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EDITORIAL

Because of the supreme importance of a right, high view of Scripture for the man of God, and because of the excellent work done by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, I am including the full text of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy drafted in October 1978.

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY

PREFACE

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

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

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life and mission.
We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God’s grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

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

I. SUMMARY STATEMENT

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God’s witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: It is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture’s divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

II. ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

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

We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.
Article II. We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

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

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

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

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

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

Article V. We affirm that God’s revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

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

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

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

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

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.
Article VIII. We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Article XIV. We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. EXPOSITION

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

A. Creation, Revelation and Inspiration

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

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

At Sinai God wrote the terms of His covenant on tablets of stone as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility, and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation He prompted men to write the messages given to and through them,
along with celebratory records of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy. The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: Although the human writers’ personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. Thus what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author, having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in freedom and faithfulness “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (1 Pet 1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin.

B. Authority: Christ and the Bible

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

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

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

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

C. Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called infallible and inerrant. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths. Infallible signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

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

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

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

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

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

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

D. Skepticism and Criticism

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

E. Transmission and Translation

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

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

F. Inerrancy and Authority

In our affirmation of the authority of Scripture as involving its total truth, we are consciously standing with Christ and His apostles, indeed with the whole Bible and with the main stream of Church history from the first days until very recently. We are concerned at the casual, inadvertent and seemingly thoughtless way in which a belief of such far-reaching importance has been given up by so many in our day.
We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible that God gave loses its authority, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one’s critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started. This means that at bottom independent reason now has authority, as opposed to Scriptural teaching. If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrines are still held, persons denying the full truth of Scripture may claim an evangelical identity while methodologically they have moved away from the evangelical principle of knowledge to an unstable subjectivism, and will find it hard not to move further.

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

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In Revelation 20, God will act precisely as one would expect if one reads His promises in a literal, normative understanding. Simply stated and among other reasons, Satan must be released so that God can demonstrate to Israel and to the world the veracity of His covenant promises, completely and precisely fulfilling them in minute and specific details—all the way to the arrival of the eternal state.

Introduction and Purpose

Many statements within Scripture contain the word “must.” Perhaps the most famous occurrence is Jesus’ declaration to Nicodemus in John 3:7: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”1 The word “must” (dei), most commonly used in the Greek with an infinitive, conveys the idea of the necessity of an event.2 It does not convey the sense as something that will happen, such as would be expected in a normal future indicative tense, but rather as something being necessary or used in the sense of a “divine destiny or unavoidable fate.”3

If John 3:7 is the most famous “must” statement in the Bible, perhaps the most unexpected use is its next-to-the-last occurrence in Scripture, namely, Rev 20:1–3.

1 Unless otherwise stipulated, all Scripture reference used are from the NASB 1977 edition. “Thee” and “Thou” are changed throughout to modern usage.
These verses reveal specific events that will transpire and specifically notes one event that must occur:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

As with all previous “must statements,” it is not only that Satan will be released, as seen with the future tense in Rev 20:7 (“And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,”), but also Scripture plainly states that after the thousand years are over, Satan “must be released for a short time.” Chafer considered that, “No small mystery gathers around the fact that Satan is released from the abyss even for ‘a little season.’” He further refers to it as “this strange release.” Based on the normal use of “must” in other Scriptures, many scholars also mark its use in Rev 20:3. Thomas writes in regard to Satan’s release, “It is a divine necessity . . . for the dragon to be released ‘after these things.’” Swete concurs, writing in reference to the future release that “it must come; there is a necessity for it (dei).” Alfard refers to the usage as “the dei of prophecy; must according to the necessity of God’s purposes.”

Walvoord does not exaggerate the massive theological divide that emerges from these verses: “The dramatic prophecy contained in these three verses has been the subject of endless dispute because to some extent the whole controversy between premillennarians and amillennarians hangs upon it.” Powell notes that “Revelation 20:1–6 is perhaps the most controversial passage in the Book of Revelation.” Regarding the importance of interpreting Revelation 20, Walvoord further notes:

The passage yields to patient exegesis, and there is no solid reason for taking it in other than its ordinary sense. According to the prediction the angel is empowered for six functions: (1) to lay hold on the dragon, (2) to bind him for 1,000 years, (3) to cast him into the abyss, (4) to shut him up, that is, to use the key which will lock up the abyss, (5) to set a seal upon Satan which will render

4 Lewis Sperry Chafer Systematic Theology. (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 5:360.
5 Ibid.
him inactive in his work of deceiving the nations, (6) to loose him after the thousand years. At every point, however, the prediction has been disputed.\textsuperscript{11}

Obviously, Rev 20:3 should not be interpreted in a vacuum, isolated, and removed from the rest of the text. Consequently, the way one approaches the events from Rev 19:11–20:10 greatly factors into its interpretation and has usually been determined in one’s theology long before coming to the specifics of Revelation 20.

For those who hold to Scripture as being God’s Word, Powell presents two distinct groups of interpretation of this prophecy, with the first he calls the “preconsummationist perspective”: “In this view the events of verses 1–6 will occur before the return of Christ to the earth. Most preconsummationists have adopted a recapitulation view of the passage, an approach usually associated with amillennialism” including both the amillennial and postmillennial views of Revelation:\textsuperscript{12}

This preconsummationist-recapitulation-amillennial view includes the following tenets. (1) The binding of Satan represents Christ’s victory over the powers of darkness accomplished at the cross. (2) The one thousand years are symbolic of a long, indeterminate period corresponding to the church age. (3) At the end of the present age Satan will be loosed briefly to wreak havoc and persecute the church. (4) The fire coming down from heaven to consume the wicked is symbolic of Christ’s second coming. (5) A general resurrection and judgment of the wicked and the righteous will occur at Christ’s coming, followed by the creation of the new heavens and a new earth.\textsuperscript{13}

Sam Storms would be a representative of this position and presents what he sees as a serious problem with premillennial interpretation:

If we were to take the events of 20:1–3 as historically subsequent to the events of 19:11–21, a serious problem arises in that 20:1–3 would describe an action designed to prevent Satanic deception of the nations who had already been deceived (16:13–16) and consequently destroyed in 19:19–21. In other words, it makes little sense to speak of protecting the nations from deception by Satan in 20:1–3 after they have just been both deceived by Satan (16:16; cf. 19:19–20) and destroyed by Christ at his return (19:11–21; cf. 19:19–20).\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} Walvoord, \textit{The Revelation of Jesus Christ}, 290–91. Walvoord presents a very logical biblical basis that Satan is not currently bound and that this event is part of the Lord’s return to earth in Revelation 19 (ibid., 282–95). See Steven Thompson, “The End of Satan,” \textit{Andrews University Seminary Studies} 37:2 (Autumn 1999): 257–60 for a listing of some of the scholarly works on Rev 20:1–3 that mostly present a figurative understanding of the text.

\textsuperscript{12} Powell, “Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6,” 94 (emphasis in the original).


\textsuperscript{14} Sam Storms, \textit{Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative} (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor Imprint, 2013), 431 (emphasis in the original).
Storms explains Satan’s binding in Rev 20:1–3 thusly: “The Gentiles (‘nations’) are portrayed as being in darkness with respect to the gospel, having been blinded (‘deceived’) while under the dominion of Satan. However, as a result of Christ’s first coming, such deception no longer obtains. The nations or Gentiles may now receive the forgiveness of sins and the divine inheritance.”

The alternate position to the preconsummationist view Powell calls postconsummationism:

In this view the events in verses 1–6 follow the second coming of Christ depicted in 19:11–21. Thus it involves chronological progression between the two passages. This view is essentially premillennial. The postconsummationist-progressive-premillennial viewpoint holds these four tenets. (1) The binding of Satan is yet future; it will take place when Christ returns. (2) The one thousand years are a literal period in which Christ will reign on earth from Jerusalem and with His people. (3) Satan will be loosed for a brief period at the end of the millennium, and this will be followed by the resurrection and judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne judgment. (4) The new heavens and the new earth will be created after the millennium, that is a thousand years after Christ’s second coming.

Michael Vlach is a representative of such a position: “The events of Rev 20:1–10 follow the second coming of Jesus described in Rev 19:11. There is sequential progression, not recapitulation in this section.” Further:

Much attention often is given to whether the activities of Satan are curtailed or ceased, but before one even considers the activities of Satan, one must recognize what is happening to Satan himself, as a personal being. Satan himself is incarcerated and confined in a real place, a place called “the abyss.” Our point here is that not just a specific function of Satan (i.e. deceiving the nations) is hindered; Satan himself is absolutely confined to a place that results in a complete cessation of all that he does.

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15 Ibid., 441. In argument against this view would be the conversion of the Gentiles of Nineveh during Jonah’s ministry. These Gentiles received the forgiveness of sins and a divine inheritance, and yet this was done before Satan is bound in Revelation 20.

16 Powell, “Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6,” 95 (emphasis in the original). Powell adds in support of this position, “The current article presents three arguments in defense of premillennialism that have often been overlooked. These concern (a) the imprisonment of Satan compared with imprisonment and binding imagery mentioned elsewhere in Revelation and the New Testament, (b) the reign of the saints in 20:4–6 compared with the saints’ reign mentioned elsewhere in Revelation, and (c) the significance of the accusative case for the extent of time in reference to the thousand years” (ibid., 97–98).


18 Ibid., 244.

19 Ibid., 246 (emphasis in the original).
Vlach concludes: “The truth that Satan is totally incarcerated during the millennium is not compatible with the views of amillennialism and postmillennialism.”

In Kingdom Through Covenant, Gentry and Wellum present a twofold purpose: (1) they “want to show how central the concept of ‘covenant’ is to the narrative plot structure of the Bible,” and (2) to demonstrate “how a number of crucial theological differences within Christian theology, and the resolution of those differences, are directly related to one’s understanding of how the biblical covenants unfold and relate to each other.” Subsequently, they land somewhat between the two previous interpretations:

But where the authors want to make a significant contribution is in regard to their understanding of how to “put together” the biblical covenants. They assert that both covenant theologians and dispensationalists have presented understandings of the covenants that “are not quite right” and “go awry at a number of points.” The authors want to present a via media—an alternative approach to covenant theology and dispensationalism that is not entirely dismissive of either but offers a better way. This middle path approach they identify as “progressive covenantalism” which is a species of “new covenant theology.”

At the heart of Gentry and Wellum’s disagreement with dispensationalism is dispensationalism’s position on Israel and the land promises from God. Vlach explains: “On the other hand, the authors say that dispensationalism makes a significant error by holding that the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant are still in force for national Israel. They say that dispensationalists do not rightly grasp that the land is fulfilled in Christ and is typical of the coming new creation. Thus, there will be no literal fulfillment of land for national Israel.” Consequently:

According to the authors, Jesus is the “antitype” of Israel who fulfills both Israel and Israel’s land. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel and the land, dispensationalists err in expecting future significance for Israel and Israel’s land. Typology, then, is at the heart of the difference between dispensationalism and the approach offered by Gentry and Wellum.

However, Gentry and Wellum’s approach to the fulfillment of the land promises is problematic:

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20 Ibid., 247.
23 Ibid., 7.
24 Ibid., 13 (italics in the original). See Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant, 122, 706.
As the biblical covenants unfold, there are two main fulfilments of the land promises. It is first fulfilled in the days of Joshua (Josh. 21:43–45) and secondly in the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 4:20–21), but in each case, the fulfilment of the land promises falls short due to the failure of the nation and the Davidic kings. In addition, it is important to note the idea of multiple fulfilments is also instructive.\(^{25}\)

Based on the tenuous and less-than-persuasive assertion that Josh 21:43–45 and 1 Kings 4:20–21 prove that God has already fulfilled the land promises has significant problems to overcome.\(^{26}\) Also, it would be hard to explain how multiple, incomplete land promises somehow fulfill the land promises that never have been fulfilled in their most complete and comprehensive sense.

Disappointingly, in the midst of their approximately 850-page book and with their typological understanding of God’s covenants, Gentry and Wellum completely ignore all events and individuals given in Revelation 19–20 associated with the Lord’s return and reign. With their Scripture Index containing not even one reference pertaining to anything from Revelation 19–20, evidently these chapters must not factor into their theology.\(^{27}\) It is hard to argue against their concerns with either dispensational or covenant theology and their attempts to present a better way without at least dealing with these verses where the implementation of God’s covenants—or, in some cases, the lack thereof—play such an important role in understanding the Book of Revelation and much of prophecy. Thus this article will deal with theologians who at least address these extremely important chapters on both the kingdom and the covenants of God.

The purpose of this article is to determine whether or not there is a biblical rationale for the absolute necessity that Satan must be released (Rev 20:3). This will be done by (1) briefly examining different approaches to Rev 20:3; (2) briefly examining different approaches to the covenant promises God made to Israel to see if a literal hermeneutic has basis; and (3) to implement these promises into the text to see if these covenant promises fit a normative understanding of what Rev 20:1–10 states will happen.

A Brief Examination of Various Approaches to Revelation 20:3

Generally, the responses to why Satan must be released fall into three categories. The first approach is that one should not attempt to understand why Satan must be released. Robert Mounce is a representative of the first group who states, “It is

\(^{25}\) Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 712 (emphasis in the original).


\(^{27}\) See Scripture Index, Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 848.
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futile to speculate just why there needs to be yet another conflict” in Revelation 20.28 Swete goes a step further stating, “It is in vain to speculate on the grounds of this necessity.”29 However, the perception that it is “futile” or “in vain” to speculate often closes a door that may never have been opened to investigation of the text. While being in full agreement that speculation cannot be equated with “thus says the Lord,” at least biblical texts should be investigated before arriving at such broad and encompassing conclusions.

The second approach for those who hold to the inspired text and look for a future fulfillment does not address the use of “must” in Rev 20:3, but instead deals with Satan’s actual release that will transpire in Rev 20:7–10. For instance, in an excellent article which explains his biblical base for understanding Revelation 19–20 as literal truths, Walvoord does not address the “must” of Rev 20:3.30 Of course, this does not mean that such scholars do not believe or recognize these verses nor deem them unimportant; it is rather that they shift their focus to the more descriptive account of the actual events in Rev 20:7–10.31 This is helpful, but it neither answers nor addresses the use and significance of Satan’s “must be released.”

In the third category are many adherents who do note the use of “must” in Rev 20:3, mark the theological significance of this word based on its normative use elsewhere, look for future events to transpire in Revelation 20, but often leave it as some sovereign work of God hidden from man.32 Seiss describes it this way: “Some interest or righteousness and moral government renders it proper that he should be allowed this last limited freedom.”33 Others, such as Govett, deduce reasons why Satan must be released: (1) to demonstrate man, if left to himself, will choose sin even in the most favorable circumstances; (2) to demonstrate God’s foreknowledge of all man’s

29 Swete, The Apocalypse of St John, 258 (emphasis added).
actions as well as His own; (3) to demonstrate the incurable evil and wickedness of Satan; (4) to justify eternal punishment that occurs in the remainder of the chapter.\footnote{Robert Govett, \emph{The Apocalypse Expounded} (London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1920), 506–08. After noting that the final answer rests with God, Thomas offers: “Yet one purpose may be a partial answer. Through his release the whole universe will see that after a thousand years of his imprisonment and an ideal reign on earth, Satan is incurably wicked and men’s hearts are still perverse enough to allow him to gather an army of such an immense size” (Thomas, \emph{Revelation 8–22}, 411). David J. MacLeod, “The Third ‘Last Thing’: The Binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1–3),” \emph{BSac} 156 (Oct.–Dec 1999): 483 writes: “For some reason, grounded in the divine will, Satan will be released and will deceive the nations again.” MacLeod points to further elaboration on why Satan must be released would be in his later article on Rev 20:7–10. See by the same author where, “The Fifth ‘Last Thing’: The Release of Satan and Man’s Final Rebellion,” \emph{BSac} 157 (April–June 2000): 204–5, who sees the two reasons for the release as first, to demonstrate the incorrigibility of Satan and second, to demonstrate the depravity of man.}

While in agreement with much of what has been written about God’s sovereignty, man’s depravity, and Satan’s unchanging evil, this article will attempt to give an additional and corroborative biblical rationale for why Satan must be released (Rev 20:3).

\textbf{Brief Examination of God’s Covenant Promises to Israel}

In an article regarding God’s promises to the nation of Israel in the Book of Revelation, Robert Thomas quotes Bruce Waltke and becomes a good beginning point on the contrasts of interpretations in matters related to Revelation 20:

Bruce Waltke finds no textual linkage in Revelation 20 to Israel’s OT promises regarding a kingdom. He writes, “In the former essay I argued among other things that if there is any tension in one’s interpretation between the Old Testament and the New, priority must be given to the New; that Rev 20:1–10 cannot be linked textually with Israel’s covenants and promises; that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets imagery of the Old Testament with a reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne.\footnote{Robert L. Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” \emph{MSJ} 19, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 29. Thomas quotes Bruce K. Waltke, “A Response” in \emph{Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition}, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 353. Waltke refers to his earlier works “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in \emph{Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.}, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1988), 263–88.}

Thomas’ article examines the Book of Revelation to determine what kinds of fulfillments are specified in the three major covenants that God made with Israel, namely, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants, and he argues for the literal fulfillment of these covenants throughout the Revelation, demonstrating the dividing line of interpretation is with those who do not understand such promises to be literally true for national Israel.\footnote{Thomas does so by contrasting three relatively recent evangelical commentaries on Revelation and shows, for instance, “the radical disagreement of allegorists in their handling of Revelation 11 illustrates the subjective nature of interpretation once the interpreter has forsaken the grammatical–historical principles” (Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 34). The three commentators critiqued in his...}
throughout his article in passages that deal directly with national Israel that allegorists must apply to the church or to some other matters and yet about which they often disagree among themselves as to exactly what or how something should be allegorized.\footnote{37} This article will not argue the points Thomas already made in his article but rather will deal with a normative understanding of the text.\footnote{38}

Obviously, this article cannot cover every item in matters related to the covenants of God, but at least some of the important features can be noted. In giving the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised the nation of Israel a people, the land, and the ability to be a source of blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1–3, 7).\footnote{39} Of special note for this article is God’s original promise to Israel “to curse the ones who curse you,”\footnote{40} initially given in Genesis 12:3, and reiterated and developed in subsequent Scripture.\footnote{41} For example, in a section rich with wonderful and multiple Messianic promises, God used Balaam to respond to Balak’s request to have Balaam curse

\begin{footnotes}
\item[37] For example, Thomas gives a chart on Rev 11:1–11 and shows that Beale and Osborne often disagree between themselves as to exactly what or how something should be allegorized (Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 35–38). Collectively, Beale and Osborne disagree with a literal understanding in every one of the fourteen areas cited in these verses (ibid., 36).
\item[38] Such an example of the difference between a normal understanding of the text versus not understanding it as such is evident in how this influences all components that connect and affects the interpretation of other verses elsewhere. For instance, Dave Mathewson, “A Reexamination of the Millennium in Rev 20:1–6,” JETS 44, no. 2 (June 2001), 248, states, “As I have suggested, the one thousand years does not refer to a period of time, but is symbolic of the ultimate triumph and vindication of the saints.” Consequently this directly affects his understanding of what the binding of Satan entails, if anything: “The binding, release, and final judgment of Satan may simply reflect a traditional apocalyptic motif as Isa 24:21–22; 1 Enoch 10:4–6, 11–13; and Jude 6, which reflect the common themes of binding and imprisonment of demonic beings (Azazel in 1 Enoch 10:4) until a future time of judgment” (ibid., 239).
\item[39] See Keith Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” MSJ 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 191–212 for a very helpful article on matters pertaining to this eternally important covenant. See also Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 31–40.
\item[41] Contra Stephen Sizer, Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon? (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2004), 148, who in writing as an antagonist against dispensationalism, concludes, “There is, however, no indication in the text of Genesis 12 that this promise of blessing and warning and cursing was ever intended to extend beyond Abraham.”
\end{footnotes}
national Israel in Numbers 22–24. God’s command and declaration to Balaam was “You shall not curse this people for they are blessed,” based on the promises of God from the Abrahamic Covenant and not on the disobedience of the Jewish people under the Mosaic Covenant. Then in the midst of multiple prophecies of the coming Messiah who will rule the nations, Yahweh repeats in Num 24:9 what He has previously promised in Gen 12:3: “Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.” Consequently, in the millennial kingdom when Messiah reigns, not only will the land promises be fulfilled and all the nations of the earth blessed through the Messiah, but God’s promise to curse the ones who curse Israel and the Messiah will still be operative.

The promises Yahweh made through the Davidic Covenant are numerous as well (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89). Thomas asserts that “the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant is a major theme of Revelation from beginning to end.” When Messiah reigns on David’s throne, the entire earth will receive benefits. In particular, Scripture presents multiple promises that relate to earthly Jerusalem and the regathered nation of Israel and reveals numerous characteristics associated with the Lord’s return both to judge and to rule. Even a small sampling of important verses shows that when Messiah reigns on David’s throne, the promises that God made will factor into interpreting the final release of Satan in Revelation 20. For example, Mic 5:2 promises to the Jewish people: “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:5 concludes this section with another promise from Yahweh: “And this One will be our peace.” So when Messiah reigns, God’s promise of peace is a major component of His reign.

In the same manner, Isa 9:6 contains prophecies of Messiah’s birth and a tremendously important pronouncement that He will both judge and rule: “For a child

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43 James M. Hamilton, Jr. “The Seed of Woman and the Blessing of Abraham.” TynBul 59 (2007): 264, writes, “The placement of the allusion to the ruler from the line of Judah (Num. 24:9a) next to the allusion to the blessing of Abraham (24:9b) interweaves these lines of promise. If it was not clear before Numbers 24:9 that these promises belong together, this verse sounds the note that unites the themes. This union means that the blessing of Abraham will come through the king who will arise from the line of Judah, reminding readers of the Pentateuch of the promise to Abraham that he would sire kings (Gen. 17:6; see the references to Israel’s king in Num. 23:21; 24:7). Balaam’s oracles, then, clarify the blessing of Abraham by linking it to the king from Judah.”


46 Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 40. See his development and defense of the importance of the Davidic Covenant in interpreting Revelation (Ibid., 40–46). In writing about those who omit the importance of the Davidic Covenant, Thomas adds, “Of course, at this point neither Beale, Aune, nor Osborne say anything about a fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. That is because Revelation 11:15 creates an impossible situation for those who interpret the book nonliterally, but for those who interpret it literally, it marks the fulfillment by God of the promises He made to David, and ultimately to Abraham too” (ibid., 45).
will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” However, in Isa 9:7 the same God offers additional promises that never were fulfilled during the first advent of Jesus: “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (emphasis added). Isaiah 9:7 is as much a part of “Scripture cannot be broken” as is any other part. When Messiah reigns on David’s throne in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant promise of God, one of the characteristics will be that “there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace.”

Similarly, when God revealed that He would at some point in the future make the New Covenant, Yahweh again made promises for peace in another everlasting covenant in Jer 31:31–34.47 This prophecy is especially striking when one studies the Book of Jeremiah as a whole because it is the disobedient nation in chapters 2–29 who receives the future promises, especially in Jeremiah 30–33:

Expositors generally agree that chapters 30–33 constitute a group of prophecies. The section has been called “The Book of Consolation.” . . . The remarkable feature of chapters 30–33 is that, though written during a time of deep distress of Jerusalem, they foretell a glorious future for the nation (cf. the latter part of 1:10). Up to this point in the book, Jeremiah’s prophecies have been threatening and gloomy. . . . Now in chapters 30–33 the prophetic outlooks change.48

When the Book of Jeremiah is considered as a whole, these four chapters of promised renewal and glory radiate with divine hope compared to the mainly condemnatory tone of the remainder of the book. The whole context of the Book of Consolation “meticulously connects the new covenant strophe with a literal restoration of the Jewish nation.”49 Parallel passages referring to the New Covenant always involve Yahweh and the nation of Israel.50 As with the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, the New Covenant contains many promises of essential events that must transpire in order for Scripture to be fulfilled. In the same way, the New Covenant also presents multiple promised blessings by God that must come true as part of His holy Word, that once stated, cannot be broken.

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47 For a much fuller detailed account, see Larry Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” MSJ 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 251–70. Thomas has “forgiveness of sins” and a “new relationship with God” as part of the New Covenant blessing God has for national Israel (Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 46–48).


The immediate context of the New Covenant begins with the phrase “Behold, days are coming” (Jer 31:31), which occurs five times within “The Book of Consolation” section of Jeremiah 30–33. Emerging in the midst of pending judgment by God (Jeremiah 1–29) comes the promise of wonderful blessings for the future. The first use is in Jer 30:3: “‘For, behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The LORD says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.’” Three times in the immediate context occurs the term “behold, days are coming” (31:27, 31, 38) and serves as a threefold division of what God promises. The first use of “behold, days are coming” in this section is Jer 31:27–30 where God promised: “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast.” The same God who promised to break down also promises now that at some time in the future He will restore fully to the same land and the same people that He Himself already will have punished. The second use of “Behold, days are coming” in Jeremiah 31 begins the section on the New Covenant. Jer 31:31-34 promised:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Before giving additional revelation, Yahweh interjects the absolute certainty that He will fulfill His Word based on His upholding His own creative order (Jer 31:35–37). The third and final “behold, days are coming” in this chapter, Jer 31:38-40, contains divine promises that are just as truthful and binding as are the previous two used in Jeremiah 31:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, or overthrown anymore forever.”

It must be noted that the same God who promised the forgiveness of sin with the making of a New Covenant gives further promises that, at some undisclosed time,

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51 For an excellent article for the literal rebuilding of Jerusalem on earth and argument for a fulfillment of the land promises in Jeremiah 31 in the future and how these relate to other land promises, see Dennis M. Swanson, “Expansion of Jerusalem in Jer 31:38–40: Never, Already, or Not Yet?” MSJ 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 17–34. Specially see critiques for the “never to be fulfilled” land promises (27–29) and the “realized” or “already fulfilled” land promises (29–32). Based on the specifics given in Jeremiah 31:38–40, Swanson argues persuasively that these promise await a future fulfillment on earth at the return of Jesus (32–34).
Jerusalem will be rebuilt for Himself, and from that time onward, it will never again be plucked up or overthrown forever.52

To briefly summarize God’s covenant promises to Israel when Messiah reigns, God promises: (1) Jerusalem will be rebuilt for the LORD (Jer 31:38), and (2) become “holy to the LORD” (Jer 31:40); (3) there shall be no end to peace or the increase of Messiah’s government (Isa 9:6–7): (4) Jerusalem will not “be plucked up any more or overthrown forever” (Jer 31:40), and (5), the fully operative blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant contain and continue God’s promise to curse the ones who curse you (Gen 12:3; Num 24:9).

An Examination of the Final Revolt in View of God’s Covenant Promises to Israel

With these divine promises that must be fulfilled because Scripture cannot be broken, Rev 20:7–10 can now be considered:

And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.53

How would these verses be interpreted in a normative understanding if one expected God to be true to His Word? God’s subsequent actions should be expected because He has repeatedly given them in His Word, especially as seen in His covenant promises to Israel and to the rest of the world. As part of the Abrahamic Covenant promises, God’s promise to curse the ones who curse Israel would also include this final Gentile rebellion since Messiah will have previously dealt with the rebellion of the Tribulation in Revelation 19 and will have already established His kingdom on earth in Rev 20:1–6.

However, in presenting what he sees as a major problem against premillennialism, Storms argues:

You must necessarily believe that physical death will continue to exist beyond the time of Christ’s second coming. The reason for this is that all premillennialists must account for the rebellious and unbelieving nations in Revelation 20:7–10 who launch an assault against Christ and his people at the end of what they

52 Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant, 492, with their bent toward typology, interpret Jeremiah 31:38–40 as referring to the New Jerusalem.

53 See MacLeod, “The Fifth Last Thing: The Release of Satan and Man’s Final Rebellion,” 207–9, for a discussion and source of how this Gog and Magog differ from previous uses elsewhere such as Ezekiel 38–39.
believe is the millennial age. Where did these people come from? They must be the unbelieving progeny born to those believers who entered the millennial age in physical, unglorified bodies. Not only they, but also the believing progeny will be subject to physical death (notwithstanding the alleged prolonged life-spans experienced by those who live during the millennial reign of Christ).54

Biblical answers about who these final rebels will be exists in such passages as Isa 65:20, which show a longevity of life but also of death occurring: “No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed.” Vlach writes, “So notice two important things here with Isa 65:20—an increased longevity of life and the presence of sin which brings curses and death.”55 Vlach questions when such a condition could have existed in history past and argues against it as being in the eternal state where sin will not exist; therefore concludes that this must transpire in the millennial kingdom.56 Arguing against those who would say that since the nations have been destroyed in Rev 19:21 it would not be logical to speak of protecting the nations from deception in 20:1–3, Powell writes, “True, the nations are destroyed in 19:21, but that does not mean that they cannot be reconstituted later under the messianic King (Isa. 2:4; 11:10–16; Zech. 14:16–21). Believing survivors will be in the nations; they and their descendants will make up the reconstituted nations at the end of the millennium.”57 Grudem writes in reference to Zechariah 14: “Here again the description does not fit the present age, for the Lord is King over all the earth in this situation. But it does not fit the eternal state either because of the disobedience and rebellion against the Lord that is clearly present.”58 But with the fullness of the Davidic Covenant, God clearly promises there will be “no end to peace” (Isa 9:6–7). Consequently, in Rev 20:7–9a only an assemblage for battle will transpire in this final rebellion and not a battle itself, for a battle would go against the promised word of Messiah’s reign having no end of peace.

Yet even without the promise of never-ending peace in Isa 9:7, when Messiah reigns, if all that Scripture revealed were the promises God made when the New Covenant comes in its fullness (Jer 31:31–34), including the section of Jerusalem being rebuilt for the LORD in Jer 31:38–40, when Satan comes up against Messiah with massive Gentile forces (Rev 20:7–8) so that “they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (Rev 20:9a), Yahweh has long before determined and revealed the outcome of any such rebellion because Jerusalem, once rebuilt for the LORD, will never “be plucked up or overthrown forever” (Jer 31:40). Although the method by which God will accomplish this judgment of the final rebellion is not given until Revelation 20, God’s actions at what He

54 Storms, Kingdom Come, 136 (emphasis in the original).
56 Ibid., 238–40.
57 Powell, “Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6,” 105.
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has revealed He will do should not be surprising because they harmonize perfectly with His previous promises that there will be no disturbance of Messiah’s peace; consequently, fire from heaven will come down and devour them (Rev 20:9b). Further, God’s promise to curse the ones who curse Israel (Gen 12:3; Num 24:9) is not limited only until Christ’s return to earth but includes all the way to the last part of His millennial reign and will be just as operative in this final Gentile rebellion as it was when God first gave it Genesis 12.

Significantly, even before the eternal state with the new heavens and the new earth, even in the midst of His kingdom reign, evil has not run its course until the end. First Corinthians 15:20–26 corroborates this and offers a glimpse of what will eventually be described in more detail in Rev 20:7–10:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign [dei] until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

Finally, Jesus must reign until He has abolished all rule and all authority and then He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father. As Busenitz explains:

Lastly, death itself will be destroyed (Rev 20:14). This is the final act of Christ’s millennial reign. As the apostle Paul explained in 1 Cor 15:25–26, “He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death.” Christ’s kingly dominion during the millennial age will culminate in the destruction of death itself. According to 1 Cor 15:28, after all the enemies are defeated and His mediatorial role is fulfilled, Christ will then subject His kingdom to the Father “so that God may be all.” Though the millennial kingdom will come to an end, the Son of God will continue to rule with His Father in Trinitarian glory for all eternity (cf. Rev 22:3–5).59

In addition to the other reasons, Satan must be released to deceive the nations and bring about not only the final rebellion, but also the final deaths of all humans who reject the Messiah. Further, God’s promise “to curse the ones who curse you” actually relates to all enemies of Israel and not only to the Gentile nations. In keeping with God’s Word, God curses Satan and throws him into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). Then when death has been abolished forever and after the Great White Throne judgment of the eternally damned (Rev 20:11–15), when all evil will have been divinely eradicated, then the new heavens and new earth—and New Jerusalem—will arrive.

Summary and Significance

In Revelation 20, God will act precisely as one would expect Him to if one reads His covenant promises in a literal, normative understanding. There is nothing bizarre or abnormal in anything that God will do in Revelation 20, for He has repeatedly promised to do these things. Revelation 20 is merely the final setting of God’s faithfulness and the summing up of all things in Christ which He has been so faithfully doing from Genesis 1 onward until ushering in the eternal state.

Simply stated, while in full agreement with other reasons, including the sovereignty of God, the depravity of man, and Satan’s utter wickedness, another extremely important reason exists: Satan must be released so that God can demonstrate to Israel and to the world the veracity of His covenant promises, completely and precisely fulfilling them in minute and specific details—all the way to the arrival of the eternal state. During the millennial kingdom, with the Abrahamic Covenant promises still in effect, God will still curse the ones who curse Israel and His Messiah (Gen 12:3; Num 24:9). As part of the Davidic Covenant and Messiah’s reign, “there shall be no end to peace” (Isa 9:7); consequently, no final battle occurs in Rev 20:7–9, only the assemblage for battle, because an actual battle would disturb Messiah’s peace and promises. With the fullness of the New Covenant in force, Jerusalem will again be rebuilt for the LORD and will be holy to the LORD, and Jerusalem “shall not be plucked up or overthrown any more forever” (Jer 31:38–40). After this final rebellion and God has completed all of His covenant promises, God will vanquish the assembled enemies before the battle begins—just as would be expected based on God’s previous promises. Then “comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God and the Father after He has abolished all rule and all power and authority” (1 Cor 15:24). For indeed “He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Cor 15:25), including the last human deaths ever recorded in Scripture (Rev 20:8–9), for “the last enemy that will be abolished is death” (1 Cor 15:26). Finally, Jesus will judge Satan, the last spiritual enemy who likewise cursed Israel (Rev 20:10). Once this transpires, no enemies of God play any future role. After the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11–15) comes the wonderful perfection of the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21–22).

