VIEWS ON THE INERRANCY OF THE BIBLE IN AMERICAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

by

JAMES HOWARD RAILEY

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in the subject

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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PROMOTER: PROF A KÖNIG

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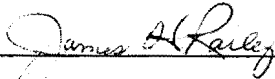
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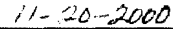
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SUMMARY

One of the distinguishing marks of American Evangelicalism is a commitment to

the Bible as the only authority for faith and practice. A question often debated is whether

the Bible should be viewed as inerrant, and if so, how the concept of inerrancy should be

understood. This study suggests that the concept of inerrancy should be maintained, but

that the concept must be understood in accordance with the way in which the biblical

materials present the concepts of truth and its opposite. The value of the doctrine of

inerrancy must be found in a better understanding not only of the didactic portions but

also of the phenomena of the biblical materials.

The first chapter of this study looks at nature American Evangelicalism and

considers the historical development of the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible. The

next three chapters consider in turn each of three divisions within American

Evangelicalism about the understanding and usage of the doctrine of inerrancy: Complete

Inerrancy, Conditional Inerrancy, and Limited Inerrancy. Complete Inerrancy is the most

rigid of the three, maintaining that in the original writings of the Bible there were no

errors, neither in spiritual nor in secular matters. Conditional Inerrancy conditions the

understanding of inerrancy by the intent and purpose for the Bible as understood from the phenomena of the texts. The focus is shifted from the autographs of the Scripture to the texts which the contemporary person has to read and study. Limited Inerrancy limits the usage both of the term and of the concept inerrant in relation to the Bible, preferring the descriptor infallible, arguing that neither in the original writings nor in the present texts of the Bible is inerrancy to be found. There are errors in the texts, but they do not take away from the ability of the Bible to accomplish its divine purpose of bringing people into contact with the Redeemer God. The last chapter draws from the analysis of the arguments within American Evangelicalism material needed to construct a redefined concept of inerrancy which maintains its importance.

Key Terms: Evangelicalism; Evangelical Theology; Scripture, Doctrine of; Inspiration, Doctrine of; Scripture, Inerrancy of; American Theology; Scripture, Authority of; Bible, Doctrine of; Bible, Inerrancy of.

INTRODUCTION

One of the distinguishing marks of American Evangelicalism is the commitment to the Bible as the only authority for faith and practice. This commitment elevates the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture to the level of great importance within the movement because of the linkage between inspiration and authority. Accompanying the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible as it is raised in theological discussions is the debate about the status of the Scripture in relationship to truth. The question which is the focal point of the debate is whether the Bible should be viewed as inerrant, and if so, how the concept of inerrancy should be understood.

This study suggests that the concept of inerrancy is one which should be maintained within Evangelicalism, but also argues that the concept must be understood more in accordance with the way in which the biblical materials present the concepts of truth and its opposite. The approach which characterizes a segment of Evangelicalism which begins with the modern understanding of truth and error as they relate to scientific precision and contemporary modes of literary exactness is difficult to apply to a book written in a different time with a unique purpose and intent. The value of the doctrine of inerrancy must be found in a better understanding not only of the didactic portions but also of the phenomena of the biblical materials.

The first chapter of this study will look at American Evangelicalism, attempting to

discern the nature of the movement and considering how the question about inerrancy of

the Bible has come to the present moment. The variety of ways in which the doctrines of

inspiration and inerrancy are presented within Evangelicalism will be noted and the

historical development of the inerrancy question will be examined.

The next three chapters will consider in turn each of three major divisions within

American Evangelicalism about the understanding and usage of the doctrine of inerrancy.

This study will suggest that the larger debate can be dealt with more easily by arranging

the discussion into three smaller groupings: Complete Inerrancy, Conditional Inerrancy,

and Limited Inerrancy. The view which is designated as Complete Inerrancy is the most

rigid of the three in the approach to the inerrancy of the Bible. This position maintains

that in the original writings of the Bible there were no errors, neither in spiritual nor in

secular matters. Beginning with an understanding of God as the ultimate author of the

Bible, and seeing Him as absolutely perfect, the argument is that the writings produced at

His direction should, of necessity, also be without error.

The view which is identified as Conditional Inerrancy conditions the

understanding of inerrancy by the intent and purpose for the Bible as understood from the

phenomena of the texts. The focus is shifted from the autographs of the Scripture to the

texts which the contemporary person has to read and study. The proponents of

Conditional Inerrancy prefer to maintain the usage of the term inerrant in relation to the

Bible, but do alter its meaning from that used by Complete Inerrancy.

The third grouping of views about the inerrancy question, Limited Inerrancy,

limits the usage both of the term and of the concept inerrant in relation to the Bible. The

position argues that neither in the original writings nor in the present texts of the Bible is

the inerrancy which is claimed by the Complete Inerrancy view to be found. There are errors in the texts, but they do not take away from the ability of the Bible to accomplish its divine purpose of bringing people into contact with the Redeemer God. He used the human authors with all of their limitations and inaccuracies to provide the record of His revelation to humankind. Instead of speaking of the inerrancy of the Bible, Limited Inerrancy prefers to use the concept of infallibility.

The last chapter of this study will draw from the analysis of the arguments within American Evangelicalism about inerrancy material needed to construct a suggested understanding of the concept of inerrancy which maintains its importance. The main issues of the debate will be highlighted and criteria constructed by which both to judge approaches to inerrancy and to guide in the development of an understanding of the concept. A proposed doctrine of inerrancy, which calls for the maintenance of a redefined concept of inerrancy, will be presented in this final chapter.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF THE INERRANCY ISSUE

The focus of this study is on a particular movement within the American Protestant church, Evangelicalism, and, more particularly, on the ways in which the theology of Evangelicalism expresses its understanding of the inspiration of the Scriptures, especially as inspiration relates to the often misunderstood concept of inerrancy. In this first chapter Evangelicalism will be defined and the history of the conflict about the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture will be traced from the eighteenth century until the present. Several themes in the history of this issue coalesced into the controversies of the early twentieth century which resulted in the establishment of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, the official representative of the Evangelical movement in the United States. Those themes will be considered in this chapter and their importance to the current debate among Evangelicals as to the understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy will be noted.

1.1 What is Evangelicalism?

1.1.1 Definition and Basic Beliefs

The movement which has come to be known as Evangelicalism is not easily defined. A detailed sketch of those beliefs is beyond the scope of this chapter, but an

overview of the basic tenets of faith is helpful in understanding the movement.[1] While

various emphases and defining attributes can be ascribed to Evangelicalism, Richard T.

France argued that "it is thus true today, as it has been since the word 'evangelical' came

to be used as the title of a distinct breed of Christian, that all who would wish to be

included under this title would agree to at least the following three propositions: (1)

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[1]Among the many explanations of Evangelicalism and evangelical beliefs are those presented by Donald G. Bloesch, Evangelical Renaissance (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 52-75 passim. Bloesch built upon this framework to produce his two volume systematic theology of Evangelicalism, Essentials of Evangelical Theology, and has begun a projected seven-volume treatment of Evangelical beliefs, Christian Foundations. The first volume of that set, A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), introduces the set and considers that doctrine of theological authority while the second volume, Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), deals with the specific doctrine of Scripture. Richard V. Pierard, "Evangelicalism," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 379-380, presents the beliefs of Evangelicalism in a manner very similar to that of Bloesch. Millard J. Erickson in The New Evangelical Theology (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1968) summarizes Evangelical theology under similar categories as those used by Bloesch. Erickson expands upon those themes in his later work, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998). Carl F. H. Henry presents several books and articles which summarize Evangelical beliefs. Perhaps his edited work, Basic Christian Doctrine (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), which is a compilation of forty-three articles which first were published in Christianity Today, best identifies the theological views of Evangelical scholars. Harold J. Ockenga in Our Evangelical Faith (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1946) presents an explanation of the statement of faith of the National Association of Evangelicals which correlates well with what is presented here. David R. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, in The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Going, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), present thirteen essays detailing the variety of approaches to understanding Evangelicalism. In a similar way, Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, in The Variety of American Evangelicalism (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), presented essays from representatives of a dozen different traditions within the larger Evangelical world. James Davison Hunter in two works considered the variety within Evangelicalism from a sociological perspective: American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), and Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Special revelation is necessary for a true knowledge of God; (2) The Bible is the supreme

and only sufficient locus of all revelation; (3) The Bible is the inspired Word of God"

(1982, 226). These three basic affirmations would not be held monolithically, but would

certainly be held among Evangelicals.

Donald Bloesch, while not disputing the three basics of Evangelicalism which

France sets forth, suggested that the basis of Evangelicalism must be found in the

Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone (1978, 7). Evangelicalism claims to

have direct linkage with the faith of the Reformers. Robert K. Johnston's summary seems

best to capture the spirit of Evangelicalism: "Evangelicals identify with the orthodox faith

of the Reformers in their answers to Christianity's two fundamental questions; (1) 'how is

it possible for a sinner to be saved and to be reconciled to his Creator and God?' (the

answer: *sola gratia, sola fide*); and (2) 'by what authority do I believe what I believe and

teach what I teach?' (the answer: *sola scriptura*)" (1979, 3). In addition to the doctrinal

tenets of Reformation truth, Evangelicalism holds the warmth of Pietism. Johnston noted

that Evangelicalism is "that group in Christendom whose dedication to the gospel is

expressed in a personal faith in Christ as Lord and whose understanding of the gospel is

defined solely by Scripture, the written Word of God" (1979, 3).

Bernard Ramm maintained, correctly, that "in the most general sense, evangelical

Christianity refers to that version of Christianity which places the priority of the Word

and Act of God over the faith response, or experiences of men" (1973, 13). While not

ruling as inappropriate the faith response of the individual, indeed the faith response is

the fundamental response of the sinner to the Gospel, this characterization focuses on the

more rational approach to faith which sets Evangelicalism apart from both the emphasis

on feelings which Schleiermacher maintained and that on ethical and volitional choice

which was proposed in Modern Liberalism.[2] This characterization of Evangelicalism also

demands that the authority of the Word of God be maintained over all human

philosophies and religions.

Bruce Shelley expanded Ramm's analysis by emphasizing the crucial nature of the

necessity of personal salvation in Evangelical thought. He suggested that Evangelicals

"emphasize salvation by faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ through personal

conversion, the authority of Scripture, and the importance of preaching in contrast to

ritual as a means of saving grace" (1967, 14). This concern for personal salvation is a

major theme of Evangelicalism, one which is even more important than the concern for

doctrinal agreement (Shelley 1967, 17).

The primary task of Evangelicalism remains the conversion of individuals, but

social involvement is seen as a method of accomplishing that goal. Bloesch opined that

while "Evangelical theology holds that the key to social amelioration is personal

regeneration" (1973, 74), "social service done in the name of Christ is also an integral

part of the mission of the church"(1973, 73) . While Bloesch does not represent all of the

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[2]This tension between a rational commitment to the "faith" and a experiential response to the "faith" continues to rage in Evangelicalism as evidenced by two recent books, each emphasizing one of these approaches. David F. Wells, No Place for Truth: Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), argues for the maintenance of the more rationalistic commitment, while Stanley J. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), suggests that room must be made for the experiential response of the community and of the individual to the body of accepted beliefs. This discussion is not ended, but the characterization of Evangelicalism as placing more priority on the Word and Act of God than on the faith response of the individual still seems to be valid.

diverse opinions under the Evangelical umbrella, he does speak for the mainstream of

thought. Social concern and action are important for Evangelicals because they are a

"fruit and evidence of our faith and also a preparation for the proclamation of faith"

(1973, 73).

One of the difficulties in defining Evangelicalism is that it is a religious

movement, not a denomination. The neat lines which are useful in differentiating between

denominations within Christendom are not very helpful at all in coming to an

understanding of Evangelicalism. George M. Marsden averred that there are some clear

indicators of that which makes one an Evangelical: "roughly speaking, evangelicalism

today includes any Christians traditional enough to affirm the basic beliefs of the old

nineteenth-century evangelical consensus. The essential evangelical beliefs include (1)

the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, (2) the real historical

character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture, (3) salvation to eternal life based on

the redemptive work of Christ, (4) the importance of evangelism and missions, and (5)

the importance of a spiritually transformed life" (1991, 4-5).

Richard Quebedeaux, a sympathetic critic of Evangelicalism, admitted that there

are various expressions of Evangelicalism and that the movement is not monolithic

enough to be definitively limited. He suggested that there are, nonetheless, three unifying

themes which make Evangelicalism identifiable: "(1) the complete reliability and final

authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice; (2) the necessity of a personal faith

in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and consequent commitment to Him as Lord; and (3)

the urgency of seeking actively the conversion of sinners to Christ" (1974, 4).

Shelley, in a book written to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the

National Association of Evangelicals, came close to the essence of Evangelicalism. He asserted that "Evangelical Christianity is not a religious organization. It is not primarily a theological system. It is more of a mood, a perspective, and an experience" (1967, 7). This characterization further emphasizes the somewhat amorphous nature of Evangelicalism and gives ample warning against the easy assertion of a definition for the movement. It is more accurate to follow Shelley's lead and attempt to trace the mood, perspective, and experience which characterize Evangelicalism as it expresses itself within various denominational labels and guises.

Timothy Weber noted that the movement can be compared to an extended family tree containing four main branches: classical, pietistic, fundamentalistic, and progressive. The classical Evangelicals are committed to the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, especially the authority of the Bible, justification by faith, an Augustinian anthropology, and a substitutionary view of the atonement. Pietistic Evangelicals, while also committed to the tradition of the Reformation, seek to complete that tradition with the incorporation of the experiential emphases of pietism, Puritanism, and the Evangelical awakenings of the eighteenth century. Fundamentalist Evangelicals embrace many of the characteristics of the classical and pietistic Evangelicals, but are especially shaped by the controversies with the modernists which took place in the early years of the twentieth century. They are greatly concerned with what is considered to be the fundamentals of the faith in opposition to liberalism and the negative effects of 'higher criticism.' Progressive Evangelicals maintain many of the emphases of the other branches of Evangelicalism, but with a greater sense of the need to relate to modernity. They hold more lightly to many of the items of faith considered to be traditional orthodoxy within Evangelicalism,

especially in the area of biblical inerrancy, the use of biblical criticism, and in the area of

personal mores (Weber 1991, 12-13).

Donald Dayton, in analyzing the variety of expressions within the larger world

called Evangelicalism, even came to the point of asserting that the term Evangelicalism

has become so amorphous in its usage as to no longer have any value as a description of a

religious movement on the American scene. He argued that "the category 'evangelical'

has lost whatever usefulness it once might have had and . . . that we can very well do

without it" (1991, 245). Making use of an analytical scheme much like that of Weber

(Dayton sees a threefold division of American Evangelicalism: reformational, pietistic

and conversionist, and fundamentalist), Dayton posited that the subsets within American

Evangelicalism are more easily identified apart from the label Evangelical and that that

label is used so variously as no longer to have coherent meaning.

The movement called Evangelicalism within the American religious scene is

difficult to define, but, to maintain Weber's analogy of the extended family, there are

characteristics which can be seen which do give to it some identification. One of those

identifying marks is to be found in the doctrine of Scripture; Evangelicals are committed

to a doctrine of the Scripture which views it as inspired of God and the authoritative rule

for faith and practice. American Evangelicals are not unique within Christianity in

affirming the inspiration and authority of Scripture, but this belief does have special

significance within this branch of Christendom. This special significance is seen in that

the doctrine of Scripture serves as a point of unity and of division within the movement.

1.1.2 Doctrine of Scripture

The Bible is accepted in Evangelicalism as the infallible norm for faith and

practice. Morris Inch argued that because Evangelicalism claims the redeeming work of

Christ as the core of its belief structure Scripture is indispensable in that it is "normative

for our understanding of the person and work of Christ" (1978, 17). This affirmation

links directly to a high view of the inspiration of the Bible. Evangelicals view God as the

primary author of Scripture, even though it is also "the product of men who lived in a

particular time and place" (Bloesch 1973, 55). The human writers were guided in their

selection of words and meanings so that their overall witness to the revelation of God is

reliable and trustworthy. The authority of the Scripture is divine, an authority derived

from its being the revelation of God. He alone is the ultimate authority.

The authority of the Scripture derives, as has been noted, from it relationship to

the self-disclosure of God. Carl F. H. Henry argued that that self-disclosure is

intelligible, thus making it both necessary and possible for human beings to have a

cognitive knowledge of God (1967, 10-11). The emphasis on the rationality of revelation

and the value of human understanding and reason, a hallmark of Henry's position, keeps

Evangelicalism from the extremes of existentialism and pietism, though both schemes of

thought have influenced the movement at several points.

The high view of Scripture which is held in Evangelicalism grants to the Scripture

prominence both in its belief structure and its practice. That recognition neither demands

nor necessitates a narrow biblical literalism nor a denigration of the rightful place and

proper use of historical criticism. Bloesch maintained that the "historical-critical method

can throw light upon the cultural and historical background of the text, but it cannot lay

hold of the divine significance of the text" (1973, 57). The presumed tension between the use of the methods of 'higher criticism' and viewing the Scripture as a product of divine revelation remains within Evangelicalism as one of the many areas of debate and discussion.

It is a mark of American Evangelicalism, as is the case within many other Christian traditions, that the Scriptures are affirmed to be inspired, but there are differences within the movement as to exactly what is meant by that assertion. Kern Robert Trembath provided a helpful analysis of the differences in approach to the doctrine of inspiration in the movement in his book, Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration, which began as his doctoral dissertation at the University of Notre Dame. Trembath's analysis will be used here to illustrate some of the variation in beliefs about inspiration in American Evangelicalism.

Trembath divided the theories of inspiration into two broad categories, each having some diversity within it, which he labeled deductivist theories and inductivist theories. A deductivist approach begins with the understanding "that knowledge is grounded upon beliefs which are not subject to empirical verification but nevertheless guide or influence empirical observations" (1987, 8). Generally, deductivist theories of inspiration begin from the theological confession of a doctrine of God which holds that God is absolute truth, that He is the author of Scripture and that He cannot be in any way a part of that which is contrary to His nature of absolute truth. Therefore, because of the prior commitment to the doctrine of God which governs all other doctrinal affirmations, the Bible is separated from all other books and elevated to the status of being the inspired and inerrant Word of God. As examples of the deductivist approach to the doctrine of

inspiration Trembath examines Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, John W.

Montgomery, and Edward J. Carnell (1987, 10-46). Each of the exemplars represents the

same approach, but each does so differently.

The second broad category into which Trembath divides the approaches to

inspiration in American Evangelicalism is given the name inductivist because "it begins

with what is more surely known by the mind through experience and proceeds to inspect

what is not yet known through comparison with the known" (1987, 47). Trembath uses

three theological figures to exemplify this inductivist approach, August H. Strong,

Bernard Ramm, and William J. Abraham (1987, 48-71). Each of these takes inspiration to

refer first to the effect that the Bible has on those who call it inspired, and from that

attempt to account for how the Bible can be said to be the "vehicle of inspiration.

Inspiration, that is, is taken to refer to an act of the mind which perceives a source of

enhancement and enlightenment outside itself" (Trembath 1987, 47).

The categorization employed by Trembath illustrates the diversity within

American Evangelicalism about the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible. Louis

Hodges, acknowledging nuances of meaning for the concept of inspiration, asserted that

"a careful study of formal definitions of inspiration offered by evangelical writers reveals

a broad diversity in content, emphasis and expression" (1994, 99). To illustrate his

contention, Hodges cited definitions from twenty-nine Evangelical theologians, each of

which varies somewhat (Hodges 1994, 110-114). After examining the variety of

definitions of inspiration, Hodges proposes his own: "Graphic (written) inspiration is the

activity by which that portion intended by God of his special revelation was put into

permanent, authoritative, written by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, who

normally worked concurrently and confluently through the spontaneous thought processes, literary styles, and personalities of certain divinely-selected men in such a way that the product of their special labors (in its entirety) is the very Word of God (both the ideas and the specific vocabulary, complete, infallible, and inerrant in the original manuscripts" (1994, 109).

The connection between inspiration and inerrancy is certainly made by many, but not by everyone, within Evangelicalism. As there are varieties of positions taken about the doctrine of inspiration, so there are numerous views within American Evangelicalism about the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible. Those views are categorized variously by those who provide surveys of these options. It will be helpful to note a few of the possible schematizations employed before suggesting the manner in which this study will categorize the views on inerrancy in Evangelicalism.

Robert Johnston divided the views about inerrancy into four camps: (1) detailed inerrancy, (2) partial infallibility, (3) irenic inerrancy, and (4) complete infallibility (1979, 19). Those whom Johnston categorized as detailed inerrantists argue that the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy are inextricably intertwined and that inerrancy demands that there are no errors, factual or otherwise, in the original writings of the Scripture. The partial infallibilists admit that the writings of the Bible contain errors at some points, but affirm that the witness to the gospel is still trustworthy and authoritative in spite of those errant materials. Those whom Johnston identifies as irenic inerrantists assert that the Bible is without error, but argue that the Bible must be allowed to determine the nature of that inerrancy according to the purpose and intention of the Scriptures. Johnston's fourth category, complete infallibilists, rejects the use of the term

inerrancy in reference to the Bible, preferring the term infallible with which to describe

the character of the biblical materials (1979, 19).

The categorization employed by Millard Erickson is much more detailed, dividing

the inerrancy positions into seven groups. The first view, absolute inerrancy, asserts that

the biblical materials are completely true and without error in all of their contents,

spiritual, historical, scientific, and geographic. Full inerrancy, Erickson's second

category, is much like the absolute inerrancy view, differing only in that the non-spiritual

material within the Bible, while still without error, is presented in phenomenal language

which must be understood and interpreted properly . The language may be more popular

than precise and is certainly in keeping with the world view of the authors, and it is

without error when understood in that light. The third category, limited inerrancy, sees a

difference between the materials in the Bible related to its salvific intentions and those

which are not related to that purpose. Inerrancy does not extend to the materials not

related to the salvific intent; in those areas the human authors were subject to the

limitations accompanying their being human and not having total knowledge about

science, history, and geography.

Erickson identified a fourth view about inerrancy, inerrancy of purpose, which

asserts that the Bible inerrantly accomplishes its purpose of bringing people into

fellowship with Christ. Since the purpose of the Bible is not to communicate truths, per

se, and since inerrancy relates to factuality in relation to truths, the Bible cannot be said to

be inerrant. Accommodated revelation, Erickson's fifth category, dismisses the term

inerrancy altogether, arguing that the revelation of God was fully accommodated to the

human vessels through which it came. That accommodation made use of the frailties of

the human authors both in the spiritual and non-spiritual aspects of their writing. The

sixth category maintains that revelation is nonpropositional, the Bible is itself not

revelation, and the question of truth or error does not apply to the biblical materials at all.

Finally, Erickson identified a position within Evangelicalism which is dismissive of the

debate about inerrancy, seeing it as completely irrelevant. The term inerrancy, and the

debate about its usage, causes far more trouble in the understanding of the value of the

Bible for the believer than it is worth (1998, 248-250).

Gabriel Fackre suggested a division of the views about inerrancy within American

Evangelicalism into three positions: conservative, moderate, and liberal. The conservative

position holds that the autographs of the Bible are completely without error and engages

fervently in the task of the harmonization of the apparent conflicts between accounts,

reported sayings, and doctrinal and moral teachings. Acknowledgment is made of the

human participation in the writing of the Bible, but that human element is not seen as

important as the divine element which worked to ensure that inerrancy was maintained.

The moderate position still holds that the Bible is without error, but elevates the human

element in its writing, admitting that there are errors in the texts that are now in use.

Those errors, however, do not touch basic Christian doctrines and are very minor in

comparison to the totality of the texts. The liberal inerrantists, in Fackre's determination,

insist that the Bible itself must determine how it is to be interpreted and what it means by

the concept of inerrancy. The various literary genres of the Bible must be considered

differently in the discussion about inerrancy (1987, 65-69).

This study of the doctrine of inerrancy in American Evangelicalism will divide

the various views on the subject into three categories: complete inerrancy, conditional

inerrancy, and limited inerrancy. The complete inerrancy view is marked by a firm

commitment to the inerrancy of the biblical texts in every respect, a commitment which is

focused on the autographs. Difficulties in the texts must be harmonized if at all possible.

The conditional inerrancy view chooses to condition the concept of inerrancy by the

intent and purpose of God in giving the Scriptures. The focus is on the texts which are

presently in use, difficulties in those texts are acknowledged, and the term inerrancy is

retained because of its possible value in maintaining proper respect for the authoritative

status of the Bible. The third category, limited inerrancy, severely limits the usage of the

concept of inerrancy. The difficulties within the biblical texts are seen as errors and

preference is placed upon calling the Bible infallible in that it does accomplish its God-

intended purpose in spite of the errors which are in the texts because of their human

authorship. These three groupings will allow for the doctrine of inerrancy to be analyzed,

from which an increased understanding of the concept and of its value for Evangelicalism

can come.

1.2 Precursors to the Controversies

1.2.1 Antebellum America

The issues which eventuated in the twentieth-century conflict among Evangelicals

concerning the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture have a long history, far longer than

can be considered presently. It is suggested that looking at the controversies which

marked the early years of the twentieth century are crucial for understanding the present

situation in American Evangelicalism. However, those controversies are not themselves

understandable without consideration being given to the concerns and positions which

were present prior to the beginning of the twentieth century. To gain some understandings

of this background it is necessary to begin in the America of the eighteenth century and

trace the development of lines of thought and coalitions of viewpoints which exploded

into open conflict in the early twentieth century.

Stewart Cole argued that the "early makers of America were a devoutly religious

people," and that the Christianity of these people was strictly evangelical, that is, it was

"undergirded with a compelling gospel of redeeming grace" (1971, 3). Cole noted that

"in such a culture the highest premium was placed upon a knowledge of the Scriptures"

(1971, 10). As a correlation to their concern for a knowledge of the Scriptures they also

evidenced a concern for correct doctrine. The church played a major and vital part in the

lives of the people, one which Cole called "a regulative agent of the first magnitude"

(1971, 14). The emphasis upon the central role of the Bible as that regulative agency set

the stage for more formal statements about the specific way in which the Bible served its

function in society, that is, as an infallible source of insight into the mind of God.

The America of the pre-Civil War years was certainly not dominated by but one

denominational expression. However, in terms of its influence upon the overall flow of

thought and societal life the Presbyterian Church exerted influence beyond its size.

Further, the conflicts within and without the Presbyterian Church concerning the

authority of Scripture, were not only descriptive of but also determinative of the future

resolutions of this doctrinal expression. For these reasons, a major focus of the historical

survey will be on the Presbyterian Church and the positions taken by its leaders on the

matter of the authority and inerrancy of the Bible.

Lefferts A. Loetscher, former Professor of Church History at Princeton

Theological Seminary, observed that Presbyterianism in the United States was composed of two major elements, the Scotch-Irish and the New England-English-Welsh. The "Scotch-Irish wing has been the churchly or Presbyterian 'high church' party which has stressed the more 'objective' aspects of religion such as precise theological formulation, the professional and distinct character of ministry, and orderly and authoritarian church government." On the other hand, the "New England element has contributed values of a more 'sectarian' type, laying less emphasis upon elaborated, fixed theology and on authoritarian church government, and more emphasis on spontaneity, vital impulse, and adaptability" (1954, 1). The tensions between the two groups led to the Old Side-New Side schism of 1741-1758 and to the Old School-New School schism of 1837-1869.

In 1729 the Presbyterians, in a compromise between the two major factions, approved the Adopting Act, which committed the denomination to the Westminster Confession, and yet allowed the individual minister some latitude in the interpretation of the Confession (Loetscher 1954, 2). This commitment to the Westminster Confession gave Presbyterians a focal point for the development of their common beliefs and practices, but it did not bind them to an absolute standard to which appeal could be made in the event of disagreements among themselves. The freedom of interpretation allowed by the 1729 Adopting Act opened the door for several areas of debate, including that of the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, and later the elevation of that view as the determinative doctrine for acceptance within the church.

Theodore D. Bozeman defined Old School Presbyterianism as "the branch of the antebellum Presbyterian church that refused to acquiesce in the rising current of optimism about man and his capacities . . . " (1977, 33). The most important center of influence for

the Old School position within the Presbyterian Church was Princeton Seminary. The predominance of Scottish Common Sense, with its linkage to Baconianism, at Princeton gave orthodox Presbyterianism a thorough immersion in the powerful river of Baconian induction based upon the image/belief union of Common Sense. The influence of Princeton Seminary, the Princeton Theology which arose there, Scottish Common Sense Realism, and the philosophy of Francis Bacon will be considered more carefully below. It needed to be noted here, though, that these powerful streams of influence impacted the development of Presbyterian thought and life, especially that of the so-called Old School Presbyterians.

The New School Presbyterians allied themselves with New England Congregationalism during the Second Great Awakening of the early decades of the nineteenth century to emphasize "revivalism, moral reform, interdenominational cooperation, and evangelical piety . . . " (Marsden 1970, x). They were forced to be a separate denomination by their Old School opponents from 1837 to 1869. In 1869 the two factions reunited to form the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

1.2.2 Millenarianism

To understand properly the formation of the coalitions which opposed each other in the controversies of the early twentieth century and the resultant decisions about the inerrancy of the Bible, further consideration of the millenarian movement of the nineteenth century is needed. Ernest R. Sandeen argued that the millenarian movement was the major formative influence upon the movement which came to be known as Fundamentalism, a movement which played a determinative role in the evolving

understanding of the important place of Scriptures in the church (1968; 1970). Whether

one accepts Sandeen's thesis in its entirety, the influence of millenarianism upon the

doctrine of the inerrancy of Scriptures must be noted.

Sandeen defined millenarianism as "Christian apocalypticism, focused upon the

millennium," that is, focused upon the 1000 years referred to in Revelation 20 which

follow the return of Christ in power to defeat the enemy and inaugurate a peaceful

kingdom (1970, 4). Sandeen noted that while belief in the future millennium was a part

of the teaching of the Church throughout its existence, a position which is debated, the

French Revolution of the 1790s fueled the fires of belief and expectancy that the

millennium so long anticipated was finally at hand (1970, 6-8).

Western society in the mid-nineteenth century had become increasingly

secularized; materialism, capitalism, and nationalism were on the rise. The American

church in the main gave its blessings to this secularization, which gave rise to, in the

years leading to 1846, several millennial movements within American theology. There

was a strong post-millennial understanding, especially in the teaching of men like

Jonathan Edwards, who saw the American experiment as ushering in the millennial

kingdom; there were also the pre-millennial groups like the Disciples of Christ and

Alexander Campbell, the Mormons and Joseph Smith, the Shakers and Mother Ann Lee,

and the Oneida community and John Humphrey Noyes (Sandeen 1970, 42-49). Pre-Civil

War millenarian views in America, however, were largely of the optimistic post-

millennial variety. The success of the American experiment, coupled with the series of

revivals, or awakenings, led the church to anticipate the kingdom being created among

them by the Christianizing of society. Jesus would only need to return to reign over the

kingdom. The Civil War brought serious questions about such a scheme of history

(Ellingsen 1988, 64).

After the Civil War pre-millennialism had an increased impact with its pessimism

about the progress of civilization, its literal interpretation of Scripture, and its

understanding that the return of Christ would precede the millennium and the entrance of

the kingdom of God. The more pessimistic views of pre-millennialism, which did not

anticipate success in Christianizing the world but looked to the judgment of the second

advent of Christ as the catalyst for the entrance of the kingdom of God, were accepted

more easily in the post-Civil War era.

"Pre-millennialism is the form of Christian orthodoxy that anticipates an

unparalleled era of peace and righteousness to be established by Christ upon His return to

earth" (Shelley 1967, 65). There are two primary types of pre-millennial belief. The

historic pre-millennial view sees a continuity between God's work with Israel, the church,

and the coming kingdom. The future kingdom, which will be ushered in by the return of

Christ, will see the consummation of God's dealings both with the church and with Israel.

The second type of pre-millennial belief, growing out of the work of J. N. Darby

and the Plymouth Brethren, is known as Dispensationalism. Based upon a

philosophy/theology of history which sees numerous dispensations of God's dealings

with human kind, Dispensationalism looks forward to the return of Christ in two stages:

one to complete God's work with the church (the secret rapture), and the other to

complete His work with national Israel (the Tribulation). The second coming of Christ

will unite the two workings of God and create a new heaven and new earth. Teachers like

J. N. Darby, W. E. Blackstone, James H. Brookes, and C. I. Scofield propounded this

dispensational view of pre-millennialism based on the premise "that the Bible was absolutely reliable and precise in matters of fact, that its literal meanings were plain, and that whenever possible it should be taken literally" (Marsden 1980, 51).

The Dispensationalism which was imported to America from Britain, having grown there in the Plymouth Brethren, especially as it was codified in the teachings of John Nelson Darby, was the combination of two important factors. The first was an ecclesiology which viewed the church as composed of true believers who lived within a corrupt church deserving judgment and who will be removed by a secret return of the Lord. The second factor was a literal reading of Scriptures with an attempt to systematize them into a great scheme of revelation. Mark Ellingsen asserted that this combination provided Dispensationalism with its foundation (1988, 63).

The millenarian movement as a whole was concerned for the literal understanding of the biblical material because such an interpretive method buttressed their understanding of God's dealings in history. Even more so, it is to be observed that "one of the major characteristics of the Dispensationalists is their particular concern for biblical literalism" (Sandeen 1968, 7). This was more than the a concern for the value and importance of the Bible; this was more than seeing the Bible as the inspired Scripture upon which to base the beliefs and practices of the church; rather, this approach demanded the Bible be seen as a complex system of prophecies and symbols which must be interpreted literally and not merely symbolically and/or figuratively. The next step in this process in the development of the view of Scripture was to see the Bible as inerrant. As viewed by the Dispensationalists, because the literal meaning is important for the establishment of their understanding of history and the future, the Bible must be accepted

as being without error, or the whole system of Dispensationalism is subject to collapse.

Norman Kraus identified three basic theological assumptions of Dispensationalism: (1) a rigid theory of verbal and plenary inspiration, (2) the absolute depravity of man and his helplessness to assist in his own salvation, and (3) the sovereign transcendence of the triune God (1958, 61). While each of these three served vital roles in the development of Dispensationalism, for this study the first is of most concern. Kraus asserted that "the Dispensationalists put forward a strict, mechanical theory of verbal inspiration as a bulwark against the inroads of Biblical criticism" (1958, 65). The Bible had, for them, a direct relationship to revelation. The words of the Bible were the very words of God, supernaturally revealed. Since this was so, the Bible is inerrant because God cannot lie or err in any way.

