Today's Crisis over Biblical Authority: Evangelicalism's Apologetic and the Postmodern Turn

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Here then is the difference. They place the authority of the Church without [outside] the word of God; we annex it to the word, and allow it not to be separated from it.

—John Calvin

No fact of contemporary Western life is more evident than its growing distrust of final truth and its implacable questioning of any sure word.

—Carl F. H. Henry

Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

—Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

This book is **Highly Recommended** and can be purchased at Amazon.

There is a very good chance that you, as a reader of this book, attend an "evangelical" church. Perhaps you have wondered why the word *evangelical* is attached as a label to your particular church body or theological perspective. The term *evangelical* finds its heritage in the Protestant Reformation, where it was used interchangeably at times with the word *Protestant*. The word *evangelical* conveyed that the Reformers, in contrast to Rome, were defending and recovering the *euangelium* ("gospel").[1] Today, after two Great Awakenings, the term has become far more complicated in its use and definition. Nevertheless, historian David Bebbington has tried to give the label precision by identifying four key components of evangelicalism. Evangelicals are those who affirm biblicism, cruci-centricism, conversionism, and activism.[2] Woodbridge and James have argued that out of these four,

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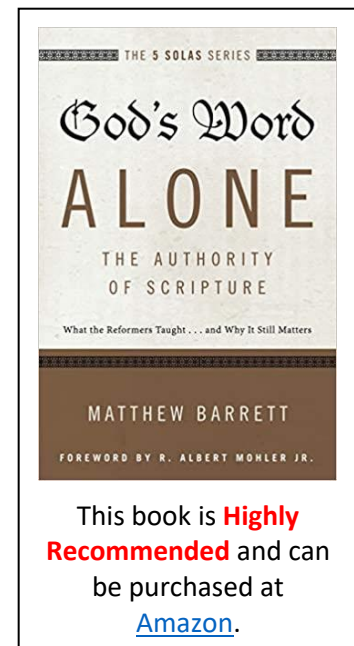
[1] John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History*, vol. 2, *From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 789.

[2] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hymnal, 1989), 3.

biblicism (an affirmation of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture) "is the first principle that provides the foundation for all the others."[3] And yet, in the twentieth century it is biblicism that has been under austere debate. For many evangelicals in America, biblicism is inseparable from the doctrine of inerrancy, though the same can be said of many British evangelicals as demonstrated by J. I. Packer's landmark book, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God.*[4] Evangelicals of the past saw themselves as heirs of the Reformation and naturally trumpeted *sola Scriptura* as one of their distinguishing doctrines, setting themselves apart from Roman Catholics. Today, this defining doctrine has come under fire and with it the Bible's truthfulness.

Fundamentalism and Neo-Evangelicalism

In order to understand evangelicalism today, we must return to the first half of the twentieth century, specifically fundamentalism's clash with modernist approaches to the Bible. George Marsden observes that between the 1890s and 1930s "many leaders of major Protestant denominations attempted to tone down the offenses to modern sensibilities of a Bible filled with miracles and a gospel that proclaimed human salvation from eternal damnation only through Christ's atoning work on the cross." Battle lines were drawn. "Fundamentalism was the response of traditionalist evangelicals who declared war on these modernizing trends," Marsden explains. While the war that ensued was fought over a variety of fronts, its struggle over the Bible was chief among them. "Modernists, influenced by higher criticism, emphasized the Bible's human origins; fundamentalists countered by affirming its inerrancy in history and science as well as in faith and doctrine."[5]

By the 1920s fundamentalists began to realize they were losing the battle in their denominations and schools. Reform from within seemed hopeless. Many separated, choosing not to cooperate with those they believed had compromised theologically. But what distinguished some fundamentalists was not merely their separation—this had been done before—but that they made separation an article of faith. Others, Marsden

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[3] Woodbridge and James, *Church History*, 792.

[4] In 1957 Gabriel Hebert published *Fundamentalism and the Church of God* (London: SCM, 1957), where he attacked British evangelicals for affirming inerrancy. In response, J. I. Packer wrote one of the most famous books defending biblical authority and inerrancy: *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958). Packer provided a basis for British evangelicalism's belief in the Bible's inerrancy.

[5] George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

notes, "did not insist on total ecclesiastical separation from modernism as a test of purity."[6] The seeds for conflict within fundamentalism had been planted.

Those fundamentalists who saw separating as absolutely essential, a mark of orthodoxy, became characterized by their disengagement with the culture.[7] Others grew dissatisfied with this approach. These individuals became known as Neo-Evangelicals, or New Evangelicals, at first seeking to reform fundamentalism from within but eventually making a permanent break with their fundamentalist brethren.[8] While they shared a common commitment to inerrancy, what set them apart was a proactive choice to be culturally engaged. Men like Harold John Ockenga (1905–85) and Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) sat in the driver's seat of this Neo-Evangelical locomotive, though others had a formative role as well.[9] They would not settle for the anti-intellectualism that had characterized some of the fundamentalists who came before them, but were resolved to be socially minded. And yet they were determined not to compromise theologically but to stand firm in defense of biblical authority and doctrinal orthodoxy.[10]

Fuller Seminary and Inerrancy

Harold Ockenga is particularly important not only because of his role in the National Association of Evangelicals but because he became the first president of Fuller Theological Seminary (1947), a pioneering institution at the start of the Neo-Evangelical movement. At the seminary's start, many were optimistic that the school would pave a middle way between modernists on the left and separatist fundamentalists on the right.[11] Ockenga recruited standout professors: Carl F. H. Henry, Everett Harrison, Wilbur Smith, and Harold Lindsell made up the first faculty and drew in students. Fuller Seminary stood out for many reasons, but at the core was its commitment to biblical inerrancy and confessional evangelical doctrine, coupled with its energetic engagement with the most pressing issues in Western culture.[12] Yet soon new winds would blow into Fuller, moving the school away from its original belief in an inerrant Bible.

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[6] Ibid., 7.

[7] Ibid., 76.

[8] On the complex history of how these labels, which were not so clear-cut early on, evolved, see ibid., 3, 10, 146–47; George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 233–36.

[9] For a recent study, see Owen Strachan, *Awakening the Evangelical Mind: An Intellectual History of the Neo-Evangelical Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

[10] Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 167–70, 172.

[11] Ibid., 67–68.

[12] Ibid., 61–63, 72–82.

Fuller's founding statement on Scripture read: "The books which form the canon of the Old and New Testaments as originally given are plenarily inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part. These books constitute the written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice."[13] Here we read a very strong affirmation of *sola Scriptura* and inerrancy. The phrase "in whole and in part" rules out any view that would argue that inerrancy applies only to the salvific message and not to the historical and scientific details of the text. Moreover, for Ockenga infallibility and total inerrancy were not opposed to each other in any way, but similar and complementary concepts, both of which were to be embraced.[14]

But a change in attitude toward the Bible would develop at Fuller in the 1960s, eventually resulting in the seminary rejecting "inerrancy," viewing it as an "inadequate expression of biblical inspiration while still holding to the authority of the Bible."[15] The seminary's search for a new president revealed that two opposing camps had evolved: conservative Neo-Evangelicals and progressive Neo-Evangelicals. On what has become known as "Black Saturday" (1962), the progressives argued that the seminary needed a new statement of faith. When Ockenga asked why, Daniel P. Fuller, professor of hermeneutics and son of Fuller Seminary cofounder and evangelist Charles Fuller, responded that the statement on inerrancy needed to be changed. "Dr. Ockenga, there are errors which cannot be explained by the original autographs. It is simply not historically feasible to say that these errors would disappear if we had the autographs."[16] Fuller argued that inerrancy can only refer to the salvific message of the Bible. When it came to cosmology or history, God had accommodated himself to the incorrect, mistaken assumptions of the ancient time period and its people. Fuller held that these errors do not hurt the message of the Bible. Fuller believed he was simply applying the historical method, basing his examination of Scripture upon empirical evidence, and this had led him to the conclusion that there were indeed errors in the text, though they occurred in non-revelational portions.[17]

Edward J. Carnell and Wilbur Smith answered back. Carnell believed that a strictly inductive approach to the Bible was philosophically harmful and dangerous. But what was the alternative? One "should come to the Bible with the hypothesis that it was indeed the word of God. Only then do we frankly admit that we have some unsolved

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[13] Ibid., 113.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Woodbridge and James, *Church History*, 809.

[16] Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 211.