Reading the text in this “normative way” makes perfect sense unless one has a theological predisposition against it. Thomas’ summation is helpful:

With this characteristic of the book as a whole in mind, for someone to say “that Rev 20:1–10 cannot be linked textually with Israel’s covenants and promises; that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets imagery of the Old Testament with a reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne” is clearly a denial of what is obvious because of adopting meanings other than what the words have in their normal usage. It is to view those verses completely divorced from their context, an exegetically unacceptable decision. God will fulfill in a literal manner all the promises He has made to national Israel and will retain
His eternal attribute of faithfulness. The Apocalypse interpreted literally verifies His compliance with His promises to the nation.60

After all, “God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will he not make it good” (Num 23:19)?

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REGAINING OUR FOCUS: A RESPONSE TO THE SOCIAL ACTION TREND IN EVANGELICAL MISSIONS

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Today churches and missionaries are being told that to imitate the ministry of Jesus they must add social justice to their understanding of the church’s mission. As pastors and missions committees embrace the idea that social action and gospel proclamation are “two wings of the same bird,” the kind of work that they send their missionaries to do changes, and this has a negative effect on world missions. This article highlights those negative effects in an African context, offers historical, practical, and biblical critiques of the trend, and redirects the church’s attention to understanding and fulfilling the Great Commission in the way the apostles did in Acts and the Epistles.

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Introduction

Evangelical missions in Africa is changing. Or more accurately, it has changed. In the past, the bulk of the theologically conservative missionaries in Africa came to do church planting and leadership training. No longer. Today many of the new missionaries being sent are focused on social relief, with the church tacked on as a theological addendum. By all appearances there has been a mega-shift in evangelical missions away from church planting and leadership training toward social justice or social action.¹

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¹ James also teaches at Grace School of Ministry in Pretoria, South Africa. Biedebach teaches at African Bible College in Lilongwe, Malawi. Both have been missionaries for twenty years.

² Social action and social justice are elastic, elusive, and basically interchangeable terms that include, for example, caring for the poor and promoting just government that keeps the wealthy from arming the vulnerable. Social justice also often includes the idea that everyone deserves his fair bit of his local or global society’s affluence, and therefore, lobbies for some kind of forced or freewill redistribution of wealth.
What we used to do, we aren’t doing anymore. In fact, mission agency representatives who visit the campuses of Christian colleges in the United States to recruit new missionaries report that the compass needle of student interest is clearly swinging away from gospel proclamation toward medical relief, orphan care, and digging wells. It’s no surprise. The influential “missional” voices currently dominating the evangelical conversation about missions are promoting a new kind of mission: shalom, social justice, or the gospel of good deeds and human flourishing. Of course, because of their concern for biblical truth, the better authors and speakers emphasize the church and the preaching of Christ crucified for sinners. However, across the board a categorical shift in emphasis is unmistakable.

And it appears that the new generation of evangelicals—the Young, Restless, and Reformed—has bought in. Churches, keen to support their enthusiastic young missionaries, often loosen their purse strings whatever the theological significance or insignificance of the mission. And market-sensitive mission agencies, having noted the change, are reworking their images to accommodate the new Peace Corps mentality. As a result, the evangelical church in the West is commissioning and sending a generation of missionaries to Africa whose primary enthusiasm is for orphan care, distributing medicine, combating poverty, and other social action projects. For the most part, these new missionaries value the church, but in many cases they seem to view the church primarily as a platform from which to run and fund their relief projects. And in a surprising number of cases, their local church involvement is nominal.

We have watched these trends in Africa with growing disquiet over the last few years, and that concern has led us to write this article. By doing so we hope to warn pastors and churches of the trend and offer an alternative. We will speak about the situation in Africa because that is the continent we are familiar with, but we have no doubt that what we say applies equally well to missions endeavors everywhere.

To quantify his concern, one of the authors recently conducted a survey of missionaries in Malawi. The following graph shows some of the results:

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3 This is the report of a friend of the authors who serves as a recruiting representative for his mission agency, and of the other agency representatives with whom he rubs shoulders.

4 In his Ph.D. research project involving missionaries in Malawi, Brian Biedebach discovered that one-third of the missionaries who focus on social relief do not attend the same church on a weekly basis.

5 It is no surprise that international missions is a place where the issue of social action comes sharply into focus. In 1923, contrasting the liberals’ social mission with a more biblical philosophy of ministry, J. Gresham Machen wrote in Christianity and Liberalism, “This difference is not a mere difference in theory, but makes itself felt everywhere in the practical realm. It is particularly evident on the missions field” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 156.

6 This survey was conducted by Brian Biedebach for his doctoral dissertation Making Disciples in Current Missionary Practice in Malawi for the University of Stellenbosch. Seventy-two percent of the missionaries surveyed had been in Malawi for five years or less, meaning these figures naturally reflect what the most recent generation of missionaries is doing.
According to the survey, thirty-eight percent of the missionaries in Malawi are involved in direct gospel-proclamation ministry, such as evangelism, church planting, and theological training. Sixty-two percent are involved in social action or serve as support staff. In fact, there are as many Western school teacher missionaries in Malawi as there are evangelists, church planters, and theological instructors combined. Some argue that the church needs to emphasize social action in missions to correct the imbalance of too many years of focusing on proclamation ministries. In light of these figures, one wonders exactly what imbalance is being redressed.

When asked if they share their faith with others, twenty-five percent of the missionaries surveyed responded by ticking the *seldom* or *never* box. Thirty-one percent said that they are not currently discipling anyone. These are the patterns that concern us: numerically speaking, social action efforts are outstripping gospel proclamation efforts, and compounding the problem is the fact that social relief missions do not seem to easily lend themselves to fulfilling Christ’s commission to make disciples. These figures reveal a trend, but where has the trend come from?

Sources of the Current Trend

The tug of war between proclamation-oriented missions and social action is not new; however, it has become a prominent debate again in our generation. Recent key voices in evangelical circles enthusiastically promoting social action in missions include John Stott, Tim Keller, and popular Emergent authors.
John Stott’s influence has been felt both through his leading role in the Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization and through his many books.\(^7\) At the 1974 Lausanne Conference, more than 2,000 attendees signed the Lausanne Covenant which declared that “evangelism and socio-political involvement are part of our Christian duty.”\(^8\) However, the Covenant also explicitly said that, of the two, gospel proclamation is of higher priority: “In the church’s mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary.”\(^9\)

In spite of this clear statement, an astonishing event took place on the last day of the conference. Approximately 200 conference attendees drafted a statement entitled “Radical Discipleship” that gave social action equal status with gospel proclamation. While it was too late to change the wording of the Lausanne Covenant, Stott (who had chaired the committee that drafted the Covenant) publically affirmed the alternative Radical Discipleship position the last night of the conference.\(^10\) It was a watershed moment for world evangelization, essentially redefining the church’s mission.

After the 1974 conference, in the face of resistance from Billy Graham and others, Stott continued to press for an equal role for social action in Christian missions.\(^11\) By 1982, the triumph of Stott’s view was clear. In that year he chaired a Lausanne committee tasked to write a report on the subject. Under Stott’s guidance, the report again recommended that the church make social action and evangelism equal partners in the fulfilling of the Great Commission:

They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird. This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus who not only preached the gospel but fed the hungry and healed the sick. In his ministry, *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakonia* (service) went hand in hand. His words explained his works, and his works dramatized his words. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be ours.\(^12\)

More recently, Tim Keller, the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, has played a leading role in promoting social activism through his books *Generous Justice* and *Center Church*, and through his prominent role as co-founder

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\(^8\) Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 5.

\(^9\) Ibid., paragraph 6.


\(^12\) “Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment,” Grand Rapids Report No. 21, Consultation on the Relationships between Evangelism and Social responsibility (CRESR) (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, 1982).
of the Gospel Coalition. Peter Naylor sums up Keller’s view succinctly: “Keller’s main thesis is that the church has a twofold mission in this world: (1) to preach the gospel and (2) to do justice, which involves social and cultural transformation and renewal.”

Key figures in the Emergent Movement also avidly promote social justice—not just as an equal partner with the gospel, but as the gospel itself. For example, Brian McLaren’s vision of being missional “. . . eliminates old dichotomies like ‘evangelism’ and ‘social action.’ Both are integrated in expressing saving love for the world.”

Summary

It’s a dicey line that authors like Stott and Keller have drawn for the church to walk: “We’re going to keep the gospel the main thing and focus the church on social action; in fact, in a sense, social action is the gospel too.” In theory, it’s a noble blend of word and deed, of transformational truth and dynamic love. Naturally, however, the further one pushes, the closer one gets to the place where social involvement ceases to be distinctly Christian and even starts to supplant that which is distinctly Christian. It’s no small wonder that David Bosch calls this issue “one of the thorniest areas in the theology and practice of mission today.”

In the 1990s, Stott acknowledged the danger of the dual emphasis on proclamation and social action that he campaigned for: “The main fear of my critics seems to be that missionaries will be sidetracked.” We believe that the results of the survey cited above indicate that being sidetracked is not merely a theoretical danger. Stott’s critics are correct: sending churches and missionaries are becoming sidetracked, and in many cases, pastors and missions committees barely seem aware of the distinction between missionaries who focus on social action and missionaries who focus on Bible translation, theological training, church planting, and gospel proclamation.

The Concerns

It would be unjust to represent the current shift toward social action by evangelicals as a wholesale abandonment of the gospel. In fact, in our experience most of

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13 Generous Justice (New York: Dutton Adult, 2010); Center Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).
15 A Generous Orthodoxy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 108.
the new evangelical missionaries coming to Africa genuinely love the gospel. Although Emergents like Brian McLaren are clearly trying to resurrect the wormy corpse of the Social Gospel, in conservative circles the problem is more subtle. Our concerns fall into three categories: history, theory, and practice.

Concern 1: Is History Repeating Itself?

As we survey what is happening in missions in our era, we wonder if enough attention is being given to the history of social activism in the North American church. We have been down this road before, and we should be aware of the lessons learned by previous generations.

In the late 1800s conservative evangelicals in the United States enthusiastically threw themselves into social reform projects in response to the pressures created by the rapid industrialization, urbanization, and immigration that typified the 1880s and 1890s. Church projects included everything from employment bureaus to day care, summer homes for tenement children, and food kitchens. These efforts were sponsored by churches and Christian groups ranging the spectrum from Calvinistic to Pietistic, premillennial to postmillennial.

However, evangelicals’ enthusiasm for social justice evaporated in the opening three decades of the 1900s. By 1930, in what has been called “the Great Reversal,” conservative evangelicals abandoned or severely curtailed their social action projects, primarily due to their fears of distortion and distraction. Doctrinally speaking, evangelicals were keen to avoid the theological distortion of the Social Gospel promoted by theological liberals. The Social Gospel placed exclusive emphasis on social intervention, offering what was essentially an alternative, social salvation. In other cases, evangelicals’ concern was distraction. Over time, keen-eyed observers began to see that while, in theory, social action did not necessarily lead to replacing the cross with a soup kitchen, in practice, it often did lead to an unintentional displacement of the gospel. Having experimented with social action for a generation, and having become acquainted with its dangers, evangelicals consciously turned away from the dual-track (proclamation and social action) philosophy of the church and missions.

18 As David Wells notes, many of today’s younger evangelicals seem to believe that history started with the Beatles, and thus they “have no historical categories” (The Courage to be Protestant [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008], 20). This lack of awareness of the lessons of history can lead to unnecessarily repeating the errors of a previous generation.


20 Marsden, 86, 92.

21 The evangelist, D. L. Moody, had warned of this all along, saying that Christians should not go to the world with a loaf of bread in one hand and a Bible in the other, lest sinners take the loaf and ignore the Bible (Ibid., 81; see also John 6:26).
However, the lessons of the last century go further than that. Looking back, we can see that not only did social reform pose a threat to the gospel, it also had a deadly effect on missions. A case in point is the Student Volunteer Movement.

The Student Volunteer Movement was a missionary movement that began in the United States in 1888, founded by university students who had a desire for world evangelism. The movement hosted large conferences at which Christian young people were challenged to become missionaries or missionary supporters; and in fact, through this movement, more than 20,000 college students became missionaries and 80,000 more dedicated themselves to support those who had sailed. Never before had there been such a large missions movement among young Americans (nor since, tragically).

The most astonishing fact about this movement is not that thousands of missionaries were sent out, but that less than forty years after the organization began to blossom, it died. In fact, very few Christians today have heard of the Student Volunteer Movement. According to David Doran, a key reason for its expiration was that it became distracted by social activism. Concerns over poverty, race relations, war, and imperialism were raised side by side with the preaching of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ: gradually the organization lost its spiritual purpose and died.

Sadly, the demise of the Student Volunteer Movement represented a broader trend. In 1900, mainline Protestant churches in the United States supplied eighty percent of North America’s missionaries. Over time, as those churches became more and more focused on social action, the number of missionaries they sent out actually became less and less. In 2000, those same (now fully liberal) Protestant denominations supplied only six percent of North America’s missionary force. Historically it appears that making social reform an equal partner with evangelism and theological training doesn’t enliven missions; it kills it.

Naturally, historical observations of this nature do not have the authority that biblical instruction does; however, before evangelicals run another lap on the track of social action missions, it would be wise to reflect on historical lessons like these.

Concern 2: Is the Underlying Theory Flawed?

While Jesus commanded believers to love their neighbors and to care for the poor, we don’t see that the New Testament church (either by dictate or example) fulfilled that command by organizing itself to carry out social action projects directed at the general betterment of Roman society. In other words, we believe that the theory

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23 Ibid., 37–39, 43.


25 Only the Word of God has the intrinsic spiritual vigor necessary to sustain the church’s long-term commitment to missions (1 Pet 1:23–25).
of social action missions is suspect from the start. If anything, the apostles seemed to avoid social reform projects directed at the world in favor of preaching the gospel to the world.

We ardently believe that Christians can and should be involved in meaningful demonstrations of compassion—everything from giving a sandwich to a homeless person to working at an orphanage. In this article we are dealing with a different issue: the idea that social reform and the gospel are equal partners in Christian mission. We will develop our reasons for rejecting this dual-track view of the church’s mission in a moment.

Concern 3: Is the Mission of the Church Being Unintentionally Neglected?

All true evangelicals are committed to keeping the gospel, expository preaching, and the church the main things; however, this becomes difficult to do in the social action model of the church and missions. Social action projects are like black holes—they have a habit of sucking in all the ecclesiastical resources within reach of their gravitational pull. While the theory states that the gospel, preaching, and the church are the main things, in regard to budgets, planning, staff, and effort, what’s actually first is all too clear.26

Even the proponents of social action acknowledge this problem. For example, Keller admits, “Churches that . . . try to take on all the levels of doing justice often find that the work of community renewal and social justice overwhelms the work of preaching, teaching and nurturing the congregation.”27 In response to Keller’s admission, Naylor writes,

Keller speaks as if there is a certain point at which this becomes problematic, but he does not demonstrate how this effect is not already in operation the moment the church becomes involved in this kind of work at all.28

As resources are fed into the gaping maw of social justice projects, by default, essential ministries are left undernourished. The West can finance, train, and send only so many missionaries to Africa. And since so many of the new missionaries being sent are focusing on relief projects, what suffers by default are the essential ministries of Christian missions: the things that only the church can do.

26 Theoretically, the concept of holistic missions is enticing: planting maize alongside an African and discipling him at the same time sounds ideal. The problem is that it so rarely works. Experience shows that the social justice missionary ends up spending the majority of his time sorting out problems and issues that arise on the social side. I (Brian) spent a year working on a holistic project in Malawi in 1997–98. I was responsible for the oversight of twenty-six Bible college students, fifty goats, four hundred chickens, and a large agricultural garden. When I woke up in the morning, the first thing on my mind was that I had to get the eggs to market. All through the day I was consumed with making sure that water was being pumped, animals were being fed, and in the middle of the night I was awake, chasing away chicken thieves and wild dogs. Illustrations of this nature could be multiplied endlessly: in social action missions, distraction is the norm, not the exception.

27 Keller, Generous Justice, 145–46.

28 In Engaging With Keller, 156.
Stated in mathematical terms, for evangelicals the problem is not subtraction of the gospel (as is the case of the liberals and the Social Gospel). Instead, it is one of addition—addition that results in competition, distraction, and eventually, an unintentional displacement of the gospel. Social projects undercut the core ministries of the church by what they add to the church’s agenda: resource-devouring ventures of dubious Great Commission value. D. A. Carson’s warning comes to mind: “I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy.”

We again want to make it clear that we believe that there is room for legitimate, non-dominating mercy efforts in Christian missions. However, what we are seeing today is a focus on social action that, at best, is disproportional to the New Testament’s emphasis, and at times is something worse.

**Specific Critiques**

Having surveyed our concerns, we want to highlight eight biblical problems with the social action model of the church and missions. It is unlikely that any single author or ministry embodies all these problems, but for simplicity’s sake we paint with a broad brush.

1. **A Redefinition of the Gospel**

   Social justice advocates are fond of describing the gospel in terms of human flourishing. The incarnation, they say, was about Christ bringing shalom or general well-being to the human race. Many evangelicals (without turning away from substitutionary atonement) have adopted this notion enthusiastically: if the gospel is about human flourishing, then any Christian effort that increases that flourishing is gospel ministry. On that basis, building a hospital or an orphanage is just as much a fulfillment of the Great Commission as church planting.

   D. A. Carson notes that this redefinition of the gospel is categorically wrong, since the gospel is “the good news of what God has done, not a description of what [Christians] ought to do in consequence... One cannot too forcefully insist on the distinction between the gospel and its entailments.” Furthermore, to represent the gospel of Jesus Christ as being about the general betterment of unbelieving society is to misrepresent the gospel. John MacArthur writes,

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Is social reconstruction even an appropriate way for Christians to spend their energies? I recently mentioned to a friend that I was working on a book dealing with sin and our culture’s declining moral climate. He immediately said, “Be sure you urge Christians to get actively involved in reclaiming society. The main problem is that Christians haven’t acquired enough influence in politics, art, and the entertainment industry to turn things around for good.” That, I acknowledge, is a common view held by many Christians. But I’m afraid I don’t agree.

. . . . God’s purpose in this world—and the church’s only legitimate commission—is the proclamation of the message of sin and salvation to individuals, whom God sovereignly redeems and calls out of the world.32

2. An Overly Realized Eschatology

An idealistic desire to bring the kingdom now often plays a role in the social action vision of the church. Advocates of social justice argue that Christ came to banish the results of the Fall; therefore, “kingdom work” includes anything in the current age that diminishes or reverses those results and promotes the good of individuals and society. In other words, Christ’s kingdom is brought into existence through the general reduction of evil and injustice in society just as much as through gospel proclamation: “The kingdom comes wherever Jesus overcomes the Evil One. This happens (or ought to happen) in the fullest measure in the church. But it also happens in society.”33

To orient the gospel toward human flourishing and general societal improvement is to step into the trap of an overly realized eschatology. It’s a version of post-millennialism. Ultimately, it attempts societal transformation that only Christ’s return can bring. Furthermore, its common-grace approach to the Great Commission ignores the fact that, biblically speaking, one participates in the blessings of Christ’s kingdom only by believing in the King (John 3:3).

Making social action an equal partner with the gospel, in effect, subordinates the need for repentance and forgiveness to temporal needs. The sad truth is that Africa has always had poverty, orphans, political corruption, sexually transmitted diseases, and other health and social crises. No amount of money and social reform will change what is essentially a heart problem that only repenting, believing in Jesus Christ, and embracing a biblical worldview can solve.34

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34 It is estimated that one trillion dollars of Western aid has been poured into Africa in the last five decades (Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert’s What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011], 188). More money is not the solution to Africa’s problems; Christ clearly proclaimed is.
Paul would have defined Africa’s problem this way: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . .” (Rom 1:18). Likewise, Africa’s solution is: “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). By focusing on social justice, evangelicals might be trying to help Africa in an unhelpful way—or at least not in the most helpful way.

3. A Preference for Indirect Gospel Ministry over Direct Gospel Ministry

In most social justice efforts, the actual direct gospel ministry is very limited—more of a hoped-for byproduct than the overt goal. For example, the thirty-eight percent of missionaries in Malawi who are school teachers must, by necessity, spend most of their days teaching mathematics, handwriting, art, and other basic educational skills. Those are good things, but actual gospel ministry is minimal when compared, for example, with what a church planter does.

An indirect approach might be appropriate and even necessary in some situations, such as in Islamic countries where missionaries need legitimate, secular employment in order to get into the country to proclaim Christ. However, there is no need to adopt indirect-gospel-ministry strategies when reaching open countries.

Often lurking behind the indirect approach is the notion that the church must first portray the gospel by means of social justice before it can preach the gospel. This belief has no basis in Acts or the Epistles. The apostle Paul did not say that God was well pleased to save sinners through the foolishness of the gospel mercied, but rather through the foolishness of the message preached (1 Cor 1:21). After noting that studies have shown that Christians spend about five times more money on poverty relief projects than on evangelism and church planting, D. A. Carson warns that the gospel is too often the missing component in “holistic” or indirect gospel ministry:

At one time, “holistic ministry” was an expression intended to move Christians beyond proclamation to include deeds of mercy. Increasingly, however, “holistic ministry” refers to deeds of mercy without any proclamation of the gospel—and that is not holistic. It is not even halfistic, since the deeds of mercy are not the gospel. . . . Judging by the distribution of American mission dollars, the biggest hole in our gospel is the gospel itself.35

As we point out the distinction between indirect and direct gospel ministries, we again want to affirm that we are not categorically opposed to the idea of believers coming to Africa to express Christian love in a tangible way. For example, Malawi has a population of 15 million people and yet there are fewer than 300 doctors in the whole country.36 If a Christian doctor wanted to move to Malawi to minister to the

35 Carson, “The Hole in the Gospel.”
physical needs of others, would we discourage him? Certainly not! Our concern, however, is that the Western church is confusing the sending of medical missionaries (for example) with its greater priority of sending missionaries who focus directly on carrying out the Great Commission. Direct gospel ministry must always take both theoretical and actual priority over social relief missions.

4. The New Pragmatism

One of the defining problems of the evangelical church in our era is “a spiraling loss of confidence in the power of Scripture.” Tragically, evangelicals often openly doubt the attracting and saving power of the gospel, and various forms of pragmatism are the result. For example, for decades the church growth gurus have been telling us that in order to get unbelievers to listen to the gospel we need to attract them first with snazzy entertainment and cultural coolness. Build a bowling alley in your church to attract the unsaved, and then you’ll be able to preach the gospel.

Today, another pressure has been added. After centuries of general acceptance in American and Western European culture, evangelicals today are reeling due to the public scorn being heaped on them by an increasingly hostile world. The radicals of the 1960s have grown up and are now running the culture, and as a result, the Bible’s exclusive and authoritative message is openly detested. Shocked that their fellow citizens are labeling them unloving and intolerant, and naively hoping to regain the cultural acceptance of a generation past, many evangelicals are hitching their wagon to the rising star of social involvement. Social action is safe. It avoids the scandal of the gospel. It allows churches to be active and to be accepted by the world.

Unfortunately, a spirit of pragmatism (and a corresponding spirit of doubt about the power of the gospel) appears to lie behind much of the social justice movement. Unchurched Harry no longer lusts after entertainment. The new Harry is socially conscious; he has embraced the cause of the disenfranchised. Therefore, Las Vegas-style stage shows are passé. Today’s socially conscious unbelievers will be wooed to Christianity by means of highly visible social relief projects—examples of human caring that they can applaud and endorse even as unregenerate people. Once the social justice agenda has made them fond of the church, then they can be nudged toward Christ. It’s the new pragmatism: the gospel needs a lead-in because it will never succeed by itself.

While we gladly admit that most social relief projects are infinitely more noble lead-ins than the entertainment of the seeker movement, the dangers of pragmatism remain unchanged: (1) the gospel is moved into second place, and (2) the medium becomes the message. And when the church puts the gospel second, the gospel has


38 For example, Tom Krattenmaker speaks of the evangelical social justice movement’s desire “... to right seemingly every global wrong you can name while restoring the credibility of publicly expressed Christianity in the process” (http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2011-06-26-can-social-justice-effort-tame-culture-wars_n.htm). (accessed January 25, 2014).
a way of staying second: eventually it disappears altogether. The following description of a social-justice church plant in Sandtown (a neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland) provides a rather bare-faced example of doubting the efficacy of the gospel and of the medium becoming the message:

Without a holistic faith, there is no gospel in Sandtown. Living out the gospel in this context has meant building a collaborative network of church- and community-based institutions that focus on housing, job development, education and health care. In 2001, the full-time staff numbered over eighty. . . . Seeking the *shalom* of Sandtown means a concentrated effort to eliminate vacant and substandard housing, a K-8 school that has high standards and an excellent record of achievement, a job placement center that links over one hundred residents a year to employment, and a family health center that serves all residents regardless of the ability to pay. . . .

. . . . Simply “preaching the gospel” would have failed.39

The gospel in Sandtown includes housing reform, job development, quality education, and health care. In fact, it appears that about the only thing that the gospel in Sandtown does not include is Jesus Christ crucified for sinners. Jesus as Savior from substandard housing and unemployment is highly visible. Jesus as Savior from sin and hell is nowhere to be found, and frankly, isn’t even necessary to most of what is being done. The medium—social justice—has become the message.40

5. Adopting the Agendas of Political Correctness

Political correctness is today’s secular piety. But the piety of political correctness does not include things like honesty, sexual purity, and humility. Instead, it val-


40 Another contributor to *The Urban Face of Missions* writes, “What churches do best is to build community. Already existing in churches are social networks and connections with organizations and other constituencies in the neighborhood. Churches provide a place for residents to meet, and provide the symbolic language necessary so that the meeting has meaning. Churches provide a place and a mechanism for building relationships, while common problems and common dreams emerge” (Clinton E. Stockwell, “The Church and Justice in Crisis,” 166). Frankly, this sounds like the way an unsaved politician would describe the church—a tool for social upliftment in his ward, nothing more. It’s disappointing that a book on Christian missions describes the church in such an insipid manner, and it reveals the dismal swamp into which the river of a social action too often drains.
ues multi-culturalism, economic socialism, a false civility toward philosophical op-
ponents, uplifting the oppressed, enfranchising the disenfranchised, and so on. In
postmodern piety, personal sin is acceptable; social injustice is definitely taboo.41

It appears that many Christians in the social justice movement have avidly
adopted the piety of postmodernism. The result is that, in a subtle way, the world
begins to set the agenda for the church. For example, we recently read a church
planting plan for a major African city in which the author (a thoroughgoing evangel-
ical) laid out his primary goals. At the same level of importance as preaching and
evangelism, the following were included: to help the city change for the better so-
cially, to increase the overall level of civility among its citizens, to encourage better
race relations in the city, and to actively advantage the disadvantaged. The author
made it clear that if the constituency of the church did not come from racially and
economically diverse backgrounds, he would consider the church plant a failure.

While all those things are good to one degree or another, we would contend that
on the whole they are not New Testament-identified goals for a church. In fact, they
appear primarily to be a rehashing of the agendas of a politically correct, postmodern
culture. And when the world sets the agenda, it is no surprise that the gospel, expos-
itory preaching, and serious theological training sometimes slip into second place.42

6. Defective Hermeneutics

The arguments used to promote a social justice philosophy of the church and
missions are often based on transparently deficient hermeneutics. The result is argu-
ments that are rhetorically compelling, but biblically suspect. Peter Naylor critiques
Tim Keller’s handling of key passages by saying, “He approaches the text with a
predetermined agenda that distorts his interpretation.”43 This error seems endemic to
the social justice movement. It is not possible to list and respond to every hermeneu-
tical misstep made by the advocates of social action; however, typical mistakes in-
clude the following:

- Passages about mercy within the church are often interpreted as if they were
  about social action projects outside the church.
- The biblical word justice is wrongly defined and its meaning is confusingly
  intermingled with the word generosity.
- The words oppression and poverty are equated.

41 For this reason, David Wells calls political correctness “fake piety,” (Losing Our Virtue: Why the

42 We would argue that the things listed in that church planting plan are primarily the results of
the gospel, not the goals of the gospel, and turning results into goals can lead to employing theologically
suspect methods.

43 Engaging With Keller, 162. As Richard Holst points out, Keller’s occasionally defective herme-
neutics—especially his habit of overworking metaphors and of sliding into allegory—are the source of
many of his questionable views (Richard Holst, “Timothy Keller’s Hermeneutic: an Example for the
Church to Follow?”, chapter 5 in Engaging With Keller).
1. Regaining Our Focus

When interpreting Old Testament passages about social justice, an appropriate distinction between Israel and the church is not maintained.

- God’s promise to Abraham (“in you all the families of the earth will be blessed,” Gen 12:3) is interpreted as a commission to the church to work for the social betterment of the world.

- The fact that Solomon and Job were *civil* leaders in their societies (with corresponding social responsibilities and powers) is not given proper weight when interpreting and applying passages about their social justice activities.

- Biblical references to poverty are interpreted as if they all referred to material poverty, and not, on occasion, to spiritual poverty.

- Passages that show Jesus ministered to all social classes are ignored.

- Passages such as Gal 6:10 (“Let us do good to all people”) are emphasized as if by position and wording they were intended to play the same defining role in the church as Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

- Biblical instructions about generosity are interpreted to mean that Christians must strive to create financial equality between all individuals and groups.44,45

7. A Misunderstanding of Jesus’ Ministry and Miracles

Those who hope to make social action and gospel proclamation two wings of the same bird claim that they are imitating the earthly ministry of Jesus. Jesus, they contend, not only preached repentance, He also focused on relieving the physical needs and the oppression of the economically downtrodden in Palestine. He healed their sicknesses, filled their stomachs, and dropped a coin in the outstretched hands of the poor.

While the Scripture implies that Jesus did express mercy to the poor on a personal level (Matt 26:9; John 13:29), it is clear from the Gospels that Jesus started no orphanages, established no poverty relief funds, no low-cost housing schemes, no well-digging programs, and set no prisoners free (not even John the Baptist). Neither did Jesus instruct or train His disciples to do so. That doesn’t mean that it’s intrinsically wrong for Christians to be involved in such work. But it certainly makes suspect the argument that, based on Jesus’ example, the church should make social action central to her mission. Personal expressions of mercy and church-organized social action programs are not the same thing: Jesus exemplified one, not the other. In fact,

44 For thorough responses to most of these errors see DeYoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?* and Naylor, in *Engaging With Keller*, chapter 4.

45 Conservative evangelicals occasionally employ bad hermeneutics in order to arrive at their preferred view of the church’s mission. Equally problematic are influential missiologists who categorically embrace postmodern hermeneutics. For example, David Bosch writes, “The text of the New Testament generates various valid interpretations in different readers. . . . Thus the meaning of a text cannot be reduced to a single, univocal sense, to what it ‘originally’ meant.” (*Transforming Mission*, 23). Clearly this is an invalid way of approaching the text of Scripture when determining the mission of the church, or anything else.
the purpose statements of Jesus’ earthly ministry always focused on proclamation and on His substitutionary death for sinners:

“Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for” (Mark 1:38).

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

“I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43).

In hopes of proving that Jesus’ mission was equally proclamation and social action, social justice advocates draw attention to Luke 4:18-19. In that passage, Jesus read Isa 61:1-2 and announced to the people of Nazareth that His mission was to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. What social justice advocates fail to give due weight to is the fact that the Isaiah passage focuses on preaching and proclaiming (mentioned 3x), and that the preaching to be done was clearly to the spiritually poor, captive, blind, and oppressed.46

But what about Jesus’ miracles? Jesus’ miracles of healing and of feeding the multitudes were genuine acts of compassion, revealing His power over sickness, nature, and even death. In short, they were a sneak preview of the power Jesus will exercise when He comes in the fullness of His kingdom. In light of Jesus’ compassion, we believe that it is perfectly appropriate for medical doctors to make mission trips to Ethiopia or for churches to send hurricane relief to Haiti. Those are good things and have a legitimate and valuable place in the body of Christ.

Interestingly, however, Jesus’ miracles are never held up as motivation for the church to focus on social action—as if the church were to continue Jesus’ program of miraculous social relief by non-miraculous means. In fact, Jesus repeatedly said that the purpose of His miracles was something else: to declare that He was the unique God-sent Messiah:

“The works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36).

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me” (John 10:24–25).

46 DeYoung and Gilbert, What is the Mission of the Church?, 36–40. These authors also deal helpfully with other key passages in the Gospels, such the sheep and goat judgment, the parable of the good Samaritan, and the account of the rich man and Lazarus (162–67).
The miracles done by the apostles shared that same primary purpose: they were “the signs of a true apostle” given by God to prove that the men who performed them were Jesus’ authoritative and trustworthy representatives (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4; Acts 3:6–7; 4:10).

To construe the miracles of Jesus as grounds for making social action central to the church’s mission is to turn a blind eye to Jesus’ stated purpose for His miracles. In fact, Jesus frequently found that His priority ministry of preaching was hindered by the relentless demands of the mercy-seekers, leading Him at times to instruct those whom He healed not to spread the word about His power (Mark 1:42–45; Matt 9:30). Jesus understood all too well that social relief can swallow up time and effort that should be dedicated to preaching, evangelism, and discipleship.

8. A Willful Blindness to How the Early Church Fulfilled Jesus’ Commission(s)

Jesus’ various commissions to the disciples leave no room for making social action an equal partner with gospel proclamation, church planting, and theological training. In fact, Jesus’ instructions to His followers after His resurrection focused exclusively on making disciples through evangelism and teaching.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . .” (Matt 28:19–20).

“Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46–48).

Realizing that social action is conspicuously absent from the commissions recorded in Matthew and Luke, John Stott draws attention to Jesus’ commission to the disciples in John 20:21, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” Stott interprets this statement to mean, “The Father sent Me to evangelize and to heal the sick and help the poor; therefore, I am sending you to do both as well.” Clearly Stott tries too hard to find social action in this text. The Father’s authoritative sending of Jesus (the co-eternal, co-equal Son) into the world is a dominant theme in John’s Gospel (John 3:16–17; 5:24, 30, 36–37; 6:44, 57; 7:28–29; 8:42). In light of this, no complicated explanation of John 20:21 need be sought: as the Father authoritatively sent the Son (and as the Son submissively obeyed), so Jesus now authoritatively sends His disciples. The issue is authority and obedience, not the content of the mission. (In fact, much of Jesus’ mission—such as His substitutionary death—was irreproducible.) Additionally, Stott’s view of John 20:21 fails to give proper regard to the fact that, in

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the context, forgiveness of sin is the only thing mentioned, not social action (20:23). Köstenberger concludes:

The Fourth Gospel does not therefore appear to teach the kind of “incarnational model” advocated by Stott and others. Not the way in which Jesus came into the world (i.e. the incarnation), but the nature of Jesus’ relationship with his sender (i.e. one of obedience and utter dependence), is presented in the Fourth Gospel as the model for the disciples’ mission.48

In fact, if Jesus’ commission in John 20:21 was a veiled encouragement to carry out a dual-track mission in the world (evangelism and social justice), then the apostles clearly failed to understand Jesus. Peter summed up his interpretation of Jesus’ commissions this way: “He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). As one untimely born, the apostle Paul received his commission from Christ years later; nonetheless, Jesus’ words to Paul on the road to Damascus (and Paul’s subsequent obedience) are strikingly familiar:

“But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness. . . . to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.” “So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (Acts 26:16–20).

