Scripture says,’ ‘God says’ then one must necessarily claim that when God originally ‘spoke’ Scripture into existence by the inspiration of the Biblical writers he did so without error. This is the heart of the inerrancy claim concerning the original autographs.

Along with the concern for keeping the truthfulness of God intact is also a realisation of humankind’s condition. The second reason for holding that the original autographs are inerrant is tied to the doctrine of man’s total depravity. Warfield writes,

Christians need not be worried about the fact that the autographa are lost... On the other hand they must be deeply concerned to maintain that an infallible revelation has actually entered into history.<sup>91</sup>

Christians ought to be deeply concerned about this because only God can reveal God according to Warfield. Along with this comes an epistemological concern. For if the original manuscripts were liable to error then, as Bahnsen concludes, “We could not possibly know the *extent* of the error in them.”<sup>92</sup> Further he writes,

The importance of original inerrancy is not that God cannot accomplish His purpose except through a completely errorless text, but that without it we cannot consistently confess His veracity, be fully assured of the scriptural promise of salvation, or maintain the epistemological authority

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<sup>89</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 179.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>91</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 47.

<sup>92</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 183.

and theological axiom of *sola Scriptura* (since errors in the original unlike those in transmission, would not be correctable in principle).<sup>93</sup>

There is an epistemological slippery-slope created if one admits to error in the original autographs. There is then no way of distinguishing between that which is an error and that which is truthful because there is no ruler by which to measure these things. But if the original autographs are inerrant then that ruler once existed and so one's hope is not grounded in sinful man's ability to distinguish truth from falsity on his own but rather on the truthfulness of God once given by the apostles in Holy Writ.

But errors have crept in by the transmission of these texts through history. This is no embarrassment for inerrantists who are often first to admit these errors. But these errors can be attributed to the sinful nature of man. This leads us to the final point that God does not require the continued transmission of an errorless text to achieve his purposes. Warfield writes, "God's creation of man holy did not involve his keeping him holy:<sup>94</sup> and no more does his giving the Scriptures errorless to man involve 'an inerrant transmission' as a corollary."<sup>95</sup>

The argument is often made that since God has not insisted on keeping the transmission of Scripture inerrant then it must not have been his intention to give mankind an errorless text in the first place. Inerrantists regard this line of thinking as absurd. "The argument is as absurd as it would be for one who had destroyed half the pages of his Bible to light his cigar with, to contend that it was not God's intention to give man a perfect Bible, or he would have restrained him from mutilating it in this manner..."<sup>96</sup> Warfield again writes, "God's desire is

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>94</sup> The argument could be made that God did need to reconcile all things through a perfect man to accomplish his purposes and so one struggles to see how this analogy fully holds.

<sup>95</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings: Volume 2*, p. 555.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 557.

that the human race shall always have the benefit of this errorless revelation. It is man's fault if he loses it."<sup>97</sup>

Greg Bahnsen summarizes this point well. He says,

We can admit, with Davis, that God did not keep the copyists from error and that nevertheless the church has grown and survived with an errant text, but to infer from these facts that an inerrant autograph was not vital to God or necessary for us would be to commit the fallacy of hasty generalization. The importance of original inerrancy is that it enables us to confess consistently the truthfulness of God Himself. We thereby can avoid saying that the one who calls Himself "the Truth" made errors and was false in His statements.<sup>98</sup>

Not unlike the whole of the doctrine of inerrancy, the plea for an inerrant original autograph is grounded in a serious theological concern. Scripture equates what it says with the words of God and, as Bahnsen remarks, if God calls himself "the Truth" then his Word must be without error. So to affirm that this Word was originally inspired without error is also to affirm the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God. This leads us into our concluding section regarding what inerrantists feel is at stake if one rejects the doctrine of inerrancy.

### **Why Does Any of This Matter?**

*Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority... We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word that marks true Christian faith.*<sup>99</sup>

To answer the question of why any of this matters we must address what inerrantists believe to be at stake if the doctrine of inerrancy is not affirmed in its entirety. Three of the main issues at stake are: 1) The authority of the Bible is questioned, 2) submission to Christ is

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

<sup>98</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 181.

<sup>99</sup> Preface to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

disregarded and 3) epistemological certainty in theology is lost.<sup>100</sup> All three of these issues are severely impaired if the doctrine of inerrancy is not upheld.

The first of these is the issue most cited by inerrantists when discussing what is lost when inerrancy is not affirmed. Greg Bahnsen writes, “If the Bible is not wholly true, then our assurance of salvation has no dependable and divine warrant; it rests rather on the minimal and fallible authority of men.”<sup>101</sup> Similarly, J.I. Packer says, “The value of these terms is that they conserve the principle of biblical authority; for statements that are not absolutely true and reliable cannot be absolutely authoritative.”<sup>102</sup>

To deny inerrancy is to deny biblical authority. Paul Achtemeier recognizes this when he writes,

It is equally clear that for the conservative understanding, inerrancy is the total basis for the authority of Scripture. To deny inerrancy for this way of understanding the Bible is to deny any authority of any kind to the Bible.<sup>103</sup>

One reason that inerrantists maintain this position is that if the Bible is not completely inerrant then man has to rely on his own understanding and reason to judge what is true and what is false in Scripture. If the Bible is not inerrant we have no foundation upon which to lay our knowledge of God since anything that is said about God in the text of the Bible could potentially be in error. Bahnsen writes,

And the minute that we say that, we have in principle lost our ultimate foundation of theological knowledge. Our personal assurance of salvation, as objectively grounded in the Scriptures, is swept away – for God’s well-meant promises of such might still be in error.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Issues concerning epistemological certainty will be quite central to the argument found in chapter two.

<sup>101</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 154.

<sup>102</sup> “*Fundamentalism*” and *the Word of God*, p. 96.

<sup>103</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture: Problems and Proposals*, p. 55.

<sup>104</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 180. This is a common link made by inerrantists. Chapters four and five will argue for a Pneumatological foundation for theological knowledge.



Warfield confirms this when he claims this of the Christian heart.

...that without such an “external authority” as a thoroughly trustworthy Bible, the soul is left without sure ground for a proper knowledge of itself, its condition, and its need, or for a proper knowledge of God's provisions of mercy for it and his promises of grace to it, - without sure ground, in a word, for its faith and hope.<sup>105</sup>

Tied closely with the need to keep the authority of Scripture intact is also the need to ensure the certainty of the Church’s theological knowledge. Without a text given by God that is completely without error, we have no certainty that what we read in the Old and New Testaments is actually a true representation of the God whom they reveal. Robert Lightner comments,

...it must be said that unless the Biblical record about Him is infallible we have no sure way of knowing whether or not we are believing right things about Him. If God’s revelation in the Bible may not be trusted entirely how are we to know when it is to be trusted. [sic, ?] If the fountain is corrupt and contaminated so is all the water which flows from it.<sup>106</sup>

What actually happens is an elevation of one’s reason to an improper position of authority.

C.F.W. Walther understood that if one finds error in the Scriptures, he establishes his reason above God’s Word. Walther declared in 1858,

He who imagines that he finds in the Holy Scripture even only one error, believes not in Scripture, but in himself; for even if he accepted everything else as truth, he would believe it not because Scripture says so, but because it agrees with his reason or with his heart.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, if one denies inerrancy he has disregarded the teaching of Christ and the apostles.

One can no longer claim them as doctrinal guides. Warfield writes,

If criticism has made such discoveries as to necessitate the abandonment of the doctrine of plenary inspiration, it is not enough to say that we are compelled to abandon only a “particular theory of inspiration,” though that is true enough. We must go on to say that that “particular theory of inspiration” is the theory of the apostles and of the Lord, and that in abandoning it we are abandoning them as our doctrinal teachers and guides, as our “exegetes”...<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 124.

<sup>106</sup> *A Biblical Case for Total Inerrancy: How Jesus Viewed the Old Testament*, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> *Biblical Authority and Conservative Perspectives*, p. 55.

<sup>108</sup> *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 180.

J.I. Packer comments about this matter when he says, “We believe in these things, not because we can prove them ‘scientifically,’ but because we are assured of them by Christ and His apostles, whom we regard as teachers worthy of our trust.”<sup>109</sup> And similarly, “Anything short of unconditional submission to Scripture, therefore, is a kind of impenitence; any view that subjects the written Word of God to the opinions and pronouncements of men involves unbelief and disloyalty towards Christ.”<sup>110</sup>

Ultimately, one holds to the doctrine of inerrancy because this is what was taught by Christ and the apostles and in so doing he has placed his trust in Christ, the Divine Teacher. Because of this there is no doubt about the authority of the Bible. It was given by the concursive operation of the Spirit to mankind in order to be a trustworthy source of the knowledge of God. And as a result man does not have to rely on his own understanding. He does not have to determine by his own fallible reason which parts of the Bible are true and trustworthy and which parts are not. Inerrancy allows man to affirm the truth and trustworthiness of all parts of the Bible without question.

However, this does not mean that the doctrine of inerrancy has all of the questions posed to it answered, nor does it claim to be able to answer all of these questions. Packer writes,

Therefore, just as we should not hesitate to commit ourselves to faith in the Trinity although we do not know how one God can be three Persons, nor to faith in the incarnation, although we do not know how the divine and human natures combined in the Person of Christ, so we should not hesitate to commit ourselves to faith in Scripture as the infallible Word of the infallible God, even though we cannot solve all the puzzles, nor reconcile all the apparent contradictions with which in our present state of knowledge it confronts us. On all these articles of faith we have God’s positive assurance; and that should be enough.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *God Has Spoken*, p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> “*Fundamentalism*” and the *Word of God*, p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

The inerrantist stands firm in the faith that he is upholding a doctrine that was taught by Christ and his apostles and affirmed by the Church for the first seventeen hundred years of her history. That somehow, whether we use the term *concursus* or not, God inspired the authors of Holy Writ in such a way that their personalities were not diminished and yet what they said in Scripture, God said as well. This resulted in the writing of a completely truthful and trustworthy text in order to faithfully reveal the God who claimed to be its author.

### **Concluding Comment**

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter it was not my intent to argue for or against the doctrine of inerrancy. What I hope to have accomplished is to outline the main claims that all inerrantists, by virtue of being inerrantists, would agree with. Inerrantists do not always agree on the minor points in their doctrines and have different ways of expressing these points, but there are some main points or claims that establish the inerrantist position and these have been discussed above.

With the main claims of inerrancy laid out, the hope is that when one encounters the term in future chapters there will be a clear understanding of what is meant. Now that the reader has been grounded in his understanding of the claims of inerrancy we are able to move into discussing Christology and the notion of truth maintained by the doctrine of inerrancy. I agree entirely with Paul Feinberg when he writes about the word inerrancy, “People surely accept or reject the word without agreeing or even knowing what someone else means by it.”<sup>112</sup>

We now have a clear understanding of the claims of inerrancy. With these claims in mind we are now in a position to examine more carefully the notion of truth presupposed by the

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<sup>112</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 293.

inerrancy claims. Chapter two examines a number of different philosophical and theological shifts that occur in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries out of which the doctrine of inerrancy developed and then examines the thought of both Warfield and Henry in order to see whether their understanding of truth has been influenced by the particular way of thinking about truth after the philosophical shifts of these centuries.

## Inerrancy's Historical Influences

In this chapter we will explore some of the historical conditions that would seem to have allowed the doctrine of inerrancy to take root and grow into the doctrine as it was presented in the previous chapter. The first section of this chapter deals with three different theses, all within the scope of what might be described as theological shifts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the space available it will not be possible to build our own thesis concerning the history of ideas on the basis of primary evidence, so what we shall do is outline some theses that have recently been advanced, and test them against the primary sources. The first thesis explores the relationship between theology and history and how this relationship degenerated during this time. The second examines the way in which the presuppositions about theological language changed from being analogical to univocal, and finally, the third thesis explores the change in attitude during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the ontology of the Bible. We will offer a brief conclusion at the end of this section of the chapter stating how these historical shifts in thinking helped to make a fertile bed for inerrancy to take root and grow into the doctrine it has become today.

The second half of this chapter will deal with the philosophical shifts during the same time period, which also would seem to have affected the way in which the doctrine of inerrancy developed. We will look particularly at the relevant aspects of John Locke and Thomas Reid's philosophy before turning to two twentieth century proponents of inerrancy, B.B. Warfield and Carl F.H. Henry, we shall examine each of their positions on inerrancy to see if it can be seen to be influenced by the philosophies of either Locke or Reid. The goal of the chapter is to show that there are certain theological and philosophical shifts that occur during

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which were necessary precursors for the doctrine of inerrancy to be developed as it has been in the twentieth century (see chapter 1 for more details). We turn now to examine three important theological shifts that help this development.

### **Separation between theology and history**

Murray Rae contends that there is a “disengagement” between truth and history that has its roots in seventeenth century thinking and that as a result “theology and history have been torn apart.”<sup>113</sup> This divorce between history and theology has caused there to be a suspicion about the truth claims of the biblical text in particular. The presupposition which drives this suspicion, Rae claims, is that history ought to be safeguarded against certain theological claims.”<sup>114</sup> In other words, the truth of historical claims cannot be understood by utilizing “theological categories in our accounts of what has taken place.”<sup>115</sup>

The separation between theology and history is one of the theological shifts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rae sees the roots of this separation philosophically, starting with, Rene Descartes (1596-1650). The theological forerunner of this position, according to Rae, is Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) followed by Samuel Reimaruss (1694-1768) and G.E. Lessing (1729-81). The writings and thought of these three seminal thinkers lay an important foundation for the proceeding skepticism about the historical claims in the Bible that affects many theologians even today.

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<sup>113</sup> Rae, Murray. *History and Hermeneutics*. p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

According to Rae, Spinoza “represents a fateful turn for Christian theology for it is under his influence that there arose in biblical interpretation a separation between history and faith.”<sup>116</sup> The biblical critic, Reimarus, makes a similar split and argues that we cannot know anything about the historical Jesus from the writings of the apostles because they deliberately fabricated their accounts of the resurrection in order to maintain the vision that Jesus had for himself.<sup>117</sup> Finally, Lessing concludes that it is the very nature of historical claims that they can never be definitive of claims concerning ultimate or absolute truth. So it is with these three thinkers that we start our examination of the theological “shifts” that allow the doctrine of inerrancy to take root and flourish.

Spinoza’s chapter ‘Of the interpretation of Scripture’ in the *Theological-Political Treatise* is where Rae points his readers and also where we shall go in order to see where the shift mentioned above begins. Spinoza’s motive for developing his hermeneutic is because “we see that nearly all men parade their own ideas as God’s Word, their chief aim being to compel others to think as they do, while using religion as a pretext.”<sup>118</sup> So, he continues, “In order to escape from this scene of confusion, to free our minds from the prejudices of theologians and to avoid the hasty acceptance of human fabrications as divine teachings, we must discuss the true method of Scriptural interpretation and examine it in depth; for unless we understand this we cannot know with any certainty what the Bible or the Holy Spirit intends to teach.”<sup>119</sup>

According to Spinoza, the primary way that one goes about achieving this certainty is by accepting that “all knowledge of Scripture must be sought by Scripture alone.” *Prima facie*

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>118</sup> Spinoza, Baruch. *Theological-Political Treatise*. Samuel Shirley trans. Hackett Publishing Co: Cambridge, 2001, p. 86.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 87.

this sounds like a reasonable way to proceed but we shall soon find that what Spinoza means by this leads him to make conclusions that separate faith and history. He writes,

Now here I term a pronouncement obscure or clear according to the degree of difficulty with which the meaning can be elicited from the context, and not according to the degree of difficulty with which its truth can be perceived by reason. For the point at issue is *merely the meaning of the texts, not their truth*. I would go further: in seeking the meaning of Scripture we should take every precaution against the undue influence, not only of our own prejudices, but of our faculty of reason insofar as that is based on the principles of natural cognition.<sup>120</sup> [my italics]

What he means by interpreting Scripture using Scripture alone is precisely this: we must only look for the true meaning of Scripture not whether historical accounts or any other affirmations in Scripture are true facts. We must only judge Scripture on Scripture's terms. He uses two sayings of Moses to illustrate his point.

The sayings of Moses, "God is fire," and "God is jealous," are perfectly clear as long as we attend only to the meaning of the words; and so, in spite of their obscurity from the perspective of truth and reason, I classify these sayings as clear. Indeed, even though their literal meaning is opposed to the natural light of reason, this literal meaning must nevertheless be retained unless it is in clear opposition to the basic principles derived from the study of Scripture... Therefore, the question as to whether Moses did or did not believe that God is fire must in no wise be decided by the rationality or irrationality of the belief, but solely from other pronouncements of Moses.<sup>121</sup>

Historical study of the text, for Spinoza, can provide us with what the author intended to convey. It can tell us the meaning of the text. Whether or not it does tell us the factuality of the history is of no consequence to Spinoza. Rae concludes, "The reference of the texts to that which has taken place apart from them fades into obscurity."<sup>122</sup> This is because the historical "facts" are unimportant to Spinoza. What is important is the virtues that Scripture teaches. Rae writes, "It is quite possible under Spinoza's scheme that the historical

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>122</sup> Rae, p. 7.



narratives be judged false, but this is no threat to faith which is concerned principally with right conduct.”<sup>123</sup>

This commitment to retrieving the eternal moral truths of Scripture is evident in Spinoza’s writings. And even though Spinoza understands his method to be “historical,” it is only in the sense that he is hoping to understand the history the Bible presents in and of itself. Furthermore, what he is primarily interested in are these universal truths which the Bible clearly conveys. He writes, “In just the same way we must first seek from our study of Scripture that which is most universal and forms the basis and foundation of all Scripture; in short, that which is commended in Scripture by all the prophets as doctrine eternal and most profitable for all mankind. For example, that God exists, one alone and omnipotent, who alone should be worshipped, who cares for all, who loves above all others those who worship him and love their neighbours as themselves.”<sup>124</sup>

What we can know and what it is important to know are these universal moral truths. Once we have extrapolated these from the biblical text then the important work is done, all other work is founded on curiosity. Spinoza concludes, “With the help of such a historical study of Scripture as is available to us, we can readily grasp the meanings of its moral doctrines and be certain of their true sense... Therefore we have no reason to be unduly anxious concerning the other contents of Scripture; for since for the most part they are beyond the grasp of reason and intellect, they belong to the sphere of the curious rather than the profitable.”<sup>125</sup>

Rae’s thesis is that Spinoza opens the door in biblical studies for the continued separation of faith and history. As the quote above indicates, and as Rae concludes, “It is the abstract and

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Spinoza, p. 91.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

universal *ideas* of the Bible that are to be reckoned with and not the history to which its narratives bear witness. The implication eventually to be drawn, not by Spinoza himself, but by those who followed him, was that the historical narratives of the Bible should properly be regarded as mythical.”<sup>126</sup> Samuel Reimarus, a biblical critic and one who lived after Spinoza, followed in this line of thinking. As Rae puts it, he dealt “a blow to the confidence that Christian truth was founded upon the solid rock of historical occurrence.”<sup>127</sup> It is to his writings that we turn to next.

Reimarus’ contemporary G.E. Lessing only published the writings that deal with this ‘blow’ after Reimarus’ death. It is in these writings where we find Reimarus seriously questioning the truth of the Bible’s historical claims. Reimarus followed Spinoza’s thought by reducing Christian truth to something ahistorical. The truth of the Christian claims about Jesus Christ are fabrication by the Apostles, according to Reimarus. What is important is the simple Gospel that Jesus proclaimed. The gospel does not proclaim the truth of a divine saviour becoming incarnate. Rather it is reduced to the simple message of repentance and talk about the immanence of the kingdom of God.<sup>128</sup>

Reimarus writes, “The person who reads and reflects upon all Jesus’ words will find their content applies collectively to these two things: either he describes the kingdom of heaven and commands his disciples to proclaim it, or he shows how men must undergo a sincere repentance and not cling to the sanctimonious nature of the Pharisees.”<sup>129</sup> The call to virtuous living by way of repentance and preparation for the immanent return of the kingdom is what the life and teaching of Jesus can be reduced to. In fact it was the goal of Jesus’

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<sup>126</sup> Rae, p. 8.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>129</sup> Reimarus, Samuel. *Fragments*. Life of Jesus Series, Charles H. Talbert ed. SCM Press: London, 1970, p. 67.

teaching to bring about these things. Reimarus is clear that “these are not great mysteries or tenets of faith that he explains, proves, and preaches; they are nothing other than moral teachings and duties intended to improve man inwardly and with all his heart...”<sup>130</sup>

According to Reimarus, Jesus Christ was not God incarnate but a pious teacher who by being given the title “son of God” was especially loved by God. “He [Jesus] urged nothing more than purely moral duties, a true love of God and of one’s neighbor...”<sup>131</sup> Addressing the meaning of the title “son of God” Reimarus concludes, “This meaning is so obvious that any other interpretation is unscriptural, new, and unprecedented if it makes the Son of God a person whom God begot out of God’s being in eternity, and who in turn with the Father who begot him produces yet a third divine person. The Old Testament, the Jews, the evangelists, do not know such a Son of God, and Jesus himself does not present himself as such; it is, rather, the apostles who first sought something greater in this term.”<sup>132</sup>

In fact, it is the Apostles who bear the brunt of Reimarus’ criticism. They were responsible for fabricating much of the history upon which orthodox Christianity relies so heavily, i.e., the resurrection. According to Reimarus, Jesus was a pious man, beloved of God, and at whose death God expressed his anger. In fact Jesus believed that God would appoint him as the Messiah over his temporal kingdom but this plan was frustrated. The disciples believed that Jesus would take on this role, as well, and when he was crucified had to fabricate the resurrection story in order to, in Rae’s words, “keep the dream alive.”<sup>133</sup>

I do not pretend to assert that the thoughts of the Antiochians, while listening to the speech of Paul, were the same as my own, but as in these days we must often be Antiochians, and must listen to Paul’s evidence of the resurrection and the Christian religion, I candidly declare that however honestly I go to

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 69

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>133</sup> Rae, p. 9.

work, I cannot draw any other inference from it; and everyone who has so far advanced in thinking as to be able to resolve a wild discourse into common-sense conclusions, and thus test it, will agree with me, that no other deduction can be wrung from the speech of Paul. Thus it is quite clear that the old Scripture evidence of the resurrection of Jesus never can stand proof before the judgment seat of sound reason, and only contains a miserable and palpable *petitonem principii per circulum*.<sup>134</sup>

According to Remairus, the Apostles adopted a new system which included a “spiritual suffering Savior” who would resurrect and ascend to heaven and only then would he return to be the Messiah and king of Israel.<sup>135</sup>

What it is important to realize is that Reimarus was very skeptical about the historical claims of the New Testament, especially the claim concerning the resurrection. Also, he reduced the message of the Gospel down to living virtuously and waiting for the kingdom of God. He believed that the message of Jesus conveyed this and that Jesus himself was a faithful teacher of this message but nothing more. Any claims about Jesus being God and resurrecting from the dead were later fabrications of his followers. Rae concludes, “His messianic delusions notwithstanding, Jesus’ ethical teaching provided worthy guidance, it was supposed, for a life well-pleasing to God. The echo of Spinoza resounds clearly here; what Christian faith is finally concerned with in the biblical material is not the dubious historical claims but the teaching about virtue.”<sup>136</sup>

The final key figure to push this shift in thinking forward, according to Rae’s thesis, is G.E. Lessing. Lessing helped to publish Reimarus’ *Fragments* and no doubt was influenced by them. He shares the same skepticism about basing universal truths on historical accounts, but whereas Reimarus thought that there was a deliberate deception on the part of the Biblical writers to create history, Lessing believed that it was actually the nature of the historical

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<sup>134</sup> Reimarus, p. 210.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p. 212.

<sup>136</sup> Rae, p. 10.

claims that they could never be strong enough to be the foundation upon which universal truth could be established. Because of the distance between the readers of the Bible today and the writers of the biblical narratives there is no way to obtain epistemic certainty about what the writers have written. Rae writes, “First, the passing of time and the mediation of testimony itself erodes the epistemic value of historical testimony to the point that, in respect of the biblical narratives, we who stand so many centuries after the events are bound to remain agnostic about the veracity of the biblical testimony.”<sup>137</sup>

‘On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power’ is undoubtedly one of Lessing’s most influential writings. It is in this work where he lays out what would become a decisive blow against the claim that Christian truth is ultimately mediated *through* history. According to Lessing the historical claims of Christianity are incidental and so do not belong to the essence of Christianity.<sup>138</sup> This marks the final break between faith and history that is characteristic of the thought of this time.

Lessing begins his work saying,

If I had lived at the time of Christ, the prophecies fulfilled in his person would certainly have made me pay great attention to him. And if I had actually seen him perform miracles, and if I had no cause to doubt that these were genuine miracles, then I would certainly have gained so much confidence in one who worked miracles and whose coming had been predicted so long before, that I would willingly have subordinated my understanding to his and believed him in all matters in which equally indubitable experiences did not contradict him.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>139</sup> Lessing, G.E. ‘On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power.’ in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*. Nisbet, H.B. ed. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2005, p. 84. Lessing has begun to show his rationalistic assumptions. Belief for Lessing appears to be assent to propositions verifiable by evidence. Certainly an argument could be made against him at this early stage that there were many who saw Jesus do these things and who did not believe so there is no necessary connection between seeing and believing that Lessing assumes.

Already we are beginning to see the uncertainty regarding historical claims that occurs in Lessing's mind. The problem that Lessing raises is whether the claims of historians are as certain as his experience. He writes, "Or is what I read in reliable historians invariably just as certain as what I experience myself? I am not aware that anyone has ever made such a claim."<sup>140</sup> His answer is no. Yet, this is what is being asked of him by Christianity. One must believe the historical claims of the Bible as firmly as one believes demonstrated truths.

It is important to note that Lessing does not doubt the historical claims made in the Bible. Rather he questions whether historical claims *qua* historical claims can ever have the same reliability as demonstrative claims. He writes,

*Firstly, who will deny – and I do not do so – that the reports of these miracles and prophecies are as reliable as historical truths can be? – But then, if they are only as reliable as this, why are they suddenly made infinitely more reliable in practice?...If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is, contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.*<sup>141</sup>

And now the break between history and faith is complete. Historical truths can never be the foundation upon which faith is built. For Lessing, only reason can be this foundation. He cites the example of the history of Alexander the Great and says, "Who, as a result of this belief, would permanently disavow all knowledge that conflicted with this belief? I certainly would not." Lessing has no *reason* to disbelieve the history of Alexander but maintains that it is possible that that entire history is based on the writings of the poet Choerilus who travelled with him. He goes on to relate this to the historical claims of Christianity.

Consequently, if I have no historical objection to the fact that Christ raised someone from the dead, must I therefore regard it as true that God has a Son who is of the same essence as himself? What connection is there between my ability to raise any substantial objection to the evidence for the former, and my obligation to believe something which my reason refuses to accept?<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

The same holds for the resurrection and the fact that both Christ himself and his disciples believed him to be the Son of God. Lessing can make no historical objection to these claims. However, what he refuses to do is go from that historical conclusion to certain metaphysical and moral beliefs, for this would be switching to a different category of truth claims. Lessing concludes,

But to make the leap from this historical truth into a quite different class of truths, and to require me to revise all my metaphysical and moral concepts accordingly; to expect me to change all my basic ideas on the nature of the deity because I cannot offer any credible evidence against the resurrection of Christ - if this is not a 'transition to another category', I do not know what Aristotle meant by that phrase.<sup>143</sup>

It is not as though Lessing is unwilling to change his metaphysical and moral beliefs. He is not against this per se. What he is against is changing them on the basis of historical claims. Historical truths do not have the power to do this. The only truths which do would appear to be ones based on reason.

Rae's thesis about the split between faith and history would seem to be correct. From Spinoza to Lessing there is undoubtedly a suspicion about the historical testimony of the Bible. "The result of Reimarus' skepticism about the reliability of the Gospels as historical witness combined with Lessing's conviction that the passing of time is corrosive of any certainty we may aspire to concerning the events of history, has convinced many people that the truth of Christian faith ought to be established on grounds other than that of historical testimony." But this shift in thinking is only one of a number of 'shifts' taking place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that allowed the doctrine of inerrancy to flourish.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>144</sup> This might seem counter intuitive. This particular shift in thinking allows the doctrine of inerrancy to maintain a partly reactionary element. Inerrancy flourishes partly as a reaction to this way of thinking. I have dealt more with this in the concluding section of this chapter.

## **From Analogy to Univocity**

Another thesis explores the shift from analogy to univocity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We turn to William Placher's work now to explore this thesis. According to Placher, a key change in the understanding of how we are to speak of God is developed in large degree in the seventeenth century. Beginning in the fifteenth century, through the writings of Cajetan and later with Suarez, the Thomistic assumption about God's transcendence is disregarded.

According to Placher, what was assumed by Aquinas and other Medieval theologians was that God's being was primarily a mystery and any talk of who God is could only be done analogously. However, beginning with Cajetan there is a univocal shift that happens to the understanding of analogous language.<sup>145</sup> It is this shift that starts what Placher terms the domestication of God's transcendence. In the seventeenth century there were many factors that were "pressing for a more univocal language and tighter argumentation in theology" and Placher's thesis represents one of these.<sup>146</sup>

This shift does not just happen among Roman Catholic theologians, according to Placher. It also has its Lutheran and Reformed representatives. For the purposes of this chapter we will have to limit our treatment of Placher's thesis to the main Reformed representative that he cites, Francis Turretin. According to Placher, Turretin's understanding of analogy closely resembles Suarez's and it is largely through Turretin's thought that the shift from analogy to univocity finds its beginning amongst Reformed Protestants. "Thus the 'shift to univocity' – the growing confidence that our language about God makes roughly the same sort of sense as

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<sup>145</sup> Placher, William C. *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong*. Westminster John Knox Press: Kentucky, 1996, p. 76.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 71, footnote 1.



our language about creatures – was nearly as common among both Lutheran and Reformed theologians as among Catholics in the seventeenth century.”<sup>147</sup>

In a similar manner Rogers and McKim argue that Turretin believed the language in the Bible was supernaturally dictated by God. “Calvin viewed the language and thought forms of the biblical writers as human products that God had graciously condescended to use. Turretin, in contrast, treated the language and thought forms of the Bible as supernatural entities dictated by God.”<sup>148</sup> Turretin writes, “Nor can we readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired (*theopneustois*) men, would not take care of their entire preservation.”<sup>149</sup>

Turretin did believe that the words of Scripture had been dictated by God to the writers of the texts. However, it is important to see what he understood to be the function of theological language. According to Placher, Turretin opens the door for the acceptance of the univocity of language in his discussion of the attributes of God. In so doing he begins the shift in Reformed Protestantism from understanding language about God as primarily analogous to being primarily univocal. However, Turretin does not explicitly develop a theory of language that is univocal. The important point that Placher establishes is that by using the language of “analogies of similarity” Turretin begins to sound very similar to Suarez, who Placher claims, plays a crucial role in establishing this shift in thinking.

Turretin’s thought is decisively different than John Calvin when it comes to his understanding of analogy. Although Calvin does not explicitly develop his understanding of analogy, perhaps because this was a common assumption of the theologians of his time, a

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>148</sup> Roger and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 177.

<sup>149</sup> Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume I*. George Musgrave Giger, trans. P&R Publishing: New Jersey, 1992, p. 71.

place in his thought where we can glean some information is when he talks about the sacraments. Calvin writes,

For this reason Augustine calls a sacrament “a visible word;” because it represents the promises of God portrayed as in a picture, and places before our eyes an image of them, in which every lineament is strikingly expressed. Other similtudes may also be adduced for the better elucidation of the nature of sacraments; as if we call them *pillars of our faith*: for as an edifice rests on its foundation, and yet from the addition of pillars placed under it receives an increase of stability; so faith rests on the word of God as its foundation, but when the sacraments are added to it as pillars, they bring with them an accession of strength. Or if we call them *mirrors*, in which we may contemplate the riches of grace which God imparts to us: for in the sacraments, as we have already observed, he manifests himself to us as far as our dulness is capable of knowing him, and testifies his benevolence and love towards us more expressly than he does by his word.<sup>150</sup>

Calvin is clear that the sacraments only *mirror* the divine reality of God’s grace toward us and they seem to do this “more expressly” than the Scriptures in his mind.

Calvin’s understanding of the working of the Holy Spirit is central to his theology of the sacraments. Without the Spirit, both word and sacrament would only strike at our ears and eyes but would not penetrate either the heart or the mind. “He illuminates our minds by the light of his Holy Spirit, and opens an entrance to our hearts for the word and sacraments; which otherwise would only strike the ears and present themselves to the eyes, *without producing the least effect upon the mind*”<sup>151</sup> (my italics). This understanding would seem contrary to the thought produced by Turretin and much of the Reformed tradition that follows him. Without the Spirit neither word nor sacrament can produce an effect on the mind. But when the shift from analogy to univocity occurs then the need for the Spirit to cause this effect on the mind seems to diminish.

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<sup>150</sup> Calvin, John. *Institutes*. IV, xiv, 6.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, IV, xiv, 9.

In fact, even Calvin was concerned about the need to maintain a doctrine of analogy, albeit indirectly. In his critique of Lombard's understanding of the sacraments this becomes apparent. According to Calvin Lombard's error was to posit that the sacraments themselves were the causes of righteousness and salvation. In other words they were univocally tied to the righteousness of God himself, i.e., Jesus Christ. But according to Calvin, the sacraments have no power *in se*. God must act in order for them to have power. If there were some kind of univocal assumption about the sacraments then they would have power *in se*.<sup>152</sup> It could be argued that because Calvin recognizes the importance of analogy he cannot take the steps needed in order for him and Lombard to agree about the sacraments. Unfortunately, the scope and purpose of this chapter will not allow me to explore this any further.

Turretin's understanding of univocity begins with his conception of the divine attributes. According to Turretin, the distinction between divine communicable and incommunicable attributes is the most frequent distinction made of the divine attributes but a distinction that is not "equally received by all." The analogous, or communicable attributes, "God produces in creatures (especially in rational creatures) effects analogous to his own properties, such as goodness, justice, wisdom, etc."<sup>153</sup> He admits that

the communicable attributes are not predicated of God and creatures univocally because there is not the same relation as in things simply univocal agreeing in name and definition. Nor are they predicated equivocally because there is not a totally diverse relation, as in things merely equivocal agreeing only in name. They are predicated analogically, by analogy both of similitude and of attribution.<sup>154</sup>

This statement is what causes Placher's conclusion that Turretin comes very close to a univocal understanding of language. Even though he denies that communicable attributes are

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<sup>152</sup> Space will not allow me to explore further Lombard's doctrine of the sacraments.

<sup>153</sup> Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume I*. George Musgrave Giger, trans. P&R Publishing: New Jersey, 1992, p. 190.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

univocal, Placher argues that by introducing an understanding of analogy of similarity, univocity is able to slip in through the back door as it were.

And at this point, Turretin started to sound like Suarez. Communicable attributes are predicated of God and creatures neither univocally nor equivocally, he explained, but analogically in two senses: analogy of attribution and analogy of similarity. God is “good,” for instance, in that God causes goodness in creatures (attribution) but also that goodness in God has “A certain similarity” to goodness in creatures (similarity). Turretin has thus arrived by a different route at exactly what Suarez called analogy of internal attribution – A causes a property in B and also itself possesses the property it causes.<sup>155</sup>

Placher’s case would seem to be validated by Turretin’s own definition of what it means to talk about analogy of similarity. He defines this category as “When one name is so attributed to more than one thing that it may be said of one primarily and principally or by priority, but of the others secondarily and by posteriority on account of dependence on the first.”<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, to talk about God’s goodness and creaturely goodness is to mean the same thing, even if the goodness in God is original and independent.

Now it would seem a reasonable conclusion to draw that if language is univocal then it would be extremely important to maintain the perfection of the particular words in the Bible. This is indeed what Turretin does. In fact, according to Turretin, written revelation is the “most perfect mode of revelation.”<sup>157</sup> This written revelation, the Bible, is dictated by God and so is authentic and divine. As a result it is the only authority and foundation for faith.

There would therefore seem to be a connection between holding a univocal theory of language and the particular doctrine of Scripture that Turretin espouses. Accordingly, the Bible becomes a kind of scientific textbook whose words univocally describe who God is.

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<sup>155</sup> Placher, p. 79.

<sup>156</sup> Turretin, p. 190.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

This means that the very words themselves must be affirmed in no way to fall into error because they perfectly speak concerning the things of God. Turretin goes to some length in the *Institutes* ‘proving’ that Scripture does not fall into contradiction. “The contradictions (*antilogia*) found in Scripture are apparent, not real;” he writes, “they are to be understood only with respect to us who cannot comprehend and perceive the agreement everywhere, but not in the thing itself.”<sup>158</sup>

Not only was it important for Turretin to prove that no contradictions existed in Scripture, he also predicated the entire authority of Scripture on its divine and inerrant properties. He writes, “Rather the question is whether in writing they were so acted upon and inspired by the Holy Spirit (both as to the things themselves and as to the words) as to be kept free from all error and that their writings are truly authentic and divine. Our adversaries deny this; we affirm it.”<sup>159</sup> He goes on to write, “The prophets did not fall into mistakes in those things which they wrote as inspired men (*theopnuestos*) and as prophets, not even in the smallest particulars; otherwise faith in the whole of Scripture would be rendered doubtful.”<sup>160</sup> And further, “For since nothing false can be the object of faith, how could the Scriptures be held as authentic and reckoned divine if liable to contradiction and corruptions?”<sup>161</sup> “Nor can we readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired (*theopneustois*) men, would not take care of their entire preservation.”<sup>162</sup>

It is important to understand that Turretin is arguing against his understanding of Roman Catholic doctrine that would place the Church as that which establishes the authority of the Bible. Instead of relying on the Church to affirm the Bible’s authority, Turretin points his

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

readers to the text itself. For Turretin the Bible proves its own authority by its very nature as a dictated text given inerrantly by God to the human writers. These human writers were assisted by the Holy Spirit in such a way that they were able to write down this inerrant word without erring themselves. The Church is not the foundation which provides authority to the text of Scripture. Rather, its authority is directly from God and proved by its own 'marks', i.e., inerrancy.

It would appear that the claim concerning inerrancy is the result of a denial to attribute authority to the Roman Catholic Church. If one is not to believe that the Bible is authoritative because of the testimony of the Church then what other grounds might there be for making the same affirmation. Because Scripture is the sole foundation for faith, according to Turretin, it is also the sole foundation for its own authority. It is able to prove itself.

But is there a connection between Turretin's understanding of the analogy of similitude of the divine attributes and his doctrine of Scripture? Ultimately, both areas of doctrine are dealing with the use of language and so it would seem at least plausible that there might be a connection. If it does exist, though, it would seem to be only implicit. As one author has written, "It is a semantical theory that is the basis for the traditional way of giving priority to revelation while at the same time appropriating insights from other intellectual sources about the nature of God."<sup>163</sup>

Placher makes a strong case that through Suarez's misinterpretation of Aquinas's understanding of analogy, there is a shift from the analogous nature of theological language

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<sup>163</sup> Rehnman, Sebastian. 'Theistic metaphysics and biblical exegesis: Francis Turretin on the concept of God.' *Religious Studies* vol 38. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001, pp. 167-186.

to a univocal nature of theological language. This happens by defining analogy differently than Aquinas did. By splitting types of analogy into appropriation and similitude, Placher claims, Turretin makes the same mistake as Suarez. Furthermore, by using the category of similitude Turretin allows for language to speak about the divine reality in a way that Aquinas would not have accepted.

