

## **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 locutionary 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 specious 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 extra-biblical 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 word *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 *meaner* (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:

<b>ADAPTATION VIEW</b>	<b>ACCOMMODATION VIEW</b>
GOD ADAPTS TO FINITUDE	GOD ACCOMMODATES TO ERROR
BIBLE USES ANALAGOUS LANGUAGE	IT USES EQUIVOCAL LANGUAGE
BIBLE STORIES ARE FACTUAL	SOME STORIES ARE NOT FACTUAL

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

#### INERRANTIST VIEW

REPORTING THEM

PARAPHRASING THEM

CHANGING THEIR FORM

GRAMMATICALLY EDITING THEM

#### NON-INERRANTIST VIEW

CREATING THEM

EXPANDING ON THEM

CHANGING THEIR CONTENT

THEOLOGICALLY REDACTING THEM

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 reinterpreted 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 to 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 from 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.BastionBooks.com](http://www.BastionBooks.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](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 ICBF*” (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**

#### **LEGITIMATE USE**

A MATERIAL CAUSE  
HELP PROVIDE PARTS  
ILLUMINATES SIGNIFICANCE

#### **ILLEGITIMATE USE**

THE FORMAL CAUSE  
DETERMINE THE WHOLE  
DETERMINES MEANING

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 “fallibilism” 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 investigative 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 (5<sup>th</sup> 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 (13<sup>th</sup> 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 (16<sup>th</sup> 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

Vanhoozer poses the question: “Why should the rest of the world care about North American evangelicalism’s doctrinal obsession with inerrancy” (Vanhoozer, 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” (Vanhoozer, 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 17<sup>th</sup>-century Englishman? Vanhoozer 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?” (Vanhoozer, 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” (Vanhoozer, 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 decry, 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 Gods' 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

(Acts 15:2). 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 Meldinius (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](http://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 of the Bible 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.