The Book of Acts reveals that the apostles and the early church fulfilled Jesus’ instruction with an astonishing single-mindedness of purpose, preaching the Word of God for the salvation of sinners and the edification of the saints.49 Luke’s summary of Paul and Barnabas’ ministry in Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, and Derbe shows that evangelism for the purpose of starting a church and subsequent leadership training were unequivocally the focus of the early church’s missionary labors:50

After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith. . . . When they had


50 In their case, Bible translation was unnecessary because, in the Septuagint, the Old Testament was already available to Greek speakers.
appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21–23)

What about the apostles’ social action endeavors? In fact, the only church-organized relief projects mentioned in Acts and the Epistles took place within the church, including the various financial gifts sent by the Greek churches to the impoverished believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29–30; Rom 15:25–26; Gal 2:10) and widow care (Acts 6:1–6; 1 Tim 5:3–16). In short, thedeacons of Acts 6 were ministers to the church, not missionaries to the world.

And even when it came to these valuable intra-church relief efforts, the apostles deliberately avoided becoming personally enmeshed in the demands and distractions of organizing them (e.g., Acts 6:2–4; 1 Cor 16:2). Their reason is obvious. As one social action advocate notes, “In the global urban context, doing justice requires an increasingly complex set of skills within the fields of community development and community organizing.” Social action ministry is not something a pastor or a missionary does on the side for ten minutes a week.

This doesn’t mean that the early Christians showed no concern for the needy outside the church. Far from it. For example, personal ministry to widows outside the church apparently did take place. There can be no doubt that believers in the book of Acts met "pressing needs" (Titus 3:14) by caring for the orphans, widows, and poor who were part of their lives, thus fulfilling Paul’s instruction: “While we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal 6:10). Loving the hurting people around us is a normal part of daily Christian living, an expected fruit of gospel proclamation. However, there is no evidence that the apostles tried to make social relief the face of the church or that social action projects were part of their Great Commission strategy.

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51 The apostles’ instructions in the Epistles were consistent with their practice: the bulk of their commands to believers focus on mercy within the body of Christ (e.g., James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17; Titus 3:13–14; Philemon 5, 3 John 5–6; Heb 13:1–3; Rom 12:13). While this in no way excludes extending mercy to non–Christians, passages commending mercy within the body of Christ are a shaky foundation on which to erect a social action model of evangelism and missions.

52 In reference to 1 Timothy 5, Naylor writes, “The test of a widow’s eligibility was strict: she had to be a member of the church, known for her good works and godliness. . . . There is no evidence that the church at Ephesus ran a social service for all the widows in the city; in fact, the text of 1 Timothy 5 shows us that it did not do so” (in Engaging With Keller, 151, emphasis in original).

53 Gornik, in The Urban Face of Missions, 193.

54 This is based on the distinction that Luke makes between “saints” and the “widows” in Acts 9:41. F. F. Bruce considers it unlikely that Luke meant that the widows were not Christians (The Acts of the Apostles [London: The Tyndale Press, 1951, 2nd ed., 1952], 213), but we acknowledge that the view is possible.

55 We are eager for the reader to understand that we encourage such love in our own churches. For example, people in our congregations are employed at orphanages, teach Bible studies for orphans, volunteer at a hospice, run a school instructing underprivileged African farmers, minister in prisons, sponsor theological training for needy pastors, have created a food–for–trash program for street children, and a host of other mercy efforts. They do these things because they are Christians, fulfilling Gal 6:10, not because the church corporate is called to organize and run social action programs.
A Test Case: Rome

The apostle Paul’s long-anticipated mission to the city of Rome provides an enlightening example of the apostles’ systematic (and if the social justice proponents are right, inexplicable) disregard for making social action an equal or significant partner with gospel proclamation. In Paul’s day, Rome was a sprawling metropolis with over a million residents, and its social woes were equivalent to or worse than those of any modern city. Poverty was rife and there was a massive gap between the elite rich and the desperate poor. Unemployment hovered at catastrophic levels, with up to two hundred thousand people in the city regularly (and all-too willingly) living off state-sponsored welfare.56 The living conditions in Rome’s disease-ridden slums were abysmal; crime, prostitution, and slavery were a normal part of life.

What would the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans have looked like if it were written by one of today’s evangelical social justice advocates? I can’t wait to come to Rome to lead the charge of Christ-centered social justice! Deed must precede word! We need to proclaim Christ’s love for the city by working to improve the general civility, race relations, and social conditions of Rome. We need to eradicate slavery and poverty; we need to start orphanages. The cynical people of Rome won’t listen to the gospel unless we first help them flourish socially and economically. But if the church organizes a series of community-based services to eradicate unemployment and to uplift the disadvantaged, then we’ll see the city of Rome transformed.

Of course, what Paul actually wrote was, “So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation . . .” (Rom 1:15–16; see also 10:14–17). The gospel that Paul went on to describe in Romans is a gospel of sin, wrath, the cross, repentance, faith, and forgiveness—not one of social improvement and human flourishing. Paul was not lacking in compassion. In Gal 2:10 he wrote, “They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.” However, although Paul was fully aware of the social conditions that prevailed in any large city of the Roman Empire, including Rome itself, he gave no attention to a social action missions strategy.

Summing Up

It is possible to view the evangelical church’s renewed preoccupation with social action as merely a difference in emphasis. And that is undoubtedly true in some cases. Because of the varying gifts in the body of Christ, some churches and missionaries will focus on mercy more than others: that’s to be expected. However, the social justice debate is not merely a squabble over whether the church should add one lump or two of mercy to its ecclesiastical tea. Ultimately, it is about making social

action and gospel proclamation co-equal partners in the church’s mission. We believe that is not merely a difference in emphasis: it’s a different ecclesiology altogether.

Results and Solutions

What has been the effect of all this in Africa? It’s an oversimplification, but the result is the wrong missionaries doing the wrong things. The African church needs help. Good at celebration and community, the African church (with a few notable exceptions) needs all the help it can get when it comes to church planting, spiritual depth, and theological training. However, the West is currently sending primarily two kinds of missionaries to Africa: first, missionaries who are unprepared to truly help the African church—wonderful, compassionate, college-age girls who have come to do orphan care; and second, missionaries who are underprepared to help the African church—enthusiastic men or couples who are eager to lead mercy projects, but whose lack of theological training and ministry experience means that they can offer little help of real significance to the African church. The work they do is emotionally rewarding for the missionaries and for the churches that send them. However, fewer and fewer of the kinds of missionaries who will make a long-term difference in Africa—Bible translators, church planters, and leadership trainers—are being sent.

Pastors and church leaders in the West can do a lot to reverse the trend. First, missionaries on the field need to be encouraged to keep their eye on the ball: what a missionary can do and what a missionary must do are not always the same. Sending churches can encourage their current missionaries by regularly letting them know that the boring, humdrum, strategic proclamation work that they are doing is of the highest significance. Secondly, preachers who are committed to proclamation-focused missions need to speak out, offering the church something better than they’re getting from the social justice bloggers and the popular missional authors. It won’t be easy. Who wants to be (unfairly) branded as being against orphans or clean water? We don’t. But the price of silence is high: the church is poised to lose a generation

57 We’re not demeaning them or what they do; they just don’t meet the church’s primary need or contribute significantly to the church’s primary mission.

58 What some have called “amateurism” in missions is an ongoing problem. While not all missionaries need to be gifted and trained at the same level, it’s worth noting that the church of Antioch sent out their best: Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1–3). We encourage churches to remember that long-term effectiveness in missions requires thorough theological training, not just enthusiasm.

59 Old-guard missionaries who are doing book-of-Acts kind of missions often feel pressure to embrace the new social justice model. There are at least four reasons for this. First, missionaries are genuinely compassionate people. Second, missionaries are as susceptible to trends and peer pressure as anyone. Third, a hubbub of voices is promoting the social justice model of missions: Which respected, clear-speaking voices are enthusiastically promoting book-of-Acts kind of missions? Fourth, missionaries can see that if they want to keep their support levels up, in today’s missional environment, they need to add a social justice component to their ministries. They know that, “We are in our fourteenth week of an exposition of Philippians in our church plant” is unlikely to receive the same response as “We cared for fourteen orphans this week.”
of missionaries to secondary work such as building schools and digging wells. And if history has anything to say about the matter, we might lose the gospel too.

Whatever the immediate benefits (some very real, some only imagined) of poverty relief, clean water, and orphanages, what will be the long-term consequences of the fact that a generation of Christian missionaries in Africa is putting social relief first and church planting and leadership training—at best—second? Long after the AIDS orphans have grown up, the wells have been blocked with sand, and the medical clinics have closed due to a lack of Western funding, the people of Africa will need churches to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. But if the Western church continues to send missionaries focused on social action, who will plant and pastor those churches? The church in Africa and around the world can flourish, but it takes the right kind of national leaders, and from the West, it takes the right kind of missionaries doing what only Christians can do:

After all, people of good will of all religions and no religion can and do address the human need for food, clothing, shelter, health, education, justice and so on. But Christians—and Christians only—can be expected to preach the gospel, win men and women of all nations to Jesus Christ, and establish churches that will worship and witness until Christ returns.60

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60 Hesselgrave, “Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error?” 144.
THE SEED OF ABRAHAM: 
A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GALATIANS 3 AND ITS 
IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAEL

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Nondispensationalists often claim that Paul’s identification of believing Gentiles as “the seed of Abraham” in Galatians 3 means that the church is now “spiritual Israel,” and that a future fulfillment of national and political blessings to Israel are now excluded. Yet a proper understanding of the “seed” concept in Galatians and the rest of the Bible shows this is not the case. Jesus’ identification as the ultimate seed of Abraham is the basis for the fulfillment of all of the Abrahamic blessings, including national and political promises to Israel along with Gentile inclusion.

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Introduction

At the heart of the disagreement between dispensationalists and covenantalists is the nature and relationship of Israel and the church. Indeed, in his classic work on defining dispensationalism, Charles Ryrie labeled the theological distinction between Israel and the church as the first sine qua non of the theological school, calling it “the most basic test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist.”1 On the one hand, covenantalists and other nondispensationalists2 contend that the church replaces or fulfills3 Israel in such a way that various promises made to the nation of Israel should

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2 Though there is a difference between a nondispensationalist in general and a covenantalist more specifically, I will use these terms interchangeably to refer to those who disagree with the dispensational position.
3 There is disagreement regarding which term is more accurate. Woudstra observes that “the question whether it is more proper to speak of a replacement of the Jews by the Christian church or of an extension (continuation of the OT people of God into that of the NT church is variously answered. Some prefer to think in terms of a growth of the church out of OT Israel” (Marten H. Woudstra, “Israel and the Church: A Case for Continuity,” in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 237). Yet this distinction in terminology is largely inconsequential, for “. . . in the end the result is the same—promises and covenants that were made with the nation Israel are no longer the possession of national Israel. . . . The position is the same while some
not be expected to be fulfilled to the nation, but can be fulfilled in the church. On the other hand, dispensationalists argue that while Israel and the church share many commonalities as the people(s) of God in their respective ages, they maintain distinct identities in God’s program. As a result, it is not biblically feasible that the covenant blessings promised to Israel should find a spiritualized fulfillment in the church. Rather, since they have not been fulfilled in history, they will be fulfilled as promised to Israel in the eschaton, per Romans 11 (cf. vv. 11–12, 15, 23–32).

In discussion of the relationship between Israel and the church and the reception of covenant blessings, one of the key points of contention centers on Paul’s remarks regarding the seed of Abraham in Galatians 3. Paul writes the letter of Galatians to safeguard the church from the heresy of the Judaizers, who were teaching that Gentile Christians must become sons of Abraham by circumcision in order to inherit the blessing of New Covenant salvation. In combating this error, Paul insists that those who believe in Christ alone for their righteousness are sons of Abraham (3:7), for Abraham believed God, and his faith was credited to him as righteousness (3:6, 9).

Indeed, because the promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed, and his seed was Christ Himself (Gal 3:16), therefore all those united to the true Seed become the seed of Abraham in Him, and thus heirs of the promise along with Him (Gal 3:29).

One quickly observes how the implications of such teaching become a matter of dispute between dispensationalists and covenantalists. Is Paul reinterpreting the text of the Old Testament, so as to supply it with a meaning not suggested by the original context? Does his identification of believing Gentiles as “the seed of Abraham” mean that the church is to be regarded as spiritual Israel? Since he teaches that Christ is the true heir of the promises, and that Christians are heirs via union with Him, does that mean that we should not expect a future restoration of the nation of Israel to her land? This article seeks to answer these questions. I will begin by considering the nondispensational interpretation of this passage and its implications. Then, I will evaluate that interpretation and seek to offer an alternative understanding more consistent with the biblical teaching, and, as I will show, with the tenets of dispensationalism. I will show that, in contrast to the claims of nondispensationalists, Galatians 3 in fact does not teach that Christ or the church replaces Israel or inherits the national and political blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant in a way that excludes a future, literal fulfillment to Israel.

The Nondispensational Interpretation of Galatians 3

The heart of the nondispensational interpretation of Galatians 3 revolves around two key issues; namely, the identity of “the seed of Abraham,” and the implication that designation has for those who will receive the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. We will consider each of these issues in their turn.

call it one thing and others call it another” (Michael Vlach, Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation [Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010], 10).

Bruce A. Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, 92–93, 96–97.

The Seed of Abraham

The first tenet of the nondispensational interpretation of Galatians 3 regards Paul’s application of distinctly “Jewish” language to the Christian church. Because Paul identifies Gentile believers as “sons of Abraham” (3:7) and the “seed of Abraham” (3:29), nondispensationalists conclude that these believers are now spiritual Jews—i.e., that the church is now spiritual Israel. George Ladd provides an example of this when he says, “I do not see how it is possible to avoid the conclusion that the New Testament applies Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament church and in so doing identifies the church as spiritual Israel. . . . If Abraham is the father of a spiritual people, and if all believers are sons of Abraham, his offspring, then it follows that they are Israel, spiritually speaking.”Anthony Hoekema agrees with Ladd’s reasoning. He writes, “What is unmistakably clear here is that all New Testament believers, all who belong to Christ, all who have been clothed with Christ (v. 27), are Abraham’s seed—not in the physical sense, to be sure, but in a spiritual sense. Again we see the identification of the New Testament church as the true Israel, and of its members as the true heirs of the promise made to Abraham.”Relating the statements of 3:7 and 3:29 to the statement about Christ in 3:16, Robert Strimple summarizes, “Since Christ is the true Israel, the true seed of Abraham, we who are in Christ by faith and the working of his Spirit are the true Israel. . . . [W]e Christians are the Israel of God, Abraham’s seed, and the heirs of the promises . . . .”

As Strimple concludes in that final phrase, the identification of the church as the Israel of God brings up the question of the way in which believing Gentiles are heirs of the promises made to Abraham. Because Paul identifies Christ as the true Seed of Abraham and thus the ultimate recipient of the Abrahamic promises, nondispensationalists conclude that we should expect no future fulfillment of any of the Abrahamic promises for the nation of Israel. Instead, Riddlebarger claims that “Israel’s promises vanish in Jesus Christ.”Similarly, Bruce concludes that Isaac him-

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6 Much of the research presented in this section is adapted from Vlach, Has the Church Replaced Israel?, 131–32.


10 Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism, 70, emphasis added.
self, “as Abraham’s ‘seed,’ is swallowed up in Christ, in whom the promise to Abraham . . . reached its fruition.” Further, since the church is also Abraham’s seed because of union with Christ and thus heirs of the promises to Abraham (cf. 3:7, 29), the church is understood to receive the Abrahamic blessing to the exclusion of the nation of Israel. Mathison reasons, “The covenantal promises do not require a future fulfillment by national Israel for God’s Word to be true. . . . They are now being fulfilled by the true Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). And they are also being fulfilled in and by all who are united to Christ by faith (v. 29),” This brings us to the second tenet of the nondispensationalist’s interpretation of Galatians 3.

The Blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant

Dispensationalists as well as nondispensationalists believe that believing Gentiles in the church today experience blessings in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Many dispensationalists do not deny that believing Gentiles are sons of Abraham by imitating the faith of Abraham (cf. Gal 3:6–9; Rom 4:12) or that they currently partake of the rich root of the olive tree of covenant blessings (Rom 11:17). The disagreement, however, centers on which blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant these Gentiles are now experiencing. Because the nondispensationalist views the church as entirely replacing, fulfilling, or transcending Israel as the seed of Abraham, he also views the church as the singular recipient of all of the Abrahamic Covenant blessings, which are viewed as a unit. Therefore, we should not expect a future fulfillment for Israel. Hoekema asks and answers this key question explicitly: “From Galatians 3:29 we learn that if we are Christ’s then we are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise. Heirs of what? Of all the blessings God promised to Abraham, including the promise that the land of Canaan would be his everlasting possession.”

He is particularly insistent that the promise of land to Israel is included and being fulfilled by the church, as elsewhere he writes, “All of us who are united to Christ by faith, therefore, are in this wider sense the seed of Abraham. And the promise of which we are heirs must include the promise of the land.”

Nondispensationalists believe the land promise is in view here in Galatians 3 particularly because verse 18 speaks of an “inheritance,” which vocabulary is alleged

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11 Bruce, Galatians, 173, emphasis added.
13 These promised blessings include (1) a nation of descendants/seed (Gen 12:2; 13:15–16; 15:6, 18); (2) a land for that nation of descendants (Gen 12:1, 7; 13:15; cf. 15:7, 18; 17:8); and (3) a universal blessing via this nation on all the peoples of the earth (12:3). See Robert L. Saucy, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 42–46.
14 Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 211, emphasis added.
15 Ibid., 279.
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to be especially associated with the land promise. However, it is quickly acknowledged that the church does not literally inherit the land of Canaan. Thus, in Galatians 3, “Paul doubtless understands this in a spiritual sense, although he does not pause to make this explicit.” Accordingly, they argue that the land promise is “typological of the creation,” should therefore be spiritualized and expanded to include the entire world, and finds its consummation eventually in the new heavens and the new earth which all believers inherit. Along with Matt 5:5, which speaks of the meek inheriting the earth (i.e., not simply the land of Canaan), particular recourse is had to Rom 4:13 to establish that the land promise has been expanded to include the new heavens and the new earth. There, Paul says that Abraham was promised to be heir of the world, not simply the land. Strimple concludes, “In the New Testament we also learn that Canaan, the land of promise, was but a type of that fuller and richer inheritance that is to be Abraham’s and all his children’s in Christ: the whole world, heaven and earth, renewed and restored in righteousness (2 Pet 3:13) as the home of God’s new race of men and women in Christ Jesus, the second Adam.” Thus, covenantalists are content to say that Paul was simply “radically reinterpreting” the Old Testament text “in a way not suggested by the Old Testament context.”

In summary, because the church is identified as the seed of Abraham, which nondispensationalists interpret to mean “spiritual Israel,” the church now inherits in a spiritualized manner the blessings promised to Israel, particularly the Abrahamic Covenant blessings of a nation of descendants, the land of Canaan in which those descendants would settle, and a universal blessing of the nations. The church is a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9) which will inherit the world (Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13) when the Lord returns to renovate and rule the earth. Because these promises find their fulfillment in Christ, the true Seed (Gal 3:16), and in all those who belong to Christ (Gal 3:29), it is wrong to expect a future restoration of the nation of Israel to the land of Canaan.


A Dispensational Interpretation of Galatians 3

However, such an interpretation does not do justice to the text of Scripture. There is no warrant to conclude that applying “seed of Abraham” language to the church means that the church is Israel. Neither is there any warrant that the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant must be fulfilled as a unit, flattening out what is a multifaceted promise. In this section, I will evaluate the nondispensational arguments and offer an alternative interpretation that is more consistent with biblical revelation.

Multiple Senses of “Seed”

One factor that contributes to the diverging opinions on the nature of the “seed of Abraham” stems from Paul’s use of the Old Testament text in Gal 3:16. Both Hebrew and Greek terms for “seed” can be used in a collective sense even while remaining grammatically singular.23 Yet in Gal 3:16, Paul insists on the singular sense in order to show that the Christ is the true Seed and the ultimate heir of God’s promises. There have been various approaches to explaining Paul’s use of the Old Testament here, with disagreement abounding not only regarding Paul’s exegetical method but even on which text he is quoting.24

While a full discussion of the New Testament’s use of the Old is beyond the scope of this article, it is necessary to mention along with Silva that “it would be ludicrous to suggest [as some have suggested] that Paul was unaware of the collective sense of sperma or that he was hoping that his readers would not detect this ‘logical flaw.’”25 Indeed, Paul relies on this very collective sense later on in this very passage when he tells believers, “if you belong to Christ, then you [plural] are Abraham’s [seed]” (3:29). Rather, I am persuaded by the exegesis of Alexander26 and Collins27

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24 See the discussion in Schreiner, Galatians, 228–30, in which he identifies five views on Paul’s use of the OT: (1) allegory, (2) midrashic exegesis, (3) a contextual, typological narrowing, (4) the seed referring to a singular family rather than many families, and (5) literal exegesis based on Gen 22:17–18. Schreiner himself opts for (3), arguing that Paul cannot be quoting Gen 22 because the LXX lacks the καὶ that he insists on repeating in Gal 3:16. Instead, he believes Gen 13:15 or 17:8 is in view.


26 “Whereas the first sperma obviously refers to a very large number of descendants, the second would, following Collins’ approach, denote a single individual who is victorious over his enemies. . . . If the immediately preceding reference to ‘seed’ in 22:17 denotes an individual, this must also be the case in 22:18a, for there is nothing here to indicate a change in number. The blessing of ‘all the nations of the earth’ is thus associated with a particular descendant of Abraham, rather than with all those descended from him” (T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations of the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” Tyndale Bulletin 48:1 [1997]: 365).

who believe Paul arrives at this singular sense of “seed” from a sound exegesis of Gen 22:17–18. This would be entirely consistent with other Old Testament uses of the noun to refer to single individuals, such as Seth (Gen 4:25), Ishmael (21:13; cf. 16:11), Samuel (1 Sam 1:11), Solomon (2 Sam 7:12; cf. 12:24), and, perhaps most significantly, the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15), which “moves from the collective many to the singular ‘he’” within that single verse.

This brief foray into the New Testament use of the Old is helpful in order to underscore the fact that “seed” is used in multiple senses throughout Scripture. Understanding these multiple senses helps us make proper conclusions about the distinctions between Israel and the church, and, as a result, the covenant promises each receives. We have already observed the first two senses very clearly in Galatians 3. In a typological way, Abraham’s seed may refer to the unique and ultimate Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ (3:16), who fulfills in the truest sense the promise of God to Adam and Eve in the protoevangelium. Secondly, there is a spiritual sense in which all believers in Christ—all Jews and Gentiles who share Abraham’s faith—are the seed of Abraham (3:29). This includes not only believing Gentiles, but also believing Jews, even during the times of Messiah (cf. Luke 19:9).

Aside from these two senses there is the biological sense—the natural seed. This sense includes the physical descendants of Abraham, whether they were true believers in Yahweh or not. Indeed, the nation of Israel was Abraham’s seed, yet not everyone was elect. But as God’s chosen nation they nevertheless “had the supreme privilege of bringing God’s blessing to all the nations through the coming of Messiah.” In fact, even in the New Covenant era, unbelieving Jews are still referred to as the seed of Abraham. Jesus Himself acknowledges even the Pharisees, whom, just a few verses later, He will call sons of the devil, are the seed of Abraham (John 8:37; cf. 8:44). The rich man in Hades calls out to Abraham and addresses him as “Father” (Luke 16:24). In his sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, Paul addresses the Jews there as “sons of Abraham’s family” (Acts 13:26). And finally, in lamenting over the widespread blindness and hard-heartedness of the Jews in his day, he nevertheless refers to them as Israelites, the seed of Abraham (Rom 11:1).

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30 Saucy, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism, 44.

31 Though they are nondispensationalists, I have found the most helpful presentation of the multiple senses of Abraham’s seed to be in Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant, 632–33, in which they offer the following categories: (1) natural (physical), (2) natural (physical), yet special, (3) true/unique, and (4) spiritual. Elsewhere they dub these: biological, biological/special, typological, and spiritual (696). Another helpful categorization is found in Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology (Tustin CA: Ariel Ministries, 2001), 700–02, in which he lists: (1) physical seed, (2) Messiah, the unique individual Seed, (3) believers today, i.e., the church, and (4) the remnant of Israel. Finally, one should also see the presentation in John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in Continuity and Discontinuity, 72–73, in which he lists (1) ethnic, (2) political, (3) spiritual, and (4) typological.

32 Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant, 632.
While the descendants of Isaac in particular—the nation of Israel—are the physical seed of Abraham, they do not lay exclusive claim to being Abraham’s physical descendants. Because they were chosen to mediate the blessings of Yahweh to the nations, they might be called a “natural, yet special seed.” Yet the Scriptures also reveal that the physical seed of Abraham includes all of Abraham’s biological descendants, which would also include Ishmael (Gen 21:13), the sons of Keturah (cf. Gen 25:1), and, by extension, even Esau and his descendants. “In each case, all of these children received the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, i.e., circumcision, even though many of them were unbelievers, and even though it was only through Isaac that God’s promises and covenant were realized (Gen 17:20–21; cf. Rom 9:6–9).” Thus, as Fruchtenbaum observes, the seed of Abraham would also include Arabs.

The reality that not all physical descendants of Abraham are Jews is strikingly significant for the debate between dispensationalists and nondispensationalists on Galatians 3. We must remember that a key claim for the nondispensationalist is that in applying the “seed of Abraham” designation to Gentile believers in the church, Paul has identified the church as spiritual Israel. However, Fruchtenbaum is right to note that “[e]ven in the physical realm not all the children of Abraham are Jews. Arabs are as much the descendants of Abraham as Jews, but in no way can they be classified as Jews. . . . Being a child of Abraham alone is not enough to make one a Jew. . . . the seed of Abraham by itself does not mean that the seed is Israel.” In fact, he goes on to make the very insightful point that for the nondispensational interpretation to pass biblical muster, they need to present a scriptural statement that New Testament church is the seed of Jacob, for “the very term Israel originated with Jacob and not Abraham.” Of course, Scripture never applies such a designation. Neither does the Bible ever call the spiritual seed of Abraham Israel. On the contrary, as Carl Hoch has demonstrated, the church is never said to have been incorporated into Israel; rather, they have become sharers with Israel in the promised covenant blessings:

Paul never writes of Gentiles as ‘in Israel’ in any of his letters. The key sense in which Gentiles are made near to Israel is the preposition sun. Paul uses six sun compounds to express the relationship of Gentiles to Jews/Israel in [Ephesians 2 and 3]. . . . The Gentiles are brought near to Israel in Christ to share with Israel in its covenants, promise, hope, and God. They do not become Israel; they share with Israel.

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Fruchtenbaum, Israelology, 702.
36 Ibid., 700–01, 702.
37 Ibid., 702.
38 Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 161; Fruchtenbaum, Israelology, 702.
39 Carl B. Hoch, Jr., “The New Man of Ephesians 2,” in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, 113, italics in original.
One could say that unity does not imply identity. There is no reason why the union of Jews and Gentiles in one body, the church, should be equated with teaching that Israel and the church are the same entity. Unity does not banish all distinctions. There can be unity in diversity. Therefore it simply does not follow that referring to the church as the spiritual seed of Abraham means the church is spiritual Israel.

Typology and Corporate Solidarity

In addition to recognizing these multiple senses of “the seed of Abraham,” as well as noting that identifying Gentile believers as the spiritual seed of Abraham in no way requires that they be regarded as a spiritual Israel, dispensationalists have also insisted that “no sense [of the seed of Abraham] (spiritual especially) is more important than any other, and that no sense cancels out the meaning and implications of the other senses.” This leads to a further observation regarding proper principles for interpreting types and typology; namely, the principle of corporate solidarity.

Typically, nondispensationalists approach typology with an underlying assumption that the presence of an antitype cancels the meaning, significance, or historicity of the original type. Indeed, as we observed before, Bruce sees Old Testament promises to Israel as typological of blessings to come for the church which are “swallowed up in Christ.” Riddlebarger views those promises as “vanish[ing] in Jesus Christ.” Since Christ is the true Israel . . . we who are in Christ by faith and the working of his Spirit are the true Israel,” and “the covenantal promises do not require a future fulfillment by national Israel for God’s Word to be true.” Thus, when Christ is presented as “true Israel,” “true temple,” or “true seed,” nondispensationalists take that to mean that the NT authors were reinterpreting the OT such that the original meaning is no longer valid. We should no longer expect a role for the nation of Israel, a rebuilt millennial temple, or a restored nation of descendants as promised in the OT.

However, this hermeneutical assumption is without warrant. Many dispensationalists, including myself, agree with nondispensationalists that Christ is the true and ultimate Israel, temple, seed of Abraham, and so on. Yet Christ is not Israel in

40 “Although distinct from the Gentile Christians, the Hebrew Christians are nevertheless united with them in the Body of Christ. Does not this distinctiveness violate the unity? Not at all. For unity does not mean uniformity. . . . Looking at the Body of Christ from a different angle, all believers are united in one body, but they are not all uniform. There are differences in position and function. All have spiritual gifts, but not the same number or kind. All are in equal standing before God, yet each is distinct. The same is true for the Jewish and Gentile element in the Body of the Messiah. In Christ, the two are one in unity but not in uniformity. Before God, we are all equal in terms of salvation but distinct in position and function” (Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, 759).


42 Bruce, *Galatians*, 173.

43 Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 70.

44 Strimple, “Amillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 88–89.


such a way that “‘transcends’ or removes the idea of corporate ethnic, national Israel.”

47 Indeed, “the truth that all the promises are fulfilled in Christ does not, as some say, dissolve their meaning into the person of Christ.”

48 The prophets persistently speak of the coming Servant “Israel” who will obey and succeed where Israel had disobeyed and failed, and in the process restore the nation to its right relationship to Yahweh ( Isa 49:5–6a) as well as to extend Yahweh’s salvation to the ends of the earth ( Isa 49:6b). Jesus Himself “preaches the kingdom to Israel and ascends with the promise that he will restore the kingdom to Israel at his return (cf. Acts 1:3, 6–7; 3:19–21).”

49 And Paul states that the adoption as sons, the covenants, and the promises presently belong to Israel, his kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom 9:1–5), notwithstanding their present hostility to the gospel (11:28; cf. 9:1; 10:1–4). “God has not rejected His people (11:1), and though they have stumbled and are presently under God’s judgment, they have not stumbled so as to fall (11:11).” There is a coming fulfillment for Israel (11:12) in which they will be grafted back into the rich root of covenant blessing (11:23–29).

Thus, especially given the flexibility of “seed” as a collective singular noun, able to refer to both one person and to many people, this principle of corporate solidarity means that Christ in His first coming can fulfill the prophecies regarding Israel’s blessing—even such that He can be true Israel, true temple, and true Seed—on behalf of Israel, rather than instead of Israel. The restoration and salvation of the many is not canceled but rather accomplished by the redemptive work of the One. In summary, then, Christ is the true and ultimate Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), and by union with Him the Gentile church is also the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:7, 29), and the nation of Israel also remains the seed of Abraham, and will inherit the blessings promised to Abraham and to his seed through faith in Christ.

The Multifaceted Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant

Yet, in order to gain a proper expectation of the fulfillment of covenant blessings to the nation of Israel, we must have an accurate understanding of the nature of the Abrahamic Covenant. We can conceptualize the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant according to three categories. First, Abraham was promised a nation of descendants, or seed (Gen 12:2; 13:15–16; 15:6; 18). As has been shown above, even though the One true Seed would one day represent the many (Gal 3:16), and that all who are in Him by faith, even though they are Gentiles, are also the fulfillment of that promise (Gal 3:29), that in no way cancels the physical and biological senses of the “seed.” These descendants were to be as numerous as the dust of the earth (Gen 13:16; 22:17) and were to be named through Isaac. Aside from this, it is significant to note that these promised descendants were to be “a great nation” (Gen 12:2; 18:18), because “the concept of ‘nation’ in the Old Testament involved race, government,
and territory. Thus the term points to the physical nature of the seed that would come from Abraham. But it also signifies the political form that the seed was to take.”

Therefore, there is an ethnic and a political aspect to this original promise of the Abrahamic Covenant.

A second category of blessing promised to Abraham concerned a land for this nation of descendants. Indeed, the very first aspect of Abraham’s call was Yahweh’s command to go to the land which He would show him (Gen 12:1). It was to the promised descendants that Yahweh also promised to give this land (Gen 12:7; 13:5; 15:7, 18). These designations are significant. In the first place, “because the concept of ‘nation’ carries a territorial aspect, the land must be viewed as the necessary corollary to the promised seed that would constitute the ‘great nation.’” Further, the land of Canaan was promised to Abraham’s seed “for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8). Thus, the physical and political realities tied to this promise, along with the guarantee that it would be an everlasting possession, ensure that the land may not be spiritualized away or made to be merely a type of something heavenly that vanishes into its antitype.

Finally, along with the promises of a physical and ethnic line of descendants who populate a political and territorial land, the third component of the Abrahamic Covenant was the universal blessing that would come upon all the peoples of the earth through the mediation of this nation. Yahweh promises Abraham, “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3; cf. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Through the ministry of the seed of Abraham, all the Gentile nations of the earth would experience Yahweh’s blessings.