[17] At the same time, Fuller was persistent that his view should not be equated with Barth's neo-orthodoxy.

problems."[18] Carnell finally said to Fuller, "My list of discrepancies is longer than yours, Dan Fuller. But that did not matter, because if we come to the Bible as the verbally inspired word of God we find that we have fewer major problems with our system than with any competing systems."[19] In his analysis, Marsden brilliantly pinpoints exactly why the conservatives could not agree with the progressives on this matter:

> In their view, inerrancy was the logical implication of the statement in 2 Timothy that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (3:16). God would not inspire an error, small or large. Furthermore, Jesus's use of the Old Testament implied that he regarded it as historically accurate in detail. In the end, if one said that parts of the Bible were inerrant and other parts had error, who was to decide which was which? What standard higher than the Bible itself was to be used? Christians would be left in a morass of subjectivism and fallible human opinion.[20]

Marsden's description is telling. For the conservatives, inerrancy and *sola Scriptura* were inseparable. To reject inerrancy meant one was now looking to a standard higher than the Bible itself. While for Catholics this standard is Tradition, for the progressives, argued the conservatives, this standard became their own human reason and methods of historical criticism. Conservative Neo-Evangelicals believed history was on their side, as it had repeatedly demonstrated the dangers of rejecting inerrancy. Countless schools, like Harvard and Princeton, began in the conservative camp only to transition out, some adopting Liberalism, others going so far as Unitarianism. As a result, a "vast empire lay in ruins." Rejecting inerrancy, it was argued, would lead down this slippery slope with no return.[21]

The events that followed "Black Saturday" were critical for the progressives. Daniel Fuller became dean and David Hubbard, president. Resignations followed. Wilbur Smith joined Kenneth Kantzer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, as did Gleason Archer, who was known for his defense of an Old Princeton view of inerrancy, a view no longer welcome at Fuller.[22] Harold Lindsell left and went to *Christianity Today*. Lindsell did not hide his reason for leaving. It was due to the seminary's "failure to maintain Article II of the Statement of Faith either in letter or in spirit."[23]

With inerrantists transitioning out, Fuller removed from its 1964–65 catalog the sentence stating that faculty had to sign the statement of faith "without mental reservation, and

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[18] Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 212.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 213–14.

[21] Ibid., 214.

[22] Ibid., 224.

[23] Quoted in ibid., 223.

any member who cannot assent agrees to withdraw from the institution."[24] This meant that while in the 1950s the majority of graduates at Fuller affirmed inerrancy, by the 1960s the majority of students now held a limited inerrancy position. Hubbard was moving the faculty and institution in a different direction. No longer did the public see Fuller Seminary as carrying on the legacy of Old Princeton for the twentieth century.[25]

In 1972 Fuller changed its confessional statement (and stance) on Scripture. The new statement read:

Scripture is an essential part and trustworthy record of this divine self-disclosure. All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. They are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through them in living power.[26]

Notice that while the statement refers to the written word of God as the "only infallible rule of faith and practice," it makes no mention of inerrancy. No longer was an affirmation of inerrancy required to teach at Fuller.

The tug-of-war between inerrantists and limited inerrantists did not end there. In 1976, Harold Lindsell published *The Battle for the Bible*, including a chapter called "The Strange Case of Fuller Theological Seminary." The book was dedicated to Archer, Carnell, Henry, and Smith. Harold Ockenga, then president of Gordon-Conwell Divinity School, wrote the foreword, and Billy Graham wrote a commendation. Lindsell stressed that belief in inerrancy was fundamental to being an evangelical. And he did not hold back in calling to account Daniel Fuller, Paul Jewett, and George Ladd. Lindsell put the spotlight on Daniel Fuller in particular because he believed Fuller and others had been dishonest in signing a creed they did not believe in, eventually rejecting it publicly.[27]

Hubbard and company "deplored Lindsell's 'unbiblical view of Scripture'" and "defended the seminary's right to be called 'evangelical.'"[28] Others also prepared responses. Jack Rogers, a Fuller professor, edited *Biblical Authority* (1977) and later wrote *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: A Historical Approach* (1979) with Donald K.

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[24] Quoted in ibid., 224.

[25] Ibid., 245.

[26] Fuller Theological Seminary, "Statement of Faith" (www.fuller.edu/about/mission-and-values/statement-of-faith/).

[27] Not all inerrantists agreed with Lindsell's approach. For example, see Carl Henry's opinion of Lindsell's work in Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 288; Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 117.

[28] Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 282–83.

McKim.[29] Rogers and McKim argued that inerrancy was the invention of rationalistic Protestant scholasticism in the seventeenth century (e.g., Francis Turretin), and in the nineteenth century Old Princeton mistakenly equated inerrancy with orthodoxy.[30] In their view, inerrancy is a doctrine that is absent from the time of Augustine to Calvin. According to Rogers and McKim, the church during this time believed that the Bible is authoritative in spiritual matters (i.e., infallible in faith and practice), but the notion of inerrancy in *all* that Scripture addresses is a foreign idea, a late invention.

John Woodbridge responded by publishing *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (1982).[31] Woodbridge, the historian from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, argued that Rogers and McKim had seriously misread and misinterpreted not only the Protestant Scholastics and Old Princeton but the entire history of the church. The *concept* of inerrancy has a long and enduring pedigree that goes all the way back to the patristic period. Woodbridge argued that it was not the conservatives who had read Warfield back into the fathers and Reformers, but Rogers and McKim who had read Karl Barth back into the fathers and the Reformers![32]

Ever since this debate, conservative evangelicals have argued that one cannot make a historical case that the phrase "faith and practice" should limit what we understand by *sola Scriptura*. To say that the Bible is our final and infallible authority in faith and practice has been used by some to say that biblical authority and inerrancy do not apply to matters in Scripture such as history and science.[33] The opposing argument goes something like this: The Bible is authoritative and true *only* when it is talking about faith and practice (i.e., spiritual matters), and this is what the church has always meant by *sola Scriptura* and

[29] Jack B. Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977); Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

[30] Rogers and McKim were dependent on the work of Ernest Sandeen, *The Origins of Fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). See also Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

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

[32] On this point, besides Woodbridge, see also Richard A. Muller, *PRRD*, 2:155; D. A. Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 10–14.

[33] This is a faulty assumption. It assumes that if we say the Bible is infallible in its main message, we are simultaneously precluding its infallibility in other areas. Again, this is an illegitimate jump in logic. There is no reason why the Bible cannot be both infallible in its main message and in other details as well. For a refutation of this type of logic in Rogers/McKim, see Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*. We will explore this issue in depth in chapter 8.

infallibility.[34] But such a move misrepresents *sola Scriptura* and the history of the Reformation. The phrase "faith and practice" was never used in a limiting way by the Reformers, but was designed to be an "all-embracing rubric."[35] The polemic the Reformers wielded was meant to dismantle Rome's elevation of tradition and papal authority. It was not meant to limit, restrict, or shrink the scope of biblical authority in the spheres of religion, history, and nature. As Woodbridge has demonstrated so thoroughly, it never would have crossed the mind of Protestants to "use this expression as a phrase circumscribing the extent of biblical infallibility."[36] No, such a "modern disjunction" would have been alien to them.[37]

Setting the Record Straight: Faith and Science

Woodbridge's point becomes all the more apparent when we consider the infamous controversy over science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a controversy Woodbridge himself interacts with in his debate with Rogers and McKim. Too often Christians today buy into the "conflict myth," the popular belief that Christianity and science are inherently antithetical to one another.[38] They also buy into what I would call the "faith and practice myth." According to this myth, the church has always believed that the Bible's authority and its inerrancy extend only to spiritual matters, not to matters of history and science.

No story has been so appealed to in order to sustain these myths than that of Galileo. In 1616 the Roman Catholic Church officially rejected the Copernican theory, a new and novel theory advocating heliocentrism.[39] Then, in 1633 Galileo was put on trial by the Inquisition for heresy since he advocated this theory, which resulted in time in prison.

On the surface, this appears to be a conflict between faith and science. Though that may be a popular interpretation, it is a mistaken one. If we dig deeper, we discover that this is actually a conflict between old science and new science. In fact, some have gone so far as

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[34] Besides Rogers and McKim, for an example of this type of argument, see Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

[35] Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 5.

[36] Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 73 (see especially 72–80).

[37] Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 5.

[38] This phrase is used by Ard Louis, professor of theoretical physics at Oxford University, in an interview conducted by Eric Metaxes for Socrates in the City. See http://www.socratesinthecity.com/video/ard-louis-science-and-faith.