But how does this affect revelation, particularly with regard to the dictated words of the Bible? As we have seen, Turretin held to a dictation theory of biblical inspiration and so if the shift to univocity is made then what is being dictated is language that fully unveils the mystery of who God is. There is no distance between the language to describe who God is in the Bible and the reality of who God is *in se*. This move is something that Aquinas would never have affirmed. The created reality of language can never describe the reality of God *in se*. Placher writes,

But it is not that God is wise like Einstein and good like Gandhi, only more so. While the predicates we apply to God are somehow connected to the way we use the same words of other things, we cannot understand what the connection is. To use Aquinas's terms....there is some connection between the "thing signified" in our experience and the "thing signified" in God. If we understood God, we would realize the appropriateness of using a term like "wise" of God. Indeed, "wise" would then seem *most* appropriately used of God, with every human application but a pale reflection. But, situated as we are, we cannot understand the "mode of signifying" that any term has as applied to God, and hence we simply cannot imagine how such terms would turn out to be appropriate.<sup>164</sup>

This may be one of the factors why it was so important for Turretin to affirm the total inerrancy of Scripture. The Bible becomes a scientific textbook which one can turn to in order to have the mystery of God unveiled through language. Hans Frei writes concerning the trends at this time in history, "Furthermore, is the appeal to the "mystery" of revelation anything other than an admission that the idea itself is unintelligible, a token of that

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<sup>164</sup> Placher, p. 29.

unwarranted intrusion of imagination or, worse yet, sheer ignorant superstition into matters religious which the new intellectual rigor must repel?”<sup>165</sup> There is a tendency in this way of thinking toward rationalism, which during Turretin’s time would have been strong. Faith can become merely assent to propositions found in the Bible. These propositions are given so much importance because they are the most perfect way, according to Turretin, for God to reveal Himself. If language is, in fact, univocal then this is undoubtedly the case. Univocity and the doctrine of Scripture are not explicitly connected in Turretin’s thought, and it would be unfair to his theology to label him a rationalist. However, rationalism is a temptation when assumptions about the univocal nature of theological language are made.

Space will not allow us to fully examine the connection, if any, between Turretin’s understanding of language and his doctrine of Scripture. However, it would seem that Placher’s claim that the tendency toward univocity was in Turretin’s thought is valid. There is no doubt that Turretin’s thought influenced later developers of Inerrancy at Princeton. It is reasonable to conclude that his doctrine of Scripture and his tendency toward univocity would have an impact on those theologians indebted to his work.

But the shift to univocity is not the only other theological change happening during this time. Another change, and the final one that we will be examining has to do specifically with hermeneutics and how the Bible was seen. By the late eighteenth century the Bible was beginning to be seen as “just another book” which could be read and interpreted like any other historical text or great work of literature. It is this assumption which we will examine next.

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<sup>165</sup> Frei, Hans. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1974, p. 52.



## Just Another Book

According to Hans Frei, Schleiermacher “thought all of hermeneutics as a fully coherent and articulated theory of interpretation, equally applicable to every discourse.”<sup>166</sup> There is a hermeneutical shift and change in attitude regarding reading the text of the Bible that takes place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and it is fully realized with Schleiermacher in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Schleiermacher develops a theory of hermeneutics that is not just interested in the question of how we are to understand a text, but, rather, how understanding happens. This is perhaps why his thought is considered by some to be a watershed in the history of Biblical Studies.<sup>167</sup> In seeking to develop the process of understanding itself (to better understand understanding) Schleiermacher broadens the scope of the hermeneutical art so that it is able to be applied universally to all language.

Because of Schleiermacher’s universal hermeneutic the Bible becomes just another book to be understood and interpreted like any other piece of literature of its kind. Part of the reason for this might have been linked to Schleiermacher’s denial of verbal inspiration. According to Schleiermacher, the Bible is not verbally inspired. He rejected the traditional view of Biblical inspiration in place of a more universal inspiration in which the Scripture participated. He writes, “These books only share in it; and inspiration in this narrower sense, conditioned as it is by the purity and completeness of the apostolic grasp of Christianity, covers the whole of the official apostolic activity thence derived. If we consider the inspiration of Scripture in this context as a special portion of the official life of the Apostles which in general was guided by inspiration, we shall hardly need to raise all those difficult questions about the extent of inspiration which so long have been answered solely in a

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 308.

<sup>167</sup> Schleiermacher, F.D.E. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. translated by: James Duke and Jack Forstman. Scholars Press: Montana, 1977, p. 1.

manner that removed the whole subject from the domain of experiential insight.”<sup>168</sup>

Therefore, the writers of the Bible were not inspired to write the words of Scripture but rather were ‘moved’ prior to the exercise of their writing. “Accordingly, their inspiration was a prior condition in which scripture participated. More important, that ‘condition’ was universal, to the extent that any book or person might serve as point of contact with the infinite.”<sup>169</sup>

Regardless of what the motivating factor was for Schleiermacher to treat the Bible like any other book, his theory of hermeneutics set this way of thinking in stone. Whereas there was a time when it was thought that the Bible needed special tools of interpretation in order for it to be understood, Schleiermacher believed that the art of interpretation was universal and so there could be no special pleading when one comes to interpret the text of the Bible. As one author has commented, “What Spinoza and Reimarus had taught before him, Schleiermacher received into the dogmatics of liberal Protestantism: the Bible must be treated like all other books.”<sup>170</sup>

Schleiermacher places hermeneutics within the field of epistemology. Hermeneutics becomes concerned with the problem of human understanding as such. “What he has in mind is no longer the pedagogical function of interpretation as an aid to the other’s (the student’s) understanding; for him interpretation and understanding are closely interwoven, like the outer and the inner word, and every problem of interpretation is, in fact, a problem of understanding.”<sup>171</sup> Thiselton writes,

This stands in contrast to both the pre-modern and post-modern models.

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<sup>168</sup> Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1999, p. 599.

<sup>169</sup> Harrisville, Roy A. and Sundberg, Walter. *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann*. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Michigan, 1995, p. 77.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>171</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Continuum: New York, 1994, p. 184.

In the former, it is perhaps too readily assumed that the interpreter, or community of interpretation, already in principle “knows” what the text is all about; hermeneutics tends in practice to furnish explanations for the different routes whereby other interpreters or communities have reached different conclusions. In the ancient world and in Patristic thought hermeneutics encouraged reflection on interpretation within a framework of trust which might include innocence and obedience, but also, on occasion, credulity and self-deception. The Reformation marked a transition towards a hermeneutic of enquiry, which increasingly raised questions about the nature of knowledge and understanding itself. Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics become, after Kant, transcendental: he enquires into the linguistic and inter-subjective conditions which make understanding possible.<sup>172</sup>

Because of this desire to broaden the role of hermeneutics so that it looks at the nature of understanding itself, Schleiermacher develops a hermeneutic that is equally applicable to interpreting any text.<sup>173</sup> No longer is a text allowed to dictate how it should be understood. Because hermeneutics is a universal category all texts<sup>174</sup> must be held to the same standard, and this includes the Biblical text. Schleiermacher remarks, “If, then, hermeneutics is important for Christian theology in the same way as it is for classical studies, then neither theological nor classical hermeneutics represents the essence of the matter. Rather, hermeneutics itself is something greater out of which these two types flow.”<sup>175</sup> He writes further,

Hermeneutics does not apply exclusively to classical studies, nor is it merely a part of this restricted philological organon; rather, it is to be applied to the works of every author. Therefore its principles must be sufficiently general, and they are not to be derived solely from the nature of classical literature.<sup>176</sup>

It is important to remember that what we know of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics is largely dependent upon handwritten manuscripts. He wrote no systematic treatise on the topic and so at times it is difficult to decipher just exactly what he means. For instance, in manuscript

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<sup>172</sup> Thiselton, Anthony C. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*. Zondervan: Michigan, 1992, p. 231.

<sup>173</sup> Richard Palmer also makes this point, see p. 95 of *Hermeneutics*.

<sup>174</sup> I have narrowed the category to just included texts for the purpose of this chapter. Schleiermacher, however, believes that this hermeneutic should not just be refined to textual interpretation but can even be used when trying to interpret the meaning of a live conversation with a friend. See *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 182 for a discussion on this exact topic.

<sup>175</sup> Schleiermacher, F.D.E. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. translated by: James Duke and Jack Forstman. Scholars Press: Montana, 1977, p. 178.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

two which dates between 1809-10, Schleiermacher begins his writing on whether the Scriptures should be considered with a special hermeneutic. He writes,

Are the books of Holy Scripture as such in a different category than secular books? One knows that they are holy only by virtue of having understood them. Either the first readers believed that the books were holy and that they themselves were holy, or they considered the books to be altogether human works and so could understand them only in the usual way. The customary belief that the Holy Spirit is not to be subjected to the rules of interpretation is simply erroneous. The catholic doctrine of inspired interpretation. But why do they grant it only to the clergy? Certainly, one cannot understand the Holy Spirit without the Holy Spirit. But this is a completely different question, and it, too, depends on being interpreted correctly. Do the Holy Scriptures, by virtue of their special nature, also require a special hermeneutics? Yes. But a special hermeneutics can be understood only in terms of general hermeneutics; otherwise, the result is still aggregate.<sup>177</sup>

Schleiermacher is addressing a particular way of doing hermeneutics where the Bible is seen to need a special hermeneutic. He takes particular issue with the thought of F.A. Wolf and Friedrich Ast. From this passage alone one might conclude that he agrees with the current thought of his time, but that would be a mistake. He wants to give some credence to the idea of a “special hermeneutic” but is insistent that this hermeneutic be based upon the universal hermeneutic that he is developing.<sup>178</sup>

Over ten years later in a manuscript titled, *Hermeneutics: The Compendium of 1819 and the Marginal Notes of 1828*, Schleiermacher addresses this idea of a special hermeneutic for Scripture. In the very first line he writes, “At present there is no general hermeneutics as the art of understanding but only a variety of specialized hermeneutics.”<sup>179</sup> He is again referring

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>178</sup> For a closer look at the philosophical implications of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic see: Bowie, Andrew. ‘The Philosophical Significance of Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutics.’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* edited by Jacqueline Marina. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 83-89.

<sup>179</sup> Schleiermacher, F.D.E. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. translated by: James Duke and Jack Forstman. Scholars Press: Montana, 1977, p. 95.

to the work of Wolf and Ast.<sup>180</sup> Later in this manuscript, Schleiermacher clarifies what he means when he says that Scripture needs a special hermeneutic. He writes,

Incidentally, the question arises whether on account of the Holy Spirit the Scriptures must be treated in a special way. This question cannot be answered by a dogmatic decision about inspiration, because such a decision itself depends upon interpretation. 1. We must not make a distinction between what the apostles spoke and what they wrote, for the church had to be built on their speeches. 2. But for this reason we must not suppose that their writings were addressed to all of Christendom, for in fact each text was addressed to specific people, and their writing could not be properly understood in the future unless these first readers could understand them...Our interpretation must take this into account, and we must assume that even if the authors had been merely passive tools of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit could have spoken through them only as they themselves would have spoken.<sup>181</sup>

Again, it seems that Schleiermacher's view of inspiration both influences and is influenced by his hermeneutics. In a footnote on this particular topic he address the issue of a special hermeneutic but only briefly,

Whether the view that everything in the Scriptures was inspired means that everything must relate to the whole church? No. This view would necessarily entail that the original recipients would interpret them incorrectly, so that it would have been better if the Holy Spirit had not produced the Scriptures as occasional writings. Therefore, grammatical and psychological interpretation always proceed in accordance with the general rules. To what extent a specialized hermeneutics is still required cannot be discussed until later.<sup>182</sup>

He finally does talk about a specialized hermeneutic for the Bible but it would appear that what he means by this is simply that we must take into account the different linguistic influences that might be on the writers of Scripture. At one point he writes that "each language could have its own special hermeneutics" and it would appear that when he mentions a "special hermeneutics" for Scripture he mainly means taking into account the influence of other languages on the original Greek of the New Testament.<sup>183</sup> He reiterates the fact that "in general a special hermeneutics is only an abbreviated procedure which must

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<sup>180</sup> See Palmer, Richard E. *Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969, ch. 7, for more on Schleiermacher's divergence from the thought of Wolf.

<sup>181</sup> Schleiermacher, F.D.E. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. translated by: James Duke and Jack Forstman. Scholars Press: Montana, 1977, p. 107.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> He does not appear to address whether a special hermeneutic is needed for the Old Testament.

be governed by the general rules.”<sup>184</sup> So it would seem that even if there are times when Schleiermacher considers a special hermeneutic for Scripture it is in no way the same kind of hermeneutic that would have been advocated by his predecessors. He most certainly desires all hermeneutics to be driven by the general hermeneutic that he develops and which has influenced in some way all of the hermeneutics is done since his time.<sup>185</sup>

The scope of this chapter will not allow us to specifically explore Schleiermacher’s hermeneutical method. Others have done this much more exhaustively than could ever be achieved here.<sup>186</sup> The point of this section was to show that with Schleiermacher the attitude toward Scripture has fully changed. Biblical studies after Schleiermacher had to deal with this change. Scripture could no longer be interpreted and understood using different methods than one would use to understand Homer or Thucydides. From Schleiermacher onwards Scripture was seen as being just like any other book and should be interpreted and understood accordingly.

## **Conclusion- Part One**

So how do any of these theological shifts affect the development of the doctrine of inerrancy? The first thing that needs to be admitted is that the doctrine of inerrancy was not developed in a bubble. Like any doctrine, its development was at the very least influenced by the specific concerns and challenges of its day. This influence may be seen to be negative or positive. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the influence was there.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>185</sup> For further information on how Schleiermacher’s thought influenced hermeneutics after him see: Thiselton, Anthony. *The Two Horizons*. Paternoster Press: Exeter, 1980, ch. IV.

<sup>186</sup> For example see Richard Palmer’s *Hermeneutics* and Anthony Thiselton’s *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, for more substantial treatment of Schleiermacher in the history of hermeneutics.

One might conclude that the doctrine of inerrancy was a reactionary doctrine. For instance, if Rae's thesis is correct and there was a separation between faith and history, then one way to counter this separation is making the connection between the historical claims in Scripture and their divine inspiration. If the historical claims have been divinely dictated and could be proved to be inerrant then there would not be reason to make the separation between faith and history that was popular at the time. To put that another way: if the Bible is inerrant then the historical claims must be taken to be factually true. Therefore, if inerrancy is assumed then one is able to guard against the separation between faith and history. This is not to say that there is any explicit connection between any of the three theses mentioned above and the doctrine of inerrancy. Nevertheless the doctrine of inerrancy that is being examined in this thesis could not have avoided being influenced by the theological shifts happening around its development.

A strictly univocal understanding of the language of the Bible would make the truth of the individual words very important.<sup>187</sup> If, as Turretin believed, verbal revelation is the most perfect revelation that God can offer, then the need to guard against imperfection of these words would seem imperative. The doctrine of inerrancy is a way of maintaining this. Perhaps, it is possible that a doctrine of inerrancy would have been developed even if the shift from analogy to univocity had not occurred, but the emphasis of the doctrine may have been different. The need to protect the individual words from error would seem a very valuable enterprise if the univocal nature of language is assumed.

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<sup>187</sup> This is not to say that if one holds to an analogical understanding of Scriptural language the words are unimportant. They are important, as well, but for different reasons.

Finally, if the Bible is “just another book” then it should be held to the same standards of examination as my sixth grade history text. So just as my sixth grade history textbook would be taken out of print if it erred in its retailing of the American Civil War or some other important historical event so the Bible too ought to be examined in a similar manner and should not be regarded as worthy of reading if it too errs in an important aspect of the history it retells. The doctrine of inerrancy regards this kind of error as impossible but if the assumption about the Bible being “just another book” is not held then perhaps the need for inerrancy becomes less important.

It would seem a reasonable conclusion to make then, that at the very least the doctrine of inerrancy is in part a response to the different theological shifts that occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Had these shifts not taken place then one wonders whether the need for the doctrine of inerrancy would have still been perceived to be as necessary. The theological shifts are only part of the historical story of this time. There were also philosophical shifts happening concurrently which undoubtedly spurred on the need for the doctrine of inerrancy to develop. We shall examine two of these shifts below.

### **Philosophical shifts in Britain during 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

There were many philosophers during this time that played a crucial role in the formation of philosophical schools. Unfortunately the scope and pursuit of this chapter will not allow many of these thinkers to be examined. Our focus will be on two British philosophers. Names such as Hobbes, Berkley and Hume played a crucial role in the building of British thought in the eighteenth century, particularly in their response to John Locke. The Cambridge Platonists, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton and Samuel Clarke are also names that if



one were reading a history of the British enlightenment one would expect to encounter. With this said, I am not attempting here to write such a history in the pages that follow. What I have had to do is pick two of the most influential thinkers within Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and focus on their thought. I have done this because I am of the opinion that of all the philosophical figures in Britain at this time the following two thinkers were most influential in the modern doctrine of inerrancy that would flourish in North America in the late nineteenth century up until the present day. These two thinkers are John Locke and Thomas Reid. John Locke is famous for the epistemology that he developed based on experience and Thomas Reid is most notable for the philosophy of common sense which he developed. It seems to me that both of these thinkers contributed to American theology in general and its epistemological presuppositions concerning truth in particular. I shall attempt to establish a case for this in the latter half of this chapter but before I can do this we must lay the foundations by discussing the particulars of the philosophies of Locke and Reid.

John Locke's magnum opus, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, is generally seen as a monumental work which represents the beginning of the modern science of psychology, the separation of philosophy and science into two disciplines and possibly the precursor to Kant's 'critical' philosophy.<sup>188</sup> In this work, Locke changed the central question of philosophy from one of metaphysics and ontology to epistemology. Locke sought to explore human understanding and questioned the rationalists' belief in innate ideas as the primary source of knowledge in favour of experience. Locke rejected Descartes' innate ideas and instead advocated a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, as the best understanding of our minds at

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<sup>188</sup> Lowe, E.J. 'Locke' in *A Companion to the Philosophers*. Edited by Robert L. Arrington. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999, p. 374.

birth. According to Locke, only once our minds have been written upon by the pen of experience are we then able to know anything.

Like Descartes, Locke believed that knowledge demanded certainty. When certainty is not obtained we are left with either belief or opinion. Because of this Locke was pessimistic about the amount of knowledge that the human mind could obtain. The scope of our knowledge is very narrow. Locke writes,

Our knowledge, as has been shown, being very narrow, and we not happy enough to find certain truth in everything which we have occasion to consider, most of the propositions we think, reason, discourse, nay, act upon, are such as we cannot have undoubted knowledge of their truth...<sup>189</sup>

The foundation of this certitude is reason. Only that which has been proven by reason can be accounted as knowledge.

Truth, for Locke, is the correct joining of signs. If the sign and the thing signified are joined together correctly this is truth. “The joining or separating of signs here meant is what by another name we call *proposition*. So that truth properly belongs only to propositions; whereof there are two sorts, viz. mental and verbal, as there are two sorts of signs commonly made use of, viz. ideas and words.”<sup>190</sup> Locke further elaborates on his understanding of the above-mentioned propositions,

We must, I say, observe two sorts of propositions that we are capable of making: - First, *mental*, wherein the ideas in our understandings are without the use of words put together, or separated, by the mind perceiving or judging of their agreement or disagreement. Secondly, *verbal* propositions, which are words, the signs of our ideas, put together or separated in affirmative or negative sentences.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Collins: London, 1975, p. 404.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 354.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 355.

So, for Locke, truth can take the form of either mental or verbal propositions. He admits that it is very hard to create mental propositions apart from words but nevertheless believes that one must maintain the distinction.<sup>192</sup>

The ideas in our minds that are either expressed by mental or verbal propositions are created by our encounter with the external world. It is through our experiences that the ideas are formed in our minds. Therefore, it is through our experiences that the truth is ultimately known.

Locke therefore took the empirical analysis and inductive reasoning of the physicist as the model for his philosophical arguments; and he took the criterion of genuine knowledge, where matters of fact are concerned, to be that which he supposed the empirical scientist employs as he goes about his business; namely, the accordance of theories or ideas with observable data.<sup>193</sup>

This ‘criterion of genuine knowledge’ is an interesting concept and ought to be explored further. Locke contended that as humans we have four different types of knowledge of which we can be certain. First we have knowledge of self evident propositions, i.e.,  $1+1=2$ . Second, we have knowledge of propositions about the contents of our own minds. An example of this would be that you have a headache or you have the feeling of being about to sneeze. Locke says that of this type of knowledge we have no reason to doubt. Third, we have knowledge of “other things,” of the world around us. Finally, certainty is also obtained with demonstrative knowledge, i.e., knowledge that can be deduced from propositions of the above three sorts of knowledge.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> This is perhaps because for Locke, ideas are primary and of most importance. We only know what we know based upon our ideas of external things. Locke does not doubt that the external world around us is accurately reflected by the ideas in our minds but this separation of ideas and the reality outside of our minds has led some modern philosophers to question his epistemology. Richard Schacht writes, “To be sure, it might still be *true* that there *are* objects which exist independently of us, and which produce the ideas we have; but Locke has not *shown* that this is so, and therefore cannot be said to *know* that this is so.” Quote taken from: Schacht, Richard. *Classical Modern Philosophers: Descartes to Kant*. Routledge Publishers: London, 1993, p. 133.

<sup>193</sup> Schacht, p. 103.

<sup>194</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000, pgs. 75-77.

This knowledge that we are able to obtain with certainty only forms a very small part of our understanding and beliefs, but, according to Locke, it is the core of those beliefs and plays a crucial part in the development of our understanding. Furthermore, it is opinion that provides the majority of what we believe not knowledge, and it is our opinions that must be guided by reason. Alvin Plantinga remarks, “Locke’s crucial claim is that we must be guided, in the formation of opinion, by reason.” He goes on to say that for Locke reason is “the power whereby we can discern broadly logical relations among propositions (IV, xviii, 3), which, of course, are the candidates for our assent, the things we believe.”<sup>195</sup>

By using our reason we are able to discern the probability of certain beliefs that we hold based on the knowledge that we currently have. We might say something like, “I believe  $x$  is probably true because of the certainty of  $y$  that I currently have.” So our beliefs, which form a large part of our understanding, are founded upon propositions which we know to be true.

Plantinga writes,

I should proportion degree of assent to the evidence; that is, I should believe a proposition  $p$  with a firmness that is proportional to the degree to which  $p$  is probable with respect to what is certain for me. This is what it is to regulate or govern opinion according to reason.<sup>196</sup>

But how does Locke deal with revelation? Are we to believe that God has revealed certain truths to us in the Bible, for instance? It is certainly the case that many of the ‘facts’ in the Bible do not fall under the four types of knowledge mentioned above; so it must be said, according to Locke’s philosophy, that we believe some of the claims made in the Bible are true not that we know for certain that they are.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. p. 77.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

Locke does not have a problem with revealed truth. In fact, he believes that God does reveal truths to us. Locke writes, “Whatever God hath revealed is certainly true: no doubt can be made of it.”<sup>197</sup> The crucial thing for our purpose is the question of how do we know which things have truly been revealed by God and which things have not. Locke makes reason the basis of this knowledge. He writes,

So that faith is a settled and sure principle of assent and assurance, and leaves no manner of room for doubt or hesitation. Only we must be sure that it be a divine revelation, and that we understand it right:...<sup>198</sup>

and

I do not mean that we must consult reason, and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles, and if it cannot, that then we may reject it: but consult it we must, and by it examine whether it be a revelation from God or no: and if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it as much as for any other truth, and makes it one of her dictates.<sup>199</sup>

Plantinga concludes: “God can certainly reveal truths to us. We are not obliged to accept as revealed, however, anything that would go contrary to what we would otherwise know, even with respect to the lowest level of knowledge.”<sup>200</sup> According to Locke, we know very little with certainty. Our beliefs and opinions form a large part of our overall understanding and we must regulate these beliefs and opinions by our reason. We do this by believing only what can be founded on the certain knowledge that we do have, to believe anything else would be unreasonable. “So we are to follow reason, in the formation of religious opinion, but so doing does not preclude accepting certain propositions as specially revealed by God, and accepting them on that basis.”<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Quoted in *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 80.

<sup>198</sup> Locke, p. 414.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, p. 432.

<sup>200</sup> Plantinga, p. 81.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

The path has now been laid to develop an understanding of philosophical foundationalism which is based on Locke's epistemology. The importance of seeing this connection is because, as Plantinga has said, "Locke's views here, particularly with respect to religion, have achieved the status of orthodoxy, and most discussions of the rational justification of religious belief have been and still are conducted in the unthinking acceptance of that framework."<sup>202</sup>

Epistemological foundationalism is a particular philosophy that bases the belief of one proposition on the evidential basis of others. "According to the foundationalist, in an acceptable, properly formed noetic structure, every proposition is either in the foundations or believed on the evidential basis of other propositions."<sup>203</sup> Locke is seen as the father of modern foundationalism because he advocated the idea that all humans have four different types of basic knowledge which are certain (see above). These four types of knowledge ought to form the foundation for all of our other beliefs and opinions. Following Locke, the foundationalist holds that only propositions that are properly basic for me are the ones that are *certain* for me.

With this said, there is no necessary reason why a foundationalist would have to agree with Locke about his four types of knowledge. Plantinga defines classical foundationalism as follows: "A belief is acceptable for a person if (and only if) it is either properly basic (i.e., self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses for that person), or believed on the evidential basis of propositions that are acceptable and that support it deductively, inductively, or abductively."<sup>204</sup> The important thing to note is that there is always some type

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

of knowledge that is basic, which everyone possesses with certainty. Once this foundation is laid then the rest of one's epistemological house can be constructed.<sup>205</sup>

To summarize Locke's philosophy we must first recognize his empiricism. He rejected the rationalism of Descartes and instead developed a notion of the mind as a *tabula rasa*.

Written on this *tabula rasa* are all our ideas created by our experience of the world around us. The knowledge that is created based on these experiences can be divided into four parts, each of which is able to provide us with certainty. However, this knowledge is very narrow and does not account for a large part of our understanding. Our understanding is largely indebted to beliefs and opinions. For these beliefs and opinions to be verified as true they must be tested against our basic knowledge that we hold to be certain. If our beliefs are not found to be somehow linked to this basic knowledge then they ought to be deemed false and disregarded. Locke does believe that God reveals truths to us but the only way that we can be certain which truths are *de facto* is to use the light of reason and assign to them a certain probability based on the basic truths that we hold to be certain.

Thomas Reid (1710 -1796) rejected Locke's empiricism for a phrase that was soon to sum up all of Reid's philosophy: common sense. Reid's retelling of the history of philosophy that took place between Locke and himself, would look something like the following:<sup>206</sup> The two

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<sup>205</sup> For a detailed account of Locke's epistemology and to some extent a new reading of that epistemology see: Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. Wolterstorff argues that Locke's primary concern was to answer the question, "How should we form our beliefs on fundamental matters of religion and morality so as to live together in social harmony, when we can no longer appeal to a shared and unified tradition?" He goes on to say that the epistemological question was indeed important for Locke but that it was a question which was "a step on the path toward answering that other question which Locke regarded as much more important." See preface and chapters three and four of *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* for further development of this argument.

<sup>206</sup> I have sketched this picture of Reid's understanding of his philosophical predecessors largely from the essay written by William Rowe in *A companion to the Philosophers*. Edited by Robert L. Arrington. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999, pp. 469-70. However, this picture is consistent with Reid's own writings. See, for instance, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* by Thomas Reid, Essay II: 'Of the Powers We Have by

major philosophical thinkers to take up Locke's philosophical notions were George Berkeley and David Hume. Berkeley argued that the ideas in the mind were not really reflections of the external world but rather that the objects in the external world were a collection of ideas. He used Locke's philosophy but advanced it logically to the next level. Locke believed that our ideas really do correspond to the external world; Berkeley felt otherwise. David Hume took Berkeley's philosophy even further and did away with the external world altogether. "Bishop Berkeley had gone so far in the same track as to reject that material world as fictitious; but it was left to Mr. Hume to complete the system," Reid writes.<sup>207</sup> For Hume, "minds themselves are nothing more than a series of ideas connected by certain relations among themselves."<sup>208</sup> This, of course, led to a scepticism that is usually attributed to Hume about the existence of the external world.

Reid believed that if we follow the path of Locke (as he felt Berkeley and Hume did) then we would end up losing a belief in the material world altogether. He writes, "The theory of ideas, like the Trojan horse, had a specious appearance both of innocence and beauty; but if those philosophers had known that it carried in its belly death and destruction to all science and common sense, they would not have broken down their walls to give it admittance."<sup>209</sup> This 'theory of ideas' advocated by Locke, Berkeley and Hume "cuts us off from direct perception of the external world – either because there is no external world to be perceived or because our own perception of it is indirect – not strictly perception at all, but inference based on what we do perceive, namely, ideas."<sup>210</sup>

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Means of Our External Senses' for a more detailed account of Reid's understanding of the philosophers mentioned here and his refutation of their ideas.

<sup>207</sup> Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. in 'Reid's Works: Volume I' Edited by Sir William Hamilton. Maclachlan and Stewart: Edinburgh, 1863, p. 356.

<sup>208</sup> Rowe, William L. 'Reid' in *A Companion to the Philosophers*. Edited by Robert L. Arrington. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999, p. 470.

<sup>209</sup> Reid, Thomas. *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1970, p. 87.

<sup>210</sup> Sosa, Ernest and Van Cleve, James. 'Thomas Reid' in *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*. Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 2001, p. 180.



It was Reid's contention that Hume's philosophy was 'a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than its contrary'. In fact, it constituted, in Reid's opinion, the *reduction ad absurdum* of scepticism. At the same time it was the result of a consistent development of the implications of certain principles, or a certain principle, which had been shared by writers such as Locke and Berkeley, and even by Descartes, who were not so consistent or rigorous as Hume in drawing the appropriate conclusions from their premises. Hence it was necessary to examine the starting-point of the process of reasoning which had led in the end to a contradiction of the beliefs upon which all men of common sense must act in common life. The root of the whole trouble Reid finds in what he calls 'the theory of ideas'.<sup>211</sup>

As a result, Reid rejected the philosophical notions developed in the 'theory of ideas' and instead advocated an understanding of common sense that he believed was innate for mankind. The principles of common sense are innate first principles "which produce irresistible belief when we are involved in the conduct of practical affairs."<sup>212</sup> Reid writes, "First, I hold it to be certain, and even demonstrable, that all knowledge got by reasoning must be built upon first principles."<sup>213</sup> And later he concludes, "Thus I conceive, that first principles, which are really the dictates of common sense, and directly opposed to absurdities in opinion, will always, from the constitution of human nature, support themselves, and gain rather than lose ground among mankind."<sup>214</sup>

These principles of common sense were a way of understanding the world that did not lead either to Materialism or Idealism, but rather took what Reid felt to be the best from both systems of thought.

Reid adopted a *symmetry thesis* as an epistemological methodology. Our knowledge of the internal world of mental operations and our knowledge of the external world of physical processes are treated symmetrically. Both are taken for granted as a starting point for philosophical reflection... If you assume only knowledge of the internal world, as advocates of the ideal theory did, then you will

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<sup>211</sup> Copleston, *Volume V*. p. 365.

<sup>212</sup> Lehrer, Keith. *Thomas Reid*. Routledge Press: London, 1991, p. 30.

<sup>213</sup> Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Derek R. Brookes ed. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, p. 454.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, p. 463.

find that you are unable to reduce the material world to the mental world and deny the existence of everything but mental states. On the other hand, if you assume only knowledge of the external world, as advocates of materialism are wont to do, then you will find that you are unable to reduce the mental world to the material world and deny the existence of the mental world altogether. In one case you become an eliminative idealist and the other an eliminative materialist. One is as absurd as the other, and the antidote to absurdity is the even-handed symmetry of accepting our common sense knowledge of both the internal world and the external world as a starting point.<sup>215</sup>

Reid felt that by establishing an understanding of common sense that could be appealed to epistemologically then he would keep himself and others from falling into either the absurdity of Materialism or Idealism. Reid, therefore, starts with common sense knowledge of the external world of objects and the internal world of the mind and sets out to prove an account of human understanding that can be demonstrated by observation and experience.

Reid writes,

The same degree of understanding which makes a man capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life, makes him capable of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident, and which he distinctly apprehends. All knowledge, and all science, must be built upon principles that are self-evident; and of such principles every man who has common sense is a competent judge, when he conceives them distinctly. Hence it is, that disputes very often terminate in an appeal to common sense... Men rarely ask what common sense is; because every man believe himself possessed of it, and would take it for an imputation upon his understanding to be thought unacquainted with it.<sup>216</sup>

In order for one not to fall into scepticism, Reid believed that he must appeal not to ideas in the mind but to the external world in which all men of common sense believe.<sup>217</sup> This leads some Reid scholars to conclude that “Reid is thus a realist in perception. The objective world is evidence for itself, irresistible, a matter of common sense.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Lehrer, Keith. *Thomas Reid*. Routledge Press: London, 1991, p. 21.

<sup>216</sup> *Works of Thomas Reid*, p. 422-23.

<sup>217</sup> See Essay II of Reid’s *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* to see how Reid appeals to common sense to argue against Locke, Berkley and Hume.

<sup>218</sup> Helm, Paul. in *Thomas Reid: Context, Influence, Significance*. Edited by Joseph Houston. Dunedin Academic Press: Edinburgh, 2004, p. 119.

Paul Helm argues that Reid rejected the foundationalism of Locke but did not reject foundationalism altogether.

Reid certainly attacked versions of foundationalism associated with the Way of Ideas. But to recognise this is not to say that he repudiated all versions of foundationalism in a principled fashion. There is, after all, a contingent connection with the Way of Ideas and foundationalism as such.... His attack on the Way of Ideas was thus not an attack on its foundationalism, but on its allegedly sceptical consequences.<sup>219</sup>

And further,

He was, in other words, a foundationalist of universal certitude, not a foundationalist of self-evidence, and a foundationalist whose foundations consisted not just of one foundation-stone, but of several stones, the several deliverances of common sense.<sup>220</sup>

So for Reid, the truth is known and must be established on the innate first principles of common sense. This is evident by the way he challenges the philosophy of the Way of Ideas (or Theory of Ideas). In refuting the Way of Ideas Reid constantly appeals to the ‘light of common sense’ or ‘the common sense of mankind.’<sup>221</sup> If what we think is true cannot be seen to be rooted in common sense then it must be rejected as absurd.

It would appear, then, that one of the main philosophical principles to be developed within the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is foundationalism. Whether this be the internal foundations developed by Descartes ‘clear and distinct’ ideas or Reid’s common sense principles, or external foundations dependent upon Locke’s evidentialism, the is period in history seems to offer a foundationalism of one type or another as the only way to establish the truth.<sup>222</sup> Further, the claim that inerrancy presupposes this kind of epistemology would thus only be substantial if it in fact presupposes one of the types of foundationalism

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>221</sup> Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Derek R. Brookes ed. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, Essay II, chapter 14.

<sup>222</sup> For a clear statement as to the difference between internal foundationalism and external foundationalism see Paul Helm’s ‘Reid and “Reformed” Epistemology’ in *Thomas Reid: Context, Influence, Significance*, p. 109.

presented above. In what follows we will seek to validate or invalidate this claim by looking at the primary modern defenders of inerrancy: B.B. Warfield and Carl F.H. Henry.

### **B.B. Warfield and the Apologetic Need for Biblical Inerrancy**

The claim that B.B. Warfield was heavily influenced by Reid's 'Common Sense' realism is not as controversial as it might first appear. In fact, Warfield's own supporters are happy to admit that like most men of their time, Warfield was to a certain extent a product of his own cultural philosophical inheritance. John Gerstner writes, "It is clear that Warfield belongs to the Scottish Realistic philosophical approach of Old Princeton and not to the Dutch presuppositionalism of his great and much-admired contemporary, Abraham Kuyper."<sup>223</sup>

Mark Noll also sees this influence and perhaps gives the influence more weight when he remarks,

Rather, he gave himself wholeheartedly to Princeton's deeply ingrained commitment to theology as a scientific task (with "science" defined in conventional Enlightenment terms). In so doing, he thus shared fully in Princeton's equally long-standing confidence in a philosophy of common-sense realism. That philosophy owed something to its formal statement by the cautious savants of the Scottish Enlightenment like Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart.<sup>224</sup>

The point of contention, then, is not whether Warfield was influenced by Common Sense Philosophy but, rather, how much it can be said that Common Sense Philosophy influenced Warfield's understanding of truth and how truth is obtained. Those who are sympathetic to Warfield's understanding of inerrancy are prepared to say that the influence is not significant and that Warfield's understanding of truth is no different from his Reformed predecessors.

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<sup>223</sup> 'Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy' by John H. Gerstner in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*. Edited by John Warwick Montgomery. Bethany Fellowship: Minneapolis, 1974, p. 121. Other writers also agree with this statement but with some reservations. For example, John Woodbridge in *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* writes, "Moreover scholars have not yet fully clarified what the significance of Common Sense Philosophy/Baconianism might have been for the Old Princetonians. Did the Princetonians view "truth" differently than the Reformers? We propose that in the main they did not." p. 136.

<sup>224</sup> Livingston, David N. and Noll, Mark A. eds. *B.B. Warfield: Evolution, Science and Scripture, Selected Writings*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 2000, p. 19.

Those who find Warfield's method unhelpful are more than willing to connect him with "Enlightenment" presuppositions (i.e., Common Sense Philosophy) and disregard his particular doctrine of Scripture. And then there are those who find themselves somewhere in the middle of these positions who are unhappy with Warfield's method but like where the method leaves them theologically.<sup>225</sup> That is to say they appreciate Warfield's "high" regard for Scripture (i.e., its inerrancy) but are suspicious of the evidentialism that leads him to postulate this of Scripture. It is the source of this anxiety that will occupy the rest of our examination of Warfield. The source of this anxiety is Warfield's evidentialist presupposition which leads him to elevate Apologetics to the first task of theology.<sup>226</sup>

For Warfield Apologetics is the first theological discipline because we must first prove that there is a God to know before we can say anything about him.<sup>227</sup> He writes,

But certainly, before we draw it from the Scriptures, we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the Scriptures. And, before we do that, we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the world. And, before we do that, we must assure ourselves that a knowledge of God is possible for man. And, before we do that, we must assure ourselves that there is a God to know. Thus, we inevitably work back to first principles. And, in working thus back to first principles, we exhibit the indispensability of an "Apologetical Theology," which of necessity holds the place of the first among the five essential theological disciplines.<sup>228</sup>

For Warfield, faith in God was not something determined apart from evidence.<sup>229</sup> Faith ought to always be grounded in or founded upon evidence.

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<sup>225</sup> In John Gerstner's article quoted above he writes, "For example, Klaas Runia, in his *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, manifestly prefers Warfield's doctrine of Scripture to Barth's but equally favours Barth's epistemological approach to Scripture to Warfield's." He also cites J.J. Markarian, Domergue and Dowey as having similar anxieties.

<sup>226</sup> Even John Woodbridge voices this anxiety when he says that Warfield probably did overemphasize the apologetic value of evidences for the truth of Scripture when compared with John Calvin. See Woodbridge, John D. *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 137.

<sup>227</sup> Rae's argument that was presented in the first section of this chapter might be seen to be part of the reason by Warfield needed to place so much theological weight with evidentialism.

<sup>228</sup> Meeter, John E. *Benjamin B. Warfield: Selected Shorter Writings, Volume Two*. P&R Publishing Co: New Jersey, 1973, p. 98.

For ourselves, we confess we can conceive of no act of faith of any kind which is not grounded in evidence: faith is a specific form of persuasion or conviction, and all persuasion or conviction is grounded in evidence. And it does not seem obvious on the face of it that the evidence adapted to ground the conviction that the Christian religion is true, and the evidence adapted to ground the conviction that I am myself in Christ Jesus, need be the same: so that the resulting acts of faith must necessarily occur together or even coalesce.<sup>230</sup>

It seems then that the conclusion to be drawn from this is that our beliefs are always founded upon some basic evidence, or first principle. Here we see the link between Warfield's thought and the foundationalism that grew out of the philosophical shifts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Warfield believed that Christianity could be proved true with evidence.<sup>231</sup> In fact, as we have seen, it is the nature of faith that it is necessarily, according to Warfield, grounded in some type of evidence. "But we are arguing that faith is, in all its exercises alike, a form of conviction, and is, therefore, necessarily grounded in evidence."<sup>232</sup>

In arguing this way Warfield believed he was representing a long Augustinian tradition regarding faith and reason. In his interpretation of Augustine's thought, Warfield writes,

He [Augustine] found no obstacle in the attainment of certitude: but nothing but apodeictic certitude satisfied him. He entertained no doubt, for example, that seven and three make ten; what he demanded was the same kind and degree of certainty he had here, for everything else. In other words, he would not commit himself to any truth for which he did not have ready at hand complete demonstration.<sup>233</sup>

This tradition he finds ultimately fulfilled in Descartes' *cogito*. When Descartes claimed *cogito ergo sum*, he, according to Warfield, was upholding Augustine's particular

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<sup>229</sup> Here we see a major difference between the method of Warfield and the method of Barth. We might say that Warfield advocates a theology 'from below' whereas Barth would insist on doing theology 'from above'.