The views about the literal meaning of the Bible held in the millenarian movement, especially as it evolved into Dispensationalism and then to Fundamentalism, tended toward the doctrine of inerrancy. The theology which developed at Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century gave firm foundation to these views. More will be said about the Princeton Theology below, but it needs to be mentioned here that there was a clear linkage between that theology and Dispensationalism. Sandeen sees the linkage between Dispensationalism and Princeton Theology as: (1) a shared general mood, (2) both held to the central theme of biblical authority, (3) both believed in an inerrant Scripture, (4) both appealed to the original autographs, (5) both thought in pre-Kantian, pre-Schleiermacherian, rationalistic terms, (6) both stressed God's transcendence and supra-historical power, (7) both were pessimistic about social problems, and (8) both shared modernism as a common foe (1968, 14).

Sandeen sagely observed that "it ought to be noticed that the effect of the

Princeton doctrine of the Scripture and the millenarian literalistic method of interpreting

the Scriptures was very much the same. Both Princeton and the millenarians had staked

their entire conception of Christianity upon a particular view of the Bible based

ultimately upon eighteenth-century standards of rationality. Both of these schools of

thought had vowed to defend the Bible or die in the attempt" (1970, 130-131).

1.2.3 Scottish Common Sense Realism and Baconianism

Much has been made already of the influence of the philosophy of Scottish

Common Sense Realism on the development of the doctrine of inerrancy in American

theological thought. The power of this philosophical school upon the flow of American

theology in general, and the Princeton Theology in particular, cannot be overestimated. In

this section attention will be focused on this philosophy and its impact in America.

Marsden provided a simple definition: "Common Sense said that the human mind

was so constructed that we can know the real world directly" (1980, 14). Scottish

Common Sense Philosophy was founded by Thomas Reid (1710-1796) as a response to

"the skepticism of David Hume, the Idealism of Bishop George Berkeley, and the

revolutionary social theories of the radical French Enlightenment" (Noll 1983, 31).

Hume and Berkeley argued that "it was impossible rationally to demonstrate any identity

between the ideas in our minds and external reality" (May 1976, 344). Reid, granting that

it was true that little could be proven by reasoning, parried by noting that if this was true

much of what was commonly held by humankind would have to be dispelled because

they were no longer capable of being proven. There then, of necessity, have to be notions

commonly held which had to be accepted because they were commonly held by rational

humans. Some of the notions to which Reid had reference were that humans could know

actual objects and not just ideas of those objects, that the reality of causation could be

accepted, and that conscience and intuitions were both real and valuable.

Reid, who's Inquiry Into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense

earned for him the chair of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow, viewed the

mind as a "functioning instrument that performs processes, not simply a stockpile of

nonmaterial objects called 'ideas'" (Hovenkamp 1978, 8). Humans know objects by

means of ideas, they do not merely know ideas. Reid linked knowledge and belief,

asserting that one could perceive, for example, a tree and believe that that tree was really

there because of the assumption, although unverifiable, that the senses do provide reliable

information. The unverifiable belief that what is being looked at really exists is forced

upon one by the act of perception, not by logical argument. This feeling is so powerful

that it is as convincing as logical demonstration, and this is what Reid called "common

sense." Reid's system was thoroughly empirical, arguing that "all of man's knowledge of

the external world comes to him through his senses" (Hovenkamp 1978, 9). The rational

mind functioned in linking together bits of empirical data, thus creating self-evident

principles which also were a part of the items which were "common sense" to all people.

The appointment of John Witherspoon to the presidency of the College of New

Jersey in 1768, later to become Princeton College, was the introduction in America of

Scottish Common Sense Realism. Hovenkamp argued that "Scottish Realism became

much more than another philosophical theory taught in a particular set of lectures on the

little campus. It became an evangelical world-view that permeated every classroom and

which eventually influenced hundreds of ministers, countless schoolmasters, and dozens of practicing scientists and physicians" (1978, 5).

By the 1790s Scottish Common Sense had become the basis of the standard curriculum in American colleges, partly because the controlling force in those colleges was moderate Calvinism, either expressed through Presbyterians or Congregationalists (May 1976, 346-347). Common Sense Realism "reigned supreme in American colleges, driving out skepticism and Berkeleyan idealism, and delaying the advent of Kant" until the Civil War, and in some quarters, such as that of the Princeton theologians, much longer (May 1976, 348).

The Common Sense Realist of the late eighteenth century believed in three sources of knowledge: (1) reason, (2) nature, and (3) scriptural revelation from God (Hovenkamp 1978, 10-11). Of these, it was believed that God spoke most directly through nature and the Scriptures. "The Scriptures contained a set of facts in exactly the same way that nature contained facts, and learning from the Bible was an empirical process. One had to receive the data, analyze and organize them, and draw valid conclusions" (Hovenkamp 1978, 11). Using the tools of the original languages of the Bible and proper interpretive principles the student could arrive at the correct beliefs of the faith. This approach created what can be called orthodoxy, the systematizing, recording, and dissemination of the truths of the faith arrived at by the inductive and analytical method of Common Sense Realism. The legacy of such a system was the insistence that all knowledge, both natural and scriptural, must be based on facts and not hypotheses.

Having this foundation of Common Sense, which appealed to the ability of

humans to know reality, "the inductive scientific method of seventeenth-century philosopher Francis Bacon was the one sure way to build on this common sense foundation" (Marsden 1980, 15). The work of Thomas Reid, the founder of Scottish Common Sense Realism, and his successor Dugald Stewart, was greatly indebted to the prior work of Francis Bacon. Bozeman argued that "the seldom-qualified veneration in which Reid and Stewart held the name of Bacon appears to be the effectual root of the Baconian Philosophy" (1977, 5). The major focus which Reid drew from Bacon was the latter's emphasis on the inductive method of reasoning.

1.2.4 Princeton Theology

To this point several disparate themes, all of which had an impact upon the development of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture and led toward to controversies of the early twentieth century, have been discussed. It remains now to consider the force which tied many of those themes together and gave them cogency and vitality - Princeton Theology. "The Princeton Theology was born with the founding of Princeton Seminary in 1812 and endured as a living force for about one hundred years" (Sandeen 1968, 12). The major forces in the Princeton theology were the theology professors of the school, Archibald Alexander (the first, and for a time the only, professor at the new Seminary), Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield, and professor of New Testament, J. Gresham Machen. Mark Noll averred that the four men who held the principal chair of theology from the founding of Princeton in 1812 to the 1920s, "shared to a remarkable degree a common conception of the theological task, took their bearings from a common view of Scripture, possessed common beliefs about the nature of truth,

and reasoned in common ways toward their Calvinistic conclusions" (1983, 13).

Mark Ellingsen argued that "the fundamental commitment of Princeton theology was to maintain American Presbyterianism's fidelity to The Westminster Confession of Faith" (1988, 73). Sandeen, to the contrary, argued that the theology of Princeton was not that of the Calvinism of John Calvin, but that the "methodology and the conclusions of their theology differed clearly from the work of Calvin himself and the standard of the Westminster Confession" (1968, 12). He asserted that Princeton Theology ignored the criticism of Hume and Kant and constructed a rationalistic method which arranged all the facts of the biblical material into a cogent presentation. They were concerned for external, not internal or personal, proofs for their theological propositions.

"Although the Princeton professors conceived of themselves as traditional Calvinist theologians, their fundamental assumptions about the theological task were derived from eighteenth-century models" (Sandeen 1970, 116). They attacked the appeal to natural religion which Deism represented and also the appeal to experience which enthusiasm, or mysticism, represented. The appeal in Princeton Theology was to reason. The theologian worked with the data of Scripture much like the scientist worked with the data of her research. The "experiential element, the witness of the Spirit, the mystical strain" must be "subordinated to the matter of theological science, the Scripture" (Sandeen 1970, 118). The Princeton theologians felt that theology must be based on the rational perception of the propositions of the Bible, propositions which all men are capable of understanding.

The Princeton Theology was convinced that the Christian faith was defined by the message of the Bible, thus it espoused a high view of the inspiration and authority of

Scripture (Noll 1983, 26-27). While fidelity to the plenary inspiration of Scripture was

constant through the first four theologians of Princeton, the expression of that view

became increasingly explicit and detailed from Alexander to Warfield. The reasons they

held so strongly to the authority of Scripture included their argument that the Bible was

entirely true (i.e. history, logic, and the evidences all proved the veracity of the Bible) and

that the Bible was inherently powerful in compelling the believer to accept its authority

(Noll 1983, 26).

"The whole Princeton view of truth was based on the assumption that truth is

known by apprehending directly what is 'out there' in the external world, not a function

of human mental activity. The mind discovers objective truth, which is much the same for

all people of all ages" (Marsden 1980, 114). This confidence was based upon their

commitment to the claims of the Scottish Common Sense Realism thoroughly immersed

in the philosophy of Francis Bacon. The Princetonians must not be divorced from the

culture in which they lived and worked. They shared with many in their age a

"widespread concern to maintain authentic spirituality in the midst of enthusiasm, nascent

rationalism, and creeping modernization" (Noll 1983, 34). In many other ways they also

represented the common consensus of their times. Noll argued that Common Sense

Philosophy was held by the majority of other American theologians of the day, that for

most of the century almost all evangelical Protestants shared a high view of the

Scriptures, and that Newtonian science was believed by almost the whole of American

intellectual culture (1983, 34-35).

"In a day of alarming change and subjectivism in religion, the so-called 'Princeton

Theology' seemed to offer an almost mathematical demonstration of an unchanged and

unchangeable religious outlook" (Loetscher 1954, 21). A chief characteristic of the

Princeton Theology was a supreme confidence in the ability of humans to reason to the

truth. The separation of reason from experience, which was necessitated by the method of

the Princeton Theology, proved to be both a strength and a weakness for the system.

1.2.5 Postbellum America

George Marsden observed that "in 1870 almost all American Protestants thought

of America as a Christian nation" (1980, 11). The Civil War behind them, the future was

unlimited in what it could be with the expansion of Christianity into every area of

America life. Revivalism and social reform linked together to advance the kingdom.

"Two premises were absolutely fundamental - that God's truth was a single unified order

and that all persons of common sense were capable of knowing that truth" (Marsden

1980, 14). This view accurately reflected the optimism of Scottish Common Sense

Realism, which by 1870 had over a century of impact in the American psyche. Marsden

suggested that in "spite of competition from various forms of Romantic Idealism,

Common Sense Realism remained unquestionable *the* American philosophy" (1980, 14).

During the period of time after the Civil War, however, two distinct cultures, or

world views, began to clash in American - the secular and the spiritual. The rising

industrial base of the American economy, with its accompanying urbanization and

materialization, hastened the conflict. The primacy of the more spiritual world view was

threatened by increasing knowledge about the world of science which provided secular

answers to questions which heretofore had received answers from the church, answers

which had depended upon allegiance to biblical authority. For example, the questions as

to the origin of human beings and the age of the earth, questions which previously had been answered with phrases and concepts from the infallible Bible, now were given answers from the world of science. The progressive evolutionary theories espoused by Darwin caused a radical shift in world view (Gasper 1981, 9).

Darwin's The Origin of Species (1859) brought into question, among other concerns, the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Marsden noted, though, that "the wider issue was whether the Bible could be trusted at all" (1991, 13). Evolution, the major theoretical expression of science at that time, brought all absolutes into question, including those recorded in the biblical material. With its emphasis of progression and change, the fixity of a revelation to which all must give allegiance became questionable (Loetscher 1954, 10). "For most educated American evangelicals, however, the commitment both to objective science and to religion was so strong, and the conflict so severe, that they were forced into one of two extreme positions. They could choose to say with Hodge that Darwinism was irreconcilable with Christianity - a new form of infidelity - and that it was speculative and hypothetical rather than truly scientific. The alternative solution was a redefinition of the relationship between science and religion" (Marsden 1980, 20).

To complicate the situation even further, the results of the Enlightenment in the field of biblical studies began to find welcome on the American landscape. The movement known as German 'higher criticism,' which questioned the historicity and reliability of the Bible, threatened to remove the foundation from beneath the spiritual world view. Increasing pressure was placed upon the church as more of its clergy traveled to Germany for their theological education, returning with the impact of historical-critical

approaches to the Bible and theology upon them (Loetscher 1954, 10). As the nineteenth

century grew to a close, more and more of those who would lead American modernism

received their theological education in Germany, primarily influenced by Rudolf

Hermann Lotze, Albrecht Ritschl, and Adolf von Harnack (Hutchison 1976, 122). The

influence of these German thinkers led to what might be called idealistic personalism, an

"insistence that reality must be defined in personal terms" (Hutchison 1976, 126). The

theological appropriation of this understanding would be to assert that God is personal

and "that human beings both know God and share the reality of God by virtue of their

own personhood" (Hutchison 1976. 126).

The underlying developments which allowed this shift to occur were the move

from the philosophical base of Common Sense Realism to Idealism in America and the

waves of new thought which came from Europe. "With the coming of the twentieth

century, critical reason, as developed by the Renaissance and further emphasized by the

Enlightenment, came to full fruition" (Loetscher 1954, 90). Ronald Nash argued that the

philosophies of Kant and Hegel, along with the theologies of Schleiermacher and Ritschl

were the major factors which began to impact the American scene in the latter half of the

nineteenth century, leading to the reaction which became Fundamentalism (1963, 21).

Added to their influence was that of the advances in natural science. "Many educated

people began to feel that the Humean and Kantian criticisms of traditional Christianity

and the implications of Darwinian evolution had made Christian supernaturalism a relic

of a dark and superstitious past" (Nash 1963, 22).

Marsden noted that because of the factors mentioned in the 1880s the solid and

optimistic front of the 1870s American evangelicalism began to crumble and the outlines

of American liberalism began to appear. "First, the progress of the Kingdom of God is identified with the progress of civilization, especially in science and morality. Second, morality has become the essence of religion and is indeed virtually equated with it. Third, the supernatural is no longer clearly separated from the natural, but rather manifests itself only in the natural" (1980, 24). In this advance, "theology was no longer viewed as a fixed body of eternally valid truths. It was seen rather as an evolutionary development that should adjust to the standards and needs of modern culture" (Marsden 1980, 25). In the face of the changing culture there were those within the church who felt that adaptation and accommodation were the ways in which the church could remain relevant. "These men set themselves the dutiful task of reinterpreting the religious witness in the face of secularism. They became the liberals of the church" (Cole 1971, 29). Those who felt the church must stand firm for the orthodoxy of the past without any attempted reconciliation became the conservatives within the church.

William Hutchison noted that there were three important aspects to the modernist, or liberal movement in the American church. First, it included the conscious and intended adaptation to modern culture by the religious faith of the church. Second, modernism viewed God as immanent in human cultural development, asserting that He revealed Himself through that culture. Third, modernism taught that human society was moving toward its ultimate realization, the kingdom, but it was not necessarily optimistic that such a goal would be realized (1976, 2). Schleiermacher can be considered the father of modern Protestant theology for many reasons, including the fact that he "embodied and articulated the new attitude toward culture" (Hutchison 1976, 5). The modernists, building on the program of Schleiermacher worked not so much to adjust religion to

culture as to remove what they saw to be an artificial barrier between religion and culture

(Hutchison 1976, 9).

In reaction to these modernizing trends, the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture

which matured during the time following the Civil War asserted the Bible's historical and

scientific reliability. Marsden noted that "with the rise of higher criticism in America in

the late nineteenth century . . . interest in using the assent to 'inerrancy' as a test for

defining the community of true believers had been growing" (1987, 112). In particular,

two groups were committed to this view of Scriptures, the Dispensationalists and the

Princeton theologians. This defensive reaction to the impact of Darwinism with its

evolutionary teaching accelerated the development of the doctrine which had its genesis

earlier in the millennial and Dispensationalist movement.

1.2.6 The Bible/Prophecy Conference Movement

One of the earliest responses to the post-Civil War situation was the beginning, in

1868, of conferences, composed mainly of conservative Presbyterians and Baptists, to

consider biblical themes and millennial prophecy. These conferences met each summer

until 1900, and from 1883 until 1897 in Niagara Falls, New York. Some among these

conferees were more dispensational in their approach to millenarianism, so in 1878, and

again four more times until World War I, Prophetic Conferences were convened which

placed even more emphasis upon pre-millennialism and biblical inerrancy. Dispensational

millennialism, then, became one of the vehicles which united the two streams noted

above into the movement of Fundamentalism (Ellingsen 1988, 60). In these conferences

the common theme of pre-millennialism became a factor which welded together the

unlikely alliance of Dispensationalism and the Princeton Theology (Sandeen 1968, 15).

"Bible conferences joined orthodox evangelicals of all denominations to deepen

class fellowship and to contend for the soundness of their testimony" (Cole 1971, 31).

These Bible/Prophecy conferences urged that people "subordinate science and philosophy

to revelation, to reinstate the Bible as supreme authority in the church, and thus be saved

from confusion" (Cole 1971, 33). "The Bible conference movement . . . represented fifty

years of conservative's effort to maintain their Christian witness in a cultural situation

that was slipping away from their control" (Cole 1971, 35).

1.3 The Emerging Fundamentalism

1.3.1 Characteristics of Fundamentalism

As a protest against the rising modernism in the church, the Bible/Prophecy

conference movement with its pre-millennial orientation paved the way for

Fundamentalism. Bruce Shelley claimed that the real concern of the Bible/Prophecy

movement was the authority of the Bible. The basic issue was whether, as the

conservatives believed, the Bible was the absolute standard for one's religion and life, or,

as the modernists held, it was but a treasury of religious devotion. Was the test of truth to

be found in the Bible, or elsewhere "in the scientific study of men, society, and the

natural world" (1967, 61)? Marsden noted that Fundamentalism "was a movement among

American 'evangelical' Christians, people professing complete confidence in the Bible

and preoccupied with the message of God's salvation of sinners through the death of

Jesus Christ" (1980, 3). Fundamentalism never became a denomination; rather, it was a

loosely confederated group of individuals and groups who fought fiercely against the

encroachment of what they perceived to be evil. They clearly emphasized the need to return to the fundamentals of the faith, from which, in the Fundamentalist way of thinking, the modernist church had turned away.

Perhaps one of the clearest ways to characterize Fundamentalism is by referring to the Five Points. Tradition, from the work of Stewart G. Cole, asserted that these points grew out of the 1895 Niagara Bible Conference and became the statement of faith for the Fundamentalist movement (1971, 34). However, Sandeen argued that "the one five-point declaration which did influence the Fundamentalist movement was adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1910 and reaffirmed in 1916 and 1923. By that action the following doctrines were declared to be essential: the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the atonement of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the miracle-working power of Christ" (1970, xiv). Sandeen is correct that the Five Points come from a point in time beyond the initial emergence of Fundamentalism, however, these five theological assertions do serve well to characterize Fundamentalism.

1.3.2 The Fundamentals

Lefferts Loetscher observed that "many date the beginnings of fundamentalism from the publication of The Fundamentals, a series of twelve pamphlets . . . " (1954, 91). This series of pamphlets was published between 1910 and 1915 and provided free to "every pastor, missionary, theological professor, theological student, YMCA and YWCA secretary, college professor, Sunday school superintendent, and religious editor in the English-speaking world . . ." (Marsden 1980, 119). The effort was financed by Lyman and Milton Stewart, wealthy California brothers who were dedicated to the concerns of

conservative Christianity (Sandeen 1968, 18). They preferred to be identified in the volumes merely as "Two Christian Laymen."

The Fundamentals was edited by Amzi C. Dixon, "a dispensationalist Baptist minister who was at that time pastor of the Moody Memorial Church" (Sandeen 1968, 19). Sixty-four authors wrote ninety articles for the volumes, twenty-nine of which dealt with biblical authority. These volumes were quite irenic in tone. In fact, Marsden noted that the two most controversial issues of that day, Dispensationalism and millennialism, were almost entirely absent from the pamphlets (Marsden 1980, 119). In spite of their irenic tone, Cole saw the publishing of this series as an "orthodox manifesto . . . a test of Christian loyalty and as a corrective to the position of liberals. This event gave the party an aggressive policy and a consciousness of social solidarity in an urgent cause" (1971, 52-53). The essays in The Fundamentals were designed to be testimonies to the truth, and as such did not engage the liberal positions in a point-by-point rebuttal. The specific areas in which the liberal views were controverted were their 'higher criticism' of the Bible, the "minimizing of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the seriousness of sin, the justice of divine punishment, or the miraculous effect of Christ's atoning death" (Hutchison 1976, 197).

While The Fundamentals had minimal impact upon the American church and society to which they were first addressed, the product is quite good, the majority of the articles being "irenic, calm, and well balanced" (Ellingsen 1988. 51). Hutchison concluded that the failure of The Fundamentals to enter into any real dialogue with the claims of modernism helped to insure that they would be ignored by the liberals almost entirely (1976, 198). In fact, there was little reaction to The Fundamentals in any of the

scholarly press of that day, conservative or liberal. "The <u>Princeton Theological Review</u>

seems quite definitely to have joined in the general indifference to <u>The Fundamentals</u>.

William B. Greene of Princeton welcomed volume one, and Caspar Wistar Hodge

mentioned the existence of volume three; but both reviews, the second of which was

utterly noncommital, were perfunctory 150-word notices that contrasted blatantly with

the extensive essays that Princeton lavished on nearly every liberal work" (Hutchison

1976, 199). Though their immediate impact was limited, because "of the quality of the

authors and their product, it is not surprising the <u>The Fundamentals</u> have made a long-

term imprint on the American religious psyche" (Ellingsen 1988, 51).

1.3.3 World's Christian Fundamentals Association

The millennial fervor which marked the Bible/Prophecy conferences of the latter

part of the nineteenth century waned early in the twentieth century only to be revived and

redirected after World War I. In 1916 a small group of ministers met in Montrose,

Pennsylvania to lay the groundwork for the movement which became the World's

Christian Fundamentals Association, attracting in the next two years such notables as

William Bell Riley, Reuben A. Torrey, dean of the Los Angeles Bible Institute, W. E.

Blackstone, author of books supporting the millenarian views, Leander W. Munhall, an

evangelist and editor, Charles G. Trumbull, editor of the influential <u>Sunday School</u>

<u>Times</u>, and Cortland Myers, fiery preacher from Boston (Furniss 1954, 49).

Furniss noted that "the first noteworthy conference of these early

Fundamentalists, a 'Philadelphia Prophetic Convention,' took place during May of 1918

and proved to be a popular event, for five thousand people thronged to the twelve

sessions" (1954, 50). The second conference, held at Moody Bible Institute, also in 1918, proved to be much more important to the movement because it took a decidedly militant tone, advocating the careful monitoring of the educational institutions to insure conformity to the orthodox standards and separation from churches considered to be apostate if necessary. The conference also "recommended the formation of a permanent organization to combat modernism and evolution and took the first step in this direction by appointing several committees to pursue the proposed methods of attack" (Furniss 1954, 51).

The formal founding of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association took place at the World's Conference on Christian Fundamentals held in Philadelphia, May 25 to June 1, 1919. At this conference R. A. Torrey and William Bell Riley "changed the program of the conference from an emphasis upon prophecy to an emphasis upon the fundamentals of the faith" (Sandeen 1970, 243). Sandeen argued that "as a result of the 1919 World's Conference on Christian Fundamentals, the millenarian movement had changed its name. The millenarians had become Fundamentalists" (1970, 246). Over the next decades the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, and several other similar organizations, fanned the flames of conservatism in theology and defensiveness against the evils of modernism through national and regional conferences and through magazines and journals.

1.4 The Controversies

1.4.1 Causes of the Controversies

The uneasy alliance which had kept the northern Presbyterian Church together

erupted in the latter part of the nineteenth century and resulted in major fissures in the

early part of the twentieth century. Norman Furniss, in his work on the Fundamentalist

controversy, identified five principal causes of the controversies (1954, 14-32). First, the

attack upon conservative belief and practice from the proponents of 'higher criticism' and

the evolutionary theory was offensive to the conservatives, who felt that the clear

teachings of the Bible were being set aside, which would result would in a lowering of

moral values and practices. Second, the conservatives failed to understand the teachings

of the exponents of evolution, choosing rather to caricature their positions than to

understand and dialogue with them. Third, the atrocities of World War I shattered the

optimism of Darwin's progressive interpretation of human existence and resulted in

bitterness toward all things German, including 'higher criticism.' Fourth, the major

champion of the conservative's cause, William Jennings Bryan, himself a controversial

political figure, engendered more intensity about the controversies. And, last, the neglect

and denigration with which the modernists and evolutionists responded to the attacks

from the conservatives early in the confrontation indicated that they felt the controversies

were not very important, which only served to increase the attacks.

1.4.2 Heresy Trials

The heresy trials within the Presbyterian Church of the late nineteenth century

were a clear indicator that the controversies had begun. These trials questioned certain

ministers about their beliefs which deviated from the positions maintained by the church.

The heresy trial of David Swing, 1874, was of "signal importance in announcing and

augmenting the presence of modernist ideas within the evangelical churches" (Hutchison

1976, 48). Swing, as pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church (then called Westminster

Church) in Chicago ran afoul of orthodoxy by insisting that "all religious expressions are

dependent upon the culture within which they are formulated, and that they cannot be

understood apart from that culture. Negatively, this meant that Scriptures, doctrines, and

creeds are of less than absolute validity, and that parts of all of them must be discounted.

On the positive side, because Swing believed in progress, it meant that new religious

expressions could be found that would improve upon older ones. One would not need to

do away with doctrine altogether; the need, rather was for adaptation" (Hutchison 1976,

52-53). The Chicago Presbytery, which heard the twenty-eight charges brought against

Swing, decided in his favor by a margin of 48-13 (Hutchison 1976, 68). Clearly the

Presbytery felt that the teachings of David Swing were not at that time completely out of

line with those of the church as a whole, but that he was placed on trial seems to imply

the suspicion that some incipient modernism was at work within the evangelical churches

of the day.

Charles A. Briggs' book, Whither? (1889), accused the Princeton theologians, and

other conservatives, of departing from the Westminster Confession in the direction of a

Calvinistic scholasticism. In his inaugural address upon his appointment to the chair of

Biblical theology at Union Seminary in New York, January 20, 1891, he noted "three

sources of authority - the Church, the Reason, and the Bible - without saying whether

they were coordinate or not" (Loetscher 1954, 49). He listed as barriers to the operation

of divine authority in the Bible superstition in the form of bibliotry, the doctrine of verbal

inspiration, too great anxiety for the authenticity of the Bible, the doctrine of inerrancy,

the conception of miracle as a violation of the laws of nature, and the conception of

prophecy as minute prediction (Loetscher 1954, 49-50). The inaugural set off a firestorm of controversy. After several aborted efforts, the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1893 voted to remove Briggs from the Presbyterian ministry until he repented of his unacceptable views. In 1898 he entered the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church (Loetscher 1954, 62).

Henry Preserved Smith, a faculty member at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, became enmeshed in the Briggs' controversy because of his friendship with, and commitment to, Briggs. At a meeting of the Presbytery of Cincinnati in 1891 considering an overture to the General Assembly because of Briggs' inaugural, Smith attempted to defend Briggs' rejection of Biblical inerrancy (Loetscher 1954, 63). The Presbytery, despite Smith's appeal, drafted a pastoral letter to its churches affirming the inerrancy of the Bible. It was clear that Smith's views were at variance with his church. The Presbytery of Cincinnati voted in September 1892 to prosecute Smith and the trial began on November 14. "The Presbytery of Cincinnati found Dr. Smith guilty on two of the three charges, and on December 13, 1892, by the close vote of 31 to 26 suspended him from the Presbyterian ministry 'until such time as he shall make manifest, to the satisfaction of the Presbytery, his renunciation of the errors he has been found to hold, and his solemn purpose no longer to teach or propagate them " (Loetscher 1954, 64).

The next major opportunity for the General Assembly to struggle with charges of heresy came as a result of the publication of A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age by Arthur C. McGiffert in 1897. McGiffert, formerly a colleague of Smith at Lane Seminary, then a professor at Union Seminary, argued that no special supernatural guidance accompanied the writing of the Scriptures, the result of which was a Bible

marked by the competing viewpoints of the various authors (Loetscher 1954, 71). The

New York Presbytery took action to condemn some portions of McGiffert's book, but did

not prosecute him for heresy. Dissident members of the New York Presbytery, unhappy

with the decision, appealed to the 1900 General Assembly to have McGiffert tried for

heresy in relation to the assertions in his book plus the charge of violating his ordination

vows. To avoid the trial, McGiffert resigned from the Presbyterian ministry before the

Assembly met.

In May 1922 Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist who by special permission was an

associate pastor and the stated preacher of the First Presbyterian Church of New York,

preached the sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" charging Fundamentalists with

being intolerant conservatives (Marsden 1980, 171). In the sermon Fosdick expressly

attacked three doctrines -- the virgin birth, Biblical inerrancy, and the physical return of

Christ -- insisting that these three were not essential doctrines and should not be made

litmus tests of fidelity to the tradition. This became the opening salvo in what would

become a war for the control and destiny of the Presbyterian Church. The Philadelphia

Presbytery petitioned the General Assembly "to condemn the teachings expressed in

Fosdick's sermon and to instruct the Presbytery of New York to see that further preaching

from the First Church conformed to orthodox Presbyterian standards" (Marsden 1980,

173). The accompanying furor led Fosdick to resign his position with the First

Presbyterian Church in October 1924, effective March 1925 (Dollar 1973, 96).

1.4.3 Machen's Book

J. Gresham Machen joined the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1915

as professor of New Testament and assumed the mantle as the defender and exponent of

the Princeton Theology. In 1923 he published Christianity and Liberalism, a call for

choosing the Christianity of the Westminster Confession and rejecting liberalism.

Liberalism was not Christian at all, and liberals should be driven out of the church

(Marsden 1980, 174-175). Loetscher asserted that Machen claimed that "contemporary

theological liberalism was not a harmless variation of historic Christianity, but that, on

the contrary, Christianity and liberalism were two distinct and wholly different religions"

(1954, 116). Machen argued that his day was a "time of great conflict: the great

redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a

totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian

faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology" (1923, 2). Based upon

this thesis, Machen concluded that it was inconceivable that those holding these

diametrically opposed views could stay in the same church. The liberals should leave, he

suggested, because the Christians were holding to what had been believed from the

establishment of the church. Such exclusivity was well received by the growing

Fundamentalist movement, and equally disapproved by the liberals.

1.4.4 The Auburn Affirmation

The 1923 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, dealing with the charges

against Henry Emerson Fosdick, reaffirmed the decision of the 1910 General Assembly

to impose a five-point test of faith upon Presbyterian ministers. In January 1924, over the

signatures of 150 ministers, a pamphlet entitled An Affirmation Designed to Safeguard

the Unity and Liberty of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, later

known as the <u>Auburn Affirmation</u>, was published (Furniss 1954, 134). The <u>Affirmation</u>

proclaimed acceptance the Westminster Confession while denying its infallibility,

rejected Scriptural authoritarianism in favor of the Holy Spirit's guiding the believer,

rejected the five-point test of orthodoxy as being additional to Scripture, and asserted the

right of toleration for every member of the church (Cole 1971, 103). By the time of the

1924 General Assembly the <u>Affirmation</u> had been republished over the signatures of

1,274 Presbyterian ministers (Loetscher 1954, 117). While neither the 1924, nor any

subsequent General Assembly, formally voted on the <u>Affirmation,</u> its effect was steadily

to move the church away from the rigid test of faith contained in the Five Points toward a

much more tolerant view in regard to the faith and practice of its ministers.

1.4.5 General Assembly Meetings

From 1729, when the Presbyterians approved the Adopting Act, the church was

committed to the <u>Westminster Confession of Faith</u>, but allowed some tolerance in the

interpretation of the statement of their faith (Loetscher 1954, 2). To focus more narrowly

that position "in 1910 the Presbyterian General Assembly, in response to some questions

raised about the orthodoxy of some of the graduates of Union Theological Seminary,

adopted a five-point declaration of 'essential' doctrines'" (Marsden 1980, 117). The more

conservative members of the church saw these five points as non-negotiable items of

belief to which every minister must conform. As the controversies continued to rage

within the church questions were raised as to the appropriateness both of the particular

faith statements and of requiring them for ordination.

Led by several important figures including William J. Bryan, J. Gresham Machen,

and Clarence Macartney, by the 1920s the Fundamentalists were firmly entrenched and exerted great power in the Presbyterian church (Furniss 1954, 127). However, that dominance was tenuous and changed quickly. An opening salvo in the coming conflict was heard at the 1921 General Assembly as charges were made that some Presbyterian missionaries in China were affected by 'higher criticism' and modernism and were defecting from viewing the Scriptures as inerrant. These charges were first made by Rev. William Henry Griffith Thomas, an Episcopal clergyman, who had traveled, along with Mr. Charles G. Trumbull, to China in 1920 and had observed first-hand these alleged heretical views (Loetscher 1954, 104). The 1921 General Assembly reaffirmed faith in the Board of Foreign Missions and in the missionaries themselves, but it also requested the Board and the presbyteries which sponsored the missionaries to continue to examine the complaints (Loetscher 1954, 107).

At the 1923 General Assembly in reaction to the sermon by Fosdick, a motion was adopted "which called upon the presbytery of New York to take action to bring the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City into line with Presbyterian doctrine, and for the second time restated the five points first declared essential to the faith in 1910" (Sandeen 1970, 252). At the 1924 General Assembly, in reaction to the Auburn Affirmation, it was decided that it was "not legal for the General Assembly alone to erect new standard of belief" (Sandeen 1970, 252). This decision rendered the famous five-points an empty gesture, no longer having the force of discipline upon offenders. The 1925 General Assembly appointed a Commission of Fifteen to study the unrest within the denomination and to propose a solution. The Commission reported at both the 1926 and 1927 General Assemblies stressing the Presbyterian Church's history of

toleration, denying the General Assembly the right to determine which doctrines above others are essential and deferring to local presbyteries in the task of licensing and ordaining ministers. In effect, the Commission voided the five-points which had been determined to be essential for all Presbyterian ministers to affirm (Sandeen 1970, 252-254).

In May of 1926 the Board of Directors of Princeton Seminary elected Machen to the Stuart Jessup Chair of Apologetics and Christian Ethics at the Seminary. The General Assembly, which had the responsibility for overseeing the affairs of Princeton, did not approve his election, deciding rather to create a committee to study the organizational structure of the school (Cole 1971, 126). There had been for some time conflict between the factions within the Seminary faculty and between the two boards of governance, the Directors and the Trustees. The committee reported at the General Assemblies in 1928 and 1929, and their report, approving a reorganization and granting more control over the Seminary to the General Assembly, was adopted in 1929 (Loetscher 1954, 146). With the growing influence of the liberals in the General Assembly the conservatives had lost another major battle.

"Within a few months of the commission's final report (at the 1929 General Assembly), a reorganization at Princeton Seminary was begun which ultimately turned the school away from the logical rigidity of the Princeton Theology and ended the domination of the school by the Hodge-Warfield faction" (Sandeen 1970, 256). This led to the resignation of four faculty members (J. Gresham Machen, Oswald T. Allis, Cornelius Van Til, and Robert Dick Wilson) and the founding, by these four, of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, on September 25, 1929, with a faculty of eight

and a student body of fifty-two (Loetscher 1954, 148).