[39] For a retelling of the story in fuller detail, see Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 12–13; Kirsten Birkett, "Science and Scripture," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 949–56; William R. Shea, *Galileo's Intellectual Revolution* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972); Giorgio de Santillana, *The Crime of Galileo* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1958).

to call the church "pro-science." Kirsten Birkett writes, "This was not a battle between an anti-science church and a pro-science individual. On the contrary, it could be better characterized as a pro-science church, led by the the academy that taught and embraced that science, against an eccentric maverick."[40] That Galileo's theory proved right in the end does not "change the true story: this is a case study in what happens when old science is threatened by new data, and the institutions that have endorsed that science are too slow to change."[41]

What we are calling "old science" is geocentrism, the belief that the Earth is at the center of the universe and the sun and planets revolve around the Earth. The "new science" is heliocentrism, the belief that the sun is at the center and the Earth revolves around the sun. This new science can be traced back to the year 1543 when Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus argued that the sun, not the Earth, was at the center.[42] Since the theory had very little scientific proof, it proved to be a minority view, as many other astronomers remained unpersuaded.[43] We must recognize that the received view was well established, relying upon Aristotle's impressive explanation of the laws of the universe. So the conflict that developed proved to be one between the long-held position of Aristotelian physics (i.e., the old science) and an entirely new system that lacked proper support thus far from the realm of physics.[44] With that in mind, the church's decision in regard to Galileo seemed the responsible one, especially given her loyalty to Thomas Aquinas who was very much reliant upon Aristotelian philosophy for his theology.[45] In the end, the conflict was not about the church opposing science, but about the church defending Aristotelian science.[46]

Now, what does all this have to do with the extent of biblical infallibility? Long story short, in a tragic yet complicated scheme to alarm the ecclesiastical authorities, Galileo's enemies accused him of contradicting the Bible, which they assumed supported Aristotelian science in its descriptions of the universe. In 1613 and 1615 Galileo wrote two

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[40] Birkett, "Science and Scripture," 950.

[41] Ibid.

[42] He made this argument in his work *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* ("The revolution of the heavenly spheres"). His theory still suffered some inaccuracy, for he thought that the planets moved in a *circle* around the center.

[43] Lacking later knowledge concerning the laws of motion and the theory of gravity, Copernicus could not explain how or why the Earth moved. See Birkett, "Science and Scripture," 951.

[44] On Aristotelian physics, see Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Fabric of the Heavens* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1961); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

[45] See Birkett, "Science and Scripture," 951–52; Jerzy Dobrzycki, ed., *The Reception of Copernicus' Heliocentric Theory* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972).

[46] Birkett, "Science and Scripture," 954.

letters, a *Letter to Castelli* and then a *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*, explaining how the Bible should be properly interpreted. In his *Letter to Castelli* Galileo addresses the issue of biblical infallibility. He writes, "[It was properly propounded to you by Madam Christina] and conceded and established by you, that Holy Scripture could never lie or err, but that its decrees are of absolute and inviolable truth." Galileo then adds, "I should only have added that although Scripture can indeed not err, nevertheless some of its interpreters and expositors may sometimes err in various ways, one of which may be very serious and quite frequent [that is] when they would base themselves always on the literal meanings of the words."[47] Notice, Galileo affirmed the *total* inerrancy of Scripture, even in regard to how the Bible spoke about the universe. The issue, for Galileo, was not inerrancy but biblical interpretation. The real question was how the Bible's genres were to be read, not whether the Bible's authority extended to its description of the universe.[48]

This becomes all the more apparent when we consider Galileo's contemporary, Johannes Kepler (1571–1630). Kepler argued for divine accommodation, asserting that the Bible describes the world as it appears to us. The Bible should not be read like a scientific textbook. Yet its statements about the natural world truthfully depict the universe *as it appears*.[49] Kepler was not trying to disprove the Bible; on the contrary he sought to show that the theory of Copernicus was consistent with the Scriptures. Had it been proven that the theory contradicted the Bible, he gladly would have dispensed with the theory.[50]

It was not until later, in the seventeenth century, that the Bible was barred from speaking to matters of science. It is not accidental that those who advocated separation of the Bible and science were also those who rejected total infallibility, but we should not conclude

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[47] Cited in Stillman Drake, *Galileo at Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 224. There is debate as to whether Galileo really believed Scripture's voice should extend beyond spiritual matters. At first, in his *Letter to Castelli*, he seems to answer in the negative. However, later on in 1615 he actually answers in the affirmative, saying, "Yet even in those propositions which are not matters of faith, this authority [of the Bible] ought to be preferred over that of all human writings which are supported only by bare assertions or probable arguments, and not set forth in a demonstrative way." He goes on to argue that "in the books of the sages of this world there are contained some physical truths which are soundly demonstrated, and others that are merely stated; as to the former, it is the office of wise divines to show that they do not contradict the Holy Scriptures. And as to the propositions which are stated but not rigorously demonstrated, anything contrary to the Bible involved by them must be held undoubtably false and should be proved so by every possible means" (Stillman Drake, ed., *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo* [New York: Doubleday, 1957], 183, 194). Some have argued that Galileo only changed his view due to pressure from the authorities. Others disagree. On this debate, see Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 91.
[48] Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 12–13; Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 90–99.
[49] Woodbridge and James, *Church History*, 340. It is important to note, as Woodbridge and James do, that this appeal to divine accommodation is very similar to Augustine and Calvin.
[50] John D. Woodbridge, "Does the Bible Teach 'Science'?," *BSac* 142 (1985): 199.

that this was the historic approach. As Carson warns, "Those who now wish to affirm the Bible's infallibility in the spheres of 'faith and practice' but not in all areas on which it speaks are doubly removed from the mainstream of historical antecedents."[51] Contrary to Rogers and McKim, the science debates in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries demonstrate that neither side believed Scripture was limited to merely spiritual matters. If it was assumed that the Bible did not address scientific issues, then the debate never would have ensued in the first place. So it is critical to explode the myth that one had to choose between a "completely infallible Bible" and a Bible "whose infallibility was limited to faith and practice."[52] The real issue, according to thinkers like Kepler and Galileo, was not whether the Bible was totally infallible, but how one should interpret this totally infallible Bible on such topics as the universe.

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

The debate over inerrancy did not end in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1978 a group of evangelicals came together to draft a statement defending the inerrancy of Scripture in light of the many challenges it was facing. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) consisted of more than three hundred of some of the most notable representatives in evangelicalism. The executive council included individuals such as Gleason L. Archer, James M. Boice, Edmund P. Clowney, John H. Gerstner, Kenneth S. Kantzer, James I. Packer, Francis A. Schaeffer, and R. C. Sproul. The advisory board brought together figureheads such as Greg L. Bahnsen, Henri A. G. Blocher, W. A. Criswell, Gordon R. Lewis, Harold Lindsell, John F. MacArthur, Roger R. Nicole, Harold J. Ockenga, and John F. Walvoord, among others.[53]

What is commendable is that the signatories of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI) came together across denominational lines.[54] The product was a bold statement affirming Scripture's truthfulness and reliability, one that still remains relevant today. Its effect was visibly seen as these men went back to their denominations (e.g., Southern Baptist Convention; Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod) to bring about reformation.[55]

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[51] Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 15.

[52] Woodbridge, "Does the Bible Teach 'Science'?," 202.

[53] James M. Boice, ed., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 12.

[54] Stephen J. Nichols and Eric T. Brandt, *Ancient Word, Changing Worlds: The Doctrine of Scripture in a Modern Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 71–72.

[55] Note the host of publications that were birthed after ICBI met. See edited works in bibliography by Boice, Hannah, Lewis and Demarest, and Nicole and Michaels.

The preamble of the CSBI reads: "Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority." *Sola Scriptura* and inerrancy go hand in hand. Very much in the vein of the Reformers, those who signed the statement prayed that it would be "used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the church in its faith, life and mission."[56]

So what does the statement say about inerrancy? The CSBI begins with a short statement that connects Scripture to the character of God: "God, who is Himself truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself." Furthermore, those human authors who wrote Scripture were "prepared and superintended by His Spirit." Therefore, God's Word is "of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches." Since it is "wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives."[57] The point is clear: *all* of Scripture is God-breathed and inerrant.

The articles of the CSBI begin with *sola Scriptura*. Sounding much like the Protestant Reformers, it states that Scripture is the authoritative Word of God and it does not receive its authority from the church or from tradition. In contrast to Rome, the church is subordinate to Scripture, as are church creeds and councils.[58] The CSBI stands in contrast not only to Rome but to neo-orthodoxy as well. It states: "We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity."[59]

Additionally, the CSBI affirmed verbal, plenary inspiration: "The whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration." Much in contrast to, say, Fuller Seminary, it denied that "the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not of the

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CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

[56] "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 493.

CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

[57] Ibid., 494.

CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

[58] Ibid., 494 (articles 1, 2).

CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

[59] Ibid., 494–95 (article 3).

CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

whole."[60] And in Articles 11 and 12 the CSBI rejected the false dichotomy many have made between *infallibility* and *inerrancy*, whereby these two terms are set over against each other. While the two may be distinguished, they cannot be set in opposition, for both affirm Scripture's truthfulness and reliability in everything it addresses. Both attest to the fact that Scripture is free from any "falsehood, fraud, or deceit."[61] Article 12 states: "We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science."[62] Therefore, it will not do to say that Scripture is infallible and inerrant in its spiritual message but not in its scientific and historical claims.[63]

The CSBI was also attuned to the objection that the human aspect of Scripture made inerrancy impossible. To the contrary, it states that God "utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers" without overriding their personalities.[64] At the same time, the Spirit's superintendence of these human writers "guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write." By no means, therefore, did the "finitude or fallenness" of the biblical authors introduce "distortion or falsehood into God's Word."[65]

While the CSBI says far more, it is legitimate to say that its argument for inerrancy is not to be taken lightly. The authors believed that rejecting the doctrine would have serious consequences. Biblical authority, they wrote, 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."[66] CSBI, therefore, inseparably connects inerrancy to authority, so that to reject the former is to do much harm to the latter.

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[60] Ibid., 496 (article 6).
CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy
[61] Ibid., 496 (article 12).
[62] Ibid., 496 (articles 11, 12).
[63] Ibid., 496 (article 12): "We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood."
CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy
[64] Ibid., 495 (article 8).
[65] Ibid., 495–96 (article 9).
CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy
[66] See point 5 of "A Short Statement," in ibid., 494.
CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

For evangelicals today, the CSBI is still taken with utmost seriousness, in some cases even serving as the focal point in evangelical debates.[67] While some argue that the CSBI should be rejected, other evangelicals and institutions today believe it is biblically rooted and doctrinally faithful in describing what Scripture says concerning itself. For these evangelicals, inerrancy is part of the very DNA of evangelicalism. Without it, evangelicalism is no longer evangelicalism. R. Albert Mohler's confession is refreshingly honest and on target: "I am quite certain that without inerrancy evangelicalism will cease to be evangelical in any real sense. For, at the end of the day, inerrancy is the single issue that truly distinguishes evangelicalism from liberal Protestantism."[68]

The Postmodern Turn: Dancing on the Tomb of God

What can we say about the present state of biblical authority? While several movements could be highlighted, the trend that has taken prominence over the past several decades has been postmodernism. Postmodernism exploded in influence at the end of the twentieth century, and while some argue that we are now a post-postmodern culture, that claim is contested. Still, as is typical, what takes off in the academy sometimes takes decades to catch on in the church. Many churches today are now suffering the collateral damage of the postmodern bombs that were dropped on the Bible in the late twentieth century.[69]

To understand postmodernism, we must return to the Age of Reason. Some have argued that the Enlightenment's elevation of the individual (and reason) can be traced back to René Descartes (1596–1650), who doubted everything until he came to the one thing he could not doubt, the thinking self. Hence his famous dictum: *Cogito ergo sum*—I think, therefore I am.[70] In his search for methodological certainty, Descartes "cut the cord of

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CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

[67] The CSBI is the document under debate in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). Contributors include R. Albert Mohler Jr., Peter Enns, Michael F. Bird, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and John R. Franke.

CSBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

[68] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Response to Peter Enns," in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views*, 120.

[69] To illustrate my point, my first teaching post was at a liberal arts university, and many times I encountered postmodernism in the college classroom from lay-level students who were usually no older than forty years old. Some of these individuals planned to lead churches. Even if they didn't know all the labels, postmodern presuppositions were ingrained in their thinking and were brought to the biblical text. I am convinced we will feel postmodernism's effects for years to come, even after the philosophy of postmodernism is out of vogue.

[70] René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, part 4, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 24.

reason from faith and revelation."[71] Descartes, whether he meant to or not, turned the human person into an autonomous rational subject.[72] Consequently, the Enlightenment project that followed assumed man could obtain cognitive certainty due to the objective nature of knowledge itself. All reality was subordinated to the test of reason. The world, it was thought, could be observed and analyzed from a standpoint of total neutrality. Accompanied by the methods of science, nothing stood in the way of the autonomous rational thinker.[73] This Enlightenment method demonstrates how highly reason was elevated and how much confidence man placed in his rational abilities.[74]

Many of those captivated by modernity assumed a *realist* or *objectivist* concept of knowledge, truth, and the world. Such a view continues today, for most people believe that the world in front of them is objectively real.[75] In other words, the world, by nature, possesses structure and order, apart from mankind's involvement. When it comes to man, his intellect can precisely image reality around him, and his use of language can accurately describe reality as it is.[76] The realist-objectivist view is grounded upon the *correspondence theory of truth*, which believes that when someone makes an assertion, it must be true or false. Furthermore, we are able to decide whether such an assertion is true or false simply by comparing and contrasting the assertion with the world around us.[77] Enlightenment thinkers believed that with such an understanding of knowledge and truth, man can acquire objective, certain, and reliable knowledge of the world.

Where many Enlightenment thinkers departed from Christianity was in thinking that this quest for objective, universal truth and knowledge of the world can be done, and should be done, apart from God's Word. They turned Augustine's and Anselm's motto upside down so that it read, "I understand in order to believe," rather than "I believe in order to understand."[78] As we have seen in the previous chapter, man's reason became autonomous; God's Word became unnecessary.

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[71] Mark S. Gignilliat, *Old Testament Criticism: From Benedict Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 22.

[72] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 3; Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, vol. 1, *From the Ancient World to the Age of Enlightenment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 184.

[73] Grenz, *Postmodernism*, 4.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 40–41.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 41.

[78] Stephen J. Wellum, "Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 162.

Postmodernism's Nucleus

Though modernity would come under severe criticism with the rise of postmodernism, it is important to recognize that these two movements still have much in common. Both affirmed the autonomy of human reason, albeit in distinct ways. Nevertheless, postmodernism significantly differentiated itself from modernity. For our purposes, we will limit ourselves to just two characteristics that summarize the postmodern turn.

First, postmodernism is characterized by *relativism*. For the postmodernist, there is no such thing as *objective* truth. No longer can one believe that there is truth that corresponds to reality. Richard Rorty says, "Truth is established neither by the correspondence of an assertion with objective reality nor by the internal coherence of the assertions themselves."[79] Stanley Grenz notes how Jacques Derrida, the father of "deconstruction," as well as Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty, rejected the Enlightenment project when they abandoned "the quest for a unified grasp of objective reality." Their view asserts that "the world has no center, only differing viewpoints and perspectives."[80] No one text (including the Bible) gives us *the* worldview that interprets reality. Instead, postmodernity offers only "dueling texts."[81] We are left, then, with a multitude of interpretations, each being equally valid. Truth is relative and subjective. Each person's "truth" is merely the product of the community he was birthed from.[82] To claim to know *the* truth, or to possess the *only* truth, is the deadliest, most arrogant sin in the postmodern universe. In regard to religion, such epistemological relativism leads to religious pluralism in which every religious text is equally as true as any other, regardless of how incompatible they may be with one another. Such pluralism lends itself to a relativistic pragmatism. As the popular expressions go, "What is right for us might not be right for you," and "What is wrong in our context might in your context be acceptable or even preferable."[83]

Second, postmodernism is characterized by *deconstructionism*. Structuralism is the belief that "language is a social construct and that people develop literary documents—texts—in an attempt to provide structures of meaning that will help them make sense out of the meaningless of their experience." Such a view assumes that a society has a "common, invariant structure."[84] However, for the *poststructuralist* or *deconstructionist*, meaning "is not inherent in a text itself," but "emerges only as the interpreter enters into dialogue

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[79] Grenz is describing Richard Rorty. Grenz, *Postmodernism*, 6.

[80] Ibid., 7.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 8.

[83] Ibid., 15.

[84] Ibid., 5.

with the text."[85] And "because the meaning of a text is dependent on the perspective of the one who enters into dialogue with it, it has as many meanings as it has readers (or readings)."[86] Poststructuralists like Derrida see structuralism as "just another attempt, like that of Descartes, to stave off the threat of relativism by finding some stable ground for meaning."[87] The poststructuralists respond with a startling news flash: There is *no* stable ground for meaning anymore!