Therefore, it is plain that the Abrahamic Covenant contained multiple promises of a variety of blessings. There were physical, national, and political blessings promised (i.e., the seed and the land) as well as spiritual blessings promised (i.e., the universal blessing of the nations). Thus, when Paul declares the Gentile church to be Abraham’s seed and heirs according to promise (Gal 3:29), we must ask, “Which of the various promises of the Abrahamic Covenant does the church inherit?” Should we assume that all of the Abrahamic promises are in view in Galatians 3? Is Hoekema correct when he insists that Gentile believers are heirs of “all the blessings God promised to Abraham, including the promise that the land of Canaan would be his everlasting possession”? I believe the answer is no. There is no reason to require that every blessing in the multifaceted promises of the Abrahamic Covenant is in view every time the covenant is mentioned or alluded to.

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51 Saucy, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism, 44.

52 Contra Berkhof, who says of the land, physical offspring, and protection against national and political enemies: “These temporal blessings did not constitute an end in themselves, but served to symbolize and typify spiritual and heavenly things” (Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1941], 296).

53 Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 211, emphasis added; cf. 279; see pages 54 and 55 above.
In fact, a conscientious study of the context of Galatians 3 yields just the opposite conclusion. Immediately after he identifies all those who believe in Christ to be Abraham’s sons (3:7), Paul links the gospel of justification by faith alone to the Abrahamic Covenant. He says, “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you’” (3:8). What is extraordinarily significant about this is that the one Abrahamic promise Paul mentions in connection with the Gentiles becoming sons of Abraham by faith is the universal spiritual blessing that would come upon all nations, not the physical, political, or territorial blessings promised to the nation Israel. Even nondispensationalists have made this observation. Fung notes the “intimate relationship between . . . justification by faith, sonship to Abraham by faith, and reception of the Spirit by faith,” and identifies “Abraham’s blessing” as justification by faith. Similarly, Bruce explicitly acknowledges that “the reference to the land . . . plays no part in the argument of Galatians.” Yet they err when they suppose that equating the Abrahamic promise with justification by faith and not mentioning the land means that the Abrahamic promise only ever was the promise of justification by faith, or that the land promise is no longer valid. Therefore, Paul’s teaching about the seed of Abraham and the inheritance of the Abrahamic promise in Galatians “is not a reference to the promises given to Abraham regarding the land . . . but refers to the spiritual blessings that come to all who, being justified by faith just as Abraham was (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3–11), will inherit the spiritual promises given to Abraham.”

Thus, the key to properly interpreting Galatians 3 is to recognize the multifaceted nature of the Abrahamic Covenant—i.e., that it included both (a) physical, political, and territorial promises to the nation of Israel as well as (b) spiritual promises to the nations. The failure of nondispensational theology has been its tendency “of flattening the Abrahamic covenant by reducing it primarily to spiritual realities while neglecting its national . . . aspects.” But the New Testament never indicates physical promises given to the nation of Israel find their fulfillment in the church. Rather, the blessings the church receives are the spiritual aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant that were ultimately promised to Gentiles in the first place. Because God’s promises to Abraham “encompassed both ‘a great nation’ and ‘all peoples on earth’ (Gen 12:2–
...when part of the referent (fulfillment) of these promises turns out to be the church, we should not be surprised.” And we certainly should not conclude from this that the church must be spiritual Israel, and thus inherit a spiritualized version of Israel’s physical and national promises in such a way that fulfillment for the nation is excluded. Rather, in Galatians 3 Paul presents justification by faith in Messiah as the fulfillment of the promise of universal blessing to the nations through Abraham’s true Seed. It does not cancel or reinterpret the promise of land for that “great nation.”

This is also substantiated by the fact that Scripture presents Abraham as the father of both Jews and believing Gentiles. Paul labors to explain that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, “so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised” (Rom 4:10–12). If Abraham were merely the father of the circumcision—the spiritual father of the Jews only—it would be necessary that Gentiles who become the seed of Abraham become part of Israel. But because Abraham received the promise while he himself was not yet a Jew (i.e., while he was uncircumcised), he can be the spiritual father of Gentiles as Gentiles—without their having to become spiritual Jews—because the Abrahamic Covenant always included a promise of spiritual blessing for the nations. Thus, even though believing Gentiles are identified as the seed of Abraham, “the promises concerning the physical seed constituting the nation of Israel remain alongside this universal promise even as they did in the original statement in the Old Testament.” These promises will be fulfilled to the nation of Israel (Rom 11:12) at the time when “the Deliverer will come from Zion [and] remove ungodliness from Jacob” (11:26). As they look on their Messiah whom they have pierced, and mourn in repentance over Him as for an only son (Zech 12:10), the nation Israel will be saved and restored (Rom 11:26; cf. Isa 49:5–6), and will thus be grafted back into the rich root of covenant blessing (11:23–24). In this way, all of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled through the New Covenant.
Conclusion

Having adequately considered the implications of the multiple senses in which Scripture speaks of the “seed of Abraham,” the principle of corporate solidarity as it relates to typology, and the multifaceted nature of the Abrahamic Covenant promises, we may come to a proper interpretation of Paul’s point in Galatians 3. Rather than identifying the present Gentile church as spiritual Israel who receives a spiritualized version of the Abrahamic Covenant promises made to the nation, Paul is simply announcing that Yahweh’s promise to Abraham of universal blessing to the nations has come in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The descendants of Abraham have mediated Yahweh’s blessing to the nations, for the true and ultimate Seed of Abraham has come from Israel, having atoned for sin and provided righteousness for sinners. Rather than being circumcised and keeping the provisions of the Mosaic Law, all the nations may become the seed of Abraham and enjoy covenant salvation as they simply follow in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham, who believed God and was reckoned righteous 430 years before the Law was given (3:17).

Therefore, in isolating the Lord Jesus Christ as the true Seed of Abraham, Paul does not revoke the physical, political, and territorial promises given to national Israel. Rather, he rebukes the Judaizers who, similar to the Pharisees (cf. John 8:33), supposed they were children of Abraham (and thus heirs of the promises) simply by virtue of their Jewishness. By referring to the Gentiles’ participation in such covenant blessings (cf. 3:7, 29), Paul echoes John the Baptist who warned the crowds that God is able to raise up children of Abraham from lifeless stones (Luke 3:8). His point is that the Abrahamic Covenant will not be fulfilled by the Mosaic Covenant, as if the promise had merely been made to the “seeds” who faithfully observed the stipulations of Torah. Rather, the Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled by the New Covenant, whose great mediator is the Seed, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. To put it in the terms of corporate solidarity, Paul is telling the Judaizers that they cannot be “the many” (hence the plural, “seeds”), who inherit the covenant promises to Abraham, by circumcision and law-keeping (i.e., by the Mosaic Covenant). Rather, they can only be “the many,” who inherit the covenant promises to Abraham, by being united by faith alone (i.e., by virtue of the New Covenant) to “the One,” Jesus Christ (hence the singular, “seed”). It is only by faith in Him that every promise of God finds its “Yes” (2 Cor 1:20). And indeed every promise will find its fulfillment in Christ, including even the promise of a great nation of Abraham’s seed settled in their land as an everlasting possession.

age promises should not surprise us. For this is precisely the pattern we see in the eschatological promise of the coming Messiah, who came, as history has now shown, first as the suffering servant and who will come again in the future as the reigning, earthly king over all. The already-not yet nature of the new covenant’s fulfillment parallels the same two-stage manner of messianic prophetic fulfillment’ (Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church, 95); cf. Blaising and Bock, Progressive Dispensationalism, 189, 193–94.
A REVIEW OF FIVE VIEWS ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY

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Introduction

The Zondervan general editor of the Counterpoint series, Stanley Gundry, together with his chosen editors, J. Merrick and Stephen Garrett, have produced a provocative book on Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy (2013). The five scholar participants are Albert Mohler, Peter Enns, Kevin Vanhoozer, Michael Bird, and John Franke. This Counterpoint series has produced many stimulating dialogues on various topics, and they no doubt intended to do the same on this controversial topic of inerrancy. However, there is a basic problem in the dialogue format as applied to biblical inerrancy.

There is Madness in the Method

The “dialogue” method works well for many intramural evangelical discussions like eternal security, the role of women in the ministry, and the like. However, when it is applied to basic issues which help define the nature of evangelicalism, like the nature of Scripture, the method has some serious drawbacks. For if inerrancy is a doctrine that is essential to consistent evangelicalism, as most evangelicals believe it is, then it seems unfitting to make it subject to the dialogue method for two reasons. First, for many evangelicals the issue of inerrancy is too important to be “up for grabs” on the evangelical dialogue table. Second, just by providing non-inerrantists and anti-inerrantists a “seat at the table” gives a certain undeserved legitimacy to their view. For if, as will be shown below, the non-inerrancy view is neither biblical, essential, nor in accord with the long history of the Christian church, then the dialogue method fails to do justice to the topic. For it offers an undeserved platform to those who do not really believe the doctrine. To illustrate, I doubt if one were setting up a conference on the future of Israel that he would invite countries who don’t believe in the existence of Israel (like Iran) to the table.
Stacking the Deck

Not only can the staging of the inerrancy discussion in the *Five Views* book be challenged, but so can the choice of actors on the stage. For the choice of participants in this *Five Views* “dialogue” did not fit the topic in a balanced way. Since the topic was inerrancy and since each participant was explicitly asked to address the CSBI (Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy), the choice of participants was not appropriate. For only one participant (Al Mohler) states his unequivocal belief in the CSBI view of inerrancy produced by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI). Some participants explicitly deny inerrancy (Enns, 83f.). Others prefer to re-define the CSBI statement before agreeing with it. Still others claim to agree with it, but they do so based on a misunderstanding of what the framers meant by inerrancy, as will be shown below.

What is more, an even greater problem is that none of the framers of the CSBI, whose statement was being attacked, were represented on the panel. Since three of them (J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, and N. L. Geisler) are still alive and active, the makeup of the panel was questionable. It is like convening a panel on the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution while Washington, Adams, and Madison were still alive but not inviting any of them to participate! Further, only one scholar (Al Mohler) was unequivocally in favor of the CSBI view, and some were known to be unequivocally against it (like Peter Enns). This is loading the dice against positive results. So, with a stacked deck in the format and the dice loaded in the choice of participants, the probabilities of a positive result were not high, and understandably the result confirms this anticipation.

Understanding Inerrancy

To be sure, whether inerrancy is an essential doctrine is crucial to the point at hand. In order to answer this question more fully, we must first define inerrancy and then evaluate its importance.

Definition of Inerrancy

Unless otherwise noted, when we use the word “inerrancy” in this article, we mean inerrancy as understood by the ETS framers and defined by the founders of the CSBI, namely, what is called total or unlimited inerrancy. For the CSBI defines inerrancy as unlimited inerrancy, whereas many of the participants believe in limited inerrancy. Unlimited inerrancy affirms that the Bible is true on whatever subject it speaks—whether it is redemption, ethics, history, science, or whatever. Limited inerrancy affirms that the Bible’s inerrancy is limited to redemptive matters.

The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), the largest of any society of its kind in the world, with some 3000 members, began (in 1948) with only one doctrinal statement: “The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs.” After a controversy in 2003 (about Clark Pinnock’s view) which involved the meaning of inerrancy, the ETS voted in 2004 to accept “the CSBI as its point of reference for defining inerrancy” (Merrick, 311). It
states: “For the purpose of advising members regarding the intent and meaning of the reference to biblical inerrancy in the ETS Doctrinal Basis, the Society refers members to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)” (see J. Merrick, 311). So, for the largest group of scholars believing in inerrancy, the officially accepted definition of the term inerrancy is that of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, CSBI).

The CSBI supports unlimited or total inerrancy, declaring: “The holy Scripture…is of divine authority in all matters upon which it touches” (A Short Statement, 2). Also, “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” (Art. 12). It further declares that: “The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own” (A Short Statement, 5, emphasis added). As we shall see below, unlimited inerrancy has been the historic position of the Christian church down through the centuries. Thus, the history supporting the doctrine of inerrancy supports unlimited inerrancy.

The Importance of Inerrancy

The question of the importance of inerrancy can be approached both doctrinally and historically. Doctrinally, inerrancy is an important doctrine because: (1) it is attached to the character of God; (2) it is foundational to other essential doctrines; (3) it is taught in the Scriptures; and (4) it is the historic position of the Christian church.

The Doctrinal Importance of Inerrancy

First of all, as the ETS statement declares, inerrancy is based on the character of God who cannot lie (Heb 6:18; Titus 1:2). For it affirms that the Bible is “inerrant” because (note the word “therefore”) it is the Word of God. This makes a direct, logical connection between inerrancy and the truthfulness of God.

Second, inerrancy is fundamental to all other essential Christian doctrines. It is granted that some other doctrines (like the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Christ) are more essential to salvation. However, all soteriological (salvation) doctrines derive their divine authority from the divinely authoritative Word of God. So, in an epistemological (knowledge) sense, the doctrine of the divine authority and inerrancy of Scripture is the fundamental of all the fundamentals. And if the fundamental of fundamentals is not fundamental, then what is fundamental? Fundamentally nothing! Thus, while one can be saved without believing in inerrancy, the doctrine of salvation has no divine authority apart from the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. This is why Carl Henry (and Al Mohler following him) affirmed correctly that while inerrancy is not necessary to evangelical authenticity, it is nonetheless essential to evangelical consistency (Mohler, 29).

Third, B. B. Warfield correctly noted that the primary basis for believing in the inerrancy of Scripture is that it was taught by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. And he specified it as unlimited inerrancy (in his book against Limited Inspiration, Presbyterian & Reformed; reprint, 1962). Warfield declared: “We believe in the doctrine of plenary inspiration of the Scriptures primarily because it is
the doctrine of Christ and his apostles believed, and which they have taught us” (cited by Mohler, 42). John Wenham in *Christ and the Bible* (IVP, 1972) amply articulated what Christ taught about the Bible, including its inerrancy, for Wenham was one of the international signers of the 1978 *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (see Geisler, *Defending Inerrancy*, 348). Indeed, to quote Jesus Himself, “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35) and “until heaven and earth pass away not an iota, not a dot, will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18). A more complete discussion of what Jesus taught about the Bible is found in our *Systematic Theology: in One Volume*, chapter 16.

Fourth, inerrancy is the historic position of the Christian church. As Al Mohler pointed out (Mohler, 48–49), even some non-inerrantists have agreed that inerrancy has been the standard view of the Christian church down through the centuries. He cites the Hanson brothers, Anthony and Richard, Anglican scholars, who said, “The Christian Fathers and the medieval tradition continued this belief [in inerrancy], and the Reformation did nothing to weaken it. On the contrary, since for many reformed theologians the authority of the Bible took the place which the Pope had held in the medieval scheme of things, the inerrancy of the Bible became more firmly maintained and explicitly defined among some reformed theologians than it had even been before.” They added, “The beliefs here denied [viz., inerrancy] have been held by all Christians from the very beginning until about a hundred and fifty years ago” (cited by Mohler, 41).

Inerrancy is a fundamental doctrine since it is fundamental to all other Christian doctrines which derive their authority from the belief that the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God. Indeed, like many other fundamental doctrines (e.g., the Trinity), it is based on a necessary conclusion from biblical truths. The doctrine of inerrancy as defined by CSBI is substantially the same doctrine held down through the centuries by the Christian church (see discussion below). So, even though it was never put in explicit confessional form in the early Church, nevertheless, by its nature as derived from the very nature of God and by its universal acceptance in the Christian church down through the centuries, it has earned a status of tacit catholicity (universality). So, it deserves high regard among evangelicals and rightly earned the title of “essential” (in an epistemological sense) to the Christian faith. Thus, to reduce inerrancy to the level of non-essential or even “incidental” to the Christian faith, reveals ignorance of its theological and historical roots and is an offense to its “watershed” importance to a consistent and healthy Christianity. As the CSBI statement declares: “However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church” (Art. 19).

**Unjustified Assumptions about Inerrancy**

A careful reading of the *Five Views* dialogue reveals that not only were the dice loaded against the CSBI inerrancy view by format and by the choice of participants, but there were several anti-inerrancy presuppositions employed by one or more of the participants. One of the most important concerns the nature of truth.
The Nature of Truth

The framers of the CSBI strongly affirmed a correspondence view of truth. This is not so of all of the participants in the Five Views dialogue. In fact there was a major misreading by many non-inerrantists of Article 13 which reads in part: “We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose.” Some non-inerrantists were willing to subscribe to the CSBI based on their misinterpretation of this statement. Franke claims that “This opens up a vast arena of interpretive possibilities with respect to the ‘usage or purpose’ of Scripture in relation to standards of ‘truth or error’” (Franke, 264). Another non-inerrantist (in the CSBI sense), Clark Pinnock, put it this way: “I supported the 1978 “Chicago Statement on the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy,” noting that it “made room for nearly every well-intentioned Baptist” (Pinnock, Scripture Principle; rev., 266).

However, the framers of the CSBI inerrancy anticipated this objection, and R.C. Sproul was commissioned to write an official ICBI commentary on the Chicago Statement which, straight to the point in Article 13, reads: “‘By biblical standards of truth and error’ is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth. This part of the article is directed at those who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal, or the like, rather than to mean that which corresponds to reality.” Thus, “all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality, whether that reality is historical, factual, or spiritual” (see Geisler and Roach, Defending Inerrancy, 31, emphasis added). So, non-inerrantists, like Pinnock and Enns, misunderstand the Chicago Statement which demands that truth be defined as correspondence with reality. This is important since to define it another way, for example, in terms of redemptive purpose is to open the door wide to a denial of the factual inerrancy of the Bible as espoused by CSBI.

Purpose and Meaning

Another serious mistake of some of the non-inerrantists in the Five Views dialogue is to believe that purpose determines meaning. This emerges in several statements. Vanhoozer claims “I propose that we identify the literal sense with the illocutionary act the author is performing” (Enns, 220). The illocutionary act is what the author is saying, and the illocutionary act is why (purpose) he said it. The what may be in error; only the why (purpose) is without error. This is why Vanhoozer comes up with such unusual explanations of biblical texts. For example, when Joshua commanded the sun to stand still (Joshua 10), according to Vanhoozer, this does not correspond to any actual and unusual phenomena involving an extra day of daylight. Rather, it simply means that the purpose (illocutionary act) indicates that Joshua wants “to affirm God’s covenant relation with his people” (Vanhoozer, Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology, 106). Likewise, according to Vanhoozer, Joshua is not affirming the literal truth of the destruction of a large walled city (Joshua 6). He contends that “simply to discover ‘what actually happened’” is to miss the main point of the discourse, which is to communicate a theological interpretation of what hap-
pened (that is, God gave Israel the land) and to call for right participation in the covenant” (Vanhoozer, *Five Views*, 228). That is why Joshua wrote it, and that alone is the inerrant purpose of the text.

However, as we explained in detail elsewhere (Geisler, *Systematic Theology: In One Volume*, chap. 10), purpose does not determine meaning. This becomes clear when we examine crucial texts. For example, the Bible declares “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk” (Exod 23:19). The meaning of this text is very clear, but the purpose is not, at least not to most interpreters. Just scanning a couple commentaries off the shelf reveals a half dozen different guesses as to the author’s purpose. Despite this lack of unanimity on what the purpose is, nonetheless, virtually everyone understands what the meaning of the text is. An Israelite could obey this command, even if he did not know the purpose for doing so (other than that God had commanded him to do so). So, knowing meaning stands apart from knowing the purpose of a text. For example, a boss could tell his employees, “Come over to my house tonight at 8 p.m.” The meaning (what) is clear, but the purpose (why) is not. Again, understanding the meaning is clear apart from knowing the purpose.

This does not mean that knowing the purpose of a statement cannot be interesting and even enlightening. If you knew your boss was asking you to come to his house because he wanted to give you a million dollars, that would be very enlightening, but it would not change the meaning of the statement to come over to his house that night. So, contrary to many non-inerrantists, purpose does not determine meaning. Further, with regard to biblical texts, the meaning rests in *what* is affirmed, not in *why* it is affirmed. This is why inerrantists speak of propositional revelation and many non-inerrantists tend to downplay or deny it (Vanhoozer, 214). The meaning and truth of a proposition (affirmation or denial about something) is what is inspired, not the purpose. Inerrancy deals with truth, and truth resides in propositions, not in purposes.

At the CSBI conference on the meaning of inerrancy (1982), Carl Henry observed the danger of reducing inerrancy to the purpose of the author, as opposed to the affirmations of the author as they correspond with the facts of reality. He wrote: “Some now even introduce authorial intent or cultural context of language as spurious rationalizations for this crime against the Bible, much as some rapist might assure me that he is assaulting my wife for my own or for her good. They misuse Scripture in order to champion as biblically true what in fact does violence to Scripture” (Henry in Earl Radmacher ed., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* [1984], 917). This is precisely what has happened with some of the participants in the Five Views book when they reduced meaning to purpose and then read their own extrabiblical speculations into the author’s supposed intention or purpose. More on this later when the genre presupposition is discussed.

Limited inerrantists and non-inerrantists often take advantage of an ambiguity in the word “intention” of the author in order to insert their own heterodox views on the topic. When traditional unlimited inerrantists use the phrase “intention of the author” they use it in contrast to those who wish to impose their own meaning on the text in contrast to discovering what the biblical author intended by it. So, what traditional unlimited inerrantists mean by “intention” is not purpose (why) but *expressed intention* in the text, that is, meaning. They were not asking the reader to look for
some *unexpressed intention* behind, beneath, or beyond the text. Expressed intention refers to the meaning of the text. And it would be better to use the word *meaning* than the world *intention*. In this way the word *intention* cannot be understood as *purpose* (why), rather than *meaning* or expressed intention (what), which is found in the text. To put it simply, there is a *meanner* (author) who expresses his *meaning* in the text so that the reader can know what is *meant* by the text. If one is looking for this objectively expressed meaning (via the historical-grammatical hermeneutics) it limits the meaning to the text and eliminates finding the meaning beyond the text in some other text (i.e., in some alien, extra-biblical genre).

Propositional Revelation

It is not uncommon for non-inerrantists to attempt to modify or deny propositional revelation. Vanhoozer cites John Stott as being uncomfortable with inerrancy because the Bible “cannot be reduced to a string of propositions which invites the label truth or error” (Vanhoozer, 200). Similarly, he adds. “Inerrancy pertains directly to assertions only, not to biblical commands, promises, warnings, and so on. We would therefore be unwise to collapse everything we want to say about biblical authority into the nutshell of inerrancy” (Vanhoozer, 203).

Carl Henry is criticized by some for going “too far” in claiming that “the minimal unit of meaningful expression is a proposition” and that only propositions can be true or false (Vanhoozer, 214). However, it would appear that it is Vanhoozer’s criticisms that go too far. It is true that there are more than propositions in the Bible. All propositions are sentences, but not all sentences are propositions, at least not directly. However, the CSBI inerrantist is right in stressing propositional revelation. For only propositions express truth, and inerrancy is concerned with the truthfulness of the Bible. Certainly, there are exclamations, promises, prophecies, interrogations, and commands that are not formally and explicitly propositions. But while not all of the Bible is propositional, most of the Bible is propositionalizable. And whatever in the Bible states or implies a proposition can be categorized as propositional revelation. And inerrantists claim that all propositional revelation is true. That is to say, all that the Bible affirms as true (directly or indirectly) is true. And all that the Bible affirms as false, is false. Any attack on propositional revelation that diminishes or negates propositional truth has denied the inerrancy of the Bible. Hence, inerrantists rightly stress propositional revelation.

The fact that the Bible is many more things than inerrant propositions is irrelevant. Certainly, the Bible has other characteristics such as, infallibility (John 10:35), immortality (Ps 119:160), indestructibility (Matt 5:17–18), indefatigability (it can’t be worn out—Jer 23:29), and indefeasibility (it can’t be overcome—Isa 55:11). But these do not diminish the Bible’s inerrancy (errorlessness). In fact, if the Bible were not the inerrant Word of God, then it would not be all these other things. They are complementary, not contradictory, to inerrancy. Likewise, the Bible has commands, questions, and exclamations, but these do not negate the truth of the text. Instead, they imply, enhance, and complement it.
Accommodationism

Historically, most evangelical theologians have adopted a form of divine condescension to explain how an infinite God can communicate with finite creatures in finite human language. This is often called analogous language (see Geisler, Systematic Theology, chap. 9). However, since the word “accommodation” has come to be associated with the acceptance of error, we wish to distinguish between the legitimate evangelical teaching of God’s adaptation to human finitude and the illegitimate view of non-inerrantists who assert God’s accommodation to human error. It appears that some participants of the inerrancy dialogue fit into the latter category. Peter Enns believes that accommodation to human error is part of an incarnational model which he accepts. This involves writers making up speeches based on what is not stated but is only thought to be “called for” (102), as Greek historian, Thucydides, admitted doing (Enns, 101-02). This accommodation view also allows for employing Hebrew and Greco-Roman genre which includes literature with factual errors in it (Enns, 103). The following chart draws a contrast between the two views:

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<tr>
<th>ADAPTATION VIEW</th>
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<tr>
<td>GOD ADAPTS TO FINITUDE</td>
<td>GOD ACCOMMODATES TO ERROR</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIBLE USES ANALAGOUS LANGUAGE</td>
<td>IT USES EQUIVOCAL LANGUAGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIBLE STORIES ARE FACTUAL</td>
<td>SOME STORIES ARE NOT FACTUAL</td>
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Peter Enns believes that “details” like whether Paul’s companions heard the voice or not (Acts 9, 22) were part of this flexibility of accommodation to error. In brief, he claims that “biblical writers shaped history creatively for their own theological purposes” (Enns, 100). Recording “what happened” was not the “primary focus” for the Book of Acts but rather “interpreting Paul for his audience” (Enns, 102). He adds, “shaping significantly the portrayal of the past is hardly an isolated incident here and there in the Bible; it’s the very substance of how biblical writers told the story of their past” (Enns, 104). In brief, God accommodates to human myths, legends, and errors in the writing of Scripture. Indeed, according to some non-inerrantists like Enns, this includes accommodation to alien worldviews.

However, ETS/CSBI inerrantists emphatically reject this kind of speculation. The CSBI declares: “We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture” (CSBI, Art. 14). Further, “We deny that Jesus’ teaching about scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity” (CSBI, Art. 15). “We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterances on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We deny that finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God’s Word” (CSBI, Art. 9). Also, “We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God’s work in inspiration” (CSBI, Art. 4).
Reasons to Reject the Accommodation to Error View

There are many good reasons for rejecting the non-inerrantists’ accommodation to error theory. Let’s begin with the argument from the character of God.

First, it is contrary to the nature of God as truth that He would accommodate to error. Michael Bird states the issue well, though he wrongly limits God to speaking on only redemptive matters. Nevertheless, he is on point with regard to the nature of inerrancy in relation to God. He writes: “God identifies with and even invests his own character in his Word…. The accommodation is never a capitulation to error. God does not speak erroneously, nor does he feed us with nuts of truth lodged inside shells of falsehood” (Bird, 159). He cites Bromley aptly, “It is sheer unreason to say that truth is revealed in and through that which is erroneous” (cited by Bird, 159).

Second, accommodation to error is contrary to the nature of Scripture as the inerrant Word of God. God cannot err (Heb 6:18), and, if the Bible is His Word, then the Bible cannot err. So, to affirm that accommodation to error was involved in the inspiration of Scripture is contrary to the nature of Scripture as the Word of God. Jesus affirmed the “Scripture” is the unbreakable Word of God (John 10:34–35) which is imperishable to every “iota and dot” (Matt 5:18). The New Testament authors often cite the Old Testament as what “God said” (cf. Matt 19:5; Acts 4:24–25; 13:34–35; Heb 1:5, 6, 7). Indeed, the whole Old Testament is said to be “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16). Bird wrongly claimed “God directly inspires persons, not pages” (Enns, 164). In fact, the New Testament only uses the word “inspired” (theopneustos) once (2 Tim 3:16), and it refers to the Scripture (grapha, writings). The writings, not the writers, are “breathed out” by God. To be sure, the writers were “moved by” God to write (2 Pet 1:20–21), but only what they wrote as a result was inspired. But if the Scriptures are the very writings breathed out by God, then they cannot be errant since God cannot err (Titus 1:2).

Third, the accommodation to error theory is contrary to sound reason. Anti-inerrantist, Peter Enns, saw this logic and tried to avoid it by a Barthian kind of separation of the Bible from the Word of God. He wrote, “The premise that such an inerrant Bible is the only kind of book God would be able to produce…, strikes me as assuming that God shares our modern interest in accuracy and scientific precision, rather than allowing the phenomena of Scripture to shape our theological expectations” (Enns, 84). But Enns forgets that any kind of error is contrary, not to “modern interest” but to the very nature of God as the God of all truth. So, whatever nuances of truth there are which are borne out by the phenomena of Scripture cannot, nevertheless, negate the naked truth that God cannot err, nor can his Word. The rest is detail.

The Lack of Precision

The doctrine of inerrancy is sometimes criticized for holding that the Bible always speaks with scientific precision and historical exactness. But since the biblical phenomena do not support this, the doctrine of inerrancy is rejected. However, this is a “Straw Man” argument. For the CSBI states clearly: “We further deny that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision…., including ‘round numbers’ and ‘free citations’” (CSBI. Art. 13). Vanhoozer
notes that Warfield and Hodge (in *Inspiration*, 42) helpfully distinguished “accuracy” (which the Bible has) from “exactness of statement” (which the Bible does not always have) (Vanhoozer, 221). This being the case, this argument does not apply to the doctrine of inerrancy as embraced by the CSBI since it leaves room for statements that lack modern “technical precision.” It does, however, raise another issue, namely, the role of biblical and extra-biblical phenomena in refining the biblical concept of truth.

With regard to the reporting of Jesus’ words in the Gospels, there is a strong difference between the inerrantist and non-inerrantist view, although not all non-inerrantists in the *Five Views* book hold to everything in the “Non-inerrantists” column:

### USE OF JESUS’ WORDS AND DEEDS IN THE GOSPELS

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<tr>
<th>INERRANTIST VIEW</th>
<th>NON-INERRANTIST VIEW</th>
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<tr>
<td>REPORTING THEM</td>
<td>CREATING THEM</td>
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<td>PARAPHRASING THEM</td>
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<td>CHANGING THEIR FORM</td>
<td>CHANGING THEIR CONTENT</td>
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<td>THEOLOGICALLY REDACTING THEM</td>
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Inerrantists believe that there is a significant difference between *reporting* Jesus’ words and *creating* them. The Gospel writings are based on eye-witnesses testimony, as they claim (cf. John 21:24; Luke 1:1–4) and as recent scholarship has shown (see Richard Bauchman, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*). Likewise, they did not put words in Jesus’ mouth in a theological attempt to interpret Jesus in a certain way contrary to what He meant by them. Of course, since Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic (cf. Mt. 27:46) and the Gospels are in Greek, we do not have the exact words of Jesus (*ipsissima verba*) in most cases but rather an accurate rendering of them in another language. But for inerrantists the New Testament is not a re-interpretation of Jesus words; it is an accurate translation of them. Non-inerrantists disagree and do not see the biblical record as an accurate report but as a reinterpretated portrait, a literary creation. This comes out clearly in the statement of Peter Enns that conquest narratives do not merely “report events” (Enns, 108). Rather, “Biblical history shaped creatively in order for the theological purposes” to be seen (Enns, 108).

Vanhoozer offers a modified evangelical version of this error when he speaks of not “reading Joshua to discover ‘what happened’ [which] is, he believed, to miss the main point of the discourse, which is to communicate a theological interpretation of what happened (that is, God gave Israel the land) and to call for right participation in the covenant” (Vanhoozer, 228). So, the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6), while not being simply a “myth” or “legend,” Vanhoozer sees as an “artful narrative testimony to an event that happened in Israel’s past” (ibid.). A surface reading of Vanhoozer’s view here may appear to be orthodox, until one remembers that he believes that only the “main point” of purpose of a text is really inerrant, not what it affirms. He declares. “I propose that we identify the literal sense with the illocutionary act an author is performing” (Vanhoozer, 220). That is, only the theological purpose of the author is inerrant, not everything that is affirmed in the text (the locutionary acts). He declared elsewhere “the Bible is the Word of God (in the sense of its illocutionary acts)…” (Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 195).
The implications of his view come out more clearly in his handling of another passage, namely, Josh 10:12: “Sun, stand still...” This locution (affirmation) he claims is an error. But the illocution (purpose of the author) is not in error—namely, what God wanted to say through this statement, which was to affirm His redemptive purpose for Israel (Vanhoozer, *Lost in Interpretation*, 138). This is clearly not what the CSBI and historic inerrancy position affirms. Indeed, it is another example of the fallacious “purpose determines meaning” view discussed above and rejected by CSBI.

The Role of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Data

The claim that in conflicts between them one should take the Bible over science is much too simplistic. Space does not permit a more extensive treatment of this important question, which we have dealt with more extensively elsewhere (see our *Systematic Theology: In One Volume*, chapters 4 and 12). Al Mohler was taken to task by Peter Enns for his seemingly a priori biblical stance that would not allow for any external evidence to change one’s view on what the Bible taught about certain scientific and historical events (Mohler, 51, 60). Clearly the discussion hinges on what role the external data have (from general revelation) in determining the meaning of a biblical text (special revelation).

For example, almost all contemporary evangelical scholars allow that virtually certain scientific evidence from outside the Bible shows that the earth is round, and this must take precedence over a literalistic interpretation of the phrase “four corners of the earth” (Rev. 20:8). Further, interpretation of the biblical phrase “the sun set” (Josh 1:4) is not be taken literalistically to mean the sun moves around the earth. Rather, most evangelical scholars would allow the evidence for helio-centric view of modern astronomy (from general revelation) to take precedence over a literalistic, pre-Copernican, geo-centric interpretation of the phrase the “Sun stood still” (Josh 10:13).

On the other hand, most evangelicals reject the theistic evolutionary interpretation of Genesis 1–2 for the literal (not literalistic) interpretation of the creation of life and of Adam and Eve. So, the one million dollar question is: When does the scientist’s interpretation of general revelation take precedent over the theologian’s interpretation of special revelation?