<sup>230</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings, Volume Two*. p. 113.

<sup>231</sup> Although he did not believe that evidence could make a Christian. No matter how much evidence is given, someone is able to become a Christian only by the work of the Spirit. "It certainly is not in the power of all the demonstrations in the world to make a Christian. Paul may plant and Apollos water; it is God alone who give the increase. But it does not seem to follow that Paul would as well, therefore, not plant, and Apollos as well not water. Faith is the gift of God; but it does not in the least follow that the faith that God gives is an irrational faith, that is, a faith without ground in right reason." *Selected Shorter Writings, Volume Two*, p. 98.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

<sup>233</sup> Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Volume IV, Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003, p. 137.

epistemology. “When he [Augustine] urged men to cease seeking truth without them, and to turn within, since the home of truth is inside man, he already placed them upon the firm footing which Descartes sought with this *cogito ergo sum*.”<sup>234</sup>

In Warfield faith and reason are never separated. Christianity is a reasonable faith and the faith that is produced in man by the Spirit is grounded in reason. Furthermore, this faith is always grounded in right reason. Even though it is through the Spirit that faith is actualized, the seeds of this faith can always be seen to be connected to or planted in the garden of evidence. The faith that grows out in this garden is always surrounded by this evidence. The appeal for the Christian believer as to their believing what is true is an appeal to evidence available to all men at all times.<sup>235</sup> How do we know that Christianity is true? We are able to appeal to the same evidence available to all men to give merit to our belief.

The Holy Spirit does not work with a blind, an ungrounded faith in the heart. What is supplied by his creative energy in working faith is not a ready-made faith, rooted in nothing and clinging without reason to its object; nor yet new grounds of belief in the object presented; but just a new ability of the heart to respond to the ground of faith, sufficient in themselves, already present to the understanding.<sup>236</sup>

Warfield was concerned that if the faith of the Christian could not be grounded in reasonable evidence then there was no way to confirm that, in fact, the Holy Spirit was working within a particular person. Warfield felt that Kuyper’s questioning of the validity of Apologetics led to subjectivism. If the only way in which we can know whether or not the Holy Spirit has brought about belief in someone is by their own *sensus divinitatis*, then truth was ultimately determined by the subject.

It is not true that the Christian view of the world is subjective merely, and is incapable of validation in the forum of pure reason. It is not true

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

<sup>235</sup> Warfield’s method is a deliberate rejection of the presuppositionalism advocated by Kuyper and his followers. Warfield is critical of the claim of Kuyper that once the Almighty has implanted faith in the heart of the believer there will be no need to ground that faith in reason.

<sup>236</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings, Volume II*, p. 99.

that the arguments adduced for the support of the foundations of the Christian religion lack objective validity.<sup>237</sup>

It seems as though Warfield wanted to maintain the internalism that he believed, rightly or wrongly, Augustine and Descartes advocated, but with that said he certainly rejected all forms of idealism. The true world really exists outside of the mind and our Christian faith corresponds to and is validated by a correct understanding of this external world.

The question that seems to follow from this is one to do with pneumatology.<sup>238</sup> What is the role of the Spirit in all of this? Does Warfield place any emphasis on the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*? Warfield seems to see the Spirit's role as one of confirmation.

The internal testimony of the Spirit cannot be used as demonstration for the truths of the Christian faith. Rather the Spirit provides a confirmation of this faith. As one author has put it, "The internal testimony seals to the heart what the external miracles provide for the mind."<sup>239</sup> Warfield remarks, "The action of the Holy Spirit in giving faith is not apart from evidence, but along with evidence; and in the first instance consists in preparing the soul for the reception of the evidence."<sup>240</sup>

He writes further, "This is not to argue that it is by apologetics that men are made Christians, but that apologetics supplies to Christian men the systematically organized basis on which the faith of Christians must rest."<sup>241</sup> So Apologetics as a discipline organises all of the evidence and when faith needs assurance it is to this evidence that it must look. Christians, according to Warfield, are able to make a case for the truth of Christianity that is solely based on common evidence available to everyone.

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>238</sup> For more on pneumatology see chapter 4 and chapter 6 of this thesis.

<sup>239</sup> 'Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy,' p. 129.

<sup>240</sup> Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Volume IX, Studies in Theology*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003, p. 15.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 16.



The role that evidence plays in the overall conception of faith is where the anxiety of many theologians seems to lie. John Woodbridge writes,

It is true, however, that the Old Princetonians (influenced by Common Sense Realism) may have overestimated mankind's ability to understand an apologetic case for Christianity based on external evidences, and this despite their Reformed anthropology.<sup>242</sup>

It appears that Warfield's emphasis on the human ability to ground faith in reason and his exaltation of Christian Apologetics as the Queen of the theological sciences has made some question his method. Rogers and McKim remark,

Properly, theology was "the science of God" which dealt with "a body of objective facts" and had as its subject matter the "knowledge of God." If this was so, argued Warfield, then apologetics "must begin by establishing the reality of objective facts of the data upon which it is based."<sup>243</sup>

Rogers and McKim conclude that for Warfield philosophy came before theology and that for God to give faith by the Spirit the requirements of human reason had first to be met.<sup>244</sup>

Rogers and McKim go on to say that according to Warfield the Holy Spirit did not create faith in man, reason does this. The Holy Spirit makes that faith which is produced by reason into a 'saving faith'.<sup>245</sup> Warfield writes in a review of Herman Bavinck's *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*,<sup>246</sup>

The truth therefore is that rational argumentation does, entirely apart from that specific operation of the Holy Ghost which produces saving faith, ground a genuine exercise of faith. This operation of the Spirit is not necessary then to produce faith, but only to give to a faith which naturally grows out of the proper grounds of faith, that peculiar quality which makes it saving faith.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*. p. 136.

<sup>243</sup> Rogers, Jack B. and McKim, Donald K. *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. Harper & Row Publishers: London, 1979, p. 328.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

<sup>246</sup> Dr. Bavinck's work sets out to describe the nature of Christian certainty. Warfield critiques Bavinck because Bavinck argues that Christians cannot obtain certainty from Apologetics or experiments. Warfield says that for Bavinck certainty is a fruit of faith itself and nothing more.

<sup>247</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings, Volume II*. p. 115.

So there appears to be in Warfield a dichotomy between secular and sacred faith, if we may use these terms. A ‘secular’ faith is produced by natural revelation (i.e., Apologetics, reason, scientific experimentation, etc.) and once this ‘faith’ is established in the mind of man, the Holy Spirit works by His internal testimony to nurture this faith into a ‘sacred’ faith or saving faith.<sup>248</sup>

John Gerstner makes the connection between Warfield’s understanding of reason and faith and his doctrine of Scripture. Gerstner writes, “Precisely because of this primacy of reason to faith, Scripture must first be authenticated to provide a rational basis for its acceptance.”<sup>249</sup> This raises the question of whether Warfield’s doctrine of inerrancy is his means of authenticating Scripture, i.e., providing a rational basis for its acceptance. Only by looking at the way in which Warfield develops this doctrine will we be able to come to some conclusions regarding this question. Henry Krabbendam writes, “In the final analysis, Warfield holds to his view of Scripture – its plenary, verbal, inspiration; its truth; its authority; its infallibility/inerrancy - because it is based on the “exegetical fact,” “the common place of exegetical science,” of the witness of Scripture, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the apostles.”<sup>250</sup>

For Warfield the evidence for the inspiration of Scripture lies with the claims made within the Bible itself.<sup>251</sup> However, he does not fall into a circular argument because the writers of the Bible are able to be accredited by evidences other than Scripture references. “...we

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<sup>248</sup> It would be quite easy here to see Warfield as a precursor of our postmodern times and to see this distinction between the different types of faith as in line with the postmodern critique of objective knowledge. However, this would be a mistake. It seems fairly evident that for Warfield ‘sacred’ faith is synonymous with objective knowledge producing belief in God.

<sup>249</sup> *God’s Inerrant Word*. p. 123.

<sup>250</sup> *Inerrancy*. p. 429.

<sup>251</sup> It is interesting to note just how much it would seem that Warfield’s argument relies on the ‘Bible as just another book’ condition.

believe the writers of the Bible, because they have been shown, independently of an assumed inspired Bible, to be accredited messengers of the God who cannot lie or err.”<sup>252</sup> Stephen Evans also claims that Warfield grounded the authority of Scripture in the historical evidences of Jesus to avoid a circular argument. Warfield thought we could gain some reasonable knowledge about the historical Jesus without assuming the inspired character of the Gospels.<sup>253</sup>

Warfield’s reliance on historical evidence might be a reaction to the anxiety over historical ‘facts’ that we covered in the first half of this chapter. Warfield would have been very aware of the challenges that Spinoza and Lessing brought to theology especially in the with regard to the truthfulness of historical claims. It is by no means a stretch of the imagination to think that Warfield would have stressed a need to hold on to historical evidence precisely because of the split between faith and history that Rae’s thesis explores.

It is with Warfield’s reliance on historical claims that we see how important Apologetics is for Warfield’s understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. Warfield writes,

First, there is the exegetical evidence that the doctrine [plenary inspiration] held and taught by the Church is the doctrine held and taught by the Biblical writers themselves. And secondly, there is a whole mass of evidence – internal and external, objective and subjective, historical and philosophical, human and divine – which goes to show that the Bible writers are trustworthy as doctrinal guides. If they are trustworthy teachers of doctrine and if they held and taught this doctrine, then this doctrine is true, and is to be accepted and acted upon as true by us all.<sup>254</sup>

By placing Apologetics in such an important role for faith, Warfield is consistent with his Common Sense heritage. The inerrancy of Scripture then becomes that ‘evidence’ of

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<sup>252</sup> *God’s Inerrant Word*. p 131.

<sup>253</sup> Evans, C. Stephan. *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1996, p. 29.

<sup>254</sup> ‘The Real Problem of Inspiration’ by B.B. Warfield in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Edited by Samuel G. Craig. P&R Publishing Company: New Jersey, 1948, p. 174.

Scripture, which is available to all men for examination, and the authority of Scripture can be upheld by this particular evidence.

### **Carl F.H. Henry and the Rational Need for Biblical Inerrancy**

Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003) was arguably one of the twentieth century's leading evangelical theologians. His six-volume magnum opus, *God, Revelation and Authority* continues to challenge evangelical and non-evangelical thinkers alike. For the purposes of this chapter we will be examining Henry's main epistemological presuppositions and how these specifically impact his doctrine of the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. And although Henry takes a noticeably Warfieldian line when it comes to the doctrine of inerrancy, he does use a slightly different method than the strict apologetic approach that Warfield assumed (see above).

In our discussion above concerning Warfield's epistemology we found that he placed a lot of emphasis on evidentialism and that he advocated a foundational understanding of epistemology based on these 'evidences.' We noted that this was very consistent with the particular foundationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy. With Henry the connection to this philosophy is far less apparent. Henry was very aware of the critique of this philosophy offered by his contemporaries and believed that Cartesian rationalism and scientific empiricism were very different epistemological 'pictures' to the one painted by Christian revelation. "The axioms of the Christian system of truth are not presuppositions shared in common with secular thought," Henry writes, "Christian doctrines are not derived from experimental observation or from rationalism, but from God in his

revelation.”<sup>255</sup> If and when these axioms resemble certain “Enlightenment” presuppositions, Henry will argue that they are given as a precedent in the written revelation of God. In the pages that follow we will be discussing the axioms and presuppositions that Henry uses to develop his particular doctrine of the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Henry’s main presuppositions that interest us here are: 1) the objective nature of revelation, and 2) the scientific nature of theology. With these presuppositions firmly in place we will be able to paint an adequate picture of his notion of truth and determine whether there are any similarities with the philosophies examined previously in this chapter.

### **Henry and the Objective Nature of Revelation**

Very early on in volume one of his work Henry writes, “Religion now has become “everyone’s own kettle of fish” – a matter of personal preference rather than a truth-commitment universally valid for one and all.”<sup>256</sup> Henry’s concern is to re-establish the historical Christian commitment to objective general and special revelation. For Henry, all knowledge revealed by God is accessible to men because all revelation is objective. Man has been created with the capacity to recognize this revelation. “...Christianity contends that revelational truth is intelligible, expressible in valid propositions, and universally communicable.”<sup>257</sup>

God primarily communicates this objective revelation through propositions. These propositions are the autographic text of Scripture, which is labelled by Henry as special revelation. By identifying Scripture with the objective propositional revelation of God, Henry establishes a way in which all men may know this objective revelation equally. By

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<sup>255</sup> Henry, Carl F.H. *God, Revelation and Authority, Volume I*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, 1999, p. 223.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, p. 229.

reading the Scriptures all men have equal access to the truth of God. In a sense the Scriptures act as a kind of revelational textbook and source for objective truth. This special revelation (i.e., the Bible) takes precedent in Henry's thinking because it takes the truth revealed generally to mankind through creation and converts it into objective propositions, which are epistemologically verifiable.

Man's ability to comprehend both special and general revelation is provided in Henry's thought by the creation of the *imago Dei* universally in man. The *imago Dei* is man's rationality. "The possibility of man's knowledge of divine revelation rests in the created capacity of the human mind to know the truth of God, and the capacity of thought and speech that anticipates intelligible knowledge and fellowship."<sup>258</sup> It is important to note here that this rationality/*imago Dei* was not fully affected by the fall. Henry argues that the fall primarily affected man's volition and not his rationality. "The fall conditions man's will more pervasively than his reason."<sup>259</sup> He seems to rationalize this belief by stating that if man's rationality were deeply effected by the fall then we would have to be sceptics because we could have no assurance that what we can know objectively is not marred by our fallen humanity. And if our cognitive abilities were thus affected then God could not objectively reveal himself to us and therefore we could not have any relationship with him or knowledge of him. The very fact that our belief in God is 'reasonable' confirms that the fall has not fully affected our ability to know God in this way. "The functions of reason – whether concepts, forms of implication, deduction and induction, judgments and conclusions, and whatever else – are not simply a pragmatic evolutionary development but fulfil a divine

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, p. 226.

intention and purpose for man in relation to the whole realm of knowledge.”<sup>260</sup> Clearly this intention was not thwarted by the fall.

Because revelational truth is objective and able to be understood rationally, Christian truth-claims can be examined by anyone of normal cognitive aptitude. “But the nature of truth is such that the Christian revelation is formally intelligible to all men; it convincingly overlaps ineradicable elements of everyman’s experience, and offers a more consistent, more comprehensive and more satisfactory explanation of the meaning and worth of life than do other views.”<sup>261</sup> Christian revelation is subject to all of the rational tests that other truth-claims are subjected to. In fact, Henry argues that rational tests will show the Christian revelation to be logically and psychologically superior to all other worldviews.

The reason why Christian truth is accessible to all men is both because mankind has an innate ability to comprehend this truth (i.e., the *imago Dei*) and because this truth is given in propositional form. The scriptural revelation is intelligible and propositional. This allows Henry to understand the revelational truth found in Scripture to be verifiable in the same way as truths found in science. He writes, “The truth-content of theology can be investigated – as can that of astronomy and botany and geology – quite apart from the moral character of the technical scholar and his interest or disinterest in a new way of life.”<sup>262</sup> And further, “Theological truth does not differ from other truth in respect to intelligibility; therefore, truth must be rationally cognized if it is to be meaningfully grasped and communicated.”<sup>263</sup> This leads us to another one of Henry’s important presuppositions that is vital to his overall understanding of Christian revelation: his identification of theology and science.

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, p. 238.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 229.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 228.

## Henry and the Scientific Quest of Theology

We have established thus far Henry's belief in objective revelation given primarily in the autographic propositions of Scripture. We turn now to his belief in the need for this revelation to be 'scientifically' verifiable. A second presupposition in Henry's theology is his understanding of theology as a scientific enterprise. He writes, "Indeed, Christianity is a genuine science in the deepest sense because it presumes to account in an intelligible and orderly way for whatever is legitimate in every sphere of life and learning."<sup>264</sup>

One of the reasons Henry gives for maintaining theology as a verifiable, intelligible science is apologetic in nature. "How else," he writes, "except by persuasive rational evidence that unmasks the inconsistencies of other views and exhibits the rational consistency of Christian claims shall we make it apparent to the non-believer that his alternative, however fantastic are its promises, lacks the intellectual compulsion of the Christian view?"<sup>265</sup> The revelation offered by God in Scripture is a logically consistent revelation of God, which is, in Henry's mind, verifiable by reason.

Because of his insistence that theology offers rationally verifiable truths, Henry sees the need to develop a methodology that will help explicate these truths. In a very telling statement Henry concludes, "If the theology of revelation holds more than an antiquarian interest, Christians must indicate their conviction that Christianity is distinguished above all by its objective truth, and must adduce the method of knowing and the manner of verification by which every man can become personally persuaded." And further "What's more, if the

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid, p. 203.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p. 234.



question of method and verifiability is left unanswered, even the Christian himself can have no rational certainty in his commitment to God.”<sup>266</sup>

For Henry, the question of verifiability is connected with the scientific aspect of theology. Like all scientific truth, theological truth must be verifiable if it is to be believed, and like all scientific truth, theological truth must maintain logical consistency. In fact any theological truth that is contrary to the law of non-contradiction must be denied as truth.<sup>267</sup> “Christianity is open to falsification by the same laws of logic that determine validity and invalidity throughout the whole range of human knowledge.”<sup>268</sup> And, “the meaning and truth of any claim must meet the test of rational intelligibility, noncontradiction and consistency or it can only remain suspect.”<sup>269</sup> The science of Christian theology must have some rationally verifiable foundation to rest upon in order to demonstrate its universal truth for all of mankind.<sup>270</sup> According to Henry the verification principle is the inerrant Word of God. “The means of verifying the truth about God, the inspired Scriptures, is accessible to all.”<sup>271</sup>

The inerrant scriptures are the means by which anyone can access the objective truth about God and verify for himself in a rational and intelligible way the claims made by them.

Henry remarks, “Evangelical Christianity insists that scriptural revelation is intelligible and propositional, and it therefore cannot dispense with any interest in harmonizing precepts and phenomena. Whatever is logically contradictory and incapable of reconciliation simply

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 214.

<sup>267</sup> This is one of many reasons that Henry is critical of Barthian theology. He says that dialectical theology forfeits the logical consistency of revelation and leads ultimately to scepticism.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p. 265.

<sup>269</sup> Henry, Carl F.H. *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume IV*. Crossway Books: Illinois, 1999, p. 49.

<sup>270</sup> This is not to say that Henry believed that there were empirical foundations upon which someone is able to base their belief. He does not seem to place much weight in empirical foundations. He remarks, “We bear no antipathy toward those who adduce supposedly demonstrative empirical evidences of highly probable “proofs.” But this seems to project a vain foundation for Christian faith, and shifts the basis of belief in such a way as to needlessly invalidate Christianity for those who find a foundational appeal to empirical data unpersuasive.” *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume I*. p., 259.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 230.

cannot be accepted as truth.”<sup>272</sup> As the inerrant revelation of God, the Bible is the only “objectively authoritative norm” for believers and non-believers alike to judge truth from falsity. Because the truth of God is communicated in this way, i.e., in an objective propositional form, one’s personal faith is not required to understand it.<sup>273</sup> Hence, Henry’s belief that theology is like all other sciences in its ability to communicate objective truths to anyone.

The inerrancy of the scriptures provide an objective epistemic authority for themselves which allows them to be rationally verified and demonstrably true. In a summarizing statement Henry concludes,

*Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.*<sup>274</sup>

### Henry’s Concept of Truth

At the beginning of *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume I*, Henry writes, “The fundamental issue remains the issue of truth, the truth of theological assertions. No work on theology will be worth its weight if that fundamental issue is obscured.”<sup>275</sup> He continues to say that contemporary Western thought has a growing distrust about ‘final’ truth.<sup>276</sup> So what is this ‘final’ truth of which Henry speaks? This final truth is an objective, unchanging truth revealed to us by God. “There is only one kind of truth. Religious truth is as much truth as

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<sup>272</sup> *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume IV*, p. 174.

<sup>273</sup> This is yet another area where Henry finds Barthian theology difficult. Contrary to Barth, evangelicals typically hold that the authority and sense of Scripture objectively precedes the reader’s faith. Henry argues that by claiming that faith needs to be present in order to understand the Bible, Barth makes the authority and meaning of the Bible dependent upon the belief of a particular individual. “But unless Scripture has objective epistemic authority as a verbally inspired record, its validity as revelational truth remains obscure and its internal personal authority is grounded solely in individual decision.” *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume IV*, p. 267.

<sup>274</sup> *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume I*, p. 215. (his italics)

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

any other truth. Instead of being devised for tasks other than to express literal truths about God, human language has from the beginning had this very purpose in view, namely, enabling man to enjoy and to communicate the unchanging truth about his Maker and Lord.”<sup>277</sup> It is the revelation of God as his written word upon which all other truths are deduced.<sup>278</sup>

Henry seems to synonymously relate Truth with propositions. For instance, he writes, “All God’s revelation is intelligible revelation; his special scriptural revelation is communicated in truths and words.”<sup>279</sup> Also, “If divine revelation is intelligible, as biblical Christianity insists, then God’s communication of truth and provision or information is its vital centre. In that event, the revelational significance of concepts and words, and of propositional truth, is indispensably important.”<sup>280</sup> In Scripture we have objective information about God and his purposes.

To know this truth one must exercise his powers of reason. Henry advocates an Augustinian notion of truth in some respects when he states that truth is located within the intellect. This truth is not one kind of truth among many kinds of truth. Henry is adamant that there is only one kind of truth. “There is but one system of truth, and that system involves the right axiom and its theorems and premises derived with complete logical consistency.”<sup>281</sup> So for something to be true it must be consistent with certain logical axioms. In fact, as far as revelation is concerned, Henry concludes that whatever violates the law of contradiction cannot be regarded as revelation.

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<sup>277</sup> *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume IV*, p. 128.

<sup>278</sup> *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume I*, p. 219.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, p. 227.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, p. 244.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, p. 227.

Henry's identification of truth with objective propositions revealed by God is consistent with his understanding of the nature of revelation and the scientific goal of theology. By identifying propositional truth with revealed truth Henry is able to verify the truth of scripture in a 'scientific' way. In volume IV of his work he talks about the "persuasive evidence" for the authority of the Bible as divinely inspired Scripture.<sup>282</sup> This divinely inspired propositional truth can be proved to be authoritative because it does not err; it is inerrant. According to Henry, the link between authority and inerrancy is maintained in classical orthodoxy. "The classical view of inspiration refuses to ground the authority of Scripture in the common life of the community of faith; it correlates that authority instead with a *divinely imparted property* of the scriptural texts" (my italics).<sup>283</sup>

The link here between Henry's understanding of truth and the doctrine of inerrancy is now apparent. Inerrancy is that divinely imparted property of Scripture that allows one to verify the authority of the divinely inspired text. Without retaining the doctrine of inerrancy one is unable to prove the authority of Scripture. Henry asks, "Can we associate divine authority with anything less than verbal inerrancy?"<sup>284</sup> Again, he asks, "But error is what is wrong, inaccurate, incorrect, mistaken. If we declared the category of inerrancy to be irrelevant for Scripture, can we any longer contend for the truth of Scripture?"<sup>285</sup> Henry's concerns regarding inerrancy and authority are consistent with the understanding of truth, which he advocates. He concludes, "Only logical imprecision can begin with errancy and conclude with divine authority. What is errant cannot be divinely authoritative nor can God have inspired it."<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume IV*, p. 101.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, p. 162.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, p. 177.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192.

There is in Henry, a univocal understanding of propositional truth and revelation that is not dissimilar to Placher's thesis concerning the univocal language of revelation. Because propositional truth is univocal with revelation when one says that the proposition has erred one must necessarily conclude that the revelation has done the same. We saw at the beginning of this chapter that Placher's thesis concerning the univocity of language about God has resulted in a modern shift in an understanding about revelation. Henry's understanding of revelation might be understood to be influenced by this shift. There is no doubt from the quotes of Henry above that he believed propositions and revelation to be univocal. It would appear that he is another thinker who is partially representative of the shift that Placher's thesis explains.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to address a number of different theological and philosophical shifts that occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that became the fertile soil through which the doctrine of inerrancy could spring to life. In the previous pages of this chapter we have addressed some of the different shifts and concluded that the philosophical shift resulted in an epistemological foundationalism. We then looked at both Warfield and Henry to see if their thought could be seen to be influence by this shift to foundationalism. We concluded that B.B. Warfield presupposed a certain foundationalism, which regarded evidence as the primary means of discovering what is true. Because of his 'Common Sense' heritage, Warfield elevated the role of Apologetics to the first task of theology. By doing this he believed he could prove the truthfulness of Christianity. The evidence for the authority of Scripture was linked to the apologetic task for which the doctrine of inerrancy became vital.

We then turned to Carl F.H. Henry and discovered a different sort of foundationalism, which relied on reason and the principle of verifiability to determine truth. Henry's emphasis on the rational demonstrability of the truth of Christianity allowed him to connect the authority of Scripture with its inerrancy. His particular understanding of truth supported this connection. In both cases we conclude that the understanding of truth promoted by the two theologians resemble certain Enlightenment concerns to do with epistemological certainty and objectivity. Although it would be an overstatement to identify Warfield and Henry as wholly influenced by the theological and philosophical shifts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is evident that their particular concerns cannot be seen apart from this context.

In the next chapter we propose to examine a number of contemporary ways of talking about 'truth', e.g., correspondence or coherence. Once the preliminary work has been done on contemporary notions of truth we will look to see if these notions are consistent with the scriptural portrayal of truth. By looking at how both the Old Testament and New Testament use the term *truth* we will be able come to some conclusions about whether Warfield and Henry's use of *truth* is consistent with the biblical picture.

## Biblical Notions of Truth: Towards a Christological Understanding

*Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "**What is truth?**" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him."*

The question, which was raised by Pilate in the quote from the Gospel of John above, is a question that has vexed both philosophers and theologians throughout human history.

Aristotle defined truth in the following manner: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false; but neither what is nor what is not is said to be or not to be."<sup>287</sup> The nineteenth century philosopher, William James, develops an understanding of the nature of truth equated with its use. He writes,

*True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not. This is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as. This thesis is what I have to defend. The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying*

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<sup>287</sup> Aristotle. 'Metaphysics.' 1011a 25. in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume II*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1995.

itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*.<sup>288</sup>

This chapter proposes to outline two of the main philosophical positions on the nature of truth, i.e., correspondence, coherence, verification/pragmatism and identity theory, in order to establish some of the options that theology has for understanding this nature.<sup>289</sup> We will then examine the way in which Scripture defines and uses the term ‘truth’ in order to see if it resembles any of the philosophical options presented in section one.<sup>290</sup> After discussing the way in which Scripture seems to understand ‘truth’ we will turn to the claim of Jesus himself that he is the truth to see if there is a theological definition of truth which bears upon the philosophical options presented in the first section of this chapter. Finally, this will allow us to re-consider the implications of our findings in relation to the doctrine of inerrancy.

## **Section One: Philosophical Theories of Truth**

### **The Nature of Truth: Correspondence Theory**

The correspondence theory of truth is often linked to Aristotle’s definition quoted above.<sup>291</sup>

It is the theory that ‘X is true, if and only if, X corresponds to reality or facts.’

Correspondence theories argue for the adequacy of things in reality to the intellect (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*). Aristotle provides the foundational definition for correspondence theorists.

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<sup>288</sup> James, William. ‘Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth.’ in Lynch, Michael P. ed. *The Nature of Truth*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, 2001, p. 213.

<sup>289</sup> I am here presupposing that truth can be properly said to have a nature and will not be presenting truth theories, such as deflationism, which would deny such claims.

<sup>290</sup> Presenting the main philosophical definitions of truth is a useful device for entering in on a consideration the biblical notion of truth presented in the following section of this chapter. In my reading on inerrancy the overall tendency is for theologians and philosophers alike to focus their discussion the main theories of truth presented below.

<sup>291</sup> It is interesting to note that Aristotle’s definition does not guarantee the separate existence of the thing referenced. This issue becomes evident when raised by Aquinas in his *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* and is addressed. For a discussion of this see: Engel, Pascal. *Truth*. Acumen Publishers: England, 2002, p. 16; also, Weingartner, Paul. *Basic Questions on Truth*. Kluwer Academic Publishers: London, 2000, pp. 108-09.



However, within the correspondence theory are terms that need to be carefully defined and understood. Correspondence theorists tend to be realists.<sup>292</sup> Realism is the philosophical position that the world exists outside of the mind. The correspondence theory is sometimes labelled a *realist* conception of truth because it holds that truth is uncovered when our thoughts correspond to a reality independent of those thoughts.<sup>293</sup> Engel writes,

Our thoughts are true *in virtue* of something that is distinct from them, and independent from our thinking and knowing of them. In this sense, the truth of a statement is also supposed to *transcend* our possible knowledge of it, or its verification.<sup>294</sup>

In this understanding of truth propositions play a key role. A proposition is a statement or assertion that can be deemed true or false. Propositions are the ‘truth-bearers’ for the correspondence theory. In other words, propositions have the property of truth; so we say that the proposition is true because it conveys or bears the truth of the reality which makes the truth.<sup>295</sup> That which makes truth (truth-maker) is the reality that exists independent of the self.<sup>296</sup> There is an intuition that truth relies not on us but on a reality independent of us.<sup>297</sup>

What we have in the end is an objective reality outside of the mind that exists independently of the mind. Something is true when it corresponds with this reality. So, the proposition: “St. Mary’s is located on South Street in St. Andrews” is a true proposition because it

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<sup>292</sup> I say “tend to be” here because as Michael Lynch has pointed out it is possible to pry realism and correspondence apart. He writes, “Strictly speaking, one could believe that objects are partly or wholly constrained by their relations to concepts and still hold a correspondence or realist account of truth.” See Lynch, Michael P. ed. *The Nature of Truth*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, 2001, p. 11.

<sup>293</sup> Engel, Pascal. *Truth*. Acumen Publishers: England, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>295</sup> There are different types of truth-bearers of which propositions are one. Other examples include ideas and mental representations (Descartes) or things located in space and time like utterances (Hobbes). I chose to use the example of propositions above primarily to make an implicit connection with my previous chapter.

<sup>296</sup> Michael Lynch rightly argues that correspondence theorists must make explicit their metaphysical assumptions like that of ‘truth-bearers,’ but also ‘truth-makers’ and the way in which these two things relate or correspond. See: Lynch, Michael P. ed. *The Nature of Truth*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, 2001, p. 9.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

corresponds to the reality, or fact, that St. Mary's is located where the proposition claims it to be.

In general then, correspondence theorists are those who can be classified as philosophical realists who regard truth as primarily conveyed in propositions. For these propositions to be considered true they must accurately reflect, portray, correspond to the reality of which they speak.<sup>298</sup> Many evangelical correspondence theorists also make an historical appeal arguing that the correspondence theory of truth has a rich philosophical history which should not just be disregarded as other theories of truth are developed.

Correspondence theory may be the most influential theory of truth amongst evangelicals. Kevin Vanhoozer admits that it may be *the* intuitive meaning of truth. However, as his article on Truth in the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* explains, there are problems with this theory of truth.<sup>299</sup> He points to the coherence theory as being perhaps the "chief rival" for a theological interpretation of Scripture. It is to this theory that we now turn.

### **The Nature of Truth: Coherence Theory**

As we saw above, the correspondence theory makes a clear distinction between subject and object. The coherence theory, on the other, does not make such a distinction. The coherence theory is rooted in Hegelian Idealism, which does not place an emphasis on distinguishing

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<sup>298</sup> Because of space limitations I am having to be particularly brief in my examination of the different truth theories. I will be only painting a general picture of the different theories and not looking at the philosophical intricacies, which make the truth theories complex. For instance, some correspondence theorists would be unhappy with my 'realist' generalization. Some would consider themselves critical realists or moderate realists or immanent realists, etc. Compare, for instance, Terence Horgan's 'Contextual Semantics and Metaphysical Realism: Truth as Indirect' and William P. Alston's 'A Realist Conception of Truth' in *The Nature of Truth* edited by Michael P. Lynch.

<sup>299</sup> Vanhoozer advocates what he calls a "chastened" correspondence view of truth that he believes helps solve some of the problems with the traditional correspondence theory presented above. For further information see his article on Truth in the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Kevin Vanhoozer, Baker: Michigan, 2005, pp. 818-22.

ideas and the objects of ideas.<sup>300</sup> In general the coherence theorists' metaphysic ends up being monistic.<sup>301</sup> We see this in the philosophy of Brand Blanshard, an American philosopher who helped develop the theory of coherence, when he writes, "To think of a thing is to get that thing itself in some degree within the mind."<sup>302</sup>

Pascal Engel defines the coherence theory in the following way: "X is true if and only if it appropriately belongs to a coherent set of propositions, beliefs and statements."<sup>303</sup> However this definition might contextualize the theory too much. According to Blanshard there is an Absolute in which all truth coheres, so for something to be true it must be seen as coherent overall with the Oneness of the universe. Blanshard is quick to realize that there is an amount of scepticism inherent within this view because we do not know what the Oneness of the world is. He writes,

The admission is that the theory does involve a degree of scepticism regarding our present knowledge and probably all future knowledge. In all likelihood there will never be a proposition of which we can say, 'This that I am asserting, with precisely the meaning I now attach to it, is absolutely true'.<sup>304</sup>

Nevertheless for a thing to be ultimately true it will find coherence within this metaphysical unity. Because of this we can only know truth imperfectly and contextually. For Blanshard, we must see truth in degrees. Because of our finiteness we are not fully able to understand how truth coheres as a whole but we are able to see a degree of truth as is coheres with our experience. "Truth is the approximation of thought to reality... The degree of truth of a particular proposition is to be judged in the first instance by its coherence with experience as

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<sup>300</sup> As Lynch writes the coherence theory became prominent at the end of the nineteenth century under the thought of H.H. Joachim and F.H. Bradley who were neo-Hegelian absolute idealists. See *The Nature of Truth*, p. 99.

<sup>301</sup> Again I say in general because there are philosophers who are coherentists but do not fit this mould. For instance, Linda Martin Alcoff would not consider herself an idealist but remains a coherentist.

<sup>302</sup> Brand Blanshard 'Coherence as the Nature of Truth' in *The Nature of Truth*.

<sup>303</sup> *Truth*, p. 26.

<sup>304</sup> *The Nature of Truth*, 112.

a whole, ultimately by its coherence with that further whole, all-comprehensive and fully articulated, in which thought can come to rest.”<sup>305</sup>

It would be easy here to think that what Blanshard is offering is very similar to the correspondence view, especially when he says things like ‘truth is the approximation of thought to reality.’ However, we must keep in mind the Idealism presupposed in such statements. The thoughts in our minds are the objects. “Thought, we have insisted, *is* its object realized imperfectly, and a system of thought is true just so far as it succeeds in embodying that end which thought in its very essence is seeking to embody.”<sup>306</sup>

For the coherentist when we say that something is true it is never the case that it is absolutely true or perfectly represents its coherence within the larger whole. We must speak about truth knowing our limitations. It is interesting to note that Blanshard still maintains that truth *qua* truth is unchanging. However, we, by our very natures, cannot represent truth in its fullness.

We have neither said nor implied that truth itself changes. What we have said is that while truth as measured by the ultimate standard is unchanging, our knowledge of that truth does change- which is a very different thing.<sup>307</sup>

Indeed of the coherentist truth can never be separated from the person who identifies it. It is important to realize here that the coherentist is certain about the truth with respect to her experience but cannot claim that this certainty is grounded in some connection with an objective reality which is independent of those experiences. Both the correspondence theorists and the coherentist have certainty but this certainty lies with different things.

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 114.

## The Nature of Truth: Pragmatism

Another mainline theory of truth is the pragmatists' understanding of truth. Charles Pierce and William James are the founding heads of the pragmatist theory. James believed that empirical investigation could be said to be true only if it was verifiable. He writes, "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify."<sup>308</sup> "He also says that a true idea leads or guides us in our dealings with reality, and that a true judgment is what is expedient to believe."<sup>309</sup> Here it seems to be the case that the truth of a judgment relies in some ways on its being practical in our everyday lives.

Pragmatists tend to relate truth and justification so that questions of justification and questions of truth end up being the same. Richard Rorty, a contemporary pragmatist<sup>310</sup> writes, "I cannot bypass justification and confine my attention to truth: assessment of truth and assessment of justification are, when the question is about what I should believe now, the same activity."<sup>311</sup> In assessing William James, Rorty writes, "His point in analogizing truth to rightness and to goodness was that once you understand all about the justification of actions, including the justification of assertions, you understand all there is to understand about goodness, rightness, and truth."<sup>312</sup> By relating truth and justification together in this way, the pragmatic theory is often forced to be quite minimalist in its definition of truth and at times seems particularly relativistic. Rorty actually argues that we must be very cautionary about our use of the word truth because of these implications.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> James, William. 'Pragmatism's Conception of Truth' in *The Nature of Truth*, p. 212.

<sup>309</sup> *The Nature of Truth*, p. 186.

<sup>310</sup> There is some debate whether Rorty is in fact a pragmatist. Pascal Engel labels him a deflationist who is arguing for a completely different concept of truth than either James or Pierce. However, Rorty does claim to be a pragmatist and for our purposes we will assume that he is right. See *The Nature of Truth*, p. 279.

<sup>311</sup> Rorty, Richard. 'Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Donald Davidson versus Crispin Wright' in *The Nature of Truth*, p. 259.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, 261.

What we find with the pragmatist theory of truth, then, is a need for verification and an emphasis on the practicality of the truth claim. So that in some sense truth is defined by its usefulness within its particular context. Truth in this sense is never seen as a static property of an object or statement, but, rather, as an active property which impacts those who claim it.<sup>314</sup>

### **The Nature of Truth: Identity Theory**

Of all of the theories presented here the identity theory is perhaps the most conceptually challenging. Because of this it seems to be the ‘ugly duckling,’ so to speak, of truth theories. The Identity Theory states that “X is true if and only if X is identical to reality.” This statement at once seems counter-intuitive and brings with it a myriad of questions and criticisms.

While explaining the Identity Theory Jennifer Hornsby writes,

If one says that there is no ontological gap between thoughts and what is the case, meaning by ‘thoughts’ cognitive activity on the part of beings such as ourselves, then one is indeed committed to a sort of idealism: one has to allow that nothing would be the case unless there were cognitive activity – that there could not be a mindless world. But someone who means by ‘thoughts’ the contents of such activity, and who denies a gap between thoughts and what is the case, suggests only that what someone thinks can be the case.<sup>315</sup>

Such content Hornsby terms ‘thinkables.’<sup>316</sup> For Hornsby, ‘thinkables’ are the same as facts.

This is what makes the identity theory unique.

According to the identity theory it is the content of thought, (i.e., thinkables), which are candidates for identification. Furthermore, the contents of our thoughts are identical with reality (i.e., facts). As a result, Identity Theory denies the metaphysical assumptions of the correspondence theory. It is wary of the objectifying nature of correspondence theories and sees the thinker as

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<sup>314</sup> Rorty mentions that pragmatists took Darwinian biology seriously and we can see this connection with evolutionary theory and the pragmatists’ particularly active aspect to their understanding of truth.

<sup>315</sup> Hornsby, Jennifer. ‘Truth: The Identity Theory’ in *The Nature of Truth*, p. 663.

<sup>316</sup> Hornsby acknowledges borrowing this term from John McDowell who has written several books on the nature of truth.

more connected with the thinkable.

The denial of the objective reality or ‘God’s-eye-view’ of the correspondence theory gets to the root of the identity theorist’s project. In a telling statement Hornsby remarks,

If there was something distinct from a thinkable (a reality, say) such that establishing that some relation obtained between it and the thinkable was a way of getting to know whether the thinkable was true then someone could be in a position of knowing what is known when the thinkable is known, yet of still not knowing whether it was true. But of course one could never be in that position: to discover whether *p* is already to discover whether it is true that *p*.<sup>317</sup>

By relating the contents of our thought with reality, the identity theorist denies both the realist and idealist conceptions of truth.

### **Conclusion: Section One**

In the above pages I have sought to present a clear and concise picture of some of the main theories on the nature of truth. This will hopefully give the reader a context for what is to come in the remaining two parts of this chapter. I acknowledge that every theory of truth has not been covered. This was to do partly with limitations on space and mostly because of the nature of evangelical discussion regarding truth. It seems to me that the dialogue amongst evangelicals concerning the nature of truth is typically restricted to the theories laid out in the above section.