In 1933 Machen created an "Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Mission" as a protest against the perceived liberal teachings in the foreign missions fields (Marsden 1980, 192). The 1934 General Assembly moved to ban Presbyterian office-holders from participation in the Independent Board, which resulted in Machen's trial and removal from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in 1936. Machen then formed the Presbyterian Church of America (Ellingsen 1988, 90). "By the summer of 1937 the Presbyterian Church of America was split and the millenarians formed the Bible Presbyterian Synod led by J. Oliver Buswell, president of Wheaton College, Allen MacRae, one of the professors at Westminster, and Carl McIntire, at that time only a minister but later to become one of the leaders of the antiecumenical and anticommunist crusades of the 1940s and 1950s" (Sandeen 1970, 259-260).

The defeat of the Fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Church was complete. They were driven from the church which they had controlled almost totally just two decades earlier. After being removed from the Presbyterian Church they continued to separate from each other, splintering into more groups which looked at each other judgmentally, attempting to identify those who were most conservative and most faithful to the "faith once delivered to the saints."

1.4.6 The Scopes Trial

Not only did the theological modernists gain increasing influence within the church with their calls for tolerance and openness to the possibility of new ways to express truth, a major political disaster aided in the demise of the influence of

Fundamentalism within the church. Furniss identified the trial of John T. Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, as the climax of "the fundamentalist controversy, that acrimonious dispute over evolution in science and modernism in theology which had arisen after the first World War" (Furniss 1954, 3). Fundamentalism's greatest victories, Furniss argued, were in the arena of public education where they had won legislative decisions to prohibit the teaching of evolution. "During the years from 1923 to 1925 such pressure had produced favorable results in Oklahoma, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas" (1954, 3). In March of 1925 the governor of Tennessee signed legislation which made it illegal "for any teacher in any of the universities, normal and all other public schools of the state, to teach any theory that denies the story of the divine creation of man as taught in the Bible and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals" (Furniss 1954, 4). Furniss noted that what was to become a news item attracting attention around the world began as a staged event, planned by George Rappelyea and John Scopes, to bring the constitutionality of the new law into question. Scopes, a public school teacher in Dayton, continued lecturing on evolutionary science in his biology classes and Rappelyea complained to the public officials that evolution was being taught. The plan worked and Scopes was arrested and indicted for violating the new Tennessee law. Their plan to allow the trial to center around the issue of the constitutionality of the law did not materialize as Judge John T. Raulston focused on the broken law and not its legality (1954, 4-5).

The most notable lawyer for the defense was the famous trial lawyer Clarence Darrow and the lawyer for the state was William J. Bryan, prominent spokesperson for Fundamentalism and a three-time candidate for President of the United States. Scopes

was found guilty of teaching evolution (the decision was reversed later), but "in the trial

by public opinion and the press, it was clear that the twentieth century, the cities, and the

universities had won a resounding victory, and that the country, the South, and the

Fundamentalists were guilty as charged" (Marsden 1980, 186). Bryan, better as an orator

than as a debater, lost badly in comparison with Darrow, even allowing himself to be put

on the witness stand where he was thoroughly embarrassed by Darrow's inquisition.

Bryan was shown to be unable to defend the biblical materials, the biblical positions on

creation, and to be unread in the contemporary arguments about the issue of Darwinism

(Marsden 1980, 186-187).

The real impact of the Scopes Trial had little to do with the verdict handed down

by Judge Raulston. What the media made of the event was the real meaning of the trial,

and what the media made of it made the Fundamentalists look ignorant and out of touch

with reality. Such negative media coverage resulted in an end to the public support which

Fundamentalism had enjoyed (Ellingsen 1988, 91). After the Scopes Trial the influence

of the Fundamentalists waned, they were no longer respected and they were all viewed as

the caricatures which the media had created. This led directly to a retreat from the

mainstream of American church life by the defeated Fundamentalists.

1.5 The Emergence of Neo-Evangelicalism

1.5.1 The Aftermath of the Defeats

The defeats of the Fundamentalists within the Presbyterian church and in public

opinion left them in disarray. As has been noted above, the split from Princeton Seminary

was followed by the split from the northern Presbyterian church, and that was followed

by multiple other divisions within the ranks of Fundamentalists. "The separatist impulse spawned the Independent Fundamental Churches of America in 1930, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches in 1932, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936, and the Bible Presbyterian Church and the Fundamentalist Baptist Fellowship in 1936, while scores of congregations became independent of any denominational ties" (Carpenter 1984, 5).

As it became clear that some sort of united front was needed for Fundamentalism to survive efforts were made to establish a larger "umbrella" under which the various groups which gave allegiance to the concepts which made for Fundamentalism could stand. The first of these to have promise was the American Council of Christian Churches, established on September 17, 1941, which was committed militantly to the theological fundamentals expressed by the five-point doctrine (Gasper 1981, 23). Membership in the American Council was open only to those who renounced modernism and who rejected any relationship with the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. Carl McIntire, a former associate of Machen, was chosen as the first president of the American Council and led the group in a militant expression of Fundamentalism (Gasper 1981, 24).

1.5.2 The National Association of Evangelicals

In 1929 J. Elvin Wright (1896-1966) founded the New England Fellowship, an early effort at providing for a conservative coalition. From 1939 to 1941 he toured the United States preaching his gospel of the need for a national coalition of conservatives who believed in a more moderate approach to society (Ellingsen 1988, 99). Wright called

for an association which would reject "merely militant Fundamentalism" and lead the

nation toward a revival made possible because of a new evangelical coalition (Carpenter

1984, 12). He had a vision for a national organization to promote evangelical cooperation,

and led the New England Fellowship at its conferences in 1939, 1940, and 1941 to adopt

resolutions calling for such an organization (Shelley 1967, 73). A preliminary meeting

was held in October 1941, in Chicago, out of which came the call for the meeting in 1942

in St. Louis at which the National Association of Evangelicals was formed.

The founding meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals, attended by

"approximately two hundred leaders and delegates from thirty-four denominations,

missionary organizations and educational agencies" elected Harold John Ockenga

president and appointed J. Elwin Wright to have charge of a temporary office, later

established in Boston (Gasper 1981, 26). The second annual convention, held in Chicago

on May 3, 1943, drew approximately 1,000 delegates, and adopted a statement of faith for

the new organization, the language of which affirms belief in the infallibility of the Bible:

> 1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritarian word of God.
> 2. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
> 3. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless Life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
> 4. We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful men regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
> 5. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enables to live a godly life.
> 6. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; but they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
> 7. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ (Gasper 1981, 26).

1.5.3 The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy

The exchange of the word infallible for inerrant in the statement of beliefs of the

National Association of Evangelicals did not mean that the concept of inerrancy, so long

the watchword of the coalition of millennial Dispensationalism and Princeton Theology,

was passe. Harold Lindsell, a former faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary, and

at the time of writing Editor Emeritus of Christianity Today, a leading Evangelical

publication, published an attack on persons, groups, and institutions which he felt to be

abandoning the strict inerrantist position concerning the Bible (Lindsell 1976). Lindsell

called for an inerrantist view of the Bible reminiscent of the most stringent of the

Princeton theologians, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield.

The resultant furor, which has abated somewhat but certainly has not ended,

resulted in the establishment of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in

1977, with the purpose of "the defense and application of the doctrine of biblical

inerrancy as an essential element for the authority of Scripture and a necessity for the

health of the church" (Boice 1978, 9). At its 1978 meeting, attended by some three

hundred scholars, pastors, and laymen, the ICBI formulated "the nineteen article

'Chicago Statement,' which defines the biblical and historic position of the inerrancy of

Scriptures" (Geisler 1980, ix). The ICBI set itself a decade long agenda of publishing in

defense of the doctrine of inerrancy, after which it voted itself out of formal existence.[3]

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[3]Among the books published as a part of the work of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy are: Norman L. Geisler, ed., Inerrancy (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980); James Montgomery Boice, ed., The Foundation of Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978); Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, ed., Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response (Chicago, IL:

1.6 Conclusion

The doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture has a long history in the American

church, especially evident in that branch of the American church known as

Evangelicalism. In recent years the doctrine has been attacked, defended, explained and

re-explained. In the next three chapters a survey of the various options presented in

American Evangelicalism will be considered, after which the future direction of the

doctrine will be considered.

Moody Press, 1984); John D. Hannah, ed., Inerrancy and the Church (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984); Norman L. Geisler, ed., Biblical Errancy: Its Philosophical Roots (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981); and, Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus, ed., Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

CHAPTER 2

COMPLETE INERRANCY

The sketch of the history of the controversy concerning the status of the Bible within American Evangelicalism indicates that the topic of the inerrant nature of those materials is one which has elicited a number of responses. Those responses range from holding the Bible to be absolutely inerrant to seeing it as the work of human authors who, though used of God in the writing of Scripture, were subject to the same faults and failures as would accompany any work of human authors. This project considers three main options presented in the discussion about inerrancy, attempting to understand and analyze each and offering a position which is consistent with the main thrust of Evangelicalism.

In this chapter the most absolute of the views on inerrancy will be considered. This view has historical validity and it does align itself with the more conservative elements within Evangelicalism. The view has been caricatured frequently and, as a result, is sometimes misunderstood, either by accident or with intent. This chapter will attempt to allow the voices of the major proponents of this view to be heard, voices which echo the strong tones of the Princeton Theologians, Archibald A. Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield and Charles Hodge. Though these theologians did not create the Complete Inerrancy view, they did have a large part to play in the consolidation and expression of

the view as it is understood to this day.

It will be necessary also to hear the concerns raised by those who cannot agree with this position. As the responses to those concerns are evaluated the question as to the adequacy of the Complete Inerrancy view will be raised. Such questioning will identify some of the areas of emphasis which will need to be considered in the construction of a position on the inerrancy of Scripture.

2.1 The Complete Inerrancy View

Among the views held in American Evangelicalism on the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scriptures the most conservative is that of Complete Inerrancy. This view, in simple terms, holds that the Scriptures are completely without error in all that they affirm, whether that affirmation is about historical, geographical, chronological, or spiritual matters. This view leaves no room for error of any kind, preferring rather to see the biblical material as coming from the hand of God, because of which it bears the imprint of His absolute perfection. Though He used human beings in the process of communicating His revelation, that does not, for the proponents of this view, take away in the least from the total accuracy of the material given.

This view, like all other views, is hardly held in terms which could be called monolithic or uniform. Variations of emphasis and expression are found within the writings of the proponents of the Complete Inerrancy position. This chapter will attempt to acknowledge the nuances of presentation and yet offer an explanation of the position which is derived from seeing more of the unity of thought than the diverse aspects of the advocates of the position.

2.1.1 The Relationship of Inspiration to Inerrancy

While the concern of this project is the exposition of a specific aspect of the

doctrine of Scripture within Evangelicalism, inerrancy, the linkage of that concern to a

broader aspect of the doctrine of Scripture, inspiration, must be noted. This is especially

true for those who hold the position being called Complete Inerrancy. It will be necessary

to identify the way in which the topic of inspiration is handled to understand its linkage to

inerrancy.

Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, two of the major figures in what

has been identified as the Princeton Theology, in an article in the Presbyterian Review for

April 1881, set out what may be as clear a definition of inspiration as is available from

the Complete Inerrancy view. They asserted that the term inspiration is to be used in "the

single sense of God's continued work of superintendence, by which his providential,

gracious and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, he presided over the

sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that

writing an errorless record of the matters he designed them to communicate, and hence

constituting the entire volume in all its parts the word of God to us" (1979, 17-18). This

definition asserts that the activity of God in inspiration rendered inerrant that which was

written, making it to be the very word of God.

Warfield, based on this, asserted even more strongly that whatever the Bible says,

God says. This would mean that one does not merely find the word of God in the Bible,

but "whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God" (1981a, 52). Warfield felt

this assertion to be the historic position of the church: "The Church, then, has held from

the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though

written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will" (1981a, 173).

That inspiration caused the words of the Scripture to be the word of God granted them a status which demands reverence and respect from the readers of Scripture, because what is being read is the mind and will of God. Charles Hodge, in his famous <u>Systematic Theology</u> which was the textbook for systematic theology at Princeton Seminary, saw inspiration as the "influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of his mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, that what they said God said" (1904, 154). This work of the Holy Spirit is distinct from a more secondary activity which might be called illumination, a work which might be available to all believers. Inspiration is, for Hodge, an extraordinary supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors of Scriptures.

The supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors enabled them to write what God intended for them to write. Harold Lindsell described inspiration as the "inward work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of chosen men who then wrote the Scriptures so that God got written what He wanted" (1976, 30). In a very real sense inspiration is a means to an end. This approach agrees fully with Warfield, who noted that the communication of God's truth to the listening ear was the ultimate goal. Inspiration was not the end in itself, but rather the means to the accomplishment of God's purpose of revealing Himself to humankind (1981a, 419). This communication of Himself through the Scriptures is seen as being completely trustworthy by the proponents

of Complete Inerrancy (Henry 1979, IV:129; Warfield 1956, 1473).

The view of inspiration held by the Complete Inerrancy position claims to be based upon the teachings of the Bible. While the specific passages used to assert this will be discussed below, it should be noted here that reference is made especially to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. J. I. Packer, taking his cue from the earlier works of Warfield, noted that the Timothy passage indicates that the Scriptures were the breathing out of God, thus affirming their divine origin. The "point of the idea of inspiration put forward in 2 Tim. 3.16 . . . is simply of a divine activity that produced Scripture – one, in other words, which involved human writers as a means to an end, but which actually terminated, not on them, but on what they wrote" (1958, 77-78). One of the foundational questions raised at this point is whether the Scriptures may be believed in what they claim for themselves. E. J. Young, former Old Testament Professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, argued that if one is to accept the Scriptures as truthful in other areas of doctrine they must be accepted when they speak to the doctrine of inspiration also (1957, 28-29). It would be a breach of logic to allow the Bible to be the basis of belief in all areas of the faith except that of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

The focus in the discussion of inspiration for the Compete Inerrantists is not so much on the mechanism by which the Scriptures were written as on the product, the finished work of the Bible. Clark Pinnock, in a work early in his career, asserted that "inspiration refers to the special providence of God who is sovereign (Eph. 1:11) which in due time provided a God-breathed Scripture. The inner testimony of the Spirit is essential to our appropriation of Biblical truth, but this is the accreditation, not the

creation, of truth deposited already by the Spirit in the infallible Word" (1967, 11). Carl

F. H. Henry insisted that the doctrine of inspiration says more about God's relationship to

the writings than about His relationship to the human authors. "Inspiration is primarily a

statement about God's relationship to Scripture, and only secondarily about the

relationship of God to the writers" (1979, IV:142). The charges which assert that

Complete Inerrantists hold to a mechanical, or dictation, explanation of inspiration are

regularly denied. Those denials will be considered below, but it needed to be noted here

that the focus is not upon the methodology but upon the result of the divine activity.

Henry approached the doctrine of inspiration from both the negative and positive

perspectives. He insisted that the biblical-evangelical view of inspiration does not include

the mechanical dictation concept nor the mere heightening of the psychic or creative

energies of the human authors (1979, IV:138-142). On the positive side of the doctrine,

Henry insisted that the biblical-evangelical view sees the inspired text of Scripture as an

objective deposit of language, that inspiration is wholly consistent with the humanity of

the writers, that inspiration did not render the human either more or less human, and that

inspiration is limited to a small company of messengers who were divinely chosen to

communicate the Word of God to humankind. In the work of inspiration, as Henry

viewed it, God communicated to the human authors information "beyond the reach of the

natural resources of all human beings, including prophets and apostles," making Him the

ultimate author of Scripture. This, he claimed, is the historic doctrine of the Christian

church (1979, IV:144-160).

The doctrine of inspiration, as held by the proponents of Complete Inerrancy, is

vitally linked to that of revelation. The two concepts are seen as being distinct from each

other, but linked in the giving of Scripture. Revelation differs from inspiration both as to

their object and to their effects. Revelation has as its object the communication of

knowledge, while inspiration has the object of securing infallibility in that

communication. The two may, or may not, occur to the same person. So, inspiration

could occur even in situations in which no special revelation was needed for the person to

be aware of the information which was to be communicated (e.g. Luke, and perhaps other

historical writers) (Hodge 1904, 155).

The revelatory activities of God, for A. A. Hodge and Warfield, are viewed as

being immanent in the creatures as God works through them in a way which they called

concursus. "The currents, thus, of the divine activities do not only flow around us,

conditioning or controlling our action from without, but they none the less flow within

the inner current of our personal lives, confluent with our spontaneous self-movements,

and contributing to the effects whatever properties God may see fit that they shall have"

(1979, 9-10). The immanent, concursive work of the Holy Spirit, in the writing of

Scripture, moved from the subjective to the objective expression of God's revelation.

Warfield asserted that

> according to the biblical representations, the fundamental element in revelation is
> not the objective process of redemptive acts, but the revealing operations of the
> Spirit of God, which run through the whole series of modes of communication
> proper to Spirit, culminating in communications by the objective word. The
> characteristic element in the Bible idea of revelation in its highest sense is that the
> organs of revelation are not creatively concerned in the revelations made through
> them, but occupy a receptive attitude. The contents of their messages are not
> something thought out, inferred, hoped or feared by them, but something
> conveyed to them, often forced upon them by the irresistible might of the
> revealing Spirit. (Warfield 1981a, 44-45)

Scripture, the objective aspect of the revelatory work of God, is the express goal

toward which all revelation pointed; it is more than the mere record of revelation.

"Scripture is conceived, from the point of view of the writers of the NT, not merely as the

record of revelations, but as itself a part of the redemptive revelation of God; not merely

as the record of the redemptive acts by which God is saving the world, but as itself one of

these redemptive acts, having its own part to play in the great work of establishing and

building up the kingdom of God" (Warfield 1956, 1482). The doctrine of inspiration has

such force among the Complete Inerrantists because it is an expansion of the doctrine of

revelation. God has, by the Holy Spirit, worked among humans to produce the objective

expression of His revelation. God, through the Holy Spirit, has moved upon those

humans in inspiration to insure the correct and infallible recording of His revelation.

While it has been implied earlier, it must be stated here more clearly: The

Complete Inerrancy view sees the entirety of the Scriptures as being inspired. The

concepts of verbal and plenary inspiration can accurately be ascribed to this view. Charles

Hodge affirmed that the doctrine of inspiration extended equally to all of its parts; that is

to say, the entire Bible is inspired. Such inspiration extends to the words of the text; the

thoughts are in the words, and the two are inseparable (Hodge 1904, 163-164). Hodge

argued that inspiration works to ensure correctness of teaching, so that in the historical

sections little would differ in the writing process between an inspired and an non-

inspired writer. The difference would come in the infallible correctness of the account

provided by an inspired writer (1983a, 138).

Not only is there a connection between revelation and inspiration in Complete

Inerrancy, there is also a connection between revelation, inspiration, and inerrancy. The

work of inspiration creates an inerrant (or infallible, the two terms are used

synonymously in most of the proponents of Complete Inerrancy) text. It is not possible to

speak of inspired texts which are not inerrant. In the essay for the Presbyterian Review

mentioned above, A. A. Hodge and Warfield make this connection.

> Thus we have come to distinguish sharply between Revelation, which is the
> frequent, and Inspiration, which is the constant, attribute of all the thoughts and
> statements of Scripture, and between the problem of the genesis of Scripture on
> the one hand, which includes historic processes and the concurrence of natural and
> supernatural forces, and must account for all the phenomena of Scripture, and the
> mere fact of inspiration on the other hand, or the superintendence by God of the
> writers in the entire process of their writing, which accounts for nothing whatever
> but the absolute infallibility of the record in which the revelation, once generated,
> appears in the original autograph. (1979, 6)

The proponents of Complete Inerrancy assert that the work of the Holy Spirit in

inspiring humans to write the Scriptures caused the words of the humans to be the Word

of God and, because of that, absolutely infallible (Warfield 1981a, 399). If the Scriptures

are inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is God and cannot lie, then they must also be

infallible. "If inspiration allows for the possibility of error then inspiration ceases to be

inspiration" (Henry 1979, IV:129; Lindsell 1976, 31; Pinnock 1971; see also Young

1957, 27).

The Complete Inerrantists move directly from revelation to inspiration to

inerrancy. What do they mean when they say that the Scriptures are inerrant or infallible?

There is no uniformity in defining this very important term; however, the definition of

Paul D. Feinberg is inclusive enough to be useful in characterizing this concept.

"Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original

autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that

they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical,

or life sciences" (1980, 294). There are a number of important aspects to this definition,

all of which will be considered below. Here, though, it must be observed that the concept

of truthfulness is applied to the entirety of the biblical materials. This understanding of

inerrancy is inferred from the fact, as Complete Inerrantists see it, that God is the author

of Scripture and His veracity is seen in the wording of the Bible (Nicole 1980, 75). As

Roger Nicole expresses it, "inerrancy will then mean that at no point in what was

originally given were the biblical writers allowed to make statements or endorse

viewpoints which are not in conformity with objective truth. This applies at any level at

which they make pronouncements" (1980, 88; see also Pinnock 1971, 70-75).

This assertion of the absolute truthfulness of the Scriptures also has a practical

side. Packer asserts that "when Evangelicals call the Bible 'inerrant,' part at least of their

meaning is this: that in exegesis and exposition of Scripture and in building up our

biblical theology from the fruits of our Bible study, we may not (1) deny, disregard, or

arbitrarily relativize, anything that the biblical writers teach, nor (2) discount any of the

practical implications for worship and service that their teaching carries, nor (3) cut the

knot of any problem of Bible harmony, factual or theological, by allowing ourselves to

assume that the inspired author were not necessarily consistent either with themselves or

with each other" (1978, 77). This definition shows the vital nature of the claim to

inerrancy made by Complete Inerrancy because it rules out the reductionist tendencies

which would follow from seeing the Scriptures in a lesser light.

The linkage between inspiration and inerrancy is so strong that the proponents of

Complete Inerrancy cannot conceive of the one without the other. Henry provided a

concise affirmation of this by saying "the doctrine that the Bible is divinely inspired is as

incompatible with the notion that God inspired error as it is with the doctrine that he need

not have inspired truth" (1979, IV:191). To affirm plenary inspiration and divine authorship and at the same time to affirm that the product of such activity is in error is a logical fallacy. The consequence of denying inerrancy while affirming the authoritative status of the inspired text is that inspiration is no longer a guarantee that truth is being taught. This would demand that the authority of the Scripture be divorced from the truth of the message contained therein. On what basis, then, could the texts be said to possess authority?

It is the affirmation of the Complete Inerrantists that the Bible is true, not only in its theological and ethical teachings, but also in the historical and scientific matters which are included "insofar as they are part of the express message of the inspired writings" (Henry 1979, IV:205). God's truth is to be found in the very words of Scripture, the propositions and sentences and not merely in the concepts and thoughts which were in the minds of the writers. This view of inerrancy is applied first to the original writings, which requires a quest for establishing the best possible approximation of the originals.

Complete Inerrantists are very careful to identify several caveats to be considered when approaching the topic of the inerrancy of the Bible. It could be said that they are guilty of so qualifying what is believed as to diminish its force; however, it may be more accurate to observe that they are attempting to be as precise as they can be in order to avoid misunderstanding. By setting out a listing of what is not being claimed by their assertions of inerrancy they answer some of the questions which could be raised against this position before they are asked.

Packer asserted that the claim of inerrancy is not the claim that the Scriptures can be dealt with as though they were written according to the conventions which apply to the

modern understanding of language usage. Rather, they must be understood according to their own age and literary genres. "The style and sense of each passage must be determined inductively in each case, by getting to know its language, history, and cultural background and by attending to its own internal characteristics" (1978, 78-79). Packer refined this position at another point in his writing by saying, "the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture are relative to the intended scope of the Word of God" (1958, 98). In that the primary thrust of Scripture is to teach about salvation and the biblical authors wrote to be understood in their day, their terminology does not have to be appropriate to the modern understandings of the world in order to be inerrant. The interpreter must always ask as to what is being asserted in the passage which must be distinguished from "linguistic forms which are simply vehicles for their communication and could be changed without altering their meaning" (Packer 1958, 98).

Feinberg, attempting to ensure that the concept of inerrancy is not misunderstood, averred that inerrancy does not demand strict adherence to the rules of grammar; does not exclude the use either of figures of speech or of a given literary genre; does not demand historical or semantic precision; does not demand the technical language of modern science; does not require verbal exactness in the citation of the Old Testament by the New Testament; does not demand that the *Logia Jesu* contain the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, only the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus; does not guarantee the exhaustive comprehensiveness of any single account or of combined accounts where those are involved; and does not demand the infallibility or inerrancy of the non-inspired sources used by biblical writers (1980, 299-302). To further the argument, Nicole pointed out that spelling variations do not impact the concern for conformity to or departure from factual

truth, that language is used by the biblical writers phenomenally instead of scientifically, and that approximations are used according to the terms of usage in the time of writing (Henry 1979, IV:201-204; 1980, 80-86; Pinnock 1967, 20-21; see also Pinnock 1971, 71-72, 75).

The summary provided by Young is helpful in drawing together the caveats applied to inerrancy by the Complete Inerrancy position.

> The doctrine of inerrancy for which we contend does not demand the literal interpretation of all parts of Scripture. It does not demand that the writers of the Bible be regarded as mere automata; it does not insist that the writers, whenever they happen to record the same event, must be in actual verbal agreement with one another. It does not necessarily require that events be narrated in the same order. Sometimes, for reasons of emphasis, where the order is not intended to be chronological, that order may vary in differing accounts of the same events. Inerrancy does not demand that when two writers translate from another language, their translations should be in verbatim agreement. It allows them freedom of expression, as long as they represent accurately the thought of the original. Inerrancy does not insist that each writer should give the details, or even as many details of the same event, as another writer. It does not demand that each writer must view the same event from precisely the same standpoint. Inerrancy, in other words, allows for the full employment of the gifts and talents with which God endowed the human writer. All that it postulates is that each writer who was borne of the Holy Spirit has recorded accurately that which the Spirit desired him to record. The Bible, in other words, is a true account of those things of which it speaks. This is the claim that Bible-believing Christians make for it, and this claim is taught by the Bible itself. (1957, 139)

2.1.2 The Importance of Inerrancy

To say that the concept of inerrancy is important to the proponents of Complete Inerrancy is little more than a truism. If it were not important there would really be no need for the view to be held and defended. The concern for this section of the chapter is not to show that inerrancy is important but to look at how and why that importance is set forth. In a general way the Complete Inerrancy view asserts the importance of inerrancy

in two different ways.

The first, and perhaps the older, approach is to claim that the doctrines of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture are the crowning jewels in the Christian faith, the culmination of all of the truth claims of the faith. A. A. Hodge and Warfield argued with conviction that the doctrine of inspiration is not the foundation of Christian belief; rather, it is the "last and crowning attribute of those sacred books from which we derive our religious knowledge" (1979, 7). They argued that there are other more important and vital doctrines than that of inspiration and that the doctrine of inspiration should not be used in the attempt to convince the skeptic of the necessity of belief in Christianity. In fact, none should "allow it to be believed that the truth of Christianity depends upon any doctrine of inspiration whatever" (1979, 8). While not denying that the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy are true, the truth of Christianity would stand even if they were to be shown to be in error (Hodge 1979, 8-9).

The prior commitment, the one which makes Christianity the vital force of truth, is to the doctrine of revelation. There is the instinctive feeling within the church that the Scriptures are trustworthy and lie as the foundation for trust in the Christian system of doctrine. But, "there is a sense in which it would not be true to say that the truth of Christian teaching and the foundations of faith are suspended upon the doctrine of plenary inspiration, or upon any doctrine of inspiration whatever. They rest rather upon the previous fact of revelation: and it is important to keep ourselves reminded that the supernatural origin and contents of Christianity, not only may be vindicated apart from any question of the inspiration of the record, but, in point of fact, always are vindicated prior to any question of the inspiration of the record" (Warfield 1981a, 67).

Warfield was clear in his commitment to the concept of the Scriptures as being inerrant, a commitment from which he did not waver. But, he was equally adamant that this position was the culmination of the total impact of the Christian faith and not the beginning point for one's consideration.

> Let it not be said that thus we found the whole Christian system upon the doctrine of plenary inspiration. We found the whole Christian system on the doctrine of plenary inspiration as little as we found it upon the doctrine of angelic existence. Were there no such thing as inspiration, Christianity would be true, and all its essential doctrines would be credibly witnessed to us in the generally trustworthy reports of the teaching of our Lord and of His authoritative agents in founding the Church, preserved in the writings of the apostles and their first followers, and in the historical witness of the living Church. Inspiration is not the most fundamental of Christian doctrines, no even the first thing we prove about the Scriptures. It is the last and crowning fact as to the Scriptures. (Warfield 1981a, 209-210)

The second approach to asserting the importance of inerrancy for the Complete Inerrantists differs greatly from the first. This approach, exemplified by Harold Lindsell, argues that the doctrine of Scripture, containing affirmations of its inspiration and inerrancy, is the most important doctrine. "Of all the doctrines connected with the Christian faith, none is more important than the one that has to do with the basis of our religious knowledge" (Lindsell 1976, 17). The Bible, according to Lindsell, is the source of knowledge for the Christian, thus the doctrinal statements about the Scripture are the most important ones in Christendom.

This view, which sees the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture as the linchpin for the entire edifice of Christianity, fears that the removal of that pivotal doctrine will result in massive defection from the faith and the eventual collapse of Christianity. Lindsell spoke for those who hold this approach by affirming, "I shall argue that once infallibility is abandoned, however good the intentions of those who do it and however good they feel

their reasons for doing so, it always and ever opens the door to further departures from

the faith" (1976, 25). If inerrancy were abandoned the difficulty of determining which of

the Bible is true and reliable and which is false and capable of deceiving would lead to

departures from the orthodox faith. The establishment of an authority above the Bible

would be required to make these crucial decisions. Lindsell asserted that allowing an

authority above the Bible would render one's claims to being Evangelical untrue (1976,

210).

Whether the appeal is to the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy as the

culmination of doctrinal teaching or as the linchpin and most essential element of the

faith, the argument for the importance of these affirmations is similar. There are three

foundational assertions: 1) the apostles and prophets taught the inspiration and inerrancy

of Scripture; 2) the character of God, as the author of Scripture, demands that they be

seen as inspired and inerrant; and 3) the epistemological nature of the doctrines of

inspiration and inerrancy is vital for the faith.

The doctrine of plenary inspiration is a very important element in the Christian

faith as understood by Complete Inerrancy, one which must be accepted because of the

same factors which compel belief of other items of faith; it was an element of faith for the

apostles and writers of the New Testament, and they are trustworthy teachers of doctrine

(Warfield 1981a, 211). The specific New Testament passages upon which this assertion is

made will be considered below. Packer, making the argument for the importance of

seeing the Bible as inspired and inerrant, noted that such cannot be based upon the work

of the modern critical scholar; rather, the appeal must be from the teachings of the Bible

themselves. Packer does not advocate that the Evangelical abandon modern scholarship.

"All that we insist on is that no critical discussion is sound or legitimate that is not based on the Bible's own view of itself." This deferring to the Word of God is an act of faith, one which must govern reasoning else reasoning will gain the ascendancy and true biblical faith will be covered over and its effect lost upon the individual (1958, 140-141).

Not only does the teaching of the apostles and prophets lead Complete Inerrancy to see inerrancy as an important doctrine of the Church, so does its understanding of the character of God and His relation to the writing of Scripture. Young asserted, "Let no one say that it is a matter of indifference whether the original was inerrant; it is a matter of greatest importance, for the honor and veracity of God Himself are at stake" (1957, 88). If there are errors in the biblical material then God Himself is less than perfect because He has allowed that which is less than perfect to come from Him. Further, one cannot say that there are merely errors in the non-spiritual areas of the Bible, for to do so is to bring the entirety of the text into question. If God cannot be believed in the areas to which mortals have access through their senses and rationality, how can He be believed in those areas which require faith for their acceptance?

Closely linked to arguing for the importance of inerrancy because of the character of God is the argument which is associated with epistemology. Pinnock argued that the central issue for theology is that of epistemology, which is embodied in the question "has God provided for humans a disclosure of Himself?" (1967, 4). The concern is whether the self-disclosure of God is available to humans in the Scripture and whether that Scripture is reliable and true. "Infallibility is a <u>necessary</u>, not merely an <u>optional</u>, inference from the Biblical teaching about inspiration. It is an intrinsic property and essential characteristic of the inspired text" (Pinnock 1967, 10). Knowledge of God depends upon

His self-disclosure being accurately and truthfully conveyed to humans by means of that revelation having been inscripturated.

The Complete Inerrancy position identifies at least three dangers which accompany the failure to see inerrancy as important to doctrinal correctness. First, if the inerrancy of the totality of the Scriptures is denied there is established, of necessity, another authority over the Scriptures which determines which materials within the Bible are without error. Lindsell asserted that if inerrancy was lost, then the determination must be made as to how much of the Bible is true, and which specific parts should be seen as true and which as false. This demands an authority above the Bible to establish these items of knowledge (1976, 203). Gleason Archer argued that that validation would have to come from the human mind, a source which is not at all trustworthy, and which would undoubtedly produce conflicting judgments as to which portions of the biblical material are true and which are false (1978, 93). Given the crucial assertion of the sufficiency and supremacy of Scripture alone as the rule for faith among the Complete Inerrantist wing of American Evangelicalism, this danger is very compelling.

A second danger which would follow from failing to appreciate fully the importance of inerrancy is the weakening of other doctrinal assertions. The proponents of Complete Inerrancy who argue for the importance of their view from the perspective that it is the linchpin doctrine upon which all others are based see this danger in a most pronounced manner. Lindsell, not the only one to suggest this position but surely one of the most noted to do so, is convinced that deviation from inerrancy in any degree whatsoever will lead inevitably to departure from other major doctrinal affirmations (1976, 203). The major purpose of his book, The Battle for the Bible (1976), and its

sequel, <u>The Bible in the Balance</u> (1979), is to show that various groups which once were

firmly entrenched within Evangelicalism had deviated at several doctrinal points after

denying the inerrancy of the Bible (See also Sproul 1978, 116).

Complete Inerrancy sees a third danger which could result from failing to hold to

the importance of inerrancy: the value of the historical material of the Bible becomes

lessened. John Warwick Montgomery noted that if the historical material of the Bible is

assumed to be, potentially at least, in error, a separation of the gospel story from its

historical foundation will have occurred. If the value of the historical material is lessened

by asserting that it does not have to be fully accurate, how can the non-historical, spiritual

material be maintained as fully truthful (1974, 28; see also Sproul 1978, 116)?