Several observations are in order on this important issue. First, there are two revelations from God, general revelation (in nature) and special revelation (in the Bible), and they are both valid sources of knowledge. Second, their domains sometimes overlap and conflict, as the cases cited above indicate, but no one has proven a real contradiction between them. However, there is a conflict between some interpretations of each revelation. Third, sometimes a faulty interpretation of special revelation must be corrected by a proper interpretation of general revelation. Hence, there are few evangelicals who would claim that the earth is flat, despite the fact that the Bible speaks of “the four corners of the earth” (Rev 20:8) and that the earth does not move: “The world is established; it shall never be moved” (Ps 93:1, emphasis added).

However, most evangelical theologians follow a literal (not literalistic) understanding of the creation of the universe, life, and Adam (Gen 1:1, 21, 27) over the
Darwinian macro-evolution model. Why? Because they are convinced that the arguments for a creation of a physical universe and a literal Adam outweigh the Darwinian speculations about general revelation. In brief, our understanding of Genesis (special revelation) must be weighed with our understanding about nature (general revelations) in order to determine the truth of the matter (see our Systematic Theology: In One Volume, chapters 4 and 12.). It is much too simplistic to claim one is taking the Bible over science or science over the Bible—our understanding about both are based on revelations from God, and our interpretations of both must be weighed in a careful and complementary way to arrive at the truth that is being taught on these matters.

To abbreviate a more complex process, which is described in more detail elsewhere (ibid.), (1) we start with an inductive study of the biblical text; (2) we make whatever necessary deduction that emerges from two or more biblical truths; (3) then we do a retroduction of our discovery in view of the biblical phenomena and external evidence form general revelation; and then (4) we draw our final conclusion in the nuanced view of truth resulting from this process. In brief, there is a complementary role between interpretations of special revelation and those of general revelation. Sometimes, the evidence for the interpretation of one revelation is greater than the evidence for an interpretation in the other, and vice versa. So, it is not a matter of taking the Bible over science, but when there is a conflict, it is a matter of taking the interpretation with the strongest evidence over the one with weaker evidence.

The Role of Hermeneutics in Inerrancy

The ICBI (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy) framers of the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (CSBI) were aware that, while inerrancy and hermeneutics are logically distinct, hermeneutics cannot be totally separated from inerrancy. It is for this reason that a statement on the historical-grammatical hermeneutics was included in the CSBI presentation (1978). Article 18 reads: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by the grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it. This leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claim to authorship” (emphasis added).

The next ICBI conference after the CSBI in 1978 was an elaboration on this important point in the hermeneutics conference (of 1982). It produced both a statement and an official commentary as well. All four documents are placed in one book, titled, Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements (available on www.BastonBooks.com). These four statements contain the corpus and context of the meaning of inerrancy by nearly three hundred international scholars on the topic of inerrancy. Hence, questions about the meaning of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI) can be answered by the framers in the accompanying official ICBI commentaries.

Many of the issues raised in the Five Views are answered in these documents. Apparently, not all the participants took advantage of these resources. Failure to do so led to misunderstanding of what the ICBI framers mean by inerrancy and how the
historical-grammatical hermeneutics is connected to inerrancy. So-called genre criticism of Robert Gundry and Mike Licona are cases in point.

The Role of Extra-Biblical Genre

Another aspect of non-inerrantist’s thinking is genre criticism. Although he claims to be an inerrantist, Mike Licona clearly does not follow the ETS or ICBI view on the topic. For Licona argues that “the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (bios)” and that “Bioi offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and inventing speeches…, and they often include legend.” But, he adds “because bios was a flexible genre, it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins” (Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 34). This led him to deny the historicity of the story of the resurrection of the saints in Matt 27:51–53 (ibid., 527–28; 548; 552–53), and to call the story of the crowd falling backward when Jesus claimed “I am he” (John 14:5-6) “a possible candidate for embellishment” (ibid., 306) and the presence of angels at the tomb in all four Gospels maybe be “poetic language or legend” (ibid., 185–86).

Later, in a debate with Bart Ehrman (at Southern Evangelical Seminary, Spring, 2009), Licona claimed there was a contradiction in the Gospels as to the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. He said, “I think that John probably altered the day [of Jesus’ crucifixion] in order for a theological—to make a theological point here.” Then in a professional transcription of a YouTube video on November 23, 2012 (see http://youtu.be/TJ8rZukh_Bc), Licona affirmed the following: “So um this didn’t really bother me in terms of if there were contradictions in the Gospels. I mean I believe in biblical inerrancy but I also realized that biblical inerrancy is not one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The resurrection is. So if Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is still true even if it turned out that some things in the Bible weren’t. So um it didn’t really bother me a whole lot even if some contradictions existed” (emphasis added).

This popular Greco-Roman genre theory adopted by Licona and others is directly contrary to the CSBI view of inerrancy as clearly spelled out in many articles. First, Article 18 speaks to it directly: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture” (emphasis added). But Licona rejects the strict “grammatico-historical exegesis” where “Scripture is to interpret Scripture” for an extra-biblical system where Greco-Roman genre is used to interpret Scripture. Of course, “Taking account” of different genres within Scripture, like poetry, history, parables, and even allegory (Gal 4:24), is legitimate, but this is not what the use of extra-biblical Greco-Roman genre does. Rather, it uses extra-biblical stories to determine what the Bible means, even if using this extra-biblical literature means denying the historicity of the biblical text.

Second, the CSBI says emphatically that “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claim to authorship” (Art. 18, emphasis added). But this is exactly what many non-inerrantists, like Licona, do with some Gospel events. The official ICBI commentary on this Article adds, “It is never legitimate, however, to run counter to express biblical affirmations” (emphasis
added). Further, in the ICBI commentary on its 1982 Hermeneutics Statement (Article 13) on inerrancy, it adds, “We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual. Some, for instance, take Adam to be a myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person. Others take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and [is] so referred to by Christ” (emphasis added). Its comments in the next article (Article 14) add, “We deny that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated” (emphasis added). Clearly, the CSBI fathers rejected genre criticism as used by Gundry, Licona, and many other evangelicals.

Three living, eye-witness framers of the CSBI statements (Packer, Sproul, and Geisler) confirm that authors like Robert Gundry were in view when these articles were composed. Gundry had denied the historicity of sections of the Gospel of Matthew by using Hebrew “midrashic” model to interpret Matthew (see Mohler on Franke, 294). After a thorough discussion of Gundry’s view over a two-year period and numerous articles in the ETS journal, the matter was peacefully, lovingly, and formally brought to a motion by a founder of the ETS, Roger Nicole, in which the membership, by an overwhelming seventy percent, voted to ask Gundry to resign from the ETS. Since Licona’s view is the same in principle with that of Gundry’s, the ETS decision applies equally to his view as well.

Mike Licona uses a Greco-Roman genre to interpret the Gospels, rather than Jewish midrash which Gundry used. The Greco-Roman genre permits the use of a contradiction in the Gospels concerning the day Jesus was crucified. However, the ICBI official texts cited above reveal that the CSBI statement on inerrancy forbids “dehistoricizing” the Gospels (CSBI Art. 18, emphasis added). Again living ICBI framers see this as the same issue that led to Gundry’s departure from ETS. When asked about the orthodoxy of Mike Licona’s view, CSBI framer R.C. Sproul, wrote: “As the former and only President of ICBI during its tenure and as the original framer of the Affirmations and Denials of the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy, I can say categorically that Dr. Michael Licona’s views are not even remotely compatible with the unified Statement of ICBI” (Letter, 5/22/2012 emphasis added).

The role of extra-biblical genre in Gospel interpretation can be charted as follows:

**THE USE OF EXTRA-BIBLICAL GENRE**

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The formal cause of meaning is in the text itself (the author is the efficient cause of meaning). No literature or stories outside the text are hermeneutically determinative of the meaning of the text. The extra-biblical data can provide understanding of a part (e.g., a word), but it cannot decide what the meaning of a whole text is. Every
text must be understood only in its immediate or more remote contexts. Scripture is to be used to interpret Scripture.

Of course, as shown above, general revelation can help modify our understanding of a biblical text, for the scientific evidence based on general revelation demonstrates that the earth is round and can be used to modify one’s understanding of the biblical phrase “for corners of the earth.” However, no Hebrew or Greco-Roman literature genre should be used to determine what a biblical text means since it is not part of any general revelation from God, and it has no hermeneutical authority.

Further, the genre of a text is not understood by looking outside the text. Rather, it is determined by using the historical-grammatical hermeneutic on the text in its immediate context, and the more remote context of the rest of Scripture to decide whether it is history, poetry, parable, an allegory, or whatever.

What is more, similarity to any extra-biblical types of literature does not demonstrate identity with the biblical text, nor should it be used to determine what the biblical text means. For example, the fact that an extra-biblical piece of literature combines history and legend does not mean that the Bible also does this. Nor does the existence of contradictions in similar extra-biblical literature justify transferring this to biblical texts. Even if there are some significant similarities of the Gospels with Greco-Roman literature, it does not mean that legends should be allowed in the Gospels since the Gospel writers make it clear that they have a strong interest in historical accuracy by an “orderly account” so that we can have “certainty” about what is recorded in them (Luke 1:1–4). And multiple confirmations of geographical and historical details confirm that this kind of historical accuracy was achieved (see Colin Patterson, The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenic History, 1990).

The Issue of Gospel Pluralism

Another associated error of some non-inerrantism is pluralism. Kenton Sparks argues that the Bible “does not contain a single coherent theology but rather numerous theologies that sometimes stand in tension or even contradiction with one another” (cited by Mohler, 55). So, God accommodates Himself and speaks through “the idioms, attitudes, assumptions, and general worldviews of the ancient authors” (Enns, 87). But he assures us that this is not a problem, because we need to see “God as so powerful that he can overrule ancient human error and ignorance, [by contrast] inerrancy portrays a weak view of God” (Enns, 91). However, it must be remembered that contradictions entail errors, and God cannot err.

By the same logical comparison, Christ must have sinned. For if the union of the human and divine in Scripture (God’s written Word) necessarily entails error, then by comparison the union of the human and divine in Christ must result in moral flaws in him. But the Bible is careful to note that, though Christ, while being completely human, nonetheless, was without sin (Heb 4:15; 2 Cor 5:21). Likewise, there is no logical or theological reason why the Bible must err simply because it has a human nature it. Humans do not always err, and they do not err when guided by the Holy Spirit of Truth who cannot err (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Pet 1:20–21). A perfect Book can be produced by a perfect God through imperfect human authors. How? Because God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick! He is the ultimate cause of the inerrant Word of God; the human authors are only the secondary causes.
Enns attempts to avoid this true incarnational analogy by arguing that (1) this reasoning diminishes the value of Christ’s incarnation. He tried to prove this by noting that the incarnation of Christ is a unique “miracle” (Enns, 298). However, so is the union of the human and divine natures of Scripture miraculous (2 Sam 23:2; 2 Pet 1:20-21). In effect, Enns denies the miraculous nature of Scripture in order to exalt the miraculous nature of the incarnation of Christ. (2) His comparison with the Quran is a straw man for it reveals his lack of understanding of the emphatic orthodox denial of the verbal dictation theory claimed by Muslims for the Quran, but denied vigorously by orthodox Bible scholars about the Bible. (3) His charge of “bibliolatry” is directly opposed to all evangelical teaching that the Bible is not God and should not be worshiped.

Of course, Christ and the Bible are not a perfect analogy because there is a significant difference: Christ is God, and the Bible is not. Nonetheless, it is a good analogy because there are many strong similarities: (1) both Christ and the Bible have a divine and human dimension; (2) both have a union of the two dimensions; and (3) both have a flawless character in that Christ is without sin and the Bible is without error; (4) both are the Word of God, one the written Word of God and other the personal Word of God. Thus, a true incarnational analogy calls for the errorlessness of the Bible, just as it calls for the sinlessness of Christ.

The Acceptance of Conventionalism

Some non-inerrantists hold the self-defeating theory of meaning called conventionalism. Franke, for example, argues that “since language is a social construct . . . our words and linguistic conventions do not have timeless and fixed meanings . . .” (Franke, 194). There are serious problems with this view which Franke and other contemporary non-inerrantists have adopted.

Without going into philosophical detail, the most telling way to expose the flaws of this view is to show that it is self-defeating. That is, it cannot deny the objectivity of meaning without making an objectively meaningful statement. To claim that all language is purely conventional and subjective is to make a statement which is not purely conventional and subjective. In like manner, when Franke claims that truth is perspectival (Franke, 267), he seems to be unaware that he is making a non-perspectival truth claim. We have discussed this problem more extensively elsewhere (Geisler, Systematic Theology, chap. 6). We would only point out here that one cannot consistently be an inerrantist and a conventionalist. For if all meaning is subjective, then so is all truth (since all true statements must be meaningful). But inerrancy claims that the Bible makes objectively true statements. Hence, an inerrantist cannot be a conventionalist, at least not consistently.

The Issue of Foundationalism

The CSBI statement is taken to task by some non-inerrantists for being based on an unjustified theory of foundationalism. Franke insists that “the Chicago Statement is reflective of a particular form of epistemology known as classic or strong
foundationalism” (Franke, 261). They believe that the Bible is “a universal and indubitable basis for human knowledge” (Franke, 261). Franke believes that: “The problem with this approach is that it has been thoroughly discredited in philosophical and theological circles” (ibid., 262).

In response, first of all, Franke confuses two kinds of foundationalism: (1) deductive foundationalism as found in Spinoza or Descartes where all truth can be deduced from certain axiomatic principles. This is rejected by all inerrantist scholars I know and by most philosophers; (2) however, reductive foundationalism which affirms that truths can be reduced to or are based on certain first principles like the Law of Non-contradiction is not rejected by most inerrantist and philosophers. Indeed, first principles of knowledge, like the Law of Non-contradiction, are self-evident and undeniable. That is, the predicate of first principles can be reduced to its subject, and any attempt to deny the Law of Non-contradiction uses the Law of Non-contradiction in the denial. Hence, the denial is self-defeating.

Second, not only does Franke offer no refutation of this foundational view, but any attempted refutation of it self-destructs. Even so-called “post-foundationalists” like Franke cannot avoid using these first principles of knowledge in their rejection of foundationalism. So, Franke’s comment applies to deductive foundationalism but not to reductive foundationalism as held by inerrantists. Indeed, first principles of knowledge, including theological arguments, are presupposed in all rational arguments, including theological arguments.

Third, Franke is wrong in affirming that all inerrantists claim that “Scripture is the true and sole basis for knowledge on all matters which it touches.” (Franke, 262, emphasis added). Nowhere do the CSBI statements or its commentaries make any such claim. It claims only that the “Scriptures are the supreme written norm “in all matters on which it touches” (Article 2 and “A Short Statement. Emphasis added). Nowhere does it deny that God has revealed Himself outside His written revelation in His general revelation in nature, as the Bible declares (Rom. 1:19–20; Ps 19:1; Acts 14, 17).

As for “falliblism” which Franke posits to replace foundationalism, CSBI explicitly denies creedal or infallible base for its beliefs, saying, “We do not propose this statement be given creedal weight” (CSBI, Preamble). Furthermore, “We deny creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible” (CSBI, Art. 2). So, not only do the ICBI framers claim their work is not a creed nor is it infallible, but they claim that even the creeds are not infallible. Further, it adds, “We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak” (CSBI, Preamble). In short, while the doctrine of inerrancy is not negotiable, the ICBI statements about inerrancy are revisable. However, to date, no viable revisions have been proposed by any body of scholars such as those who framed the original statements.

Dealing with Bible Difficulties

As important as the task may be, dealing with Bible difficulties can have a blinding effect on those desiring the clear truth about inerrancy. For it provides a temptation not unlike a divorce counselor who is faced with all the problems of his
divorced counselees. Unless he concentrates on the biblical teaching and good examples of the many happy marriages, he can be caught wondering whether a good marriage is possible. Likewise, one should no more give up on the inerrancy (of God’s special revelation) because of the difficulties he finds in explaining its consistency than he should give up on the study of nature (God’s general revelation) because of the difficulties he finds in it.

There are several reasons for believing both of God’s revelations are consistent: First, it is a reasonable assumption that the God who is capable of revealing Himself in both spheres is consistent and does not contradict Himself. Indeed, the Scriptures exhort us to “Avoid … contradictions” (Gk: antitheses—1 Tim 6:20 ESV). Second, persistent study in both spheres of God’s revelations, special and general revelation (Rom 1:19–20; Ps 19:1), have yielded more and more answers to difficult questions. Finally, contrary to some panelists who believe that inerrancy hinders progress in understanding Scripture (Franke, 278), there is an investigatory value in assuming there is no contradiction in either revelation, namely, it prompts further investigation to believe that there was no error in the original. What would we think of scientists who gave up studying God’s general revelation in nature because they have no present explanation of some phenomena? The same applies to Scripture (God’s special revelation). Thus, assuming there is an error in the Bible is no solution. Rather, it is a research stopper.

St. Augustine was right in his dictum (cited by Vanhoozer, 235). There are only four alternatives when we come to a difficulty in the Word of God. Either: (1) God made an error; (2) the manuscript is faulty; (3) the translation is wrong; or (4) we have not properly understood it. Since it is an utterly unbiblical presumption to assume the first alternative, we as evangelicals have three alternatives. After over a half century of studying nearly 1,000 such difficulties (see The Big Book of Bible Difficulties, Baker, 2008), I have discovered that the problem of an unexplained conflict is usually the last alternative, namely, I have not properly understood.

That being said, even the difficult cases the participants were asked to respond to are not without possible explanations. In fact, some of the participants, who are not even defenders of inerrancy, offered some reasonable explanations.

Acts 9 and 22. As for the alleged contradiction where Paul’s companions “heard” (Acts 9:4) and did not “hear” (Acts 22:9) what the voice from heaven said, two things need to be noted: First, the exact forms of the word “hear” (akouo) are not used in both case. First, Vanhoozer (229) notes that Acts 9:4 says akouein (in the accusative) which means hear a sound of a voice. In the other text (Acts 22:9) akouontes (in the genitive) can mean understand the voice (as the NIV translates it). So understood, there is no real contradiction. Paul’s companions heard the sound of the voice but did not understand what it said.

Second, we have exactly the same experience with the word “hear” today. In fact, at our house, hardly a day or two goes by without either my wife or I saying from another room, “I can’t hear you.” We heard their voice, but we did not understand what they said.

One thing is certain, we do not need contorted attempts to explain the phenomenon like Vanhoozer’s suggestion that this conflict serves “Luke’s purpose by progressively reducing the role of the companions, eventually excluding them altogether
from the revelatory event” (230). It is totally unnecessary to sacrifice the traditional view of inerrancy with such twisted explanations.

**Joshua 6.** This text records massive destructions of the city, with its large walls falling down, which goes way beyond the available archaeological evidence. Peter Enns insists that “the overwhelmingly dominant scholarly position is that the city of Jericho was at most a small settlement and without walls during the time of Joshua” (Enns, 93). He concludes that “these issues cannot be reconciled with how inerrancy functions in evangelicalism as articulated in the CSBI” (92). He further contends that the biblical story must be a legendary and mythological embellishment (96).

In response, it should be noted that: (1) this would not be the first time that the “dominant scholarly position” has been overturned by later discoveries. The charge that there was no writing in Moses’ day and that the Hittites, mentioned in the Bible (Gen 26:34; 1 Kings 11:1), never existed, are only two examples. All scholars know that both of these errors were subsequently revealed by further research. (2) There is good archaeological evidence that other events mentioned in the Bible did occur as stated. The plagues on Egypt and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are examples in point. The first fits well with the Uperwer Papyrus and the second with the recent discoveries at the Tall el Hamman site in Jordan (see Joseph Holden, *A Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, Harvest House, 2013, pp. 214–24).

Indeed, Enns admits that the Joshua description of some other cities around Jericho fits the archaeological evidence (Enns, 98). He even admits that “a trained archaeologist and research director” offers a minority view that fits with the Joshua 6 record (Enns, 94); only the alleged time period is different. But the dating issue is still unresolved by scholars. So, a date that fits the biblical record is still possible.

The fact that the belief in the full historicity of Joshua 6 is in the minority among scholars poses no insurmountable problem. Minority views have been right before. Remember Galileo? As for the alleged absence of evidence for a massive destruction of a walled city of Jericho, two points are relevant: (1) the absence of evidence is not necessarily the evidence of absence since other evidence may yet be found; (2) the main dispute is not over whether something like the Bible claimed to have happened actually did happen to Jericho, but whether it happened at the alleged time. However, the dating of this period is still disputed among scholars. Hence, nothing like “overwhelmingly” established evidence has disproven the biblical picture of Joshua 6. Certainly there is no real reason to throw out the inerrantist’s view of the historicity of the event. On the contrary, the Bible has a habit of proving the critics wrong.

**Deuteronomy 20 and Matthew 5.** Again, this is a difficult problem, but there are possible explanations without sacrificing the historicity and inerrancy of the passages. The elimination of the Canaanites and the command to love one’s enemies are not irreconcilable. Even Enns, no friend of inerrancy, points out an “alternate view of the conquest that seems to exonerate the Israelites” (Enns, 108), noting that the past tense of the Leviticus statement that “the land vomited [past tense] out its inhabitants” (Lev 18:25) implies that “God had already dealt with the Canaanite problem before the Israelites left Mt. Sinai” (ibid.).

But even the traditional view, that Israel acted as God’s theocratic agent in killing the Canaanites, poses no irreconcilable problem for many reasons. First of all, God is sovereign over life and can give and take it as He wills (Deut 32:39; Job 1:21).
Second, God can command others to kill on His behalf, as He did in capital punishment (Gen 9:6). Third, the Canaanites were wildly wicked and deserved such punishment (cf. Lev 18). Fourth, this was a special theocratic act of God through Israel on behalf of God’s people and God’s plan to give them the Holy Land and bring forth the Holy One (Christ), the Savior of the world. Hence, there is no pattern or precedent here for how we should wage war today. Fifth, loving our enemy who insults us with a mere “slap on the right cheek” (Matt 5:39) does not contradict our killing him in self-defense if he attempts to murder us (Exod 22:2), or engaging him in a just war of protecting the innocent (Gen 14). Sixth, God gave the Canaanites some 400 years (Gen 15:13–15) to repent before he found them incorrigibly and irretrievably wicked and wiped them out. Just as it is sometimes necessary to cut off a cancerous limb to save one’s life, even so God knows when such an operation is necessary on a nation which has polluted the land. But we are assured by God’s words and actions elsewhere that God does not destroy the righteous with the wicked (Gen 18:25). Saving Lot and his daughters, Rahab, and the Ninevites are examples.

As for God’s loving kindness on the wicked non-Israelites goes, Nineveh (Jonah 3) is proof that God will save even a very wicked nation that repents (cf. 2 Pet 3:9). So, there is nothing in this Deuteronomy text that is contradictory to God’s character as revealed in the New Testament. Indeed, the judgments of the New Testament God are more intensive and extensive in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev 6–19) than anything in the Old Testament.

**Responding to Attacks on Inerrancy**

We turn our attention now to some of the major charges leveled against CSBI inerrancy. We begin with two of the major objections: It is not biblical, and it is not the historical view of the Christian church. But before we address these, we need to recall that the CSBI view on inerrancy means total inerrancy, not limited inerrancy. Total or unlimited inerrancy holds that the Bible is inerrant on both redemptive matters and all other matters on which it touches, and limited inerrancy holds that the Bible is only inerrant on redemptive matters, but not in other areas such as history and science. By “inerrancy” we mean total inerrancy as defined by CSBI.

**The Charge of Being Unbiblical**

Many non-inerrantists reject inerrancy because they claim that it is not taught in the Bible as the Trinity or other essential doctrines are. But the truth is that neither one is taught formally and explicitly. Both are taught in the Bible only implicitly and logically. For example, nowhere does the Bible teach the formal doctrine of the Trinity, but it does teach the premises which logically necessitate the doctrine of the Trinity. And as The Westminster Confession of Faith declares, a sound doctrine must be “either set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture” (Chap. I, Art. 6). Both the Trinity and inerrancy of Scripture fall into the latter category. Thus, the Bible teaches that there are three Persons who are God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 29:18–20). Further, it teaches
that there is only one God (1 Tim 2:5). So, “by good and necessary consequences” the doctrine of the Trinity may be deduced from Scripture.

Likewise, while inerrancy is not formally and explicitly taught in Scripture, nonetheless, the premises on which it is based are taught there. For the Bible teaches that God cannot err, and it also affirms that the Bible is the Word of God. So “by good and necessary consequences [the doctrine of inerrancy] may be deduced from Scripture.”

Of course, in both cases the conclusion can and should be nuanced as to what the word “person” means (in the case of the Trinity), and what the word “truth” means (see below) in the case of inerrancy. Nonetheless, the basic doctrine in both cases is biblical in the sense of a “good and necessary consequence” of being logically “deduced from Scripture.”

The Charge of Being Unhistorical

Many non-inerrantists charge that inerrancy has not been the historic doctrine of the church. Some say it was a modern apologetic reaction to liberalism. Outspoken opponent of inerrancy, Peter Enns, claims that “… ‘inerrancy,’ as it is understood in the evangelical and fundamentalists mainstream, has not been the church’s doctrine of Scripture through its entire history; Augustine was not an ‘inerrantist’” (Enns, 181). However, as the evidence will show, Enns is clearly mistaken on both counts. First of all, Augustine (5th cent) declared emphatically, “I have learned to yield respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error” (Augustine, Letters 82, 83).

Further, Augustine was not alone in his emphatic support of the inerrancy of Scripture. Other Fathers both before and after him held the same view. Thomas Aquinas (13th cent) declared that “it is heretical to say that any falsehood whatever is contained either in the gospels or in canonical Scripture” (Exposition on Job 13, Lect 1). For “a true prophet is always inspired by the Spirit of truth in whom there is no trace of falsehood, and he never utters untruths” (Summa Theologica 2a2ae, 172, 6 ad 2).

The Reformer, Martin Luther (16th cent), added, “When one blasphemously gives the lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter, . . . one blasphemes the entire God…” (Luther’s Works 37:26). “Indeed, whoever is so bold that he ventures to accuse God of fraud and deception in a single word . . . likewise certainly ventures to accuse God of fraud and deception in all His words. Therefore it is true, absolutely and without exception, that everything is believed or nothing is believed” (cited in Reu, Luther and the Scriptures, 33).

John Calvin agreed with his predecessors, insisting that “the Bible has come down to us from the mouth of God” (Institutes, 1.18.4). Thus “we owe to Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from Him alone….The Law and the Prophets are…dictated by the Holy Spirit” (Urquhart, Inspiration and Accuracy, 129–30). Scripture is “the certain and unerring rule” (Calvin, Commentaries, Ps. 5:11). He added, the Bible is “a depository of doctrine as would secure it from either perishing by neglect, vanishing away amid errors, of being corrupted by the presumptions of men” (Institutes 1.6.3).
Furthermore, it is nit-picking to claim, as some non-inerrantists suggest (Franke, 261), that the church Fathers did not hold precisely the same view of Scripture as contemporary evangelicals. Vanhoozer claims they are “not quite the same” (73). Bird asserted, “The biggest problem I have with the AIT [American Inerrancy Tradition] and the CSBI [Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy] are their lack of catholicity. What Christians said about inerrancy in the past might have been similar to the AIT and CSBI, but never absolutely the same!” (Bird, 67). However, identical twins are not absolutely the same in all “details,” but, like the doctrine of inerrancy down through the years, both are substantially the same. That is, they believed in total inerrancy of Scripture, that it is without error in whatever it affirms on any topic.

The basic truth of inerrancy has been affirmed by the Christian church from the very beginning. This has been confirmed by John Hannah in *Inerrancy and the Church* (Moody, 1984). Likewise, John Woodbridge provided a scholarly defense of the historic view on inerrancy (titled, *Biblical Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*, Zondervan, 1982), which Rogers never even attempted to refute. Neither Rogers nor anyone else has written a refutation of the standard view on inerrancy, as defended by Woodbridge and expressed by ETS and explained by the ICBI.

Of course, other difficulties with the historic doctrine of inerrancy can be raised, but B. B. Warfield summed up the matter well, claiming: “The question is not whether the doctrine of plenary inspiration has difficulties to face. The question is, whether these difficulties are greater than the difficulty of believing that the whole Church of God from the beginning has been deceived in her estimate of Scripture committed to her charge—are greater than the difficulties of believing that the whole college of the apostles, yes and of Christ himself at their head were themselves deceive as to the nature of those Scripture…” (cited by Mohler, 42).

The Charge of the “Slippery Slope Argument”

An oft-repeated charge against inerrancy is that it is based on a “Slippery Slope” argument that it should be accepted on the basis of what we might lose if we reject it (Enns, 89). The charge affirms that if we give up the inerrancy of the Bible’s authority on historical or scientific areas, then we are in danger of giving up on the inerrancy of redemptive passages as well. In brief, it argues that if you can’t trust the Bible in all areas, then you can’t trust it at all. Enns contends this is “an expression of fear,” not a valid argument but is based on “emotional blackmail” (ibid.). Franke states the argument in these terms: “If there is a single error at any place in the Bible, [then] none of it can be trusted” (Franke, 262).

One wonders whether the anti-inerrantist would reject Jesus’ arguments for the same reason when He said, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things” (John 3:12)? The truth is that there are at least two different forms of the “slippery slope” reasoning: one is valid and the other is not. It is not valid to argue that if we don’t believe everything one says, then we cannot believe anything he says. For example, the fact that an accountant makes an occasional error in math does not mean that he is not reliable in general. However, if one claims to have divine authority, and makes one mistake, then it is reasonable
to conclude that nothing he says has divine authority. For God cannot make mistakes, therefore, any who claim to be a prophet of God but make mistakes (cf. Deut 18:22) cannot be trusted to be speaking with divine authority on anything (even though he may be right about many things). So, it is valid to say, if the Bible errs in anything, then it cannot be trusted to be the inerrant Word of God in anything (no matter how reliable it may be about many things).

The Charge of Being Parochial

Vanhooker poses the question: “Why should the rest of the world care about North American evangelicalism’s doctrinal obsession with inerrancy” (Vanhooker, 190). There are no voices from Africa, Asia, or South America that had “any real input into the formation of the CSBI” (Franke, 194). “Indeed, it is difficult to attend a meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society and not be struck by the overwhelming white and male group it is” (Franke, 195).

However, “It is a genetic fallacy to claim that the doctrine of inerrancy can’t be right because it was made in the USA” (Vanhooker, 190). While it is true that “in the abundance of counselors there is wisdom” (Prov 11:14), it is not necessarily true that universality and inter-ethnicity is more conducive to orthodoxy. Would anyone reject Newton’s Laws simply because they came from a 17th-century Englishman? Vanhooker rightly asks, “Is it possible that the framers of the Chicago statement, despite the culturally conditioned and contingent nature of the North American discussion, have discovered a necessary implication of what Christians elsewhere might have to say about Scripture’s truth?” (Vanhooker, 190). Is it not possible that inerrancy represents a legitimate development of the doctrine of Scripture that arose in response to the needs and challenges of our twentieth-century context? I don’t see why not” (Vanhooker, 191).

The early Christian creeds on the deity of Christ and the Trinity were all time-bound, yet they rightly attained the status of a creed—an enduring and universal statement which is accepted by all major sections of Christendom. Although the CSBI statement does not claim creedal status, nonetheless, being time-bound does not hinder its deserved wide representation and acceptance in historic evangelical churches.

Franke claims that one of the problems with claiming inerrancy as a universal truth is that “it will lead to the marginalization of other people who do not share in the outlooks and assumptions of the dominant group. Inerrancy calls on us to surrender the pretensions of a universal and timeless theology” (Franke, 279). However, he seems oblivious to the universal and timeless pretension of his own claim. As a truth claim, the charge of parochialism is self-defeating since it too is conditioned by time, space, and ethnic distinctiveness. Indeed, it is just another form of the view that all truth claims are relative. But so is that claim itself relative? Thus, the proponent of parochialism is hanged on his own gallows.
The Charge of Being Unethical

The alleged unethical behavior of inerrantists seems to have been the hot-button issue among most of the participants in the dialogue, including the editors. They de-cry, sometimes in strong terms, the misuse of inerrancy by its proponents. In fact, this issue seems to simmer beneath the background of the anti-inerrancy discussion as a whole, breaking forth from time to time in explicit condemnation of its opponents. In fact, the editors of the *Five Views* book appear to trace the contemporary inerrancy movement to this issue (see Merrick, 310).

Both the editors and some participants of the *Five Views* book even employ extreme language and charges against the inerrancy movement, charging it with evangelical “fratricide” (Merrick, 310). The word “fratricide” is repeated a few pages later (317). Three participants of the dialogue (Franke, Bird, and Enns) seem particularly disturbed about the issue, along with the two editors of the book. They fear that inerrancy is used as “a political instrument (e.g., a tool for excluding some from the evangelical family)” (Vanhoozer, 302) in an “immoral” way” (Enns, 292). They speak of times “when human actions persist in ways that are ugly and unbecoming of Christ…” (Merrick, 317).

Enns, for example, speaks strongly to the issue, chiding “those in positions of power in the church…who prefer coercion to reason and demonize to reflection.” He adds, “Mohler’s position [the only one explicitly defending the CSBI inerrancy view] is in my view intellectually untenable, but wielded as a weapon, it becomes spiritually dangerous” (Enns, 60). He also charges inerrantists with “manipulation, passive-aggressiveness, and…emotional blackmail” (Enns, 89). Further, he claims that “inerrancy regularly functions to short-circuit rather than spark our knowledge of the Bible” (Enns, 91). In spite of the fact that he recognizes that we cannot “evaluate inerrancy on the basis of its abusers,” Enns hastens to claim that “the function of inerrancy in the fundamentalist and evangelical subculture has had a disturbing and immoral partnership with power and abuse” (Enns, 292).

Franke joins the chorus against inerrantists more softly but nonetheless strongly expresses his disappointment, saying, “I have often been dismayed by many of the ways in which inerrancy has commonly been used in biblical interpretation, theology, and the life of the church…. Of even greater concern is the way in which inerrancy has been wielded as a means of asserting power and control” over others (Franke, 259).