What happens when deconstructionism is applied to one's view of the universe? Answer: there is "no one meaning of the world, no transcendent center to reality as a whole."[88] Most fundamentally, therefore, postmodernism is an "*incredulity toward metanarratives,*" as Jean-Francois Lyotard famously concluded.[89] Or as Terry Eagleton has put it, postmodernism "signals the death" of metanarratives.[90] No worldview can give us *the* objective interpretation of reality. There may be many interpretations of reality, but no one interpretation can claim to have the God's-eye point of view.

Language plays a key role in deconstructionism. For the Enlightenment man, truth corresponds to the objective reality that we perceive and analyze. For the postmodernist, we do not approach an objective reality, but construct a reality of our own making, and we do this through language. Grenz explains:

> The Enlightenment realist view also assumes that a simple, one-to-one relationship exists between the bits of language we use to describe the world and the bits of the world we seek to know. Twentieth-century linguists argue that this is a faulty assumption. We do not simply match bits of language to bits of the world, they say, nor does any given language provide an accurate "map" of the world. Languages are human social conventions that map the world in a variety of ways, depending on the context in which we are speaking.[91]

Ludwig Wittgenstein's "language games," says Grenz, have taught us that the way we use words determines how we conceive the world around us. Postmodernists, therefore,

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[85] Ibid., 6.

[86] Ibid. Vanhoozer defines deconstruction as a "painstaking taking-apart, a peeling away of the various layers—historical, rhetorical, ideological—of distinctions, concepts, texts, and whole philosophies, whose aim is to expose the arbitrary linguistic nature of their original construction.… Deconstruction is thus best understood as a kind of *undoing*" (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 52).

[87] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 52.

[88] Grenz, *Postmodernism*, 6.

[89] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), iv.

[90] Terry Eagleton, "Awakening from Modernity," *Times Literary Supplement* (February 20, 1987): 194.

[91] Grenz, *Postmodernism*, 42.

have adopted a *nonrealist, constructivist* understanding of knowledge and truth. Language, they argue, actually creates and constructs reality, and since society is always in flux, "meanings—and, as a consequence, the world as we see it through language—are constantly shifting as well."[92] In this light, two key presuppositions of postmodernism can be identified:

1. Postmoderns view all explanations of reality as constructions that are useful but not objectively true.

2. Postmoderns deny that we have the ability to step outside our constructions of reality.[93]

"Useful" is the key word. Since each one of us is trapped by our own constructions of reality, and since these constructions are not objectively true, their value is not in their veracity but in their pragmatic benefit. The question is not whether our construction is true, but whether it is useful. As Stanley Fish argues, there is no truth in the world just waiting to be discovered. Instead, truth is determined by the community, and the community decides what is true for them based on what seems good to them.[94] And when it comes to reading a text, meaning's origin is not to be found in the author of the text, but in the reader who invents the meaning.[95] Our mission, therefore, is to deconstruct meaning. "If language really does construct meaning (as opposed to revealing an objective meaning already present in the world), then the work of the scholar is to take apart ('deconstruct') this meaning-constructing process. By deconstructing influential concepts, perhaps we can break their control over our thoughts and actions."[96]

What happens when a nonrealist view is applied to a written text, like the Bible? We end up with *hermeneutical nonrealism*. As Kevin Vanhoozer explains, for the *hermeneutical realist* "there is something prior to interpretation, something 'there' in the text, which can be known and to which the interpreter is accountable."[97] Meaning, he adds, is "prior to and independent of the process of interpretation."[98] Not so for hermeneutical nonrealists,

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[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., 43: "Because we cannot view the world apart from the structures we bring to it, the argument goes, we cannot measure our theories and propositions in comparison to an objective, external world. To the contrary, the theories we devise create the different worlds we inhabit."

[94] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 13. Vanhoozer calls Fish (and Richard Rorty) "The Users" who hold to "Neo-pragmatism." Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 55–56.

[95] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 56.

[96] Grenz, *Postmodernism*, 43.

[97] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 26.

[98] Ibid., 48.

such as Derrida or Fish. They deny "that meaning precedes interpretive activity; the truth of an interpretation depends on the response of the reader."[99] As a result, biblical authority is done away with. In fact, authority in any text is done away with. It has to be since it is not the text but the reader (or community) who now governs and creates meaning. "The text, again, becomes only a mirror or an echo chamber in which we see ourselves and hear our own voices."[100] Or as Nietzsche said, "There are no facts, only interpretations."[101] Some have concluded that postmoderns like Derrida celebrate "the arbitrariness of meaning and truth by dancing on the tomb of God."[102]

Finally, we see that hermeneutical nonrealism is *anti-authority*. To believe that meaning comes from the author of a text or from the text itself is to succumb to hermeneutical slavery. For postmodernists, the "age of the author" is "the age of oppression."[103] "The 'real'—the stable order of things defined by words with stable meanings—hinders human freedom."[104] If one's interpretation of a text must align with the authorial intent, then the reader is servant to the author, who is master of his text. A postmodernist believes we must escape such bondage. No longer can nor should the author be the "lord of textual meaning," but the "author must die if the text is to live and the reader is to be liberated."[105] Vanhoozer explains, "The death of the author becomes a necessary step in refusing to assign a 'real' meaning to the text.… No longer reduced to a single message with a single correct interpretation, the text is opened to a pluralism of readings; meaning is effectively destabilized, and authority withers on the textual vine."[106]

Naturally, postmodernism is a self-professing enemy to *biblical* authority, which not only asserts that the reader is subservient to the author, to God as the divine author, but also holds that meaning and truth are determined by God, not by us, the readers. Postmodernism denies that there is an authoritative presence behind the biblical text and instead chooses *nihilism*—"the denial of meaning, authority, and truth."[107] God will not deconstruct us, cries the postmodernist, but we shall deconstruct God! What is left after

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[99] Ibid., 26 (cf. 48–49).

[100] Ibid., 24.

[101] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 481. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 58.

[102] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 50. Vanhoozer has in mind critiques such as Brian D. Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 224. But note the many divergent interpretations of Derrida described by Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 51–52.

[103] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 72.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 69.

[106] Ibid., 70.

[107] Ibid., 73.

deconstruction? A dead author, and in the Bible's case, a God who is dead.[108] The consequences could not be more devastating for a doctrine like *sola Scriptura*. With biblical authority undone, postmodernists

> effectively strip the Bible of any stable meaning so that it cannot state a fact, issue a command, or make a promise. Furthermore, without the author to serve as touchstone of the distinction between meaning and significance, every interpretation becomes just as authorized a version as another. A text that cannot be set over against its commentary is no authority at all. Finally, biblical authority is undermined by the instability of meaning because, if nothing specific is said, the text cannot call for any specific response. Interpreters can give neither obedience nor belief to texts that lack specificity. If there is no meaning in the text, then there is nothing to which the reader can be held accountable.[109]

The Postconservative Reconstruction of *Sola Scriptura*

The critiques raised by postmodernism have resulted in some positive (and necessary) outcomes, and it is fair to say that there is some truth in postmodernism's epistemology. If postmodernism has taught us anything, it is that we cannot retreat back to modernism. Postmodernism rightfully exposed modernism's dependence on the myth of neutrality as well as modernism's overreliance on reason, that reason is autonomous, supreme, and omnicompetent. Postmodernism has demonstrated that each person comes to a text with set presuppositions, and we interpret texts out of an entire framework of preunderstanding.[110] Additionally, postmodernism has helpfully rebuked modernism for its elevation of individualism. Instead, postmodernism shows us the importance and value of community, a value that should resonate with Christians since the Bible highlights the significance of the interpretive community in the context of the local church. Postmodernism, whether it intended to or not, has helped Christians to see that modernism is no "sanctuary for the gospel."[111]

Yet postmodernism itself is plagued by massive problems. If true, postmodernism would spell the "death of God" as Nietzsche, the nonrealist, predicted. The God of the Bible not only speaks, but claims to speak *the truth*, even sending his Son who is the way, the truth, and the light (John 14:6), the Logos who speaks the truth with authority (John 1:1), a truth that liberates the enslaved (John 8:32). Historic Christianity has argued that Scripture hands to us not just any narrative, but *the* metanarrative that interprets reality and judges

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[108] Ibid., 72.

[109] Ibid., 86.

[110] D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 189.

[111] Ibid.

all other competing narratives. This claim lies at the heart of *sola Scriptura* and the Bible's claim to authority. The Bible gives to us the supreme, final, truthful, objective, clear, and sufficient metanarrative, and this claim makes *sola Scriptura* offensive to the postmodernist mind. For many evangelicals, postmodernism and historic Christianity could not be more antithetical.