Section two will seek to present an account of truth that is faithful to Scripture. In this section the reader will find differing pictures of truth in Scripture which will help the conclusion of the chapter in showing that the main philosophical positions laid out in section one are not able to encompass by themselves the way in which truth is used in Scripture.

After assessing a Scriptural perspective on the nature of truth we will then turn to a current dialogue between evangelicals who espouse two different theories of truth: correspondence

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 666.

and coherence. This dialogue will allow the reader to concretize in her mind a specific instance where the nature of truth has divided evangelicals. I will also, where appropriate, point to what seems to me to be the inadequacy of both positions.

Once this has been done we will then be able to approach section four which will be devoted to grounding the nature of truth theologically. We will draw out the scriptural presentation of truth as well as how talking about truth theologically will have implications for our language about truth. The goal being to show the inadequacy of the classical definitions of truth which have not sought to integrate any explicit theological perspectives in the their construction. Furthermore, we found in chapter two the connection between an Enlightenment seeking for truth and the influence this way of thinking had on both Warfield and Henry. Consequently, their understanding of inerrancy was largely influence by Enlightenment thought. At the end of this chapter we will seek to draw some conclusions regarding the doctrine of inerrancy and the notion of truth that it presupposes.

## **Section Two: Reflections on a Scriptural Conception of Truth**

Most contemporary evangelical discussion of truth revolves around whether or not truth has an objective status or whether it is created within a particular culture.<sup>318</sup> Douglas Groothuis writes in the opening pages of *Truth Decay*,

Is the truth indissolubly connected with objective reality, or is it something more malleable, fungible and adaptable to circumstance? Do we construct truth – whether individually or as a culture – or do we receive truth as a gift, however unnerving it may be?<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> An example of this debate is found in Grenz's *Renewing the Center* and Erickson's *Reclaiming the Center*.

<sup>319</sup> Groothuis, Douglas. *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000, p. 10.



For the most part conservative evangelicals, following Groothuis, agree that truth is of the latter sort. Truth, they contend, is connected with ‘objective’ reality and we receive it as a gift. However, even though this is affirmed, there is the realization that Scripture is somewhat vague when it comes to philosophical constructions of the nature of truth. Roger Nicole gives one of the firmest conclusions available when he writes that “The primary New Testament emphasis is clearly on truth as conformity to reality and opposition to lies and errors.”<sup>320</sup> Groothuis concludes similar things in *Truth Decay*. According to Groothuis the Bible does not offer a “carefully nuanced philosophical” position on the nature of truth but what it does affirm about truth is in opposition to the Postmodern position.<sup>321</sup>

There are evangelicals, like Stanley Grenz, who would be unhappy with the specific delineation of the concept of truth in Scripture made by Groothuis. David Alan Williams, who writes an insightful article on Scripture and truth, says that post-modern talk has much to teach us about our understanding of truth and also the nature of Scripture as a whole.<sup>322</sup> For Williams the notion of truth represented in Scripture is primarily structured by metaphorical language.<sup>323</sup>

And there are other scholars within the church who would not be considered evangelical but who are asking similar questions of Scripture with regard to the nature of truth. One such scholar is Wolfhart Pannenberg who has a detailed chapter on the nature of truth in Scripture in volume two of his *Basic Questions in Theology*. In this chapter Pannenberg, who we will

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<sup>320</sup> Nicole, Roger. “The Biblical Concept of Truth.” in *Scripture and Truth*, edited by D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983, p. 293.

<sup>321</sup> Groothuis, Douglas. *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000, p. 60.

<sup>322</sup> Williams takes a particular metaphorical approach to Scripture’s understanding of truth that I will not have time to cover here. He concludes by seeing truth in a similar way to pragmatism as that which calls us to act. For more see: Williams, David Alan. ‘Scripture, Truth and Our Postmodern Context.’ in *Evangelicals & Scripture*. Edited by Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez and Dennis L. Okholm. Intervarsity Press: Illinois, 2004.

<sup>323</sup> ‘Scripture and Truth in Our Postmodern Context’, p. 234.

return to in the next section of this chapter, presents a Scriptural account of truth that is intimately linked to eschatology and founded upon Jesus Christ as the truth. In doing this Pannenberg seems to offer an account of truth which is in accord with Scripture and at the same time avoids the typical dichotomy formed in evangelical circles between subjective and objective notions of truth. However, before we look at Pannenberg's thought any further we should look at the general picture of Scripture's use and understanding of truth.

### **Truth in the Old Testament**

According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the Hebrew word *émeth*, which is often translated into English as truth or faithfulness, has an underlying sense of certainty or dependability.<sup>324</sup> It is a word that is often seen as an attribute of God as in Genesis 24:27; Exodus 34:6; Psalms 25:5, 31:5; Jeremiah 4:2, 10:10. The *Wordbook* also says that this term can apply to God's words. For instance Psalm 119:151 says, "But you are near, O LORD, and all your commandments are true."

Further, it is a word that becomes the means by which mankind know and serve God as their saviour. An instance of this is found in I Kings 2:4, "that the LORD your God may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in *faithfulness* with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'" [my italics] Because *émeth* is used in this sense, it is characteristic of those who have come to God. Psalm 15:1-2 says, "O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart".

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<sup>324</sup> Harris, R. Laird ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: Volume I*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1980, p. 116.

R.W.L. Moberly writes that '*emeth* has a meaning which is wider in scope than the mere 'true/false' distinction allows.

When, however, the psalmist celebrates Yahweh's torah and commandments as [*'emeth*] (Ps 119:43, 142, 151, 160), he does not just mean that they are true as opposed to false, but that they also have the character of being trustworthy and reliable for people to base their lives on. OT usage of [*'emeth*] characteristically takes on such wider moral implications.<sup>325</sup>

He goes on to say that the major theological significance of the term '*emeth* is its use in the development of the character of God.<sup>326</sup> '*Emeth* is used to convey God's faithful character (e.g., Exodus 34:5-7). Also the term '*emeth* can be further understood when it is seen in connection with the words to which it is commonly combined. It is often seen with *hesed* (God's steadfast love), *sedeq* (righteousness) and *mispat* (justice) which according to Moberly, all contribute in our understanding of '*emeth*'s moral characteristics.<sup>327</sup>

One scholar who does offer a significant amount of information on this topic seems to have written the authoritative account of truth when it comes to both the Old and the New Testaments' usage. Anthony C. Thiselton's article, written in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, is found in the bibliography of several other essays on the subject. His work on this topic seems to be an authoritative voice amongst scholars seeking to come to some conclusions on the matter.

Thiselton's approach is holistic. He does not believe that the traditional distinction between Greek and Hebraic understandings of truth is applicable to the discussion of truth within the Bible. Rather he sees a consistent understanding of truth in both Testaments. He writes, "For many years there has been a tendency in biblical studies to over-generalize about the

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<sup>325</sup> VanGemenen, Willem A. ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Paternoster Press: United Kingdom, 1996, p. 428.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 429.

uses of *aletheia* and *alethes* in cl. Gk. This has been done partly with a view of drawing a clear-cut contrast between Gk. and Heb. concepts of truth.”<sup>328</sup>

Thiselton begins his treatment of *‘emeth* by stating “the majority of O.T. scholars claim that for the Heb. writers “truth” is close to faithfulness in meaning, suggesting the idea of stability, firmness, or reliability.”<sup>329</sup> Because *‘emeth* is rooted in the concept of firmness, Thiselton says that many scholars conclude that the Hebraic understanding of truth is very different from the Greek understanding of truth as something that is abstract.

If this view is adopted we have all the ingredients for postulating a radical and clear-cut contrast between Hebraic and Gk. conceptions of truth. We have already suggested, however, that whilst such a contrast has validity in certain respects, it can be misleading and simplistic to build arguments on this foundation, unless certain strong qualifications are first made and observed.<sup>330</sup>

However, strong qualifications must be made so that we do not make the same mistake that Thiselton believes Bultmann has made in his article on Truth in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Thiselton presents three reasons for not making this over-generalization: 1) There are a variety of different contexts in which *‘emeth* is used in the OT; 2) Arguments based on etymology are not conclusive; 3) The fact that the LXX translates *‘emeth* using different Greek words could be a case of polysemy (i.e., in some contexts *‘emeth* means truth, in others it means faithfulness).

So Thiselton writes that *‘emeth* is used in many different senses and so any Scriptural treatment of the term *‘emeth* which emphasizes the dichotomy between “Greek” and “Hebrew” understandings of truth is not being consistent with the Scriptural witness. There are a number of places in the OT where truth can be seen as having a more “Greek”

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<sup>328</sup> Brown, Colin ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. The Paternoster Press: Exeter, 1978, p. 874.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, 877.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

connotation (i.e., in contrast to falsehood). Thiselton points to Genesis 42:16, Exodus 18:21, Deuteronomy 13:14 and 1 Kings 17:24 as examples of this use. We also have incidences of this in the Wisdom literature (i.e., Prov. 8:7, 12:19, 22:21, 23:23), as well as in the Psalms (i.e., PS 43:3, 45:4, 51:6). However, Thiselton concludes,

Even when we take account of the varied ways in which [‘*emeth*’] is used, it is still clear that in the vast majority of contexts truth is not a merely abstract and theoretical concept. To this extent W. Pannenberg is correct when he asserts that in accordance with the OT background “the truth of God must prove itself anew.” The God of Israel reveals his truth not only in his words but also in his deeds, and this truth is proved in practice in the experience of his people... It is not surprising, then, to find at times what would nowadays be called an existential view of truth in the OT.<sup>331</sup>

With this said, however, Thiselton is careful not to lead us down an exclusively existentialist path. He admits that passages like Psalm 119 have an existential ‘ring’ to them at times but Thiselton is keen to make sure that we recognize that the Psalmist also sees the law of God as a lamp unto his feet “which shows the believer the true state of affairs, although admittedly the true state of affairs as it relates in practise to him (“my feet...my path”).”<sup>332</sup>

Thiselton ends his discussion of the OT view of truth with a reference to John Calvin. He says in Calvin’s words “there is agreement between the sayings of God and the doings of God.”<sup>333</sup> Thiselton sees this OT view of truth and the logical relationship between truth and faithfulness as being completely consistent with the NT conception of truth as correspondence between word and deed. *Black’s Bible Dictionary* concludes the same when it says, “the O.T. concept of truth is, therefore, not so much an intellectual as a moral one.”<sup>334</sup> And so it is to the NT that we turn in order to continue our discussion of what it would mean

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid, 881.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, 882.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Miller, Madeleine S. and Miller J. Lane eds. *Black’s Bible Dictionary*. Adam & Charles Black: London, 1973, p. 786.

to talk of a Biblical view of truth before drawing some conclusions on whether there is any overall picture of truth in Scripture.

### Truth in the New Testament

Volume one of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, which is edited by Gerhard Kittel, was published in 1933.<sup>335</sup> Its article on *aletheia*, the Greek word for truth, was written by the theologian Rudolf Bultmann. It would not be inaccurate to say that the publication of this article ignited a longstanding debate about the difference between the “Greek” New Testament use of truth and that of the “Hebraic” Old Testament use. Bultmann suggests that one must understand the Greek philosophical definition of *aletheia* in order to fully grasp its use in the New Testament. However, Bultmann does not deny the influence that *‘emeth* sometimes has on the use of *aletheia* in the New Testament. For instance, he writes,

αληθεια is also that “on which one can rely” (in the sense of [ *‘emeth*]).  
a. It signifies “reliability” or “trustworthiness.”... This can be understood only in the light of the [ *‘emeth*] concept.<sup>336</sup>

Where he seems to see a much bigger influence of the Greek concept is in the Johannine writings. Thiselton’s critique of Bultmann has some warrant here but it should be noted that Bultmann does see a development of the term *aletheia* in John’s gospel that would not be characteristic of the Greek understanding. In fact, as much as Bultmann sees John’s use of the term as being influenced by Greek notions, it can be said that he sees John’s use as distinguished from the Greek understanding.<sup>337</sup> He concludes that in John’s gospel the “reception of αληθεια is conditioned neither by rational or esoteric instruction on the one

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<sup>335</sup> This is date of the original German publication. The English translation that is being used here, was originally published in 1964.

<sup>336</sup> *TDNT*, p. 243.

<sup>337</sup> Bultmann writes that there is a good deal of agreement between John’s writings and Hellenistic dualism but that nevertheless, for John, “the antithesis between αληθεια as divine power and ψευδος as anti-divine is not cosmological, in spite of the mythological form in which it is sometimes clothed (Jn 8:44).” see: *TDNT*, p. 245.

side nor psychical preparation and exercise on the other; it takes place in obedient faith.”<sup>338</sup>

Here we see the existential conclusion similar to Thiselton’s finding that ‘*emeth* is at times to be understood in an existential way. We shall return to a discussion of John’s gospel later but first we need to look at the wider use of *aletheia* in the New Testament.<sup>339</sup>

In the synoptic Gospels the term *aletheia* is used fairly infrequently. Apart from a few adverbial uses in the Gospels it would seem that if one wanted to find out how the New Testament uses *aletheia*, the Synoptics would not be the prime option for research.<sup>340</sup> Paul however does use the term frequently and in interesting ways.

Paul “puts a good deal of emphasis on truth”, but he uses it in a much ‘richer’ sense than it is commonly used today.<sup>341</sup> Leon Morris defines three distinct ways in which this ‘richer’ sense is expressed in Paul’s writings: 1) The Truth of God, 2) The Truth of the Gospel and 3) Truth in Christian Living.<sup>342</sup>

Paul speaks of the truth of God on many occasions. For example, Romans 3:7 says, “But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?” And 15:8 states, “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness...” This identification with truth and the being of God is fully realized for Paul in the person of Jesus Christ (Eph 4:21); however, even Morris concludes

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<sup>338</sup> *TDNT*, p. 245.

<sup>339</sup> It would be impossible to adequately talk about the use of *aletheia* in the NT without looking at the Johannine writing in more detail because nearly half of the 109 occurrences of *aletheia* appear in the Johannine writings (20 times in the epistles and 25 times in the Gospel).

<sup>340</sup> See Hastings, James. ed. *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels: Volume II*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1909, p. 786 for a discussion of these uses in the synoptic Gospels. For some reason the author of this article has missed Mark 5:33 which uses the term *aletheia*. Nevertheless, the point remains that the synoptic Gospels do not use the term very often.

<sup>341</sup> Morris, Leon. ‘Truth’ in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, InterVarsity Press: England, 1993, p. 954.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

that “God has revealed the truth, indeed has sent his Son *to live it* and *to proclaim it*, but sinful people have refused to listen” [my italics].<sup>343</sup>

The emphasis in this conclusion presupposes a primarily propositional truth, but this is not a necessary presupposition that is found in Paul. For instance, 2 Corinthians 11:10, which states, “As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia,” does not necessarily imply that Paul is talking primarily about propositions that Christ spoke which are in his memory. Again, II Timothy 4:4 states, “...and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” There is not reason to conclude that Scripture demands that we read truth here as a set of propositions which the sinner has stopped listening too.

Paul uses *aletheia* in the context of the Gospel and points to Colossians 1:5, Galatians 2:5, etc. “The Gospel and truth are closely connected.” Morris connects this ‘fact’ with God’s desire that people would be saved and come to a knowledge of truth by citing I Timothy 2:3-4: “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” The primary question we must ask is what does Paul mean when he uses the phrase ‘knowledge of the truth.’ He seems to suggest that people also turn away from this truth (II Tim 2:18) and that he could not do anything against it (II Cor 13:8).<sup>344</sup> There is no doubt that some of these verses cited above ought to be seen in light of a propositional understanding of truth. The context of II Timothy 2:18 is pretty clear and seems to indicate that the people who are “swerving from the truth” are doing so because they are claiming something that is not factually the case. But this is by no means an indication that Scripture asks us to view truth in this way all the time.

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> The authorship of 2 Timothy is disputed. However, the epistle does seem to be characteristically Pauline in thought and so for the purposes of this discussion the author will describe the epistle as being written by Paul.



Paul also sees truth as an aspect of Christian living. Accordingly, “we should see truth as a quality of action as well as of speech. Paul wants his converts to live the truth as well as to speak it.”<sup>345</sup> For instance, we read in I Corinthians 13:6, “it [love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.” And so there is also a sense in Paul of the moral side of truth, which calls us into action. Thiselton writes, “Thus we find that for Paul, as for Jesus, truth becomes a matter of correspondence between word and deed.”<sup>346</sup>

Thiselton gives more aspects of the Pauline use of truth. Truth has power. It is part of the Christians’ armour and can even lead to salvation (e.g., Rom. 3:4; 2 Thess. 2:10; Eph 6:14).<sup>347</sup> It “is demanded of the Christian as a corollary of his union with Christ and status as a new creation” (e.g., I Cor. 5:8).<sup>348</sup> Paul is also the only writer in the New Testament to use the verbal form of *aletheia*, *althea*, once in Galatians and the other time in Ephesians.<sup>349</sup> In Galatians the context suggests that truth means the actual fact of the Gospel and in Ephesians “It is possible that *aletheuo* here entails integrity of life in addition to truthful speech.”<sup>350</sup> Paul uses the adjective of *aletheia* in I Thessalonians 1:9 and the context suggests that truth means that which is real or genuine as opposed to fake idols.

If we were to limit our understanding of *aletheia* to what we have discussed above then we would need to draw at least two conclusions about the term. 1) The Old Testament identifies truth with the being of God; 2) Both the Old and New Testaments speak of truth in a variety of different ways. Sometimes truth is seen as that which uncovers reality and other times it is

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid, 955.

<sup>346</sup> *NIDNTT*, p. 886.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> I recognize that the authorship of Ephesians is disputed by some Biblical scholars but for our purposes I will maintain the traditional Pauline authorship.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, 887.

seen as that which is faithful or dependable; 3) Paul uses *aletheia* in ways that are consistent with the variegated use in the Old Testament, however we see in Paul a development from identifying truth with God to identifying truth with the person of Christ (Eph 4:21).

However, we have not yet examined the Johannine texts which use *aletheia* more than any other author of Scripture and out of the New Testament, is the only writer who records Jesus as identifying Himself with the truth (John 14:6). Thiselton writes, “Considerations about word-frequency alone suggest the importance of truth in John and the Johannine Epistles.”<sup>351</sup> To do any justice to talking about a Biblical understanding of truth requires examination of the Gospel of John and his letters.

In the opening lines of John’s gospel we get a glimpse of the central focus of John’s use of *aletheia*. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:14,17). Rudolf Schnackenburg says of this text that “the ‘truth’ has become an event” and rightly clarifies this statement to say that the person of Christ is the truth.<sup>352</sup>

Ἀληθεῖα is not simply ‘divine reality’, and certainly not in a Platonic sense. Nevertheless, because Jesus not only reveals the truth in his words and actions, but also embodies it in his person, God’s reality becomes manifest in him, manifest as will and power to save.<sup>353</sup>

John’s gospel does not talk about truth primarily with regard to intellectual instruction or factual statements.<sup>354</sup> In John’s gospel truth is life. Truth provides sanctification and power. Schnackenburg writes,

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid, 889.

<sup>352</sup> Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel According to St John: Volume II*. Burns & Oates: London, 1980, p. 225.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, 228.

The people who accept this truth do not receive intellectual instruction or enlightenment, but are ‘sanctified’ in the truth (17:17a, 19), filled with God’s life. The truth becomes a reality and power in them (cf. 1 Jn 1:8; 2:4) which rescues them from their unfreedom and frees them for true freedom (8:23-36). At the same time the truth must become the norm which governs their lives; they must ‘do the truth’ and practise love ‘in deed and in truth’ (cf. 3:21; 1Jn1:6; 3:18). A person’s attitudes and actions show whether he is ‘of the truth’, that is, ‘of God’, or whether he has fallen into the power of ‘lies’ and so of the devil, the ‘liar from the beginning’, who ‘has nothing to do with the truth’ (cf. 8:44; 1 Jn 1:6; 2:21).<sup>355</sup>

Truth is ontologically associated with divine reality in John’s writings. According to Thiselton what John wishes to stress is that “in Christ the Logos, men can see God in his genuine actuality and reality. If men can see God’s *reality* anywhere, it is in Christ.” But to limit the idea of truth strictly to divine reality would be inaccurate. As Thiselton points out there are times when John uses *aletheia* to mean that which is in contrast to falsehood.<sup>356</sup> Thiselton writes, “One of the most important uses of *aletheia* and *alethes* in Jn, is to convey the idea of reality, in contrast to whatever the situation may seem to look like on the surface.”<sup>357</sup> Thiselton sees a clear example of this usage in John 6:55 when Jesus is speaking of the Eucharistic meal.

John also uses the phrase “doing the truth,” which Thiselton says must be given special attention. A *prima facie* read of this phrase brings OT understandings of truth to mind, but Thiselton is wary of making a strong link with this phrase and the OT ethical aspect of truth spoken above. He says that Dodd and others have interpreted this phrase correctly by rejecting the notion that it simply means practising fidelity.<sup>358</sup> There is no tension between

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<sup>354</sup> This is not to say that he never uses *aletheia* in this way. For instance, the Samaritan woman speak about the truth of her marital status in John 4:18. However, the interesting thing is to note that John’s use is much more complex than a simple ‘truth as factual correspondence’ would seem to indicate.

<sup>355</sup> Schnackenburg, p. 229.

<sup>356</sup> *TNIDNTT*, p. 890.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 891.

Christian faith and practise and to interpret truth in such a way that makes this tension would be inconsistent with the use of truth in John and in Scripture as a whole.<sup>359</sup>

We finally get to the crux of the matter with John 14:6. Thiselton admits that *aletheia* is used here in a distinct way that cannot be equated with any of the views of truth he has defined thus far in his article. Writing about Dodd and Bultmann, he says,

Dodd and Bultmann interpret this verse along the lines of a Hellenistic or gnostic dualism, to mean that through Christ the soul ascends to the heavenly realm of truth. Whilst we may question Bultmann's assumptions about the relevance of gnostic background, he is nevertheless correct when he writes: "He (Christ) is the way in such a manner as to be at the same time the goal; for he is also *he aletheia*... as the revealed reality of God."<sup>360</sup>

Schnackenburg concludes the same when he writes that Bultmann, Dodd and others' interpretation of John's language in this passage as influenced by Hellenism and Gnosticism should be "considerably reduced."<sup>361</sup> Schnackenburg concludes that we must recognise the originality of the Johannine concept of truth. It is not founded in Hellenistic or Gnostic philosophy nor is it the same as the Qumran understanding.<sup>362</sup> By recording Jesus' statement that He is the truth, John has captured an understanding of truth that transcends all prior conceptions.

For John Jesus is not only an interpreter of the old revelation and a teacher of truth, but also becomes himself, through his all-embracing direct revelation of the Father, the way through which we reach the Father.<sup>363</sup>

Schnackenburg concludes saying,

Truth is not an object with which people can do what they like, not a ready-made possession, which one can take over and administer. The truth which Christ has revealed must be opened up by the 'Spirit of

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Schnackenburg, 231.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 236.

truth', ever more deeply explored and exposed to particular possibilities of understanding it (the Paraclete sayings, esp. 16:13). It is a dynamic process, which makes it a duty for every generation to learn to understand the revelation brought by Christ anew in the Spirit of God.<sup>364</sup>

However, not all commentators see the need to develop an account of truth which is based on the Christological reading of John 14:6. This is because many commentators see 'truth and life' in this passage as clarifying the term ἡ ὁδὸς and so they do not stand alone in describing Christ.<sup>365</sup> For instance, George Beasley-Murray writes,

Despite the coordination of the three terms the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the emphasis clearly falls on the first, for the statement explains the assertion of v 4 ("You know the way"), and concludes with a deduction from the main clause: "no one *comes to the Father* except through me." To say this is not to denigrate the importance of the second and third terms, for they explain how it is that Jesus is the Way: he is the Way because he is the truth, i.e., the revelation of God, and because the life of God resides in him (in the context of the Gospel that includes life in creation and life in the new creation, 1:4, 12-13; 5:26).<sup>366</sup>

Even if the emphasis on Christ's being the truth is not implied in this passage the conclusion seems similar to one if the emphasis was there. Beasley-Murray concludes,

It is evident that v 6 presupposes the teaching on the Christ as the Logos, the Word made flesh. The latter clause of v 6 must then be related to the Prologue, where it is stated that the Christ is the Life, the Light of men, who *enlightens every one* (1:4,9) [my italics].<sup>367</sup>

It would seem that the identification of truth with Jesus, even if it is only to clarify Jesus as the way, is connected ontologically to his person so that we are justified in maintaining a conclusion similar to that of both Schnackenburg and Thistleton about the 'personal' nature of truth that is advocated by Scripture.

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>365</sup> There are many commentators who interpret this passage in this way. In fact, this is probably the standard interpretation based on exegesis of the text. I have included one specific example in the text above but there are others. See for instance: R.V.G. Tasker's commentary on John in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* series. InterVarsity Press: Leicester, 1960; Barrett, C.K. *The Gospel According to St John*. SPCK: London, 1967.

<sup>366</sup> Beasley-Murray, George R. *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 36*. Word Books: Waco, 1987, p. 252.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

Thiselton draws similar conclusions about the use of truth when it is equated with Christ in 14:6 as Schnackenburg does. For Thiselton, John 14:6 requires an understanding of truth that is not “abstract or supra-historical but revealed in the actual personal life of the Word made flesh.”<sup>368</sup> On account of this Thiselton argues that the best way to understand the nature of truth in Scripture is in two ways. First, he argues that we must conclude that the idea of truth is multiform which makes the criteria for truth change depending on which form truth takes; second, there is a kind of truth that is universal “which somehow undergirds and holds together particular expressions and experiences of truth in thought and life.”<sup>369</sup> Scripture seems to set up a Christological foundation upon which the nature of truth depends.

In our discussion of Scripture and its use of the word truth we have seen that it varies in its understanding. At times we see that truth is used as correspondence to facts and at other times there seems to be the idea that truth coheres and is dependent on other truths. We have also seen the Old Testament’s moral use of truth which could be seen as reflective of the pragmatist/verificationist model of truth in that this type of truth entails a call to action. Finally we have seen an aspect of the identity theory of truth that equates God with truth. Specifically we found this to be the case in John’s writings where both Christ and the Spirit are identified with truth.<sup>370</sup> It would seem that in light of this we would need to conclude that no single philosophical theory of truth, identified in the first section above, is able to fully describe what is being portrayed in Scripture.

So, where to do we go from here? If there is to be a foundation for all of our knowledge it must be the revelation of Jesus Christ, and if our knowledge is to be seen as built on this

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<sup>368</sup> *TNIDNTT*, 892.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, 894.

<sup>370</sup> Medieval thinkers especially drew out this connection. For instance, St. Anselm in *De Veritate* identifies truth with God.

foundation then we must see that Christ's reconciling work continues and one day we will know fully as we are fully known. Colin Gunton offers us a way forward,

The co-eternal Word is thus the basis of any and all meaning as 'foundation': not only of the faith of the believer, but of the very possibility of knowledge of any kind. If Christ is the mediator of creation, then he is the basis of created rationality and therefore of human knowledge, wherever and whatever; we might say of all human culture.<sup>371</sup>

Surely this is the Christological foundation to which Scripture pointed us. By maintaining a Christological 'center' to our understanding of truth we are able to avoid the relativism that so many conservative evangelicals are concerned about without wholeheartedly accepting a specific philosophical view of truth which cannot do justice to the Scriptural portrayal.<sup>372</sup>

When Christ is the center there seems to be a tension between the theories of truth discussed above (i.e., a tension between the objective notions of truth in correspondence theories and the subjective notion within coherence understandings). This tension would appear to encourage us to enlarge our categories when speaking of truth. We turn now to a brief discussion of some of the implications a Christological center has to our understanding of the nature of truth.<sup>373</sup> This will allow us to conclude the chapter's overall discussion concerning the doctrine of inerrancy and its reliance on specific understandings of truth.

### **Section Three: Theological Reflections on a Particular View of Truth in Scripture**

William H. Willimon writes in an article for *Christianity Today*, "but isn't it curious that Jesus did not say to his disciples, 'I am here to tell you *about* the truth?' He says, "I *am* the truth."<sup>374</sup> The fullness of God's revelation about the nature of truth is found not *in* Christ

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<sup>371</sup> Gunton, Colin E. *A Brief Theology of Revelation*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1995, p. 124-25.

<sup>372</sup> For a contemporary discussion of this debate see *Renewing the Center* by Stanley Grenz, Baker Academic: Michigan, 2000 and *Reclaiming the Center* edited by Millard Erickson, Crossway Books: Wheaton, 2004.

<sup>373</sup> I will not be able to develop here such a system but only to point out some possible implications that will help us see that the categories provided by philosophers to define the nature of truth are not sufficient to fully engage with the Christological picture that Scripture give us.

<sup>374</sup> Willimon, William H. 'Jesus' Peculiar Truth: Modern Apologists for Objective Truth are Making a Tactical Error.' *Christianity Today*, March 4, 1996, pg. 21.

but *as* Christ. When Jesus claims to be the truth we are ‘theologically-enlightened’ about the nature of truth, which ought to inform and influence any discussion on truth that would proceed. Willimon goes on to write,

The truth is a person, personal. This truth is not sheer subjectivity, either, for the truth of Jesus is utterly inseparable from him – his life, death, and resurrection. We Christians really would have no idea what the truth is if it were not for our being met and called by Jesus.<sup>375</sup>

The epistemological implications of this way of thinking are numerous. Knowing the Truth becomes dependent upon God’s action toward his creation. In a manner that is comparable to the theological concerns expressed by Barth and Kuyper in chapter five below, knowing the Truth would ultimately depend on the Holy Spirit’s action. Truth cannot be accessed by anyone.<sup>376</sup> It must be given and humbly received by mankind.

It also might mean that all truths (i.e., created truths<sup>377</sup>) are derivative of *the* Truth that is Jesus Christ. This would imply that all ‘created’ truths are signs of the one Truth and in some way witness or point to Him, the One through whom these truths were made. Of course, this way of thinking pushes the traditional talk about truth. Thinking about truth in a ‘derivative’ way necessitates a certain kind of humility when the claim is made to know the truth. Some truths may point more directly to *the Truth* and others may take quite circuitous routes.

Seeing truth in this way is much more congruent with the kind of eschatological approach of Pannenberg. To use Paul’s analogy of seeing as through a glass dimly, certain truths may reflect more accurately the person of Jesus Christ than others, but no one truth does this

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 22

<sup>376</sup> I recognize the exclusive character of the nature of truth I am advocating. However, with a robust Pneumatology this critique can be overcome. For does not the Spirit blow where he wills? (John 3:8)

<sup>377</sup> I use the phrase ‘created truth’ to mean any truth discovered or established by mankind. I take it that the only truth that is not created is the Son of God incarnate as Jesus Christ.



univocally. How accurately ‘created truth’ reflects Christ is wholly dependent on how much Christ by his Spirit reveals himself to us. Again, this means that knowledge of the truth cannot be strictly identified as either subjective or objects as the traditional discussion of truth often does.

If truth is identified with Jesus Christ then in a certain sense truth is always objective because by his very nature as God he is other than his creation. And yet by becoming part of his creation in the incarnation the truth becomes a subject and so is not properly considered just an object. The truth is present with us but cannot be constrained by us, nor can it be defined or determined by us. We are dependent upon him, which means we are dependent on it. So to speak of truth as an object would not seem to be an entirely accurate way of speaking.

Perhaps using the distinction between archetype and ectype that Abraham Kuyper (see chapter five below for a more specific account of how Kuyper uses this distinction) and many of the Reformers used might be helpful. If Jesus Christ is the archetype of truth then any truth of which we speak is the image or ectype of truth. Therefore the truthfulness of our claims about truth is dependent on that which they image. For something to be labelled true it must image the archetype.

Willimon offers a radical picture of truth which pushes the subjective/objective boundaries. In a Barthian manner he writes of his concern for seeing truth in ‘objective’ ways and what the impact of Christ’s statement has on this ‘objective’ understanding,

Arguing that Christ and his way are “objectively true,” we run the risk of deceiving people into thinking that they are already capable, just as they are, of thinking about these matters without first knowing Jesus, without conversion.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

When we take seriously the claim of Jesus Christ to be the truth the traditional categories that are used to talk about the nature of truth (i.e., subjective/objective) are no longer adequate. In light of a Christological notion of truth which takes into account the incarnation, Christ (and as a result truth) must be seen both to transcend creation (the objective criterion of truth) and be immanent in creation as well (the post-modern subjective criterion of truth). An incarnational understanding of truth goes beyond these categories by not resolving them but leaving them in tension. Jesus Christ was both in the world and the world was made through him. He is both immanent and transcendent (John 1:10), and whatever conclusions one makes regarding the nature of truth it would seem that a Christological understanding of truth would not allow us to resolve the tension that usually arises from the traditional categories mentioned above.

This is the implication given by Thiselton in the quote above. Truth should not be viewed as abstract or surpa-historical. Thiselton says that it is revealed *in* the person of Jesus Christ. However, even using the preposition *in* implies the truth somehow resides in Christ and could be abstract from him. It would be better to speak of the truth *of* or *as* Jesus Christ so that this implication is not made. Jesus Christ is the truth bar none. The truth does not reside in him or live outside of him. He does not dwell in the truth or come into contact with it as though it were one of Plato's eternal forms.

Thinking about truth in this way may mean that one is forced to conclude that the truths we know are not necessarily abstract, eternal truths but temporal images that sometimes image the One who is the eternal Word. But this does not mean that we will never have access to or come into contact with the truth. One theologian who has drawn similar theological conclusions, and to whom Thiselton points, is Wolfhart Pannenberg. We end our reflection

on the nature of truth by turning to the particular theological expression of truth given by Pannenberg in *Basic Questions in Theology*.

Pannenberg accepts the basic thesis that there are different understandings of truth within the Greek and Hebrew worldviews. He understands the Greek worldview as primarily presupposing the essence of truth as unchangeable. He writes,

For Greek thought, the unity of truth excluded all change from it. Change would entail multiplicity, a succession of different forms, and then the full, whole truth, and truly constant, could not be found in anything. It belongs to the essence of truth to be unchangeable and, thus, to be one and the same, without beginning or end.<sup>379</sup>

However this does not mean that truth must be seen to be in constant flux if we deny the Greek assumptions about it. According to Pannenberg, the Hebrew mind considered God to be constant. He writes, “For the Hebrew, however, that [God’s constancy] is just not self-evident. It is not the result of logical necessity, that what-is, is.” God’s constancy is known in his economy. Therefore if God is the truth then this truth is also constant. Disregarding notions of abstract truth does not mean disregarding notions of constant truth as long as these notions are theologically grounded. This grounding is found in the constant *economia* of the Spirit. Christology and pneumatology are combined so that the truth remains constant.

For Pannenberg the tension we spoke of above will finally be resolved only in the Eschaton. According to Pannenberg, the answer to the question regarding the nature of truth lies in the “proleptic character of the Christ event.”<sup>380</sup> The truth, which will finally and fully be known in the end has a Hegelian ring to it, which Pannenberg is willing to admit. In fact, he says that Hegel’s understanding of truth “approximates” to the biblical understanding.

Hegel’s thesis that the truth of the whole will be visible only at the end of history approximates the biblical understanding of truth in two

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<sup>379</sup> Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Basic Questions in Theology: Volume Two*. SCM Press Ltd.: London, 1971, p. 19.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid, 24.

aspects.... truth as such is understood not as timelessly unchangeable, but as a process that runs its course and maintains itself through change... the unity of the process, which is full of contradictions while it is under way, will become visible along with the true meaning of every individual moment in it, only from the standpoint of its end.<sup>381</sup>

Paul seems to suggest this in his first letter to the Corinthians when he says, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (I Cor. 13:12).<sup>382</sup>

But how do we know the truth now? Is Willimon correct when he says, “There is a sense in which we cannot know the truth without first being made truthful”? If we adopt Pannenberg’s model, that truth is an eschatological reality, then are we to adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion when it comes to truth now? It seems to me that Scripture offers a way forward that both maintains a tension between the now and not yet, as well as, offers a way for us to have ‘glimpses’ of the truth in the present. Pannenberg does not point us to the work of Spirit but it by the Spirit we are told the truth.

The answer to our question needs to be rooted in Pneumatology. “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13). It is by the Spirit that we receive ‘glimpses’ of the truth, who will one day meet us face to face. By incorporating the Spirit’s function in giving truth we may be able to reject the scepticism that some post-modern notions of truth lead to and also deny the ‘objectivity’ of truth, which so many modern evangelical apologists seek today.

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>382</sup> The argument may be made at this point that just because we are unable to ‘see’ objective truth now does not mean that Paul is suggesting that there is *no* objective truth. However, in light of the Christological model suggested above the truth that we see fully in the end will not be an object but a person. This idea carries with it both theological and philosophical implications which we will not have time to expound on here.

By relying on the Spirit to reveal truth we recognise the transcendent character of “truth-revealing.” The scepticism that often results from speaking about truth as that which is created in particular societies is overcome by this transcendence. The truth may be given to particular communities in particular ways but it is never created by them. There is never a sense in which we can say that the truth that I know is dependent upon the particular community in which I am involved because the Spirit is free from each and every manmade community and in his freedom gives truth where and when he wills.

With that said neither is truth able to be considered an object solely for our analysis and use. Because truth is *given* we are to rightly understand our position as “truth-receivers” and not those who create and master truth. There is a certain responsibility that comes with this understanding of truth. If the Truth is the Son of God and every other truth is derivative of Him then when we claim to know the truth we recognize that it is only by the free gift of God that we have been given this truth. It is not ours, therefore, we cannot do anything we like with it.

Willimon is right to be sceptical about affirming an objective nature to truth. But the opposite of objective is not encounter/existentialism. At the end of his essay, Willimon who is openly influenced by Hauerwas, gets close to advocating the position that truth is *lived*. Of course, this is a popular way of speaking about truth and the reason for this is a valid one. The concern is to allow truth to be more than just an intellectual exercise. But the truth still has ontological status because it is identical to Jesus Christ. We must in a very real way *know* the truth and then *live* by it. But this living is a work of the Spirit. We do not live the truth; we live by the truth through the Spirit. Therefore, pneumatology is intricately connected to Christology so that when we know the truth we know Him by His Spirit.

By seeing the need to incorporate an adequate Pneumatology into our understanding of truth we are able to draw a similar conclusion to Thistelton when he writes,

Reverence for truth is not simply the pseudo-cynicism of our own age which tries to “unmask” everything, in the belief that no one and nothing can genuinely lay claim to truth. It is the attitude which combines joyful confidence that truth can indeed be found, with a humble submission to truth whenever and wherever it emerges. Such openness to truth is required of those who worship the God of truth; whilst a due reverence for truth ensures honesty in a man’s dealings with his neighbor, both in word and deed. This is the attitude, we have seen, to which both the OT and the NT bear witness.<sup>383</sup>

#### **Section Four: Truth and the Doctrine of Inerrancy**

If we return to our discussion in chapter one on the claims of inerrancy one thing that we were able to recognize is the dependence of inerrancy on the nature of truth. The definition of inerrancy given in the ‘Chicago Statement’ insists that “*inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.”<sup>384</sup> It also claims that “the authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.”<sup>385</sup> We will discuss the connection between authority and inerrancy in the following chapter but for now it remains for us to discuss the connection between the biblical view of truth and the doctrine of inerrancy. It would seem that if the doctrine of inerrancy is dependent on a correspondence view of truth then it would by its own standard be impaired because as we have shown above this view of truth does not *correspond* with the Christological notion of truth at the heart of Scripture.

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<sup>383</sup> *TNIDNTT*, 901.

<sup>384</sup> *Inerrancy*, p. 500.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid*, p. 494.

It is clear that the doctrine of inerrancy does in fact presupposes a correspondence theory of truth. In fact, Paul Feinberg says this in his chapter on ‘The Meaning of Inerrancy.’ “For pristine simplicity and clarity one can hardly beat Aristotle’s definitions of true and false.”<sup>386</sup> Feinberg takes this position by showing that the main use of truth in Scripture is exemplified by passages which reflect such tendencies. For example, he cites Psalm 119:142 “Your law is true” and v. 151, “all your commands are true.” “It is this idea,” he writes, “that is appropriate to the English word *inerrancy*.”<sup>387</sup> As we concluded earlier there are certainly some passages in Scripture that seem to imply a view of truth that would fit nicely with the philosophical position of correspondence.