A Response to the Ethical Charges

Few widely read scholars will deny that some have abused the doctrine of inerrancy. The problem is that while we have a perfect Bible, there are imperfect people using it—on both sides of the debate.
Misuse Does Not Bar Use

However, the misuse of a doctrine does not prove that it is false. Nor does the improper use of Scripture prove that there is no proper way to use it. Upon examination of the evidence, the abuse charge against inerrantists is overreaching. Almost all the scholars I know in the inerrancy movement were engaged in defending inerrancy out of a sincere desire to preserve what they believed was an important part of the Christian faith. Often those who speak most vociferously about the errors of another are unaware of their own errors. Ethics is a double-edged sword, as any neutral observer will detect in reading the above ethical tirade against inerrantists. Certainly, the charges by non-inerrantists are subject to ethical scrutiny themselves. For example, is it really conducive to unity, community, and tranquility to charge others with a form of evangelical fratricide, a political instrument for excluding some from the evangelical family, ugly and unbecoming of Christ, a means of asserting power and control, a means of coercion, spiritually dangerous, manipulation, a passive-aggressiveness attack, emotional blackmail, and a disturbing and immoral partnership with power and abuse? Frankly, I have never seen anything that approaches this kind of unjustified and unethical outburst coming from inerrancy scholars toward those who do not believe in the doctrine. So, as for the unethical charge, the charge looks like a classic example of the kettle calling the pot black!

The Log in One’s Own Eye

Non-inerrantists are in no position to try to take the ethical speck out of the eye of inerrantists when they have an ethical log in their own eye. Harold Lindsell pointed out (in *The Battle for the Bible*) the ethical inconsistency of the Fuller faculty in voting inerrancy out of their doctrinal statement which they had all signed and was still in effect when they were voting it out of existence. But how could they be against it, if they were on record being for it. We know they were for it before they were against it, but how can they be against it when they were for it? Is there not an ethical commitment to keep a signed document? When one comes to no longer believe in a doctrinal statement he has signed, then the ethical thing to do is to resign one’s position. Instead, at Fuller, in ETS, and in organization after organization, those who no longer believe what the framers meant will stay in the group in an attempt to change the doctrinal statement to mean what they want it to mean. This is a serious ethical breach on the part of non-inerrantists.

Let me use an illustration to press the point home. If one sincerely believes in a flat earth view and later comes to change his mind, what is the ethical thing to do? It is to resign and join the Round Earth Society. To stay in the Flat Earth Society and argue that (1) it all depends on how you define flat; (2) from my perspective it looks flat; (3) I have a lot of good friends in the Flat Earth Society with whom I wish to continue fellowship; or (4) the Flat Earth Society allows me to define “flat” the way I would like to do so—to do any of these is disingenuous and unethical. Yet it is what happened at Fuller, is currently happening at ETS, and is occurring in many of our Christian institutions today.

An important case in point was in 1976 when the ETS Executive Committee confessed that “Some of the members of the Society have expressed the feeling that
a measure of intellectual dishonesty prevails among members who do not take the signing of the doctrinal statement seriously.” Later, an ETS Ad Hoc Committee recognized this problem when it posed the proper question in 1983: “Is it acceptable for a member of the society to hold a view of biblical author’s intent which disagrees with the Founding Fathers and even the majority of the society, and still remain a member in good standing?” (emphasis added). The Society never said No. The door was left open for non-inerrantists to come in. This left a society in which the members could believe anything they wished to believe about the inerrancy statement, despite what the framers mean by it.

The ETS Committee further reported that other “members of the Society have come to the realization that they are not in agreement with the creedal statement and have voluntarily withdrawn. That is, in good conscience they could not sign the statement” (1976 Minutes, emphasis added). This is exactly what all members who no longer believed what the ETS framers believed by inerrancy should have done. And the other members who are now allowed to sign the ETS statements which “disagrees with the Founding Fathers” are not acting in “good conscience.” Thus, it is only a matter of time before the majority of the members disagree with the ETS founders, and the majority of the Society has officially deviated from its founding concept of inerrancy. As someone rightly noted, most religious organizations are like a propeller driven airplane: it will naturally go left unless you deliberately steer it to the right.

No Evidence for Any Specific Charges Ever Given

The Five Views dialogue book contains many sweeping charges of alleged unethical activity by inerrantists, but no specific charges are made against any individual, nor is any evidence for any charges given. Several points should be made in response.

First, even secular courts demand better than this. They insist on due process. This means that: (1) Evidence should be provided that any persons have allegedly violated an established law. This is particularly true when the charge is murder of a brother!—“fratricide.” In the absence of such evidence against any particular person or group, the charge should be dropped, and the accusers should apologize for using the word or other words like demonize, blackmail, or bullying. (2) Specifics should be given of the alleged crime. Who did it? What did they do? Does it match the alleged crime? The failure of non-inerrantists to do this is an unethical, divisive, and destructive way to carry on a “dialogue” on the topic, to say nothing of doing justice on the matter. Those who use such terms about other brothers in Christ, rather than sticking to the issue of a valid critique of deviant views, are falling far short of the biblical exhortation to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

The Robert Gundry Case

The so-called “Gundry-Geisler” issue is a case in point. First, ethical charges by non-inerrantists reveal an offensive bias in narrowing it down to one inerrantist in opposition to Gundry, when in fact there were was a massive movement in opposition to Gundry’s position, including founders of ETS. Indeed, the membership vote to ask
him to leave the society was an overwhelming seventy percent. There were no hard feelings expressed between Gundry and those asking for his resignation before, during, or after the issue.

Long-time Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, was the first one to express concern about the issue to me. An ETS founder, Roger Nicole, made the motion for Gundry’s resignation with deep regret. Knowing I was a framer of the CSBI statement, Gundry personally encouraged me to enter the discussion, saying, he did not mind the critique of his view because he had “thick skin” and did not take it personally. So, to make charges of ethical abuse against those who opposed Gundry’s “dehistoricizing” (see CSBI, Article 18) of the Gospel record is to turn an important doctrinal discussion into a personal attack, and it is factually unfounded and ethically unjustified.

Second, the CSBI principles called for an ethical use of the inerrancy doctrine. CSBI framers were careful to point out that “Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship humbly and faithfully obeying God’s written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master” (Preamble to CSBI). It also acknowledges that “submission to the claims of God’s own Word…marks true Christian faith.” Further, “those who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the Divine Word” (ibid.). The framers of CSBI added, “We offer this statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God’s grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said” (ibid.). To my knowledge, the ETS procedure on the Gundry issue was in accord with these principles, and none of the participants of the Five Views book provided any evidence that anyone violated these procedures.

Third, in none of the ETS articles, papers, or official presentations was Robert Gundry attacked personally or demeaned. The process to ask him to resign was a lawful one of principle and not a personal issue, and the parties on both sides recognized and respected this distinction. Anyone who had any evidence to the contrary should have come forward a long time ago or forever hold his peace.

Fourth, as for all the parties on the inerrancy discussion over Gundry’s views, I know of none who did not like Gundry as a person or did not respect him as a scholar, including myself. In fact, I later invited him to participate with a group of New Testament scholars in Dallas (which he accepted), and I have often cited him in print as an authority on the New Testament and commended his excellent book defending, among other things, the physical nature of the resurrection body (Gundry, Soma in Biblical Theology, Cambridge, 1976).

Fifth, the decision on Gundry’s views was not an unruly act done in the dark of night with a bare majority. It was done by a vast majority in the light of day in strict accordance with the rules stated in the ETS policies. It was not hurried since it took over a two-year period. It involves numerous articles pro and con published in the ETS journal (JETS) as well as dozens of ETS papers and discussions. In short, it was fully and slowly aired in an appropriate and scholarly manner.

Sixth, the final decision was by no means a close call by the membership. It passed with a decisive majority of seventy percent of the members. So, any charge of misuse of authority in the Gundry case is factually mistaken and ethically misdirected.
Since there are no real grounds for the ethical charges against those who opposed Gundry’s views on inerrancy, one has to ask why the non-inerrantists are so stirred up over the issue as to make excessive charges like blackmail, demonization, or fratricide? Could it be that many of them hold similar views to Gundry and are afraid that they may be called on the carpet next? As the saying goes, when a stone is tossed down an alley, the dog that squeals the loudest is the one that was hit! We do know this: there is some circumstantial evidence to support this possibility. For many of the most vociferous opponents are the ones who do not accept the ICBI statement on inerrancy. Or, they called for either modification or destruction of it. For example, Enns argues “inerrancy should be amended accordingly or, in my view, scrapped altogether” (Enns, 84). But it has been reported that he himself left Westminster Theological Seminary under a cloud involving a doctrinal dispute that involved inerrancy. And as fellow participant of the Five Views book, John Franke, put it: “His title makes it clear that after supporting it [inerrancy] for many years as a faculty member at Westminster Theological Seminary…. In reading his essay, I can’t shake the impression that Enns is still in reaction to his departure from Westminster and the controversy his work has created among evangelicals” (Franke, 137).

Putting aside the specifics of the Gundry case, what can be said about ethics of inerrantists as charged by the participants of the Five Views dialogue? Allow me to respond to some specific issues that have been raised against inerrancy by non-inerrantists.

**Does Abuse of Inerrancy Invalidate the Doctrine of Inerrancy?**

Most scholars on both sides of this debate recognize that the answer is “No.” Abusing marriage does not make marriage wrong. The evil use of language does not make language evil. And abusing inerrancy does not make it wrong to believe it. Even if one would speak truth in an unloving way, it would not make it false. Likewise, one can speak error in a loving way, but it does not make it true. Of course, we should always try to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). But when the truth is not spoken in love it does not transform the truth into an error. Accordingly, Vanhoozer rightly wondered whether “Enns too quickly identifies the concept of inerrancy itself with its aberrations and abuses” (Vanhoozer, 302).

**Is Animated Debate Necessarily Contrary to Christian Love?**

Even the editors of the Five Views book, who spent considerable time promoting harmony in doctrinal discussions, admit that the two are not incompatible. They claim: “There is a place for well-reasoned, lucid, and spirited argumentation” (Merrick, 312). They add, “Certainly, debate over concepts and ideas involve[s] description, analysis, and clear reasoning” (Merrick, 316). Indeed, the apostle Paul “reasoned’ with the Jews from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2) and tried to “persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). He taught church leaders “to rebuke” those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). Jude urged believers to “contend for the faith” (v.3). In view of Peter’s defection, Paul “opposed him to his face” (Gal 2:11). Indeed, Paul and Barnabas “had no small dissension and debate” with the legalists from Judea...
Sometimes, a refutation, or even a rebuke is the most loving thing one can do to defend the truth.

Our supreme example, Jesus, certainly did not hesitate to use strong words and to take strong actions against his opponent’s views and actions (Matt 23; John 2:15–17). There are in fact times when a vigorous debate is necessary against error. Love—tough love—demands it. All of these activities can occur within the bounds of Christians. John Calvin and Martin Luther were certainly no theological pansies when it came to defending the truth of the Christian faith. But by the standards of conduct urged by non-inerrantists, there would have been no orthodox creeds and certainly no Reformation. Should any knowledgeable evangelical charge the Reformers with being unethical because they vigorously defended Scripture or salvation by faith alone? Of course not!

Should Unity Be Put Above Orthodoxy?

One of the fallacies of the anti-inerrancy movement is the belief that unity should be sought at all costs. Apparently no one told this to the apostle Paul who defended Christianity against legalism or to Athanasius who defended the deity of Christ against Arius, even though it would split those who believed in the deity of Christ from those, like Arius and his followers, who denied it. The truth is, when it comes to essential Christian doctrine, it would be better to be divided by the truth than to be united by error. If every doctrinal dispute, including those on the Trinity, deity of Christ, and inspiration of Scripture, used the unity over orthodoxy principle that one hears so much about in current inerrancy debate, then there would not be much orthodox Christian faith left. As Rupertus Meldinus (d. 1651) put it, “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty, and in all things, charity.” But as we saw above, the inerrancy of Scripture is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith for all other doctrines are based on it. So, it is epistemologically fundamental to all other biblical teachings.

Is it Improper to Post Scholarly Articles on the Internet?

Some have objected to carrying on a scholarly discussion on the Internet, as opposed to using scholarly journals. My articles on Mike Licona’s denial of inerrancy (see www.normgeisler.com/articles) were subject to this kind of charge. However, given the electronic age in which we live, this is an archaic charge. Dialogue is facilitated by the Internet, and responses can be made much more quickly. Further, much of the same basic material posted on the Internet was later published in printed scholarly journals.

In a November 18, 2012 paper for The Evangelical Philosophical Society, Mike Licona speaks of his critics saying “Bizarre” things like “bullying” people around, of having “a cow” over his view, and of engaging in a “circus” on the Internet. Further, he claims that scholarly critics of his views were “targeting” him and “taking actions against” him.” He speaks about those who have made scholarly criticisms of his view as “going on a rampage against a brother or sister in Christ.” And he compares it to the statement of Ammianus Marcellinus who wrote: “no wild beasts are such danger-
ous enemies to man as Christians are to one another.” Licona complained about critics of his view, saying, “I’ve been very disappointed to see the ungodly behavior of a few of my detractors. The theological bullying, the termination and internal intimidation put on a few professors in SBC…all this revealed the underbelly of fundamentalism.” He charged that I made contacts with seminary leaders in an attempt to get him kicked out of his positions on their staff. The truth is that I made no such contacts for no such purposes.

While it is not unethical to use the Internet for scholarly articles, it is wrong to make the kind of unethical response that was given to the scholarly articles, such as that in the above citations. Such name-calling has no place in a scholarly dialog. Calling the defense of inerrancy an act of “bullying” diminishes the critic, not the defense. Indeed, calling one’s critic a “tar baby” and labeling their actions as “ungodly behavior” is a classic example of how not to defend one’s view against its critics.

What is more, while Licona condemned the use of the Internet to present scholarly critiques of his view as a “circus,” he refused to condemn an offensive YouTube cartoon produced by his son-in-law and his friend that offensively caricatured my critique of his view as that of a theological “Scrooge.” Even Southern Evangelical Seminary (where Licona was once a faculty member before this issue arose) condemned this approach in a letter from “the office of the president,” saying, “We believe this video was totally unnecessary and is in extremely poor taste” (Letter 12/9/2011). One influential alumnus wrote the school, saying, “It was immature, inappropriate and distasteful” and recommended that “whoever made this video needs to pull it down and apologize for doing it” (Letter 12/21/2011). The former president of the SES student body declared: “I’ll be honest, that video was outright slander and worthy of punishment. I was quite angry after watching it” (Letter 12/17/2011). This kind of unapologetic use of the Internet by those who deny the CSBI view of inerrancy is uncalled for and unethical. It does the perpetrators and their cause against inerrancy no good.

Is Disciplinary Action Sometimes Called for in Organizations like ETS?

“Judge not” is a mantra of our culture, and it has penetrated evangelical circles as well. But ironically, even that statement is a judgment. Rational and moral people must make judgments all the time. This is true in theology as well as in society. Further, discipline on doctrinal matters is not unprecedented in ETS. Indeed, the ETS By Laws provide for such action, saying: “A member whose writings or teachings have been challenged at an annual business meeting as incompatible with the Doctrinal Basis of the Society, upon majority vote, shall have his case referred to the executive committee, before whom he and his accusers shall be given full opportunity to discuss his views and the accusations. The executive committee shall then refer his case to the Society for action at the annual business meeting the following year. A two-thirds majority vote of those present and voting shall be necessary for dismissal from membership” (Article 4, Section 4). This procedure was followed carefully in the Robert Gundry case.
In point of fact, the ETS has expressed an interest in monitoring and enforcing its doctrinal statement on inerrancy from the beginning. The official ETS minutes record the following:

1. In 1965, ETS journal policy demanded a disclaimer and rebuttal of Dan Fuller’s article denying factual inerrancy published in the ETS Bulletin. They insisted “that an article by Dr. Kantzer be published simultaneously with the article by Dr. Fuller and that Dr. Schultz include in that issue of the Bulletin a brief explanation regarding the appearance of a view point different from that of the Society” (1965).

2. In 1965, speaking of some who held “Barthian” views of Scripture, the Minutes of the ETS Executive Committee read: “President Gordon Clark invited them to leave the society.”

3. The 1970 Minutes of ETS affirm that “Dr. R. H. Bube for three years signed his membership form with a note on his own interpretation of infallibility. The secretary was instructed to point out that it is impossible for the Society to allow each member an idiosyncratic interpretation of inerrancy, and hence Dr. Bube is to be requested to sign his form without any qualifications, his own integrity in the matter being entirely respected” (emphasis added). This reveals the commitment of ETS to protect and preserve the integrity of its doctrinal statement.

4. In 1983, by a seventy percent majority vote of the membership, Robert Gundry was asked to resign from ETS for his views based on Jewish midrash genre by which, held that sections of Matthew’s Gospel were not historical such as the story of the Magi (in Matt 2:1–12).

5. In the early 2000s, while I was still a member of the ETS Executive Committee, a majority voted not to allow a Roman Catholic to join ETS largely on the testimony of one founder (Roger Nicole) who claimed that the ETS doctrinal statement on inerrancy was meant to exclude Roman Catholics.

6. In 2003 by a vote of 388 to 231 (nearly sixty-three percent) the ETS expressed its position that Clark Pinnock’s views were contrary to the ETS doctrinal statement on inerrancy. This failed the needed 2/3 majority to expel him from the society, but it revealed a strong majority who desired to monitor and enforce the doctrinal statement.

Finally, preserving the identity and integrity of any organization calls for doctrinal discipline on essential matters. Those organizations which neglect doing this are doomed to self-destruction.

Should an Inerrantist Break Fellowship with a Non-Inerrantist over Inerrancy?

The ICBI did not believe that inerrancy should be a test for evangelical fellowship. It declared: “We deny that such a confession is necessary for salvation” (CSBI, Art. 19). And “we do not propose that this statement be given creedal weight” (CSBI, Preamble). In short, it is not a test of evangelical authenticity, but of evangelical consistency. One can be saved without believing in inerrancy. So, holding to inerrancy is not a test of spiritual fellowship; it is a matter of theological consistency. Brothers
in Christ can fellowship on the basis of belonging to the same spiritual family, without agreeing on all non-salvific doctrines, even some very important ones like inerrancy. In view of this, criticizing inerrantists for evangelical “fratricide” seriously misses the mark and itself contributes to disunity in the body of evangelical believers. Indeed, in the light of the evidence, the ethical charge against inerrantists seriously backfired.

**Conclusion**

In actuality, the *Five Views* book is basically a two views book: only one person (Al Mohler) unequivocally supports the standard historic view of total inerrancy expressed in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI). The other four participants do not. They varied in their rejection from those who presented a more friendly tone, but undercut inerrancy with their alien philosophical premises (Kevin Vanhoozer) to those who are overtly antagonistic to it (Peter Enns).

There was little new in the arguments against the CSBI view of total inerrancy, most of which have been responded to by inerrantists down through the centuries into modern times. However, a new emphasis did emerge in the repeated charge about the alleged unethical behavior of inerrantists. But, as already noted, this is irrelevant to the truth of the doctrine of inerrancy. Further, there is some justification for the suspicion that attacks on the person, rather than the issue, are because non-inerrantists are running out of real ammunition to speak to the issue itself in a biblical and rational way.

In short, after careful examination of the *Five Views* book, the biblical arguments of the non-inerrantists were found to be unsound; their theological arguments were unjustified; their historical arguments were unfounded; their philosophical arguments were unsubstantiated; and their ethical arguments were often outrageous. Nevertheless, there were some good insights in the book, primarily in Al Mohler’s sections and from time to time in the other places, as noted above. However, in its representation of the ETS/ICBI view of total inerrancy, the book was seriously imbalanced in format, participants, and discussion. The two professors who edited the book (J. Merrick and Stephen Garrett) were particularly biased in the way the issue was framed by them, as well in many of their comments.
REVIEWS


Reviewed by Mark A. Hassler, Faculty Associate in Old Testament Studies

In the realm of OT textual criticism, Jean-Dominique Barthélemy (1921–2002) gained widespread acclaim for his work on the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll and his Devanciers d’Aquila (xv–xvi). The present work translates from French into English the combined introductions to the first three volumes of Barthélemy’s magnum opus, Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament or CTAT (Orbis biblicus et orientalis 50, Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1982–92). Because the posthumous fourth volume of CTAT (2005) lacks a major introduction, it does not appear in this book (xii). The fifth, final, and forthcoming volume of CTAT will cover the Wisdom books (158n15). The Textual Criticism and the Translator series (TCT) by Eisenbrauns also includes Jan de Waard’s A Handbook on Isaiah (vol. 1, 1997), A Handbook on Jeremiah (vol. 2, 2003), and A Handbook on the Psalms (vol. 4, forthcoming).

The current contribution, James A. Saunders says, provides “an in-depth review of the whole field of textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible” (xvi). In Emanuel Tov’s words, this compilation offers “an almost complete introduction” to OT textual criticism (xii, xv, back cover).

To prepare the reader, the work commences with an “Editor’s Preface” by the series editor, Roger L. Omanson (xi–xiii), an “Introduction” by Saunders (xv–xxviii), and a list of “Abbreviations” (xxix–xxxii). The back materials consist of a “Supplement” on “Norms concerning the Height of Columns in the Sepher Torah” (583–90), the “CTAT Preface” (591–606), a list of “Works Cited” (607–67), an “Index of Authors” (669–75), and an “Index of Scripture” (676–88). The absence of a subject index hampers the searchability.

The book divides into three parts, each part consisting of an introduction to one of the CTAT volumes. Part one, translated by Stephen Pisano and Peter A. Pettit, sketches the fascinating history of OT textual criticism from its inception to J. D. Michaelis (1–81), and introduces readers to the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (HOTTP) of the United Bible Societies (UBS) and the Project’s aims (82–141). Part two, translated by Joan E. Cook and Sarah Lind, fills in the background of the five modern versions consulted in CTAT, namely, the Revised Standard Version (RSV),
the *Bible de Jérusalem* (BJ), the Revised Luther Bible (RL), the *New English Bible* (NEB), and the *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible* (TOB) (143–225). Part three, translated by Sarah Lind, analyzes the ancient textual sources (227–582), and by doing so, showcases “Barthélemy at his best” (xxvii).


Of the five thousand textual issues addressed in volumes 1–3 of CTAT, the HOTTP committee proposes 334 emendations to the MT (276). To their credit, the committee exercises “extreme caution” in proposing conjectural (unattested) emendations (94), primarily because “there is no evidence that [such emendations] functioned as sacred Scripture for a community” (96). As a catalyst to one’s own studies, technicians can compare the list of 176 textual variants from the Qumran Isaiah texts (392–409) to lists published elsewhere (e.g., Ulrich and Flint, *Qumran Cave 1. II, The Isaiah Scrolls*, pt. 2, *Introductions, Commentary, and Textual Variants*, DJD 32, Oxford, 2010).

By studying the writings of Judaeo-Arabic medieval exegetes, Barthélemy was able to show his colleagues that “many texts that had been thought unintelligible or corrupt were actually examples of the intricacies of Hebrew grammar and syntax long since forgotten” (xix; cf. xxiv). In a helpful manner he lays out the criteria for evaluating textual forms (89–92, 598–603), and reinforces the importance of viewing textual difficulties diachronically (591–94).

As for drawbacks, the author suggests that ancient authorities imparted canonicity to Scripture by human sanction at the Council of Jamnia and other times (229–30). However, evangelicals, such as Gleason Archer, make it clear that God’s people merely recognized the documents for what they were—canonical and divinely inspired (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed., Moody, 2007, 67–68).

In dealing with the ancient translations, Barthélemy slights the Aramaic Targums and the Syriac Peshitta, much like Tov does in his *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed., Fortress, 2012). Whereas the ancient Greek text receives fifty-five pages (412–67) and the Latin Vulgate thirty-eight pages (497–534), the Targums only gets two pages (540–41) and the Peshitta six pages (534–40). To plug the holes, inquiring minds can glean from the fine essays by Philip S. Alexander on the Targums (217–53) and Peter B. Dirksen on the Peshitta (255–97) in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, edited by Mulder and Sysling (Hendrickson, 2004). Concerning the Vulgate, Barthélemy fails to mention the value of Codex Amiatinus (AD 690–716) as a way of bypassing the Catholic corruptions of Pope Sixtus’ *Vulgata Sixtina* (AD 1590) during the Counter Reformation.
These matters aside, the present reviewer commends this tome for Bible translators, textual critics, advanced exegetes, graduate-level textual researchers, and religious academic libraries. The book provides a wealth of material to interact with, regardless of whether practitioners adopt every nuance of Barthélemy’s methodologies and trajectories. Notwithstanding the fortes, this volume should not usurp Tov’s *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* as the principle textbook for seminary classes on OT textual criticism. Some will find much of Barthélemy’s introductions too detailed and technical. Such readers could peruse the more accessible introductions by Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Baker, 1994), and Wegner, *A Student’s Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results* (InterVarsity, 2006).


Reviewed by F. David Farnell, Professor of New Testament Studies

Craig Blomberg has written a new work, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* The publisher promotes this the book in the following terms:

Challenges to the reliability of Scripture are perennial and have frequently been addressed. However, some of these challenges are noticeably more common today, and the topic is currently of particular interest among evangelicals. In this volume . . . Craig Blomberg offers an accessible and nuanced argument for the Bible’s reliability in response to the extreme views about Scripture and its authority articulated by both sides of the debate. He believes that a careful analysis of the relevant evidence shows we have reason to be more confident in the Bible than ever before. As he traces his own academic and spiritual journey, Blomberg sketches out the case for confidence in the Bible in spite of various challenges to the trustworthiness of Scripture, offering a positive, informed, and defensible approach (back cover).

He dialogues in questions of textual criticism, canon issues, translations, inerrancy, genre interpretation, and miracles, offering various solutions to various problems that center in these topics. This book is highly commended by Scot McKnight (Northern Seminary), Darrell Bock (Dallas Theological Seminary), Paul Copan (Palm Beach Atlantic University), Craig S. Keener (Asbury Theological Seminary) and Leith Anderson (National Association of Evangelicals). Bock himself encourages the reader to “read and consider anew how to think about Scripture” (ibid). Blomberg immediately tips his hand regarding the true nature of this work when the dedication page says,

To the faculty, administration, and trustees of Denver Seminary who from 1986 to the present have created as congenial a research environment as a
professor could hope for, upholding the inerrancy of Scripture without any
of the watchdog mentality that plagues so many evangelical institutions (v).

This statement reveals the dual nature of this work in that it not only reveals
Blomberg’s unusual take on inerrancy but is intended to deride those who would dare
question Blomberg’s positions that he sets forth in the work.

In evaluating this book, several thoughts immediately come to mind. Perhaps
the term most summarizing the book is “angry rant” against anyone who would dare
disagree with a critical British-trained scholar. The hubris and over-estimation of the
writer is a stunning example of Paul’s warning in Rom 12:3. Does not the Scripture
warn against pride? Very little humility is displayed in this work.

He less than subtly compares “A handful of very conservative Christian leaders
who have not understood the issues adequately” as having “reacted by unnecessarily
rejecting new developments” (7–8). In this logic, disagreeing with Blomberg or those
in the fraternity of critical scholarship means being labeled as ignorant at best or even
Nazi-like. He tells of one of his professors warning students to avoid “the far left or
the far right” as being related to “Nazism and Communism” (8). Rogers and McKim
took a similar position in 1979 when they wrote about the 20th century, “In this cen-
tury both fundamentalism and modernism sometimes took extreme positions regard-
ing the Bible” (Rogers and McKim, The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible,
Harper and Row, 1979, xxiii). This present reviewer had deja vu all over again when
he read Blomberg at many places and recalled Rogers’ and McKim’s similar argu-
ments to Blomberg’s.

Discussing inerrancy, he attacks “extremely conservative Christians who con-
tinue to insist on following their modern understandings of what should or should not
constitute errors in the Bible and censure fellow inerrantists whose views are less
anachronistic” (10). Blomberg’s escape from anachronism in inerrancy, however, is
“genre” (10–11). He relates something that immediately causes the reader to take
pause,

Most important, simply because a work appears in narrative form does not
automatically make it historical or biographical in genre. History and biog-
raphy themselves appear in many different forms, and fiction can appear
identical to history in form (11).

He affirms, “the way in which the ancients wrote history is clearer now than
ever before. Once again the result is that we know much better what we should be
meaning when we say we ‘believe the Bible,’ and therefore such belief is more de-
fensible than ever” (ibid). He attacks “ultraconservatives” who do not abide by his
assessment in the following terms, “once again, unfortunately, a handful of ultracon-
servatives criticize all such scholarship, thinking that they are doing a service to the
gospel instead of the disservice that they actually render” (ibid).

He takes issue with The Master’s Seminary as a questionable reaction to Bi-
ola/Talbot: “founding of the Master’s Seminary and breaking away from Biola Uni-
versity and its Talbot Theological Seminary in protest against their retreat from fun-
damentalism” (143). One note, he wrongly identifies Robert Thomas as a “point person” in the creation of TMS, when, in fact he didn’t join TMS until a year after the seminary began. He did this also in 2000 with his book, *Solid Ground* (Leicester: Apollos, 2000) where he publicly attacked The Master’s Seminary, the motives of those involved in its founding, and its president, John MacArthur (*Solid Ground*, 315). In the same work where he bemoaned, “I can hardly imagine such a book [i.e. *The Jesus Crisis*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998] ever being published by a major Christian press in the UK and that “I do think that British evangelicals, however, have better developed mechanisms for formal co-operation and joint scholarship ventures” (*Solid Ground*, 313).

Because of limited space in a review, Chapter 4, “Don’t These Issues Rule Out Biblical Inerrancy” (119–46) and Chapter 5, “Aren’t Several Narrative Genres of the Bible Unhistorical” (147–78) deserve special scrutiny for any one who would affirm belief, and especially inerrancy, in the Bible. Blomberg here addresses the “fundamentalist-modernist controversy.” He claims that the idea of inerrancy as understood by American efforts is largely an American phenomenon: “Other branches of evangelicalism, especially in other parts of the world not heavily influenced by American missionary efforts, tend to speak of *biblical authority*, *inspiration*, and even *infallibility*, but not inerrancy” (119). He relates that some have “consciously rejected inerrancy as too narrow a term to apply to Scripture” (ibid). He relates that these misunderstandings about inerrancy emerge especially “among those who are noticeably more conservative or those who are noticeably more liberal in their views of Scripture than mainstream evangelicalism” (ibid). He mentions the following who, in his belief, have misunderstood inerrancy because they are too conservative: “from the far right of the evangelical spectrum, Norman Geisler, William Roach, Robert Thomas, and David Farnell attack my writings along with similar ones by such evangelical stalwarts as Darrell Bock, D. A. Carson, and Craig Keener as too liberal, threatening inerrancy, or denying the historicity of Scripture.” (120).

In response to this, the writer of this review would urge the reader to examine the latest book from Geisler and Farnell, *The Jesus Quest: The Danger From Within* (Xulon, 2014) to make up their own mind as to the interpretative approaches of Blomberg and these scholars, especially in terms of inerrancy (we report, you decide). Blomberg addresses the effect that creeds and confessions of Christendom especially in terms of inerrancy (120–21).

He relates that “[t]here are two quite different approaches [to inerrancy], moreover, that can lead to an affirmation that Scripture is without error” (121). These two approaches are an “inductive approach” that “begins with the phenomena of the Bible itself, defines what would count as an error, analyzes Scripture carefully from beginning to end, and determines that nothing has been discovered that would qualify as errant” (ibid); and the “deductive approach” that begins with the conviction that God is the author of Scripture, proceeds to the premise by definition that God cannot err, and therefore concludes that God’s Word must be without error” (121). He reacts negatively against the deductive approach of “evidentialists” and “presuppositionalists” by noting that these two terms “ultimately views inerrancy as a corollary of inspiration, not something to be demonstrated from the texts of Scripture itself. If the Bible is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), and God cannot err, then the Bible must be inerrant.” Hence, the inductive approach to Blomberg requires that the Bible prove that
it is inerrant through critical investigation of the texts themselves rather than the others that just assume the texts are inerrant. Thus, he shifts the burden of proof from the Bible to that of the scholar. It is the critical investigator that must establish whether the text is truly inerrant.

Importantly, Blomberg believes that the real debate on inerrancy is one of “hermeneutics” (125). By his reasoning one could legitimately claim to be an inerrantist but still believe that a particular event in Scripture is really symbolic and not to be taken as literally an event in the time-space continuum (creation in six days, 126). As a result,

Genesis 1 can be and has been interpreted by inerrantists as referring to a young earth, and old earth, progressive creation, theistic evolution, a literary framework for asserting God as the creator of all things irrespective of his methods, and a series of days when God took up residence in his cosmic temple for the sake of newly created humanity in his image. Once again, this is a matter for hermeneutical and exegetical debate, not one that is solved by the shibboleth of inerrancy (126).

One must note, however, that Blomberg reveals his startling differences with inerrancy as defined by ICBI in 1978: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.” Here Blomberg’s position is neither grammatical, historical, nor literal, for he argues, “defenders of inerrancy do not reflect often enough on what it means to say that non-historical genres are wholly truthful” (128). He also reflects a *deja vu* mantra of Rogers and McKim who wrote in 1979, “But often without realizing it, we impose on ancient documents twenty-first century standards that are equally inappropriate.” Rogers and McKim, said, “To erect a standard of modern, technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church” (Rogers and McKim, xxii).

The practical result is that genre can be used to deny anything in the Bible that the interpreter finds offensive as a literal sense. The allegorical school did such a thing, the gnostics did it to Scripture, and now Blomberg applies his updated version of it with genre being applied to hermeneutics. Blomberg’s use of genre, to this present review, smacks of an eerie similarity to Rogers’/McKim’s deprecation of literal interpretation when they noted Westerners’ logic that viewed “statements in the Bible were treated like logical propositions that could be interpreted quite literally according to contemporary standards” (Rogers and McKim, viii).