Nevertheless, some evangelicals believe postmodernism has something to offer. Accepting the label "postconservative," these evangelicals believe postmodernism is right in rejecting a realist-objectivist (i.e., foundationalist) view of knowledge, truth, and the world. Its advocates are diverse, but postconservatism is represented in the work of Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke.[112]

Grenz and Franke side with postmodernism's rejection of a realist-objectivist (i.e., foundationalist) understanding of knowledge and the world, and instead embrace a constructionist view (i.e., postfoundationalist view). They argue that no one possesses a God's-eye point of view, one that is objective. Language, including theological language, does not provide us with an objective lens through which we gain true, certain knowledge of the world. Language does not objectively picture reality or correspond to reality as it is, and our assertions do not provide us with objective truth claims about reality.[113]

Christians through the centuries have affirmed that Scripture, as God-breathed, is first-order language, and our theological formulation is second-order language. If the interpreter's theological formulation is based on Scripture, then it is true and trustworthy. *Sola Scriptura* is assumed in this entire hermeneutical process. Grenz and Franke seem to deny that one can move objectively from Scripture to theological formulation, and they are uncomfortable with the evangelical who draws theological conclusions based upon his exegesis of Scripture, only to believe that these conclusions are biblically accurate and definitive. The postfoundationalism of Grenz and Franke discards the belief that the Christian has in Scripture an "objective revelational foundation" from which he can draw sure theological conclusions.[114]

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[112] We will focus strictly on Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). However, one should also consult Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville: Abindgon, 2009); idem, "Scripture, Tradition and Authority: Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of *Sola Scriptura*," in Bacote et al., *Evangelicals and Scripture*, 192–210; idem, "Recasting Inerrancy: The Bible as Witness to Missional Plurality," in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views*, 259–87.
[113] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 23–54.
[114] Ibid., 49–51. This wording comes from Wellum, "Postconservatism," 172–74.

While at first appearing to affirm *sola Scriptura*, Grenz and Franke eventually scrap the traditional understanding of the formal principle. Scripture is inspired and authoritative only in the sense that the Spirit speaks to the community through the Bible, not because the Bible is inherently God-breathed.[115] It "is not the Bible as a book that is authoritative," they argue, "but the Bible as the instrumentality of the Spirit; the biblical message spoken by the Spirit through the text is theology's norming norm."[116] Again, sounding very Barthian: "The authority of scripture does not ultimately rest with any quality that inheres in the text itself but with the work of the Spirit who speaks in and through the text. Scripture is authoritative because it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks."[117] Therefore, the entire Reformation debate over authority is misguided, for "neither Scripture nor tradition is inherently authoritative in the foundationalist sense of providing self-evident, noninferential, incorrigible grounds for constructing theological assertions," but both derive their authority from the Spirit and are very much dependent upon each other.[118]

Not only are there three sources for theological formulation (Scripture, tradition, and culture), but the latter two appear to be just as essential and authoritative as the first.[119] The community is needed and necessary, along with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to make Scripture whole.[120] Since Grenz and Franke elevate these other norms to the level of Scripture, their affirmation of *sola Scriptura* fumbles out, somewhat tongue in cheek:

> Yet, while acknowledging the significance of sola scriptura as establishing the principle that canonical scripture is the *norma normans normata* (the norm with no norm over it), it is also true that in another sense scriptura is never *sola*. Scripture does not stand alone as the sole source in the task of theological construction or as the sole basis on which the Christian faith has developed historically. Rather scripture functions in an ongoing and dynamic relationship with the Christian tradition, as well as with the cultural milieu from which particular readings of the text emerge.[121]

In what sense, then, is Scripture the determining norm? For Grenz and Franke, the *text* of Scripture is not the determining norm, but only its *message*. This follows from their belief that the text of Scripture is *not* to be equated with the Word of God.[122] Scripture is the

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[115] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

[116] Ibid., 69.

[117] Ibid., 114–15.

[118] Ibid., 117.

[119] On these three, see ibid., 64–68, 102–15.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid., 112.

[122] Ibid., 70–72.

determining norm only in the sense that the Spirit uses the message of Scripture to impact the community.[123]

But even here the situation is far more complicated, for the meaning of the text is not restricted to the biblical author's intent. Following French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Grenz and Franke believe that once the biblical author has finished his text, the text "takes on a life of its own."[124] The Spirit, they explain, is not bound to authorial intent when appropriating the text to the community's contemporary situation.[125] How the Spirit works through the text, therefore, is not restricted to the biblical text. The community's job is to listen to how the Spirit might be speaking today through the biblical message.[126] We must remember, say Grenz and Franke, that the Spirit is speaking to us today not only through Scripture but also through tradition and culture. Scripture, tradition, and culture, they assert, all speak together to the community, each being equally significant.[127]

The Evangelical Response to Postconservatism

How have evangelicals responded to postconservatism? At the start of the twenty-first century, one of the most instructive critiques can be seen in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, edited by Erickson, Helseth, and Taylor, a book incorporating chapters by fourteen evangelicals from diverse evangelical denominations. Stephen Wellum's chapter on biblical authority is particularly representative of evangelicals dissatisfied with a postconservative view of Scripture.

Wellum agrees with Grenz and Franke that postmodernism "has been helpful in pointing out the inherent problems of modernism, namely, its hubris in thinking that finite human beings are self-sufficient, autonomous subjects who can discover, on their own apart from God and his revelation, truth in the metanarrative sense of universality and objectivity."[128] The best of the Christian tradition—thinkers like Herman Bavinck, Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry—have rejected such an approach. But Grenz and Franke's reliance on postmodernism as an alternative is equally disastrous, for it has the same starting point: human autonomy. In other words,

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[123] Ibid., 74: "If the final authority in the church is the Holy Spirit speaking through scripture, then theology's norming norm is the message the Spirit declares through the text."

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid., 74–75.

[126] Ibid., 74–90.

[127] Ibid., 161–63.

[128] Wellum, "Postconservatism," 186.

postmodernism falls into the same trap as modernism precisely because it does not begin with God and his revelation to mankind.[129]

Furthermore, Grenz and Franke fail to distinguish between *modernist* foundationalism and *biblical* foundationalism. "A scriptural foundationalism is *not* grounded in the finite human subject, as both modernism and postmodernism attempt to do, but instead it is rooted and grounded in the Bible's own presentation of the triune God—to use the famous words of Francis Schaeffer, 'the God who is there.' "[130] It is simply a mistake to assume that knowledge in the biblical foundationalism framework is the same view of knowledge adhered to by modernism. Unlike the latter, the former is rooted in the sovereign Lord, who is omniscient and has created his image bearers for the purpose of revealing himself to them. In short, Grenz and Franke have thrown the baby (biblical foundationalism) out with the dirty bathwater (modernist foundationalism).

Moreover, since language is a God-given gift, we can possess true knowledge of God, man, and the world around us even if this knowledge is not exhaustive.[131] Wellum strikes against the anti-realism and anti-objectivism of Grenz and Franke: "Why should we think that because our knowledge of God comes through revelation and then through our senses, reason, and linguistic means, it cannot be knowledge of God as he really is or of reality as it really is, but only a matter of linguistic construction? That is simply an unscriptural concept."[132] According to Scripture, God and his universe can be and are known. From the beginning, God did not endow man with reason and senses that obstruct, distort, or blockade knowledge of him and the world; instead, they serve as the very means God uses to bring us to a knowledge of the truth. As John Frame states, "God is Lord; He will not be shut out of His world."[133] In that light, man can possess an objective, true understanding of God, his Word, and the world even if this knowledge is not exhaustive, but limited. Because God has revealed himself, a God's-eye view of reality is possible.[134]

The postconservative view of Scripture is inconsistent with what Scripture says about itself. As we will see in the chapters that follow, Scripture not only presents itself as communicating an objective word from God, but Scripture itself is equated with God's Word and is considered God-breathed. Since Scripture is inspired by God and inerrant,

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[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid., 186–87.

[131] Ibid., 187. See also Vern Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 246; D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 191.

[132] Wellum, "Postconservatism," 187.

[133] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 33.