However, there are at least some if not an equal amount of ‘proof-texts’ which would seem to imply something different. An implication of this would seem to be that if when the Bible speaks of truth it does not always imply the correspondence theory then when we speak of the Bible as true we ought to be justified in seeing the truth of the Bible as something other than correspondence to ‘objective’ reality. If this is the case, then it would seem that the truth of Scripture would need to be rooted in, or founded upon, something (or someone) different than a strict correspondence theory would allow.

Feinberg also uses the work of the Polish logician Tarski to support the definition of truth advocated by the doctrine of inerrancy. He says, “The characteristics of Tarski’s definition are as follows: (1) Truth is defined in terms of language; (2) truth is defined in terms of *sentences* (that is, truth is a property of sentences), not of individual words; and (3) truth is defined in terms of *correspondence*.”<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid, p. 294.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p. 295.

Recalling the conclusions made above, does the nature of truth advocated by Tarski and presupposed in the doctrine of inerrancy do justice to the biblical picture of truth? The Bible seems to convey truth in ways that are different than the strict correspondence view would allow.<sup>389</sup> Tarski's view above would make truth reliable on propositional assertions. But the Bible seems to be full of instances where truth is conveyed apart from propositional assertions. One needs only to bring to mind the story Jesus tells of the prodigal son. It is true that the story makes assertions but it would seem that the 'truth' of the assertions made (i.e., whether there was a son who was given his inheritance, etc.) is the least interesting part of the story. The truth that is conveyed by the telling of the story is the reason for the telling in the first place.

An instance in Scripture that can be seen to be more typical of a coherence theory of truth is found in Genesis 11. The story of the tower of Babel can be seen as historically true and so understood in light of the correspondence theory but the truth of the story would seem to be independent from the 'facts' portrayed.<sup>390</sup> Whether God actually was displeased with a specific group of people in a city who had a common tongue is less interesting to the truth that one of the consequences of sin is our inability to understand each other.<sup>391</sup> It would seem that Scripture is capable of conveying truth in ways that are not bound by the 'rules' stated by Tarski above. We might say that there are 'truths' given by Scripture without reliance on propositional assertion or correspondence.

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<sup>389</sup> In fact, it probably could be argued that the Bible conveys truth the majority of the time in ways which cannot be accounted for by the Correspondence Theory.

<sup>390</sup> The connection between correspondence and a literal reading of the text is one that seems necessary given the adoption of propositional truth and its correspondence to 'objectivity.'

<sup>391</sup> This story has theological implication beyond the Old Testament. The fact that the early church was given the Spirit and as a result spoke with a unified 'tongue' raises interesting questions. The remark could be made that I am relying on my own interpretation of the text here but the point still stands that the 'truth' of the story seems to lie behind the correspondence of the proposition which make up the story and their connection with objectivity.



Feinberg is not innovative when it comes to this type of thinking amongst inerrantists. This type of thinking is consistent with the thought and theology of both B.B. Warfield and Carl F.H. Henry. We saw in chapter 2 of this thesis that both Warfield and Henry rely on different foundations but that nevertheless these foundations justify the need for a doctrine of inerrancy and so in this way were connected to Enlightenment philosophy. Now we will find that their understanding of truth would seem to be predicated upon an understanding of correspondence theory.

One instance where we see this type of understanding coming out in Warfield's writing is in his aptly titled essay 'Christianity the Truth.'<sup>392</sup> Warfield begins the essay with alluding to the Scriptural account of truth as Christological but does not spend any time elaborating on the implications of this.<sup>393</sup> Rather, he then suggests that the gospel seeks "to propagate itself in the world as the only "truth," and therefore only by those *methods* by which "truth" makes its way" [my italics].<sup>394</sup> The methods by which truth makes its way in the world, according to Warfield, are apologetic in nature.

Because Warfield understands Christianity to be the "reasonable religion," he sees the task of Christians being to proclaim the truth of this reasonable religion to the world. The proclamation of truth would seem to presuppose the propositional nature of truth according to the correspondence theory. Also, Warfield speaks in this article of objective truth and cites Aristotle as an authority for establishing the principles, which should govern the controversy that this kind of understanding of truth will bring about. He writes, "The limits

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<sup>392</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *Selected Shorter Writings*. Volume 2. New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 2001, pp. 213-18.

<sup>393</sup> Warfield does write on the implications of Jesus as the truth in an article entitled 'Incarnate Truth' in *Benjamin B. Warfield: Selected Shorter Writings, Volume II*. Edited by John E Meeter. P&R Publishing: New Jersey, 2001, pp 455-67.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, p. 213.

of controversy for the saving truth of God must be sought then solely in objective considerations.”<sup>395</sup> For Warfield, then, the truth of Christianity is able to be expressed in objective proclamation and Christians are able to convince the world of the truth of Christianity through reason and evidence. That is why it is an apologetic religion.

This objective proclamation is rooted in the One through whom all things are created. In an article elaborating his understanding of Jesus being equated with the Truth, Warfield writes,

In like manner, that John has especially in mind here the highest manifestations of truth – our Lord’s trustworthiness in the great work of salvation – in no way empties the word of its lower connotations. He is still the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and all the truth that is in the world comes from him and must seek its strength in him.<sup>396</sup>

The fact that Christ is the truth entails three implications for Warfield. First, Jesus Christ could never have uttered a statement which contained any admixture of error. Second, no truth can be against the religion which Christ has founded. And third, since Jesus Christ is the truth we are called to love the truth.<sup>397</sup>

That John has equated Jesus with the truth is not a subjective opinion, according to Warfield, but an “objective fact.”<sup>398</sup> And this truth that John is thinking of is “chiefly Christ’s ‘faithfulness’.”<sup>399</sup> This statement is as close as Warfield gets to an ‘Old Testament’ understanding of truth-as-faithfulness. The question that needs to be raised is what does Warfield mean when he used the word ‘truth’ in contexts about Christ where the idea of faithfulness is less apparent? It seems pretty obvious that Warfield moves from understanding truth as faithfulness to truth as propositional and objective correspondence. We see this in his first point given above. He says that raising this point is almost an insult to

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid, p. 218.

<sup>396</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings, Volume II.* p. 458.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid, 458-65

<sup>398</sup> Ibid, 457.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid, 458.

our intelligence because it seems so obvious. What it means for Christ to be the truth is that any proposition given by Christ is inerrant. It appears that all truth corresponds to the objective reality of the Son. In discussing his second point he writes,

We must not, then, as Christians, assume an attitude of antagonism toward the truths of reason, or the truths of philosophy, or the truths of science, or the truths of history, or the truths of criticism. As children of the light, we must be careful to keep ourselves open to every ray of light. If it is light, its source must be sought in him who is the true Light; if it is truth, it belongs of right to him who is the plenitude of truth.<sup>400</sup>

Ultimately, all ‘natural truths’ find their ground in the ‘supernatural truth’ of Christ and are commentaries of this truth that is Christ.<sup>401</sup>

Carl F. H. Henry advances a similar understanding of objective truth although under what he sees as the mandate of Protestant Orthodoxy. He writes,

When we speak of propositional revelation we are not, however, referring to the obvious fact that the Bible, like other literature, is written in sentences or logically formed statements. The Bible depicts God’s very revelation as meaningful, objectively intelligible disclosure. We mean by propositional revelation that God supernaturally communicated his revelation to chosen spokesman in the express form of cognitive truths, and that the inspired prophetic-apostolic proclamation reliably articulates these truths in propositional revelation of the unchanging truth of God.<sup>402</sup>

According to Henry, all of the truth of God can be understood as propositional. He writes,

“If God reveals himself intelligibly and truly, then that revelation takes propositional form.”<sup>403</sup>

He goes on to say, “regardless of the parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions used by these writers, their literary devices have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false.” Henry is clearly presupposing a

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid, 463.

<sup>401</sup> Because of his presupposition of correspondence theory Warfield has developed a Christological understanding of truth that has many implications for discussions on natural revelation and special revelation. It is interesting to note here that in this article the only time the Spirit is mentioned is in the last paragraph in relation to mission. In the next chapter I will try to draw out some of the deficiencies in pneumatology in both Warfield and Henry. In some ways a strong doctrine of inerrancy is more liable to minimalistic pneumatology and I will seek to show why this is in the following chapter.

<sup>402</sup> Henry, Carl F.H. *God, Revelation and Authority, Volume III*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, 1999, pp. 456-57.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, p. 453.

correspondence theory of truth in his claims about the objective and propositional nature of truth.

The problem with this type of understanding of truth as we have briefly discussed above is its inability to reconcile its claims with the personal and Christological/theological nature of truth found in Scripture generally. This is the problem that neo-orthodox theologians like Karl Barth had with this understanding. Also, Kevin Vanhoozer shows this understanding to be problematic. He writes,

The assumption that truth pertains to statements has far-reaching implications for the theological interpretation of Scripture. At one extreme, it is conducive to proof-texting- to abstracting individual statements of Scripture out of their context and insisting that they nonetheless are true. Second, the focus on statements makes it difficult to take seriously the contention of the Fourth Gospel that Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). Finally, to reduce truth to what can be stated in individual assertions is to lose the richness of truth's expression through metaphors and through various forms of literature...The issue is whether truth is always transparent to the indicative mood of reason, or whether some truths can be mediated only via certain forms of the poetic imagination (e.g., narrative, poetry, myth).<sup>404</sup>

Are we to understand Truth as that which meets us in the person of Jesus Christ by the Spirit and then gets transformed into different propositions or whether we must presuppose some kind of propositional truth about the Son of God prior to an encounter with the Son of God? In other words, what is more basic: the person or the proposition? For Barth and other neo-orthodox theologians, it is the former; for Henry and inerrantists, it is the latter.

It would seem that contemporary inerrantists are consistent with both Warfield and Henry in their understanding of the nature of truth. In fact, it is now clear that it would be difficult for an inerrantist to completely deny all forms of correspondence theory because the propositions that are the revealed truths of Scripture are inerrant because they correspond to the objective

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<sup>404</sup> Vanhoozer, Kevin J. ed. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Baker Books: Michigan, 2005, p. 820.

reality known by God. The doctrine of inerrancy would seem to be inextricably connected with this specific understanding of truth.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter we have laid out the basic philosophical theories of truth that are generally adopted by evangelicals. We did this in order to set the stage for examining the way in which Scripture uses and seems to describe truth. After examining the Scriptural content we concluded that none of the philosophical theories of truth able to fully encompass and speak about truth in the same manner as Scripture. Because of this we moved forward look at some theological implications for developing a theory of truth which remained consistent with the Scriptural portrayal. In the final section we related our discussion of truth back to the doctrine of inerrancy and showed how the doctrine of inerrancy is rooted in a very specific understanding of truth as correspondence. We found that Warfield and Henry, as well as, contemporary inerrantists presuppose the propositional and objective nature of truth that correspondence demands and eluded to the claim that the doctrine of inerrancy depends on a view of truth that does not sufficiently account for the way in which Scripture uses and understands truth.

In the following chapter we propose to examine the doctrine of inerrancy in light of its presuppositions regarding pneumatology. In this chapter we will suggest that as a result of its reliance on a correspondence theory of truth, the doctrine of inerrancy is not able to maintain a pneumatology that is consistent with the ‘pouring out of the Spirit’ in the New Testament. We will again look at Warfield and Henry as theological representatives of inerrancy and specifically look at their understanding of the Spirit and its connection with the authority of Scripture. The goal of this chapter will be to show why inerrantists must root the

authority of Scripture in ‘properties’ of the text and not in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

## Authority, Inerrancy and The Holy Spirit

*We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave loses its authority, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one's critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started. This means that at bottom independent reason now has authority, as opposed to Scriptural teaching.*<sup>405</sup>

We are now in a position to discuss what seems to be the root of the problem inerrantists have with other doctrines of Scripture. According to the doctrine of inerrancy, the authority of Scripture is dependent upon the properties of an errorless text. Inerrantists are all too often concerned that if Scripture cannot be said to be without error, or inerrant, then it cannot be authoritative for the Christian community (and in some cases the wider world in general). As we see in the quote of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Authority above, the Bible loses its authority if one does not maintain its complete and utter truth. We saw in the previous chapter that the type of truth presupposed in this statement is rooted in a correspondence theory, which relegates truth to propositions. If these propositions cannot be shown to be errorless then the Bible loses its authority.

We saw in chapter two that a specific kind of foundationalism plays a crucial role in the theology of both B.B. Warfield and Carl F.H. Henry. Because of a commitment to this foundationalism, both Warfield and Henry see inerrancy as the foundational property of the biblical text that supports its authority. Using a 'foundational' metaphor, we might say that biblical authority cannot be built on any other foundation but an errorless original autograph.

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<sup>405</sup> 'The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy' as cited in *God Has Spoken* by J. I. Packer. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1979, p. 154-55.

Warfield and Henry also presuppose different types of apologetics. As we saw in chapter two Warfield seems to be comfortable with a certain kind of evidentialism<sup>406</sup> while Henry is confident in reason and its ability to lead to faith. These apologetic commitments combined with a foundationalism that depends on a doctrine of inerrant autographs force both Warfield and Henry to interpret the Reformed doctrine of the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti* in a specific way.

In this chapter we will discuss the relationship between the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Scripture in the thought of both Warfield and Henry. Once we have understood this dynamic in these theologians, we will then turn to Calvin to see if the understanding which Warfield and Henry have about the interaction between the Holy Spirit and the authority of Scripture is similar to or different from Calvin's thought. The goal being to show that by presupposing certain philosophical assumptions (see chapter two) the doctrine of inerrancy is forced to place its understanding of authority not in the 'hands' of the third person of the Trinity but in a static (some might even say stagnant) property of the text of Scripture. When this is done, the doctrine of inerrancy limits the continuing work of the Holy Spirit and separates itself from the doctrine of the internal testimony of the Spirit which is crucial in Reformed theology.<sup>407</sup>

### **Setting the Stage**

Before discussing the particular thought of Warfield and Henry on the Spirit an historical note needs mentioning. There was a debate which took place between the Reformers and the radical Reformers on the specific relationship between Word and Spirit. According to

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<sup>406</sup> Evans, C Stephen. *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: the Incarnational Narrative as History*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1996, p. 28.

<sup>407</sup> There are different traditions within Reformed thought. For instance, Warfield's interpretation of Calvin may represent a particular Reformed tradition that is different to Kuyper's interpretation of Calvin. When using the phrase 'Reformed theology' above, I mean a particular tradition which is informed by both Calvin and Kuyper.



Gordon Rupp the primary concern regarding the Holy Spirit centered around a particularly sharp dichotomy maintained by the Radical Reformers (i.e., Carlstadt, Müntzer and Denck) between the “inner” and “outer” Word.<sup>408</sup> Rupp writes,

We have to consider how this close alliance of Word and Spirit became pressed by controversy and misunderstanding into an antithesis, until on the one side the Word approaches equation with “pure doctrine” and the Spirit becomes the cover for a human subjectivism.<sup>409</sup>

Rupp argues that the dichotomy between an “inner” and “outer” word was not a particularly sharp dichotomy for the Reformers and that for Luther, Zwingli and the Strassburg theologians both parts were needed to expound *one* doctrine of Scripture.<sup>410</sup> However, Rupp writes,

...the pressure of controversy led the radicals to stress more and more an inward word, the direct action of the Holy Ghost, or of the eternal Logos, upon the “ground of the soul,” and to oppose it sharply to the Biblicism of the so-called “Scribes of Wittenberg.”<sup>411</sup>

According to Rupp, these early Radical Reformers did not believe that the Scriptures were univocally the Word of God. They were a witness validated by the “inner” Word of the Holy Spirit.<sup>412</sup> According to Rupp’s reading of Müntzer, Luther and the other Wittenberg theologians could only account for a *fides historica* because the external or “outer” word can only provide this kind of faith.

The early Radical Reformers saw the need for the internal working of the Holy Spirit prior to any understanding of scriptural authority or authenticity. A possible connection with Platonism can be made here. By devaluing the ‘letter’ or the materiality of the “outer” word,

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<sup>408</sup> This is a particular historical claim made by Rupp. Whether Rupp is right to make this specific claim about the particular Radical Reformers he mentions will not be evaluated here. For our purposes the fact that the dichotomy between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ word existed at the time is more relevant Rupp’s claim regarding who developed it.

<sup>409</sup> Rupp, Gordon. ‘Word and Spirit in the first Years of the Reformation’ in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*. Volume 49, 1958, Issue 1/2, p. 13.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid, p. 23

the early Radical Reformers sought refuge in an experience of faith created by the “inner” word by which they meant the work of the Spirit within man. Hans Denck, one of these Radical Reformers gives an example which makes the dichotomy clear,

But to say, Scripture is to be rated so high, because through it a man comes to the knowledge of God? I answer, if somebody gave you a letter, and promised you great good in it, and you did not know how great and good he was... it would be folly to rely simply on that letter. But if he really is what that letter says he is even then you don't rely on the letter until you know whether he is really like this. If you find he is really good and rich, then you say, “Ah Lord let me be your servant. I am not worrying about the letter. I want no other reward than to be your servant and have you as my Lord.” If a man is not in God's house, the letter is no use to him. If he is, he needs no writing to tell him God is good.<sup>413</sup>

Luther was very opposed to this kind of thinking. He reacted against this thought by saying that the Spirit works through the “outer” word, i.e., the preached Word of God, Baptism, etc.<sup>414</sup> Rupp writes, “Thus, for Luther, Word and Spirit were not to be parted asunder, and we must not exaggerate the extent to which discussion of the relation between the “Outer” and “Inner Word” broke that Biblical connection.”<sup>415</sup> He concludes his article by saying that only with Calvin are we given a full blown attempt to restore a balance between the “subjective” or “inner” word and the “objective” or “outer” word.<sup>416</sup>

The question could be raised at this point concerning why any of this is important for a discussion of inerrancy. This debate gives an example of an extreme dichotomy between Word and Spirit which ended in a devaluation by the Radical Reformers of the Spirit's connection with the “outer” word. What we must ask is whether there is a tendency in the doctrine of inerrancy for the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction; a direction which would magnify the “outer” word at the expense of the “inner” word. We will examine the thought of both Warfield and Henry in this light before turning to Calvin to see if Rupp is

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<sup>413</sup> Cited in ‘Word and Spirit in the first Years of the Reformation’ by Gordon Rupp, p. 23.

<sup>414</sup> WA 18.137.5 Luther's work cited in Rupp, p. 24.

<sup>415</sup> Rupp, 25.

<sup>416</sup> See section on Calvin below.

correct in concluding that Calvin restores the Balance between the “objective” word of Scripture and the “subjective” word of the Spirit.

Gary D. Badcock writes,

If the doctrine of the *deity* of the Spirit is the central concern of the fathers of the fourth century, and if the *filioque* preoccupies medieval pneumatologists, then the intrinsic connection of the work of the Spirit in the church with the doctrine of the Word of God as written and preached constitutes the distinctive emphasis of the pneumatology of the Reformation.<sup>417</sup>

Badcock’s claim helps us to know where we ought to start looking for a discussion of the work and role of the Spirit in Warfield’s theology. If Badcock is correct then we would expect to find Warfield’s discussion of the Holy Spirit connected to his doctrine of Scripture, and this is in fact the case. Warfield’s understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit is largely embedded in his discussion of inspiration.<sup>418</sup> The other times he spends talking about the work of the Holy Spirit is under the guise of his interpretation of Calvin’s thought and in his introduction to Kuyper’s work. Warfield’s reading of John Calvin largely influenced his understanding of the Holy Spirit’s work.<sup>419</sup> Because of this we will need to try and extract his own thought from his writings on two subjects: namely, the work of the Spirit in inspiring the biblical writers, and his interpretation of Calvin. By looking at these sources we should be able to understand what his own position is regarding the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Once we have done this then we will be able to find out whether the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit has any role to play regarding the authority of Scripture.

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<sup>417</sup> Badcock, Gary D. *Light of Truth & Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Eerdmans Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1997, p. 86.

<sup>418</sup> Warfield makes a comment in his introduction to Kuyper’s work *On the Holy Spirit* that the early church was mostly concerned about the Spirit’s function “as inspirer of the prophets and apostles” and that it was not until Calvin that we were given a full treatment on the work of the Holy Spirit. See Warfield, Benjamin B. *Selected Shorter Writings: Volume One*. Edited by John E. Meeter. P&R Press: New Jersey, 2001, pp 203-19.

<sup>419</sup> In fact, Warfield writes in his article ‘Calvin the Theologian’ that there have been complaints about Calvin’s *Institutes* being too subjective and that this has had the effect of him being constituted as “pre-eminently the theologian of the Holy Spirit.” See: <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/bbwcalvin1.htm> Accessed 13/9/06

Another theologian's writings that Warfield was aware of were those of his contemporary Abraham Kuyper. In fact, Warfield composed the introduction for Kuyper's work on the Holy Spirit. In the introduction Warfield calls Kuyper "one of our own prophets."<sup>420</sup> Warfield goes on to claim that a systematic treatise on the function of the Holy Spirit was only first produced during the Reformation by John Calvin and that Kuyper's work is not a novelty amongst English-speaking churches but "a specially finely conceived and executed presentation of a topic on which we are all thinking."<sup>421</sup> Warfield writes a very favourable introduction to Kuyper's work. Furthermore, Kuyper and Warfield believed they were continuing the thought of Calvin with regard to the authority and work of the Holy Spirit and His influence on the church's doctrine of Scripture, and yet they offer a remarkably different understanding of this doctrine. It is my contention that although Warfield saw himself as continuing a Reformed doctrine of Scripture he drastically changed the work of the Spirit which consequently forces him to construct a doctrine of scripture that is different from Kuyper and ultimately inconsistent with Calvin's thought.

Kuyper saw man's need for Scripture as being rooted in the Fall. "But so long as the Church is on earth, face-to-face communion withheld, and our hearts accessible only by the avenues of this imperfect existence, Scripture must remain the indispensable instrument by which the Triune God prepares men's souls for higher glory."<sup>422</sup> However, Scripture is not given directly from heaven. Rather, the Holy Spirit inspires the writers of Scripture to translate divine thoughts into the "life of this world."<sup>423</sup> This does not mean, according to Kuyper, that the Holy Spirit dictates or commands every chapter of every verse to be written. What Kuyper wants to affirm is that the end result is exactly what God wanted it to be. He writes,

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<sup>420</sup> Kuyper, Abraham. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. WM.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, 1956, p. xxvi.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, xxix.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, 62.

“But “inspiration” is the name of that all-comprehensive operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He has bestowed on the Church a complete and infallible Scripture. We call this operation all-comprehensive, for it was organic, not mechanical.”<sup>424</sup> He continues to say, “But whether He dictates directly, as in the Revelation of St. John, or governs the writing indirectly, as with historians and evangelists, the result is the same: the product is such in form and content as the Holy Spirit designed, an infallible document for the Church of God.”<sup>425</sup> The writers of Scripture may have been directed by the Holy Spirit at times consciously and at other times unconsciously but the important thing for Kuyper is that the end result is exactly what the Holy Spirit intended.<sup>426</sup>

At this point there does not seem to be much difference in the thought of Kuyper and Warfield. His understanding of inspiration is similar to Warfield’s doctrine of *concursum* (see chapter 1 above) in that both Warfield and Kuyper are concerned to deny any type of mechanical understanding of divine inspiration. Warfield would probably be very comfortable with the claims Kuyper has made thus far. But then Kuyper goes in a direction that certainly Warfield will not follow. Kuyper says that any objectionable content in Scripture was actually put there by the Spirit in order to allow faith.

That the Scriptures themselves present a number of objections and in many aspects do not make the impression of absolute inspiration does not militate against the other fact that all this spiritual labour was controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit. For the Scripture had to be constructed so as to leave room for the exercise of *faith*.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>426</sup> Kuyper does talk about the inner and outer work of the Holy Spirit. However, this does not seem to be connected with the dichotomy of inner and outer word mentioned by Rupp above. Kuyper uses this distinction to designate the different ways in which the Holy Spirit inspired the Old Testament and the New Testament writers. He sees a need to distinguish the work of the Holy Spirit with the Old Testament writers and their New Testament counterparts. This is primarily because of the Pentecost event and Jesus’ claim in John 16:7 that the Holy Spirit could not be sent until he had ascended.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 78.

This is where Kuyper and Warfield begin to disagree and where their doctrines of Scripture cease to resemble each other.

Kuyper does not go into detail about what these ‘objections’ might be. The important thing to notice is that he does not have a notion of apologetics that requires he put himself in a position of appealing to original autographs that do not have ‘objections.’ For Kuyper, there is no authority of Scripture without the Holy Spirit and there is no recognition of this authority without faith. In a crucial passage Kuyper proclaims,

To have faith in the Word, Scripture must not grasp us in our *critical thought*, but in the life of the *soul*. To believe in the Scripture is an act of life of which thou, O lifeless man! are not capable, except the Quickener, the Holy Ghost, enable thee. He that caused Holy Scripture to be written is the same that must teach thee to read it. Without Him this product of divine art can not affect thee. Hence we believe... that these stumbling-blocks were introduced that it might be impossible for us to lay hold of its content with mere intellectual grasp, without the exercise of faith.<sup>428</sup>

This particular understanding of the relationship between authority, faith and the Holy Spirit influences Kuyper’s later thought on the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*. As a result the Spirit plays a vital role in the authority of Scripture. For Kuyper the Spirit must ‘seal the Word.’ By this he means that the Holy Spirit “creates in the hearts of believers the firm and lasting conviction concerning the divine and absolute authority of the Word of God.”<sup>429</sup> He writes further,

We mention the *sealing* of the Word first, for without faith in its divine authority it can not be God’s Word to us. The question is: How do we come in real contact and fellowship with the Holy Scripture, which, as a mere external object, lies before us? We are told that it is the Word of God; but how can this become our own firm conviction? It can never be obtained by investigation. In fact, it ought to be acknowledged that the more one investigates the Word the more he loses his simple and childlike faith in it.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, 191.

Kuyper does not appeal to the internal properties of the Scriptural text in order to establish its authority, i.e., errorlessness. He asserts that the authority of Scripture relies solely on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit who provides the faith that Scripture is authoritative. There is no way to convince an unbeliever of the authority of Scripture and to do so would be like casting the pearls of Scripture before swine. This also means that one's conviction about the authority of Scripture does not rely on his or her own intellectual ability but the Spirit is able to seal this conviction upon the heart of anyone who believes. "And thus God's elect obtain a firm assurance concerning the Word of God that nothing can shake, of which no learning can rob them."<sup>431</sup>

Warfield is certainly going to advocate a very different position. This is probably because, as Mark Noll writes, "Warfield held that history, reason, and objective science could demonstrate the validity of Scripture as divine revelation."<sup>432</sup> Kuyper would never have suggested such an idea. He placed little emphasis on apologetics (especially the kind which influenced Warfield). Warfield, however, is very influenced by his particular understanding of the value of apologetics and we shall see in the pages that follow just how much this aspect of his thought influences his understanding of the work of the Spirit in relation to a doctrine of Scripture.

### **Warfield and the Holy Spirit**

Warfield never wrote a treatise as such on the Holy Spirit and so it can be quite difficult to determine what Warfield does think about doctrines like the internal testimony of the Spirit. Warfield is explicit about the role of the Spirit in the production of Scripture and where he

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>432</sup> Noll, Mark. ed. *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921*. Baker Academic Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 41.

believes the authority of Scripture is derived. However, when it comes to talking about the internal testimony of the Spirit we have to extract what Warfield thinks out of his representation of Calvin on the matter. We could approach this in two ways: one, we could look at what Warfield says explicitly about the Holy Spirit and His relationship to the text of Scripture and then move on to His internal testimony in the believer; or two, we could look at Warfield's reading of Calvin on this matter and then see how his understanding of Calvin influences his own explicit statements about the work of the Holy Spirit. This latter approach would seem more beneficial to our purposes here because we will be able to discover why Warfield does not spend any significant amount of time developing the doctrine of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the authority of Scripture. Once we have uncovered his interpretation of Calvin on this matter then we will be in a position to establish Warfield's own thought on the role of the Spirit in establishing the authority of Scripture.

According to Warfield<sup>433</sup> Calvin's doctrine of the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti* was intimately connected with what Calvin calls "true faith." Calvin is clear that objective proofs cannot produce this "true faith," but only by the internal working of the Holy Spirit is someone given "true faith." Warfield writes,

But objective proofs – whether the conclusive testimony of witnesses, or the overwhelming evidence of rational considerations – be they never [sic] so cogent, he does not consider of themselves capable of producing "true faith." And it is "true faith," we repeat, that Calvin has in mind in his doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> For the rest of this section it should be assumed by the reader that anything mentioned about Calvin is given from Warfield's perspective. There will certainly be other ways of reading Calvin but this section will be focused only on how Warfield reads Calvin. With this said, Warfield makes a crucial step here that is similar to what Henry does. He says that the Holy Spirit *confirms* the revelation of Scripture. Henry talks about the Holy Spirit *assuring* believers of Scripture. Both seem to misunderstand how vital the role of the Holy Spirit is in Calvin's thought. For more on Calvin see below.

<sup>434</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Volume V*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 2003, p. 74.



It is important to see the stress that Warfield finds in Calvin between the internal testimony of the Spirit and truth faith of the believer. As a result of this connection, Warfield says that it seemed utterly unimportant to Calvin that someone could be convinced by stressing some type of rational evidence to them. “No conclusions based on “reasoning” or “proofs” or founded on human judgment can compare in clearness or force with such a conviction, which is instinctive and immediate, and finds its ultimate ground and sanction in the Holy Spirit who has wrought in the heart this spiritual sense which so functions in recognizing the divine quality of Scripture.”<sup>435</sup>

Having said this Warfield is quick to ask the question of whether the Holy Spirit’s internal testimony is to be conceived of as a new revelation, some kind of ungrounded faith or a grounded faith. And if it is to be conceived of as grounded faith what is it grounded in?<sup>436</sup> If the testimony is not grounded in something then the result would seem to be a blind faith and Warfield is concerned that Calvin has been wrongly interpreted as advocating this position. He is quick to show that Calvin’s doctrine of the internal testimony of the Spirit produces a faith grounded in evidence. “It is not to supersede nor yet to supplement these recorded revelations that the testimony of the Spirit is given us, he insists, but to confirm them (I. ix. 3).”<sup>437</sup>

According to Warfield, Calvin would never have envisioned an understanding of the Spirit which produced a blind faith because Calvin held scientific proof in high regard. For instance, Calvin thought that both the Canon and the integrity of the transmission of Scripture could be proved on historical-critical grounds.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid, 92.

However, what cannot be proved by science is the divinity of Scripture. This aspect of Scripture is wholly proved by the internal testimony of the Spirit. For Calvin, Word and Spirit are unable to be separated. “Only in the conjunction of the two can an effective revelation be made to the sin-darkened mind of man. The Word supplies the objective factor; the Spirit the subjective factor; and only in the union of the objective and subjective factors is the result accomplished.”<sup>439</sup>

These “objective” factors Warfield labels *indicia*. Warfield asks,

Are we to understand him [Calvin] as teaching that the Holy Spirit by His almighty power creates, in the souls of those whom God has set upon to bring to a knowledge of Him, an entirely ungrounded faith in the divinity of Scriptures and the truth of their contents, so that the soul embraces them and their contents with firm confidence as a revelation from God wholly apart from and in the absence of all *indicia* of their divinity or of the truth of their contents?<sup>440</sup>

Warfield says, No. The Holy Spirit cannot produce assurance in the believer about the authority of Scripture without the *indicia*. However, he also states that the *indicia* are wholly insufficient on their own to convince us of the divinity of Scripture but it is by them that the Spirit brings us to this conviction.<sup>441</sup> He writes,

But what about the *indicia* in conjunction with the testimony of the Spirit? It would seem to be evident that, on Calvin’s ground, they would have their full part to play here, and that we must say that, when the soul is renewed by the Holy Spirit to a sense for the divinity of Scripture, it is through the *indicia* of that divinity that it is brought into its proper confidence in the divinity of Scripture.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>441</sup> One may ask whether there is room in Warfield’s own thought for this position to exist. Here he seems to be commenting specifically on Calvin’s understanding. Turretin’s influence on Warfield may shed some light on this subject. According to William Placher, Turretin saw “no need for the Spirit’s illumination to establish scripture’s authority.” See *The Domestication of Transcendence* by William C. Placher. Westminster John Knox Press: Kentucky, 1996, p. 169.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid, 87.

However, Warfield does mention that Calvin does not speak explicitly concerning what role, if any, the *indicia* play in the forming of faith under the work of the Spirit.<sup>443</sup> They seem only to play a role in the conviction of the divinity of Scripture for a believer.

Calvin can be seen to stress three main ideas according to Warfield. First, the Holy Spirit must be involved in a person's life before that person can be convinced of the divinity of Scripture. Second, the Holy Spirit uses the objective evidence in Scripture in His testimony to the believer. Third, Word and Spirit are unable to be separated in Calvin and both are needed to bring about "true faith."

With these points establish we are now in a position to examine the specific things Warfield says about the authority of Scripture and how it may relate to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is clear that Warfield sees a tension in Calvin between what he calls the objective *indicia* of Scripture and the subjective testimony of the Spirit. We must remind ourselves here of the dichotomy of the inner and outer Word discussed at the beginning of this chapter. We seem to be having glimpses of a similar dichotomy in Warfield's talk about the objective *indicia* and the subjective testimony.

It should become very apparent in our discussion below that Warfield spends a lot of time talking about the 'objective' qualities of Scripture that would make it authoritative. This should not come as a surprise to us and the fact that he does this means that he remains consistent with what we would expect from him. There is little doubt about the role that evidentialism in particular and apologetics in general plays in Warfield's theology. Perhaps a question that we must try to answer is how much did his understanding of Calvin's doctrine

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid, 88.

of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit play a part in his doctrine of Scripture? It may be possible to argue that Warfield presupposed this ‘subjective’ role of the Spirit and as a result spent the majority of his intellectual efforts elaborating the role of the ‘objective’ *indicia* of Scripture and their connection to Scripture’s authority.

To try to specify what percentage of Warfield’s thought was reliant on or presupposed the internal testimony of the Spirit and what percentage was reliant on the objective ‘proofs’ of Scripture’s authority is an impossible task. What we can do is give the reader a taste of how Warfield develops his own understanding of Scriptural authority and see if it can be compatible with his own understanding of Calvin’s doctrine.

It was Warfield’s desire to produce an understanding of Scriptural authority which was based on how the Apostles and even Christ himself viewed the Scriptures. In the articles produced in, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, he sets out on such a task. In what is clearly a summary of his work written as an introduction for *The Independent* Warfield writes,

Our Lord and his apostles looked upon the entire truthfulness and utter trustworthiness of that body of writings which they called “Scripture,” as so fully guaranteed by the inspiration of God, that they could appeal to them confidently in all their statements of whatever kind as absolutely true; adduce their deliverances on whatever subject with a simple “it is written,” as the end of all strife; and treat them generally in a manner which clearly exhibits that in their view “Scripture says” was equivalent to “God says.”<sup>444</sup>

For Warfield there appear to be two types of *indicia*, internal and external. An extensive amount of work was done to elaborate on the specifics of each. For instance, Warfield wrote on both the church’s doctrine of inspiration (external *indicia*) and Scripture’s doctrine of inspiration (internal *indicia*). He writes,

The more we contemplate this church-doctrine, the more pressing the questions of what account we are to give of it, - its origin and persistence.

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<sup>444</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *Selected Shorter Writings: Volume II*. P&R Press: New Jersey, 2001, p. 580.

How shall we account for the immediate adoption of so developed a doctrine of inspiration in the very infancy of the church, and for the tenacious hold which the church has kept upon it through so many ages? The account is simple enough, and capable of inclusion in a single sentence: this is the doctrine of inspiration which was held by the writers of the New Testament and by Jesus as reported in the Gospels.<sup>445</sup>

According to Warfield, ultimately the reason why the church has accepted the Scriptural account of inspiration, as he has presented it, is because of its belief in the trustworthiness of Scripture. He says that the church has always had an “instinctive feeling” that the trustworthiness of Scripture is foundational to trust in Christian doctrine.<sup>446</sup> The reason why Scripture is trustworthy is because of the particular influence the Holy Spirit had on its writers.<sup>447</sup> In order to show this trustworthiness Warfield develops a coherent way of understanding the inspiration of Scripture which allows for the authors to remain fully human while writing and at the same time the product of this work is literally God’s Word.

Warfield must stress the divinity of Scripture because it is only authoritative if it is a divine product. In fact, it only can be wholly trustworthy if it is from God and of God.

Its authority rests on its divinity and its divinity expresses itself in its trustworthiness; and the New Testament writers in all their use of it treat it as what they declare it to be – a God-breathed document, which, because God-breathed, is through and through trustworthy in all its assertions, authoritative in all its declarations, and down to its last particular, the very word of God, His “oracles.”<sup>448</sup>

It is clear that Warfield sees an intrinsic connection between divinity, authority and trustworthiness. The writers of the New Testament treated the Scriptures, according to Warfield, as if they had divine authority and believed that what is written in the Scriptures

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>447</sup> There is little emphasis on the Spirit’s action towards the reader of the text of Scripture. This may be because both Warfield and Henry see Scripture having a literal sense. When Scripture is viewed in a strictly literal way then the tendency is to see the Spirit as applying the literal sense of Scripture to the reader but not interpreting it. I am grateful to Dr. Mark Elliot for pointing this out to me.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 150.

was the same as God speaking to them directly. For the writers of the New Testament and for Jesus himself, the Scriptures were absolutely trustworthy.<sup>449</sup>

He is careful here not to fall into a dictation-theory of inspiration, however. Warfield was not satisfied with the dictation-theory because he says it is not intimate enough. The Holy Spirit's work was much more intimate than the theory of dictation would allow.

Scripture is the produce of man, but only of man speaking from God and under such control of the Holy Spirit as that in their speaking they are "borne" by Him. This conception obviously is that the Scriptures have been given by the instrumentality of men; and this conception finds repeated incidental expression throughout the New Testament."<sup>450</sup>

So we see that the Spirit acted in such a way that the writings that were produced were exactly the product He wanted.

Because of this Warfield is able to conclude,

Thus these books become not merely the word of godly men, but the immediate word of God Himself, speaking directly as such to the minds and hearts of every reader. The value of "inspiration" emerges, thus, as twofold. It gives to the books written under its "bearing" a quality which is truly superhuman; a trustworthiness, an authority, a searchingness, a profundity, a profitableness which is altogether Divine. And it speaks this Divine word immediately to each reader's heart and conscience; so that he does not require to make his way to God, painfully, perhaps even uncertainly, through the words of His servants, the human instruments in writing the Scriptures, but can listen directly to the Divine voice itself speaking immediately in the Scriptural word to him.<sup>451</sup>

This is where we see a potential problem in Warfield's account and it seems to have a direct influence on his understanding of the internal testimony of the Spirit. Warfield's insistence

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<sup>449</sup> A question immediately arises as to why the apostles thought that these writings were authoritative and trustworthy. They did not seem to examine them to see if they proved to be inspired. One might suggest that they were persuaded by the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives that the text ought to have authority for them. Warfield is right that both the Apostles and the Lord Jesus himself saw the Scriptures as authoritative but held this conviction for different reasons than he offers his readers. The very fact that one would suggest that we need evidence to prove the Bible's authority seems foreign to any notion that the writer's might have had.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, 158.

on the *immediate* word in Scripture allows him to focus on the ‘external’ factors which influence the divine authority of Scripture at the expense of any contemporary work of the Holy Spirit. He seems to completely bypass the role the Spirit plays in convicting the believer’s heart of the divinity and authority of Scripture.

There is no doubt that he was aware of Calvin’s stress on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit in leading man to believe in the divine trustworthiness of Scripture. And although Warfield believed that the Holy Spirit did this through the *indicia* of Scripture, in his writing he seems to focus on the *indicia* at the expense of the internal testimony of the Spirit.<sup>452</sup> This may be because of his commitment to apologetics and his reliance on evidentialism (or, perhaps the influence of Turretin’s theology; see note 401 above), but nevertheless, by stressing the evidences of Scripture’s divinity in order to establish authority, he relegates the continuing work of the Holy Spirit to the margins. And it is a very easy step from this to making the inerrancy of Scripture the key for belief in its authority and he takes this step at the end of his article on ‘The Biblical Idea of Inspiration.’ He writes,

...so in the case of the production of Scripture by the conjoint action of human and Divine factors, the human factors have acted as human factors, and have left their mark on the product as such, and yet cannot have fallen into that error which we say it is human to fall into, because they have not acted apart from the Divine factors, by themselves, but only under their *unerring* guidance.<sup>453</sup> (my italics)

Inerrancy becomes *the indicium* that gives evidence of the divinity of Scripture. As we have seen, Warfield ties any notion of authority directly to the divinity of Scripture. Therefore, if we attack the inerrancy of Scripture we attack the very authority of Scripture itself.