2.1.3 The Appeal to the Autographs

The claim for the absolute inerrancy for the biblical texts is made by Complete

Inerrancy for the original writings, the autographs. Warfield noted that the Westminster

Confession asserted that the original texts of the Scripture were immediately inspired of

God, "a technical term in common theological use at the time, by which the idea of divine

authorship, in the highest sense of the word, is conveyed. To this original text alone,

therefore, it is to be understood, are attributed, in their fullest sense, the various 'qualities'

of Scripture which are ascribed to it in the Confession, on the ground of its being the

Word of God – such as divine authority, perfection, perspicuity, entire trustworthiness,

and the like" (1983b, 269). The appeal to the autographs as being inerrant is not seen as a

limitation upon the faith of the believer. In fact, it is viewed as the way to reverence the

gift of God in the Scriptures without having to apologize for scribal, copying, and

printing errors.

In that the original writings of the Scripture are not extant the charge is often made that an appeal to them is improper because the appeal can neither be verified nor invalidated. John Gerstner noted that those who make such an appeal really have nothing else to which to appeal because no one would assert that the translations and copies of Scripture are inerrant. He further noted that there are good reasons to believe that because of 'lower criticism' the original text has been virtually restored (1978, 48; see also Montgomery 1974, 35). The appeal to the autographs is not, Pinnock asserted, a failed effort to avoid the apparent contradictions and discrepancies of the text; rather, it is an appeal to the nature of Scripture as the Word of God, inspired through human authors (1967, 15).

The appeal to the autographs is viewed as an answer to some of the alleged discrepancies which are cited to contradict the concept of complete inerrancy. That is, it is noted that some of the alleged errors entered the text through the process of the transmission and copying of the original. However, few within the Complete Inerrancy camp would argue that all of the alleged discrepancies can be eliminated by the restoration of the original. Even Warfield, a staunch advocate of absolute inerrancy based on the autographs, admitted that it is not being claimed that the original autographs were completely free from all difficulties and apparent discrepancies. The modern scholar is bound to deal with the remaining apparent discrepancies and not merely relegate them to the world of the original writings (1983b, 272).

Roger Nicole, a contemporary representative of the Complete Inerrancy position, also admitted that the evidence is clear that there are variances among the extant

manuscripts. This reality had led to the emphasis on the inerrancy of the original

manuscripts. However, appeal to that reality, that is, inerrant originals and errant copies,

cannot to be used as an escape for every alleged error which is mentioned. In truth, as the

science of textual criticism has amply shown, God "has safeguarded for us a text which is

in substantial conformity with what was originally given" (Nicole 1980, 74). Even though

there is extant a close approximation to the originals in which there are remaining

difficulties, Nicole argued that there is a need for positing that the originals were errorless

because of the claims of divine authorship which implies that they could not have been

blemished by errors (1980, 78).

The question as to the precise meaning of the concept of autograph in relation to

the Scripture is one that remains to be settled among scholars. As an example, Paul

Achtemeier argued that given the progressive nature of the writing of the biblical

materials, with compilation, editing, and redaction, it is not possible to identify what

could be called an autograph of any biblical book (Achtemeier 1980). It remains, then, for

the Complete Inerrantist position to define carefully what is meant by the original

writings of the Scripture.

Greg Bahnsen defined "an autograph to be the first completed, personal, or

approved transcription of a unique word-group composed by its author" (1980, 190). The

use of an amanuensis, or even some levels of redactionary activity, would not necessarily

deny to every biblical book an autograph in this usage of the concept. Henry, too, argued

for the inerrancy of the autographs by which he meant "a primal content vouchsafed by

chosen writers, whatever the actual mechanics of implementation may have been" (1979,

IV: 207). He further argued in relation to the human author, "The primary issue is not

whether he handwrote or dictated the content but whether the inspired writer imposed the written end product upon the recipients as divinely authoritative. The basic question is not who did the actual physical writing, but who gives and vouches for the truth and accuracy of the content. In this sense there was obviously an autograph for each book of the Bible" (1979, IV:208).

The argument for asserting that the original writings of Scripture are that which is absolutely inerrant is made from two different perspectives: 1) from an apologetic perspective, and 2) from a theological perspective. The two perspectives are complementary and are not mutually exclusive.

A vital aspect of the apologetic approach to arguing for the inerrancy of the autographs is the assertion that this is the historic position of the church. Warfield, for example, cited several luminaries in the church's past, Richard Baxter, Martin Luther, and the Westminster Divines, as being aware of the difference between the copy of the Scriptures which they possessed and the originals (1983b, 273). The originals were considered by these, and other major figures in the history of the church, to be inerrant as compared with the present copies which contain the errors which were introduced in the process of transmission.

Montgomery furthered the apologetic approach to the inerrant autographs by noting that one must appeal to them when faced with the reality that there are errors in the earliest and best copies now extant. The objection is raised against the appeal to the autographs that since errors exist in the earliest and best copies there could not have been an errorless original. Montgomery would concede to that charge if "(a) the number of errors increased or even remained constant as one moved back through the textual

tradition toward the time of original composition, and (b) the conservative evangelical, to solve alleged biblical errors and contradictions, hypothesized that the autographs differed materially and unjustifiably from the best copies in existence" (1974, 36). Montgomery contended that neither of these is true. The errors decrease as one comes closer to what the original must have been and the argument is not made that those originals differ substantially from the copies with which the modern scholar has to work. Thus, for Montgomery, the appeal to the autographs is still valid.

Archer added to the apologetic argument for appealing to inerrant autographs by asserting that (1) if the original was not without error, there is little need to try to establish what it was by eliminating the copyist's errors, (2) humans are accustomed to appeals to inerrant models in several other areas of life (e.g. time, weights, measures, etc.), and (3) if mistakes were in the originals in any aspect of their expression they would be rendered useless for the establishment of rules for faith and practice (1978, 88-89). In that the entire effort of textual criticism has been directed toward the re-establishment of the original writings of Scripture, the goal must have been to find the text that was not tainted in any way by the work of copying through the centuries.

Perhaps no contemporary American Evangelical presented the apologetic approach to the appeal to inerrant autographs more cogently than Carl F. H. Henry. If there are errors in the autographs the copies of them are no longer merely questionable at some points, they are completely in dispute because the originals are filled with errors which cannot be fully recognized or corrected. "If the autographs are not inerrant and the inspired prophets and apostles in their teaching were unable to discriminate truth from falsehood, how are we to tell what parts are true and what parts are false either in the

copies or in the autographs" (Henry 1979, IV:231)? If there are no inerrant originals there

is no absolute standard by which to compare and judge the copies and the views which

they may espouse. Further, the door is open to the rearrangement of the materials to suit

the particular scholar's fancy or desire for a novel understanding or reinterpretation of the

Christian faith. In that the Scriptures are God-breathed, the acceptance of errors in the

autographs is tantamount to denying that God inspired them. Textual criticism has no

purpose if the originals are errant. Simply finding older texts would not bring the scholar

any closer to the truth of God (Henry 1979, IV:231-240).

While the apologetic approach is the predominate one, Bahnsen argued that the

appeal to the inerrancy of the autographa should be made apart from the apologetic

motivation; the proper motivation is theological. Faced with the twin realities that the

extant copies have transmission errors, indeed God did not promise that they would not,

and the uniqueness of the inspired Word of God, inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy

must be theologically restricted to the autographs. "It should now appear clear that

restriction of inerrancy to the autographa is based on the unwillingness of evangelicals to

contend for the precise infallibility or inerrancy of the transmitted text, for Scripture

nowhere gives us ground to maintain that its transmission and translation would be kept

without error by God" (Bahnsen 1980, 176).

The rationale for restricting inerrancy in its most absolute understanding to the

autographs is that "there is biblical evidence for the inerrancy of the autographa, but not

for the inerrancy of the copies; the distinction and restriction are therefore theologically

warranted and necessary" (Bahnsen 1980, 176). The response which is made to the appeal

to the autographs often is that it is irrelevant because the autographs are not available.

Bahnsen responded that "restricting inerrancy to the autographa enables us to consistently confess the truthfulness of God – and that is quite important indeed" (1980, 179)! The God of truth cannot utter that which is not true, thus in the originals there could be no error because of the inspiring activity of God upon the human authors. An error in the original would have to be attributed to God and that would be in violation of His character. The appeal to an inerrant original is also important because it allows those who now have only errant copies to be assured that there was an inerrant original and to be able to identify the extent to which the copies have deviated from that original. The science of textual criticism is very important in establishing the original to the extent that it is possible. The principle of *sola scriptura* is not possible if there is not an inerrant text to which appeal can be made. If the text is errant appeal has to be made to something else (human reason?) for determining what is and is not the correct Word of God in the text. Scripture is no longer the absolute authority.

To the charge that the autographs are lost, thus appeals to their inerrancy are groundless speculation, Bahnsen noted that such appeal is not made on empirical grounds (which would not show an errant original either) but on theological grounds, as is the argument for inerrant autographa. "The nature of God (who is truth Himself) and the nature of the biblical books (as the very words of God) require that we view the original manuscripts, produced under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit of truth, as wholly true and without error" (Bahnsen 1980, 189).

2.1.4 The Relationship of the Divine and Human Authorship of Scripture

The proponents of Complete Inerrancy are adamant in their rebuttal of any

intimations that because they hold to the inerrancy of Scriptures they also believe that they were dictated to the human authors who became transcription instruments. This theory of the inspiration of the Scriptures, which is called the dictation theory, sees that the "mental activity of the writers was simply suspended, apart from what was necessary for the mechanical transcription of words supernaturally introduced into their consciousness" (Packer 1958, 78). The dictation theory is rejected by asserting that it never was the approach that has been taken to the authorship of the Scriptures by the church, that it does not align well with the testimony of the authors of Scriptures who claim to be participants in the writing process, that it does not account for differences in writing styles between various authors of Scripture, and that, in short, it is not the view which the Scriptures themselves maintain (Lindsell 1976, 32-33; Packer 1958, 78-79; Young 1957, 66).

The proponents of Complete Inerrancy do not swing from the denial of over-emphasizing the divine side of the inspiration of Scripture, which dictation calls for, to the over-emphasis upon the human side, which, they charge, Liberalism advocates. Maintaining their Evangelical foundations, they refuse to deny the divine authorship of Scripture, but at the same time they call for the recognition of the human activity in inspiration. A. A. Hodge and Warfield offered a strong affirmation of the human co-operation in the writing of Scripture. Except for those passages in which the biblical writer is quoting God, they see the need to affirm an interaction between the divine and the human in producing Scripture. The human aspect is to be acknowledged as the authors drawing from their knowledge and experience with God and His work in their lives; the divine aspect of the genesis of the Scriptures is to be noted in a similar, and

somewhat natural manner. "The Scriptures have been generated, as the plan of redemption has been evolved, through an historic process" (1979, 12-13).

This position, which emphasizes the aspect of the human authorship of Scripture, was not new or novel for Warfield. In the address given upon his induction into the Chair of New Testament Literature and Exegesis in Western Theological Seminary in 1878, eight years before he joined the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, Warfield asserted the need to consider the human authorship of Scripture. In that address Warfield argued that it is the view of Reformed Churches that "every word of the Bible, without exception, is the word of God; but, alongside of that, they hold equally explicitly that every word is the word of man" (1981a, 397-398).

The view seeing the human authorship as a vital aspect of the doctrine of Scripture which Warfield held was quite in line with that of Charles Hodge, under whom Warfield studied at Princeton. In his Systematic Theology Hodge noted that it must be remembered that when God uses humans as his instruments, "He uses them according to their nature" (1904, 156). Humans, as intelligent voluntary agents, were used of God according to that description of their nature. Hodge asserted that "the sacred writers were not machines." Inspiration did not suspend the human writers' human faculties, "neither did it interfere with the free exercise of the distinctive mental characteristics of the individual" (1904, 157).

The contemporary followers of Complete Inerrancy are in step with the earlier exponents of the view in this regard. Gordon R. Lewis listed several concerns which argue for giving more attention to the human authors of Scripture within the concept of inerrancy. He noted that 1) the human authors were not autonomous, but under God, 2)

the human authors have characteristics common to all people as created in God's image, 3) the human authors' unique perspectives were prepared by divine providence, 4) the human authors' teachings originated with God, and 5) the human authors' research and writing were done under supernatural supervision (1980, 241-254). Henry, while reluctant to talk about dual authorship, or of a divine-human co-authorship of Scriptures, asserted that the human authors were more than simply divine secretaries; they expressed their differences of style and personality. "The Holy Spirit's inspiration of the chosen writers involves a special confluence of the divine and human. The simultaneous agency of God and man in one and the same event, whether historical (Acts 2:23) or literary (2 Peter 1:21), is a doctrine not foreign to biblical theism" (Henry 1979, IV:142).

When God looked for human authors through whom to reveal His Word He did not just look for any person who might be available at the moment. He looked for the one whom through years of training He had prepared to speak and write precisely that portion of the Scripture which He wished for that one to write (Young 1957, 70). A. A. Hodge and Warfield argued that "each sacred writer was by God specially formed, endowed, educated, providentially conditioned, and then supplied with knowledge naturally, supernaturally or spiritually conveyed, so that he, and he alone, could, and freely would, produce his allotted part" (1979, 14). The human authors of Scripture were prepared for their task of writing by God's gracious dealings with them throughout their lives.

Emphasizing, as they do, the vital importance of the human aspect of the process of writing the Scriptures, opens the proponents of Complete Inerrancy to the charge that the humans necessarily introduced error into the texts they were writing. The truism that being human is defined by the capacity and propensity to err is the basis of such charges.

The Complete Inerrantists respond to the charge by appealing to the pattern of the perfection of the incarnate Christ. Montgomery noted that "a moment's reflection will show that, while man frequently errs, he does not err all the time, or in any given case necessarily" (1974, 33). His assertion was that such a position which connects error with human involvement does not derive from the biblical understanding that humans were fallen, but from Platonism's rational idealism. Montgomery referred to the incarnation of Jesus Christ as an example of perfection on the human plane and asserted that the working of God within the human authors could have achieved the level of perfection in the writing of the Scripture which is being argued for.

Pinnock, too, gave as much emphasis to the human authors of the Scriptures as to the divine, insisting that that does not necessarily allow for the possibility of error. "Naturally we reject the puerile maxim: 'To err is human – Scripture is human – therefore, Scripture errs.' For error is no more required of the Bible's humanity than sin is of Christ's. Inerrancy no more deifies Scripture or makes criticism impossible, than sinlessness renders Christ docetic and makes historical study of His life impossible. A better maxim is this: 'To err is human – ergo, God gave Scripture by inspiration – so that it does not err'" (Pinnock 1971, 176). The two factors, human and divine, interpenetrate the text at every point so that Scripture is fully human and fully divine.

Henry, who also appealed to the incarnate Christ as the pattern of perfection which is possible, especially with the inspiring work of the Holy Spirit active in the lives of the human authors, suggested that the human capacity to err does not of necessity have to be evidenced in every human activity. With some degree of irony he noted that "with remarkable conceit many modernists (quite apart from any claim to special transcendent

inspiration) assumed finality for their communication of what supposedly was the authentic content of Christianity, while at the same time they argued that if inspired apostles told the infallible truth about Christ and the Christian faith their humanity must somehow have been breached" (1979, IV:151).

While the proponents of Complete Inerrancy are united in arguing that human participation in the writing of Scripture must be acknowledged, they are not as united in describing how the human and divine aspects of that writing occurred. The precise way in which the divine and human are related in the process of inspiration is not argued for, but that that relationship is responsible for the Scripture is accepted. Warfield asserted that the divine Scriptures have "a human side or aspect" to them. The only answer to the question as to how this came about which Warfield adamantly refused was that of dictation. The process was more intimate than the word dictation would allow for; the Holy Spirit worked within the human authors to superintend their work so that they were preserved from making any error in the recording of the message of God to humans (1956, 1479).

Neither the human nor the divine aspects of the writing of the Scriptures should be seen as dominating the other; further, according to Warfield, the two aspects should not be viewed as being in competition with each other so that one or the other is always diminishing, or eliminating, the other (1983a, 276-278). Thus, the Scriptures are a "Divine product produced through the instrumentality of men." These human authors were not the initiators of the material they wrote; rather, they were moved by the "Divine initiative and borne by the irresistible power of the Spirit of God along ways of His choosing to ends of His appointment" (Warfield 1956, 1480).

The position of Warfield on the relationship of the divine and human in the writing of Scripture is fairly standard for the Complete Inerrancy position. There is, however, some disagreement as to the way in which one should view that relationship. Are the human authors to be seen as co-authors with the divine in this process? Young rejected the idea that the Bible is the product of the combined effort of God and humans. "There were indeed human writers of the Scripture, but they are not to be considered as co-authors with God. It is not that God contributed certain parts of the Scripture, and men supplemented these, and it most certainly is not the case that men contributed the greater portion of Scripture to have it supplemented by God. Nor did God and man take counsel together as to what should be included in the Scripture. God did not consult man as to what should be written. The Bible is truly the Word of God. He is the final and the ultimate author; the Bible comes from God" (Young 1957, 79). The use of humans was an act of grace which allowed them to be authors but not the originators of the words and thoughts which they expressed.

The majority view Complete Inerrancy, however, is that the human authors of Scripture were real authors, active in the process of writing the Scripture. Ramm, while not fully representative of Complete Inerrancy, does speak for this aspect of the position by asserting that the human authors fulfilled a legitimate role in the process of writing the Bible. They were real authors, not mere secretaries. "The Holy Spirit used their language, their vocabularies, their culture, their emotions, their thoughts, and their mouths. The mystery and marvel of Scripture is that it is the result of a dual authorship, the apostle and the Holy Spirit, yet in such a way that the originative authorship of each is not infringed upon by the other" (Ramm 1961, 179).

A. A. Hodge and Warfield were very clear that the human and divine interaction which produced Scripture was the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit. They observed that for the human author, "throughout the whole of his work the Holy Spirit was present, causing his energies to flow into the spontaneous exercises of the writer's faculties, elevating and directing where need be, and everywhere securing the errorless expression in language of the thought designed by God. This last element is what we call 'Inspiration'" (1979, 16). Charles Hodge, in agreement with this emphasis upon the activity of the Holy Spirit, asserted that the biblical writers were not subject to having been evacuated of their person or senses in the writing of the Bible, nor where they reduced to the status of a machine nor elevated to states of ecstasy in the process. He suggested his understanding of the process with the rhetorical question, "If the Spirit of God can mingle itself with the elements of human action and render it certain that a man will repent and believe and persevere in holiness without interfering with his consciousness or liberty, why may not that same Spirit guide the mental operations of a man so that he shall speak or write without error and still be perfectly self-controlled and free" (1983a, 138)?

The Bible was written by human and divine agencies, that is, by God and the humans whom He chose for the task. The human writers maintained their own styles of writing, but the Holy Spirit so operated within them that the product of their effort was God's. Lindsell viewed the relationship of the human and divine in the writing of Scripture as comparable to the mystery of the two complete natures in Jesus of Nazareth. "Just as Jesus had a human and a divine nature, one of which was truly human and the other truly divine, so the written Word of God is a product that bears the marks of what is

truly human and truly divine" (1976, 31).

Two terms are used by Complete Inerrancy to describe the interaction of the divine and human in the process of producing Scripture: confluency and concursus. Pinnock uses the term confluency to describe the dual authorship of the Bible, "the fact that the Bible is at one and the same time the product of the divine breath and a human pen" (1971, 92) The mystery can be, and must be, confessed, but it cannot be fully understood. The mutually distinct categories of Divine and human are caused by the Divine plan to work together confluently to produce the Scriptures. "God and man can both be significant agents simultaneously in the same historical . . . or literary . . . event" (Pinnock 1971, 92). This sense of confluency is also expressed by Packer, who noted that "Scripture indicates that God in His providence was from the first preparing the human vehicles of inspiration for their predestined task, and that He caused them in many cases, perhaps in most, to perform that task through the normal exercise of the abilities which He had given them" (1958, 78).

The other term which is used to describe the Divine-human relationship in the writing of Scripture is concursus, a term which Warfield used to describe one of the three ways in which God revealed Himself to His creation. The other two descriptors of revelation were "external manifestations," which described the mode of revelation expressed in the theophanies of the biblical record, and "internal manifestations," which described the mode of revelation expressed in the prophetic ministry recorded in the Bible. Concursus, the mode of revelation expressed in the receiving and communicating of what became the biblical material, employed the total personality in the process of revelation. "The Spirit is not to be conceived as standing outside of the human powers

employed for the effect in view, ready to supplement any inadequacies they may show

and to supply any defects they may manifest, but as working confluently in, with and by

them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as His

instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration do His work and reach

His aim. The product, therefore, which is attained by their means is His product through

them" (Warfield 1981a, 27).

Warfield argued that this concept of concursus is the only adequate way to explain

the relationship of the Divine and the human in the writing of Scripture.

> The fundamental principle of this conception is that the whole of Scripture is the
> product of divine activities which enter it, however, not by superseding the
> activities of the human authors, but confluently with them; so that the Scriptures
> are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them
> at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing
> which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every
> part, every word and every particular. According to this conception, therefore, the
> whole Bible is recognized as human, the free product of human effort in every
> part and word. And at the same time, the whole Bible is recognized as divine, the
> Word of God, his utterances, of which he is in the truest sense the Author.
> (Warfield 1983a, 278-279)

Packer also used the concept of concursus to explain the relationship between the

divine and human in the writing of Scripture. Rejecting any accommodation theories

which would allow the fallen human condition to impact negatively the process of writing

the Scriptures, Packer preferred to describe the interaction between the human and divine

as concursive. The Spirit's inspiring activity was "exercised in, through and by means of

the writers' own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was both free and

spontaneous on their part and divinely elicited and controlled, and what they wrote was

not only their own work but also God's work" (1958, 80). The freedom of God and the

freedom of the human are not mutually exclusive. They can be held simultaneously;

indeed, "the freedom of God, who works in and through His creatures, leading them to act according to their nature, is itself the foundation and guarantee of the freedom of their actions" (Packer 1958, 81). It is a deistic mistake to assume that the human freedom to err must be maintained else the human is totally lost in the interaction with the divine.

2.2 Logic of the Complete Inerrancy View

Complete Inerrancy holds that the Bible is completely without error in every part, the spiritual as well as the historical, or more secular. This assertion is made for the original writings of Scripture, the autographs, and is the case because of the activity of the Holy Spirit upon, and within, the human authors in such a way as to not diminish their humanity while assisting them to write without error the message of God. The position is the result of the expression of a specific logical approach to the writing of Scripture, to which attention must now be turned.

2.2.1 Introduction

The logic of the view of inerrancy held by Complete Inerrancy is based upon a foundational view of the nature of the Bible. This view provides the necessary grounding for the expression of the logic which results in the view which has been explained earlier. The Bible is accepted as a unitary product with a single author, God, and a single theme, the plan of God's redemption in Christ Jesus. The entire Bible witnesses to that central theme, Jesus Christ as the Redeemer, but it does so with varying levels of intensity and applicability. The Bible, for Complete Inerrancy, is seen as the Word of God, a phrase which argues for the Bible being a divine utterance. Packer summarized this foundational assertion: "The biblical concept of Scripture, then, is of a single, though complex, God-

given message, set down in writing in God-given words; a message which God has spoken and still speaks. On the analogy of scriptural usage, therefore, it is evident that to describe Scripture as the Word of God written is entirely accurate" (1958, 88).

Building upon this understanding of the Bible, an appeal is made to the inductive approach as that which best accomplishes the goals of accepting and defending the doctrine of inerrancy. While the appeal is made to induction as a methodological approach, it must be noted that there are qualifications placed upon the inductive method. Warfield argued that he held to the method of induction when setting forth the doctrine of the inspiration of Scriptures. "When we approach the Scriptures to ascertain their doctrine of inspiration, we proceed by collecting the whole body of relevant facts. Every claim they make to inspiration is a relevant fact; every statement they make concerning inspiration is a relevant fact; every fact indicative of the attitude they hold towards Scripture is a relevant fact. But the characteristics of their own writings are not facts relevant to the determination of their doctrine" (1981a, 205). He asserted with this argument that the claims of Scripture have primacy over the phenomena within Scripture. This is the limitation placed upon the inductive method; the phenomena within Scripture, that is the data of the writings, the forms and styles of writing, and the geographical, historical, and scientific assertions, are subordinate to the claims which the Bible makes for itself for being inspired and inerrant (Warfield 1974, 44).

That which is called an inductive approach, then, takes as its starting point the collection of the claims of the biblical material from which to make the theological assertion that the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy are taught by the Scriptures. From this vantage point the details about the Bible which are ascertained through biblical

criticism and exegesis, the phenomena, can be evaluated. The real concern, from this starting point, is whether the Bible can be trusted as a guide in doctrine, as a teacher of truth. If not, then the whole system of Christianity collapses because of a lack of a foundation. To argue that belief in the doctrine of inspiration is based upon the claims of the sacred writers, as does Complete Inerrancy, is not to argue in a circular fashion. It claims not to assume inspiration in order to prove inspiration. Warfield argued that the only assumption needed to validate the use of Scripture in the establishment of doctrinal assertions is that of honesty and sobriety on the part of the writers. "If a sober and honest writer claims to be inspired by God, then here, at least, is a phenomenon to be accounted for" (1981a, 398). Warfield continued the explanation, "If the New Testament writers, being sober and honest men, claim verbal inspiration, and this claim was allowed by the contemporary church, and their writings in no respect in their character or details negative it, then it seems idle to object to the doctrine of verbal inspiration on any critical grounds" (1981a, 407).

Before moving to look more carefully at the expression of the logic of inerrancy, it must be observed that Complete Inerrancy is not only motivated by a commitment to induction, they are also concerned about the danger, or dangers, which they see in the denial of inerrancy. Among the dangers identified is that of determining the base of authority in deciding what is and what is not inspired and without error if one should move away from seeing the entirety of the Scripture in those terms. Warfield, speaking somewhat prophetically, worried about the standard which would be applied if not that of the entirety of the Bible (1956, 35). A modern exponent of this view, Harold Lindsell, saw the additional danger of total defection from orthodoxy if the doctrine of the

inerrancy of Scripture was abandoned. It was his warning, made most cogently in his book, <u>The Battle for the Bible</u>, that set off the current dispute about inerrancy in American Evangelicalism (1976, 23-26, 141-160).

2.2.2 The General Approach

The general approach to the logic of the argument for inerrancy presented by the Complete Inerrancy view can be expressed in seven steps. While variations in emphasis can be found among the proponents of this view, there is some agreement as to the importance of this general approach to the issue. First, the Bible is to be accepted as generally reliable, a beginning point which does not demand acceptance of full inerrancy but does demand acceptance of general reliability. The second step is the acceptance of the apostles and prophets as being generally reliable; that is, they are seen as trustworthy and honest persons, individuals whose words would be accepted as being truthful. The third step moves to the faith statement that Christ is the Son of God. This third step provides the foundation for the fourth, which calls for the acceptance of the view of Scriptures set forth by the Christ, especially because He is the Son of God. The fifth step in the general approach to the logic of the doctrine of inerrancy asserts that Christ viewed His work and words as the equal to, and the extension of, the Old Testament. The sixth step is the acceptance of the work and words of the apostles of Christ as the extension of His work and words, carrying with them the same authority and status as that granted to Him. The final step in the general approach is the assertion that the church throughout its history has accepted the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Having briefly highlighted the seven steps, each must be explained further.

Archibald Alexander, the founder of Princeton Theology, asserted forcefully the

general reliability of the Scriptures in his inaugural address as the first professor at

Princeton. He made his argument in a series of six propositions (1983, 77-79). (1) The

facts recorded in the Scripture are true. These are primarily of a miraculous nature and the

logic which asserts that they are true is that those doing miracles must be assisted by God

in so doing. "Now the truth of these miracles may be established by testimony like other

ancient facts; and also by the history of them being so interwoven with other authentic

history, that we cannot separate them: and especially, by that chain of events, depending

on them, and reaching down to our own time which has no other assignable origin but the

existence of these miracles" (Alexander 1983, 78). (2) Many of the prophecies of the

biblical materials can be shown to have been fulfilled. (3) The contents of the Scriptures

are superior to other ancient writings. "The extraordinary and superlatively excellent

nature of the Christian religion proves that it could not have been the production of

impostors, nor of unassisted fishermen; nor indeed, of any description of uninspired men"

(Alexander 1983, 78). (4) The gospel has the effect of reforming the hearts and lives of

human who come into contact with them. (5) The gospel has been successful even against

the overwhelming forces it faced in the beginning and at various points since then. (6)

Christianity has exerted a beneficial impact of on the nations in which it has been

received.

Accepting that the Bible is generally reliable, Complete Inerrancy asserts,

secondly, that the apostles and prophets were persons of integrity and worth, whose

testimony can be believed. These persons experienced such a forceful call upon their lives

from God that they risked everything to be obedient. In the examination of their records

and lives there is no evidence that they received personal gain for the obedience rendered in service to God. They showed themselves to be worthy of acceptance. Added to this is the acknowledgment that they were persons whom God inspired for their tasks. Charles Hodge noted, "According to all antiquity, an inspired man was one who was the organ of God in what he said, so that his words were the words of the God of which he was the organ" (1904, 157). The sacred writers had the same idea in mind when they use the concept of inspiration, indicating that these persons were worthy of belief. This is further shown from the meaning of the word prophet, which Hodge saw as a "spokesman, one who speaks for another, in his name, and by his authority; so that it is not the spokesman but the person for whom he acts, who is responsible for the truth of what is said" (1904, 159).

The next step in the general approach to the logic of the Complete Inerrancy view requires the faith statement that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to argue the case for this faith assertion, but it must be noted that the proponents of this position regarding the doctrine of inerrancy do accept it. The critical aspect of this step in the logical approach is that if Christ is accepted as the Son of God, His views and assertions must be accepted as coming from God and must be believed. Archer argued that the New Testament teaches that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God, a teaching which is verified by His miracles, teaching, death and resurrection, and the testimony of the early church through the apostles (1978, 92). Hodge, building on this faith-acceptance of the deity of the Christ, asserted the conclusion of the position, "Faith . . . in Christ involves faith in the Scriptures as the word of God, and faith in the Scriptures as the word of God is faith in their plenary inspiration" (1983a, 137).

However, before that conclusion can be reached further support for the logic of the view must be considered.

The faith-acceptance of the Christ as the Son of God leads the proponents of Complete Inerrancy to the necessary acceptance of His teachings in all things, especially His teachings about the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. A. A. Hodge and Warfield, in a summary fashion, argued that since Christ is the ultimate standard and, as such, He accepted the inspiration and inerrancy of the Old Testament, His followers must, too, accept the Old Testament (1979, 24). Warfield argued further that "Jesus' occasional adduction of Scripture as an authoritative document rests on an ascription of it to God as its author. His testimony is that whatever stands written in Scripture is a word of God" (1956, 1477).

Pinnock noted that the basis for Christian belief and practice is the belief that Jesus Christ is normative for His followers and that He taught the divine origin and authorship of the Bible. The doctrine of Scripture as taught by Christ contained the following elements. He taught the literal truth of biblical history, by making such references as to Abel (Lk. 11:51), Noah (Mt. 24:37), Abraham (Jn. 8.56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Lk 10.12), Lot (Lk. 17.28), etc. He believed and taught the doctrinal teachings of the Old Testament (Mt. 4.1-11; Lk.4.1-13). He rebuked the religious leaders for not holding to the Old Testament carefully enough (Mt. 23.23). He held and taught a high view of the writings themselves. He heard God's voice speaking through the words of Scripture (Mk 12.36; Mt. 19.5). He held that the Old Testament would not be abolished (Mt. 5.17; Lk. 16.17). He saw Himself as fulfilling the Old Testament (Mt. 5.17), a fulfilling which had to do with "filling out the full measure of the text." John 10.31-39,

which quotes Psalm 82.6, is an example not merely of a proof-texting approach of the theology of Jesus about the Scripture, but is "entirely representative of his constant approach to the Bible." His understanding of promise and fulfillment also testified to His v iew of Scripture. He frequently used the phrase, "the Scriptures must be fulfilled" (Lk. 22.37; Mt. 26.56; Lk. 4.21, etc) (Pinnock 1974a, 201-206).

John Wenham, in <u>Christ and the Bible</u>, presented in detail the argument for the view of Christ about the Bible being that which governs His followers (1973). In an article which was published as a part of the work of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy he summarized his presentation. "Christ held the Old Testament to be historically true, completely authoritative, and divinely inspired. To Him, the God of the Old Testament was the living God, and the teaching of the Old Testament was the teaching of the living God. To Him, what Scripture said, God said" (See also Packer 1958, 54-58; 1980, 6). The presentation is clear: Jesus, the Son of God, held to a view of the Old Testament which saw it as completely inspired and inerrant; His followers are obligated to share that view.

This aspect of the logic for the Complete Inerrantist view does not stand unchallenged. The details of some of the challenges raised will be presented below when the other two views on the inerrancy of Scripture are discussed. Simply put, the challenges allege that even though Jesus may have been the Son of God He accommodated His views of Scripture to those current in His day. Therefore, what He taught about the inspiration and inerrancy of the Old Testament was merely what the faithful of His time believed. Further, the challenge is raised that what is found in the New Testament and ascribed to Jesus is really the expressions of faith by those who

wrote the materials and not those of the Christ Himself. Both of the charges are dismissed

by the Complete Inerrantists (Pinnock 1974a, 207).

The response made by Lindsell to such challenges is suggestive of the lines

adopted by those who hold this position.

> If Jesus taught biblical inerrancy, either He knew inerrancy to be true, or He knew it to be false but catered to the ignorance of His hearers. Or, He was limited and held to something that was not true but He did not know it. Whichever way anyone goes with regard to his Christology, certain conclusions follow inevitably. For example, if Jesus knew that the Scripture is not inerrant and yet taught that it is, He was guilty of deception. Thus He was a sinner rather than a sinless being. If He was a man of His times and in ignorance thought inerrancy to be true, then He was in no sense omniscient, and this leads to a strange Christology. The third alternative is the only one that holds water. Christ taught that Scripture is inerrant because He knew it to be so. This is the only view that fits the New Testament evidences about the person of Jesus. (1976, 44)

In addition to the argument which appeals to the character and deity of Jesus in

opposition to an accommodation theory it is also contended that when the ministry of

Jesus is examined, it is clear that He frequently contradicted the common view of the

world and religion espoused by those in His day. Wenham suggested that Jesus was not

slow at all to confront His hearers about areas in which their beliefs and/or practices were

deficient. Jesus distinguished between the divine law and their false and inadequate

interpretations and understandings of it, repudiated their narrow nationalistic

interpretations, and defied their misconceptions. It is unlikely that He would have merely

accommodated Himself to their belief about the Scriptures had that belief not been

correct (1980, 14). Pinnock, agreeing with Wenham's position, noted that Jesus could be

viewed as a non-conformist, who held the Scriptures as central to His life and ministry.