[134] Therefore, Wellum, building off of Vanhoozer, advocates a type of "critical realism."

it is first-order language. All second-order language is derivative and must be evaluated by Scripture.[135] The Bible holds first place, Wellum explains, "not merely because it is the community's book, nor merely due to its being utilized by the Spirit in some dynamic sense, but precisely because it is what it claims to be, God's Word written, that is, divinely authorized discourse that gives us God's own interpretations of his own mighty actions."[136]

In this light, the postconservative view of Scripture does not do justice to *sola Scriptura*. Grenz and Franke do not actually treat the Bible as first-order language that is fully authoritative. Instead, for Grenz and Franke, "it is the 'Christian interpretive framework,' which is a combination of Scripture, experience, and interpretation, that is basic and foundational for them, but it is in the category of second-order."[137] Grenz and Franke sound much like Karl Barth on this point, for they do not believe that Scripture is inherently authoritative and self-authenticating. Instead, authority is present when the Spirit speaks through the text or appropriates the text in our communities, but Scripture is not authoritative because the Spirit has inerrantly breathed out the text in the first place.[138]

Both postconservatism and postfoundationalism leave the Christian on the all-too-shaky ground of hermeneutical subjectivism. Grenz and Franke "assert that 'the Spirit speaking through the Scripture' refers to the *Spirit's* illocutions, but these are *not* identical with those of the biblical authors."[139] Such a position "views the Spirit as speaking and creating a world independently of Scripture's speaking, instead of maintaining a correct view that the Spirit's speaking is *always* the speaking of Scripture."[140] This raises a host of problematic questions:

- How does one know what the illocutionary acts of the Spirit are, especially when it is possible for the Spirit to speak independently of the human authors' illocutionary acts?

- How is Scripture really serving as our final authority for theological construction?

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[135] Wellum, "Postconservatism," 189.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid., 190.

[139] Ibid., 191.

[140] Ibid.

- How, then, does one determine what the Spirit is actually speaking, except in the light of the *subjectivity* of the local community's hearing the Spirit's voice? And, furthermore, which community do we listen to?

- Given their rejection of *sola Scriptura* and their acceptance of a nonfoundationalist epistemology, how can we actually "check and see" to know whether the world the Spirit is creating in and through our theological language belongs to the eschatological world?

- How can we falsify a world of our own idolatrous making that contradicts the Bible's world?[141]

In short, it is hard to see how the Christian is not left stuck in the black hole of relativism.[142]

The Bible under Fire Today

The battle over biblical authority is far from over. There continues to be an ever-growing number of books published on the subject every year, many questioning Scripture's authority, inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency. Consider the following sampling from representatives we will call "evangelical Bible critics"—a label that fits since they are critical of Scripture (in varying degrees) and identify themselves in some sense as evangelical (or at least did so at one time).[143]

- *Peter Enns*: The Bible is not reliable and factual in its historical narrative. What the Bible says happened didn't happen. Much of the Old Testament reads like fairy tales (e.g., Adam and Eve, God parting the Red Sea). Furthermore, many of its theological descriptions (even about God) and ethical instructions are disturbing, wrong, contradictory, and at times even immoral and barbaric (e.g., the Old Testament portrayal of God and genocide). Consequently, the Bible is

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[141] Ibid., 191–92.

[142] Many other contemporary movements could be explored. For examples, see Grant Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Theological Interpretation," in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 62–86; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 10–12.

[143] The following are my summaries of these authors, though I have striven to closely parallel the words of the authors to represent their claims.

not inerrant, clear, or sufficient, nor should we consider parts of it inspired at all.[144]

- *Kenton L. Sparks*: The Bible is primarily a human book, and since it was written by humans it naturally errs. Historical errors and contradictions are present throughout (e.g., Moses didn't write the Pentateuch, Paul didn't write many epistles bearing his name, the flood and exodus never happened, Nineveh never repented, Gospel writers contradict each other, the prophecy of Christ's return is mistaken). But these errors are not only historical in nature, but theological and ethical, as the Bible espouses values that are sinister and evil. Even Jesus's teachings were not immune from the fallen condition. Therefore, the Bible, being fallen and broken, has a dark side. Nevertheless, Scripture is still God's Word and authoritative in its main message, since God accommodates himself to error, redeeming and sanctifying man's broken word.[145]

Numerous other "evangelical Bible critics" could be mentioned, but we can make two observations based on the positions held by Enns and Sparks.[146] First, while the "evangelical Bible critics" mentioned above look at apparent Bible "problems" and conclude that the Bible is not inerrant but nonetheless remains the "word of God," skeptics (e.g., Bart Ehrman) look at the *same* Bible "problems" and conclude that the Bible most definitively is *not* the "word of God."[147] On this point, ironically, evangelical

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[144] Peter Enns, "Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does," in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views*, 83–141; Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). For a response, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 499–516; G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Michael Kruger, Review of *The Bible Tells Me So*, The Gospel Coalition, http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-bible-tells-me-so.

[145] Kenton L. Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). For a response, see Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Embattled Bible: Four More Books," *Themelios* 34, no. 1 (2009): 6–25. One author who takes this "dark side" accusation mentioned above to an extreme is Thom Stark, who says the biblical text is "evil" and has a "devilish nature." Thom Stark, *The Human Faces of God: What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 218–19.

[146] For a sweeping overview of other critics, as well as a helpful critique, see D. A. Carson, "The Many Facets of the Current Discussion," in Carson, *Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, 3–42.

[147] For example, Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005); Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

inerrantists and skeptics have much in common over against "evangelical Bible critics"—they agree that if the Bible errs, it cannot be the authoritative "word of God."

Second, for "evangelical Bible critics," not only is the historicity of the biblical accounts called into question (e.g., the historical Adam, the flood, the exodus, Mosaic authorship of Pentateuch, the miracles of Jesus), but the very theology and ethics of the Bible are questioned. We should not think that "evangelical Bible critics" have a problem with *minor* issues. Rather, their criticism of Scripture is with the Bible's own theology and ethical instruction; indeed, the Bible's own worldview.

How Shall We Then Proceed? The Self-Authenticating Nature of Scripture and the Internal Testimony of the Spirit

Having taken this brief history of modern and postmodern approaches to the Bible, what can we learn about the development of *sola Scriptura* and its application to our context today? To begin with, we must recognize that rationalistic modernism and subjectivist postmodernism are inadequate and inherently unbiblical. Each view makes the individual the starting point. Many Enlightenment thinkers began with the autonomous self apart from divine revelation. Liberalism did the same with man's experience. Postmodernism is no better and is the natural and logical outworking of modernism's rationalism. Postmodernism continues to elevate human reason as our "final authority" and "final arbiter of truth, even if that truth is only personal and self-created." Therefore, the "fundamental plank of the Enlightenment" has not been abandoned by the postmodernist.[148] It is not a surprise, then, when postmodernism turns Scripture into a wax nose and empties it of its divine authority in its exaltation of man's subjective experience.[149]

In contrast to rationalistic modernism and subjectivist postmodernism, we should begin by listening to what Scripture has to say about itself, for it "claims for itself an authority not derived from human beings but from God," and as "divine revelation it presents us with a meta-story that claims to communicate absolute truth that cannot be discovered by any other means."[150] Rather than imposing a modern or postmodern agenda upon the

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[148] On postmodernism's elevation of man's subjective experience, see Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 28.

[149] Ibid.

[150] T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 9.

text, we will have an open ear to the biblical categories that Scripture itself provides in order to guide us in its interpretation.[151]

This means we cannot buy into the Enlightenment illusion that we can come to Scripture *neutral*, unbiased, and perfectly objective. No one comes to Scripture neutral. We all approach the text with certain traditions and preunderstandings in place. But neutrality is not our goal. While some preunderstandings may be misguided, others are right on target, guiding us to a correct understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Therefore, our aim will be to come to Scripture and allow its own voice to affirm *and* correct our preunderstanding of what Scripture is and how it should be read.[152]

Such an approach seeks to acknowledge the *self-authenticating* nature of Scripture.[153] Or as John Calvin and John Owen said, Scripture is *autopiston* (from *autopistos*, meaning trustworthy in and of itself).[154] While there is an important place for historical investigation, sometimes evangelicals approach Scripture making external data from historical investigation the ultimate judge over Scripture. In these approaches, the external data are necessary to validate whether the Bible is God's Word.[155] Ironically, such a starting point does not differ significantly from Liberalism, though the conclusions

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[151] Notice how our approach differs from Sparks and Enns, who say we should approachScripture by interrogating it or as if we are engaging in a wrestling match. Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word*, 30, 39; Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So*, 22–23.

[152] J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 47–54.

[153] It is sometimes referred to as the "self-attestation" of Scripture. Some, like James Barr, have rejected this doctrine (*Fundamentalism* [London: SCM, 1977], 78). However, many evangelicals in the Reformed camp have affirmed it: Sinclair Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 47–66; Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 19–59; John Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself," in *God's Inerrant Word*: *An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), 178–81.