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<sup>452</sup> I am aware that it might be argued in response to this that Warfield obviously understood Calvin’s position and interpreted him correctly. Furthermore, we should assume that he always has in his mind the place for the internal testimony of the Spirit even if he does not elaborate it in writing. But I suppose this is partly my point. He does not show that the Spirit must be contemporarily involved in the process by which a person comes to trust in the authority of Scripture.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid, 163.

Warfield spends the majority of his writing on Scripture developing the ‘external’ proofs by which someone may be convinced of the authority of the text. He is certainly aware of Calvin’s doctrine of the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*. In fact, he spends sixty pages developing the concept and yet spends little time in his other writings showing how he believes this doctrine relates to the authority of Scripture. As we have seen in previous chapters, Warfield spent a lot of time focusing on evidence which may have led him to downplay the importance of the testimony of the Holy Spirit which he found in Calvin. To put it another way, he spends a lot of time writing on the ‘outer’ word and virtually no time on the ‘inner’ word.<sup>454</sup> If someone were only to read his writings on the inspiration and authority of Scripture they would have no idea whether or not he even knew about Calvin’s thought on the internal testimony of the Spirit. It seems fair to suggest that however much Warfield believed and maintained a Reformed perspective on the internal testimony of the Spirit in his own life it does not play a large role in his writings on the authority of Scripture.

Another contributor and defender of the doctrine of inerrancy whose thought we have looked at in previous chapters is Carl F. H. Henry. Because of his role in framing the contemporary thought on inerrancy it will be useful to examine his understanding of the Work of the Holy Spirit and to see if he differs at all from what we have seen of Warfield and Kuyper above.

### **Carl F.H. Henry and the Holy Spirit**

We have seen in a previous chapter of this thesis that Henry held very strongly to a rational understanding of revelation. We noted that according to Henry any person of normal rational capabilities could see the truth of the Christian revelation in Scripture. This conviction comes from a specific scientific understanding of revelation, which in turn allows Henry to

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<sup>454</sup> As far as I can tell Warfield does not use these words but they represent a dichotomy that would not be inappropriate to his work.



develop a distinctively rational apologetic founded upon a written revelation which includes inerrant properties.

When we examine Henry's writing on the contemporary work of the Holy Spirit and his continued testimony to mankind of the validity of Scripture we find little mentioned. In a chapter entitled, 'The Ministry of the Holy Spirit' where Henry spends his most sustained time discussing the current activities of the Spirit there is only one sentence in the entire chapter that seems to allude to Calvin's doctrine of the internal testimony. Henry comments, "The Spirit assures us through the written Word itself that Scripture is indeed the revelatory Word of God (Eph. 6:17; Heb 4:12)."<sup>455</sup> The rest of the chapter is weighed down by a discussion of the modern Pentecostal movement in the US and the different arguments for and against its understanding of *glossolalia*.

Henry is committed to revelation being primarily propositional in nature. As a result there is univocity between Scriptural revelation and God.<sup>456</sup> Carl R. Trueman writes, "On the issue of propositionalism, Henry is no doubt at his most vulnerable when arguing for the univocity

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<sup>455</sup> Henry, Carl F.H. *God, Revelation and Authority, Volume VI*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, 1999, p. 386.

<sup>456</sup> In *The Domestication of Transcendence*, William Placher argues that univocity is a shift that modern theology makes in response to different pressures caused by modern ways of thinking. Placher argues that unlike Aquinas and the Reformers, modern theologians needed to speak of God in a concrete and authoritative way and so moved away from the basic principle of God's mysteriousness that Aquinas and the Reformers held in common. For these thinkers, because God is transcendent our language about him can only be analogous. According to Placher, key modern theologians understood analogous language as not being strong enough to handle the challenges posed to theology at the time. He traces this shift from Cardinal Cajetan and Francisco Suárez to Jacob Martini, Johannes Andreas Quenstedt and Francis Turretin. One of the interesting points about Placher's claim is the connection to Francis Turretin. If Placher interprets Turretin's *Institutes* correctly and Turretin is following Suárez and making a subtle move away from analogy toward univocity, then there are many implications that follow. As was seen in a previous chapter, there is most definitely a connection between Warfield and Turretin with regard to common sense philosophy. An entire thesis could focus on whether a specific understanding of the univocity of language in Turretin influences Warfield's development of inerrancy. Could there be a strong connection between univocity and inerrancy? Placher is not concerned with this question but his charge against Turretin makes it an appropriate question to ask. For further information see: Placher, William C. *The Domestication of Transcendence*. Westminster John Knox Press: Kentucky, 1996.

of human language about God.”<sup>457</sup> According to Trueman, Henry’s univocal thinking was passed down from his mentor Gordon H. Clark. Alan Padgett agrees and writes,

Henry’s greatest weakness is an undefended reliance on the philosophy of Gordon H. Clark. This has led to a rationalistic theology, where logic is over-valued and propositions alone are considered to be true. Even faith in Christ becomes a “kind of literal shorthand” for belief in propositions (3:438). The Person of the Logos is reduced to an impersonal, abstract system.”<sup>458</sup>

Because of the univocal relation between the propositional revelation of Scripture and God, Henry only needs the Spirit to assure believers of Scripture’s authority.<sup>459</sup> Henry’s doctrine of Scripture does not require a strong contemporary work of the Holy Spirit to maintain its authority.<sup>460</sup> That is why we find Henry focusing on the Spirit’s *past* work of inspiration and writing comparatively little on the whether the Spirit has a role to play in the Church’s contemporary belief in Scriptural authority.

Henry is very wary of the neo-orthodox account of authority in functional terms. He says that according to David H. Kelsey, Barth

becomes a watershed for [sic], since he understands “scriptural authority” in functional terms, Kelsey comments that in Barth’s view “the texts are authoritative not in virtue of any inherent property they may have, such as being inspired or inerrant, but in virtue of a function they fill in the life of the Christian community.”<sup>461</sup>

But it is these ‘inherent properties’ on which Henry hangs his entire system. These properties ensure, for Henry, the objectivity and scientific nature of theology. As a result he

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<sup>457</sup> Trueman, Carl R. ‘Admiring the Sistine Chapel: Reflections on Carl F.H. Henry’s *God, Revelation and Authority*’ in *Themelios*. Vol 25. No. 2, pp 48-58, 2000.

<sup>458</sup> Padgett, Alan. Review of *God, Revelation and Authority*. in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Vol. 52. No. 4, pp 785-786, 1984.

<sup>459</sup> As we mentioned above in note 395 and will see below this is the reverse of Calvin’s understanding. For Calvin, the *indicia* provide assurance and the Holy Spirit is the key to biblical authority. What this means is that the Scriptures would still have authority without these *indicia*.

<sup>460</sup> This fact is reflective of mainstream inerrantists, as well.

<sup>461</sup> *God, Revelation and Authority, Volume IV*. p. 84.

can find no room for linking scriptural authority with functionality.<sup>462</sup> Henry concludes that understanding biblical authority in terms of its functionality leads to relativism. He writes,

The erosion of fixed rational biblical truth by a functional correlation with inner believing response involves each and every biblical concept; no fixed meaning survives for any doctrine whatever if the functional premise is to be consistently applied.<sup>463</sup>

According to Henry, the authority of Scripture is given in no other way than by the past work of the Holy Spirit in divinely inspiring data so that once the Spirit had done his work the Scriptures would be authoritative for all of mankind and would evidence that authority by very specific properties, i.e., inerrancy. He summarizes this act of the Spirit in the following way,

In Scripture we are dealing with what the Holy Spirit tells and foretells, with divinely inspired data, with what is known by special revelation, with what the Spirit communicates in a definitive way. God is the authority who renders Scripture authoritative; inspiration is the special phenomenon that imparts this character of divine authority to the writings and logically necessitates fulfillment of written prophecies.<sup>464</sup>

Any other way of talking about biblical authority implicitly assumes, according to Henry, that “the truthfulness of the Bible is not held to be guaranteed by divine inspiration but is to be attributed or mediated by something else.”<sup>465</sup> This ‘something else’ could be experience or subjective feeling, viz., the kind of mediation that Henry feared the neo-orthodox doctrine of Scripture led to.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> This is where one might be able to draw some type of evangelical and Barthian views of Scripture together. What if the property that Scripture has which makes it authoritative is not inerrancy but rather being the text where Christ promises to dwell. The reason Scripture is authoritative is because Christ promises to meet us in this text and no other. The promise is tied to this specific text and even though Christ is free to meet us somewhere else he promises to meet us here. Looking at authority this way might give the text of Scripture an “objective” quality, which may make it more compatible with many evangelical concerns but retains the Christo-centrism of Barth’s method.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>466</sup> An important question to note is whether the doctrine of inerrancy accomplishes the mediation Henry wants here. He seems to want the Spirit to mediate authority and believes that his doctrine of inspiration establishes this. By binding inerrancy and authority together as he does one wonders whether the Spiritual mediation he

With all of this being the case one would expect Henry to be adamant about the doctrine of inerrancy. One would expect that if the authority of Scripture is based on its past inspiration evidenced by its inerrancy that Henry would be very concerned to tie inerrancy and authority together as the passage from ‘The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy’ quoted above does, in fact do. Henry does not seem to want to make such a move while discussing authority. He comments, “The first claim to be made for Scripture is not its inerrancy or even its inspiration, but its authority.”<sup>467</sup> The comment is made in the midst of Henry’s explication on how Scripture has been conferred authority from the Son. It does allude to an altogether different priority for Henry than some of his followers would be comfortable with.<sup>468</sup>

But what does Henry mean when he uses the term authority? By authority does he mean, as one author has written, “it is the ultimate and final mediated standard of truth and criterion for judgment and evaluation”?<sup>469</sup> Henry seems to understand authority in an ethical way. Authority is talked about in terms of ‘rights.’ If someone has authority they have the right to do what they are doing.

This authority, in fact, all authority is derivative. All authority is God-given. According to Henry, God alone has underived authority. He has absolute authority, which is then passed

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seems to seek is not replaced by errorless propositions of the text so that authority ends up being mediated by postulating an errorless text.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>468</sup> At this point in volume IV Henry’s words would be a cause of concern for inerrantists. He seems to make less of a link between authority and inerrancy when he is writing about authority, but later in the volume when he is writing about inerrancy he blatantly connects the two.

<sup>469</sup> Lightner, Robert P. *A Biblical Case for Total Inerrancy: How Jesus Viewed the Old Testament*. Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 78.

down to the Son. The Son passes this authority on to the apostles and the apostles inscribe it as Scripture.

He bases his understanding of authority on the term *exousia* used in the New Testament.

This is what *exousia* means in revealed religion: authority and power that the living God alone can wield underivedly and unrestrictedly. In the New Testament we face the fact that God's *exousia* is the power and authority given to Jesus Christ and under him, to his disciples...Jesus' *exousia* is the presupposition of whatever authority the apostles have in respect to the things of God, that is, of all apostolic authority.<sup>470</sup>

One of the crucial questions at this point is whether the Bible is for Henry a "special locus of divine *exousia*."<sup>471</sup> According to Henry, the Bible is the only source for our knowledge of the divine creation, fallen mankind and God's offer of forgiveness. In fact, it is "the only knowledge-basis we have for anything we say about the person and work of Christ, about his distinctive authority, and about the authority he conferred upon the apostles."<sup>472</sup> This is why establishing its authority is more important for Henry than establishing its inerrancy. Henry does believe that it is the special locus of divine *exousia*. And like all authority, the Bible has authority because God has given it such.

God's authority is His alone to share. But all authority of any kind, according to Henry, is in some sense derived from this One source. "Whether we speak of men or angels, of civil government, even of Satan, none of them holds underived authority. God alone is the absolute power of decision."<sup>473</sup> This, of course, begs the question about whether God uses errant sources to wield authority. It would seem that if one maintains that all authority is given by God then it must mean that things that err can still be authoritative. If this is the

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<sup>470</sup> *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume IV*. pp. 26-27.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25.

case then the link between the authority of Scripture and the need for an inerrant text becomes very tenuous.

Nevertheless, Henry spends a significant amount of time going through a similar exegetical process to that of Warfield in showing how both Christ and the apostles presupposed the authority of the Old Testament and how the apostles believed that their writings possessed the same authority. By establishing this, Henry finds the foundation for belief in the authority of Scripture. The foundation for belief in the authority of Scripture comes from the Scriptures themselves.

Henry moves on from discussing the authority of Scripture to how one is to understand truth and then into a discussion of inerrancy. During this discussion the issue of authority rises and Henry is explicit about the need to hold both inerrancy and authority together. He writes, “Only logical imprecision can begin with errancy and conclude with divine authority. What is errant cannot be divinely authoritative nor can God have inspired it.”<sup>474</sup> He writes further,

The inevitable consequence of insisting on biblical authority and inspiration on the one hand and on an errant Bible on the other is, of course, that inspiration ceases to be a guarantee of the truth of what the Bible teaches; the authority of Scripture must then somehow be divorced from the truth of its content. The problem with such alternatives is that they destroy the objective truth of the Christian religion, trivialize theology, and lead finally to scepticism.<sup>475</sup>

The Henry who thought that Scriptural authority was the primary category to establish seems to be long lost. We find much more insistence on the logical incompatibility between an errant text and its authority and the need to uphold biblical inerrancy in order to maintain biblical authority. “To affirm the errancy of the text but to insist on the divine authority and reliability of the Bible requires one to impose upon the notion of biblical authority ‘the death

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid, p. 192-93.

of a thousand qualifications.”<sup>476</sup> By the end of his discussion of biblical inerrancy there is no doubt in his mind that one cannot consistently hold both that Scripture is authoritative and that it is errant.<sup>477</sup> Inerrancy then becomes the key property of Scripture, which ensures its authority.

So what becomes of the Spirit? Henry has a very strong doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture which, like Warfield, sets the stage of his doctrine of inerrancy. It would appear that the Spirit does not have much of a role to play in regard to Scriptural authority after His work of inspiration was complete. There is no sense in Henry (as there is in Kuyper) that the Spirit continues to make the Scriptures authoritative for the elect. Rather, the Spirit is relegated to the role of assurance giver. He is the one who gives assurance of authority that is based on the ‘objective’ inerrant qualities, which can be rationally validated. It could be argued that when Kuyper talks about ‘sealing the word’ he is using language that is consistent with Henry’s mentioning of the Spirit’s assurance. The problem with this argument is that Kuyper makes this act of *sealing* vital in his understanding of authority where Henry just makes passing mention of it. With that said we should now turn to an examination of Calvin’s doctrine of the internal testimony of the Spirit to see if we can find any correlations between his thought and that of Kuyper, Warfield and Henry.

### **Calvin’s Doctrine of the Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit**

We started this chapter looking at Abraham Kuyper’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit as it relates to his understanding of Scriptural authority and we end with one of the fathers of the Reformation, John Calvin. It is important that we end here for a number of reasons. As we saw in chapter one of this thesis, inerrantists often claim historical precedent is found in the

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>477</sup> This is largely to do with Henry’s philosophical commitments, which we have discussed in a previous chapter.

Reformers for their understanding of Scripture. What this chapter has sought to show is that by maintaining a particular doctrine of inerrancy, as found in Warfield or Henry, inerrantists are liable to find little need for the a contemporary involvement of the Holy Spirit in their account of biblical authority. What we shall be asking in this final section is whether or not Calvin's understanding of the authority of Scripture is consonant with the contemporary inerrantist doctrine.

Of course there is a danger inherent in this type of questioning. As Stephen Holmes has remarked in an unpublished paper on Calvin's doctrine of Scripture there is a danger of forcing foreign 'thought-worlds' and 'doctrinal questions' on to the *Institutes*. In a footnote relevant to our purposes Holmes remarks, "As I have noted elsewhere, and will develop later in this chapter, the (sterile) debate about whether Calvin's doctrine of Scripture is inerrantist or neo-orthodox is a classic example of this failing: he can at times sound like both Warfield and Barth, which demonstrates only that the conceptual distinctions developed to differentiate their positions were not ones Calvin had made."<sup>478</sup>

In order not to be accused of introducing foreign categories into Calvin's thought we will stay strictly with his own account of biblical authority. With this said, however, it would seem that inerrantists are correct when they argue that Calvin unashamedly believed in the total inspiration of the Scriptures and presupposed their infallibility. As many have already argued there should be no doubt that this is the case. Like most of his contemporaries, Calvin was deeply committed to the trustworthiness of Scripture.<sup>479</sup> The question we must

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<sup>478</sup> Holmes, Stephen R. 'Calvin on Scripture.'

<sup>479</sup> A classic example of where Calvin holds in tension his belief in both the trustworthiness of Scripture and its possible ability to err is found in his commentary on Genesis 1:26. Here he shows that astronomers have proved something differently than the account given by Moses (Calvin accepted the tradition at the time that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch). Calvin writes, "Moses makes two great luminaries; but astronomers prove, by conclusive reasons that the star of Saturn, which on account of its great distance, appears the least of



ask in this section is not whether he thinks Scripture is trustworthy and authoritative but why he does. And as we shall see, the answer lies primarily in the contemporary work of the Holy Spirit.

Richard Muller writes,

The orthodox generally preserve the same order and/or priority of discussion as was found in Calvin's *Institutes*: the testimony of the Spirit remains the **primary key** to the authority and divinity of Scripture, with the evidences standing as ancillary testimony and, more importantly, as the necessary result of the divine work performed in the inspiration and writing of the text.<sup>480</sup> (my emphasis)

To say that the function of the Holy Spirit is the primary key in Calvin's understanding of the authority of Scripture is true but can be misleading. One can also say that the Holy Spirit is the primary key in the inerrantists' understanding of the authority of Scripture and so conclude that these two positions are consistent with each other. However, it is more complicated than this. As we have seen, Warfield and Henry can both claim that the Holy Spirit is the primary key to the authority and divinity of Scripture but the locus of this claim lies in the Spirit's *past* work of inspiration. Their thought at this point is very consistent to

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all, is greater than the moon. Here lies the difference; Moses wrote in a popular style things which without instruction, all ordinary persons, endued with common sense, are able to understand; but astronomers investigate with great labor whatever the sagacity of the human mind can comprehend. Nevertheless, this study is not to be reprobated, nor this science to be condemned, because some frantic persons are wont boldly to reject whatever is unknown to them. For astronomy is not only pleasant, but also very useful to be known: it cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God... Lastly since the Spirit of God here opens a common school for all, it is not surprising that he should chiefly choose those subjects which would be intelligible to all. If the astronomer inquires respecting the actual dimensions of the stars, he will find the moon to be less than Saturn; but this is something abstruse, for to the sight it appears differently. Moses, therefore, rather adapts his discourse to common usage. For since the Lord stretches forth, as it were, his hand to us in causing us to enjoy the brightness of the sun and moon, how great would be our ingratitude were we to close our eyes against our own experience? There is therefore no reason why janglers should deride the unskilfulness of Moses in making the moon the second luminary; for he does not call us up into heaven, he only proposes things which lie open before our eyes. Let the astronomers possess their more exalted knowledge; but, in the meantime, they who perceive by the moon the splendor of night, are convicted by its use of perverse ingratitude unless they acknowledge the beneficence of God." Calvin's doctrine of accommodation is at work here in his explanation of how the Spirit could inspire Moses to write what he did and not have it correspond to the current astronomical science of his day. Because of Calvin's doctrine of accommodation he can believe both in the trustworthiness of Scripture and modern science's conclusions about our universe which seem to differ in some ways to the biblical perspective. The current debate on evolution would find much help from Calvin's way of thinking in this passage.

<sup>480</sup> Muller, Richard A. *Holy Scripture, The Cognitive Foundation of Theology: Volume II*. Baker Academic Press: Grand Rapids, 2003, p. 266.

Calvin. However, Calvin also speaks of a contemporary internal witness of the Spirit in the life of the believer and without this work Scripture would not be recognised as authoritative by the believing community.

It is important to see Calvin in his historical context. When he talks about the authority of Scripture, Calvin is very concerned that it is considered and established outside of the influence of the Roman Church. Calvin calls it a pernicious error to contend that Scripture only has as much weight as the church consents too. Furthermore, according to Calvin, one mocks the Holy Spirit when the question about who will convince people of the authority of Scripture is asked as if a man or institution could establish this.<sup>481</sup> Calvin writes,

Therefore illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men.<sup>482</sup>

When Calvin talks about "anyone else's judgment" it is clear from the context of his writing that he has in mind the Roman Church. God alone can prove the conclusion that Scripture is authoritative and this is done by the work of the Spirit.<sup>483</sup>

We found earlier that Kuyper uses the term 'sealed' to express the particular action of the Spirit and our belief in Scripture's authority. This is also language that Calvin uses in his

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<sup>481</sup> Calvin, John. *Institutes: Volume I*, edited by John T. McNeill. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1960, p. 75. [1.7.1]

<sup>482</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>483</sup> In *First Theology* Kevin Vanhoozer develops a specific account of how this takes place within the church. Vanhoozer argues that Scripture is the locus of divine communicative action "consisting of three aspects. First, the Father's 'locution': the words are the authorized words of the Father/Author. Second, the 'illocutionary' dimension: what God *does* in Scripture is testify, in various ways, to Christ. Finally, to return to the catechism, we may best view the Holy Spirit's work as God's 'perlocution,' that is, as what happens as a *result* of speaking." Vanhoozer argues later that the Spirit has a contemporary role in bringing about all three aspects of the divine communicative action: he convicts us of God's locution so that the text is authoritative for the church, he illumines the words so that the reader finds Christ, and he sanctifies believers so that the desired result is achieved. Vanhoozer is consciously using language compatible with Calvin's *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*. By doing so, he concludes similarly to Gordon Fee that the Spirit is the key to everything. See Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics*. InterVarsity Press: Illinois, 2002, chapter 7.

description of the Spirit's work. "For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit."<sup>484</sup>

The temptation here is to separate Word and Spirit. Calvin has a very high doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. "Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard."<sup>485</sup> He believes that the Scriptures are from God in their entirety. But how do we know this? According to Calvin, our assurance comes only by the inner testimony of the Spirit.

A crucial point for us to see is that the authority of Scripture is connected to both the past act of the inspiration of Scripture and the present act of 'sealing' the Word in the believer. To attempt to convince someone of Scripture's authority based on the past actions of the Spirit alone, which may or may not have given the text certain inerrant properties is to disregard the importance that Calvin places on the current work of the Spirit.<sup>486</sup> Calvin acknowledges that there are 'evidences' in Scripture that support its divine authorship, but he is very insistent that these 'evidences' (or *indicia*) can only confirm the authority of Scripture that has been established by the internal testimony of Scripture.

For Calvin these "arguments" for the credibility of Scripture were "human judgments" that were "vain" arguments *in themselves*. Our faith in Scripture, according to Calvin, could be assisted by these arguments, but only *after* we believed in Christ and accepted the authority of the biblical witness to him under the leading of the Holy Spirit... Calvin completely rejected the notion that rational proofs of the divinity of Scripture were necessary before one could have faith in it. He accepted, however, the encouragement such arguments could give to believers after their faith in

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid, p. 79. [1.7.4]

<sup>485</sup> Ibid, p. 74. [1.7.1]

<sup>486</sup> Admittedly, Calvin does not use nor know of any doctrine of inerrancy but the point still stands when comparing his view of authority with the inerrantist position.

Scripture had been established by contact with the Word itself and by consent to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Scripture could not be known as authoritative outside of faith in it, according to Calvin.<sup>487</sup>

And Calvin himself writes,

Unless the certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, *or to confirm it with other helps*. For unless this foundation is laid, its authority *will always remain in doubt*. Conversely, once we have embraced it devoutly as its dignity deserves, and have recognized it to be above the common sort of things, those arguments- not strong enough before to engraft and fix the certainty of Scripture in our minds- become very useful aids.<sup>488</sup> (my italics)

It would appear that this is why Richard Muller calls the contemporary work of the Spirit a primary key to understanding Calvin's doctrine of biblical authority. The certainty of the Bible's authority, according to Calvin, will always remain in doubt if the Church in any way establishes it or one tries to establish it by some type of rational argument, which provides some kind of evidence of this 'proof.' If we are to be certain about the Bible's authority it can only be established by a gift of the Spirit. "But those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known."<sup>489</sup> The inner testimony of the Holy Spirit is given to those whom the Spirit wills to give it. For Calvin, there is no other way to establish this authority.

The concern that is often raised in response to the doctrine of the internal testimony of the Spirit is that it leaves us with a "dead letter" understanding of Scripture. By this it is meant that Scripture on its own is useless for salvation. Calvin does seem to agree with this idea. It

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<sup>487</sup> Rogers, Jack B. and McKim, Donald K. *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. Harper & Row: New York, 1979, p. 105. For a discussion of Warfield and his elevation of these evidences in Scripture to equal status with the internal testimony see: Dowey, Edward A. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1965, p. 116.

<sup>488</sup> *Institutes, Volume I*. pp. 81-82. [1.8.1] Calvin's understanding here seems parallel to the contemporary debate amongst Thomists regarding whether Aquinas' proofs were intended to establish God's existence apart from faith. For an example of the debate see: Kerr, Fergus. *Contemplating Aquinas on the Varieties of Interpretation*. SCM Press: London, 2003.

<sup>489</sup> *Institutes: Volume I*. p. 92. [1.8.13]

would appear that when the ‘letter’ of Scripture is cut off from ‘Christ’s grace’ then it, in Calvin’s words, “slays its readers.”<sup>490</sup> He says,

The letter, therefore, is dead, and the law of the Lord slays its readers where it both is cut off from Christ’s grace [II Cor. 3:6] and, leaving the heart untouched, sounds in the ears alone. But if through the Spirit it is really branded upon hearts, if it shows forth Christ, it is the word of life [cf. Phil. 2:16] “converting souls,... giving wisdom to little ones,” etc. [Ps. 18:8, Vg.; 19:7, EV].<sup>491</sup>

Calvin cannot conceive of Scripture being effective or used for what it is intended for without the work of the Spirit. He will not allow Word and Spirit to be separated. It would seem to work conversely, as well. The Spirit needs the Word to achieve his purposes in the world. In fact, one might say that Word and Spirit are mutually dependent on each other.

Neither achieves its purpose separate from the other. Calvin writes,

God did not bring forth his Word among men for the sake of a momentary display, intending at the coming of his Spirit to abolish it. Rather, he sent down the same Spirit by whose power he had dispensed the Word, to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of the Word.”<sup>492</sup>

We would be unjustified in attributing to Calvin the dichotomy between inner and outer word mentioned above. However, his language does seem to be a precursor to such a move.

Where those who advocate such a position differ from the tradition in which Calvin belongs is their exaltation of the outer word at the expense of the inner word. Without trying to force Calvin into a position foreign to him, it seems that we can at the very least conclude that he would be against any dichotomy which places an emphasis on the outer word to the neglect of the inner word. According to him, the internal work of the Spirit and the external existence of the text are inseparable when speaking about the authority of Scripture.

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid, p. 95. [1.9.3]

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

We started this chapter with a quote from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. This quote introduced a connection between belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and belief in biblical authority. The statement concluded that if inerrancy is not held then ‘the Bible which God gave loses its authority.’ It is not unreasonable to say that this is at least one of the significant concerns raised by the doctrine of inerrancy. In fact, it is conceivable that for many inerrantists, maintaining the authority of Scripture is the primary reason for continued belief in errorless original autographs. However, it would appear that this comes at a price.

This chapter was not written to challenge every aspect of the doctrine of inerrancy. Rather, it was written to explore how the main exponents of the doctrine (i.e., Warfield and Henry) understand the contemporary role of the Holy Spirit. We found that the price paid is a significantly downgraded pneumatology with respect to the Bible’s authority in the contemporary church. By placing so much emphasis on the Spirit’s past act of inspiration, both Warfield and Henry find little need to continue Calvin’s emphasis on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the *indicia* which Calvin saw as only providing assurance for an already established belief in the authority of Scripture, become that which establish its authority. To say this in another way, the outer word takes precedence in their understanding of biblical authority and the inner word is marginalized.

One might respond by saying that Calvin was incorrect when he spoke of the internal testimony of the Spirit, but showing Calvin’s consistency with both the early church’s understanding of the Spirit and the tradition which followed is not possible here. However, we can conclude that both Warfield and Henry break with the thought of Calvin at this point,

and inasmuch as Calvin represents the traditional view of the church, they break with it as well.

Trying to understand the dynamic between Word and Spirit seems to be the most important task for anyone thinking through their own understanding of biblical authority. If one elevates the Spirit over the Word, what results is a kind of subjectivism or fideism. To the contrary, if one elevates Word over Spirit, what results is a kind natural theology or deism where God is no longer needed. Surely, Calvin (and with him many of the other Reformers) was right to hold in tension both Word and Spirit so that faith in the Bible's authority is ultimately given as a gift of God.

In the chapter that follows we will examine two different doctrines of Scripture which seem to allow the Spirit to function in a more crucial manner than the doctrine of Scripture found in Warfield or Henry will allow. We will look at Barth's understanding of the threefold word of God and Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of Scripture. Once we have seen other doctrines of Scripture then we will be able to offer some concluding remarks about the overall theological implications for the doctrine of inerrancy. J.I. Packer in his book, *God Has Spoken*, gives an applicable challenge,

Readers of this book, who, like its writer, are children of an age that is heavily conditioned against the 'old paths' will feel that this approach raises problems. It is no part of our concern to deny this; we would only invite our readers to consider, in light of what we have said, whether alternative approaches do not raise greater problems still.<sup>493</sup>

And so it is to alternative approaches we now turn in order that we may understand the different ways of speaking about biblical authority which are not founded upon the doctrine of inerrancy.

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<sup>493</sup> *God Has Spoken*, 134.

## Alternative Doctrines Of Scripture

In this chapter we will be examining two theologians who have doctrines of scripture that are markedly different to the doctrine of inerrancy. We first look at the thought of Karl Barth with particular emphasis on his doctrine of scripture as it is developed in § 19 of *Church Dogmatics* I/2. Then we turn to the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper and his work *Principles Sacred Theology*. Although he was considered an inerrantist of his time, he offers a very different doctrine of scripture than the one developed by the majority of inerrantists today.

### **Karl Barth's Doctrine of Scripture**

Trying to write a succinct analysis of Barth's doctrine of scripture is no easy task. This is mostly due to Barth's prolific writing, which has generated numerous theses exploring his thought. There is always a danger when writing anything on Barth's thought that one will have missed an obscure reference in one of the many multi-paged footnotes in the *Church Dogmatics* or in one of his works published separately from the *Dogmatics*. But there is also another danger that has to do with compartmentalizing Barth's thought. As John Webster has observed, Barth's thought in the *Church Dogmatics* is "one cohesive argument, and no single stage within the argument is definitive for the whole..."<sup>494</sup>

However, this should not discourage us from the task at hand. There are presuppositions that Barth has which drive him to make some of the conclusions that he makes and there are

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<sup>494</sup> Webster, John. *Karl Barth*. Continuum: London, 2004, p. 50.



certain things that can be said about his doctrine of Scripture. For the purpose of this chapter we will have to limit our reading of Barth to § 19 of CD I/2. We find Barth's most developed doctrine of scripture in this specific text and it will give us enough scope to analyze this doctrine in the pages that follow.

In the *Church Dogmatics* Karl Barth offers us a perspective on the role of scripture within the life of the Church,<sup>495</sup> which like all of his theology revolves around the person of Jesus Christ. In order for us to understand Barth's view of scripture we must see its connection to the Son of God, the Word made flesh. However, before looking at Barth's doctrine of scripture there are at least two presuppositions in Barth's thinking that need explanation because they play a crucial role in his theology in general and a specific role in his understanding of scripture.

First, some scholars have connected Barth's theology with an apparent influence by existentialism and, although he loathes the term, they conclude he is ultimately not able to escape its influence. The existentialist influence is apparently largely dependent upon the thought of Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard. He was not able to accept the existentialism of Schleiermacher largely because of Schleiermacher's 'natural theology.' Trevor Hart writes,

Schleiermacher, having learned from Kant that theology could not properly be a matter of knowledge, preferred nonetheless to trace religion and to root theological reflection not in the moral sphere, but in another dimension of human existence, the capacity for what he describes as a 'sense of absolute dependence' or, more theologically, 'God-consciousness'. What this amounts to is a claim that all humans (whether or not they are

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<sup>495</sup> It is vital for one to see Barth's doctrine of Scripture (as well as all theology) as created within the church. Unlike Warfield and Henry, Barth did not see his doctrine of Scripture as being apologetic in nature. John Webster writes, "Because Barth begins by firmly placing theology within the church, he steers away from conceptions of the discipline as some sort of rational act in which we transcend the life of the church or try to place that life on a better foundation." For a further discussion of this see John Webster's *Karl Barth*. Continuum: London, 2004, p. 53.

aware of the fact) are *naturally fitted* for an encounter with Infinity.<sup>496</sup> [my italics]

Ultimately Barth is unable to accept the idea of man being *naturally fitted* for any type of encounter with God whether it is experiential or cognitive. For Barth, there is an infinite qualitative difference between the Creator and His creation. This is the first presupposition that is behind Barth's talk about the role and position of Scripture within the life of the Church.

As can be seen in Barth's reply to Brunner regarding natural theology there is no room in Barth's thinking for a natural tendency or capacity for belief. Because of the fall, sinful man is incapable of knowing God. There is no natural point of contact or epistemic capacity between God and man as such. By the witness of Holy Scripture and the proclamation of the church, the Holy Spirit creates this contact between God and man today.<sup>497</sup> Hart continues,

The conclusion to be drawn from all this, for Barth, is that 'we have no organ or capacity for God' (CDI/1, p.168), and that this lack is not partial but total (see CD I/2, p. 257). There is, in other words, no natural propensity or aptitude for God in humans; it is unbelief and ignorance rather than faith and knowledge which are the most natural manifestations of humanity with respect to God (GD, p. 456).<sup>498</sup>

This complete transcendence of God makes Him unable to be known or spoken about by human beings.<sup>499</sup> If we can keep in our minds the idea that God is completely transcendent and that only because of the event of the incarnation does God become immanent as Jesus Christ then we are well on our way to grasping Barth's understanding of Holy Scripture and its authority within the life of the people of God.

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<sup>496</sup> 'Revelation' by Trevor Hart. *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000., p. 39

<sup>497</sup> Hartwell, Herbert. *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1964, p. 84.

<sup>498</sup> *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 42.

<sup>499</sup> This is in part Barth's response to the neo-Kantian philosophy of his day in which something is known as it is made into an object and then classified and labeled by the mind according to a universally given set of categories. Barth argues that God cannot be known in this way. God must not be made into an object for His creation to examine.

The second presupposition that plays a role behind the scenes as it were in Barth's doctrine of Scripture is his understanding of God's complete and utter freedom from and in His creation. For Barth God is not bound by anything he has created and is absolutely free to act when and where he wants within his own creation. "God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog. We do well to listen to Him if He really does."<sup>500</sup> God must not be bound by any of our doctrines or understandings of Him. In fact, God is not even bound by Himself. Barth writes,

God is not prevented either by His own deity or by our humanity and sinfulness from being our God and having intercourse with us as with His own. On the contrary, He is free for us and in us. That is the central content of the doctrine of Christ and of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Christology and Pneumatology are one in being the knowledge and praise of the grace of God. But the grace of God is just His freedom, unhindered either by Himself or by us.<sup>501</sup>

So, for Barth, it must be the case that God is absolutely free. And because of our sinful nature we are unable to know God without God making the first move towards us. God is completely free to make or not make this move and it is in His freedom that the incarnation takes place. It is in His freedom that revelation of Himself occurs. The unveiling of that which is veiled takes place only by the free act of God as Jesus Christ.

Just talking about God's freedom is not accurate enough, however. One cannot speak about God's freedom apart from God's love. According to Barth, God is the One who *loves* in freedom. Barth defines God's being in terms of His action. In fact, God's essence is His action. For God to be is for God to act. This action that is who God is, Barth understands, to be God's love. To love us is part of God's overflowing essence which in itself matches

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<sup>500</sup> CD I/1, p. 55.

<sup>501</sup> CD I/2, p. 3.

God's existence.<sup>502</sup> "In the fact that he determines to love such another, His love overflows. But it is not exhausted in it nor confined or conditioned by it."<sup>503</sup> This overflow of love toward the creation is both completely free and necessary for God. It is both because of God's essence being equal to God's act. God is free to love because nothing outside of God necessitates this loving and at the same time God must love because this act of loving is God's essence. What God does, God is.<sup>504</sup> There does not seem to be any way of talking about God's freedom apart from his loving action in Himself and toward creation.

It is this God, who is not bound by His creation but freely loves it, whom Barth presupposes when he develops his understanding of scripture. It is vital that we not lose sight of these presuppositions in our analysis of Barth's doctrine of scripture in the following pages because Barth's doctrine of God completely determines his doctrine of scripture. Because of this, Barth's understanding of scripture could never look like an inerrantist's understanding. The differences will become clearer in the pages that follow.

Barth's doctrine of scripture develops in the midst of his discussion of the text of scripture being a *witness* to divine revelation and how this text *becomes* the word of God for the church. There are times when reading Barth's *Dogmatics* when it would be easy to show Barth equating the Word of God with the text of Scripture. For instance in *CD I/2* Barth says, "Holy Scripture is the Word of God to the Church and for the Church."<sup>505</sup> This statement taken on its own looks like a good 'proof-text' for Barth's equation of the Word of God with the text of Scripture. But it would be unfair to Barth's theology to equate the two in this way. This is mainly because of the second presupposition mentioned above, i.e.,

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<sup>502</sup> CD II/1. p. 273.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid, 280.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid, 274.

<sup>505</sup> CD I/2 p. 475

God's freedom. For Barth the text of scripture cannot be univocally God's Word because this would inhibit the freedom of God. Barth writes,

The statement that the Bible is the Word of God cannot therefore say that the Word of God is tied to the Bible. On the contrary, what it must say is that the Bible is tied to the Word of God. But that means that in this statement we contemplate a free decision of God – not in uncertainty but in certainty, not without basis but on the basis of the promise which the Bible itself proclaims and which we receive in and with the Church.<sup>506</sup>

Part of the issue here is one of dependency. Barth is always concerned to keep God from becoming determined. Furthermore, he is concerned to keep the Word of God, i.e., the eternal Son of the Father, from becoming determined as well. When he states that the Word of God is not tied to the Bible but rather that the Bible is tied to Word of God, he seems to be stressing this point. The Word is not dependent upon the text of Scripture, i.e., is not tied to the text, does not have to go where the text leads or drags. It is the other way around. It is the text that is tied to the word and is determined by the action of the Word. To say this any other way would be to violate God Himself and to violate the freedom and sovereignty of God.<sup>507</sup>

It is perhaps worth mentioning at this point what Barth means when he speaks of the Word of God. Barth incontrovertibly means the second person of the Trinity, the same Word that became flesh and now sits at the right hand of the Father. He says in the middle of his writing on scripture, "There is only one Word of God and that is the eternal Word of the Father which for our reconciliation became flesh like us and has now returned to the Father, to be present to His Church by the Holy Spirit."<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> CD I/2 p. 513

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

According to Barth, when the church gives scripture the label “word of God” it is appealing to the incarnational promise that the Word will meet it within creation.

In Holy Scripture, too, in the human word of His witnesses, it is a matter of this Word and its presence. That means that in this equation it is a matter of the miracle of the divine Majesty in its condescension and mercy. If we take this equation on our lips, it can only be as an appeal to the promise in virtue of which this miracle was real in Jesus Christ and will again be real in the word of his witnesses. In this equation we have to do with the free grace and gracious freedom of God.<sup>509</sup>

When the church says that the Bible is the word of God it is appealing to God that His Son would become present in a manner remarkably similar to the incarnation. However, Barth is clear that there is not an exact correlation between what happened in the incarnation and how the text becomes the word of God. Nevertheless, this does appear to be the prominent model that shapes his doctrinal position.