Because of this, He would have been reluctant to compromise His understanding of the

inspiration and inerrancy of the Old Testament merely to appease the understandings held

by those around Him (See also Archer 1978, 92-93; 1974a, 207).

Henry, arguing that Jesus did not merely accommodate His views about the
Scripture to those current in His day, asserted that Jesus was more than willing to alter the
prevailing view of Scripture. He identified several ways in which Jesus did so.

> In summary, Jesus altered the prevailing Jewish view of Scripture in several ways:
> (1) he subjected the authority of tradition to the superior and normative authority
> of the Old Testament; (2) he emphasized that he himself fulfills the messianic
> promise of the inspired writings; (3) he claimed for himself an authority not below
> that of the Old Testament and definitively expounded the inner significance of the
> Law; (4) he inaugurated the new covenant escalating the Holy Spirit's moral
> power as an internal reality; (5) he committed his apostles to the enlargement and
> completion of the Old Testament canon through their proclamation of the Spirit-
> given interpretation of his life and work. At the same time he identified himself
> wholly with the revelational authority of Moses and the prophets – that is, with
> the Old Testament as an inspired literary canon – insisting that Scripture has
> sacred, authoritative and permanent validity, and that the revealed truth of God is
> conveyed in its teachings. (Henry 1979, III:47)

The general approach to the logic of the Complete Inerrantist position, which
began with accepting the general reliability of the Bible, moves to another level with the
assertion that Jesus, the Son of God, who believed in the inspiration of the Old
Testament, claimed that His work and teachings were equal to the Old Testament. Jesus
consciously linked His ministry to the Old Testament by constantly showing that He was
fulfilling the prophetic expectations of what was, for His day, the Scriptures. He claimed
that He came to fulfill, not to abolish, the Old Testament, that not the smallest stroke or
letter of it would pass until it was fulfilled, and, towards the end of His ministry, used the
same language to assert that His words would not be destroyed (e.g. Matt. 5:17-20; 11:5;
24:34-35; 26:24, 53-54) (Packer 1958, 54-62).

The argument that the Christ viewed Himself as a part of the revelatory work of
God in the world must be linked necessarily to the continuation of that work in and

through the apostles whom Christ called and commissioned. Warfield clearly articulated this important connection: "We believe this doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures primarily because it is the doctrine which Christ and his apostles believed, and which they have taught us" (1981a, 74). Warfield argued that the doctrine of inspiration held by the church is that which the biblical writers held, and that they are "trustworthy as doctrinal guides." These two aspects of the argument are crucial to his case. For the critic to destroy the doctrine they will need to defeat these two pillars of support for the position. Any attempt to separate the view of Jesus on Scripture from that of the apostles, that is to suggest that they accommodated their views to the fallacies of their day while the Christ had a higher and more correct view, is to render the apostles worthless as teachers of doctrine. Could they then be believed in any other area of teaching (Warfield 1981a, 173-185)? How could one even be sure that they had accurately reported the teaching and works of the Christ? On the contrary, if the apostles are accepted as truthful teachers and their teaching were derived from those of the Christ, their teaching must be accepted by their followers.

Charles Hodge proposed a logical framework for the acceptance of the connection between the views of Christ and those of the apostles. He noted that Christ promised the apostles the Holy Spirit "who should bring all things to their remembrance, and render them infallible in teaching." This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost with the sending and reception of the Holy Spirit within the apostles. Hodge cited 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Corinthians 2:7-13; 14:37, Galatians 1:8, and 1 John 5:10; 4:6, as passages in which the apostolic voices are heard claiming direct divine origination and authority for their teachings. This claim was not only made by apostolic words but was authenticated by the

nature of the truths they proclaimed, by the power of those truths over the lives of the

hearers, and by the inward witness to the truths by the Holy Spirit (Hodge 1904, 160-

162).

The New Testament apostolic writers testify to the inspiration and inerrancy of the

Bible in a number of ways. Jesus promised supernatural guidance to His followers (Matt.

10:19-20; Mk. 12:11; Lk. 21:12), and the New Testament writers distinctly claimed

divine authority. They wrote with a sense of authority the history they presented and the

teachings they espoused. Either they were delirious or they were acting as emissaries of

the risen Lord. They saw their words as binding (2 Cor. 10:7-8), of more value than

angelic messages (Gal. 1:7-8), and as commands which must be obeyed (1 Thess. 4:2, 11;

2 Thess. 3:6-14; 1 Cor. 14:37) (Warfield 1981a, 401).

In addition to these examples of implied inspiration as the source of such writings,

the New Testament writers explicitly claimed inspiration. Warfield noted, for example, 1

Corinthians 7:40, "where the best and most scientific modern exegesis proves that Paul

claimed for his 'opinion' expressed in this letter direct divine inspiration . . . (1981a,

402)." Warfield also adduced 1 Corinthians 2:13, in which Paul saw the words he used to

be of divine inspiration, as another example of the apostles claiming for themselves

divine inspiration in what they wrote. Warfield also affirmed that the "New Testament

writers distinctly place each other's writings in the same lofty category in which they

place the writings of the Old Testament; and as they indubitably hold to the full - even

verbal - inspiration of the Old Testament, it follows that they claim the same verbal

inspiration for the New" (1981a, 403).

Not only did the apostles see their work as being from divine inspiration, they

accepted the Old Testament, as did the Christ, as the Word of God. Warfield, identifying

two classes of biblical passages, noted that the New Testament writers employed a

number a techniques to affirm their understanding that the Old Testament was the

utterance of God. "In one of these classes of passages the Scriptures are spoken of as if

they were God; in the other, God is spoken of as if He were the Scriptures; in the two

together, God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in

point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them" (1981a, 283).

Some examples of the first class of Scriptures are Galatians 3:8 and Romans 9:17.

Examples of the second class are Matthew 19:4-5, Hebrews 3:7, Acts 4:24-25; 13:34-35,

and Hebrews 1:6. "The two sets of passages, together, thus show an absolute

identification, in the minds of these writers, of 'Scripture' with the speaking of God"

(Warfield 1981a, 284).

The Old Testament was the supreme authority for the apostles. Edwin Blum

argued that this is seen in that they quote and allude to the Old Testament frequently "to

support or to illustrate an argument, to serve as a point of departure in a discussion, or to

act as a proof text" (1980, 41). This position is verified further by noting that the Apostles

use several literary devices to affirm their view of the Old Testament. For instance, they

will use the formula "it is written" when introducing an Old Testament quote as a "legal

expression for that which is authoritatively binding." Further, they will refer to the Old

Testament as "the oracles" or "the words" to show that they viewed them as the very

words of God. Also, the New Testament writers refer to the Old Testament as the

"Scriptures" to identify them as the sacred writings (Blum 1980, 42-43).

The general approach to the logic of the view on inerrancy held by the Complete

Inerrantists, then, maintains that there is a linkage between Christ and the apostles. Henry noted that "the New Testament view of the inspiration of the Old Testament writers is precisely that of Jesus Christ himself. Like him, that view unqualifiedly affirms both the divine origin of Scripture and its divine authority" (1979, IV:137). Not only is there seen a complementary view of inspiration and authority, but it is accepted that Christ commissioned and empowered the apostles to continue the ministry which He had begun, a commissioning and empowerment which ensured that their work and writings, too, would bear the imprint of inspiration and inerrancy.

There remains one final step in the general approach to the logic of the Complete Inerrancy position – the testimony of the church. This step is quite disputed by those who hold to other views about the question of inerrancy. Looking at the same historical data the various positions in the debate arrive at differing conclusions. Here it will be observed that the Complete Inerrancy position sees in the historical data a consistent testimony throughout the life of the church to the absolute inerrancy of the biblical material. In the following chapters, which deal with Conditional Inerrancy and Limited Inerrancy, their contradictory conclusions will be noted.

The position of Complete Inerrancy is that the church's view of inspiration is that the Bible is the Word of God. Warfield noted that this "is the doctrine of inspiration which was held by the writers of the New Testament and by Jesus as purported by the Gospels." Thus, "this church-doctrine of inspiration was the Bible doctrine before it was the church-doctrine, and is the church-doctrine only because it is the Bible doctrine" (1981a, 60). To Warfield this is so obvious that it is not worthy of lengthy proof. The concern is not whether the Bible teaches its inspiration and that the church has

consistently proclaimed the same, but whether the modern believer will accept the truth

of what is taught (See also Hodge 1979, 32).

In a book which grew out of the work of the International Council on Biblical

Inerrancy, Inerrancy and the Church, edited by John Hannah, the argument to support the

conclusion that the Church has always held to the inerrancy of Scripture was made

(1984). The articles in the book, written by proponents of Complete Inerrancy, survey the

field of the history of the church, adducing from that history support for the

understanding that the Bible is absolutely without error and that is what the church has

always taught.

Robert D. Preus, in surveying the view of the church from the beginning to the

time of Luther, asserted "that the Bible is the Word of God, inerrant and of supreme

divine authority, was a conviction held by all Christians and Christian teachers through

the first 1,700 years of church history" (1980, 357). The article by Preus, The View of the

Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church Through Luther, presented citations and

references from personages in this time frame to support the conclusion that total

inerrancy is the view which is held (1980, 357-382). In a similar manner, and in an article

in the same book, though focusing on the historical period dominated by Calvin and the

Westminster Divines, John Gerstner asserted that "inerrancy has been the classic view of

Scripture throughout church history. To view it as the brain child of seventeenth-century

Protestant scholasticism or the *de novo* creation of the 'Old Princeton' school is to distort

history." In fact, Gerstner argued that the "main historic path of the Reformed tradition in

particular has been that of full inerrancy" (1980, 385-386).

Lindsell argued that the doctrine of inspiration, with its accompanying emphasis

upon inerrancy, was not the focus of concern until the eighteenth century, and was occasioned by the rise of rationalism, romanticism, evolution, and higher criticism. Before that time, however, the church, with but few exceptions, accepted the view that the Scriptures were inspired and therefore inerrant. This rising tide of philosophical skepticism allowed the view of the Bible to become radically altered. "Whereas earlier ages argued whether ultimate religious authority was to be found in the Bible alone, or the Bible through the teaching of the Church, or the Bible through the Pope, or by the addition of tradition, now there was a direct frontal assault on the Bible itself. The Bible under this attack ceased to be a book with the stamp of the divine upon it. It became to the critics a human document composed by men who were no more inspired than other literary figures and certainly not to be fully trusted for ultimate truth in theological or other areas of witness" (Lindsell 1984, 53).

Lindsell, and others in Complete Inerrancy, argued that the church has never accepted any other view than that of absolute inerrancy. "When we look at infallibility in church history, one fact stands out in sharp focus. The dogma of biblical inerrancy never was an acute issue in the church until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." Lindsell contended that the reason the issue was never a central one in the history of the church was that, apart from a few exceptions, "the church through the ages has consistently believed that the entire Bible is the inerrant or infallible Word of God" (Henry 1979, IV:368-384; 1976, 41-43; Pinnock 1971, 147-158; See also Young 1957, 93-99).

The general approach to the logic of the view on inerrancy held by the Complete Inerrantist, which began with the assertion of the general reliability of the Bible, culminates with the argument that the church has held steadfastly to this doctrine. Each of

the seven steps in the process is important to the conclusion toward which they are

directed. There are two further aspects of the logic of Complete Inerrancy which must be

considered. They are not properly steps in the argument but are expansions upon aspects

of the seven steps already presented. The Complete Inerrantist appeals directly to specific

Scripture passages in arguing for total inerrancy and also to the work of the Holy Spirit in

guaranteeing such inerrancy.

2.2.3 The Claims of Scripture

As noted above, Complete Inerrancy argues that the Scriptures claim for

themselves the status of being without error in every aspect and form of their writing.

Before looking at the specific biblical passages to which they appeal it must be

understood that there is a claim made for the logic of appealing to the claims of the Bible

to support the theological view of absolute inerrancy. This logical approach has four

components to it: 1) the writers of Scriptures were honest, sober, witnesses who can be

trusted; 2) the purpose of the Scriptures is to teach doctrine which must be believed by

the followers of the Bible; 3) there must be an ultimate criterion, and, in matters of

Christian faith that ultimate criterion is the Bible; and 4) the Bible is replete with the use

of specific phrases which support the direct assertions of inerrancy. The logic for the

usage of specific Scriptures to support their position on Complete Inerrancy grows out of

the overall logic of their argumentation, thus, there are duplications to be noted in the

explanation of their view at this point.

The first aspect of the logic of appealing to the Scriptures to support the doctrine

of total inerrancy is the acknowledgment that the writers of the Bible were persons of

honesty, sobriety, and truthfulness. Warfield asserted that the authors were "trustworthy

as doctrinal guides" (1981a, 173). In that they were seen in this light their testimony is

worthy of belief, even in regard to nature of Scripture.

Complete Inerrancy, basing its position on the teaching of Scripture, further notes

that it is proper to allow the Scriptures to assert their own inerrancy because the biblical

material does teach doctrine. Charles Hodge asserted that it is the business of the believer

to set forth what the Bible teaches, so that if it teaches the inspiration of the Scriptures,

what the writers teach us about the nature of the influence under which they wrote must

be believed. The Scriptures are the product of one mind, evidenced by their organic unity,

and that one mind must be the mind of God. In addition, there is an internal witness to the

truths contained in the Bible. The believer must believe what Christ has taught in every

area, including the area of the inspiration of the Bible (1904, 166-167).

Packer, agreeing with Hodge, affirmed that the Scripture is God's Word written

and as such it is the final authority for all matters of faith and practice. He argued,

accordingly, that one must turn to the Scripture to hear what it says about any item of

doctrine, including that of the inerrancy of Scripture. "Our aim is to formulate a biblical

doctrine; we are to appeal to Scripture for information about itself, just as we should

appeal to it for information on any other doctrinal point. That means that our formulation

will certainly not give a final or exhaustive account of its subject. All doctrines terminate

in mystery; for they deal with the works of God, which man in this world cannot fully

comprehend, nor has God been pleased fully to explain" (Packer 1958, 75-76). So, to

leave some questions unanswered is not a problem, but the reality that the Bible teaches

doctrine is an important link in the argument for looking to the Scriptures to ascertain

understandings for the doctrine of inerrancy.

John Frame asserted that since other Christian doctrines are established by appeal to the Scriptures it is proper to appeal to the Scriptures to defend their inspiration. Frame, identifying the third aspect of the logic for such an approach, noted that when arguing on behalf of an ultimate criterion, and the concern for Scriptural authority is certainly an ultimate criterion, the argument will, of necessity, be somewhat circular, but that does not render it invalid (1974, 179). It is not acceptable to argue for one ultimate criterion by appealing to another. The issue is the self-witness of the Bible, but the Bible is not primarily a self-witness; rather it is a book about God and His Christ and the plan of redemption for the human race. "We conclude, then, that the witness of Scripture to its own authority is pervasive: (1) The whole biblical message of salvation presupposes and necessitates the existence of revealed words – words of absolute demand and sure promise; without such words, we have no Lord, no Savior, no hope. (2) Throughout the history of redemption, God directs his people to find these words in written form, in those books which we know as the Old and New Testaments" (Frame 1974, 192). If the Bible is granted the status of an ultimate authority, its claims must be accepted because there would be no greater authority to which to appeal.

The fourth aspect of the logic of Complete Inerrancy for appealing to the Scripture as that which gives reason for accepting the doctrine of inerrancy is that the biblical writers used several words or phrases which describe the Scriptures as being the very words of God. As an example of the words and/or phrases which are in mind, Warfield pointed to the abundant use in the biblical material of phrases like "the Scripture," or "the Scriptures," or "the Oracles of God," or "it is written," "it is spoken,"

"it says," "God says," "Scripture says," and the like (1981a, 65). Warfield noted that

> the designation of Scripture as 'scripture' and its citation by the formula, 'it is written,' attest primarily its indefectible authority; the designation of it as 'oracles' and the adduction of it by the formula, 'it says,' attest primarily its immediate divinity. Its authority rests on its divinity and its divinity expresses itself in its trustworthiness; and the NT writers in all their use of it treat it as what they declare it to be - a God-breathed document, which, because God-breathed, is through and through trustworthy in all its assertions, authoritative in all its declarations, and down to its last particular, the very word of God, his 'oracles.' (1956, 1478)

Lindsell, citing further evidence of the use of words and/or phrases to picture the Scripture as the words of God, stated, "The writers of the Old Testament professed more than 2,000 times that the words they wrote were given them directly from God." He noted that the phrase, or its equivalent, "Thus saith the Lord," is used frequently by the writers to affirm the God-originated character of the material. That prophecies were made and fulfilled can also be used to affirm that correct nature of the biblical material. Archaeological discoveries have also proven the reliability of the Scriptures. "The spades of a thousand diggers over the centuries have not discredited the truth of Scripture nor has the turned-over earth proven the Bible to be untrue" (Lindsell 1976, 35).

Based on the rationale presented, Complete Inerrancy depends on several specific passages from the Bible, but the main lines of the presentation can be seen by looking at the three major passages to which the appeal of inerrancy is made: 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; and John 10:34-35. The use of 2 Timothy 3:16 as a text for the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture has a long tradition within Complete Inerrancy. Warfield, in his dispute with Henry P. Smith, who was removed from the Presbyterian ministry because he proposed a view of the limited inspiration of Scripture which Warfield felt to be heretical, argued that this central passage denied the limited inspiration view (1974,

11-12). The pivotal assertion of the passage in question is that the Scriptures are inspired, or God-breathed. This assertion is drawn from the Greek *theopneustos*, which is only found here in the New Testament. In a major exegetical study Warfield concluded that the term *theopneustos* "is primarily expressive of the origination of Scripture, not of its nature and much less of its effects. What is *theopneustos* is 'God-breathed,' produced by the creative breath of the Almighty. And Scripture is called *theopneustos* in order to designate it as 'God-breathed,' the product of Divine spiration, the creation of that Spirit who is in all spheres of the Divine activity the executive of the Godhead" (See also Warfield 1956; 1981a, 280). Thus, the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture takes its impetus from this assertion that the Bible is, in the highest and truest sense, the creation of God, and as such cannot contain error of any kind (See also Blum 1980, 44-47; Henry 1979, IV:131; Lindsell 1976, 34).

In regard to the second major text used, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Warfield noted that "Peter is making high affirmations concerning prophecy, and he limits the prophecy of which he makes them to Scriptural prophecy, that he may guard his readers against false prophecy" (1974, 24). Warfield understood that Peter had in mind the whole of Scripture by the use of the phrase "prophecy" and not just the specifically prophetic sections thereof. Again, the origin of Scripture is the concern, and Peter, as did Paul in 2 Timothy, affirms that it is not of human origin; rather, God moved the men who wrote (Warfield 1956, 1474). This passage, according to Lindsell who speaks for many within Complete Inerrancy, showed that God used human instruments to accomplish His divine purpose (1976, 35). Though God used human instruments, Scripture is not the result of the exercise of the human will in an attempt to understand and explain a religious system of

beliefs. The human authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit and, because of that, they were enabled to speak from God. This, at least in some ways, speaks of the concursive operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors of Scripture (Archer 1978, 90; Blum 1980, 48-49; See also Henry 1979, IV:132).

The third passage which is used to assert the inspiration and total inerrancy of Scripture is John 10:34-35, a passage in which Jesus makes an appeal to Scripture. He noted that the Scripture to which he appealed is in the Law, even though the citation is from the Psalms, because He viewed it a part of the Scripture at large. Further, Jesus asserted that the Scripture cannot be broken, that is, "it is impossible for the Scripture to be annulled, its authority to be withstood, or denied" (Warfield 1956, 1475). Thus, in the mind of Jesus the Scripture possesses an indefectible authority. Warfield noted that what Jesus is asserting as having this powerful authority is a rather unimportant assertion. If that is true about such a relatively minor passage, how much more is it true for those which have more prominence (1956, 1475)? Henry, agreeing with the position on this passage proposed by Warfield, argued that Jesus "attaches divine authority to Scripture as an inviolable whole. The authority of Scripture, he avers, cannot be undone or annulled, for it is indestructible" (Henry 1979, IV:133).

The logic of Complete Inerrancy includes the use of the assertions of the biblical material, as they understand them, to support the view of Scripture as fully inspired and completely without error. The three passages which form the basis of their argument show the Scriptures to be the product of the breathing of God, the product of the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors, and, therefore, it is rendered in its entirety the perfect revelation of God. The final step in the logic of the Complete Inerrantist view is

the recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit in constituting the Bible as inspired and inerrant.

2.2.4 The Role of the Holy Spirit

The logic for Complete Inerrancy concludes with the recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration and affirmation of the Scriptures. Most in this camp would see the role of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Bible to include an additional step, that of aiding the believer in understanding the material presented in the Scriptures. That step, however, is beyond what is necessary for seeing the activity of the Holy Spirit inspiring and confirming the Bible as inerrant. Acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit is a vital aspect of the logic which undergirds the view of Complete Inerrancy.

The beginning assertion about the work of the Holy Spirit has to do with His work of inspiring Scripture. The passages of Scripture discussed in the previous section are the texts used to illustrate this work of the Holy Spirit. In particular, 2 Timothy 3:16, with its assertion that the Scriptures are the product of the breath of God, and 2 Peter 1:20-21, with its claim that the Scriptures are the result of the moving on the human authors by the Holy Spirit, are the two main passages to which Complete Inerrancy appeals. The role of the Spirit in inspiring Scripture, though not fully explained or delineated, is declared in these Scriptures.

Perhaps of more importance, although one would be hard pressed to weigh these assertions against each other, is the assertion that the Holy Spirit is at work within the believer to enable them to view the Bible properly and to live in harmony with its teachings. Warfield, in his study of the work of the Westminster Assembly on the

doctrine of Scripture, noted that "man needs something more than evidence, however abundant, to persuade and enable him to believe and obey God's Word; he needs the work of the Holy Spirit accompanying the Word" (1981b, 211). What is needed is the work of the Holy Spirit in the creation of a new heart within the person so that the truths about the inspiration of the Scripture can be held without doubt. Warfield averred that "faith in God's Word is not man's own work, but the gift of God; and that man needs a preparation of the spirit, as well as an exhibition of the evidences, in order to be persuaded and enabled to yield faith and obedience" (1981b, 212). Both the work of the Spirit and the evidences are highlighted by Warfield, and by most of his followers in Complete Inerrancy, as the basis for belief in the inspiration of the Bible.

In speaking of those who doubt the Bible is really the word of God, Charles Hodge asserted that those doubts "have their origin in the state of the heart." The heart must be right with God for the evidences about the reality of the Scriptures as God's inspired word to have their full and correct impact. "No amount of external evidence can produce genuine faith" (1983b, 133). That lack of faith is due to the deficient moral state of the individual, a condition which must be corrected before full faith can be known, a correction which is affected by the Holy Spirit. The faith which one has in Christ, which Hodge links to faith in the plenary inspiration of the Bible, "rests on the demonstration of the Spirit" (1983a, 137). This work of the Holy Spirit is an internal one. "It does not consist in the outward array of evidence, but in a supernatural illumination imparting spiritual discernment, so that its subjects have no need of external teaching, but this anointing teaches them what is truth" (Hodge 1983a, 137).

Complete Inerrancy argues that the entirety of the biblical materials must be

viewed as being without error. The logic which supports this view maintains that one

must, at a minimum, see the Bible as a generally reliable book written by apostles and

prophets who were honorable and reliable persons. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, viewed

the Scriptures as inspired and inerrant, a position which those who follow Him must

accept, and viewed His own work as a fulfillment of the Old Testament bearing the same

weight of value and correctness. The apostles acknowledged that their work and writings

were an extension of that of Christ, a view which has been maintained historically by the

church. The Scripture claims for itself the status of being inspired and without error. All

of this logical support for the doctrine of the total inerrancy of the Scripture is confirmed

by the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiring and affirming the Bible. As can be imagined,

this view is not without its challengers; thus, in the next section a brief overview of the

way in which Complete Inerrancy defends its doctrine will be presented.

2.3 The Response of Complete Inerrancy to Problems

In the debate which swirls around the question of the inerrancy of the Bible many

specific biblical passages are identified which are used either to support Complete

Inerrancy or to deny the position. The focus of this section is not on those specific

passages; rather here the general approach to any and all of the problems which could be

raised will be discussed. After identifying that general approach, five more specific ways

in which the defense of the absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures is made will be presented.

2.3.1 General Approach to Problems

The defense Complete Inerrancy makes against the charges made by its opponents

generally takes three approaches. These three are fairly universal among the defenders of

Complete Inerrancy and will be considered before looking at some of the more variable

ways in which the defense is made. The first of the more generally held positions adopted

in defending Complete Inerrancy is the assertion that the challengers to the view raise few

alleged errors in the biblical text. Charles Hodge noted that all charges of discrepancies

fall into one of two categories: (1) the writers of Scripture contradict themselves, or each

other, and (2) the writers teach what is clearly contradictory to history or science. As to

the first category, Hodge noted most of the ones mentioned are trivial, some are easily

solved, and others are ascribed to mistakes made in the transcription process. Given the

antiquity of the biblical material, Hodge is amazed that there are not many more with

which to be concerned (1904, 169). He compared the alleged contradictions between the

biblical writers to specks of sand which might be found in the marble of the Parthenon

which may be easily dismissed. "Admitting that the Scriptures do contain, in a few

instances, discrepancies which with our present means of knowledge, we are unable

satisfactorily to explain, they furnish no rational ground for denying their infallibility"

(Hodge 1904, 170).

Pinnock argued that the charge that the Bible is filled with errors and

discrepancies is unfounded and that, to the contrary, the number of those alleged errors

and discrepancies is relatively small, most of which have been discussed by the church

throughout its history. In fact, he asserted that it would require an infallible human to

prove the allegation of an error in the text (1967, 19). Warfield also asserted that the

number of alleged discrepancies were really very few in number and that they were

steadily diminishing as further research and discovery took place (1981a, 220).

Not only does Complete Inerrancy consistently deny that there are many alleged

errors in the biblical text, they also charge that the real culprit is the careless application

of the 'higher critical' approach to studying the Scriptures. Warfield noted that in his day

there were efforts from critical studies of the biblical materials which claimed to have

raised severe problems for the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible. He cited several,

including C. A. Briggs, who felt that 'higher criticism' had rendered the concept of

inspiration useless. Warfield asserted that "it is not the established doctrine of inspiration

that is brought into distress by the conflict, but the school of Old Testament criticism

which is at present fashionable" (1981a, 169-172). Warfield suggested that "biblical

criticism must show: either that the New Testament writers do not claim inspiration; or,

that this claim was rejected by the contemporary church; or, that it is palpably negatived

by the fact that the books containing it are forgeries; or equally clearly negatived by the

fact that they contain along with the claim errors of fact or contradictions of statement"

(1981a, 400). It is, of course, Warfield's contention that the biblical critic has failed to

accomplish any of these.

The defense of Complete Inerrancy, further, and quite optimistically, maintains

that the charges of errors and discrepancies in the biblical material can be easily

dismissed and that there is no real need to answer every charge that is made. Packer

suggested that the problems which are often raised are of a secondary nature and that in

the main the biblical materials are clearly affirmed and easily seen to be without error

(1958, 107). He rejected the notion that one must resolve every apparent and/or real

discrepancy before belief can come. To take such a position would mean that to allow one

area in which full understanding has not yet come would lead to the refusal to accept the

biblical doctrine of the Scripture. "Christians are bound to receive the Bible as God's

Word written on the authority of Christ, not because they can prove it such by independent enquiry, but because as disciples they trust their divine Teacher" (Packer 1958, 108). It must be noted that the same approach applies to other areas of doctrine, areas in which there are, too, concerns not fully addressed and questions not fully answered. So, "we should not hesitate to commit ourselves to faith in Scripture as the infallible Word of the infallible God, even though we cannot solve all the puzzles, nor reconcile all the apparent contradictions, with which in our present state of knowledge it confronts us" (Packer 1958, 109).

2.3.2 The Appeal to the Qualification of the Concept of Error

Based upon the previously stated general aspects of the defense presented by Complete Inerrancy, the defense becomes much more aggressive as it disputes with its challengers the means by which to qualify the concept of error. The detractors from the Complete Inerrancy position point to what they allege to be errors in the Bible and the defenders of seeing the Bible absolutely without error reply that it is very difficult to prove that there are errors there. A. A. Hodge and Warfield anticipated that in the many copies of copies through which the Scriptures have gone apparent discrepancies will have crept in. "Such apparent inconsistencies and collisions with other sources of information are to be expected in imperfect copies of ancient writing, from the fact that the original reading may have been lost, or that we may fail to realize the point of view of the author, or that we are destitute of the circumstantial knowledge which should fill up and harmonize the record" (Hodge 1979, 27). In addition they pointed out the possibility that the humans who charge the Bible with errors may themselves be subject to error.

A. A. Hodge and Warfield, in dealing with the understanding of what an error in Scripture was, argued that the biblical writers were not omniscient, they were limited, did not attempt to teach about every conceivable topic, and wrote in human languages, which in itself is a limitation on full and complete expression (1979, 28). They were quite definite in the way in which they qualified the concept of error. For an alleged discrepancy to be called an error

> let it (1) be proved that each alleged discrepant statement certainly occurred in the original autograph of the sacred book in which it is said to be found. (2) Let it be proved that the interpretation which occasions the apparent discrepancy is the one which the passage was evidently intended to bear. It is not sufficient to show a difficulty, which may spring out of our defective knowledge of the circumstances. The true meaning must be definitely and certainly ascertained, and then shown to be irreconcilable with other known truth. (3) Let it be proved that the true sense of some part of the original autograph is directly and necessarily inconsistent with some certainly-known fact of history or truth of science, or some other statement of Scripture certainly ascertained and interpreted. (1979, 36)

This manner of defining the concept of error places the burden of proof upon those who allege the error instead of the defender of absolute inerrancy. Charles Hodge, in responding to the alleged discrepancies of history and science in the biblical material, noted that (1) one must distinguish between what the biblical writer taught and what was believed in the day in which they lived; (2) the language of the Bible is that of common life, founded upon what was apparent; (3) there is a distinction between fact and theory; and (4) there is a distinction between the Bible and the interpretation of it by the believer (1904, 170-171). With such stringent expectations, the qualification of the concept of error is circumscribed sufficiently to make it very difficult for one to verify that an error exists in the Scripture, which, of course, is the intent of the Complete Inerrantist.

2.3.3. The Appeal to Faith in the Doctrine of Inspiration

The proponents of Complete Inerrancy also defend their doctrine against charges of error and discrepancy in the Scriptures by appealing to the importance of the doctrine of inspiration they feel is taught in the Scriptures themselves. Young admitted that there are things in the Bible which are not understood, apparent discrepancies for which there are no easy solutions. He refused, however, to abandon the doctrine of inspiration because of this reality. "In every doctrine of revealed religion, including that of the inspiration of the Bible, there are difficulties, and they exist because we are but finite creatures, unable to plumb the depths of those things which God has revealed" (Young 1957, 59-60). The problems created by these areas of failed understandings are of less consequence than abandoning the inspiration of the Scripture, a decision which leaves one with less hope, or with none at all. Young summarized, "Difficulties in the Bible there are, and many of them we cannot now solve to our complete satisfaction; but that they are actual errors is another matter. There must always be kept in mind the limitations of human knowledge. Much that scholars of a previous day have pronounced to be in error is now acknowledged to be true" (1957, 61). The primacy of the doctrine of inspiration is seen in this approach; it takes precedence over the alleged, and even real, discrepancies, or areas of the lack of full understanding.

In responding to Henry P. Smith, who argued that there were parts of the Scripture which were in error, Warfield noted that one must not set up the facts of Scripture over the declarations of Scripture. It is more appropriate to "declare that the facts of Scripture cannot be contrary to the statements of Scripture" (1974, 41). Warfield was confident that all of the alleged errors in Scripture have been discussed by scholars and that most of

them have received adequate explanation and justification. Warfield preferred the "statement of the Lord that 'the Scripture cannot be broken,' and of Paul that 'every Scripture is inspired by God;' and the confidence shown by our Lord and His apostles in every statement of Scripture; and their assignment of it to God or the Holy Ghost in all sorts of passages as it fell in their way to quote it; and their unfailing reverence for its every word . . ." (1974, 42). Warfield acknowledged that there are difficult passages and apparent problems within the biblical material. To collect them, give them the "interpretation most unfavorable possible to the credit of the Scripture, and then make them, so interpreted, the *principium* of our doctrine of Inspiration" is, he charged, a grave logical mistake (1974, 46).

Based on his strong appeal to the plenary inspiration of Scriptures, Warfield suggested that the approach to the study of the phenomena within Scripture proceeds from the presupposition that they contain no errors and that any apparent errors are indeed that and not errors in fact. To wait until all apparent conflicts and alleged discrepancies are resolved before believing in the inspiration of Scripture is as faulty a procedure as waiting until all of the difficulties with any other doctrine are resolved. For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity, or the incarnation, or the two natures of Christ, etc., are all fraught with difficulties, yet they are considered vital to orthodox belief. Warfield called for the testing of the claims of inspiration, but with the understanding of the seriousness of the inquiry, so that the claims of the critics will be considered only after they have been demonstrated conclusively (Lindsell 1976, 181; See also Pinnock 1974b, 151-152; 1981a, 214-216).

2.3.4 The Appeal to Copyist Errors

The position of Complete Inerrancy is based upon the non-extant autographs of Scripture. It is accepted, therefore, that one must deal with copies of copies of the Bible. Given this, Complete Inerrancy also appeals to the possibility, or even the reality, that errors could have entered the manuscripts in the process of copying. Lindsell, for example, admitted that it is to be expected that errors were made in the copying of the biblical materials. "But a copyist's mistake is something entirely different from an error in Scripture. A misspelled or a misplaced word is a far cry from error, by which is meant a misstatement or something that is contrary to fact" (Lindsell 1976, 36). As an example of the sort of errors that may have occurred in copying of the manuscripts, Lindsell noted that since the ancient Hebrew text did not include vowel points, until supplied by the work of the Masoretes, some errors could have occurred in the copying and transmitting of the Bible. The problem of numbers in the Hebrew text is another area in which there could have been some problems with the copying of the text (See also Archer 1980; 1976, 36-37).

Such an appeal to copyist errors is not new to the contemporary scene, A. A. Hodge and Warfield made use of it in their conflicts with the rise of modernism in the late nineteenth century. They admitted that "such apparent inconsistencies and collisions with other sources of information are to be expected in imperfect copies of ancient writing, from the fact that the original reading may have been lost, or that we may fail to realize the point of view of the author, or that we are destitute of the circumstantial knowledge which would fill up and harmonize the record" (1979, 27). While the Complete Inerrantist does appeal to the possibility that some of the present discrepancies

in the Scripture are the result of the errors made in the process of copying, they do not

argue that every alleged error in the present text can be so explained.