In Chapter 5, “Aren’t Several Narrative Genres of the Bible Unhistorical,” his use of hermeneutics continues to be the means by which he can redefine what a normal definition of inerrancy would be, and he uses it to deny the plain, normal sense of Genesis 1–3 (150), while advocating that we must understand the author’s intent in such passages, with the key question from Article 13 of ICBI, “standards of truth
and error that are alien to its usage or purpose.” Applying a completely wrong understanding of this clause of ICBI as well as the original intent of the founders of ICBI, Blomberg advocates the idea that “the question is simply one about the most likely literary form of the passage” (150). From there, he proceeds to allow for non-literal interpretations of Genesis 1–3 that are, in his view, fully in line with inerrancy, e.g. Adam and Eve as symbols for every man and woman (152), evolutionary and progressive creation (151–53), a non-historical Jonah (160), the possibility of three Isaiah’s (162), Daniel as apocalyptic genre rather than prophetic (163–64), fully embracing of midrash interpretation of the Gospels as advocated by Robert Gundry as not impacting inerrancy (165–68), as well as pseudepigraphy as fully in line with inerrancy in NT epistles under the guide of a “literary device” or “acceptable form of pseudonymity” (168–72). He argues that we don’t know the opinions of the first-century church well-enough on pseudepigraphy to rule it out:

[B]arring some future discovery related to first-century opinions, we cannot pontificate on what kinds of claims for authorship would or would not have been considered acceptable in Christian communities, and especially in Jewish-Christian circles when the New Testament Epistles were written. As a result, we must evaluate every proposal based on its own historical and grammatical merits, not on whether it does or does not pass some pre-established criterion of what inerrancy can accept (172).

Several summaries after reading Blomberg’s work are in order. First, under the logic of Blomberg, one would wonder if Galatians would not have been accepted by evangelical communities since in it Paul has quite a few charged statements against the Judaizers that to today’s evangelicals might seem unfair, such as,

If I or an angel from heaven preach to you a different gospel than that which you heard, let them be anathema. I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal 1:6–10).

In Gal 5:12 Paul says of those false teachers who advocated circumcision, “I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves,” where Paul advocates that the false teachers who proclaimed works in salvation through circumcision should slip with their knife and cut off some important member. In Philippians, Paul calls out two ladies who are bickering with each other by name, “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.” In the Pastorals, Paul calls by name heretics and delivers them over to Satan, “Among these are Hymenaus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.” In 2 Tim 4:14, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay
him according to his deeds.” Would Paul’s warning to take every thought captive (2 Cor 10:5) not call for rigorous examination of all evangelical positions that we might be faithful to God’s Word (1 Cor 4:4)? What about Jude’s warning about false teaching that “crept in unnoticed” or 2 Peter’s language of no uncertain terms, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maltreated; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (2 Pet 2:3–4). Would critically trained evangelicals advocate such language as too harsh, too censorious or even Nazi-like? Surely Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23 was within the bounds of evangelicalism today, one would hope at least.

Second, it is not only very poor logic, but also unprofessional to connect evangelicals who are concerned for inerrancy issues with “Nazism and Communism” (7). In light of the Scripture verses quoted above about certain NT books defending the faith, would some critically trained evangelicals call Paul’s concern for the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word in such terms? Surely Paul’s warning (2 Tim 4:2–4) that false teaching would arise would cause these evangelicals to have a concern: “Teach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” Does a seminary education, Ivy League or critically-trained, immunize one from these concerns?

Second, Blomberg shows a remarkable lack of understanding of the ICBI 1978 and 1982 statements, and, at times, clearly is in opposition to them. He does not accept them as originally intended or as a guideline that he will abide.

Third, this book is often little more than an angry rant rather not a scholarly discussion. Blomberg’s anger completely overwhelms his discussion to the point of absolute distraction. His arrogance in his own personal assessment of himself as an evangelical-critical scholar who truly discerns the issue strikes one very negatively.

In conclusion, perhaps a better title for this book should be Can We Still Believe Evangelical-Critical Scholars? Why? Some, like Blomberg, say that they believe in inerrancy, but Blomberg’s book leaves much doubt as to whether they really do believe it the way the church has traditionally maintained that doctrine throughout the millennia. Indeed, the present review challenges all to re-read Rogers’ and McKim’s work (1979), as well as Rogers, Biblical Authority (1977) to discover startling parallels in many thoughts between their position and that of critical-evangelical scholars like Blomberg today. It is painfully obvious in this book that Paul’s warning of not to be taken captive by philosophy (Col 2:8) has been totally overlooked, ignored and disregarded by Blomberg, as well as Paul’s warning to take every thought captive (2 Cor 10:5).

Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition

Gary M. Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and Graduate School, has written a book *Jesus and the Jewish Festivals*, part of the publishers “Ancient Context, Ancient Faith Series.” Burge writes in a clear, easy-to-read format and his book is well illustrated with beautiful and fitting pictures. The educated layman or woman in the church could easily handle this book. The attempt of the author is to drop the reader down into the world of the Jewish people during Jesus’ time so that the Jewish festivals make sense to the modern reader, especially as these feasts factor into the life and ministry of Jesus. Burge presents many valid points that would be beneficial to the reader in better understanding of this often alien setting to many Christians, far removed from these feasts in both time and culture.


While *Jesus and the Jewish Festivals* does have merits to it, it also has significant drawbacks, which require mentioning. Burge’s well-established views on eschatology and ethnic Israel show up in three specific areas. First, in keeping with Burge’s previously released *Who Are God’s People? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians* (Zondervan, 1993), Burge understands that the Jewish people hold no special place in God’s plan or program. Consequently, in his introductory chapter on the Jewish feasts he writes along the lines that all cultures had special holidays or seasonal observances, and so did the Jews (which is true), but treats these in the same way as all other cultures without acknowledging or accepting any special relation that Israel has with God (which is not true—for example, among numerous verses: Deut 4:6–8; 32:6–8).

Secondly, while noting Yahweh’s original three feasts in Exodus 23 and sometimes citing Leviticus 23 in reference to other Jewish feasts, Burge does not note the eschatological significance that God places within this chapter. In Leviticus 23, Yahweh takes the original three feasts of Exodus 23 but adds and develops them to include not only feasts and occasions to be observed by the nation, but what become eschatological time markers as well. Leviticus 23 could well be entitled “The Appointed Times of Yahweh,” since it contains five specific references to this in this chapter. The first two references occur in Lev 23:2: “Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, ‘The LORD’s appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these . . .’” followed by the third reference, “These are the appointed times of the LORD” (Lev. 23:4). The fourth reference in this chapter is Lev 23:37: “These are the appointed times of the LORD.” The final verse of this chapter concludes, and thus with the initial references cited, brackets all of Leviticus
23: “So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the LORD” (Lev 23:44). Space does not permit elaboration on this, but the first four “appointed times of Yahweh” have already been fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus, such as 1 Cor 5:7: “For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.” The final three occurrences—the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths—do not have a New Testament fulfillment yet and remain unfulfilled prophecy as part of the appointed times of Yahweh, which calls to national repentance, to have the true Day of Atonement, followed by the Feast of Tabernacles with Messiah reigning.

Thirdly, Burge’s eschatological perspective is clearly evident in chapter four, “Jesus and Tabernacles.” Burge barely notes aspects of Zechariah 14 in relation to the Jews and the feast of Tabernacles:

The rabbis in Jesus’ day sought more than light and water in these ceremonies. Zechariah 14 was read during the feast, and there the prophet declared dramatically that God’s light would come and banish darkness forever (Zech. 14:6) and that living waters would flow continuously from the mountain of Jerusalem (14:8).

He further states,

But more was needed in Israel’s life. Israel needed refreshment not merely through living water but from God’s own Spirit . . . The water of Zechariah 14 was viewed as a promise of the Holy Spirit (80–81; italics his).

This is all that Burge has from Zechariah 14. Based on his eschatology, what he chose to omit were verses such as Zech 14:1–3, where the LORD will assemble the nations against Jerusalem for war, which will include the Yahweh Himself going out to battle. Zechariah 14:4 prophesies that the Messiah’s feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, and a massive split will occur. Zechariah 14:5 concludes with “Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all His holy ones with Him!” Zechariah 14:9 promises that returned King Jesus “will be king over all the earth; in that day, the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.” After Jesus has judged His enemies and established His kingdom on earth comes this specific prophecy regarding the future observances and celebrations of the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles, as Zechariah states,

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went up against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths [Tabernacles]. And it will happen that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them (Zech 14:16–17).

These Messianic prophecies—none of which Burge mentions—are just as scriptural and binding and must be fulfilled as any other promise of God and remain as part of the yet-to-be-fulfilled appointed times of Yahweh as it relates to the Feast
of Tabernacles (Lev 23:39–43). If you want to be biblically based, you must include Zech 14:16–17 as part of the significance of “Jesus and Tabernacles” because He will most assuredly be there and the recipient of worship properly due during that time as Lord and King.

Instead of worship of the King of kings in Jerusalem as the last and most blessed appointed time of Yahweh and having any eschatological significance, Burge sees a different significance, concluding his chapter “Jesus and Tabernacles” this way:

The Jewish Feast of Tabernacles is a helpful reminder that thanksgiving needs to be a vital part of our daily lives. In a wonderful essay on the centrality of gratitude for spiritual growth, Stan Guthrie notes how much research now proves that gratitude promotes emotional well-being, our sense of connection with the world, and a transformation in social attitudes. While this is encouraging, Tabernacles does not look at thankfulness with a view to our benefit. Tabernacles promotes gratitude because it reminds us of our ultimate dependence on God and His provisions. It is what the faithful man or woman ought to do. I am reminded of the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17 who were cured by Jesus. Only one turned back to express thanks. It is a story as well as a parable about human life.

At Tabernacles Israel looked back over the sweep of the year and was able to speak not merely a generic word of thanks, but gave specific thanks for the success of a completed agricultural seasons. From barley to sheep to pomegranates, God was given credit for sending goodness to his people. Of course there was labor (but labor without rain is futile). Of course there were human resources, human ingenuity, and time well spent. But a thoughtful person knows the capacities and opportunities we enjoy often should be credited less to ourselves and more to others and to God. Tabernacles says: bring samples of what God has given you to the temple. And with them in hand, wrapped in your personal lulav, thank him (81–82).

While these applications have some basis, and the Jews did indeed look backward, Zechariah 14 also looks forward to the day when King Jesus will reign in Jerusalem, and the nations will come up year by year to worship Him and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles with Him and others. Jesus and the Jewish Festivals has merit and helpful points, but it also leaves out significant matters as it relates to prophetic aspects of what God has promised. For the fuller story, read Leviticus 23 and Zechariah 14 which, in plain terms, makes God’s purposes in the feasts clear.


Reviewed by F. David Farnell, Professor of New Testament
A recently published work, Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism, offers a salient example of the dangers involved in historical criticism for the orthodox church and its faithfulness to Scripture. Perhaps a better title should be “Evangelical Faith and the Magic of Historical Criticism Demonstrated” since it demonstrates clearly how historical criticism can be used to develop novel views of Scripture through its methodology. The book not only exemplifies the psychological operation that historical criticism conducts among evangelical students who desire to further their education for ministry but also opens these students up to heterodoxy and heresy, as well as highlighting the dangers of historical criticism that is rapidly overwhelming evangelical colleges and seminaries. The book in its essence constitutes a “Trojan Horse” that allows historical criticism to surreptitiously replace centuries of faithful, orthodox understanding of both the Old and New Testament, with aberrations that would not have been espoused by the church from its beginnings.

Written by evangelicals who were trained and influenced at either Wheaton Graduate School or in prestigious British schools (Oxford, Aberdeen, St. Andrews), it constitutes a warning among the evangelical camp that such British-influenced schools like this are rapidly gaining significant influence upon evangelical educational systems and theological positions in America through the hiring of those who are trained in pastoral and higher education from such places.

One editor/author, Christopher Hays, thanks “the British Academy for funding my postdoctoral research, for it was under the aegis of the British Academy that this book came to completion . . . . I owe a debt of gratitude to the Warden and Fellows of Keble College, and to the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Oxford” (x). The other editor/author is a doctoral graduate of Wheaton. The book’s purpose is “a call for conservative interpreters of the Bible to be both critical and evangelical” (17). The book “aims to stimulate evangelicals to engage seriously with the historical critical method by demonstrating that the very fact of such engagement does not jeopardize one’s Christian’s confession” (18). If this is the stated purpose, the book proves the opposite and highlights the central thesis of The Jesus Quest: The Dangers from Within (Xulon, 2014). The book also contends that “it is not our intention to offer our pennyworth to the inerrancy debate” (3) so that it attempts to distance itself from the impact its assertions would make on such a cardinal doctrine. Indeed, it wants to ignore the doctrine of inerrancy for a special purpose, “we would like to set aside the subject of inerrancy, especially because evangelicals have been leery of joining historical criticism for another reason: fear of heresy (i.e., fear of beliefs that imperil the legitimacy of one’s claim to Christianity)” (4). They editors argue, “[w]hat this book provides is an accessible and succinct account of the theological consequences of historical-critical scholarship” (9) An examination of its contents reveals that the book only succeeds in what it is not trying to accomplish, i.e. it raises startling, shocking fears about the abdication of evangelicals from the historical position inerrancy and orthodoxy, as well as its presentation of views that may be considered heretical by the orthodox Christian community. It constitutes a raison d’être for an immediate, urgent clarion call among evangelicals to re-examine how far the drift from this cardinal doctrine is ongoing as exemplified among its young, future scholars in evangelicalism. The book provides many examples for alarm.
In Chapter 2, Hays and Herring use historical criticism to examine the historicity of Genesis 2–3. The chapter contends that “[i]n the end . . . wherever the debate about the historicity of Adam may end, essential Christian doctrine will remain on sure footing, even though certain features of that doctrine may need to be refined” (20). It argues that Paul’s account of human sinfulness in Romans 5 “does not include original guilt” and that his teaching about Christ’s work does not require originating sin” (45). They also assert that James 1:13–15, along with Romans 5, “propound a hamartiology of concupiscence, without requiring originating sin or original guilt” (46). To the authors, a historical-critical denial of the historicity of Adam’s fall, would require rejigging of the way that one understands hamartiology and how one reads some specific texts. But sometimes people fail to realize that historical criticism can help ameliorate certain problems created by older doctrinal constructions (49).

The authors assert, “if we were to agree with a historical-critical perspective and deny the historicity of the fall, would we be obliged to deny the existence of concupiscence? That seems quite unlikely” (51). They contend, “original guilt is not an idea endorsed in Scripture, not even in Romans 5” (54). While they label their chapter as an “imaginative and speculative endeavor,” they argue that,

[n]one of this [chapter] is to conclude that Genesis 2–3 must be unhistorical or that original guilt must be false; we have been speculating; imagining, musing. What we do hope to have shown is that a historical criticism reading of Genesis 2–3 does not destroy Christian faith, even if it would challenge some parts of our theological framework” (53–54).

So, the reader is left with the definite impression that whether Adam’s fall was historical is not really pivotal to the Christian faith, i.e. it has no important impact to theology. In Chapter 3, “The exodus: fact, fiction or both?” Ansberry contends,

[H]istorical criticism also indicates that the exodus even may not have occurred in history the way in which it is portrayed in the biblical text. This does not mean that we should despair of our theological convictions that God acted in the exodus, nor does it entail that we cannot be Christians and listen to historical criticism. There is much more middle ground between these two extreme positions. We can still hold to our religious understanding of the exodus’ meaning and countenance a critical assessment of the historicity of the exodus narrative, as long as we maintain that God achieved some sort of deliverance of his people from Egypt.

Whether this deliverance is described in terms of several smaller movements by distinct groups that were conflated into a single theological narrative or conceptualized through Israel’s liberation from Egyptian hegemony within Canaan, something of its historical occurrence is essential to Israel’s identity, her theological vision, as well as Christian orthodoxy. Without some sort of “exodus”
through divine intervention, the grounds for Israel’s election, identity and unique relationship with Yahweh are bogus. Without some sort of “exodus” through divine intervention, Israel’s future hope of redemption from exile is baseless. In the same way, without some sort of Israelite “exodus” through divine intervention, the Christian hope of release from spiritual bondage and the “Babylon” of this present age are diminished, thinned, attenuated (71).

Yet, even if the “exodus” did not happen in the way Scripture indicates, “[t]he Christian tradition is able to withstand the ahistorical nature of the exodus, since the primary ground of our belief is in God’s redemptive action in Christ” (71). Yet, the writer does not explain how if the Old Testament has misreported historically the Exodus, how then does the writer think that the New Testament accurately recorded Christ’s redemptive act? The writer contends that “[i]n suggesting that some sort of historical exodus occurred via divine intervention, we have moved beyond the realm of historical inquiry and entered into the realm of faith” (72). Moreover, “we must recognize that direct historical evidence for the exodus does not exist and that the precise historical minutiae of the event will most likely not materialize in our lifetimes . . . our faith is one that is rooted in history; it demands historical-critical inquiry” (ibid). So, the reader is left with the definite impression that whether the Exodus was historical does not really matter to the Christian faith, i.e. it has no important impact to theology.

In Chapter 4, “No covenant before the exile?” Ansberry and Jerry Hwang argue that “reflections on authorship and reappropriation of Deuteronomic covenant suggest that historical-critical research on Deuteronomy can make evangelicals more attuned to its locus of authority as well as to the way in which Deuteronomy’s theological ideas have been received by Israel throughout her history” (93). Ansberry and Hwang contend that scholars must make a “decisive move away from modern construals of authorship and authority, which have often hobbled the work of both evangelical scholars and their more skeptical interlocutors” (93–94). Moreover, the “urgent dynamism of the Mosaic voice in Deuteronomy simply cannot be relegated to a single time or place, whether, Mosaic, Josianic or otherwise; nor can the authority of the document be located in a single person.” Those evangelicals who contend for the importance Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy have the wrong focus, “[w]hen Deuteronomy’s authority as Christian Scripture is located in the content of the document in general and the Holy Spirit’s work through authorized tridents in particular, even the most trenchant attacks on its Mosaic authorship fail to usurp its authoritative status or muffle its revelatory voice” (94). To them, such a perspective, “coupled with the canonical posture of Deuteronomy, indicates that historical-critical work on the document does not pose a threat to Orthodox Christianity” (ibid). So, the reader is left with the definite impression that whether Deuteronomy was written by Moses or many authors or in diverse periods of Israel’s history does not really pivotal to the Christian faith, i.e. it has no important impact to theology.

In Chapter 5, “Problems with prophecy,” Warhurst, Tarrer and Hays argue that while “all evangelicals recognize the importance of prophecy” (95) the Scripture has places where “prophesied events do not occur as foretold” (96). They argue that
“[t]here is no denying that the Old Testament harbours examples of prophetic predictions not materializing in the manner adumbrated by the prophets” (123). They conclude,

[O]ur study has focused on the apparently ‘problematic’ instances of prophecy, it was also quite often the case that things did occur in history as they were foretold. But prophecy can also be a much more flexible phenomenon than that: sometimes fulfillments overflowed what the prophet foretold, all the while remaining congruous with the essential will of God revealed in prophecy (123–24).

They also assert,

[S]ometimes prophecy could be composed “after-the-fact,” not in an effort to deceive, but as an expression of the confidence of God’s people that God has been sovereign over history and that God will indeed deliver them. Once one appreciates how prophecy professes to work, the apparently trenchant problems in the biblical record of prophecy and fulfillment/failure melt away (ibid).

So, the reader is left with the definite impression that accurate fulfillment of prophecy is not really pivotal to the Christian faith, i.e. it has no important impact to theology.

In Chapter 6, “Pseudepigraphy and the canon,” Ansberry, Strine, Klink, and Lincicum argue that pseudepigraphy in the Old and New Testament is quite possible. To them, evangelicals must understand that,

ancient conceptions of authorship and authority provide a framework through which to understand the phenomenon and theological implications of pseudepigraphy in the canonical Pentateuch (129).

Furthermore, those in the modern era must understand the “environment of the ancient world…[w]hen the Pentateuch is understood within the conceptual environment of the ancient world, questions concerning its authorship appear anachronistic” (130). Furthermore, “[w]hen the Pentateuch is understood within the conceptual environment of the ancient world, questions concerning its authorship appear on several accounts” (ibid). Two especially are cited: first, the Pentateuch is an anonymous work and second, the striking lack of interest in authorship throughout the Hebrew Bible, as well as the absence of the term ‘author’ in the Classical Hebrew language, indicates that the search for the ‘author’ of the Pentateuch is misguided” (ibid).

One must understand “ancient conceptions of authorship” where “author” represented not necessarily an individual as in modern conceptions of the notion, but “the ancient oriental world valued the group as well as collective tradition over autonomous, individual expression” (136). To these evangelicals, “‘authorship’ does not represent a claim of literary origins; it represents a claim of authoritative, revelatory tradition” (146). This is key. Accordingly, they allow for the possibility of three Isaiahs, the “product of multiple authors” (136), the Gospel of John as a collective work of the “Johannine “community” (146), as well as some in the Pauline group
(e.g. the Pastorals, 147–56). They argue that “the historical evidence suggests that new models are needed for evangelicals to make sense of pseudepigraphal compositions that may at some level have an intention to deceive, but still function as canonical Scripture” (154). Furthermore, “[t]o claim that pseudepigraphy is irreconcilable with infallibility can arguably only result in subjecting Scripture to our own autonomous standard of perfection, instead of seeking the perfection Scripture has in a historically a posteriori act of discipleship” (155). Their conclusion is quite startling:

If the biblical documents locate authority in the context and canonization of the inspired text rather than their “author(s)’, then historical criticism helps us to problematize modern conceptions of authority and to understand the nature of the biblical text. And if ancient perceptions of authorship and the realities of text production were more fluid than are modern conceptions, then historical criticism opens new horizons for thinking about the way in which God worked through the Holy Spirit to compose and codify the biblical text (156).

Furthermore, “the acceptance of pseudepigraphy or pseudonymity in the biblical canon neither undermines the principal tenets of the Christian faith nor operates outside the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.” So, the reader is left with the definite impression that pseudepigraphy or pseudonymity does not really matter to the Christian faith, i.e. it has no important impact to theology.

In Chapter 7, Daling and Hays contend that “the discipline of historical Jesus scholarship does not lead inevitably to heresy, so much as it engages both believing and non-believing scholars in debates of real significance for the beliefs of the Church.” They contend, “Christian theology ought not to resist the idea that Jesus was ignorant of certain things” (Mark 13:32; Matt 24:36). Accordingly, “Jesus was a human, and thus experienced human ignorance, not as an ontological defect but as a constitutive feature of his humanity.” Again,

[W]e should also ask if it is theologically necessary that Jesus possessed or disclosed awareness of his own divinity. Probably not. It is imaginable that Jesus could have been God without ever knowing it. What’s more, even without a divine self-awareness, one could conceivably still affirm that Jesus was fully obedient and faithful to God unto death, accomplishing whatever was necessary for our salvation without knowing precisely how or why he was doing it (164).

They are to be commended that they affirm the virgin birth, “the present authors would eschew” its rejection (174), as well as the resurrection of Jesus, “the facticity of Jesus’ unique and divinely effected resurrection from the dead in space and time is the defining trait, the conditio sine qua non, of the Christian faith” (180). One is left wondering, however, at their logic in this work. That is, why if God was responsible for the miracle of the virgin birth as well as the historical resurrection of Jesus, could He not guard in His faithfulness other parts of His Word in the Old and New Testaments from such dubious assertions found in the rest of this work about history, authorship, prophecy, and faithfully preserving his Word from error. These writers seem rather arbitrary in their picking and choosing!
Finally, in Chapter 9, Ansberry and Hays, sum up their work. They contend that "historical criticism is not a dead-zone, irradiated and left lifeless by atheistic historiography" (204). They admit that "[t]his book does not doubt that historical criticism can be dangerous fuelled by atheistic hostility or over-weaning skepticism, some historical critics have suggested devastating theses" (205). This reviewer suggests that these young evangelicals have failed to apprehend that they too have fallen into an alarming pattern of thought. The trap of historical criticism has been sprung on them. The form of "historical criticism" they present is just as dangerous for evangelicism. They argue that "conservative Christian seminaries and academics can cease their embargo of historical criticism" (206) based on their book’s presentation. The book, however, fails significantly here. It actually is a proverbial “poster child” for avoiding historical criticism. These writers accept historical criticism in a vacuum away from its philosophical presuppositions and historical antecedents. They contend, “this book has aimed to show that historical criticism can provide the Church with exciting and significant resources, especially once that criticism has been harnessed by the perspective of faith” (ibid). This statement demonstrates that these young writers exhibit incredible naïveté. They do not understand history. They do not remember or regard evangelical history; they do not realize the ever-present dangers historical criticism possesses (James 3:1). The whole book constitutes a warning to evangelicals that historical criticism has not changed; no modification of it is redeemable for evangelical study. A key question remains, Do these young evangelicals believe that they have found a form of “historical criticism” that should be acceptable to evangelicals in their presentation? If so, that is also incredible hubris.


Reviewed by Mark A. Hassler, Faculty Associate in Old Testament Studies

At first glance, certain passages like Acts 13:46–47 can make it seem like the gospel message was reserved for the Jews until Paul’s time (xii). But as the author contends (xiii–xiv), the good news in the OT extends even to the Gentiles. The gospel is for everyone of every era.

Kaiser is president emeritus and Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. In building his case, Kaiser points to various OT passages, peoples, and periods. Three biblical passages form the OT’s core teaching regarding evangelistic outreach to the Gentiles: Deuteronomy 28, Gen 12:1–3, and Exod 19:5–6 (18). The Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20; Mark 16:15) finds its OT counterpart in Gen 12:3 (xii). Missionary accounts come from Melchizedek (38), Jethro (38–39), Balaam (39), Rahab (39–40), Ruth (40), the captured Israeli girl and Naaman (40–48), Jonah and the Ninevites (65–71), select Major and Minor Prophets (71–74), select psalms: 67, 96, 117 (28–34), and Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles (75–82). The book of
Jonah possesses a missionary purpose: to prompt God’s people to evangelize their enemies (69–70).

“An Excursus on Enoch” (4) addresses the prophet Enoch (Jude 14–15), but the Prophet Abel goes untreated (Matt 23:35; Luke 11:50–51; Heb 4:11). Also untreated are the conversions of the sailors on Jonah’s ship and the (probable) conversion of Nebuchadnezzar. Kaiser bypasses the salvation speeches by ancient Gentiles outside of Israel, namely, Job (9:30–35; 16:18–22; 19:23–27) and Elihu (33:23–28). He does not explore the possibility that the Gentile Abram became a believer by reading the gospel in Job, the oldest book of Scripture (cf. Gal 3:8).

Some published English translations obscure the meaning of missionary texts like Gen 4:1 (3), 9:27 (5), 12:3 (11), and 2 Sam 7:19 (23–24). In the four servant songs (Isa 42:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), Kaiser construes the servant of the Lord as the Messiah and Israel collectively (56–62), just as he does with the seed of Abraham in 41:8 (57). In 42:1, he says, the servant will bring true religion (not “justice” NAU) to the nations (59–60).

Concerning the interpretation of Scripture, Kaiser advocates an inaugurated eschatology (63). The reference to “the Hebrew perfect tense” (10) differs from the view that Hebrew verbs derive their tense solely from the context, as per Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition* (86) and Waltke and O’Connor, *IBHS* (347).

The second edition adds “Study and Discussion Questions” (83–86) for each of the book’s eight chapters. The back cover advertises “two new chapters,” but the “Preface to the Second Edition” (ix) lists three new chapters: Chapter 1, “God’s Preparation for Missions in Genesis 1–11” (1–7); Chapter 2, “God’s Plan for Missions in the Patriarchal and Mosaic Eras” (9–18); and, Chapter 3, “God’s Promised Person for All—The Davidic King of Promise” (19–26). Kaiser does not update his research, as evidenced by the lack of sources in the footnotes published after the first edition (2000). The book retains its one table (57).

In the back, the “Glossary” (87–89) with its twenty-two items remains basically unaltered. The ninety bibliographic entries of the original edition become 113 in the current “Bibliography” (91–97). Twenty-four resources were added; one was eliminated. From the last decade (2002–12) Kaiser adds only four works to the bibliography, two of which are his: *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Zondervan, 2008) and * Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Zondervan, 2009). A set of indexes concludes the volume: “Scripture Index” (99–102), “Subject Index” (103–6), and “Author Index” (107).

Whether a budding believer or seasoned saint, one can profit from this edifying and enjoyable read. When it comes to missiology, we dare not neglect the OT in our doctrinal formulation.


Reviewed by Keith Essex, Associate Professor of Bible Exposition
As the subtitle indicates, *The Lion and the Lamb* is an abridgement of *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (see *MSJ* 24, No. 1 [Spring, 2013]: 158–59). The original NT introduction was over 900 pages and contained not only basic information, but also intermediate and advanced knowledge. By contrast, *The Lion and the Lamb* “focuses on introductory-level core knowledge for each book of the NT” (xvi). While the first volume was designed for seminary-level students, the present book is planned to be a resource for undergraduate students and beginning readers of the NT.

The content of *The Lion and the Lamb* mirrors that in *CCC*. Only the final chapter in *CCC*, “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament,” has been completely dropped from the new volume. The other 20 chapters of the present book correspond to the original. The first two chapters (Part One) lay the foundation dealing with (1) the nature and scope of Scripture, and (2) the political and religious background of the NT. The authors’ rationale for these beginning chapters is clearly stated. “It is vital for all students of Scripture to have a proper understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, so chapter 1 discusses the formation of the NT canon, its inspiration and inerrancy, the preservation and transmission of the Bible over the centuries, and issues pertaining to the translation of Scripture” (xiv). Further, “As we approach our study of the NT, we need to acquaint ourselves with the political and religious background of the NT (the contents of chap. 2). This is an ingredient not always found in standard NT introductions, an omission that when teaching NT survey courses in the past has sent us scrambling for other resources to prepare our students adequately for entering the world of the NT” (xiv). The authors affirm that Scripture’s self-attestation leads to the conclusion that Scripture is inspired and inerrant. “This follows both from specific scriptural references regarding the nature of Scripture as entirely trustworthy and is also required by the character of God as the ultimate source of Scripture” (16).

Chapters 3–20 progressively move through the NT books themselves. Part Two (chapters 3–7) begins with a chapter on Jesus followed by introductions to each of the four Gospels. Part Three (8–15) starts with a chapter on the book of Acts, then a chapter introducing Paul before the Pauline letters are discussed. Part Four (16–20) introduces Hebrews through Revelation. As in *CCC*, each NT book is discussed as to its history, literary structure, and theological themes. The historical section has been pared down by omitting challenges to the book’s traditional positions concerning authorship, date, and audience. Omitted in the literary discussions are treatments of literary rearrangements and partition theories. However, the book outlines and unit-by-unit discussions are verbatim from *CCC*. Finally, the theological themes have been trimmed. The volume concludes with an abridged glossary and name, subject, and Scripture indexes. Two additions to *CCC* are Points of Application to the end of each chapter dealing with the biblical books and sixteen pages of maps taken from the *Holman Bible Atlas* at the end of the book.

*The Lion and the Lamb* is a highly recommended introductory survey of the NT. It will be most helpful to those teachers familiar with the discussion in *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*. However, it will also prove beneficial for those who do not know the original. When evaluated against other NT surveys (especially Gundry and Elwell & Yarbrough), this new work has a more traditional design. The visuals and graphics are meager in comparison. However, the content here is “meaty” and well presented; this is the book’s best feature.

Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, Samara Center for Biblical Training (Samara, Russia)

Scott Manetsch is Professor of Church History and Christian Thought at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He has written numerous articles on Reformation history, as well as publishing his dissertation, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572–1598* (Brill, 2000).

In 1994 William G. Naphy lamented the nature of original resource study by contemporary scholars on Geneva. He writes, “research at the state archives in Geneva has shown that the sources commonly used represent only a small fraction of the total amount of material available for studying the social and political context of Calvin’s situation in Geneva.” Furthermore, “Suffice it to say that an examination of the works used by most scholars shows an almost total reliance, for secondary sources, on the works of nineteenth-century historians such as Roget and Galiffe” (*Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* [Westminster John Knox Press], 2).

Manetsch has taken up this challenge and through the course of a decade immersed himself in the original resource materials of Geneva. He has produced fresh insight into the nature of pastoral ministry in Geneva from 1536 to 1609. As the definitive date for Geneva’s religious reformation and the beginning of Calvin’s ministry in the city, 1536 is the starting date for the author’s study. This is then concluded in 1609, which is four years following the death of Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza. Enriched by these archives, Manetsch writes, “The central purpose of this book is to examine the pastoral theology and practical ministry activities of this cadre of men who served as pastors in Geneva’s churches during nearly three-quarters of a century from 1536 to 1609” (2). Of particular interest to the author is the extent of change that took place after the death of John Calvin.

One of the great benefits of exposing his audience to Geneva’s archives is that they experience a lively account of day-to-day life in Geneva from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There are vivid and specific details on the challenges that faced Geneva’s pastors, and how they responded. Manetsch assiduously explains the reform of Geneva, the Company of Pastors, how Genevans thought of the pastoral vocation, how pastors were expected to run their households, the liturgical practice of the Genevan churches, the nature of preaching, how the pastors gave moral oversight, shepherded their flock, and how publishing was a significant ministry of the pastors.

Concerning the evolution of ministry from 1536 to 1609, the author concludes that the pastors largely maintained the traditions of the church during Calvin’s tenure until 1609. While the pastors were not mindless followers of Calvin, and although there were changes and advancements, the pastors in large part preserved Calvin’s theological vision. Manetsch also gives a corrective on the theological trajectory of Calvin’s successors. He writes, “Scholars of the reformed tradition have sometimes
pitted Calvin against later Calvinists, arguing that Protestant ‘scholastic’ theologians such as Beza, Daneau, Chandieu, and La Faye were guilty of adopting a rationalistic scheme of theology that fundamentally betrayed the doxological and Christological focus of Calvin’s theological work. My study of the books published by Geneva’s ministers from 1536 to 1609 challenges this thesis” (302).

Considering the depth of research, breadth of topics and engaging style of writing, it would be hard to improve upon Manetsch’s book. It is an impressive example of scholarship that should be emulated by future historians. The reader should understand that the work is more academic in nature, so it does not read as a practical guide for contemporary pastoral ministry. For those interested in Reformation studies, particularly that of Geneva, this book is highly recommended.


Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, Samara Center for Biblical Training (Samara, Russia)

Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott are two of the world’s leading scholars on Jonathan Edwards. McClymond is Associate Professor of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University, and McDermott is Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion at Roanoke College. They have both written extensively on Edwards, and are qualified to write such a groundbreaking work. Although Yale is partnering with the Eerdmans Publishing Company to produce an encyclopedia on Jonathan Edwards, comprising of 450 entries, The Theology of Jonathan Edwards is the most comprehensive treatment of Edwards’s theology currently available in one volume.