That the Word had become Scripture is not one and the same thing as its becoming flesh. But the uniqueness and at the same time general relevance of its becoming flesh necessarily involved its becoming Scripture. The divine Word became the word of the prophets and apostles by becoming flesh.<sup>510</sup>

Bruce McCormack presents the subtlety of Barth’s understanding of the ‘incarnational’ aspect of scripture’s becoming in the following way,

First, what the Bible *is*, is defined by the will of God as expressed in his act of giving it to the church. And this means that where and when the Bible *becomes* the Word of God, it is only becoming what it already is. But, second, where and when the Bible does *not* become the Word of God, there God has chosen provisionally, for the time being, not to bear witness to himself in and through its witness *to this particular reader or this particular set of readers of it*. This changes nothing whatsoever as to the true nature of the Bible as defined by the divine will which came to expression in the giving of the Bible to the church. It only means that God does not will, of the time being, that the Bible should *become* what it is for these readers. Thus, the being-in-becoming of the Bible as Holy Scripture, as the Word of God, is a being-in-becoming that takes place under two conditions. The one is the relation of faith and obedience in which the would-be interpreter stands to the God whose Word the Bible is. And the other, truly decisive condition is that God is willing to grant faith and obedience to the would-be interpreter so that the first condition

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 500.

might be fulfilled.<sup>511</sup>

So is there ever a sense when the Word of God can be said to be written? It seems to me that the text of Scripture acts as a catalyst for the Word of God to be written in that it is only when Christ meets the text at the same time that it is being read do we find the Word of God written. Furthermore, this event is done by the act of God through the working of the Holy Spirit. This is the promise of God to His Church that they will hear the Word of God, i.e., encounter Christ, through the reading of the text of Scripture.

Yet the presence of the Word of God itself, the real and present speaking and hearing of it, is not identical with the existence of the book as such. But in this presence something takes place in and with the book, for which the book as such does indeed give the possibility, but the reality of which cannot be anticipated or replaced by the existence of the book.<sup>512</sup>

Because there is no necessary or *a priori* equation between the text of Scripture and the Word of God Barth calls the Bible the witness to revelation. Webster writes, “the language of witness has a double purpose: it gives full weight to the function of Scripture as the bearer of revelation, and it does so without taking away from the fact that the Bible is a collection of human texts.”<sup>513</sup> Just as John the Baptist in Grünewald’s *Crucifixion* is pointing to the Christ with his long bony finger, so Scripture points to, or witnesses to Jesus Christ, the revelation of God by the action of the Holy Spirit. “The Bible is God’s Word to the extent that God causes it to be His Word, to the extent that He speaks through it.”<sup>514</sup>

Just as the Bible cannot be strictly identified with the word of God neither can it be strictly identified as the revelation of God. This is ultimately for the same reason. Jesus Christ is properly the revelation of God. All other “revelations” are derivative of him and dependent upon him. Therefore, the Bible can only properly be labelled a witness to divine revelation,

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<sup>511</sup> McCormack, Bruce L. ‘The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming’ in *Evangelicals & Scripture*. Edited by Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez and Dennis L. Okholm. InterVarsity Press: Illinois, 2004, pp. 66-7.

<sup>512</sup> CD I/2 p. 530

<sup>513</sup> Webster, John. *Karl Barth*. Continuum: London, 2004, p. 65.

<sup>514</sup> CD I/1 p. 109

i.e., a witness to Jesus Christ. But Barth carefully nuances this understanding. He writes, “If what we hear in Holy Scripture is witness, a human expression of God’s revelation, then from what we have already said, what we hear in the witness itself is more than witness, what we hear in the human expression is more than a human expression. What we hear is revelation and therefore the very Word of God.”<sup>515</sup>

Notice that one *hears* the very Word of God, one does not read the Word of God. This is because the Word speaks to us by the Spirit through the text. The text is not identified with the Word but witnesses to it. This idea in Barth relates to the presuppositions mentioned above. Barth’s understanding of revelation is dominated by his concern for God to remain free. He writes,

We must leave it to revelation itself to introduce itself either in its unity and entirety or indeed at all. Revelation is never behind us: always we can only follow it. We cannot think it: we can only contemplate it. We cannot assert it and prove it: we can only believe it, believe it in recollection and expectation, so that if our faith is right and well-pleasing to God in what we then think and say, it can assert and prove itself.<sup>516</sup>

Scripture is the word of God in a very real sense; when we hear it as such. It is the word of God when God speaks through it but it is never able to be the word God without God’s action through it. If it were, then God would be controlled by the text and since God’s freedom must be maintained, equating the two (word of God and text of scripture) is not an option for Barth.

The question about the inspiration of scripture naturally arises at the point. Doesn’t inspiration somehow guarantee that the text is the word of God?<sup>517</sup> As one would suspect, Barth sees no such guarantee. In fact he states that until 1700 the doctrine of inspiration was

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<sup>515</sup> CD I/2 p. 473.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid, 484.

<sup>517</sup> See chapter one above for inerrantist position on inspiration.



more about the free grace of God but only in the post-Reformation period with the gradual uncertainty about the church's doctrines of sin, justification, judgment and grace did the church develop a more "supernaturalistic" character of inspiration.<sup>518</sup> He writes,

This new understanding of biblical inspiration meant simply that the statement that the Bible is the Word of God was now transformed (following the doubtful tendencies we have already met in the Early Church) from a statement about the free grace of God into a statement about the nature of the Bible as exposed to human inquiry brought under human control. The Bible as the Word of God surreptitiously became a part of the natural knowledge of God, i.e., of that knowledge of God which man can have without the free grace of God, by his own power, and with direct insight and assurance.

Barth explains that his view of inspiration is actually more radical than the "supernaturalistic" view he believes must be discarded.

We must attack it rather because its supernaturalism is not radical enough. The intention behind it was ultimately only a single and in its own way very "naturalistic" postulate: that the Bible must offer us a *divina et infallibilis historia*; that it must not contain human error in any of its verses; that in all its parts and the totality of its words and letters as they are before us it must express divine truth in a form in which it can be established and understood; that under the human words it must speak to us the Word of God in such a way that we can at once hear and read it as such with the same obviousness and directness with which we can hear and read other human words; that it must be a codex of axioms which can be seen as such with the same formal dignity as those of philosophy and mathematics... Therefore we have to resist and reject the 17<sup>th</sup>-century doctrine of inspiration as a false doctrine... In it the Word of God could no longer be the Word of God and therefore it was no longer recognised as such. The Bible was grounded upon itself apart from the mystery of Christ and the Holy Ghost. It became a "paper Pope," and unlike the living Pope in Rome it was wholly given up into the hands of its interpreters. It was no longer a free and spiritual force, but an instrument of human power.<sup>519</sup>

Barth's understanding of the inspiration of scripture would appear to be driven by his commitment to a specific translation of *theopneustos*. Barth rejects Warfield's translation<sup>520</sup> and instead translates *theopneustos* as 'of the Spirit of God.' Barth notes that his literal translation encompasses the idea of God breathing but also entails a lot more. 'Of the Spirit

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<sup>518</sup> CD I/2 p. 522.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid, p. 525.

<sup>520</sup> See chapter one.

of God' means "given and filled and ruled by the Spirit of God, and actively outbreathing and spreading abroad and making known the Spirit of God."<sup>521</sup>

Barth concludes this brief excursion on the meaning of *theopneustos* by saying that in the end all we can say about the meaning of this word used in relationship to scripture is that it is part of the free grace of God. "At the decisive point all that we have to say about it can consist only in an underlining and delimiting of the inaccessible mystery of the free grace in which the Spirit of God is present and active before and above and in the Bible."<sup>522</sup> Barth refuses so say anymore about it. The interesting point to mention for our purposes is that Barth does not conclude that the Bible is inerrant because of the use of this word in 2 Timothy. For Barth, there is no necessary connection between the use of *theopneustos* and the doctrine of inerrancy.

But it is in Barth's refusal to strictly equate the text of the Bible and the Word of God where he loses all credibility with inerrantists. For in their minds he has just undermined the only source of certainty that one has for faith. If the Bible is not absolutely and objectively the Word of God for men then we can have no certainty, according to inerrantists, that God is really who the Bible claims him to be. And yet Barth turns this kind of thinking on its head. For Barth the very claim that the Bible is the Word of God is a confession of faith that is given by the Holy Spirit. And so to talk about an 'objective' and 'certain' foundation for our faith in the text of Scripture does not make sense to Barth.

The Bible is the concrete means by which the Church recollects God's past revelation, is called to expectation of His future revelation, and is thus summoned and guided to proclamation and empowered for it. The Bible, then, is not in itself and as such God's past revelation, just as Church proclamation is not in itself and as such the expected future

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<sup>521</sup> CD I/2 p. 504.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid, p. 504.

revelation. The Bible, speaking to us and heard by us as God's Word, bears witness to past revelation. Proclamation, speaking to us and heard by us as God's Word, promises future revelation. The Bible is God's Word as it really bears witness to revelation, and proclamation is God's Word as it really promises revelation.<sup>523</sup>

The Bible is the witness to revelation in Barth because a witness has the role of pointing beyond itself to another. It is a servant of this other and vouches for the truth of the other but it is *not* the other.<sup>524</sup> This is a very important point that must not be missed. As a witness to revelation the Bible points to the only revelation of God that we know, Jesus Christ, whom the witness speaks of as the Word of God. And, in fact, Barth believes he is simply restating what the Bible claims for itself.<sup>525</sup>

Barth affirms "Holy Scripture is the Word of God for the Church, that it is Jesus Christ for us, as He Himself was for the prophets and apostles during the forty days."<sup>526</sup> He draws on Luther's understanding of Scripture as the cloak of Christ which allows him to be seen. He writes in a significant footnote to his thought on scripture,

We must leave it to revelation itself to introduce itself either in its unity and entirety or indeed at all. Revelation is never behind us: always we can only follow it. We cannot think it: we can only contemplate it. We cannot assert and prove it: we can only believe it, believe it in recollection and expectation, so that if our faith is right and well-pleasing to God in what we then think and say, it can assert and prove itself. This, then, is the conclusion and demand to which we are led by a right understanding of the unity of Holy Scripture... Luther once spoke of the unity of Holy Scripture in this way: "For Holy Scripture is the garment which our Lord Christ has put on and in which He lets Himself be seen and found. This garment is woven throughout and so wrought together into one that it cannot be cut or parted...."<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> CD I/1 p. 111

<sup>524</sup> Ibid

<sup>525</sup> Notice the similar method here to the inerrantist position. Both Barth and inerrantists believe they are developing a position that is congruent with how scripture speaks of itself.

<sup>526</sup> CD I/2 p. 544

<sup>527</sup> Ibid, 484

And so through the reading of Holy Scripture Christ meets us. This is His promise to us that in it He, the Word of God, would be with us always. Where shall we find Him? We find Him in the text that witnesses to Him. But this *finding* is not done on our own. At every point the Holy Spirit assists us. He is our guide. This is why Barth says the specific things he does about the relationship between scripture and the church.

For Barth Scripture is not the church's book. The church is Scripture's people. He writes, "It is the Canon because it imposed itself upon the church as such, and continually does so." And further, "No, the Bible is the Canon just because it is so. It is so by imposing itself as such."<sup>528</sup> So the first thing to recognize is that the Bible is over the church and is used by God to become the event of His own encounter with us.

So what or who gives Scripture authority? Francis Watson recognizes that there is not much trace of the anxiety about inerrancy in Barth, which is true. We do not find Barth appealing to an errorless original autograph to provide a foundation for Scripture's authority. Rather we see Barth weaving together the Spirit of God and the faith of the people of God to provide an understanding of Scripture's authority.

Watson writes, "The truthfulness and trustworthiness of this human speech can be guaranteed not by subjecting it to general criteria of 'historical reliability' and the like, but only by showing it to be grounded in the truthfulness and trustworthiness of divine speech."<sup>529</sup> And further,

The truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible are therefore guaranteed by its *intrinsic* relationship to the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the divine self-disclosive speech-act that takes place in Jesus. For Barth, the Bible *is* 'the Word of God' in that the

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<sup>528</sup> CD I/1 p. 107.

<sup>529</sup> 'The Bible' by Francis Watson. Webster, John. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 60.

Word God spoke once for all continues to address us in the word and testimony of the biblical writers.<sup>530</sup>

The text of Scripture is authoritative within the Church because it is the place where the Word of God meets us. By faith, which is itself a gift of God, we recognize this Word and accept it. Christians do not hold the Koran or any other religious text as authoritative because they do not witness to the one Word of God. And, although, God is free to encounter someone wherever He chooses, and He could choose the Koran, He promises to meet us where the written and proclaimed Word are. So it seems to be the case that the Bible is authoritative because through its human words we are able to encounter the Son of God, Jesus Christ Himself. That this will happen is the church's hope.

But none of this occurs without the work of the Spirit. The Spirit's role in all of this is vital because He is the one who gives us 'eyes to see' and 'ears to hear.' By the power of the Spirit we are able to meet Christ in the text of Scripture and so again it becomes authoritative for the church. It becomes the Word of God for us. In the same way that Christ had authority amongst the disciples as the Word of God so the Biblical text has authority amongst Christ's current disciples. This is not because the Bible is some kind of divine book sent directly from heaven. It is simply because it becomes the Word of God for us as we meet Christ in it.

This is the faith of the church, a faith which is in fact given by God Himself.

Faith is not one of the various capacities of man, whether native or acquired. Capacity for the Word of God is not among these. The possibility of faith as it is given to man in the reality of faith can be understood only as one that is loaned to man by God, and loaned exclusively for use.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>531</sup> CD I/1 p. 238.

In faith we hope to encounter Christ in the reading of Holy Scripture and in the proclamation of the Word. And the church does, in fact do this! The reason why scripture has authority within the church is the simple fact that God keeps his promises. The church has met Christ in the text of Holy Scripture which has imposed itself upon the church. And so, the church continues to turn to Holy Scripture because she continually desires to meet Christ and in faith believes that this is where He is to be found. One might say that it is here where God freely loves to meet us. As the quote from Luther above conveys, it is the garment that Christ puts on when he wishes to be seen and found.

Finally, through the gift of faith the church meets Christ. The Church experiences the Son of God as the Word of God in the written text of Scripture and through its own proclamation.

This is how the church knows the Son through its experience of him. Barth writes,

If knowledge of God's Word is possible, this must mean that an experience of God's Word is possible. We have defined knowledge as confirmation of human acquaintance with an object whereby its truth becomes a determination of the existence of the man who has the knowledge.<sup>532</sup>

And further,

Jesus Christ Himself lives in the message of His witnesses, lives in the proclamation of His Church on the basis of this message, strides forward as the Lord of grace and judgment to meet the existence of the hearer of the Word. Experience of God's Word, then, must at least be also experience of His presence, and because this presence does not rest on man's act of reconciliation but on God's making Himself present in the life of man, it is acknowledgment of His presence.<sup>533</sup>

And this is what the church does in faith. It acknowledges the presence of Christ within its life by the power of the Holy Spirit through the text of Holy Scripture and its own proclamation by the reading of Scripture and participating in the Sacraments. If we are to

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid. 198.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid, 206.

ask Barth why the Bible has authority for the church it is simply because the presence of the living Word, the Son of God is within it waiting to meet us.

And we must not downplay the role of faith in Barth's understanding of Scripture. For in the phrase 'we believe that the bible is the Word of God' there is an element of faith involved that is crucial. For Barth the Word of God as scripture is a statement of faith. It cannot be proved by some type of scientific method forced upon it. It can only be received in faith as that which it is: the Word of God for us.

We must say at once, that of itself the mere presence of the Bible and our own presence with our capacities for knowing an object does not mean and never will mean the reality or even the possibility of the proof that the Bible is the Word of God. On the contrary, we have to recognise that this situation as such, i.e., apart from faith, only means the impossibility of this proof.<sup>534</sup>

Of course, this line of thought has many implications for apologetics and whether or not methods like evidentialism are valid ways of bringing about faith. Unfortunately the scope of this chapter cannot allow us to address this, but it seems fair to say that Barth would challenge much of modern-day apologetics.<sup>535</sup>

However, this evidences another area where Barth's thought would make many inerrantists uneasy. We must keep in mind that inerrantists use inerrancy as a means of proving the authority of scripture both within and without the church and for Barth this is simply getting the cart before the horse. An encounter with Christ which produces faith must happen prior to a belief in the authority of scripture. Now this encounter can happen when one meets the Word in Scripture for the first time, but the point is that one cannot believe in the authority of scripture without this encounter.

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<sup>534</sup> CD I/2 p. 506.

<sup>535</sup> For a discussion of why Barth does not start with an apologetic prolegomena see John Webster's *Karl Barth*. Continuum: London, p. 54.

The encounter language is one that often leaves Evangelicals in general and inerrantists in particular dissatisfied. As Kevin Vanhoozer has asserted in a recent article on the topic, Evangelicals are sceptical of Barth because of what appears to be the ‘subjective’ nature of his doctrine of scripture.<sup>536</sup> It is clear that Barth is primarily concerned with the Subject of scripture, i.e., that to whom scripture points, and that he refuses to think of scripture in any way that would determine God’s action.<sup>537</sup> But does this mean that Barth can speak of no ‘objective’ quality to the text?

However, as Vanhoozer suggests, “The notion that the Bible is caught up in divine discourse casts new light both on Scripture’s ontology and its role in the economy of divine revelation.” The Bible *is* the book that Christ cloaks himself with when he wishes to be found. If we are to talk about some kind of ‘objective’ status of the text in Barth, then surely this is where we should start. And although the text has its being in becoming, as McCormack’s quote showed above, because this text is where God promises to encounter his people it retains a unique status among other texts produced by mankind. This is the closest Barth’s doctrine of scripture gets to the Evangelical concern for objectivity and although it is not the same as appealing to an inerrant original autograph it may be a window by which Evangelicals can continue in dialogue with Barth’s thought.

Another theologian who seemed to have a more ‘Evangelical’ understanding of the ‘objectivity’ of scripture is Abraham Kuyper. However, he has much of the same

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<sup>536</sup> This particular reading of Barth comes from Van Til and Gordon Clark who both have had a large impact on the way that Evangelicals read Karl Barth. As Vanhoozer has clearly articulated in the article quoted above this may be a misreading of Barth which leads Evangelicals to distrust his theology. See chapter 2 in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* edited by Sung Wook Chung. Paternoster: Michigan, 2006.

<sup>537</sup> This is perhaps where Vanhoozer’s case for divine speech-act pushes Barth too far. For Vanhoozer God’s action is tied to the locution of the text. Certainly, Barth could not make this move.



Pneumatological emphasis as Karl Barth. We turn to an analysis of his doctrine of Scripture now in order to give another alternative doctrine of scripture, one that might be more sympathetic to Evangelical concerns but that does not need to establish a doctrine of inerrancy to found scriptural authority.

This problem evangelicals have with Barth is related to our discussion of the nature of truth in the previous chapter; if we understand truth as correspondence to facts, then Barth's account seems weak, as it ducks the notion of truth. Barth's doctrine of Scripture presupposes, or perhaps gives rise to, a rather different understanding of truth, truth as encounter, perhaps.

But the inerrantist/evangelical critique still poses some problems for a doctrine like Barth's. Truth must have some propositional content, particularly given the literary form of large sections of the Bible that are composed of (what appear to be) historical narratives. However much we want to insist that the truth of the Christmas narratives is primarily located in their witness to the living Christ, either Mary was or wasn't a virgin; it either happened in a Bethlehem animal shed or somewhere else; and to dismiss these questions as irrelevant to the truth of the passage (in the manner of a radical Bultmannian, perhaps), seems difficult, at least.

We may accept, then, that Barth's emphasis on the freedom of God, the gift of revelation, and the promised present activity of the Spirit, serve together to dethrone the inerrancy question from being the most important, or even the only

question we ask about Scripture, but they do not remove the need to ask it entirely. For this reason, perhaps, Kuyper is more interesting.

### **Abraham Kuyper's Doctrine of Scripture**

Kuyper's doctrine of scripture would suggest that there is a way to affirm inerrancy and yet not place the importance on it that many contemporary inerrantists seem to do. I will suggest in what follows that by having a strong doctrine of sin Kuyper must rely on the work of the Spirit to bridge the gap between Creator and Creation. Because of his particular pneumatology Kuyper finds fault with the kind of apologetics affirmed by Warfield and Henry. His suspicion of these apologetics is congruent with why he is ultimately unable to regard the inerrancy of Scripture as key to maintaining the authority of Scripture.<sup>538</sup>

Early on in his *Sacred Theology* Kuyper conveys his understanding of the effects of sin on the creation. It would appear that Kuyper is comfortable suggesting that sin has effected all aspects of the created order and not just primarily the will as at least some readings of the tradition would seem to indicate. Because Kuyper believes that sin pervades all aspects of the created reality he is suspicious of science and its claims to discover truth. Because sin affects man's epistemological capacity it would appear that his ability to do science is partially impaired.<sup>539</sup>

Sin has affected man's nature and as a result sin has weakened his energy of thought.<sup>540</sup> In fact, Kuyper goes as far to say that because of sin we often use "a false and apparently logical, but in reality very unlogical, reasoning" which cannot be put right by the act of

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<sup>538</sup> I offered an introductory comment on Kuyper's understanding of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of chapter 4. Here I am seeking to present a more complete picture of his thought in order to conclude the following chapter with a call for inerrantists to reconsider the Kuyperian perspective.

<sup>539</sup> I say partially because Kuyper is clear that our ability to reason logically has not been affected by sin for if it was, the result would be insanity.

<sup>540</sup> Kuyper, Abraham. *Sacred Theology*. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Inc.: Indiana, 2001, p. 30.

reasoning alone. He calls this the “darkening of our consciousness” and because of this *darkening*, mankind’s spiritual sense is defective.<sup>541</sup> It is important to note here that Kuyper makes the distinction between the ‘natural’ and ‘spiritual’ sciences. Kuyper spends most of his time, when talking about the effects of sin on science, examining particularly the ‘spiritual’ sciences, and showing that as a result of sin there is a disharmony within creation.

Disharmony rules our innermost parts. The different senses, in the utterances of our inner selves, affect each other no longer in pure accord, but continually block the way before each other. Thus discord arises in our innermost selves. Everything has become disconnected. And since the one no longer supports the other, but antagonizes it, both the whole and its parts have lost their purity. Our sense of the good, the true, the beautiful, of what is right, of what is holy, has ceased to operate with accuracy. In themselves these senses are weakened, and in their effect upon each other they have become mixed. And since it is impossible, in the spiritual sciences, to take one forward step unless these senses serve us as guides, it readily appears how greatly science is obstructed by sin. And finally, the chiefest harm is the ruin, worked by sin, in those data, which were at our command, for obtaining the knowledge of God, and thus for forming the conception of the whole.<sup>542</sup>

Furthermore, there does not seem to be any hope in Kuyper’s mind of mankind’s ability to prove the existence of God. According to Kuyper, all attempts to do this have failed and must fail because of the effects of sin on the created order. But Kuyper also seems to indicate that we should be suspicious of some of the conclusions or ‘truths’ obtained by the natural sciences because of this sinful state. He concludes the section on the relation between sin and science with this comment,

From which it by no means follows, that you should skeptically doubt all science, but simply that it will not do to omit the fact of sin from your theory of knowledge. This would not be warranted if sin were only a thelematic conception and therefore purely ethic; but much less, now, since immediately as well as mediately, sin modifies so largely all those data with which you have to deal in the intellectual domain and in the building-up of your *science*. Ignorance wrought by sin is the most difficult obstacle in the way of all true science.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid, 32.

One of the effects of sin's dominion in creation is the "struggle for truth." There would be no struggle after what is true if sin did not cause the estrangement of creation from its proper object of knowledge, the Creator. An interesting aspect of Kuyper's understanding of truth, which is particularly relevant to our purposes is that truth is not the opposite of mistake. He says, "It will not do to say that seeking after truth is directed exclusively against the possibility of mistake. He who in good faith has made a mistake, has been *inaccurate* but not *untrue*."<sup>544</sup> Rather, the search for the truth is actually mankind's attempt to escape the "fatal power of what Christ called the lie."<sup>545</sup> Untruth, or the lie, seems to have some kind of ontological status in Kuyper's thought. He labels it a power which "affects injuriously the consciousness of man" and "intentionally brings into our mind a representation of existing things which proscribes reality, with the avowed aim of estranging us from it."<sup>546</sup>

This would seem to imply that to speak of something as inerrant would not to imply that it is without mistake. So to say that scripture is inerrant would not make it immune from making mistakes regarding history, science etc. On Kuyper's logic an inerrant scripture would be a scripture not affected by the power of the lie, which desires to estrange us from our Creator. It would appear then that one could claim inerrancy for scripture and yet still find 'inaccuracies' within its content.

Accordingly, the struggle for truth

does not aim at the correction of simple mistakes in the representation, neither does it combat prejudice, nor rectify inaccuracies; but it arrays itself against a power which ever in a new form entangles our human consciousness in that which is false, makes us servants to falsehood, and blinds us to reality.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

Because of this power over us Kuyper believes it is ridiculous to believe that science, either natural or spiritual, can ever decide absolutely between truth and falsehood. He says, “To believe that an absolute science in the above-given sense [i.e., a science that is able to clear away whole series of fallacious representations of reality] can ever decide the question between truth and falsehood is nothing but a criminal self-deception.”<sup>548</sup> This is an act of self-deception because of the subjective starting point of all knowledge. In a way reminiscent of post-modern concerns, Kuyper argues that science always comes to conclusions that are a result of its own subjective starting-point. Of course, one must remember that the struggle for truth happens because of sin and so the subjective factor of our scientific results would also appear to be related to the reality of sin.

At this point the position that Kuyper is espousing would seem to lead to some sort of radical scepticism. However, he quickly develops the idea that faith actually counteracts the scepticism that may result from seeing the universal affects of sin on creation. Kuyper argues that, in fact, faith is a universal foundation that is common among all types of knowledge. He disagrees with the traditional dichotomy between faith and knowledge and seeks to show that faith functions universally inside and outside the scientific world.<sup>549</sup> In a lengthy comment he writes,

To take a position with reference also to this antithesis [between faith and knowledge], it is necessary that we go back to the formal function of faith, and investigate whether this function does or does not exhibit an *universal* character. For if it does, this universal function of faith must also influence that particular function by which the scientific result is obtained, and the extent is traceable to which the function of faith is able to exert itself, as well as the point where its working stops. We purposely consider this function of faith, next to wisdom, as a similar reaction against Scepticism. All Scepticism originates from the impression that our certainty depends upon the result of our scientific research. Since, however, this result constantly appears to be governed by subjective influence, and is affected

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>549</sup> One can start to see how the Reformed epistemologists are indebted to Kuyper here.

by the conflict between truth and falsehood which is the result of sin, there is no defense against Scepticism except in the subject itself.<sup>550</sup>

Faith is the only means people have of obtaining certainty. It is the only bridge between the ego and the non-ego or in Kantian terms, the phenomena and the noumena.<sup>551</sup> By faith, he does not mean some kind of religious belief. He is clear that faith is knowledge which we possess that has not been demonstrated. Faith is understood generally according to Scripture, to mean “assurance” and “proving” of objects which either we do not perceive or which do not show themselves. It is this understanding that drives Kuyper’s position on the universal role of faith in the certainty of what we know.

Faith is that which is the foundation of all demonstration. “A proof proves only what it proves definitely and conclusively, and everything which in the end misses this conclusive character is not obtained by your demonstration but *from elsewhere*; and this *other* source of certainty is the very point in question. Or rather, - for even now we do not speak with sufficient emphasis,- this other source, which we call faith, is the *only* source of certainty, equally for what you prove definitely and conclusively by demonstration.”<sup>552</sup> Furthermore, faith is understood as the *instrument* by which we possess certainty and without it we would have no certainty about anything. It is the means by which our ego believes our senses and so is foundational to all knowledge, scientific or otherwise. Kuyper concludes,

All this but shows the utter untenability of the current representation that *science* establishes truth, which is equally binding upon all, exclusively on the ground of observation and demonstration, while *faith* is in order only in the realm of suppositions and of uncertainties. In every expression of his personality, as well as in the acquisition of scientific conviction, every man starts out from *faith*. In every realm *faith* is, and always will be, the last link by which the object of our knowledge is placed in connection with our knowing *ego*. Even in demonstration there is no certainty for you because of the proof, but simply because you are bound *to believe* in the force of the demonstration... And for this reason it was very important to

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid, 39.

show that *faith* is the element in our mind by which we obtain certainty, not only in the spiritual, but equally in the material sciences.<sup>553</sup>

Kuyper's suspicion of the ultimate authority of the material sciences to establish certainty about the things we know is rooted ultimately in his understanding of the fallen creation. For Kuyper, science is not primarily concerned with truth because science would still exist in a world that was not fallen since the desire to discover things about the world would still be there. The difference that sin makes to the picture is that there is no necessary connection between our reflection on the created world and the truth of the conclusions drawn. In fact the possibility of doing science at all in a fallen world is only possible upon a foundation of faith. For Kuyper, it is faith that bridges the gap between ourselves and the created world outside of us.

The role of faith becomes more important in Kuyper's thought as he addresses his understanding of how it is that theology is a science. It is important to remember that Kuyper distinguishes between material sciences and spiritual sciences. It would seem that the kind of faith Kuyper envisions as being foundational to the natural sciences is a kind of natural faith that is shared by all of creation, but when he starts talking about theology as a science the type of faith that is foundational to this kind of science does not seem to be the same as that of the material sciences. The reason for this may have something to do with the particularly 'dependent' character of theology. What Kuyper means by this will become clear in what follows. We now turn to the second aspect of Kuyper's thought that is particularly influential in forming his understanding of Scripture: theology as science.

According to Kuyper theology is a science precisely because it seeks to gain knowledge about God.<sup>554</sup> What makes the science of theology different to all other sciences is its

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid, 46.

particular relationship to the object of knowledge it is pursuing. “For all other investigations the investigating subject places himself *above* the object to be investigated...But when the thirst for knowledge directs itself to Him whom man and all creation owe their origin, existence, and consciousness, the circumstances are materially changed.”<sup>555</sup> Kuyper understands the science of theology to be dependent on the action of the object of study to reveal Itself. This ‘dependent’ characteristic of theology is what makes it different to all other types of science. When seeking knowledge of God, man “stands no longer *above*, but *beneath* the object of his investigation, and over against this object he finds himself in a position of entire *dependence*.”<sup>556</sup>

It is possible to see a similarity here between Kuyper’s thought and Barth’s. Both in different ways are concerned not to objectify that which theology seeks to identify. Barth does this by presupposing God’s utter freedom so that he cannot be objectified or controlled by his creation. Kuyper, in a similar way, speaks of the dependent nature of theology. Theological knowledge must wait for God to reveal himself. This kind of knowledge is dependent on God’s action.

This dependent character of theology is crucial in Kuyper’s overall conception of theology as a science. He compares theological knowledge with that of an absolute stranger falling into the hands of the police. The police are entirely dependent upon what this person determines to reveal to them and if he does not utter a single syllable from his mouth the police find themselves facing an enigma they cannot solve. Our knowledge of God happens in a similar

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<sup>554</sup> Kuyper spends some time reflecting on the etymological distinctions that are inherent in *θεολογία* and concludes that the Greeks used this term to mean speaking of God, speaking about God, knowledge that God has of Himself, and knowledge that we have of God. In the Western church this term came to mean the knowledge of God that He has revealed of Himself to creation. This is the primary meaning that Kuyper employs.

<sup>555</sup> *Sacred Theology*, 96.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*



way in that we are completely dependent on God's utterance if we are to know anything about Him. Kuyper writes,

They [the police] are entirely dependent upon the will of that stranger either to reveal or not to reveal knowledge of himself. And this is true in an absolute sense of the Theologian over against God. He cannot investigate God. There is nothing to analyze. There are no phenomena from which to draw conclusions. Only when that wondrous God will speak, can he listen. And thus the Theologian is absolutely *dependent* upon the pleasure of God, either to impart or not to impart knowledge of Himself.<sup>557</sup>

Kuyper adopts the distinction of the 'old Theologians' between ectypal and archetypal theology. All of our knowledge of God is ectypal in that what God reveals of himself to us is not identical with God's own self-knowledge, i.e., archetypal. "All knowledge remains *received* knowledge, and it is not God himself, but the *knowledge* He has revealed to us concerning Himself which constitutes the material for theological investigation. Hence *ectypal* Theology."<sup>558</sup> All of our knowledge of God is a copy of the knowledge that God has of Himself. Kuyper maintains this distinction because he believes that no man can investigate God Himself and so the knowledge we have must be ectypal.

In maintaining this distinction Kuyper separates himself from one of the theological assumptions that lead to the doctrine of inerrancy examined in the pages above. As we have seen in a previous chapter, Carl Henry has a univocal understanding of revelation. This understanding is the exact opposite of the distinction between ectypal and archetypal theology in Kuyper. According to Henry, the knowledge that God reveals of Himself to us is exactly the same knowledge that God has of Himself. Kuyper will not make this conclusion. As we see below, this is primarily because of what it means for mankind to be created.

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

This is not to say that the knowledge God has given us is less *true* than the knowledge that God has of Himself. Kuyper uses the picture Paul gives that “now we see in part, but then we will see face to face” to illustrate the difference between ectypal and archetypal theology. It is not as though, Kuyper argues, in the self-knowledge of God there are ten parts, six of which he has decided to reveal to us. Rather we see the whole as though we are looking through a dimmed glass.<sup>559</sup>

The distinction between archetypal and ectypal is ultimately founded on an understanding of the relation between Creator and creation. Man is the ectype over against God as the archetype. Therefore man’s knowledge must be ectypal. What it means for man to be created in the *imago dei* is that he is the ectype of the archetype. Kuyper continues, “Rather, therefore, than lose ourselves in this intellectualistic abstraction, we adopt the names of Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in the originally fuller sense, i.e. as standing in immediate relation to the creation of man after the image of God. As man stands as ectype over against God, the archetype, man’s knowledge of God can therefore be only ectypal.”<sup>560</sup> According to Kuyper this is why man’s knowledge of God must be a dependent knowledge. He concludes, “This is what we mean when we call Theology a *dependent* knowledge- a knowledge which is not the result of an activity on our part, but the result of an action which goes out from God to us; and in its wider sense this action is God’s self-revelation to His creature.”<sup>561</sup>

The argument Kuyper makes for the continued distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge of God is not *prima facie* what one would expect. By rooting the distinction in the *imago dei* Kuyper seems to imply that it is properly part of the doctrine of creation and

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

yet he speaks in terms of ultimately seeing ‘face to face’ which implies that in the eschaton we will have archetypal knowledge of God. However, Kuyper does not mention the doctrine of sin and its relation to this epistemological distinction. Therefore, it would not seem that we have an ectypal knowledge of God not because we are fallen but rather because we are created. If this is the case then what it means to “see face to face” does not imply archetypal knowledge of God.

Regardless of this, the fact that Kuyper maintains this distinction is of crucial importance. If we combine the foundation of faith with the ectypal knowledge that is obtained by the dependent theological science then one is inclined to ask how this knowledge is obtained and what the role is of faith in this attaining. Kuyper’s answer relies on a detailed pneumatology.<sup>562</sup> It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that man has faith and is able to receive the ectypal knowledge revealed to him by God. The Holy Spirit’s continuing action in the world is decisive in Kuyper’s thought at this point.

To use the phrase “the Holy Spirit’s action *in the world*” may not be accurate enough. This is because Kuyper is very adamant that the church produces theology and not theology the church. Knowledge of God is ultimately only given to those whom God by His Spirit wills to give it. This revelation is given to those who have been given the gift of faith by the Spirit and as a result theology, *per se*, comes out of the church which makes it confessional in nature.<sup>563</sup>

The Church does not spring from theology, but theology has its *rise* in the life of the Church. And if the objection is raised, that in this way theology is robbed of its character of universal validity and thus becomes unscientific, we answer: (1) that for

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<sup>562</sup> Comments have already been made about Kuyper’s pneumatology in chapter 4. We will spend some more time looking at this area of his thought after dealing with the principium of theological knowledge below.

<sup>563</sup> Kuyper does admit that in Scripture there are cases where revelation of God happens without regeneration but he is quick to say that this is an exception and not the rule. In general, regeneration precedes spiritual illumination.

universal validity the acceptance of all individuals is not demanded; but only of those who are receptive to the truth of a matter and are well informed of it; (2) that every convinced theologian in the presence of his opponent also appeals from the mind that has been ill-informed (male informatum) to the mind that is to be better informed (melius informandum).<sup>564</sup>

The implications of this way of thinking vary. One implication has to do with apologetics. If Kuyper is correct and theology only rises out of the church then theological science is not able to speak to anyone to whom the Spirit has not first given the gift of faith. Theology, then, would appear to have little apologetic value. Only those who have been reborn, according to Kuyper, received the illumination of the Spirit and so are able to see the object of theological science.<sup>565</sup> Therefore, theology is not universal in scope and cannot be because unlike other sciences its object of knowledge is related differently to the subject than the material science's object to its subject.

Again, Kuyper and Barth are not far from each other in their thinking at this point. Barth also places theology within the church and the implications for apologetics in his thought are the same. Theology cannot simply be a rational exercise which transcends the church.<sup>566</sup> Both thinkers distance themselves from a certain kind of modern theological assumption that theological knowledge is like any other kind of knowledge that is accessible to anyone of normal cognitive aptitude. This is why Kuyper speaks of the *principium* of theology in the distinct way that he does.

If the object of theology had stood coordinate with the objects of the other sciences, then together with those sciences theology would have been obliged to employ a common principium of knowing. But, since, on the other hand, the object of theology excluded every idea of coordination, and thinking man, who asked after the knowledge of God, stood in a radically different relation to that God than to the several kingdoms of created things, there *had* to be a difference in the principium of knowing. With every other object it was the thinking subject who *took*

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>566</sup> Webster, John. *Karl Barth*. Continuum: London, 2004, p. 53.

*knowledge*; here it was the object itself that *gave knowledge*.<sup>567</sup>

Kuyper seeks to understand this *principium*, or foundation, of theology. This *principium* must be different to all other scientific foundations of knowing because of the particular relationship between the subject and object of theological knowledge. Moreover, it must be different because of the dependent characteristic of theological knowledge.

So what is the foundation of theological knowledge? Kuyper acknowledges that it has been customary to regard Scripture as the foundation but he is concerned with this understanding. He writes,

This has made it customary to seek the proper principium of theology immediately in the Holy Scripture, by which was meant of course simply the material principium of knowing (*principium cognoscendi materiale*). The knowledge of God, which God Himself had communicated by numerous facts and revelations, and which under his guidance was embodied in the Holy Scripture, was the gold which theology was to delve from the mine of the Holy Scripture. Meanwhile this could not be intended otherwise than as an abbreviated manner of speech. A principium is a living agent, hence a principium of knowledge must be an agent from which of necessity knowledge flows. And this of course the Bible as such is not. The principium of knowledge existed before knowledge had emerged from this principium, and consequently before the first page of Scripture was written. When, nevertheless, the Sacred Scripture is called the sole principium of theology (*principium unicum theologiae*), then the Scripture here is taken as a plant, whose germ has sprouted and budded, and has unfolded those buds. It is not, therefore, the naked principium, but the principium together with what it has brought forth. Speaking more accurately, we should say that the material principium is *the self-revelation of God to the sinner*, from which principium the data have come forth in the Holy Scriptures, from which theology must be built up.<sup>568</sup>

Accordingly, the proper *principium* of theological knowledge is not Scripture. The problem is that Scripture is so often understood to be the *principium* that it becomes the object of knowledge similar to scientific objects of exploration. In a telling remark, Kuyper comments, “It is unfortunate, however, that in olden time so little attention was paid to the

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<sup>567</sup> *Sacred Theology*, 141.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

formal principium. For now it seemed altogether as though the still darkened understanding was to investigate the Scripture as its object, in an entirely similar way to that in which this same understanding threw itself on plant and animal as its object.”<sup>569</sup>

If the formal *principium* is not Scripture then what is it? The *principium*, according to Kuyper, is the action of the Holy Spirit. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, or more accurately, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit on the sinful mind of man the knowledge of God is received. Kuyper writes,

There is no third something, that guarantees to our consciousness the reality of this principium. The working of this principium upon our consciousness is direct. This is really self-evident, since every principium finds its particular character in this, that it is itself *ground*, and therefore allows no other ground *under* itself; but in the case of the principium of theology ideas have been so confused, that a separate study of it cannot be omitted. For the sake of clearness we start from the ultimate cause, i.e., *from special inspiration. God from His own mind breathes (inspirat) into the mind of man, more particularly into the mind of sinful man, and that, too, in a special manner.* This, and nothing else, is the principium, for which knowledge of God comes to us sinners, and from which also theology as a science draws its vital power.<sup>570</sup>

And further,

If, therefore, our knowledge of God is only derived from the self-communication of God, i.e., the fruit of inspiration, then God as inspirer (Deus inspirans) must be the principium, the first agent in our knowledge of God; and the finding of something *back* of this principium, from which it should follow or flow, is simply inconceivable.<sup>571</sup>

It is clear from the comments above that the Spirit of God is the foundation of all knowledge of God. Kuyper is clear that this fact cannot be demonstrated and as such cannot be disproved. It is sufficient unto itself and needs no proof.<sup>572</sup> He does admit that the early church fathers believed this also to be the case because of their understanding of Scripture.