2.3.5 The Appeal to Efforts to Harmonize

When faced with the apparent contradictions and discrepancies in the biblical

material Complete Inerrancy often attempts to harmonize the specific concerns. That is,

they attempt to consider possible ways in which the alleged difficulty can be managed in

such a way as to show that the text is not in error. An example of the attempt to

harmonize away apparent discrepancies is the work of Lindsell regarding the number of

times Peter denied Jesus during His trial. In an effort to take seriously the disparate

numbers and denials recorded in the Gospels, Lindsell proposed that "Peter received two

different warnings about denying Jesus and in each warning he was to deny Jesus three

times. The first crowing of the cock would occur after the first three denials and the

second crowing of the cock would occur after the sixth denial" (1976, 175). It must be

noted that all proponents of Complete Inerrancy do not go to such lengths to harmonize

discrepant passages, not even in explaining the number of times Peter denied the Christ.

For example, Archer disagreed with Lindsell's proposal of six denials and pieced together

the four narratives in such a manner as to evidence three denials before the crowing of the

rooster (1980, 65).

The effort to harmonize the biblical passages takes several specific tacks. It is

asserted that the differences in some of the larger numbers can be attributed to the

rounding off of specific numbers by the authors of Scripture. Some of the accounts which

mention different numbers of people being involved can be harmonized by noting that

one of the accounts only mentions the more prominent of the individuals in the situation.

For example, Matthew and Mark mention one angel in the resurrection story, whereas

Luke and John mention two; Matthew 8:28 mentions two demoniacs who confronted

Jesus, whereas Mark 5:2 and Luke 8:27 refers only to one; and Matthew 20:30 tells of

two blind persons petitioning Jesus for their sight to be restored, whereas Mark 10:46 and

Luke 18:35 mention only one. Other specific attempts at harmonization appeal to secular

historical records and the possibility of their being misunderstood as a means of

reconciling apparent biblical discrepancies. For example, the dating of the exodus is

dependent upon reconciling the biblical data which places the exodus 480 years before

the commencement of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:1), the location of the slave labor

work in Egypt at Raamses (Exodus 1:11), and the secular concerns for whether the

references are to the Egyptian Pharoah Raamses, or to a Ramose, a nobleman living in the

reign of the Pharoah Amenhotep III. The determination would place the exodus either

about 1440 B.C., or much later around 1290 B.C. (Archer 1980, 60-77; Henry 1979,

IV:353-367; Lindsell 1976, 161-181).

It must be noted that the appeal to harmonization is not viewed by Complete

Inerrancy as the only, or even the most important, manner in which the doctrine of the

inerrancy of Scripture can be defended. Warfield argued against what he called strained

exegesis of any kind, either to attack or to defend the doctrine of inspiration. "We are not

bound to harmonize the alleged phenomena with the Bible doctrine; and if we cannot

harmonize them save by strained or artificial exegesis they would be better left

unharmonized. We are not bound, however, on the other hand, to believe that they are

unharmonizable, because we cannot harmonize them save by strained exegesis" (1981a,

219). So, one must believe that harmonization is possible, even if that cannot be done at the present. Such belief is based upon the Bible doctrine, not upon the phenomena within the Scriptures. Young, too, called for efforts to harmonize as best possible the apparent discrepancies and conflicts in the biblical text. He recognized that it is really not the call of the biblical exegete to defend the text to the satisfaction of every objector, and in those cases in which harmonization cannot be achieved without the straining of credulity, Young urged the scholar to admit that the material denies harmonization. It is better to be guilty of a lack of full knowledge than to be guilty of dishonesty in the attempt to harmonize that which cannot, at this present level of knowledge, be accomplished (1957, 124).

2.3.6 The Appeal to the Lack of Full Knowledge at the Present

As has been noted in the preceding section, the Complete Inerrantist often admits that at the present time there is not enough knowledge to accomplish the reconciliation of the apparent contradictions in the text. When this occurs the response is that when the full knowledge of the facts and situation is found the apparent errors will be resolved and the absolute truth of the Bible will be defended. Pinnock argued that the claim to unreconcilable errors in the text is a claim by the critic to an infallibility which is being denied to the Scriptures. He called for an approach which is "synthetic and integrating," one which takes the starting point when confronted by apparent contradictions that both positions are correct and begins to look for the connecting lines which will allow both to be held. Careful and correct exegetical work is required to avoid the extremes of a harmonization effort which would, in effect, tear the heart of the meaning of the passages

in question from them. "The most fundamental hermeneutical rule is always the doctrine of inspiration because it is decisive throughout the work of interpretation" (Pinnock 1971, 179). In those situations in which the resolution is not readily obtained through this approach, Pinnock argued for awaiting a future resolution, or accepting that there remain mysteries which are not subject to being solved. After all, he asserted, all doctrinal affirmations come with some unanswered questions and uncertainties (1971, 180).

There is a degree of humility, then, in the approach of Complete Inerrancy in acknowledging that all knowledge about every detail of the biblical situation is not known, and may never be known by humans. Nicole summed it up nicely by saying, "The authority of Scripture is not dependent upon the ability or resourcefulness of any man to vindicate its truth at every point. Therefore, we should never be reluctant to acknowledge that we may not at the present time be in possession of the solution of particular difficulties" (1980, 90).

2.4 Conclusion

The view of the question of the inerrancy of the Bible which has been designated as Complete Inerrancy calls for seeing the biblical material absolutely without error. This strong call to faith refers to the autographs which are the direct word of God. The copies of those autographs, with which the modern person deals, are virtually the word of God as they agree with the originals. This very conservative position is not the only one held among American Evangelicals. This study now turns to consider the second of the three groupings of views on this topic, the Conditional Inerrancy view.

CHAPTER 3

CONDITIONAL INERRANCY

After considering the historical development of the issue of the doctrine of

inerrancy in American Evangelicalism and examining the most absolute view of that

controversy, this chapter focuses on a mediating position. The view, which will be

identified as Conditional Inerrancy, is not so rigid and absolute in its understanding of the

inerrancy of Scripture as was Complete Inerrancy, nor will it be seen as flexible as

Limited Inerrancy, to be considered in the next chapter. Conditional Inerrancy attempts to

condition the concept of inerrancy by acknowledging the phenomena within the text,

giving consideration to the purpose and intent for the writing of the Bible, and yet

maintaining a position which looks to Scripture as the authoritative revelation of God.

This view redefines the concept of inerrancy, but advocates continuing to use the term to

describe the value of the Bible.

The proponents of Conditional Inerrancy tend to receive criticism from both of the

other positions. From the perspective of Complete Inerrancy the Conditional Inerrantist

has violated the true understanding of a Scripture within which there are no errors

whatsoever. From the viewpoint of the Limited Inerrancy position the charge is that

Conditional Inerrancy has not gone far enough, has not been honest enough with the

difficulties of Scripture, and is trying to maintain a middle ground where there is none.

After introducing Conditional Inerrancy this chapter will examine the concerns raised against Complete Inerrancy. Against the backdrop of the differences established by Conditional Inerrancy from the former position the basis for Conditional Inerrancy and the arguments made in its support will be considered.

3.1 Introduction to Conditional Inerrancy

Conditional Inerrancy follows in a logical sequence after Complete Inerrancy. While establishing the claim to historical sequence requires much further investigation and analysis, involving one in the circle of historical controversies and interpretation, it can be said that Conditional Inerrancy logically diminishes the strict and unyielding position of Complete Inerrancy. It is necessary, however, to ensure that the two are neither placed in such a juxtaposed position as to be seen as diametrically opposed to each other nor seen as merely saying the same thing in different ways; they are two separate views, having both lines of convergence and many lines of divergence. It will serve the inquiry into Conditional Inerrancy to note first the areas of agreement with Complete Inerrancy and then observe the ways in which the former position analyzes the latter, the approach to the doctrine of inerrancy in Conditional Inerrancy, and the reasons for dissatisfaction with the use of the term inerrancy to describe fidelity to the Scripture material.

3.1.1 Affirmation of Scriptural Authority

Conditional Inerrancy, as has already been noted, disputes the absolute view of the inerrancy of the Scriptures which is held in Complete Inerrancy. While charges are often made that this alteration lowers the view of the inspiration and authority of the

Bible, proponents of Conditional Inerrancy are adamant in their affirmation of the full

inspiration and complete authoritative status of the Scripture. Richard Coleman asserted

that the move to limit the view of inerrancy does not at the same time limit the

understanding that the Bible is fully inspired (1984, 162). The category of inerrancy is

applied to that within the Bible which is relevant to, and a part of, the purpose for God's

revelation, but the category of inspiration is still extended to the entirety of the biblical

material.

The fear, whether real or imagined, that the movement away from the full

inerrancy of the Bible is at the same time a deviation from holding its full inspiration

leads some to continue to hold to the concept of complete inerrancy (Coleman 1984,

164). In contrast, Coleman, who sees the doctrine of inerrancy as a logical deduction

from the doctrine of inspiration, argued that that is not the only deduction one could

make. He suggested that one could also deduce, as he does, "that Scripture is inspired

throughout, but that inerrancy is limited to those matters necessary for our salvation"

(1984, 164). The definition and explanation of the view of inerrancy held by Conditional

Inerrancy will be considered more carefully below. It should be noted here, though, that

they maintain the full inspiration of the Bible along with the abbreviating of the view of

its inerrant nature.

Clark Pinnock, with his book, The Scripture Principle (1984), is a leading

spokesperson for Conditional Inerrancy and will be considered more carefully throughout

this chapter. In the preface to the book he stated that his intent for writing grows out of

his desire "to speak out, in the context of the crisis of the Scripture principle, in defense

of the full authority and trustworthiness of the Bible" (1984, vii). He was not willing to

participate in any move to see the biblical materials as being merely a "fallible testament of human opinion and religious experience," and thus to denigrate their authoritative value in the life of the church (1984, vii).

For Conditional Inerrancy the authoritative status of the Bible as that which God has inspired for the church must be upheld. "The reason Christians have felt historically that the authority of the Bible is a crucial conviction is that they have realized the Bible is needed to give us a reliable knowledge of the truth, without which we cannot exist long as Christians" (Pinnock 1984, x). There is the real pragmatic concern that Christians need to be able to affirm that the revelatory activity of God has resulted in that which can be trusted. Guidance for faith and practice is vital to the living of the faith, and, as seen by Conditional Inerrancy, that depends upon an inspired Bible.

At this point, on the doctrine of inspiration, Conditional Inerrancy is fully within the boundaries of American Evangelicalism. They affirm, with the majority view within Evangelicalism, that "all Scripture is God breathed and constitutes the Word of God written, the locus of God speaking and teaching us. Scripture is true, not just in its existential symbols or in the thrust of its historical narrative; it is our divinely inspired teacher and guide" (Pinnock 1976, 62). Robert Price, analyzing the position of Pinnock, called his view of inspiration concomitant inspiration. By this he noted, correctly, that for Pinnock, and for most within Conditional Inerrancy, "God simply supervised the writers of Scripture, making sure that all went well and that the result was an adequate Scripture" (1988, 177). This view of inspiration accepts that God worked persuasively and not coercively in guiding the work of the human authors. This benchmark position should provide the necessary fellowship within which to discuss, and even disagree, about the

deductions one could make from this starting point.

While to this juncture in the discussion of the view of inspiration in Conditional Inerrancy major areas of agreement with Complete Inerrancy have been observed, there is a nuance of difference that must not be missed. The doctrine of inspiration, and also that of inerrancy, in Complete Inerrancy, would appeal to the original writings of the Scripture, the autographs. Pinnock demurred, noting that

> . . . evangelicals agree that the inspiration and infallible authority of the Bible resides in the message presently conveyed by existing texts and translations, despite their minor imperfections. Inspiration does not simply refer to ancient autographs (now lost), though indeed those autographs were given by the Spirit. It also refers to a present quality of the Bibles we now read and is the reason they have such life-giving power. The Scriptures which Jesus and Paul used and exalted were not the original manuscripts, but copies and translations of them which were able, despite minor imperfections, to function as the very Word of God. (1976, 62)

This nuance of difference, seeing inspiration applicable to the texts which are presently available to the believing community, is of major import. As the investigation into the position of Conditional Inerrancy continues the position will be seen to have increasing importance.

3.1.2 Analysis of the Conflict

The proponents of Conditional Inerrancy admit that there is a conflict as to how the inspired Scriptures should be viewed in relation to the concern of inerrancy. Whereas Complete Inerrancy saw the connection between the two doctrinal affirmations as a straight line, Conditional Inerrancy sees much more of a disjunction between the two. The analysis of the conflict which continues among Evangelicals about this connection is helpful in understanding the position.

While the charge could be made that the concept of inerrancy is a negative one, saying what the Scriptures are not instead of making a positive affirmation about them, J. Ramsay Michaels observed that many other doctrinal statements are also negative. Often it is easier to delimit the concept under consideration than to offer positive statements; occasionally those delimiters are necessary to highlight the positive affirmations. Thus, the conflict should not turn simply on the charge that inerrancy is a negative concept (1980, 54).

In his analysis of the conflict between the various positions about the question of the inerrancy of the Bible Everett F. Harrison argued that certain affirmations did not need to be made within the concept of inerrancy. He asserted that there does not need to be verbal agreement in multiple accounts of the same events and that some variation is to be expected. There does not need to be the same degree of completeness and finality in the statements of Scripture at all periods because some sense of progression is to be expected within the biblical material. Quotations, especially those in the New Testament of the Old Testament, do not need to be verbally exact. Loose quotations and paraphrased quotations are well within the expectations for all written materials, including the Bible. In describing natural phenomena the biblical authors freely used language which does not meet the test of scientific precision, and this is not to be considered a part of the conflict (Harrison 1958, 17).

Conditional Inerrancy acknowledges that an aspect of the conflict about inerrancy is the existence within the Bible of difficulties, but they prefer to assert that those are minor and of little consequence relative to the message of the Scripture. Pinnock suggested that these minor difficulties can be described as "duplicate portions, numerical

discrepancies, the Semitic world picture, popular expressions, and the like" (1976, 62). These difficulties do not move the Conditional Inerrantist to attempt the sometimes strained and forced harmonizations which occasionally mark Complete Inerrancy. Pinnock, for instance, admitted that difficulties are in the text, but asserted with confidence that nothing substantive about the message of the Bible is at stake.

In analyzing the conflict, the position of Conditional Inerrancy is that theological concerns should drive the discussion more than apologetic ones. Pinnock noted that the driving force behind Complete Inerrancy is more apologetic than theological, motivated by the fear that all doctrinal affirmations and faith will collapse if this specific item of faith, inerrancy, is not held. This dangerous apologetic technique brings all of the Christian faith into question on the basis of one doctrinal affirmation, inerrancy of Scripture. By contrast a theological approach to the question of inerrancy would give precedence to the testimony of the divine revelation about itself rather than making deductions from that testimony (1976, 63). To drive home the analysis that the issue should be debated on theological and not apologetic grounds Pinnock asserted, "The answers lies in exegesis" (1976, 64).

3.1.3 Inerrancy is Inferred

In contrast to Complete Inerrancy, which holds that the doctrine of inerrancy is taught explicitly in the biblical materials Conditional Inerrancy maintains that inerrancy is an inferred doctrine, based on and related to the doctrine of inspiration. As will be noted there is some variability of opinion as to the closeness of the inference between the two doctrines. That inerrancy is viewed as an inference does not of necessity render it an

inferior truth, but it does serve to remind the adherent of this position that there is some theological distance between the absolute affirmation of inspiration and the more tentative affirmation of inerrancy.

Harrison succinctly stated what is now standard for the Conditional Inerrancy position about the inferred status of the doctrine of inerrancy. He observed, "One must grant that the Bible itself, in advancing its own claim of inspiration, says nothing precise about inerrancy. This remains a conclusion to which devout minds have come because of the divine character of Scripture" (1959, 238). This position by Harrison, expressed while he was Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, proved to be prophetic of the contours the debate about inerrancy would take. Instead of fearing the results of critical studies of Scripture, cowering in fear lest an error be found that would bring down the entire edifice of faith, Harrison urged his colleagues to welcome criticism and to be led by the phenomena within the Scriptures. "It would seem that the only healthy attitude for conservatives is to welcome criticism, and be willing to join in it. No view of Scripture can indefinitely be sustained if it runs counter to the facts. That the Bible claims inspiration is patent. The problem is to define the nature of that inspiration in the light of the phenomena contained therein" (Harrison 1959, 239).

For Conditional Inerrancy the doctrine of inerrancy is not that upon which all of Christianity rests, for it is a secondary doctrine. It is interesting to note that, as Coleman pointed out, Benjamin Warfield, one of the patriarchs of Complete Inerrancy, "was careful to avoid being trapped into making all Christian doctrines rest upon the single doctrine of biblical inerrancy" (1975, 296). The position which followed his lead, Complete Inerrancy, does place the concept of inerrancy in the pivotal role of being the

linchpin doctrine of Christianity. Conditional Inerrancy tries to avoid that possible pitfall.

As has been noted, there is some degree of variability as to the explanation of the connection between the claims of Scripture for inspiration and the inference from that to inerrancy. On the more conservative side the connection is seen as a very close one. Millard J. Erickson, as an example, agreed that inerrancy is not taught explicitly, but argued that it is taught as an inference "from the teachings of the biblical writers about the way they treated the sacred writings which they had in their time. It is not merely a deduction from the nature of God, or what we think he must have done. In this respect, inerrancy is like the doctrine of the trinity, which, while not taught explicitly in the Bible, is a valid inference from a number of biblical texts" (1987, 175). This position ties the two, inspiration and inerrancy, together, using the analogy of a major doctrine of Christendom, the trinity, to illustrate the connection. Such a close connection would indicate that the trajectory between the two is, if not necessary, surely far more than merely optional or incidental.

A less conservative view of the relation between the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy proposes that inerrancy is derived from inspiration for specific purposes and is, therefore, not a necessary and direct inference from inspiration. Robert Johnston, basing his position on the premise that "inspiration is the basis of inerrancy, not vice versa," suggested that the elevation of inerrancy has occurred for apologetic and epistemological reasons. "The question is this: do we need convincing objective reasons prior to our faith, or can we rely on the Holy Spirit's witness to Christ heard through the biblical evidence" (Johnston 1979, 40)? In this way the connection between the two affirmations of faith is separated. If, on epistemological grounds, faith is tied to inerrancy, what happens to faith

if inerrancy is shown to be an inadequate manner in which to affirm the authority of the Bible?

Pinnock, too, argued that inerrancy is inferred from inspiration, but his position is somewhat between the two extremes that have been observed. Asserting that inerrancy is a logical deduction from the doctrine of inspiration, Pinnock opined that "at the very most, one could say only that it is implicit and could be drawn out by careful argument – but this is disputable and not the basis for the dogmatic claims one hears for inerrancy. In the last analysis, the inerrancy theory is a logical deduction not well supported exegetically" (1984, 58). Inerrancy as an inference could serve the purpose of supporting a view of the Scripture as authoritative for faith and practice, even if it is not the clear statement of the biblical material itself.

3.1.4 Dissatisfaction With the Term Inerrancy

Conditional Inerrancy affirms full confidence in the inspiration and authority of the biblical materials but is dissatisfied with using the term inerrancy to describe the trustworthiness of the Bible. The argument which is made notes that the term is not the best one which could be used to maintain the proper understanding of the vital nature of the biblical revelation. Michaels noted that the Evangelical movement, in an effort to maintain a separate and distinct identity within the Christian church, uses the word inerrancy. This is so, he argued, because Evangelicalism is not a denomination; rather it is a fellowship of people drawn from multiple denominational backgrounds who share similar beliefs and practices. The term inerrancy serves well as a distinguishing feature to give them identity. This is not the best reason to adopt such a difficult term. Michaels

asserted that earlier Fundamentalism had used the phrase verbal inspiration, a phrase

which he saw as preferable to inerrancy, to affirm faith in the reliability of the Bible

(1980, 52-53).

Pinnock summarized quite clearly the frustrations with the term inerrancy. He

noted that for the term to be used to any profitable understanding it requires multiple

qualifications and limitations. By the time the qualifications are listed and considered the

usage of the term is rendered less valuable. He also admitted that the term does not

describe the Bible which is in use presently. The difficulties which are identified in the

text of the Bible are obvious in the texts and versions which are currently in use. The

appeal of the term inerrancy as a description of texts which are not currently available

detracts, according to Pinnock, from acceptance of the authority of the text which is

available to persons today. To use the term inerrancy guarantees attention will be focused

in the debate on the difficulties, small and large, in the biblical text. This is unhelpful

because it takes attention away from seeing the "infallible truth of its intended

proclamation." Pinnock is also critical of the usage of the term inerrancy because it is so

easily used as a slogan which in turn divides and injures believers in the debate (1976,

65).

3.2 The Concerns Raised Against Complete Inerrancy

Conditional Inerrancy, starting from a similar faith in the inspiration and authority

of the Bible, identifies several areas of concern about the position taken by Complete

Inerrancy. Examining them will provide a more clear delineation between the two views

and prepare for looking at the argumentation used by Conditional Inerrancy in support of

its position. This section will identify some of the general objections raised against Complete Inerrancy and then look at some specific items held by Complete Inerrancy with which Conditional Inerrancy cannot agree.

3.2.1 General Objections to Complete Inerrancy

The debate between those holding a stringent view of inerrancy and those who hold a lesser view often revolves around the issue of whether deductive or inductive reasoning should control the approach to the topic. Conditional Inerrancy charges that Complete Inerrancy is based on deductive thinking which begins with the assumption of total divine control. This approach, which proceeds deductively from a view of God which is based in His sovereign control over everything, leaves very little room for the human involvement in the writing of Scripture. "Unfortunately it also gets one into great difficulties with the actual phenomena of the text and stakes the entire truth of Christianity upon not finding any slips in the whole Bible" (Pinnock 1984, 101).

Conditional Inerrancy, as has been noted, argues that the doctrine of inerrancy is arrived at as an inference from the doctrine of inspiration. However, as Harrison noted, "the form that our view of inerrancy ought to take is to be derived inductively from the data of the text"(1958, 17). Complete Inerrancy, it is charged, claimed to have arrived at the doctrine of inerrancy inductively, that is, they claimed that the inductive study of the Scripture led directly to the doctrine, but in fact they defined the nature and extent of inerrancy deductively. The Conditional Inerrancy position disagrees with this deductive approach to the task of creating a doctrine of inerrancy, arguing that the nature of inerrancy should be discovered from inductively examining the biblical material.

This leads directly to the objection against Complete Inerrancy that it is inconsistent, claiming to give credence to what the Bible says but being governed by *a priori* conceptions about the nature of God and the Bible from which deductions are made resulting in the idea of inerrancy (Pinnock 1984, 58). This inconsistent mixing of the deductive and inductive approaches, along with being controlled by *a priori* assumptions, creates the possibility of arriving at the wrong conclusions. The Conditional Inerrantists assert that they are far more consistent with their allegiance to but one approach, induction from the phenomena within the text itself.

The proponents of Conditional Inerrancy also object to what they see as the use of inerrancy by the Complete Inerrancy for apologetic reasons. This turns the idea of inerrancy into an argument for the authoritative status of the Bible, but at the same time rests that authority upon the condition of being able to maintain its absolute perfection. To defend this approach Complete Inerrancy is compelled to harmonize, question critical results, and qualify the concept of inerrancy at many points. Since the controlling factor is that of the apologetic intent, should the text be shown to contain any error at all the desired result of defending the authority of Scripture would be lost. Conditional Inerrancy raises the valid question as to whether theological points should be arrived at by, and be based upon, the needs of apologetics (Price 1988, 170).

Conditional Inerrancy also charges Complete Inerrancy with blurring the distinction between the concepts of error, which could be a mistake, and falsehood, which could be intentional. Michaels observed that "advocates of the term inerrancy actually mean by it, 'without error or falsehood,' a meaning which is possible only because of a tacit combination of the idea of historical or scientific exactitude with the traditional

Christian understanding of error as false or heretical teaching" (1980, 57). Such usage of the term inerrancy distorts the meaning of the terms error and falsehood, robbing them both of their distinctive value. Certainly neither Complete nor Conditional Inerrancy would charge the Bible with intentionally misleading the reader at any point.

The question can also be raised against the position of Complete Inerrancy as to the applicability of the term inerrancy to every literary genre used within the Bible. How can one talk about inerrant poetry? Or, how can one assert that apocalyptic material is inerrant? In what sense, then, could the term be applied as a designation of the entirety of the biblical data?

Some within Conditional Inerrancy assert that the term inerrancy is so ambiguous as to have little value. They suggest that whatever else the term may connote it demands conformity to some norm. Would not the norm by which the Bible is to be judged be God? To allow for any other norm, such as rationality, facticity, or empirical verifiability, to be the point of comparison would be idolatry, even if that norm were to be a human, or philosophical, designation of God. So, Michaels reasoned, "biblical inerrancy can mean only that God has revealed to us in Scripture exactly what He wanted to reveal, no more and no less" (1980, 59). Starting with what God has provided, rather than with what the scholar asserts that God must have done or provided, results in a position which takes seriously the phenomena of Scripture in constructing doctrines which uphold the authority of the Bible.

The view presented by Complete Inerrancy claims that the belief in inerrancy is the basis for a high view of the Bible's inspiration and authority. Conditional Inerrantists object, according to Johnston, noting that that order "is to reverse biblical priorities. It is

to confuse the Evangelical's primary commitment to *sola scriptura* with a secondary

commitment, a particular theory of the result of inspiration" (1979, 5). The elevation of

inerrancy reverses the order of priority, which should be authority, inspiration, and

inerrancy, placing inerrancy at the head of the list of commitments. This would at the

very least bring to the fore the question as to which is the primary commitment,

Scriptures, or theories about Scriptures.

3.2.2 Specific Areas of Disagreement

Conditional Inerrancy identifies, in addition to the more general objections, some

specific items of disagreement which directly counter positions which are seen as vital to

the argumentation of the Complete Inerrantists. Attention will be drawn to four such areas

in which Conditional Inerrancy asserts that it presents a better understanding of the

particular line of argument than is presented by Complete Inerrancy.

One of the very important bases for Complete Inerrancy is the claim that the

autographs, the original writings of the Bible, were absolutely inerrant. These documents,

which are not presently available for examination, are the focus of the claims for

inerrancy. Given the possibility of a more lengthy process of authoring of at least some of

the biblical books, the involvement of redactors and editors, and the use of amanuenses

making copies, even multiple copies, of the message of a writer, serious questions are

raised about the concept of autographs of the books of the Bible. Conditional Inerrancy,

based on these concerns does not appeal to the autographs. The line of disagreement

between Complete and Conditional Inerrancy on this concern also takes another direction.

Harrison saw the appeal to inerrant autographs as problematic because it raised

questions about the multiple variant extant readings which have to be considered.

Granting that neither inerrant nor errant copies of the autographs have been discovered,

he queried whether the very doctrine of inspiration might not be jeopardized by the

quarrels about the proper reading to be followed in some passages (1959, 139). This

would not mean that doubt as to the existence of a text of Scripture, which might be

called autographic, existed, but does indicate discomfort appealing to it as the basis for

supporting the idea of inerrancy. Harrison, while confident that there were autographs,

noted that what is extant are copies in which variants are obvious, variants, however,

which do not compromise the basic message of the Bible. It is to that basic message, not

to autographs, that attention should be given in attempting to understanding the doctrine

of the Scriptures (Harrison 1959, 240).

The attention given to the autographs in Complete Inerrancy also raises the

possible question as to the authoritative status of the text of the Bible which the

contemporary believer possesses. At the very least such an appeal implies that the present

texts are not as inerrant as were the autographs, implying that the reader must await

further scholarly advances toward that inerrant text. In the interim the text that is

available presently may, or may not, be inerrant. Pinnock asserted that such an approach

"actually threatens the confidence in the Bible they now have because of its effectiveness

in bringing them to God and substitutes for it a confidence that may one day be warranted

when the scholars have finished their work" (1984, 76). Conditional Inerrancy places the

emphasis upon the text which is available to the contemporary believer. That text has

impacted their lives, that text is authoritative.

Complete Inerrancy deduces logically that if God is the author of the Scripture

and God cannot lie, then the Scriptures cannot contain error. Should they contain error that would, of necessity, impugn the nature of God. Pinnock, agreeing that God is not subject to falsehood, noted that that does not necessarily demand an errorless Bible because God chose to use all manner of secondary authors. One should not deduce from the premise that God cannot lie to the conclusion that He gave an errorless text. The concern should not be how God could, or should, have given the Bible, but how He did do so. The expectations which are raised as to what God can, or cannot do, are not as important as what He actually did, and does. Pinnock noted, "we have to inquire into what it (Scripture) claims and what was produced" (1984, 57). The attention, for the Conditional Inerrantist, shifts from the more abstract argument about the nature of God and the limitations that His nature might have placed on His activities, to the reality of what He has done. From that reality statements can be made about His works.

Complete Inerrancy also argues that Jesus supported the particular view of Scripture which the proponents of the position hold and Conditional Inerrancy agrees that Jesus and those who followed Him held the Scriptures in very high regard. Pinnock noted that "the fact is that Jesus and the New Testament writers respected the text enormously as God's written Word and qualified it in view of the new messianic situation" (1984, 37). To the charge that Jesus merely accommodated His view about Scripture to that of the day in which He lived, Conditional Inerrancy responds that Jesus did far more than that; He shared that reverence for the Scripture. The question that separates the two positions is whether the view of Jesus can be used to support a rigid position on inerrancy, with Conditional Inerrancy arguing that it cannot.

In considering Jesus' view of the Bible several important items must be

considered. Jesus did not generally quote from the Old Testament verbatim, which suggests that He was more concerned for the message of the text than for literal accuracy. Further, He was concerned for what God was saying in the present more than preserving the past material without any deviation. While the Law was very important for Him, He was more concerned to be loving than to adhere strictly to precepts which may or may not be vehicles for displaying that love. His very high view of the Scriptures, while a model for the attitude with which the modern person should approach God's Word, may not necessarily be used to settle the contemporary debate about inerrancy nor to arbitrate the issues of biblical criticism. Pinnock summarized well the position of Conditional Inerrancy on Jesus' view of Scripture: "Of course his view of the Bible is important for us when we try to ascertain what our own view should be, but it ought not to be used as an independent proof to establish objectively the authority of the Scriptures apart from faith in Jesus" (1984, 39).

Conditional Inerrancy argues that one cannot attribute to Jesus and the apostles the complicated theory of inerrancy propounded by Complete Inerrancy (with distinctions between copies and autographs, qualifications, intention of authors, definitions of errors, etc.). This is especially true in that the New Testament did not exist at the time Jesus and His apostles ministered. Pinnock explained, "my point is not that Jesus and the apostles do not teach us about biblical inspiration and authority. Obviously they do so. But rather that in their teaching they present a far more practical and open concept than the high Protestant one" (1987a, 97). This response is based on, among other passages, 2 Timothy 3:15-17, which indicates that Scripture is inspired and profitable to the life of the community. This is a far more practical view of the Scriptures, a view which Jesus

supported.

The proponents of Complete Inerrancy take great pains to establish their view of inerrancy as being that which the church throughout its history has maintained. Citing quotations from the fathers from the beginning to the present they argue that there is but one view in the church, inerrancy. Johnston argued that this claim to an unbroken historical tradition is not well founded. His argument did not engage with the endless citations of quotations which usually mark the debate; rather, he questioned whether those quotes were interpreted in light of the times from which they came or in light of the modern situation in which they were being used. He opined, "A modern concept of inerrancy involving scientifically precise language was of course unknown prior to the rise of modern science" (1979, 21). This implies that the quotations from the various church leaders which are adduced to support a strict inerrancy view might not have been speaking in the same terms that are being used in the contemporary debate. Therefore, Conditional Inerrancy asserts that such appeal to those quotations from the history of the church do not really speak to the modern debate about inerrancy.

3.3 The Basis for Conditional Inerrancy

Conditional Inerrancy, while having some affinity for Complete Inerrancy, has, as has been noted, several areas of disagreement with that view. It is necessary to establish the basis upon which Conditional Inerrancy is founded. Conditional Inerrancy approaches the definition of the concepts of inerrancy and truth from a different perspective than does its adversaries. These two different definitional approaches provide parts of the basis for the position. There is also a commitment to exalt the Bible that is available to the

contemporary believer as opposed to depending upon autographs which are not extant. Conditional Inerrancy uses the analogy of the incarnation of Christ as a way in which to support its arguments, and is committed to the inductive approach for deriving doctrinal affirmation, arguing that the biblical claims themselves support a view of inerrancy which is less stringent than that of Complete Inerrancy.

3.3.1 Definition of Inerrancy

The manner in which Complete Inerrancy defines the concept of inerrancy is based on a model of scientific precision and correspondence to reality. Such a definition requires that every biblical text be subjected to that standard of scientific precision in order for it to be accepted as inerrant. Conditional Inerrancy questions whether this approach to inerrancy is either proper or accurate when applied to the biblical material which was written before the scientific era. This is a basis for Conditional Inerrancy, even though there is not a single definition of inerrancy to which every proponent of Conditional Inerrancy would agree.

Pinnock observed that some within Conditional Inerrancy would be comfortable with the approach of the Chicago Statement to inerrancy, which defines the term making use of affirmations, qualifications, and denials (For a copy of the Chicago Statement see Inerrancy 1980, 493-502; 1987b, 75). It was, however, Pinnock's opinion that a better approach to defining the term would be to reconsider the category of inerrancy from its origins, asking how that became so important. He noted, "What we are really arguing about here, I believe, is whether it is prudent to insist upon a position of great elaboration and strictness with regard to the presuppositions with which we come to Scripture, or

whether to adopt a simpler more spontaneous biblicism which also trusts the Bible

without reservation but does not believe it is good to burden the Bible reader with too

much human theory lest he or she misses what God is saying in the text" (1987b, 75).

This definition of inerrancy is not concerned with the more elaborate and strict approach

taken by Complete Inerrancy, but accepts a more simple and practical approach which

uses the term to affirm that the Bible is above all suspicion and doubt.

Conditional Inerrancy argues repeatedly that the Bible is not a western book, nor

the product of the twentieth century; rather, it is an Oriental book and that world view

must be allowed to determine the manner in which all scholarship approaches it,

especially that which wishes to construct a doctrine of its authoritative status. Harrison

argued, "Our western way of thinking, patterned after the Greek, inclines to demand

uniformity. We tend to associate diversity with deviation and so with error. Apart from

the question as to which outlook is correct, we ought not to sit in judgment on Scripture

as untrustworthy because of a variety of presentation of the same basic material" (1958,

18). The only way in which to talk about inerrancy, then, is to do so in light of the

purpose for the writing of the material being considered. Instead of applying western

standards of accuracy to an Oriental book, Harrison advised that "our concern ought to be

to learn with all humility as much as we can of the methodology that God the Spirit has

chosen to use in giving us the Word of God" (1958, 18).