[154] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.5. See also John Owen, *Divine Original*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 16:309; Muller, *PRRD*, 2:257–58. Elsewhere Muller explains *autopistos*: "If Scripture is trustworthy in and of itself (*in se* and *per se*), no external authority, whether church or tradition need be invoked in order to ratify Scripture as the norm of faith and practice" (*DLGTT*, s.v. *autopistos*, 54).

[155] Paul Helm, "Faith, Evidence, and the Scriptures," in Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 303–20.

reached are vastly divergent. Both groups look to historical data as judge over Scripture.[156] Looking to Scripture itself becomes subservient to external proofs.

Though addressing the larger subject of the canon of Scripture, Michael Kruger notes several problems with such an approach.[157] To begin with, it assumes that historical investigation is neutral. Scripture must be authenticated and proved only through biblical criticism's assured results. Christian and non-Christian alike must submit themselves to the neutral methods of historical research. But can one's method truly be worldview neutral? Such an approach is naive. Historical evidence does not interpret itself, but must be interpreted by somebody, and a "somebody" always has a worldview.[158] This means that there is no worldview-neutrality. The unbeliever comes at the biblical text with an entire non-Christian worldview in place, filled with unbiblical (and anti-biblical) presuppositions. His preunderstanding most definitely impacts his historical investigation. The methods of historical investigation are never neutral. They are "founded upon, and presuppose, some philosophical-religious system."[159] What appears convincing to the Christian appears foolish to the unbeliever.[160] So while historical arguments are important, they are supportive, not determinative. As Kruger writes, "Their effectiveness is always dependent upon the worldview of the one evaluating the evidence."[161]

That said, we are still left with the massive problem—one that appears to violate the spirit of *sola Scriptura*—that the Bible is subject to an external standard, in this case the assured (and neutral!) results of historical investigation.[162] To be clear, historical investigation is not a bad thing. "Historical-critical study," says Herman Bavinck, "may yield a clear insight into the origination, history, and structure of Scripture," but it can never lead "to a doctrine, a dogma of Holy Scripture."[163] Neither is it supposed to be the standard by which we judge Scripture. In doing so, we once again buy into an Enlightenment mentality that "allows autonomous human assessment of historical evidence to become

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[156] Michael Kruger identifies these two approaches as the "canon-within-the canon" model (Liberalism) and the "criteria-of-canonicity" model (some evangelicals). Michael J.Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 68–76.

[157] Ibid., 77–87.

[158] Ibid., 81.

[159] Ibid., 78.

[160] Ibid., 79.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Richard Gaffin, "The New Testament as Canon," in Conn, *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, 170; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1988), 7.

[163] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 424 (cf. 425).

an external authority over God's Word."[164] So we are back to the key question, stated here by Kruger: "How can the Scriptures be the ultimate standard of truth if their reception is dependent upon some *other* (presumably more certain) standard?"[165]

We must begin by looking to Scripture itself for the answer, for Scripture is self-authenticating. In other words, we seek to ground authority in the greatest authority that we can find, namely, Scripture itself, for in doing so we are actually grounding Scripture's authority in God, for *he* is its divine author and it is *his* Word.[166] As Calvin said, "God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word … Scripture is indeed self-authenticated."[167] Such an approach looks to the *content* of Scripture to discover what Scripture is and does, rather than looking ultimately or solely to the community (Roman Catholicism and postmodernism) or the autonomous individual's reason and experience (modernism and Liberalism). Scripture, as Bavinck notes, acts as our "first principle," meaning it must be "believed on its own account, not on account of something else." "Scripture's authority with respect to itself depends on Scripture."[168] Our approach is not to deny the value of historical investigation or evidence from outside of Scripture as "useful aids," as Calvin called them, but rather to say that such useful aids must come to us under the authority of Scripture itself.[169]

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[164] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 80.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid., 89.

[167] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.4–5. See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–97), 1:89.

[168] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:458.

[169] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 91. Some will object that such an approach is circular ("The Bible is God's Word because the Bible says so"). However, such an objection falls short: (1) Any appeal to an ultimate authority is necessarily circular. After all, there is no higher authority to appeal to. If there were a higher authority outside of Scripture to appeal to, then Scripture would no longer be the highest authority (and *sola Scriptura* would be compromised). See Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*, 76; John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 10; D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 35–36. (2) The objection does not recognize the heart of the argument. Ultimately, we are not saying the Bible is God's Word because the Bible says so (though that is true), but more precisely because *God* says so. In other words, the objection assumes that the Bible cannot be inspired because it divorces God from Scripture from the start. But our argument is different. The reason we can appeal to the Bible to understand the Bible is because we are ultimately appealing to the highest authority one can appeal to—God himself. (3) We believe the Bible on the authority of Christ and the apostles, which is the same basis on which we believe every doctrine. In short, we believe the Bible because Jesus did. See chapters 7 and 8. (4) Is it really fair for critics to tell evangelicals that they cannot look to Scripture to explain what Scripture is and what it does? D. A. Carson argues, "Surely part of the effort to find out what Scripture *is* requires that we read Scripture and see what it says of itself." D. A.

Second, and hand in hand with the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, we must possess the Spirit's internal testimony and witness. While Scripture is self-authenticating, due to our sinful minds we will fail to perceive its true nature apart from the work of the Spirit. "Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God," Calvin said, "only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit."[170] The same Spirit who "has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what has been divinely commanded."[171]

For example, in 1 Corinthians 2 Paul says that the "natural person," the unregenerate person, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (2:14 ESV). The Spirit is the one who gives spiritual sight, so that though the unbeliever previously saw the cross as folly, he now sees the cross as his salvation.[172] As Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (ESV; cf. Acts 26:18; Eph 1:13).[173]

Therefore, though the church or external evidences may be key, they bear only an ancillary testimony. The internal testimony of the Spirit is the "primary key to the authority and divinity of Scripture."[174] Like Calvin before him, Puritan John Owen

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Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 162, emphasis added.

[170] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.8.13.

[171] Ibid., 1.7.4 (cf. 3.2.34).

ESV English Standard Version

[172] F. W. Groshede, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 73; Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, TBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 60.

ESV English Standard Version

[173] Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 200–204; George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 243–46.

[174] Richard A. Muller, *PRRD*, 2:266. Also see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.5. "The Westminster Confession of Faith," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600–1693*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 235 (I.V), makes this point beautifully: "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." For a recent work on the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, see John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

clarifies that this internal testimony of the Spirit is not new revelation but instead the illumination of the Word. The Spirit, Owen wrote, "gives no new light to Scripture." Rather, he "cleareth our understanding, to see the light of Scripture, by the very Scripture itself and by the light of the Scripture."[175] How essential is this internal testimony of the Spirit? If "the Holy Ghost, speaking in the Scripture, [does] not first of all inspire our minds, and open the eyes of our understanding … all other means shall profit us nothing at all."[176]

Where Shall We Begin? In the Beginning

One final consideration addresses the need to see Scripture in a holistic sense. Since Scripture comes to us in the form of a story—a redemptive-historical story—we will begin there. We will give special focus to Scripture's promise-fulfillment pattern as seen in the biblical covenants, only to then shift gears and look at its different attributes.[177] We will move from biblical theology to systematic theology, and in doing so we aim to read Scripture on its own terms and categories.[178] When the Bible's story is approached properly, it will act as our metanarrative, transforming our understanding of Christianity and even providing us with a comprehensive worldview.[179]

We will take our cue from the text itself so that we are not making God think our thoughts after us, but rather we are thinking God's thoughts after him.[180] Throughout this entire process we will wear the spectacles of Scripture, as Calvin advised, and simultaneously aim to apply *sola Scriptura* afresh in light of today's hermeneutical challenges.[181]

➢ Chapter 3 of *Part 1: God's Word Under Fire, Yesterday and Today*.

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[175] Owen, *Divine Original*, in Goold, *Works*, 16:325–326. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.1.

[176] Robert Rollock, *Treatise of Effectual Calling*, trans. Henry Holland (London, 1603), 69–70; quoted in Muller, *PRRD*, 2:266. See also "The Westminster Confession of Faith," in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 4:235 (I.V).

[177] D. A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology," in Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 69.

[178] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004); Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 32–34.

[179] Carson, *Gagging of God*, 191, 194; Wellum, "Postconservatism," 196.

[180] Another way to say this is that we will be "intratextual" rather than "extratextual" in our interpretation of the text.

[181] Barrett, M., & Mohler, R. A., Jr. (2016). *God's word alone—the authority of scripture: what the reformers taught...and why it still matters* (pp. 115–150). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.