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

“They founded their confession of the Scripture ultimately upon no other testimony than the *witness of the Holy Spirit*.”<sup>573</sup> Evidence may be added to this testimony, but it is never the foundation for belief. The foundation for belief is solely based on the work of Spirit in the life of sinners.

This understanding of the *principium* finally relates to Kuyper’s assessment of the relationship between Holy Scripture and the *principium*. All of what has been said thus far has led us to the point where we are now in a position to speak about Kuyper’s doctrine of Scripture which must be seen in light of everything discussed prior to this. His doctrine of Scripture only makes sense in light of these things.

Questions concerning the ontology of Scripture have been the dominant Evangelical concern when it comes to speaking about the doctrine of scripture. However, for Kuyper, this does not seem to be the most important aspect of what it means for scripture to be scripture. This is not to say that Kuyper does not hold to an orthodox understanding of the inspiration of scripture or that he does not believe that scripture is the Word of God. Rather, Kuyper is concerned to address how it is that we recognize scripture as these things. It should come as no surprise that Kuyper does not believe that we come to know these things based on rational arguments or empirical evidences related to Scripture itself. There is no sense in Kuyper that we are able to speak about these things without the aid of the Holy Spirit. In one instance he writes,

And the witness of the one central revelation which neither repeats nor continues itself, lies for us in the Holy Scripture. Not, of course, as though the Bible, by itself, were sufficient to give, to every one who reads it, the true knowledge of God. We positively reject such a mechanical explanation; and by their teaching of the witness of the Holy Spirit as absolutely indispensable for all *conviction* concerning Scripture, by their

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<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

requirement of the illumination for the *right understanding* of the Scripture, and by their high esteem of the ministry of the Word for the *application* of the Scripture, our fathers have sufficiently shown that such a mechanical explanation cannot be ascribed to them.<sup>574</sup>

Kuyper draws on the church fathers' understanding of Scripture as a source for his understanding of the role that the Spirit plays. There is no sense in Kuyper that the Spirit merely assures of the convictions we have about Scripture which are apparently based on the evidences of Scripture itself. Rather, the Spirit is the one doing the convicting in the life of the believer so that any belief about Scripture is a direct result of his work in the believer. There is even a sense that in order for Scripture to be the Word of God the Spirit must do this work in the believer. If this is the case then it would appear that it makes no sense to call the Scriptures the objective Word of God. It would seem that they only are the Word of God in relation to a believing subject. "To him who does not feel that, at the moment when he opens the Holy Scripture, God comes by and in it and touches his very soul, the Scripture is not yet the Word of God, or has ceased to be this; or it is this in his *spiritual* moments, but *not* at other times, as when the veil lies again on his heart, while again it is truly such when the veil is taken away."<sup>575</sup>

Kuyper is careful to explain that the revelation of God does not come individually to each sinner. He envisions it more like a banquet table that has been set up for the entire church. This one revelation is organically connected to all believers and is accessed through Scripture. The crucial point is the Pneumatological one. As was seen in the last quote, even though the central revelation of God does lie in scripture it can only be accessed by the will and work of the Spirit.

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid, 151.



The scripture is the document of this revelation but *not* the revelation itself. This is similar to the archetypal/ectypal distinction made previously. The image of the revelation is in Scripture not revelation itself. Kuyper likens this to the production of a photograph. “Even as your person, by an optical process, photographs itself and produces its own image upon the collodion plate, so it is likewise the Revelation itself which has given its own image in the Holy Scripture. The scripture as the document of the central Revelation is therefore organically connected with that Revelation itself.”<sup>576</sup>

However, the action of God has not ended when the scripture had been written. To go back to the photograph analogy: it would seem that in order for us to even recognize the image of ourselves in the picture we need a special lens through which we look at this picture.

Similarly, in order for us to recognize scripture as the Word of God we must have the special lens of the Holy Spirit affecting our ‘vision’. With this perspective Kuyper can conclude,

At no single point of the way is there place, therefore, for a support derived from demonstration or reasoning. There is no man that seeks, and seeking finds the Scripture, and with its help turns himself to his God. But rather from beginning to end it is one ceaselessly continued action which goes out from God to man, and operates upon him, even as the light of the sun operates upon the grain of the corn that lies hidden in the ground, and draws it to the surface, and causes it to grow into stock.<sup>577</sup>

It is clear that one’s recognition of scripture as the Word of God is solely up to the Spirit’s work in one’s life. There is a strong sense of the providence of God upon which Kuyper relies. There is no sense that a ‘scientific’ examination of Scripture or a logical analysis of scripture is able to produce faith in its being the Word of God.

For no single moment, therefore, may we entertain the admission that argument may be the ground of conviction. This would be a “passing into another kind,” which is logically condemned. Faith gives the highest assurance, where in our own consciousness it rests immediately on the testimony of God; but without this support, everything that announces itself

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid, 152.

as faith is merely a weaker form of opinion based on probability, which capitulates the moment a surer knowledge supersedes your defective evidence.<sup>578</sup>

No recognition of scripture as the Word of God is possible without this testimony. It is this testimony, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which is the foundation of theology. However, Kuyper does seem to speak of scripture as being in some sense the *principium* of theology. We have established that he acknowledges that the *principium* must be a living agent and yet there are times where he calls scripture the *principium*. So what does he mean by this?

It would seem that Kuyper wants to maintain that when we seek to know anything about God, the instrument through which we obtain this knowledge is Scripture. Because of the Fall there is nowhere else for man to turn but scripture which God has provided by the inspiration of the Spirit. It is in this sense that Kuyper speaks of scripture as the *principium* of theology. Even though scripture is this ontologically, there can be no recognition of it apart from the Spirit. Kuyper uses the language of the Reformers by talking about the *providential specialissima* to describe the action of God in “rendering this Scripture a special revelation for this and that given person.”<sup>579</sup>

This leads Kuyper to conclude that if God were to take away the faith we have that scripture gives us His special revelation then we could no longer believe the things we do about scripture. “If God then withdraws Himself, if in the soul of men He bear no more witness to the truth of His Word, men *can* no longer believe, and no apologetics, however brilliant, will ever be able to restore the blessing of faith in Scripture. *Faith*, quickened by God Himself, is invincible: *pseudo-faith*, which rests merely upon reasoning, is devoid of all spiritual reality, so that it bursts like a soap-bubble as soon as the thread of your reasoning breaks.”<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid, 152.

But a further clarification needs to be made. As Harriet Harris writes in her chapter on Kuyper's doctrine of Scripture in *Religious Pluralism and Public Life*, "It is a manner of speech to call Scripture the principium of theology, but one that suffices if understood properly."<sup>581</sup> She is correct to say that it is a 'manner of speech' because it is here and here alone where one's knowledge of God is obtained.

The description of this action of God, i.e. the providing of this central Revelation for our human race, is contained in the Holy Scripture. He who would know this central Revelation, must seek it therefore in the Holy Scripture. And in *that* sense the question, where the *special* principium with the central Revelation to our race as its fruit is now to be found, must be answered without hesitation as follows: In the *Holy Scripture* and in the Holy Scripture *alone*.<sup>582</sup>

It would appear that the characteristic that makes scripture the *principium* of theology is that it is the place where the special revelation of God is found. In so much as it is here, and here alone, where this revelation is found, Kuyper is able to define scripture in this way.<sup>583</sup>

So it would seem that the *principium* of theology can be understood as scripture but is not fully defined by scripture. This is partly realized in Kuyper's understanding of the temporality of scripture. The giving scripture is strictly a temporal event that occurred as a result of the fall. Because of this when creation has been fully redeemed the scripture will no longer have a role to play in our knowledge of God. We will then have a completely natural knowledge of God.<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Harris concludes that Scripture ends up being the principium for theology, but I think she has misread Kuyper at this point. The reason Scripture cannot ultimately be understood as the principium of theology has been mentioned above. See: Lugo, Luis E. *Religious Pluralism and Public Life*: W.B. Eerdmans Press: Michigan, 2000, pgs. 123-144.

<sup>582</sup> *Sacred Theology*, 150.

<sup>583</sup> The tension between Scripture being the principium of theology and the action of God being the principium is reminiscent of Barth's understanding of how Scripture is the Word of God.

<sup>584</sup> Kuyper likens this to someone with croup. He says, "When croup prevents the breathing in of air, the heroic operation in the throat is sometimes undertaken, in order in this way to obtain a new opening for the supply of fresh air; but they are still the same lungs for which the air is intended, and it is the same atmosphere from which the air is drawn; only another entrance has been unlocked *temporarily*, and in so far a *different*

Because of sin, the special revelation of God accessed through scripture is of vital importance to theology. Ontologically, scripture is like a glittering sapphire. The problem is, ontologically we are like blind men. So even though Kuyper sees scripture as being very valuable it is only by the illumination of the Spirit that we are able to see scripture as it truly is. Kuyper is aware that many have tried through certain types of arguments to reveal the glimmer of scripture. He draws the conclusion that internally, i.e., inside the church, these may help to combat doubt; however, externally, i.e., outside of the church, any arguments of this kind have no value. Why is this? It should be no surprise that the answer lies with Kuyper's commitment to pneumatology. "The witness of the Holy Spirit is and ever will be the only power which can carry into our consciousness the certainty concerning the special revelation."<sup>585</sup>

Because of the nature of the Spirit's interaction with scripture in Kuyper's thought, questions concerning the ontology of Scripture seem to play a tertiary role. At times Kuyper talks of scripture merely as a vehicle or instrument for God's purposes. His wording is quite strong when he remarks, "By itself the Bible is nothing but a carrier and vehicle, or, if you please, the instrument prepared by God, by which to attain His spiritual purpose, but always through the ever-present working of the Holy Spirit."<sup>586</sup> Kuyper's comment is indicative of his understanding of Scripture. He is not concerned to talk about scripture merely in terms of its ontological status. He does not elevate scripture to a position which makes its ontological

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principium of respiration has been established. In this sense it can be said, that the normal entrance, which in creation God had unlocked for Himself to our heart, had become inaccessible by sin, and that for this reason, by an act of heroic grace, God has temporarily opened for Himself, another entrance to our heart, to reveal Himself as the same God to the same creature, only now with the aid of a *different* principium of revelation." See *Sacred Theology*, 159.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid, 168.

status of primary importance. To do so would be to make it the proper *principium* of theology which it can never be.

Kuyper's focus is always upon God's action toward creation. When it comes to discussing scripture, Kuyper is adamant that the work of the Spirit is what is primarily important to our knowledge of God. Without him and his work it would not matter how long we stared at the text of scripture or how long we debated about its inerrant qualities; nothing would result except maybe a *pseudo-faith*. By emphasizing the Spirit in the way he does Kuyper is not drawn into rationalistic or empirical debates concerning the text of scripture. Kuyper's faith that Scripture is the fountain from which our knowledge of God springs is founded on nothing else than the work of the Spirit in him.

The implications for what it would mean to label Kuyper as an inerrantist are becoming clear. There seems to be a connection between Warfield's inerrancy and Kuyper's doctrine. Harris comments, "In 1881, the year that A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield published their article defending the verbal inspiration of Scripture and the inerrancy of the original autographs, Kuyper proclaimed the very same doctrines in his rectorial address at the Free University."<sup>587</sup> However, she admits that these doctrines did not feature strongly in his *Sacred Theology*. This begs the question as to why inerrancy would not feature strongly in Kuyper's writing when the majority of the time he is concerned with revelation and Scripture.

As we saw in chapter four, Kuyper connected the authority of Scripture and the internal testimony of the Spirit in such a way that Scripture has no authority apart from this witness. This is congruent with the area of Kuyper's thought we have examined in this chapter. It

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<sup>587</sup> Lugo, 125.

would seem that the doctrinal weight of inerrancy would not be as much in Kuyper's thought because of his particular Pneumatological emphasis. It may be that Scripture is infallible and inerrant. It seems pretty clear that Kuyper was happy to affirm these properties of the original autographs, but I suppose one question is, "what does it matter?"

If, according to Kuyper, one's belief that Scripture has authority over his life is rooted not in any rational argument that it should have authority nor in any empirical investigation into its claims, but first and foremost because God has touched this person's heart in such a way that he believes that Scripture has authority, then it would seem these proofs become less important. As Kuyper says, they may help when the person has times of doubt, but they are unable to be the cause of this person's belief.

Ultimately, the central assumption has to do with apologetics. What is the function of apologetics in the world? For Kuyper, apologetics serve the humanness of the *church*, not the humanness of the world. The Spirit must provide faith and it is on the foundation of this work that our faith should and must rest. No other foundation is appropriate or reliable. In the conclusion of the following chapter we will look at the implications of this way of thinking for the church's current understanding of inerrancy and how it might be understood according to these implications.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a summary of two further doctrines of Holy Scripture which are not entirely in agreement with the inerrantist position. The first section examined Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture. We found that in Barth Scripture is not revelation but its witness. The One revelation from God is the person of Jesus Christ. In

Barth there is no confusion between the revelation of God and Holy Scripture. They cannot be identified.

We showed that Barth's doctrine of scripture was founded upon two primary presuppositions: God's complete transcendence and God's essence as being one who loves in complete and absolute freedom. Because of these two presuppositions Barth is unable to identify the Word of God with the text of Scripture and he is unable to accept any theological idea that would be connected with natural theology.

Because of His transcendence God's revelation must meet us and He does so as the Word of God in three forms. God meets us as the person of Jesus Christ, in the written witness to His Word from the Apostles and in the proclamation of His Word within the Church. Barth understands the Word of God in this threefold form.

But because of God's freedom He is necessarily not tied to either the written word or the proclaimed word and so chooses to meet us in those things. And so for Barth the authority of scripture lies in the fact that Christ promises to meet us at or in that text. Furthermore, Christ is free not to make himself known for a period of time in the text or to a specific reader or specific readers of the text. Meeting Christ in the text involves faith and this faith is the gift of a God who loves in freedom. In order for Scripture to be the Word of God man must be given faith to see it as such.

Because of Barth's particular understanding of scripture as the witness to revelation he had no great interest in the doctrine of inerrancy. In fact, it could be said that Barth opposed such a doctrine because he felt it took away some of the graciousness of a God who made contact

with and revealed Himself to and through erring human beings. Ultimately, for Barth, the authority of Scripture rests in the person to whom it witnesses not on errorless propositions.

Following on from Barth we have a clear statement Kuyper's doctrine of scripture. This doctrine is solidly based on his understanding of the contemporary work of the Spirit within the church. One's belief in the authority of the Bible is solely dependent upon the free gift of the Spirit of God.

Because of his understanding of sin and its effects on creation Kuyper was careful not to base his understanding of biblical authority on anything that could be affected by the fall.

Therefore, the only authority that can be trusted is that of God. Kuyper did not need the evidence of an errorless text to establish his understanding of biblical authority. Rather, he recognized that the only authority that could be fully trusted was that which was established by the work of the Spirit of God within the life of the church. Ultimately, Scripture has authority because of the Spirit's testimony and this testimony is His gift to the church.

Both theologians examined above highly regarded scripture. Both thinkers develop doctrines that are highly dependent on the active contemporary work of the Holy Spirit. And while Barth denied the doctrine of inerrancy as it had developed in his time, Vanhoozer has commented that we might label Barth's view of scripture as an inerrant witness.<sup>588</sup> And although there is no doubt that Kuyper used the language of inerrancy and found it helpful, neither thinkers' doctrines of scripture will allow them to accept the specific doctrine of inerrancy as it is defined in this thesis.

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<sup>588</sup> *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, p. 50.



Both see the contemporary witness of the Spirit as foundational to any development of the authority of scripture. Whereas, the doctrine of inerrancy places the past inspiration of the Spirit as the foundation for Biblical authority, Barth and Kuyper heavily rely on His current work in order to establish Biblical authority. Barth's need for past inspiration of the Biblical text may be dubious and Kuyper's thought perhaps not as fully developed as one would like, nevertheless neither need the Spirit to 'produce' the text in the same way as inerrantists do. This is because of the specific Pneumatological perspective that they share.

This means that the statement "If the Bible was not originally inerrant, it cannot have authority" has absolutely no weight in either theologian. When one situates the action of the Spirit in the specific manner that both have, then this statement means nothing. Why is the Bible authoritative? Both would answer, "Because I have been given faith that this is where God has revealed or is revealing himself." And the Spirit gives this faith. It's not something that can be accessed by anyone 'examining' the Bible as many inerrantists imagine. This specific Pneumatological position is one major aspect of their doctrines of scripture that distinguishes both Barth and Kuyper from their inerrantists contemporaries.

With this Pneumatology always in the back of our minds we turn to the concluding chapter of this thesis. In this chapter we will incorporate all that has been established in the previous chapters in order to present a clear picture of both the philosophical and theological presuppositions involved in the doctrine of inerrancy. Once this has been done we will briefly examine the way in which a couple of contemporary post-modern theologians attempt to understand biblical authority before offering conclusions of our own about a way forward for the doctrine of inerrancy that may not involve so many of the presuppositions that the current doctrine requires.

## A Way Forward

Where do we go from here? In chapter four we looked at the connection between inerrancy and biblical authority and followed that chapter with two very different understandings of biblical authority, neither of which needed to commit to any particular definition of inerrancy. Each of the different ways of establishing biblical authority have their strengths and weaknesses. So in this chapter I want to suggest a way forward for those of us who believe that Scripture is authoritative in our lives but feel that inerrancy might not be the principle way of establishing this belief. The picture of a way forward presented in this chapter will look more like the impressionism of Monet than the precision of a photograph by Ansel Adams.

The way in which the doctrine of inerrancy must be challenged is in its claim to be the foundation for a person's faith, and hence the priority for inerrancy ought to be reduced. Colin Gunton offers some insight into what our foundation should be. In the quote below Christology and pneumatology are not separated. In an Irenaean fashion, the hands of God cannot act alone. Because of the close tie between Christology and pneumatology, Gunton's thought gives us a glimpse of how we might go forward in our understanding of where the priority for the doctrine of inerrancy lies. He writes,

The co-eternal Word is thus the basis of any and all meaning as 'foundation': not only of the faith of the believer, but of the very possibility of knowledge of any kind. If Christ is the mediator of creation, then he is the basis of created rationality and therefore of human knowledge, wherever and whatever; we might say, of all human culture. But that point must be developed pneumatologically also, so that all rationality, truth and beauty are seen to be realised through the perfecting agency of God the Spirit, who enables things to be known by human minds and made by human hands. Christ is indeed the Truth, but the truth becomes truth in

all the different ways in which it is mediated by the Spirit. Pneumatology is thus the key to any adequate theology of revelation and of its mediation.<sup>589</sup>

By establishing a Christological foundation through the work of the Spirit, Gunton links all knowledge to Christ. By doing this it actually becomes impossible to argue using foundations that are ‘secular’ in nature, i.e., rationalistic. According to Gunton, because Christ is the mediator of all creation then ultimately He is the one upon whom all of our knowledge and certainty is established.

Being sceptical of *foundationalism* does not imply doing away with *foundations* (as many postliberals would agree). However, if Gunton is correct then this foundation is always known by faith through the gift of the Spirit. It cannot be argued for on the basis of creation, either natural or rational. It must be gifted. When this is applied to the authority of Scripture it entails that knowledge of this authority is also gifted. The rational evidences may support what is known by the gift of the Spirit but are never in a position to prove what only the Spirit can. Apologetically, this means trusting much more in the work of the Spirit to open eyes rather than in our ability to force them open by natural means.

If Christ truly is the foundation for all of our knowledge then we ought to be very careful not to let him become replaced by something else. It would seem that we would be in danger of being unfaithful when we allow something else to take a position that only Christ can truly occupy. But it is one thing to suggest that Christ is the foundation, and quite another thing to say what this might look like in terms of the doctrine of inerrancy.

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<sup>589</sup> Gunton, Colin E. *A Brief Theology of Revelation*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1998, p. 124.

Abraham Kuyper, who we met briefly in chapter four and then again more substantially in chapter five might be considered an inerrantist in a general sense.<sup>590</sup> However, he did not seem to allow the doctrine of inerrancy to become foundational to his belief in the authority of scripture. In one passage he writes,

But however firmly the organic relation both of our race and of revelation must be maintained, it is not asserted that the Holy Scripture is enough for the individual. This is *not* the case at all, and he who thinks that the Holy Spirit really gave the Scripture, but now leaves its appropriation to our natural reason, is woefully mistaken. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit, who gave up the Scriptures, is Himself the perpetual author (*auctor perpetuus*) of all appropriation of their contents *by* and of all application *to* the individual. It is the Holy Spirit who, by illumination, enables the human consciousness to take up into itself the substance of the Scripture; in the course of ages leads our human consciousness to ever richer insights into its content; and who, while this process continues, imparts to the elect of God, as they reach the years of discretion, that personal application of the Word, which, after the Divine counsel, is both intended and indispensable for them.<sup>591</sup>

When the authority of scripture is thought of in this sense the motivation for reading it changes. It is not because the Bible is *prima facie* the Word of God written. Rather, one reads the Bible in order that he might hear the Spirit speaking and in so doing be continually transformed into the community of Christ.

There are many implications of this way of thinking. It clearly makes the church a people of the book. The authority of scripture is most easily recognized *within* the church. It is this community who has been constructed by the Holy Spirit by His speaking through the Biblical text, which is then able to recognize the authority of the Bible. The question of whether the Bible can in any way act authoritatively outside of the community which is formed by the Spirit's appropriation of it is a question often raised. But the question presupposes a

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<sup>590</sup> I am aware that the doctrine of inerrancy was not fully developed and available to Kuyper and those of his time. However, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. writes a convincing article showing many of the ways in which Kuyper would have been sympathetic with claims of inerrancy. See: Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. 'Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy.' in the *Westminster Theological Journal* vol. 44, pp. 250-89, 1982 and vol. 45, pp. 219-72, 1983.

<sup>591</sup> Kuyper, Abraham. *Sacred Theology*. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Inc.: Indiana, 2001, p. 169.

separation between pneumatology and authority that must not be made. Wherever Scripture is found to be authoritative it is a direct result of the Spirit's work.

So does the Bible have authority? Yes. Not because it was once inspired by God and so contains inerrant properties which anyone either in or outside the church would be able to acknowledge. Rather, it has authority precisely because the Spirit appropriates it to accomplish his purposes. Its authority is reflective of the Holy Spirit's current authority within the church and will continue to be authoritative as long as the Spirit is working to bring about His purposes.

It seems that one of the main points of the doctrine of inerrancy is that in order to have an authoritative Bible the Bible must have been first given without error. It would be consistent then for inerrantists to concentrate on the past work of the Holy Spirit in creating an errorless autograph. What is evident is that the Spirit does play a primary role in establishing biblical authority, but it is the past work of the Spirit that does this. It is the past work of the Spirit one must continually appeal to if he is going to show the Bible to be authoritative.

Without this decisive act of the Spirit there could be no doctrine of inerrancy. It is only because God has 'breathed' the Scriptures that they can be said to be inerrant. The Spiritual work of inspiration guarantees the inerrancy of the product of this inspiration, which in turn guarantees the authority of the product of this inspiration. To put it more simply, divine inspiration guarantees inerrancy and inerrancy provides the foundation for biblical authority.

What is important about this condition is the kind of emphasis placed on the Holy Spirit. There is little to no appeal by the inerrantist to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit that

happens in a believer's life today. It would almost seem that this aspect of the Spirit's work is an added extra on top of the more tangible evidences of inerrancy. The picture we are given by the doctrine of inerrancy has a remarkable resemblance to the Barth and Brunner debate over natural theology. What it comes down to is this: Has God given us something that is part of the created realm by which we can access His truth through our own natural faculties, or must God work in the life of a person prior to their coming into contact with a specific aspect of creation in order for them to see how this aspect of creation supports the belief they have about God already. One might argue that the doctrine of inerrancy supports a type of natural theology where the Bible becomes the aspect of creation that all can access and by which all can come to know God. If this is the case then the Holy Spirit comes after belief is established by the encounter with Scripture and confirms this encounter. Faith is not so much a gift as a natural response to the evidences of creation (in this case the inerrant Scriptures).

There is little need for the testimony of the Spirit within the doctrine of inerrancy because the evidences of Scripture are enough to establish belief in its claims. The tendency then is to see the Spirit as a relief player who only comes in when the evidence of Scripture is not sustaining conviction. When this happens the Spirit comes in and provides assurance to the believer that the evidence is correct and that the Bible is authoritative.

Does this mean that anyone who believes in the past work of Spirit's production of the Biblical text must adopt a doctrine of inerrancy? No. John Webster is one of a number of theologians who accept the past inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the production of the texts of Scripture but who do not find the doctrine of inerrancy vital to their understanding of Scripture. He talks about the inspiration of Scripture as "the sanctifying work of the Spirit so

that they [the texts] may become fitting vessels of the treasure of the Gospel.”<sup>592</sup> He even uses the language of concursus when talking about the inspiration of Scripture and yet he does not see the doctrine of inerrancy as a necessary component to the doctrine of Scripture he provides.

What does not seem to be the case is the ability to affirm the doctrine of inerrancy apart from the past act of the Spirit. The act of producing an inerrant revelation is strictly reliant upon the action of God. So to talk about inerrancy without the past inspiration of the Holy Spirit upon the writers of the Scriptures would seem to be impossible. However, by accepting the doctrine of inerrancy one finds little need of the contemporary work of the Holy Spirit to establish biblical authority.

If the authority of scripture is dependent upon the contemporary work of the Holy Spirit then does this necessarily mean that we have to completely do away with the doctrine of inerrancy altogether? No. The doctrine of inerrancy still may play a vital role as being one of many *indicia* which help to support the faith of those who know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. But when it is taken out of the realm of proving scripture’s authority then it no longer is the foundation of faith. Therefore, one’s faith does not have to be stumbled by an apparent problem with the text, and also, one does not have to prove that there are not any problems with the text before one believes. The Spirit gives both faith in Christ and faith in the authority of Scripture.

This means that scripture is not some kind of scientific textbook which we are at liberty to ‘put to the test’ which many both within and without the church have wanted to do for nearly three hundred years. We can affirm the mysteriousness of the text and not need to

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<sup>592</sup> Webster, John. *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003, p. 38.

examine it under a fine-tooth comb. The Bible is not that kind of text, but when the inerrancy of the text is the foundation for its authority then the temptation is to treat it as such. If there is no guarantee ‘from below’ that when one reads the Bible she will be enlightened of the mysteries of God, like one would be about the reproduction of a butterfly after reading an entomology textbook, then one ought to approach the Bible differently than one would a scientific textbook. When the church reads its scripture it hopes that it will meet with her risen Lord and so come to know and love God more. That meeting is the work of the Father through the Son by the Spirit. If there is a guarantee that this meeting will happen it is from God alone. We hope but cannot expect this to happen, so we ought to approach the text of scripture humbly with reverence hoping that we might love God more as he meets us in our reading of the text.<sup>593</sup>

In this understanding the role of the Holy Spirit is key. We saw that the work of the Holy Spirit is important for the doctrine of inerrancy but that that work is restricted to his past act of inspiration. For both Calvin and Kuyper restricting the authority of Scripture to the past act of the Spirit is inadequate. But if one wants to see scripture as a scientific textbook that acts as the foundation for the church’s faith then one has to restrict the role of the Spirit to the past act of inspiration. What we are suggesting here is that one recognizes the necessity of the Spirit’s contemporary work in making scripture authoritative to mankind and so not treat it as a text with which one can do anything one likes. If we reduce the Spirit’s role in scriptural authority to the past act of plenary inspiration then not only are we prone to treat the text we have as a scientific textbook that is the foundation of our faith, but also we are in

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<sup>593</sup> My argument here is similar to the Reformation debates over the efficacy of the Sacraments. Is there something in the sacrament that is itself powerful, or is the power of the sacrament only the promise of God? Similarly, is there something in the text of Scripture that is itself powerful, or is the power of Scripture reliant on the promise of God, i.e., God’s faithfulness?



danger of deism- the Holy Spirit acted once before in the past but we no longer need him to continue to act for us to believe.

Is this an exclusive picture that I am painting? Do only those who are part of the club recognize the authority of Scripture? I don't think so. There does not seem to be any necessary reason why one would need to equate recognition of the authority of scripture and being in the community of believers called the church. It is possible to imagine that the Spirit would convict someone of scripture's authority and for whatever reason they do not find themselves part of the believing community. The point I am stressing is that **whenever** belief in the authority of Scripture happens it is a direct result of the current work of the Holy Spirit. It is not because the Holy Spirit once acted a long time ago and so now we have all these proofs so that anyone of normal cognitive abilities ought to be able to recognize and believe in scripture's authority.

This thesis started with a quote from Harold Lindsell. In his remark we are told that it would be a sin not to come to grips with the doctrine of inerrancy, a doctrine which he believed would be the watershed issue for American evangelicals in the twentieth century. Six chapters later we have come to a point where some conclusions are necessary. This thesis has never been about disproving the doctrine of inerrancy. Rather, it has sought to question its status as a foundational doctrine for the church. Furthermore, the doctrine of inerrancy may have a role to play amongst the other doctrines of the church, but this thesis concludes that it ought not play *the* primary role upon which all other doctrines rely. The two main reasons were established in each of the two main sections of this thesis. Fundamentally, the doctrine of inerrancy assumes an inadequate account of truth and authority and so cannot be the definitive statement on these subjects.

The doctrine of inerrancy is primarily rooted in an eighteenth century understanding of truth which regarded truth as propositional in nature. It depends on the presupposition that these propositions correspond to an objective reality independent of themselves and that these propositions are founded upon specific epistemological certainties accessible universally to rational beings.

This particular view of truth is not theologically adequate. A more appropriate understanding of truth would consider the implications, as well as, define itself according to the theological claim of Jesus Christ to be the truth. The claim of Scripture is that truth is not properly to be understood as a proposition but that it has theological significance, and this theological significance cannot be completely appropriated by the definition of truth presupposed by the doctrine of inerrancy.

This 'Christological' definition of truth is a larger category than the propositional definition given by inerrantists and so logically may include an understanding of truth where sometimes truth is conveyed by propositions. However, if one presupposes a definition of truth, which is, formed by the philosophical assumptions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, then one cannot affirm the theological definition of truth required in the scriptural witness. The doctrine of inerrancy does this and therefore does not provide an adequate understanding of truth.

But it is not only its definition of truth where the doctrine of inerrancy struggles. Its account of biblical authority is also inadequate for many of same reasons. Because of their philosophical presuppositions, both Warfield and Henry base scriptural authority on the past

act of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the text. This pneumatology is an inadequate representation of the Spirit's function within the church and is not consistent with the Calvin's doctrine of biblical authority, whom both Warfield and Henry see as a guiding light for their theology.

Both Warfield and Henry's particular pneumatologies and their doctrines of Scripture do not adequately represent the area of the Reformed tradition of which they were a part. Calvin required a very contemporary role for the Spirit in order for his doctrine of biblical authority to succeed. Without the contemporary internal witness of the Spirit, Holy Scripture would not have authority for those who read it. However, both Warfield and Henry place so much emphasis on the *past* act of the Spirit that His contemporary witness is of little or no value. This is one of the reasons why inerrancy is so valuable.

Inerrantist insist with the utmost decisiveness that all authority is lost if the one does not believe that the Scriptures in their original autographs are without error. But if the Dutch Reformed position of Abraham Kuyper is then the current work of the Holy Spirit relied on to establish the authority of Scripture. Furthermore, the model constructed by Barth has such a strong Christological aspect to it that the authority of Scripture is grounded in this (however, the role of the Spirit cannot be seen as separate here). Furthermore, both of these models provide different ways of understanding Biblical authority without presupposing some of the necessary things of the doctrine of inerrancy.

Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Reformed theologian mentioned above, provides a way of understanding biblical authority that seemed very similar to Calvin's Reformed position. He also would probably have accepted *prima facie* the doctrine of inerrancy, or at the very least

the idea that Scripture did not lie in what it revealed. And yet nowhere, does he connect his understanding of biblical authority with his beliefs about whether or not Scripture erred. If there is a way forward for the doctrine of inerrancy then I would suggest that it should root itself in Kuyper's theological commitments. Kuyper seems to offer an account of biblical authority that is pneumatologically robust and consistent with his Reformed predecessors.

But what do we mean when we say that Scripture has no authority without the contemporary and internal work of the Holy Spirit. It seems that people who come to the text of Scripture without the work of the Spirit can read much of it and know what it says. However, this does not mean that they understand what it says. The first thing that comes with the Spirit's work upon the reader of the text is understanding. When the Bible presents the claim that Jesus is Lord to the person reading it, it is authoritative when the person understands what that claim means. So when it is said that the authority of Scripture is reliant upon the Spirit's testimony, it is meant that a person is given understanding of the text by the Spirit.

But authority does not just imply understanding. If a person reads the Bible and is presented with the claim that 'Jesus is Lord' they will believe and be convicted that this is the case only by the inner work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). Therefore, in some sense the term authority implies conviction. The Bible has authority means that the Bible's claims about reality bring conviction to those who have been internally witnessed to by the Holy Spirit.

Both understanding and conviction are results of the Bible's authority for those who have been given the gift of faith. The reader is not able to produce these things on his own. When these things do not exist the Bible is not authoritative to the person reading it. This is reason why it is so important to hold the Bible's authority and the contemporary work of the Holy

Spirit together. However, this does not mean that we have to deny that authority is a property of the text. It is possible to affirm that the text has authority but that this authority is unrecognizable to those who have not first been given ‘eyes to see.’ Because inerrantists often equate authority with the text of Scripture and assume that anyone of a normal rational capacity could understand what it says and recognize its authority, they do not need the contemporary work of the Spirit.

But could there be a doctrine of inerrancy that looked different to the one that is rejected by post-modern theologians and that we have been examining in this thesis? I would suggest that a ‘post-conservative’ doctrine of inerrancy, one that does not presuppose the philosophical foundations discussed throughout this thesis, and one that allows for the current work of the Holy Spirit in establishing the authority of the Bible but does not neglect His past work of inspiration might be modelled after Abraham Kuyper’s thought.

What would this doctrine look like? An entire thesis could be devoted to answering this question. I can only give some suggestions of how one might conceive of this ‘new’ type of inerrancy. First, because it would not be rooted in the philosophical shifts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it would not play a primary role amongst other church doctrines. Rather, it would be more like one of Calvin’s *indicia*, providing assurance for the faith of the believer who has already received the witness of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Furthermore, it would have no apologetic value. It could not be the bridge that spans the gap between the church and the world. Scripture would then truly become the church’s book and only once one is given faith by the Spirit would one be able to recognize it as the Word of God and value it as inerrant. Thinking about inerrancy this way would require the church to

re-examine its understanding of pneumatology. It would have to rely more heavily upon God's current action in building His church and less upon trying to prove that He acted in the past to inspire a specific set of writings known as the Bible upon which people should place their trust.

Of course, the whole notion of error might be reconsidered in light of the Christological foundation upon which all derivative truth is founded. If Jesus Christ really is the Truth then all error would be misrepresentations of who He is. In a post-conservative account of inerrancy the error would not be true propositions representing objective reality versus false propositions misrepresenting objective reality, but rather, Christ versus anti-Christ. So to say that the Bible errs may indicate that it is against Christ in some way. There are other ways of thinking about this but the point is that a doctrine of inerrancy that presupposes truth as Christological will not be asking the sort of questions that the 'classical' understanding of inerrancy asks.

No longer will questions about the correspondence between truth claims in scripture and what we know of the reality of the world take centre stage.

Classical inerrancy assumes that we have a grasp of what the reality of the world is. In this respect it is classically modern. Thus it assumes what it means to err. In other words, its understanding of error is dependent upon the presupposition that it knows the what the reality of the world is. But what if the reality of the world is Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 8:6)? In fact, this seems to be the picture the Bible paints of Jesus' relation to the world. The reality of the world *is* Jesus Christ. This reality is what he made it to be and what it is being made to be through his life, death and resurrection.

If this is the case then asking what it would mean to err seems to be a relevant question. What is error? It would seem that one way to understand error would be this way: Error is any misconstrued picture of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This would not be just theological error, it is error of any kind, i.e., historical or scientific, philosophical or theological because all of these fields of knowledge deal with a universe what was made by and through Jesus Christ. For instance, scientific knowledge is a particular type of knowledge which examines an aspect of the world that was created through Christ and at which Christ is the center. To make a claim like ‘the earth is the center of the universe’ is a scientific error, yes, but the primary reason it is an error would be different than normally espoused. On a Christo-centric model that claim is false because at root is a misconstrual of how this universe finally relates to Jesus Christ.

Because the world was made by him and through him and because all things are subjected to him any account truth and falsity must be founded upon him. The result of this understanding of error is not that we fully change the idea of what error is, but rather we change what the principle cause of error is and therefore change how we evaluate the importance of particular errors.

What might this mean for the church? It seems that one significant implication has to do with the Spirit. How is it that one can know and understand truth of any kind? Well, it seems right to appeal to the Spirit who promises to lead men and women into the truth. Relying on the Spirit to be the giver of truth means that man does not have to rely on himself. Therefore, man does not have to make himself into an idol.

Does this mean that only truth is given to believers or the church? I do not think this has to be implied. The Spirit provides truth to whom he wills, church and unchurched alike. The difference is that for some he enables them to recognize him as the giver of that gift and Christ as the foundation upon which the derivative ‘truths’ that the Spirit provides are founded. This model recognized the very active role the Spirit plays in the contemporary world. It is opposite to the classically modern picture of man in control of everything. It means that the economy of God is central to both our knowing and understanding the truth that he both is and has created.

On this model the need to define truth and falsity according to the standard “correspondence vs. coherence” debate is seen to be inadequate. There is a sense in which all truth corresponds to the reality of Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ is not an object to whom we can take under our control and scientifically verify. Therefore, the strict correspondence view simply does not work. Furthermore, there is also a sense in which Jesus Christ might be seen to be he who causes the coherence of truth and so it might seem that the coherence model fits better with this picture. However, because Christ transcends the world, as the truth, he does not fit the strict coherence view either. There are aspects of each of these views on truth that seem to fit with the model I am suggesting but neither fully realize philosophically the picture I am attempting to paint.

Any theory of truth that does not start with the originator of truth will be inadequate. A theory of truth which revolves around a Christological center, much like the earth revolves around the sun, and is drawn to that center by the Spirit, much like the gravitational pull the sun has on the earth, will begin to portray an adequate notion of truth. It would take another entire project to develop these things fully. What I have sought to do is a way forward for a



doctrine of inerrancy that assumes a Christological view of truth and in doing that to show where the main inadequacies are in the classical doctrine of inerrancy. I only offer these specific thoughts toward the end of the thesis in order to give a glimpse of what a neo-inerrancy might look like.

Harold Lindsell may have been right about the doctrine of inerrancy being the watershed issue for evangelicals of the twentieth century but that is only because of the specific philosophical and theological commitments it makes, ones that we have drawn out in this thesis. However, in order for it not to continue to be the watershed issue of the twenty-first century, it must be taken off of its pedestal as the foundational Christian doctrine upon which all others depend. Although, there is no reason for it to be disregarded entirely because it conveys an important theological claim, i.e., that God is not a deceiver, when He speaks he does not lie. The thought of Abraham Kuyper and those theologians influenced by him may be able to help create a doctrine of inerrancy uninfluenced by philosophical concerns of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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