In defining the term inerrancy Conditional Inerrancy moves away from imposing

an external standard of conformity to scientific precision toward an internal standard to

be found within the biblical text itself. To do so is, among other concerns, to take with the

utmost seriousness the manner in which God is depicted in the Scripture. The starting

point in defining the nature of God, and thus the nature of inerrancy, must be that presented by the phenomena within the Bible and its didactic portions and not that imposed from any philosophic *a priori* understandings.

The concern for allowing the biblical material to set the agenda in defining inerrancy is also evidenced by a concern for the teaching focus of the Bible. Millard Erickson defined inerrancy as "the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teachings . . . that the Bible, when judged by the usage of its time, teaches the truth without any affirmation of error" (1998, 246). The element which distinguishes such a definition from that of Complete Inerrancy is the concern for what the Bible affirms, or teaches. Erickson, in defining inerrancy, is concerned for more factors than the teaching focus of the Scriptures, but that is his major concern. His more complete, and very helpful, definition of inerrancy is: "The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purpose for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms" (1998, 259). Pinnock, making the same argument, summarized the discussion of the definition of inerrancy by observing, "inerrancy is relative to the intent of the Scriptures, and this has to be hermeneutically determined" (1984, 225).

Conditional Inerrancy, while differing from the rigid and inflexible manner in which Complete Inerrancy defines the concept, does not give room for the view that the Scriptures are full of errors. On the one hand the concept of inerrancy must be reconsidered, but on the other, the concept must not be completely abandoned in favor of one which would bring the nature of the truthfulness of the scriptural revelation into question. For example, Pinnock readily admitted that at present the Bible is not inerrant,

but asserted that in spite of that "it can accomplish exactly what is claimed for it" (1984, 224). It is a part of the basis for Conditional Inerrancy that the literal and strict definition of inerrancy must be altered, but the metaphorical usage of the term to affirm the complete trustworthiness of the Bible is maintained. To give the impression that the Bible errs in any significant way is not on the agenda for the Conditional Inerrantist. Though the modern scientific precision which Complete Inerrancy sees in the term inerrancy is not acceptable to Conditional Inerrancy, it is their strong declaration that the Bible can be trusted in what it teaches and affirms.

3.3.2 The Meaning of Truth

As should be expected, with a definition of inerrancy which depends upon the affirmations and phenomena of Scripture, which is seen as an Oriental not a western book, the understanding of what is truth and its opposite, is also different for Conditional Inerrancy. Complete Inerrancy, with its rigid and strict interpretation of inerrancy, views truth and its opposite in twentieth-century, western terms. That which is true is that which conforms to empirical verification in light of scientific precision. However, the Conditional Inerrancy position calls that understanding into question.

In applying western, scientific precision to an ancient book the Complete Inerrancy position is guilty of requiring something other of that ancient text than should be expected of it. Harrison charged that when this is done the requirement appeals far more to the Hellenistic mode of thinking, which expected truth to be identifiable with reality, than is proper to do with the Bible. He suggested that "the writers of Scripture were not as greatly influenced by this conception of truth as by the Hebrew conception

which identifies truth as what corresponds to the nature and purpose of God" (1959, 239).

The consideration of the Hebraic nature of the biblical text means that it is necessary to

approach the Bible with the intent to grasp the influence of Hebrew thought upon its

composition and interpretation. The careless westernizing of interpretive methods and the

forcing of western thought processes upon the doctrinal affirmations of the text without

first hearing the Hebraic influence upon the text is a dangerous approach.

If the concept of truth is to be understood from the perspective of the nature and

purposes of God, the text must be studied carefully to ascertain what that nature and those

purposes are. This would delay the easy and quick rush to apply to the text philosophic

understandings about what the nature and purpose of God might, or even must, be.

Pinnock, agreeing with the affirmation that the Bible is true, noted that the

category of truth is too complex to be reduced to the simple expectation of conformity to

reality. He argued that "when we look for the Bible to prove true, we must open ourselves

to the kind of truth it chooses to deliver and not try to limit its freedom. We have to let

the phenomena of the text guide us, even when they disappoint our expectations or

surprise us. It is enough to expect the Bible to be entirely trustworthy for the purposes

God had in inspiring it. It only gets us into trouble when we impose further requirements

of a deductive nature on the text" (1984, 152).

Conditional Inerrancy sees truth in terms of the nature and purposes of God as

they are revealed in the text of the Bible. The imposition of an external definition of truth

upon the Bible is not appropriate. Pinnock noted that the work of the Holy Spirit includes

bringing to the believer the acceptance of the truthfulness of the Scripture. Basing his

view upon 1 Corinthians 2:4, "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive

words of wisdom, but demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (NASB), he argued that

the Spirit brings to the believer that needed certainty. "This kind of certainty, born of the

Spirit's witness to our hearts, is a different thing from the kind of rational certainty the

human theory of errorlessness attempts (and fails) to engender" (Pinnock 1987a, 100).

The category of truth in the Bible is to be found in the revelation of the nature and

purposes of God to be found in the text and made real to the heart of the believer by the

work of the Holy Spirit.

3.3.3 Defend the Present Bible

The Conditional Inerrancy view makes use of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, as did the

Complete Inerrancy position. However, the usage is quite different. When the question is

raised about the nature of God, a question which is vital to understanding the purpose of

the Bible, from which one can consider the nature of truth, the Conditional Inerrantist

notes that the Timothy passage teaches that Scripture has the purpose of providing for

humans saving knowledge of God. That purpose for the Scripture was claimed for the

copies of the Scripture which Paul and Timothy had before them for use at the time of the

writing. There was no appeal in this passage by Paul to materials which existed earlier, or

to texts which may come later; rather, the value and power of the present texts were

extolled (Pinnock 1984, xviii).

In an analogous way, the Bible which is available today is the instrument of God

to introduce humans to the saving and transforming knowledge of God. The concern for

basing faith in the Scripture on perfect autographs, which are not extant, is counter to

acknowledging that what is available bears the clear imprint of the power of God to bring

people into relationship with Himself. Conditional Inerrancy focuses attention on the

present text of Scripture as a part of the basis for its approach to the inerrancy question,

acknowledging that it is not without error, but affirming that it does bear witness to the

salvation purposes of God (Pinnock 1984, xix).

3.3.4 Analogy With the Incarnation

In searching for an analogy with which to explain the approach to the doctrine of

inerrancy, Conditional Inerrancy, as does Complete Inerrancy, makes use of the doctrine

of the incarnation. However, the way in which the appeal is made to the incarnation as an

analogy of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is different in the two positions.

Pinnock noted that "it is natural to see an analogy between the incarnational character of

revelation and the Bible. As the Logos was enfleshed in the life of Jesus, so God's Word

is enlettered in the script of the Bible. In both cases there is some kind of mysterious

union of the divine and the human, though of course not the same kind. But in each case

both the divine and the human are truly present" (1984, 97).

It would be possible, based upon this analogy, to argue that the Bible, because of

its incarnational nature, is, if not totally human, more human than divine. The logic of

such an argument would be the recognition of the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth and

the difficulty of seeing the expression of His divinity during His earthly life. Undoubtedly

the divinity of Jesus was hidden and very seldom seen and accepted by those with whom

He came in contact. If the analogy is continued it can be argued that in a similar fashion

the divinity of the Bible is not always obvious, especially to those who may read it

carelessly or, even, critically. However, this use of the analogy to deny the divinity of the

Bible is not the way in which Conditional Inerrancy uses it.

Another implication which could be drawn from the analogy between the incarnation and the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible is the suggestion that as the incarnate Christ was sinless, so the Scriptures produced through an incarnational activity are without error. This would be the usage of the analogy which Complete Inerrancy makes. Pinnock, however, suggested that this does not quite fit reality, "for sin and error need not be equated so closely." Though Jesus did not sin, He did not know all things and spoke as a citizen of the first century; thus the two categories, sin and error, need not be seen as synonymous. For Jesus to have erred because of the world view in which He participated or because of the limitations accepted upon His incarnate existence does not indicate that He was involved in sin nor negatively impact the purpose for which He came, the redemption of the fallen race. Pinnock summed up the argument by noting "we cannot conclude that the Bible never makes any mistakes at all, should these not affect what the Bible was truly teaching us" (1984, 98).

3.3.5 An Inductive Approach

As was observed above, Conditional Inerrancy claims that Complete Inerrancy makes use of the deductive approach to the doctrine of Scripture and, in so doing, arrives at conclusions which cannot bear the weight of the evidence of the Scriptures themselves. The deductive approach, making use of syllogisms and logic, could take several forms in its usage in the doctrine of inerrancy. For example, the approach could reason that God is perfect; the Bible is the Word of God; therefore, the Bible is perfect. Or, God cannot lie; the Bible is the Word of God; therefore, the Bible cannot lie. In both of these, and in the

other ways in which deduction could be applied to inerrancy, the evidence of the text is not the starting point; rather, it is used to illustrate, or give proof of, the conclusions reached through logical deductions.

By contrast, the inductive method purports to begin with the evidence, the documents of Scripture themselves, and to be governed by them as to the conclusions to be drawn about the nature of the Bible. The claims, the teaching, the nature, the content, and the affirmations of the text are the points of beginning for Conditional Inerrancy, and they continue to impact the understanding of inerrancy throughout. Johnston asserted that this approach, induction, though not as neat and tidy as the deductive approach, is more faithful to the text of Scripture (1979, 39). This focus on the text itself provides more attention to the authoritative Word of God, allowing it to speak for itself throughout the process of forming doctrinal affirmations about its nature and function.

Complete Inerrancy agrees with the need for the text of Scripture to be given primacy in all doctrinal debates and discussions. A point at which it diverges from the inductive approach is that it gives primacy to the explicit teachings of Scripture over the phenomena within the text. That is, Complete Inerrancy asserts that the Scriptures explicitly claim to be inspired and that entails their being inerrant, a conclusion reached through deduction. Price noted that the re-evaluation of the doctrine of Scripture which has produced the position of Conditional Inerrancy is based on the presupposition that "in formulating ones understanding of biblical authority, the 'phenomena of Scripture' must be given equal weight with its explicit teaching on the subject" (1986, 319). The scholar must not only consider what the text says, but also the manner in which it expresses those truths.

Conditional Inerrancy considers it very important that the Bible be allowed to be as it is and not be coerced to be what a particular proponent of any given view of Scripture demands that it be. Honesty compels one to note that there is a tendency of all who approach the Scripture to make it be whatever one wishes it to be. If one wants to believe that the Bible is inerrant there is the temptation to work at saving the Bible from the phenomena that might not meet that criteria. On the other hand, if one wants to prove the Bible to be errant there is the temptation to over-emphasize elements within the text which are difficult. Pinnock correctly noted that it is not for the scholar to prescribe for God how He should give His Word; rather, the scholar should seek to understand how He gave it (1984, 90). The powerful reality which gives additional impetus to the point is that God has revealed Himself in what is available to the contemporary person. The goal is to move from asking how He should have to how He did reveal Himself.

Conditional Inerrancy determines to examine, and be guided by, the phenomena of the Bible. Price noted about the Bible, in agreement with Pinnock, that "if it does in fact teach either dictation or confluence, we are in trouble if we wish to be critically honest with the text. But if it does not, we may dismiss the pseudo-problems over which Evangelical apologists have so long exercised themselves. It is time for a truly inductive theology of inspiration 'from below'" (1988, 175). This inductive approach will require an intensive involvement with the specific texts of the Scripture rather than trying to impose a doctrinal teaching on the Bible.

The perspective about the text of Scripture adopted by Conditional Inerrancy can be identified as inductive. However, there are within Conditional Inerrancy some who extend the inductive approach to the denial of all presuppositional starting points. Most

Conditional Inerrantists allow some basic presuppositions, such as the existence of God, that He has revealed Himself, etc., from which to approach Scripture. Daniel Fuller, though for the most part within the parameters of Conditional Inerrancy, argued that the inductive approach implies the "right of reason and criticism to be sovereign." He defined induction as "letting criticism control all aspects of the knowing process from beginning to end" (1973, 67). The inductive approach of Conditional Inerrancy certainly allows for a critical approach to the Bible, but the proponents of this view generally operate inductively within the outlines of the basic presuppositions of the Christian faith.

3.3.6 Scriptural Claims About Inerrancy

The final aspect of the basis for Conditional Inerrancy is directly related to the call for an inductive approach, the examination of the claims of the Bible about the doctrine of inerrancy. The position of Complete Inerrancy is that the Scriptures explicitly claim to be both inspired of God and inerrant. As was noted in Chapter 2, they use several approaches all designed to affirm that the teaching of Scripture about itself includes the doctrine of a strict and rigid inerrancy. Conditional Inerrancy argues that the text of the Bible does not include such specific and explicit claims.

The divergence within American Evangelicalism about the scriptural claims concerning inerrancy can be traced at least as far back as the controversy, during the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, between Charles A. Briggs and the Northern Presbyterian Church. In that debate one of Brigg's supporters, Henry Smith, defended Brigg's position by arguing for limiting the view of the inerrancy of Scriptures to their purpose of teaching faith and morals. This

limitation was based upon the assertion that the Scriptures claimed no more than that the

teachings about faith and morals, which was the intent of the Scriptures, was inerrant

(Coleman 1984, 161).

The real concern in attempting to understand the Scriptural claims about

inerrancy, Richard Coleman argued, is to discover what the "Biblical authors intended to

teach as necessary to salvation" (1984, 162). This would refocus the attention on the

biblical teaching about inerrancy away from the subject matter of the Scriptures to the

purpose for that subject matter. Inerrancy is a category with which to describe the purpose

of the Bible to provide what is necessary to lead humans to the redemptive activities of

God.

This does not bring one into the realm of uncertainty as to what in the biblical

material is a part of this purpose and what is not. Coleman contended that while it is

necessary to determine what doctrines and affirmations are necessary for salvation, it is

also possible to make that determination (1984, 163). The clear evidence that the

Christian church does assume to know what aspects of the biblical revelation contribute

to the purpose of expressing God's redemptive plan is that the church preaches that

message. In that preaching the church declares what it sees in the biblical material as

revealing the involvement of God for the salvation of the human race.

When the issue of relating inerrancy to the purpose of Scripture is discussed one

of the problems which must be addressed is the biblical material that does not relate, or at

least does not relate directly, to the salvific purposes of God. Is that material to be

considered errant? Conditional Inerrantists are hesitant to allow for the bifurcation of the

Scriptures along the lines of inerrancy, preferring rather to apply their understanding of

inerrancy (trustworthiness) to the entirety of the text in light of the intent and purpose of

the Bible. In that inerrancy relates to what Scripture intends to teach, the task of exegesis

is very important for it serves to distinguish between what "Scripture intends to teach as

revelation and what it merely reports or transmits" (Coleman 1984, 164).

In contrast to the position of Complete Inerrancy, Pinnock asserted that the Bible

does not claim to be perfectly errorless (1984, 104). What the Bible claims is that it

testifies adequately and sufficiently to the saving revelation of God which culminated in

Jesus. Further, the Bible claims to be given by God, but does not claim that it was given

inerrantly. Pinnock summarized his understanding that the Bible is trustworthy with truth

where it counts, the expression of the means provided by God for salvation, by noting

that it presents "truth that is not so easily threatened by scholarly problems" (1984, 105).

Complete Inerrancy bases much of its argument for the inerrancy of the Bible on

its understanding that Jesus and the New Testament teaches the perfect errorlessness of

the Bible. Conditional Inerrancy responds by noting that the concept of inerrancy as held

by modern scholarship is far more complex than would have been the view of the

Scripture maintained by Jesus and His followers. At a far more simple and functional

level, the Bible is seen as claiming "divine inspiration and a general reliability, with a

distinct concentration upon the covenantal revelation of God" (Pinnock 1984, 58).

Conditional Inerrantist views the Bible as the revelation of God and His plan for the

redemption of the race.

In that the definition of inerrancy for Conditional Inerrancy involves a far less

rigid understanding that does that of Complete Inerrancy, the former must be concerned

lest the impression is made that the truthfulness of the Bible is not important. Pinnock,

conscious of this possible charge, opined that the Bible teaches "a broad and untechnical kind of inerrancy" (1984, 75). Instead of the technical approach to inerrancy, demanding scientific precision, the Conditional Inerrancy position maintains that "the Bible's emphasis tends to be upon the saving truth of its message and its supreme profitability in the life of faith and discipleship. It does not really inform us how we ought to handle perplexing features in the text" (Pinnock 1984, 75).

The lines of the approach to the claims of the Scripture on inerrancy taken by Conditional Inerrancy converge at the point of the intention(s) of the biblical authors. Discovering those intentions becomes the task of scholarship and the effort must employ the best available techniques for understanding the biblical text. Coleman asserted that in this approach to inerrancy "the crux is not so much how many errors can be found but the nature and purpose of each biblical writing" (1975, 300). This would demand, in the words of Johnston, that "what is intended must be judged according to each particular passage. And the intent of individual texts must be investigated from a posture that assumes the overall trustworthiness of the text" (1979, 43).

The emphasis upon, and argument about, inerrancy may, according to Conditional Inerrancy, focus attention away from where it should be. E. Earle Ellis argued that "the Word-of-God character of Scripture, its infallible and revelational character, was always bound up with its meaning and, we add, its meaning for the contemporary hearer" (1967, 201). Conditional Inerrancy bases its understanding of inerrancy on the teaching of Scripture, but sees that teaching focusing on the intent and purposes of Scripture rather than on explicit claims for inerrant status.

3.4 The Argument for Conditional Inerrancy

The argument made in support of Conditional Inerrancy has been previewed as the differences between this position and Complete Inerrancy have been highlighted. Additional indications as to the lines of argumentation have been hinted at in the elaboration of the base from which Conditional Inerrancy makes the argument. With those preliminary materials in mind it is now possible to outline the argument which is made to support Conditional Inerrancy. It generally takes five specific expressions, although there is some variability as to the weight to be given to each of them. The argument is: (1) Inerrancy is limited to the revelational material of the Bible; (2) Inerrancy is limited by the teaching focus of the Scripture; (3) Inerrancy must take into consideration the human authorship of the Bible; (4) Inerrancy must consider the use of sources by the biblical writers; and, (5) Inerrancy must be viewed in relation to inspiration.

3.4.1 Limited to Revelational Material

Conditional Inerrancy asserts that inerrancy must be focused upon what can be called the revelational material in the Bible as contrasted with that which might be called non-revelational. The revelational category would designate that within the Bible which is most clearly related to the revelation of God to humans, that is, material which is not easily attributed to the general knowledge of the writer or of the hearers/readers. For example, historical or geographical data would be considered non-revelational in that that information would have been known generally by the authors and by the people addressed (Fuller 1968, 81).

This argument is based on the view that the Scripture affirms, in several passages, that the revelational material in it should be seen an inerrant. It will be helpful to look at some of those here to understand and illustrate the manner in which the argument is made. The words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5:18, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (NASB), are seen as speaking to "the inviolability and inerrancy of the commandments of the Old Testament Law" (Fuller 1968, 81). Fuller argued that such a strong assertion of the inerrancy of the revelational aspect of the Old Testament did not extend to the Old Testament material which spoke about "paleontology, cosmology, and meteorology" (1968, 81).

The central passage to which Conditional Inerrancy appeals in limiting inerrancy to that which is revelational is Paul's affirmation of the inspiration of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (NASB). In this passage the inspiration of Scripture, and by inference its inerrancy also, is qualified by the revelational focus of that which produces people of God. In Evangelical terms this indicates that the qualification to be placed upon the understanding of inerrancy has to do with that which reveals the plan of God for the redemption of the fallen race. That concept of redemption would go beyond the moment of conversion to include the making of disciples, people of God, who are adequate for service in the Kingdom of God.

If the discussion of inerrancy is to be centered on the revelational materials in the Bible, the implication is that there are also within the Scripture that which is non-

revelational. If they are not to be viewed as inerrant, are they of necessity to be considered to be errant? While this difficult question will be considered later, it must be observed here that Conditional Inerrancy does accept that the non-revelational materials are accommodated to the views of the original hearers to enhance the communication of revelational truth (Fuller 1968, 81). As an example, it is noted that Jesus asserted that the mustard seed was the smallest of seeds, an obvious inaccuracy in light of further knowledge of seeds, but an assertion which expressed His knowledge, and that of His hearers, and communicated the message about the growth of His Kingdom and the power of the smallest amount of faith (Matt. 13:31-32; 17:20).

Fuller, in summarizing this argument, noted that the doctrinal verses of Scripture "unmistakably teach that the Bible gives men infallible, inerrant teaching about God, about man's lost condition, and how he comes to full salvation in Christ. . . . Paul said that the Scriptures are able to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ (II Tim. 3:15), and this can only mean that all the Biblical assertions which teach or rightly imply knowledge that makes men wise unto salvation are absolutely inerrant, for how could fallible statements yield wisdom" (1968, 80)?

3.4.2 Limited to the Teaching of Scripture

The second aspect of the argument made by the Conditional Inerrancy position, which limits inerrancy to the teaching focus of the Scripture, is very much like the first argument, which limits inerrancy to the revelational material of the Scripture. Whereas the first argument saw the revelational material of the Scripture about the redemptive intentions of God toward humanity, the second argument expands the limitation to

include all of the affirmations, or teachings, of the Bible. This second argument, a corollary to the first, responds to the possible charge that the first argument tends to restrict inerrancy too much.

Fuller, when pressed even by those within Conditional Inerrancy, responded that "all that the Bible teaches is infallible and inerrant" (1973, 68). While the proponents of Conditional Inerrancy do see the focus of the Scriptural teaching on the redemptive purposes of God, they do wish to be open to other teaching foci in the biblical material, teaching foci which are also inerrant. Fuller stated their concern: "If there is one error anywhere in what Scripture intends to teach, then everything it intends to say is suspect and we have not even one sure word from God" (1973, 68).

This argument certainly gives proper consideration to the teaching foci of the Bible, but it does not always provide clear delineations between the teaching foci and that which does not, or does not intend to, teach. In an effort to assist in the distinguishing between the two, Erickson suggested that false statements by ungodly persons and even statements by godly persons not speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would not need to be seen as teaching foci, and, thus not inerrant. An example of a godly person not speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit could be the speech of Stephen prior to his death (Acts 7), in which he mistakenly tells some of the history of Israel. By contrast, when affirmations are made by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the biblical writers, even if those affirmations are drawn from non-canonical sources, as Jude does in his Epistle, they are to be considered as inerrant (1998, 259). Erickson also noted that statements employing moods other than the indicative (questions, wishes, etc.) may not, unless they are clearly used to make an affirmation, be considered inerrant (1998, 260).

3.4.3 Must Accept the Human Authorship of the Bible

It is of great importance to the Conditional Inerrancy position that the human

aspects of the inspiration and writing of the Scriptures are fully acknowledged. Both

Complete and Conditional Inerrancy accept that there is the cooperative effort of the

Divine and the human in the production of the Scriptures, but Conditional Inerrancy

argues that more attention must be given to the human side of that interaction when

constructing the doctrine of inerrancy.

There is inherent in the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy the tension between

the divine and human agencies in the writing of Scripture and it is difficult to balance the

emphasis between the two. Pinnock noted that the goal is to "avoid both the idea that the

Bible is the product of mere human genius and the idea it came about through mechanical

dictation. The *via media* lies in the direction of a dynamic personal model that upholds

both the divine initiative and the human response" (1984, 103). Neither the divine nor the

human may be disregarded without doing violence to the proper understandings of the

doctrinal affirmations of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.

In upholding the divine and the human aspects of the writing of the Scripture it

must be remembered that the result of their interaction was the truth of God, the Bible.

Given that the result is what is revered as His Word, the active involvement of the Holy

Spirit to keep the human element from distorting the message beyond the boundaries of

God's truth must be acknowledged and accepted.

The human element in the writing of Scripture was not merely accidental, nor

incidental, to the purposes of God; nor should it be seen as merely the accommodation of

God. Pinnock asserted that "the Bible is God's Word in human language – the two aspects cannot be disassociated. God has willed the human character of the text as much as he willed the poverty of the manger and the hard wood of the cross" (1984, 85). The involvement of humans in the authorship of Scripture is not a matter for which apologies need to be offered; it is the manner in which God chose to reveal Himself through what became the Bible.

For Conditional Inerrancy, that the Scriptures are human is not viewed as a problem whatsoever, because they are what God willed that they should be. If there needs to be some proof produced to show that the way in which God does His bidding is the best way, and it could be questioned whether one needed to even produce such, the Conditional Inerrantist points to the effect the Scriptures, as they are, have on human beings whom they touch and who respond to their message in faith. The Scriptures have proven to be effective in carrying out their "religious purpose in Christian experience" (Pinnock 1984, 85).

A fear that has to be dealt with when the human aspect of the Scripture is considered is that of diminishing the emphasis on the divine character of the Bible. Does the recognition that human authors, real human authors, wrote the Scripture take away from the faith assertion that they are the Word of God? To this fear, and to this question, Pinnock answers in the negative. "We examine the humanity of the text, not because it poses a threat to the divine character of the medium of the Word of God, which has already been settled for the Christian, but to facilitate its proper interpretation" (1984, 86). Acceptance of the divine aspect of the authorship of the Bible is neither denied nor belittled by Conditional Inerrancy as it argues that the human authorship of the text must

be acknowledged.

In arguing for the human authorship of the text the Conditional Inerrantist

expresses the reality that "God's revelation was stated in terms of the language, logic, and

location of the people to whom it was originally written" (Johnston 1979, 43), which is to

assert that the Scripture is culturally-directed. Johnston saw Mark 10:3-12 as a paradigm

by which to understand the cultural-directedness of the Scripture. In a dispute with the

Pharisees about the question of divorce, Jesus pointed to the original intention of God that

there not be divorce, and then to the allowance for divorce by God through Moses

because of the situation of the people, the hardness of their hearts. This, Johnston noted,

indicates that God's will must be interpreted in light of the realities of life and the wider

revelation of His will (1979, 45). Through this paradigm it can be seen that the Mosaic

text is culturally-directed, that is, a divine accommodation, which does not detract from

its being inspired, but does raise questions about inerrancy, especially in terms of the

application of that culturally-conditioned message into another cultural situation. For the

Conditional Inerrantist such considerations demand that the science of biblical

interpretation be intimately linked to the doctrine of inerrancy.

Accepting the human authorship of the biblical text means, according to Pinnock,

that the reader must "permit the Scripture to employ whatever forms of literary

composition it chooses" (1984, 115). The modern reader must avoid the temptation to

insist that the ancient writer employ, or be judged by, contemporary literary styles and

conventions. Instead, the modern reader must "respect the liberty of the biblical writers to

use the forms of literary composition they decide on, even if it shocks us and contravenes

our standards of writing" (Pinnock 1984, 118). The standards of that day must be used to

judge the writings of the Bible about the exactness of the use of quotations, the precision in the use of numbers, and in all of their literary conventions (Erickson 1998, 261).

Conditional Inerrancy also maintains that contemporary historiography must not be used to judge the manner in which the biblical writers wrote history. Pinnock observed that the style of historical narration employed by the biblical writers was different from that of the modern era and should not be forced to emulate the contemporary methodology. The Scriptures "were written to lead people to know and love God and on historiographical principles native to the ancient world" (Pinnock 1984, 121). Conditional Inerrancy maintains that inerrancy must be limited by the literary, linguistic, and historical standards of the times from which the Scripture comes and not by those of the modern, scientific era.

In arguing for the human authorship of the Bible, Conditional Inerrancy also admits that "the writers bring along with them a set of cultural assumptions that can create difficulties for readers of other times and places" (Pinnock 1984, 108). In that inerrancy is defined in terms of the intended teaching and/or purpose of the text, such an admission raises the difficulty of distinguishing between that which is normative and that which is cultural in the text. The resolution to the difficulty is to look in the text for the intended teaching in light of the overall purpose of the Bible (Pinnock 1984, 109). The difficulty which comes with accepting the cultural assumptions and influences of the human writers is compounded by the recognition that there are instances in which theological and ethical conclusions are linked to language and culture. Examples of this additional difficulty are the commands of God to completely destroy the inhabitants of Canaan, the allowance of polygamy, and the allowance of the institution of slavery.

Conditional Inerrancy does not attempt to erase, or to explain, all of these difficulties;

they are noted as evidencing the manner in which God has chosen to reveal Himself,

employing human authors in the process.

Pinnock proclaimed that "revelation has not come to us in the unmistakable forms

of glory, but in the midst of human weakness" (1984, 98). The incarnation of Jesus, His

life among human beings, and His crucifixion all point to the revelation of God in human

weakness. God, in the provision for a written record of His revelation, accepted the

frailties of human language with its limitations and possibilities of failing to completely

express what needed to be expressed. This, Conditional Inerrancy maintains, is what God

did, and that is what must be accepted. What one may assert that God could, or should,

have done is immaterial to the debate about inerrancy,

Perhaps the best summary of the argument for accepting the human authorship of

the text when attempting to construct a doctrine of inerrancy was provided by Pinnock.

"The Bible does not attempt to give the impression that it is flawless in historical or

scientific ways. God uses writers with weaknesses and still teaches the truth of revelation

through them. It is irresponsible to claim that in doing so God himself makes a mistake.

What God aims to do through inspiration is to stir up faith in the gospel through the word

of Scripture, which remains a human text beset by normal weaknesses. Thus God

achieves his ends without doing violence to the human through human weaknesses and

historicity" (1984, 100).

3.4.4 Inerrancy in the Use of Sources

While not a major part of the argument presented by Conditional Inerrancy, there

is an appeal made to the possibility that the sources used by the biblical writers could have been errant. Inerrancy would only mean, then, that the biblical writer correctly and without error made use of a source which contained error. Harrison, after examining the phenomena within Scripture and admitting difficulties of a chronological, numerical, transcriptional, and comparative nature, asked if inspiration, and inferentially inerrancy, required that a biblical writer be kept from error in the use of sources. His answer was clear: "We are not affirming that this is a dogmatic requirement, but if the inductive study of the Bible reveals enough examples of this sort of thing to make the conclusion probable, then we shall have to hold the doctrine of inspiration in this light. We may have our own ideas as to how God should have inspired the Word, but it is more profitable to learn, if we can, how he actually inspired it" (1959, 249).

This argument would both explain the existence of some of the difficulties which are discovered in the text of Scripture through the inductive approach and provide a limitation, or at least a new definition, of the doctrine of inerrancy. Edward J. Carnell noted that the major proponent of Complete Inerrancy, Benjamin Warfield, opened the way for such a position by admitting that the phrase "it is written," which usually is understood to mean that "God said," also implied, in certain situations, that the writer was inspired to give a true account. This is illustrated by the quotation, preceded by "it is written," of Job 5:13, words of Eliphaz not of God, in I Corinthians 3:19. Carnell declared that "when orthodoxy made this admission, it saddled itself with a very troublesome expedient. Whether orthodoxy realized it or not, it was really saying that inspiration, at times, ensures no more than an infallible account of error" (1959, 102). This line of argumentation, recognizing that inerrancy would not render the sources used

inerrant, appeals again to the intent of Scripture. The use of sources by the biblical writer which contained error would be appropriate as they contribute to the purpose of Scripture, although the material from an errant source would remain errant.

3.4.5 Relation to Inspiration

Conditional Inerrancy also argues that there is an important and vital linkage between the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. Complete Inerrancy accepts a linkage between the two doctrines, but posits that that linkage is direct: the Scripture is inspired, therefore it is of necessity inerrant. The relation between the two concepts as viewed in Conditional Inerrancy is not so direct; it is more indirect and implied. Even if the linkage is more tenuous there is a relation between inspiration and inerrancy which must not be overlooked.

Erickson, using a commonly accepted definition, saw that the Bible is "completely inspired by God, even to the selection of details within the text" (1998, 251). This understanding of inspiration leads to the corollary view, inerrancy. Erickson opined, "our view of inspiration logically entails the inerrancy of the Bible. If, then, it should be shown that the Bible is not fully truthful, our view of inspiration would also be in jeopardy" (1998, 251). Though inerrancy is accepted as a logical inference from the doctrine of inspiration, it is important to that doctrine. It should be remembered that Erickson, and most of those within Conditional Inerrancy, prefer to talk about inerrancy in terms of the affirmations, teaching focus, or intent of the Bible. The linkage between inspiration and inerrancy, though not so direct, does not lead to the rigid view of inerrancy which is expressed in Complete Inerrancy.

The attaching of the concept of inerrancy to the intent of Scripture by Conditional Inerrancy does not lessen or detract from the very high view of the inspiration of Scripture which the position holds. Coleman noted that Complete Inerrantists assume "that any restriction of inerrancy logically entails a corresponding limitation on Biblical inspiration – namely, that some parts of Scripture are inspired while others are not, or that some are more inspired than others" (1984, 163). The tie between the two doctrinal affirmations is so close in Complete Inerrancy that they stand or fall together. Such logic, according to Conditional Inerrancy is fallacious.

On the contrary, Conditional Inerrancy argues that the limitation of inerrancy to the intent of the biblical authors does not negatively impact inspiration. Coleman expressed that opinion, noting that "if, as the consensus seems to be, the Scriptures do not explicitly or formally teach their own inerrancy, and inerrancy is only 'logically entailed' in the doctrinal verses, then the sole question left is whether this is the only logical deduction. The other equally logical and viable conclusion is that Scripture is inspired throughout, but that inerrancy is limited to those matters necessary for our salvation" (1984, 164). The argument of Conditional Inerrancy is that the concept of inerrancy is linked to inspiration as a particular case, but that it is "neither the end nor the sole consequence of inspiration" (Coleman 1984, 164). The two concepts are not logically inconsistent with each other. Inspiration implies inerrancy; inerrancy does not limit inspiration.

3.5 Conclusion

The position of Conditional Inerrancy differs from that of Complete Inerrancy

both as to the starting points and the points of arrival. Inerrancy is not seen by

Conditional Inerrancy as a direct teaching of the Bible; rather it is a logical deduction

from, or corollary to, the teaching of the Scripture about inspiration. Inerrancy is defined

in terms of the purpose, or intent, of Scripture rather than as a comparison with reality as

is known by the modern scholar. The Bible is sufficient to accomplish what God

intended, rather than being a perfect volume.

Interestingly, many within Conditional Inerrancy prefer to continue using the term

inerrancy, now redefined and refocused, instead of replacing it with another term that

might not ensure the proper understanding of, and respect for, the Bible. Pinnock chose to

call the manner in which he understood inerrancy as "focused inerrancy," by which he

accepted that the Scriptures are focused on the claim "to be able to bring us to know and

to love God in Jesus Christ and to nurture us in that saving relationship" (1984, 127).

Inerrancy, in these terms, indicates that the Bible is able to accomplish its purposes, many

of which are seen in the lives of believers, and in so doing the Bible has established its

fundamental reliability. The encounter with Jesus through the Holy Spirit diminishes the

difficulties in the biblical text to the status of relative unimportance. The attitude of

Conditional Inerrancy is that of an expectation that the Bible will, as it has, prove itself

fully worthy of the faith which is placed in it. Pinnock noted that "although the New

Testament does not teach a strict doctrine of inerrancy, it might be said to encourage a

trusting attitude, which inerrancy in a more lenient definition does signify" (1984, 77).