The book is comprised of three parts: (1) “Introduction: Historical, Cultural, and Social Contexts;” (2) “Topics in Edwards’s Theology” (with sections on “Methods and Strategies;” “The Triune God, the Angels, and Heaven;” “Theological Anthropology and Divine Grace;” and “Church, Ethics, Eschatology, and Society”); and (3) “Legacies and Affinities: Edwards’s Disciples and Interpreters.” Throughout the work, the authors identify five driving forces behind the theology of Edwards: trinitarian communication, creaturely participation, necessitarian dispositionalism, divine priority, and harmonious constitutionalism (4–6). Behind these five constituent forces lie two of his chief intellectual strategies: (1) “concatenation,” or the search for the interconnectedness of metaphysics, and (2) “subsumption,” in which Edwards’s theology trickled down into all other aspects of theology (11–12).

Taken as a whole, The Theology of Jonathan Edwards is a significant contribution to Edwardsean studies. Whereas detailed treatments of his works have been isolated to disparate books, articles, and introductions to the Yale editions of the Works of Jonathan Edwards, this volume contains a detailed treatment of all the significant areas of Edwards’s thought. It also takes advantage of the 73-volume edition of the Works of Jonathan Edwards (http://edwards.yale.edu).
Of particular interest is how the authors discuss Edwards in relation to the history of Catholic and Orthodox thought. Comparing Edwards’ writings on the sacraments and justification to Catholicism, or his thought on divinization with that of the Eastern tradition is thought provoking. However, herein lies a point of caution concerning the book. By imposing these concepts onto Edwards, the reader could interpret Edwards as promoting that which he categorically denied. For example, Edwards was a champion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which was the subject of his *Quaestio*, his first published treatise, and the impetus of the initial phase of the First Great Awakening. Yet, Edwards’ stress on works and perseverance as the great sign of regeneration cause the authors to assert, “Edwards seems to have rejected or significantly qualified sola fide . . . .” and instead maintained “conditions” for salvation that were analogous to Catholic views on “merit” (696; cf. 81–82; 392–404; and 722). While Edwards’s use of words such as “condition” and “infusion” are understandable with definition in a Protestant context, the authors chose to push for Edwards being a bridge to Catholicism by employing a questionable semantic strategy. A similar course was used for interpreting Edwards’s compatibility with the Orthodox view of “divinization.” Although the authors note that Edwards never used the term, and likely never read authors espousing the unique qualities of divinization in the Eastern paradigm, they justify Edwards as a bridge to Orthodoxy (albeit under the guise of early modern Neo-Platonism; 413, 423). One may imagine that suggesting Edwards was a bridge to Arminianism would be just as palatable to him as that of Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy.

Viewing Edwards as a bridge to the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements was also discussed, with the conclusion that Edwards “would likely have found much to affirm in this global [Pentecostal-Charismatic] movement, as well as much to criticize” (725). Considering the theological basis upon which Edwards evaluated such movements (cf. Distinguishing Marks and Religious Affections), it is difficult to imagine him responding to these movements with anything but displeasure.

The authors push the limits of Edwards’s thought by affirming his openness to world religions and comparing his thought to neo-orthodox and liberal authors such as Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher. The authors write, “Edwards’s writings are a challenge for contemporary Christian thinkers to reexamine non-Christian religions and to do so without the presumption that this line of inquiry requires them to abandon Christian truth claims or affirmations of Christianity’s distinctiveness” (726).

While a majority of the book is stellar in its representation of Edwards’s thought, the reader discovers the constituent factors behind the authors’ narrative of Edwards’s writings by making him a theological bridge to other belief systems. For example, the book concludes with the following scenario: “Imagine a Christian dialogue today that included adherents of ancient churches—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic—with various modern church bodies—Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Disciples of Christ—as well as an ample representation from the newer evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic congregations from around the world. If one had to choose one modern thinker—and only one—to function as a point of reference for theological interchange and dialogue, then who might one choose? Our answer
should be clear” (728). If one understands Edwards’s Puritan heritage, and reads extensively from his theological treatises, miscellanies, letters and sermons, this claim is difficult to accept. In short, this is a reinvention of Edwards. One must consider the authors’ own warning, “Studies of Edwards thus reveal as much or more about the interpreter as they do about the interpreted” (720).

Despite the above listed shortcomings, the forty-five chapters of this volume provide the reader with a wealth of information on the staples of Edwards’s theology, such as theocentrism, divine beauty, the sovereignty of God, and the nature of revival. Being the most comprehensive, in-depth, one-volume work on Jonathan Edwards’s theology, it is essential reading for any serious student of Edwards (notwithstanding its size and cost). It is not for the uninitiated, however, as it contains the intricate depths of Edwards’s theology and philosophy.


Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament Studies

This series, the Gospel According to the OT, has three clear aims: to lay out the pervasiveness of the revelation of Christ in the OT, to promote a Christ-centered reading of the OT, and to encourage Christ-centered preaching and teaching from the OT (xi).

George Schwab received his Ph.D. from Westminster Seminary, is a trained biblical counselor, and is an OT professor at Erskine Seminary. The first three chapters of his commentary set the stage for how to understand the book of Judges. He summarizes his goal in this section as exploring “how Judges was formed and shaped over time, how it wants to be interpreted, and what principles should guide the Christian in that effort” (1). Midway through his third chapter, he presents six perspectives that guide him in his interpretation of Judges (34). First, he assumes that the people described in the book really lived and events actually happened. Second, he presents how the text advanced David’s cause, preparing the way for Samuel. Third, he views the book of Judges as a sermon on Deuteronomy. Fourth, he pursues what Judges says about Jesus and His gospel. Fifth, he inquires into how the book should speak to the church today. Sixth, he asks, How does the text anticipate the final judgment and glory that will be revealed in us?

In his focus on what the text of Judges meant, Schwab makes several helpful observations and provides clear visuals (charts and maps). He provides several charts that help him make his point. He correctly affirms that the judges were not national, but regional rulers, some of whom had overlapping reigns. He shows how the book of Judges paves the way for the books of Ruth and Samuel by preparing for a pro-David and anti-Saul environment (exalting the tribe of Judah and indicting the tribe of Benjamin).

Although Schwab makes a contribution to one’s understanding of the text of Judges, I have several concerns about his basic approach and various conclusions he
reaches. Doubtless, my grave concerns about a Christocentric hermeneutic (needing to find primary Christocentric significance in each OT passage) occasions many of these concerns. The below paragraphs offer a narrow selection of potential examples of these issues.

One of my concerns about Schwab’s commentary involves the word plays to which he points. He suggests that Samson’s encounter with the lion carcass evokes the concept of God’s future judgment on the nations (xvi). Although two different words for “carcass” occur in Judg 14:8 (with different meanings), he connects the idea with various other passages to reach this conclusion. A reader would easily assume a strong connection of a word in Judges with these other passages, but that is not the case. I could not find another commentary that made this connection either. In Judg 14:9 he affirms that the word for Samson “scraping” the honey from the carcass always means, “to rule, have dominion.” This points to an anointed one, empowered by the Spirit, who will rule over all nations. As a matter of fact, the verb (rdh) used in Judges 14 is a homonym for the word to which he refers. According to HALOT, it means to take bread out of an oven or honey out of a beehive (1190). He points out that Samson was a Nazirite (Judg 13:5) and then refers to Jesus as the Nazarene who has similar characteristics. The proximity and similarity of these two names suggests a connection, when one refers to a unique life pattern (Nazirite), while the other refers to Jesus’ hometown (from Nazareth). In Judg 14:8 he connects the word for “swarm” of bees with the nation of Israel and ultimately, the church. He emphasizes that the noun ‘edah often signifies the nation of Israel. He affirms that it “elsewhere always refers to people” (xvi). Schwab points out that honey is a divine blessing for the covenant nation. After building on the other word plays he cites in Judges 14, he concludes, “Under his sovereign rule, the church thrives in the midst of a hostile world and produces good fruit, sweet like honey, to God” (xvii). However, various lexical resources show that the basic idea of the noun is a “gathering.” It can refer to a gathering of bees or flock of birds (Hos 7:12) as well as a gathering of different smaller groups of people (Pss 22:17; 68:31; Job 16:7). Although it is true that the land of Canaan is called “the land of milk and honey” in numerous passages, is the divine author of Judges intending to signify something about the nation of Israel and the church by this reference to a swarm of bees?

Another area of concern deals with historical issues. Schwab fairly presents the early date of the Exodus view and affirms that this book does not take issue with that view (4). However, in subsequent comments, he does not regard most numeric references at face value. He suggests that the reader of Judges “should be attuned to some possible reshaping or formatting of the time references” (14). He regards most of these time references as symbolic. Also, he proposes that Judges represents “stylized history” (11) or “interpreted history” (17). On the one hand, one must recognize that biblical history is selective and presented with a theological point. On the other hand, Schwab seems to go beyond this. He refers to Sisera’s nine hundred chariots (Judges 4). He writes: “to read [this passage] as real history requires stretching our imaginations to devise a scenario wherein it is plausible” (17). Schwab later affirms that he accepts Judges as history, but seeks to avoid a literalistic as well as a liberal approach to these issues.
A final area of concern deals with Schwab’s efforts to delineate parallels between a given passage in Judges and the life of a believer in the church or transitions to Christology. After referring to Spirit-empowered leaders in Israel (which I would call theocratic anointing), Schwab likens the role of judges in Israel to God’s willingness to accomplish His mission for the world through “very fallible and wayward people who make up his church” (42). He regards the judge Othniel as a type of Christ (47). He also argues that in light of the New Covenant, NT writers “co-opt” (69) OT language to make a different point than that found in the OT. For example, Schwab concludes that Paul’s citation of the law about not muzzling an ox (Deut 25:4) demonstrates that this command is not really about oxen but is about people (67). In response, the OT law did concern treatment of oxen. It is correct to point out the fundamental truth of this law is kindness and compassion. The NT does not co-opt this language and show that the law is really about people. Rather, the NT draws on the fundamental principle and shows how this should govern human relationships as well.

On the one hand, in this volume Schwab provides a number of helpful insights in the book of Judges. I must admit, however, that I cannot wholeheartedly recommend this book for the average reader or for a pastor. Fundamentally, the Christocentric impetus occasions several examples of exegetical fallacies.


Reviewed by F. David Farnell, Professor of New Testament Studies

The writers state that their “specific objective is to understand better how both the Old and New Testaments were spoken, written and passed on, especially with an eye to possible implications for the Bible’s inspiration and authority” (9). They add, “part of the purpose of this book is to bring students back from the brink of turning away from the authority of Scripture in reaction to the misappropriation of the term inerrancy” (ibid). They assert that as Wheaton College professors, they work “at an institution and with a faculty that take a strong stand on inerrancy but that are open to dialogue” and that this openness “provided a safe context in which to explore the authority of Scripture from the ground up” (10). John Walton wrote the chapters on the Old Testament, while D. Brent Sandy wrote the chapters on the New Testament. W/S have written this book especially for “Christian students in colleges, seminaries and universities” with the hopes that they will find their work “useful,” as well as writing for “colleagues who have a high view of Scripture, especially for those who hold to inerrancy” (ibid). The book is also “not intended for outsiders; that is, it’s not an apologetic defense of biblical authority.” Rather, “we’re writing for insiders, seeking to clarify how best to understand the Bible” (9). The writers also assure the readers that they have a “very high view of Scripture; “[w]e affirm inerrancy” and that they “are in agreement with the definition suggested by David Dockery that the,

Bible properly interpreted in light of [the] culture and communication developed by the time of its composition will be shown to be completely true (and
therefore not false) in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and his creation” (David S. Dockery, Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation, Nashville: B & H, 1994, p. 64).

The central thrust of the book is that the world of the Bible (both Old and New Testament) is quite different from modern times: “Most of us a probably unprepared . . . for how different the ancient world is from our own . . . We’re thousands of years and thousands of miles removed. It means we frequently need to put the brakes on and ask whether we’re reading the Bible in light of the original culture or in light of contemporary culture. While the Bible’s values were very different from ancient cultures’, it obviously communicated in the existing languages and within cultural customs of the day” (p. 13). Such recognition and the “evidence assembled in this book inevitably leads to the question of inerrancy” (13). “[T]he truth of the matter is, no term, or even combination of terms, can completely represent the fullness of Scripture’s authority” (13). W/S then quote the Short Statement of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy of 1978 (14). This creates the impression that they are in agreement with the statement. However, this is deceptive because book constitutes an essential challenge to much of what the Chicago Statements asserted. This uneasiness with the Chicago Statement can also be seen in those who are listed as endorsers of the work, Tremper Longmann III who chairs the Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, as well as Michael R. Licona who recently, in his The Resurrection of Jesus, used genre criticism to negate the resurrection of the saints in Jerusalem in Matt 27:51–53 at Jesus crucifixion as apocalyptic genre rather than indicating a literal resurrection, and Craig Evans, Acadia Divinity College, who is not known for his support of the Chicago Statements.

The book consists of 21 propositions that seek to nuance biblical authority, interpretation and an understanding of inerrancy, with the essential thought of these propositions flowing basically from two areas: (1) their first proposition, “Ancient Near Eastern Societies were hearing dominant [italics added] and had nothing comparable to authors and books as we know them” [in modern times since the printing press] while modern societies today are “text dominant” [italics added] (19, see also, 17–28) and (2) speech-act theory that they frequently refer to in their work (41–46, 48, 51, 200, 213–18, 229, 288). They qualify their latter acceptance of speech-act theory:

We do not agree with many of the conclusions with speech act theory, but we find its foundational premise and terminology helpful and have adopted its three basic categories. The communicator uses locutions (words, sentences, rhetorical structures, genres) to embody an illocution (the intention to do something with those locutions—bless, promise, instruct, assert) with a perlocution that anticipates a certain response from the audience (obedience, trust, belief) (41).

They go on to assert that God accommodated His communication in the Scripture: “[a]ccommodation on the part of the divine communicator resides primarily in the locution, in which the genre and rhetorical devices are included.” (42). And,
Genre is largely a part of the locution, not the illocution. Like grammar, syntax and lexemes, genre is a mechanism to convey an illocution. Accommodation takes place primarily at the locutionary level. Inerrancy and authority related to the illocution; accommodation and genre attach at the locution. Therefore inerrancy and authority cannot be undermined, compromised or jeopardized by genre or accommodation. While genre labels may be misleading, genre itself cannot be true or false, errant or inerrant, authoritative or non-authoritative. Certain genres lend themselves to more factual detail and others more toward fictional imagination” (45).

While admittedly the book’s propositions entail many other ideas, from these two ideas, an oral-dominated society in ancient times of the OT and NT vs. a written/text dominant-society of modern times and the implications of speech-act theory cited above, flow all that W/S develop in their assertions to nuance their take on what a proper view of inerrancy and biblical authority should be. The obvious implication of these assertions is that Robert Gundry, who was removed from ETS due to his dehistoricizing in 1983, was wronged because value judgment about genre does not impact the doctrine of inerrancy. Gundry was perfectly in the confines of inerrancy to dehistoricize because, according to W/S, it was ETS that misunderstood the concept of inerrancy as not genre driven. It is the illocution (purpose or intent) not the wording that drives inerrancy. Gundry’s theorizing of a midrashic genre, according to this idea, had nothing at all to do with inerrancy. Gundry believed sincerely in inerrancy but realized the midrashic, not historical, nature of Matthew 2.

This review will give commendations of the book. First, W/S are to be commended for their affirmation of inerrancy and their sincere desire to explore the authority of Scripture. Second, they also recognize that there exists no perfect attempt by theologians of representing the fullness of Scripture’s authority. As the IVP “Academic Alert” (22, no. 4 [Winter 2014]) noted on the front page, “Where Scholars Fear to Tread, John Walton and Brent Sandy take on the juggernaut of biblical authority in The Lost World of Scripture.” Since they have taken on this “juggernaut,” their theorizing about inerrancy opens itself up to critique.

Unfortunately, their propositions create more problems for inerrancy than they attempt to solve. Their idea of the orality of the ancient Near East in which the OT and NT often gives the impression W/S imagine that these ancients were not only different in approach (ear-dominant vs. text dominant) but also rather primitive as well as unscientific in what they held in terms of their concept of the material world around them. Walton’s and Sandy’s work is reminiscent of Rogers and McKim, in their now famous, The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible (1979), An Historical Approach, who made a similar error in their approach to Scripture. They also spoke of “the central Christian tradition included the concept of accommodation;” that today witnesses a “scholastic overreaction to biblical criticism;” “the function and purpose of the Bible was to bring people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ”; “the Bible was not used as an encyclopedia of information on all subjects;” and “to erect a standard of modern, technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church.” (R/M, xxii). W/S similarly assert in their implications of an oral society that
“The Bible contains no new revelation about the material workings and understanding of the Material World” (Proposition 4, 49–59) so that the,

Bible’s “explicit statements about the material world are part of the locution and would naturally accommodate the beliefs of the ancient world. As such they are not vested with authority. We cannot encumber with scriptural authority any scientific conclusions we might deduce from the biblical text about the material world, its history or its regular processes. This means that we cannot draw any scientific conclusions about such areas as physiology, meteorology, astronomy, cosmic geography, genetics or geology from the Bible. For example, we should believe that God created the universe, but we should not expect to be able to derive from the biblical texts the methods that he used or the time that it took. We should believe that God created humans in his image and that through the choices they made sin and death came into the world. Scientific conclusions, however, relating to the material processes of human origins (whether from biology in general or genetics in particular) may be outside the purview of the Bible. We need to ask whether the Bible is making those sort of claims in its illocutions (55).

They continue,

The Bible’s claims regarding origins, mechanics or shape of the world are by definition of the focus of its revelation in the theological realm (55).

According to W/S, what the Bible says plainly in the words of Genesis 1 may not be what it intends. Immediate special creation cannot be read into the text; rather the door is open for evolution and the acceptance of modern understandings of science. Thus, Genesis 1 and 2 may well indicate God’s creation but not the means of how he created, even when the locutions say “evening and morning”; “first day” etc. Much of what is in Genesis 1 reflects “Old World Science”:

One could easily infer from the statements in the biblical text that the sun and moon share space with the birds (Gen. 1). But this is simply a reflection of Old World Science, and we attach no authority to that conclusion. Rather we consider it a matter of deduction on the part of the ancients who made no reason to know better” (57).

For them, “[t]he Bible's authority is bound into theological claims and entailments about the material world.” For them, “since the Bible is not a science textbook,” its “authority is not found in the locution but has to come through illocution” (54). Genesis 1–2, under their system, does not rule out evolution; nor does it signify creation literally in six “days.” Such conclusions press the text far beyond its purpose to indicate God’s creation of the world but not the how of the processes involved. They conclude, “we have proposed that reticence to identify scientific claims or entailments is the logical conclusion from the first two points (not a science textbook; no new scientific revelation) and that a proper understanding of biblical authority is
dependent on recognizing this to be true” (59). They assert that “it’s is safe to believe that Old World Science permeates the Old Testament” and “Old World Science is simply part of the locution [words, etc.] and as such is not vested with authority” (300).

Apparently, W/S believe that modern science has a better track record at origins. This assumption is rather laughable. Many “laws” of science for one generation are overturned in other generations. Scientific understanding is in constant flux. Both of these authors have failed to understand that modern science is predominately over-whelmingly by materialistic philosophies rather than presenting any evidence of objectivity in the area of origins. Since science is based on observation, testing, measurement and repeatability, ideas of origins are beyond the purview of modern science too. For instance, the fossil record indicates the death of animals, but how that death occurred and what the implications of that fossil record are delves more into philosophy and agendas rather than good science. Since no transitional forms exist between species in the fossil record, evolution should be rendered tenuous as an explanation, but science refuses to rule it out due to a dogmatic a priori.

While W/S quote the ICBI “short statement” their work actually is an assault on the articles of affirmation and denial of the 1978 Chicago Statement on Inerrancy. In article IX, it noted that,

“We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the biblical authors were moved to speak and write” and Article XII, “we deny that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.” Article XI related, “far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all matters in addresses.”

Another area that is troubling is in their theorizing of text-canonical updating. W/S’s adoption of multiple unknown redactor/editors who updated the text over long periods of time in terms of geography, history, names, etc. actually constitutes an argument, not for inerrancy, but for deficiency in the text of Scripture and hence an argument for errancy, not inerrancy. Due to the OT being an oral or ear-dominated society, W/S also propose a text-canonical updating hypothesis: “the model we propose agrees with traditional criticism in that it understands the final literary form of the biblical books to be relatively late and generally not the literary product of the authority figure whose words the book preserves” (66). This while Moses, Isaiah, and other prominent figures were behind the book, perhaps multiple, unknown editors were involved in any updating and final form of the books in the OT/NT that we have. For them, in the whole process of Scripture, “[t]he Holy Spirit is behind the whole process from beginning to end” in spite of the involvement of unknown hands in their final development (66). W/S negate the central idea of inerrancy that would center around original autographs that were inerrant, or that such autographs even existed,
Within evangelical circles discussing inerrancy and authority, the common affirmation is that the text is inerrant in the original autographs . . . since all copies were pristine, inerrancy could only be connected with the putative originals (66).

Modern discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has made it “clear that there was not only one original form of the final literary piece” of such books as Samuel and Jeremiah” (67). Which version is original cannot be determined. Under W/S it does not make any difference because “in the model that we have proposed here, it does not matter. The authority is associated with Jeremiah, no matter which compilation is used. We cannot be dependent on the ‘original autographs,’ not only because we do not have them, but also because the very concept is anachronistic for most of the Old Testament” (ibid).

For W/S, “inerrancy and authority are connected initially to the figure or the authoritative traditions. We further accept the authority represented in the form of the book adopted by faith communities and given canonical status” (ibid). “Inerrancy and authority attach to the final canonical form of the book rather than to putative original autographs” (68). Later on in their work, W/S assert that “inerrancy would then pertain to the role of the authorities (i.e. the role of Moses or Isaiah as dominant, determinative and principle voice), not to so-called authors writing so-called books— but the literature in its entirety would be considered authoritative” (281). For them, “[a]uthority is not dependent on the original autographs or an author writing a book. Recognition of authority is identifiable in the beliefs of a community of faith (of whom we are heirs) that God’s communications through authoritative figures and traditions have been captured and preserved through a long process of transmission and composition” (68). For them, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch “does not decide the matter” regarding its authority, “for many may have been involved in the final form of the first five books of Moses” (69). The final form involved perhaps many unknown editors and updaters: “Our interest is in the identifying of the prophet as the authority figure behind the oracles, regardless of the composition history of the book” (72). Thus, while Moses, Jeremiah, for instance were the originator of the tradition or document and names are associated with the books, this approach of many involved in the product/final form of the book and variations, “allows us to adopt some of the more important advances that critical scholarship has offered” (74). For them, unknown editors over long periods of time would have updated the text in many ways as time passed. They argue “it is safe to believe that some later material could be added and later editors could have a role in the compositional history of a canonical book” (299). Their positing of such a scheme, however, is suggestive that the text had been corrected, updated, revised, all which smacks of a case for errancy more than inerrancy in the process.

Again, orthodox views of inerrancy, like the 1978 Chicago Statement, were not so negative about determining the autographs as Article X related, “We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographs of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy.”
W/S also assert that “exacting detail and precise wording were not necessary to preserve and transmit the truths of Scripture” (181) because they were an “ear” related culture rather than a print related culture (Proposition 13).

In reply to W/S, while this may be true that the New Testament was oral, such a statement by W/S needs qualification in their propositions throughout. No matter what the extent of orality in the OT and NT as posed by W/S, the reportage in these passages is accurate, though it may not be, at times, precise. While they are correct that “exacting detail and precise wording were not necessary to preserve and transmit the truths of Scripture,” two competing views need to be contrasted in that oral reportage that was written down in the text of Scripture: an orthodox view and an unorthodox view of that reportage. This important distinction is lost in W/S’s discussion (see Norman L. Geisler, “Evangelicals and Redaction Criticism, Dancing on the Edge” [1987] for a full discussion):

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Article XIII of the 1978 Chicago Statement was careful to note that inerrancy does not demand precision at all times in reportage. Any criticism of the Chicago Statements in this area is ill-advised, “We further deny that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reportage of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.” W/S’s caveat on harmonization needs qualification: “it is not necessary to explain away the differences by some means of harmonization in order to fit modern standards of accuracy” (151). While anyone may note many examples of trite harmonization, this does not negate the legitimacy or need for harmonization. Tatian’s Diatessaron (c. 160–175) is a testimony to the ancient church believing that the Gospels could be harmonized since they were a product of the Holy Spirit. From the ancient Christian church through to the time of the Reformation, the church always believed in the legitimacy and usefulness of harmonization. It was not until modern philosophical presuppositions (e.g. Rationalism, Deism, Romanticism, etc.) that created the historical-critical ideology that harmonization was discredited. The orthodox position of the church was that the Gospels were without error and could be harmonized into a unified whole. The rise of modern critical methods (i.e. historical criticism) with its

On page 274, W/S assert “[o]ur intention is to strengthen the doctrine of biblical authority through a realistic application of knowledge of the ancient world, and to understand what inerrancy can do and what it can’t do.” They believe that the term inerrancy is a term that “is reaching its limits” and also that “the convictions it sought to express and preserve remain important” (274). “Inerrancy” is no longer the clear, defining term it once was and that “has become diminished in rhetorical power and specificity, it no longer serves as adequately to define our convictions about the robust authority of Scripture” (275). They cite several errors of inerrancy advocates in the past. Most notably are the following: inerrancy advocates, “have at times misunderstood ‘historical’ texts by applying modern genre criteria to ancient literature, thus treating it as having claims that it never intended.” Apparently, this position allows W/S to read the findings of modern “scientism” into the ancient text that often conflicts with today’s hypothesis of origins (i.e. creation). “They have at times confused locution [words, sentences, rhetorical structures, genres] and illocution [the intention to do something with those locutions—bless, promise, instruct, assert]. Inerrancy technically applies on to the latter, though of course, without locutions, there would be no illocution.” W/S here confuse inerrancy with interpretation and understanding of a text with this supposition. Each word is inspired but the understanding or interpretation of those words may not be considered “inerrant” but a process of interpretation of those words in the context in which those words occur. If Genesis 1 says “evening and morning” and “first,” “second” day, it is tenuous to imply that these terms are so flexible in interpretation to allow for long periods of time to accommodate evolutionary hypotheses. “They have been too anxious to declare sections of the Old Testament to be historical in a modern sense, where it may not be making those claims for itself.” Here, this principle allows W/S to negate any part of the Old Testament that does not accord with modern sensibilities. It creates a large opening to read into the text rather than allow the text to speak for itself. They assert that positions such as “young earth or premillenialism may be defensible interpretations, but they cannot invoke inerrancy as a claim to truth” (282). For W/S, “the Israelites shared the general cognitive environment of the ancient world . . . . At the illocutionary level we may say that traditions in the early chapters of Genesis, for example served the Israelites by offering an account of God and his ways and conveying their deepest beliefs about how the world works, who they are and how it all began. These are the same questions addressed by the mythological traditions of the ancient world, but the answers given are very different” (303–04).

One other area where the elasticity of W/S’s concept of history centers is that they allow for hyperbolic use of numbers in the Old Testament: “It is safe to believe that the Bible can use numbers rhetorically with the range of the conventions of the ancient world” (302). For them, “we may conclude that they are exaggerated or even that contradictory amounts are given in sources that report the same event” (302). “These may well be inaccuracies or contradictions according to our conventions, but
that doesn’t mean that they jeopardize inerrancy. Again, numerical quantity is location. Authority ties to the illocution and what the narrator is doing with those numbers” (302). Whatever he is doing, he is doing with the accepted conventions of their world” (302).

Finally, W/S argue that “our doctrine of authority of Scripture has become too enmeshed in apologetics . . . . If we tie apologetics and theology too tightly together, the result could be that we end up trying to defend as theology what are really just apologetic claims we have made” (306).

Finally, W/S contend: “ill-formed versions of inerrancy have misled many people into false understandings of the nature of Scripture, which has led to poor hermeneutics for interpreting Scripture and to misunderstandings of Bible translations. Even more serious, certain views of inerrancy have led people away from the Christian faith. Such views can also keep people from considering more important matters in Scripture. If there is a stumbling block to people coming to the faith, should it not be Christ alone rather than a wall that we inadvertently place in the way of spiritual pilgrimages?” (308).

This reviewer has one reply to the illogic of W/S. If the documents are cannot be trusted in their plain, normal sense (e.g. creation), then how can their testimony about Christ be trusted? If the documents have as much flexibility as hypothesized by W/S, how can they be trusted to give a reliable, accurate and faithful witness to Him? While W/S have wrapped their work in an alleged improvement of current concepts of inerrancy and its implications, they have actually presented a system that is (1) quite inferior to that of the ICBI statements of 1978 and 1982 and (2) one that really is designed to undermine the years of evangelical history that went into the formulation of those documents against the onslaught of historical-critical ideologies that W/S now embrace. They treat that history and reasons of the formulation of ICBI statements in a dismissive fashion that is perilous, for those who do not remember the events of the past are doomed to repeat its mistakes, as evidenced in this work of W/S. A better title for this book would have been “The Lost World of Inerrancy” since W/S’s system undermines the very concept.


Reviewed by Keith Essex, Associate Professor of Bible Exposition

The NICOT is one of the best evangelical commentary series on the OT. The reputation of the series will only be enhanced with this superb work on Judges. The author, Barry Webb, is Senior Research Fellow Emeritus in OT at Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia, where he taught for thirty-three years. He writes, “My labors on Judges began a long time ago. I spent most of 1982–84 in Sheffield, England, working on it for my Ph.D.” (xvii). His dissertation was subsequently published in 1987 with the title The Book of Judges: an Integrated Reading. In his new work, “New material has been added, and old material reworked in light of new research
that has been done since the 1980s. The result is a new and different kind of work. I had to start again, even if building on old, proven foundations” (xvii). The result of thirty years of intense study is evident on every page of this NICOT volume. Moreover, Webb writes in a warm, personal style that makes this commentary unusual, it is very readable.

An eighty-seven page introduction begins the commentary (1–87). Thirty-two of these pages are devoted in one way or another to a discussion of the previous writings on the Book of Judges, both Jewish and Christian. Webb concludes that Judges is a conceptual unit with a clear literary strategy. He writes, “Such is the book this commentary is concerned with. It is a given entity, a received object for study, not one whose existence or parameters must be postulated before interpretation can begin” (8). Webb states that his essential purpose is the same as Daniel Block in his NAC volume published in 1999: “First, it focuses on the final form of the text as the primary datum for exegesis; it focuses on the canon as the primary context in which Judges must be read to access its theology; and finally, it has strong interest in what lies in front of the text (in the life if the church) as well as what lies behind it (in the history of Israel)” (45). Ultimately, the historical, literary, or canonical study of biblical text must move to the task of theological exegesis for the contemporary church. “The main focus of this commentary is literary and theological” (10). However, while concentrating on the literary aspects of Judges, Webb does not discount its historical reliability. He writes, “While making full allowance for the theological agenda of Judges and its literary quality (to which we will give a lot of attention in this commentary), there is no reason in principle why it should not preserve, and indeed be anchored in, real historical knowledge of the period in question. Nor is it necessary, or even right, to subordinate its witness about this history to reconstructions based on the current state of archeological knowledge” (17). There is no attempt to give a precise chronology of the period of the Judges in this volume, but the author does state his preference: “However, on balance I am more convinced by the arguments for the earlier date [for the Exodus], and will assume for the purpose of this commentary that the exodus took place about 1446 B.C., giving us a date of 1326 B.C. for the beginning of the judges period. So we can think of the judges era as extending roughly from 1326 to 1092 B.C., about 234 years in all” (12). Webb also describes how Judges contributes canonically to OT theology (53–55), and notes connections of the book with other parts of Scripture in his literary analysis.

Toward the end of the Introduction (55–74), Webb tackles major issues associated with Judges. First, he deals with Judges as Christian Scripture. His foundation is the fact the NT does not repudiate the book, but rather invokes four of the judges as examples of faith (Heb 11:32). This does not mean “that we must whitewash the judges and turn them into paragons of virtue and models in all respects for Christian behavior” (57). Yet to point out their faults and not find “faith” in them is to miss something important. The book speaks realistically of the shameful abuse of women and the extreme violence during this era of Israel’s history. However, in both these cases, Webb points out that Judges is balanced. Concerning women, some were leaders, others manipulative, one a traitor, but some were victims of male power, insecurity, ambition, or folly. As for violence, there are three kinds of wars presented and, since there is no perfect justice in the world, arms can be taken up in a just cause.
Thus, these issues demand of the interpreter an identification of the theology that frames and interprets the data in the book. Second, the BHS text of Judges is relatively well preserved, and known variants from it contain the same subject matter in the same order throughout. Third, three translation issues are addressed. Webb’s own translation given throughout the commentary tends to be “direct” rather than “functional equivalent,” with few emendations of the Masoretic text as it stands. Also, the personal name of God is rendered “Yahweh” throughout. Finally, the large numbers in the text (20:15–18 for example) are allowed to stand since “no workable solution to the problem of the large numbers has been so far found, and the advantages of leaving them as they are outweigh any gains in changing them” (74).

The Text and Commentary section discusses the book sequentially (89–512). Webb adopts the standard threefold division of the book: Introduction (1:1–3:6), Careers of the Judges (3:7–16:31), and Epilogue (17:1–25:25). The strength of the commentary is the literary analysis of the units of the text with multiple diagrams provided. At the end of the Introduction discussion, the provisional theme of the book as a whole is stated: “Yahweh’s reluctant but just judgment on Israel” (156). This tension between Yahweh’s need to discipline His disobedient and ultimately unrepentant people with his desire to show compassion and mercy to them is highlighted throughout the rest of the book. The book concludes with indexes of authors (531–14), subjects (515–33), and Scripture references (534–55).

This NICOT volume is a highly recommended complement and supplement to Block’s NAC work, Judges, Ruth. It also complements well the new (2013) volume by Robert Chisholm, Jr., A Commentary of Judges and Ruth, in the Kregel Exegetical Library (KEL). Chisholm provides historical and grammatical discussion, which supplements Webb’s emphasis on literary analysis. The works of Webb, Block, and Chisholm have found expositional expression in Judges: Such a Great Salvation by Dale Ralph Davis. With these resources now available, there is no excuse for Judges not to be preached by evangelical expositors.
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