Conditional Inerrancy claims to have several advantages over Complete

Inerrancy. There are, admittedly, areas in the text of Scripture which are problematic for

Complete Inerrancy, areas which are usually dealt with by appealing to the autographs

and to future knowledge for their solution. Fuller noted that the Conditional Inerrancy

view does not fear that those difficulties in the phenomena of Scripture will harm the

faith of the believer (1968, 83). The totality of the faith is not based on one doctrinal

affirmation, inerrancy; the danger of losing the faith if that one position should be shown

to be false is eliminated. As Pinnock claimed, "if the Bible asserts it, it must be a part of

its purpose or else it would have been omitted" (1984, 128). Conditional Inerrancy also

has the advantage of not needing to defend the Bible against the incursions of science and

criticism. The revelational material of the Bible, that which carries the God-intended

purpose of leading people to the relationship with God which He provides, is not subject

to being destroyed by either science or criticism.

Conditional Inerrancy is sensitive to the charges that it sets up a bifurcation in

Scripture whereby parts of it which could be said to be revelational, or related directly to

the intent of the Bible, are inerrant, and other parts, which could be said to be non-

revelational and not related to the intent, are non inerrant. They are reluctant to speak of

the non-revelational materials as containing, or being in, error. Harrison asserted that "the

spiritual message is intrinsically more important than the historical minutiae of the

narrative framework, yet the Scripture gives no hint of distinction as far as

trustworthiness is concerned. This is understandable since the historical element is itself

the unfolding of God's providential and saving activity" (1958, 16).

A further complication faced by Conditional Inerrancy about the distinguishing

between revelational and non-revelational materials in Scripture is the difficulty of

determining which biblical material is which. Pinnock noted that "the attitude of Jesus

and the Apostles toward Scripture was one of total trust. It cannot be shown that they

performed a revelational calculus on the text, believing what came down on the one side

and not the rest" (1984, 71). The two, revelational and non-revelational, are so

inextricably united in the text that such divisions are difficult to maintain. Thus, the

Conditional Inerrancy view refuses to call some aspects of Scripture inerrant and other

parts errant. The assertion is that inerrancy, as understood in terms of the fidelity to its

overall purpose, applies to the entirety of Scripture.

Conditional Inerrancy offers an alternative to Complete Inerrancy as a way of

understanding the doctrine of Scripture. Basing itself on the phenomena of Scripture and

appealing to the inductive method for deriving doctrinal affirmations, Conditional

Inerrancy asserts that the Scripture is inerrant in terms of the intent, or affirmations of the

text. The difficulties with the present text of Scripture are acknowledged, but the

Conditional Inerrancy view neither abandons the present text in favor of the autographs

nor attempts the process of forced harmonization to mitigate the difficulties. For the most

part, proponents of Conditional Inerrancy still wish to affirm the authoritative status of

the Bible and prefer to retain the word inerrancy, although it is recognized as not being

the best word with which to affirm the value of the Bible.

The final view to be considered is given the name Limited Inerrancy, in that its

proponents severely limit the applicability of the concept of inerrancy, preferring to

abandon the term. This view will be shown to handle the concept of inerrancy differently

than did either Complete or Conditional Inerrancy. The difficulties, so-called, within the

text of Scripture are typically admitted by the Limited Inerrantist to be errors. In spite of

that admission, Limited Inerrancy continues to view the Bible as a trustworthy witness to

the Gospel of Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIMITED INERRANCY

The third position about the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture in American

Evangelicalism is that of Limited Inerrancy. On the spectrum which runs from most rigid

to less rigid in the views on inerrancy, Complete Inerrancy occupies the most rigid

perspective, Conditional Inerrancy the middle position, and Limited Inerrancy the least

rigid. In fact, while Complete Inerrancy demands that the term inerrant be used and

Conditional Inerrancy reluctantly allows its usage, Limited Inerrancy proposes that the

term inerrant not be used in regard to the Bible.

The descriptor, Limited Inerrancy, is used here somewhat differently than is the

case in most studies of the doctrine of Scripture, where the phrase describes a view of

inerrancy which qualifies the term severely in specific ways so as to keep the term, but

with multiple reductions on the extent to which it is applied. Here the phrase is used to

describe a position within American Evangelicalism which recognizes errors within the

biblical text and accepts that they are not there as mistakes which render the text

unavailing, but they are there by the will and purpose of God. This view holds that the

term inerrant should not be applied to the biblical texts, although it does maintain that

they remain authoritative for faith and practice within the Christian community.

This chapter will highlight the differences and disagreements which Limited

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Inerrancy has with the two other positions. Limited Inerrancy is based on the recognition

that the phenomena within the Scripture must be accepted for what they are and the

understanding that in the main the church has never supported views about the Bible

being absolutely inerrant. The specific arguments made in support of Limited Inerrancy

will be identified and explained, which will illustrate the conclusion that although there

are errors in the text of Scripture it is essentially accurate and trustworthy.

4.1 Introduction to Limited Inerrancy

Limited Inerrancy, while distinct from either Complete or Conditional Inerrancy,

is, too, within American Evangelicalism. In this section it will be necessary to note how

Limited Inerrancy deals with three concerns basic to the discussion in American

Evangelicalism about the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. It will be noted that the

Scriptures are seen as authoritative by Limited Inerrancy, that it does hold to their

inspiration, albeit in terms that are different from some of their colleagues within

Evangelicalism, and that it defines inerrancy in ways which set them apart from the other

two positions which have been considered.

4.1.1 Authority of Scripture

Limited Inerrancy, as did Complete and Conditional Inerrancy, holds the Bible in

high regard, seeing it as the authoritative rule for faith and practice within the church. In

line with the major Evangelical tenets, Limited Inerrancy affirms the phrase *sola*

scriptura as describing its understanding of the importance of the Scriptures for the life of

the community of faith. Dewey Beegle observed, however, that "it should be recognized

. . . that it is impossible to practice the use of 'Scripture alone' in an absolute sense. Even

Martin Luther did not understand it that way" (1973, 119). Given the distance

geographically, culturally, and chronologically from the world in which, and to which,

the biblical writers wrote, there is the need for involvement with the biblical languages,

the history of the biblical times, and the background concerns of the writers' world, to

understand the Bible. In that way the Bible can serve as the final norm for faith and

practice.

This caveat does not lessen the authoritative status of the Bible. Beegle affirmed

that "the core meaning of 'Scripture alone' is that the canon is the only place where one

can go to find the authoritative gospel of Christ. Notwithstanding all of its difficulties, the

Bible presents the clearest picture of Jesus and God his Father" (1973, 121). The Bible

must be accepted as the revelation of God, the authoritative norm for determining what

He expects for the Church in the living out in the world of the gospel of Christ.

4.1.2 Understanding Inspiration

All three of the views on the inerrancy of the Bible give allegiance the inspiration

of the Bible, an important affirmation within Evangelicalism. Limited Inerrancy,

however, does approach the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scripture in a manner which

sets it apart from the other two views. To set out the view of inspiration in one sentence,

Beegle asserted that "just as there are varying kinds of revelation in Scripture, there are

different kinds of inspiration" (1973, 199). The concept of inspiration is to be found

throughout the biblical materials though there is no effort within the Bible to give

explanation as to how it took place. Limited Inerrantists, as did their adversaries in the

inerrancy debate, appeal to 2 Timothy 3:15-16 and 2 Peter 1:21 to argue for the

inspiration of the Bible, focusing, as did the Conditional Inerrantists, on the materials

extant at the time Paul and Peter wrote. The reality of the progressive work of authoring,

editing, and redacting, complicates the claim for inspiration upon the multiple individuals

involved in the process.

It is a common-place to speak of God as the author of Scripture, but Beegle

observed that "while Scripture claims unequivocally that God was the source of

revelation and inspiration, it is interesting that nowhere does the Bible teach that God was

its author" (1973, 203). Limited Inerrancy attributes much of the confusion about the

authorship of God to Aristotle's concept of instrumental efficient causality, noting that

such argumentation is foreign to the biblical intent and message.

Limited Inerrancy bases its view on the variability of inspiration within the Bible

on their understanding that the Jews placed the primacy of inspiration on the Torah,

seeing lesser inspiration for the Prophets, and even less for the Writings (Beegle 1973,

205). In that all of the activities of the biblical writers involved some sort of inspiration, it

can be said that the Bible is inspired, but, as Beegle noted, in that "all of Scripture does

not involve special or primary revelation . . . there is not need to posit unique inspiration

for every word of the Bible" (1973, 208). The Bible reveals that the concept of inspiration

is applied variously, with differing levels of intensity and effect, which means that some

materials, for example the Gospel of John, have more inspirational impact than other

books, for example Esther. To say lesser inspiration in reference to a specific biblical

portion, however, is not to deny the function of that material within the entirety of God's

purposes. Lesser inspiration is still inspiration.

It must be emphasized that the position of Limited Inerrancy is that the Bible is

inspired and it recognizes that the stringent manner in which Complete Inerrancy has supported this view of Scripture has made a positive impact on American Evangelicalism. However, as David A. Hubbard noted, the "emphasis on the inspiration of all parts of the Bible has sometimes resulted in the attempt to apply equally all parts of the Bible to our conduct and doctrine" (1977, 159). Hubbard observed several examples of the problem being identified; often the context of biblical passages is not considered when applying them to the contemporary reader; major biblical themes are neglected in the rush to support minor details; allegorical means of interpreting are employed; and the various literary forms in which the Bible is written are not recognized (1977, 159-160). While these are concerns for the proper hermeneutical approach to understanding the Bible, they are also illustrations of the need to consider the doctrine of inspiration more carefully so as to delineate its application to the Scripture with more discrimination.

Limited Inerrancy is not comfortable with the approach to inspiration which is designated as verbal inspiration, an approach which argues for the activity of the Holy Spirit ensuring that the very words of the text were explicitly what God intended. Limited Inerrancy prefers to talk about inspiration in organic terms. Harry R. Boer explained this approach to inspiration by noting that "inspiration is regarded as a divine activity which is on the one hand wholly congenial to the character of the divine author and on the other hand wholly confluent with the mental, emotional, and spiritual processes of the human agents whom the Spirit influenced. As the divine and the human are organically related in the Person of our Lord, so the inspiring Spirit associated himself with the conscious and unconscious processes of the human agents whom he directed in ways we dare not define" (1977, 100).

Limited Inerrancy holds in high esteem the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible, but does not see that inspiring activity of the Holy Spirit upon the authors of the Scripture in the same way as does Complete Inerrancy. Stephen T. Davis explained the inspiration of the Bible as "that influence of the Holy Spirit on the Biblical writers (a) that what they wrote was a reliable and authoritative account of how God has revealed himself in history, and (b) that what they wrote was a reliable and authoritative theological interpretation of God's revelatory acts" (1977, 54). Though a human book, the Bible is the Word of God and provides the record of His revelation which is able to lead one into a saving relationship with God. The Bible does testify to its authoritative status and to its own reliability or trustworthiness, but it does not make the additional claim of its inerrancy.

It would not be correct to charge Limited Inerrancy with a lowered view of the inspiration of the Bible. Donald G. Bloesch, in fact, used concepts which are acceptable to Complete Inerrancy to express his understanding of the inspiration of the Scripture. He affirmed that "Scripture is not only a human witness and medium of divine revelation but also a divinely inspired witness and medium," and he advocates the "plenary inspiration of Scripture, meaning that Scripture in its totality is inspired" (1978, 54-55). Bloesch, however, expanded this definition of inspiration to encompass the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors, the illumination of the minds of the readers/hearers of the text by the same Holy Spirit, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the preserving of the writings. He defined inspiration as: "the divine election and guidance of the biblical prophets and the ensuring of their writings as a compelling witness to revelation, the opening of the eyes of the people of that time to the truth of these writings, and the

providential preservation of these writings as the unique channel of revelation" (1994, 119-120).

4.1.3 Definition of Inerrancy

Limited Inerrancy does not see the doctrine of inerrancy explicitly taught in the biblical materials. Beegle, expressing a common theme among Limited Inerrantists, noted that the "earliest non-biblical formulations of inspiration were general statements that conceived of Scripture as the trustworthy, authoritative Word of God. Implied in trustworthiness, of course, were the aspects of truthfulness and accuracy of the record because the ancients concurred in Balaam's answer to Balak, 'God is not man, that he should lie' (Numbers 23:19)" (1973, 156). Such an implication must be considered as it is, an implication drawn from the biblical material and applied to the available copies of Scripture, not a direct assertion made by the Bible.

One of the fears used by Complete Inerrancy to maintain its strict interpretation of the concept of inerrancy is that if one error is allowed the entire edifice of the Scriptures will crumble. The maxim, in legal terms, being applied is, "false in one, false in all." Beegle noted that this legal maxim is not adhered to rigidly in the courts and asks "on what authority, then, must this principle be applied with absolute consistency to the Scriptures" (1973, 219)? Limited Inerrancy rejects the assumption that the entirety of the Scripture must be inerrant or else all of the Scripture will be rendered meaningless. The real concern about the Bible is its truthfulness in relation to the message of God's redemption which it proclaims, and that is the case whether or not absolute inerrancy is ascribed to every detail of the text.

Complete Inerrancy refuses to permit any of the historical details of the text of Scripture be considered to contain error, because if they do, the message of the text cannot be trusted. If in areas in which some external examination can be brought to bear to test truthfulness errors are found, how can the areas in the Scripture which are beyond such scrutiny be trusted? Limited Inerrancy disagrees with such logic, asserting that "minor historical errors in Scripture invalidate neither our faith nor true doctrine" (Beegle 1973, 276).

There is a decided preference in Limited Inerrancy for the term infallible over the term inerrancy as a description of their view of the authoritative status of Scripture. Boer noted that the term infallible can be used in two different ways, the first being almost synonymous with the term inerrant. This would be using infallible very literally to describe the text of Scripture as having no errors of fact, no contradictions, and no inconsistencies. Boer argued that the preferred usage of the term infallible, however, is concerned with "the certitude, the unbreakable validity, of the gospel which only faith can recognize. It holds to an infallibility that corresponds to the character of the biblical revelation which faith accepts" (1977, 7-8). This usage of the term infallible represents the call to see beyond the clashing data and contradictory phenomena in the biblical text and to refuse to let the certitude of the gospel message be in any way diminished by them.

Not only does Limited Inerrancy refuse to accept the definition of inerrancy which is proposed by Complete Inerrancy, they also deny that the Bible teaches its own inerrancy. If it does not teach inerrancy, it certainly does not provide a definition of the term. To extend the rejection of the concept further, Davis argued that the "Bible does not teach inerrancy, nor does inerrancy seem to be presupposed or implied by what it does

teach" (1977, 61). Limited Inerrancy charges that to arrive at a doctrine of inerrancy one must link inspiration and inerrancy inextricably together; that is, one would need to assert that the Bible is inspired if and only if it is inerrant, and since the Bible does claim to be inspired, it must then also be inerrant. Such logic is fallacious in that it defines inspiration in a way that the Bible does not and then claims for the Bible what it does not claim for itself.

4.2 Disagreements With Complete and Conditional Inerrancy

As might be imagined, and as has already been noted, Limited Inerrancy presents several areas of disagreement with the two other positions. While Limited Inerrancy will display disagreements with both Complete and Conditional Inerrancy, the areas of difference will be more clearly noted with the former position. Five specific areas of disagreement will be noted. Limited Inerrancy asserts that the use of Aristotelian categories by Complete Inerrancy creates an area of disagreement. This usage of Aristotelian categories is supplemented in Complete Inerrancy by excessive dependence upon the Protestant Scholasticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Limited Inerrancy also argues that the appeal to inerrant autographs is one which clearly sets them apart from their opponents. Such an appeal, the bulwark of Complete Inerrancy, is totally disallowed by the Limited Inerrancy position. The manner in which the concept of error is defined and used is another area in which Limited Inerrancy distinguishes itself from its opponents. The last area of disagreement is that of the usage of the doctrine of inerrancy as an apologetic vehicle with which to create fears in those holding to inerrancy about the dangers of abandoning the position. Limited Inerrancy

views such scare tactics as not only inappropriate but also unnecessary.

4.2.1 The Usage of Aristotelian Categories

Jack B. Rogers divided the philosophical influences on Christian theology in general, and the doctrine of inerrancy in particular, into two categories, the one headed by Plato, and the other by Aristotle. As he described the Platonic school, he noted that it "assumed that the knowledge of great truths, like God as Creator, was born into every person. Knowledge of particular things in this world was known by deduction from those general principles. When applied to theology, the Platonic method assumed that faith preceded and provided a framework to make possible right reasoning" (1977, 18). By contrast, Rogers noted that according to the Aristotelian school humans "are born with blank minds but a capacity for reasoning. All knowledge begins from sense experience of things in the world. . . . When applied to theology, the Aristotelian method assumed that reason, based on the evidence of senses, must precede and would lead to faith" (1977, 18).

The history of the development of doctrine within the church is, according to Rogers, the story of the competing influences of Platonism and Aristotelianism. The former reigned in the early church, being most clearly expressed in the Augustinian, and later the Anselmian, dictum, "I believe in order that I may understand." The latter began to make inroads of influence in theology with the rise of Scholasticism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, most clearly seen in the work of Thomas Aquinas. While for Aquinas "all knowledge came from the same source – reason based on the data of our sense experience," reason and faith, Aristotelian philosophy and scriptural teaching, were still

held together in a synthesis (Rogers 1977, 23). The Reformers, Luther and Calvin, both

reacted against the Aristotelian-Thomistic synthesis, returning to the Augustinian

expression of Platonic thought, preferring the primacy of faith over reason.

With the death of the Reformers and the consolidation of Roman Catholic

positions in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the "Post-Reformation Protestants tried to

prove the authority of the Bible using the same Aristotelian-Thomistic arguments which

Roman Catholics used to prove the authority of the church" (Rogers 1977, 29). This shift

away from the neo-Platonic Augustinianism to the neo-Aristotelian Thomism began the

period of Protestant Scholasticism, from which the modern rigidity in the doctrine of

inerrancy has come. The foundation for what was to follow, according to Rogers, was the

conclusion that "the doctrine of Scripture, therefore, was not an article of faith, but the

principium (foundation) of other articles of faith" (1977, 30).

The theology of Francis Turretin (1623-1687) is representative of the movement

toward the Aristotelian-Thomistic synthesis and of the elevation of the doctrine of

Scripture to the status of primacy in theology. Rogers concluded that for Turretin "the

authority of Scripture was the most important subject in theology" (1977, 30). To the

vital questions as to whether the Bible is truthful and divine and how that can be known,

Turretin proclaimed that the Bible is inerrant in all matters. The Aristotelian method

demanded that reason must precede faith, therefore in the doctrine of Scriptures reason

must show that they are completely inerrant before faith in their efficacy can be

maintained.

The influence of the Aristotelian-Thomistic synthesis on the doctrine of inerrancy

in American Evangelicalism is to be seen in the influence of Turretin's theology on

Princeton Theological Seminary, a major site from which the doctrine of inerrancy

spread. Turretin's text was the text for theology classes at Princeton from its founding in

1812 until the seminary was reorganized in the 1930s (Rogers 1977, 36-37). The

emphasis on the doctrine of Scripture as the foundational doctrine of Christianity,

buttressed by the affirmation that the Scriptures were completely inerrant in everything

which they say, gave rise to Complete Inerrancy.

Limited Inerrancy argues that the deviation from the neo-Platonic-Augustinian

position of the early church and of the Reformation was a movement in the wrong

direction. The starting point, as proclaimed in the Augustinian tradition, is that of faith,

which then makes room for reasoning and understanding. This position sees the doctrine

of Scripture as important, but not as the foundational doctrine upon which all of Christian

thought rests. If the doctrine of Scripture is not the foundational doctrine there is no need

to create a rigid inerrancy view to maintain every aspect of the text. The focus can be

more on the totality of the Christian faith and not so centered on the defense of every part

of Scripture. In that the progress from Aquinas to Protestant Scholasticism, to Turretin, to

Princeton, resulted in inerrancy becoming a cardinal doctrine, and that movement was a

deviation from the proper and historical path of the church, the belief in inerrancy is not

necessary and must be abandoned.

4.2.2 The Influence of Protestant Scholasticism

Limited Inerrancy finds fault with the dependence by Complete Inerrancy upon

the period of Protestant Scholasticism, usually dated in the centuries immediately

following the Reformation. During this period the successors to the Reformers developed,

according to the analysis of Hubbard, "theories of inspiration more meticulous than any the church had yet seen" (1977, 154). The development in the doctrine of inerrancy was forced upon the church by the opposition to the Scripture which arose after the sixteenth century, especially by the Socinian attack on key doctrinal affirmations such as the Trinity and the resurrection. Hubbard concluded that the "Reformed emphasis on the saving message of Scripture was shifted somewhat to put more stress on the words and phrases of Scripture itself. For the first time theological arguments began to focus on the inerrancy of Scripture as well as on its sufficiency and clarity. One of the ways in which the seventeenth-century theologians defended the plenary inspiration of Scripture was to insist that if the inspiration of any part of the Bible were in doubt, the inspiration of the whole would be put in question" (1977, 154).

Limited Inerrancy observes that in defending doctrinal affirmations the tendency is often, if not always, to overreact to the heretical assertions, the unbelief, or the opposition. Such overreactions are marked by exaggerated claims, overstatements of belief, and the elevation of what otherwise should be considered minor details to the status of vital affirmations. Hubbard correctly observed that "in the long centuries of church history, one extreme has frequently provoked another" (1977, 156). The rigid understanding of inerrancy proposed and defended by Complete Inerrancy is, according to Limited Inerrancy, one of those extremes, growing out of the period of Protestant Scholasticism and being used in American Evangelicalism to defend against the rise of modernism which was perceived to threaten the authoritative status of the Bible. Limited Inerrancy moves away from that extreme defensive position toward one which still maintains the authoritative status of the Bible without resorting to the exaggerated claims

of absolute inerrancy.

4.2.3 The Appeal to the Autographs

As has been observed above, Complete Inerrancy appeals to the autographs as the site of the inerrant Scriptures, a position with which both Conditional and Limited Inerrancy disagree. Beegle examined the book of Jeremiah and concluded that it would be difficult to argue that there was an original autograph of that particular biblical book, suggesting that the same conclusion could be reached about most of the books of the Bible (1973, 150-152). Given the use of amanuenses, the evidence of the work of redactors, the destruction and rewriting of books and letters, and that Jesus, for example, made use of and exalted the text to which he had access in his day, the appeal to the autographs to support a doctrine of inerrancy is tenuous at best.

As did Conditional Inerrancy, Limited Inerrancy also cites 2 Timothy 3:16-17, John 10:34-36, and 2 Peter 1:19-21 as passages in which the biblical writers make appeals to the texts which were available to them for their views on inspiration and, implicitly if at all, inerrancy. In each case, while there is certainly the claim that the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative, nothing is said about basing such affirmations on materials behind those that were in service at the time the speakers spoke and the writers wrote (Beegle 1973, 152-156).

Davis argued that the claim by Complete Inerrancy that the autographs are that which are inerrant "throws the Biblical argument out of joint" (1977, 64). The evidence of the biblical data is that Jesus, Paul, and others claimed that the Old Testament was inspired, but they did not have the autographs in their purview when they made such

assertions. In fact, in the biblical material cited to show the high view of the Old

Testament by Jesus, Paul, and others there is no mention whatsoever of the autographs.

Davis further noted that "the inference seems compelling that the New Testament writers

regarded fallible copies and even fallible translations such as the Septuagint . . . as

inspired" (1977, 64). This is testified to by the numerous quotations of the Septuagint

used in the New Testament, especially by Paul the Apostle himself.

Limited Inerrancy notes that while Complete Inerrancy appeals to inerrant

autographs it admits that the copies which are available are not without error, which

raises the legitimate concern, based on the reality of the failure of the transmission

process to maintain the errorless status of the originals, as to whether God intended for

humans to have an inerrant Bible. Further, as Davis argued, "it does not seem clear why

we need an inerrant Bible" (1977, 78). The errant copies which have circulated within the

church have proven to be exceptionally powerful in communicating the gospel to

individuals and calling them into fruitful relationship with God. The conclusion to be

drawn is that since God did not cause the text to be transmitted without error and He has

chosen to make powerful use of the errant copies which are in service, He did not intend

for the Bible to be viewed in the absolute inerrant categories which are applied to it by

Complete Inerrancy.

In his analysis of the view of the absolute inerrancy of Scripture held by American

Fundamentalism, Bloesch noted that the proponent of such has to either ignore the

thousands of variant texts which are extant or try to take refuge in the autographs.

Bloesch noted that taking refuge "in the autographs to resolve textual divergences often

defies plausibility" (1994, 96). The New Testament persons, Jesus, Paul, Peter, etc.,

certainly viewed the Scripture which they had as authoritative, but did not mention or

appeal to the autographs which they did not have. Bloesch charged Fundamentalism with

resting the authority of the Bible on an inerrant record instead of resting it on an

experience with the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. He also suggested that

"Fundamentalists do not allow for the fact that copyists and editors may have been

guided to improve the original copy (the autographs)" (1994, 97).

4.2.4 The Meaning of Error

Limited Inerrancy diverges from Complete Inerrancy in the manner in which the

concept of error is conceived in relation to the biblical text. Beegle provided a very

helpful analysis of the divergence.

> The doctrine of inerrancy is a negative statement with the specific intent of
> protecting God and his Written Word. The early adherents had no idea how
> complex and multifaceted the term 'error' was. They naively thought that the
> Bible had no deviation from absolute truth, and of course by Scripture they meant
> the copies in hand. When the recognition of error in copies became a reality, then
> the defense of the doctrine was pushed back to the original biblical writings. Later
> on, when it was acknowledged that God had not given a science textbook the
> focus shifted to theological integrity and authenticity as the standard for defining
> error. Where biblical data raised problems even in the realm of theology, the
> standard of reference was sometimes shifted to the intention of the writer. In more
> recent years the study of linguistics has shown the enormous burden that the
> proponents of inerrancy have shouldered.. . . the standard of reference for defining
> an error has been shifting over the generations and that even now the adherents to
> the doctrine of inerrancy do not have a full-blown, consistent definition by which
> their theory can be put to the test. (1973, 148-149)

Complete Inerrancy defines error in terms of technical accuracy, and in so doing

forces the text of the Scripture to meet modern standards of the same. Rogers argued that

the biblical notion of error is willful deception, which is not at all what the Complete

Inerrantists have in mind when they use the word. By keeping the focus on the definition

of error as willful deception, of which the Bible is not guilty, attention can be given to the

real purpose of the Bible, "to warn against human sin and offer us God's salvation in

Christ. Scripture infallibly achieves that purpose. We are called, not to argue Scripture's

scientific accuracy, but to accept its saving message. Our faith is not in human proofs but

in a Divine Person whose Word persuades us" (Rogers 1977, 46).

If by inerrancy one means to assert the absolute correctness of the biblical

materials, Limited Inerrancy asks about the standard one uses to make that judgment.

Berkeley Mickelsen noted that one "may apply the standards adhered to in biblical times

or our modern standards, or a mixture of the two; and we may vary the degree in which

we use them, from applying them rigorously, or less rigorously, but still carefully, down

to applying them only carelessly" (1977, 84). Limited Inerrancy argues that the standards

of usage in the times of the biblical authors should be applied to judging the correctness,

or incorrectness of the Scriptures.

The way in which the concept of error is used is crucial to the discussions of

inerrancy in American Evangelicalism. Hubbard asserted that "error should surely be

defined in theological terms derived from and limited to the Bible itself. Yet time and

again in the arguments presented by those who purport to follow the Hodge-Warfield

position words like error, or inerrancy, or infallibility are defined by secular, twentieth-

century standards, sometimes with an appeal to Webster's Dictionary for support"(1977.

167). This usage of modern parlance is completely inappropriate. Hubbard noted that

"error theologically must mean that which leads us astray from the will of God or the

knowledge of his truth" (1977, 168). This is the definition which should be used in the

discussion of the inerrancy of the Bible, not one which requires scientific precision and

conformity to reality as is known by the modern readers.

The understanding of the concepts of truth and error are vital to dealing with the issue of the inerrancy of Scripture, and Limited Inerrancy argues that those definitions as used in Complete Inerrancy are unacceptable. Bloesch noted that "truth in the Bible means conformity to the will and purpose of God. Truth in today's empirical, scientific milieu means an exact correspondence between one's ideas or perceptions and the phenomena of nature and history. Error in the Bible means a deviation from the will and purpose of God, unfaithfulness to the dictates of his law. Error in the empirical mind-set of a technological culture means inaccuracy or inconsistency in what is reported as objectively occurring in nature or history. Technical precision is the measure of truth in empiricism. Fidelity to God's Word is the biblical criterion for truth" (1983, 120). The Limited Inerrancy position prefers to define error and truth according to what Bloesch called the biblical approach.

In attempting to walk the fine line between maintaining the authoritative status of the Bible based on its infallibility and abandoning all concern for that in light of the error-filled text, Limited Inerrancy defines error very carefully. As an example, Bloesch said, "We must never say that the Bible teaches theological or historical error, but we need to recognize that not everything reported in the Bible may be in exact correspondence with historical and scientific fact as we know it today" (1994, 36-37). Obviously some of the factors which are important to the manner in which Limited Inerrancy re-conceives the idea of error are revealed in his statement. The concern is for the teaching focus of the Scriptures versus the mere reporting of information, and the comparison which determines the qualifier of error is between the precision of the modern scientific world

and the view of the ancient world from which the Bible came.

Bloesch argued that in "biblical religion error means swerving from the truth, wandering from the right path, rather than defective information (cf. Prov. 12:28; Job 4:18; Ezek. 45:20; Rom. 1:27; 2 Pet. 2:18; Jas. 5:20; 1 Jn. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:16-19). Scriptural inerrancy can be affirmed if it means the conformity of what is written to the dictates of the Spirit regarding the will and purpose of God. But it cannot be held if it is taken to mean the conformity of everything that is written in Scripture to the facts of world history and science" (1994, 107). This more theological understanding of the meaning of the term inerrancy requires that the purposes and promised of God be considered of more importance than historical and scientific exactness.

There are those within Limited Inerrancy who prefer to use other terms with which to discuss the problem areas of the text of the Bible, areas to which the description of inerrant does not apply. For example, Bloesch asserted that "it is better to speak of ambiguities and inconsistencies in the Bible, even imperfections, rather than error. The reason is that what the Bible purports to tell us is not in error" (1994, 115). The admission is still made, however, that the Bible contains outdated, when compared to the modern scientific world view, and culturally and historically bound material, which make the Bible to be imperfect in its form. However, that reality does not detract from the more important reality that the Bible is not mistaken in its intent (Bloesch 1994, 115).

4.2.5 The Use of Scare Tactics

Limited Inerrancy charges Complete Inerrancy with using the doctrine of inerrancy as an apologetic tool, employing arguments which tend to raise fears in the

hearts and minds of believers, fears which have little or no basis. One of those fears is that if the doctrine of inerrancy is not held firmly the slide away from the faith will be precipitous and rapid. Finding an error will render it impossible to trust anything at all in the text. Paul Rees retorted that "it is that brand of reasoning, as well as the mentality that it creates, that should give us pause" (1977, 12). Such a position risks the entirety of the Christian faith on the absolute and complete accuracy of texts, the autographs, which are not extant, because the texts available to the modern student do contain errors in them.

Such an emphasis upon the cruciality of establishing the divine character of the Bible by claiming the inerrancy of even the minutest detail and raising that affirmation to the status of being the essential element of the Christian faith, may result in the unanticipated consequence of placing the faith in doubt. Hubbard noted that while such an apologetic approach to Scripture has provided solace for some, it has driven others away. "Faced with the conflict between a doctrine of 'literal' inerrancy and the conclusions of respected biblical scholars that seemed to contradict it, they felt forced either to give up their system of belief or to give up their sense of intellectual integrity" (Hubbard 1977, 158-159). The linkage between literal inerrancy and the truth of the gospel made in Complete Inerrancy can serve to keep some within the boundaries of the faith. But, should that claim for literal inerrancy be questioned, or shown to be impossible to maintain, the result could be a departure from faith in the Scripture. This, Limited Inerrancy claims, is a very dangerous consequence, one that can be avoided by abandoning the claims to literal inerrancy.

The establishment of a rigid view of the inerrancy of the Bible, which is occasioned more by an apologetic than a theological rationale, impacts the entire

theological enterprise, sometimes in ways that are less than positive. In an era in which

biblical and theological studies are being conducted more and more by Evangelical

scholars Hubbard contended that the stringency of the inerrancy argument has a limiting

effect, especially on the area of biblical scholarship. He noted that "one explanation

accounts for the silence of biblical scholars more than any other; the basic fear that their

findings, as they deal with the text of Scripture, will conflict with the popular

understanding of what inerrancy entails. Where a rigid system of apologetics becomes the

basic definition of orthodoxy, true biblical scholarship becomes difficult if not

impossible" (1977, 176). For American Evangelicalism to flourish and continue to impact

the theological scene, freedom must be granted to the scholars to study the text of

Scripture without the fear of running afoul of a predetermined conclusion which they

must support. That freedom must be used responsibly, but it must be granted nonetheless.

Another position taken by Complete Inerrancy, which Limited Inerrancy charges

is used to keep believers in line by pointing to dangers which are not there, could be

called the epistemological argument. As Davis explained this argument it holds that

"unless the Bible is inerrant, Christians have no sound epistemological foundation on

which to base their beliefs" (1977, 66). This would demand that inerrancy be maintained

else the entire system of knowledge in relationship to the Christian faith would crumble.

Davis responded to the epistemological argument by noting that the believer can believe

in the basic doctrinal affirmations of Christianity without also believing in the inerrancy

of Scripture. He contended that even an errant Bible can be viewed as authoritative in that

the believer would employ his rational faculties in handling the biblical materials,

determining what is to be believed. This appeal to reason is not inconsistent with what

even Complete Inerrancy does, for it, too, uses reason to determine how to harmonize the discrepancies within the text. The word of the Bible on whatever it addresses is to be accepted unless there are compelling reasons not to do so (Davis 1977, 66-82).

Limited Inerrancy also asserts that the argument that when inerrancy is denied other Christian doctrines will also be denied fails to be convincing. Davis argued that while it is possible that a person might move from the denial of inerrancy to the denial of other major Christian doctrines, there is nothing inherent in the concept of inerrancy the denial of which would guarantee such a defection. This slippery slope argument, as most slippery slope arguments, appeals to the worst case scenario and makes it the guarantee of what will happen (1977, 83-90).

Of further concern, and perhaps of major concern, is the question as to how Evangelicals are to determine what they are to believe. Davis asserted that "the real question to ask is whether or not a doctrine is true, not what the pragmatic effects of believing or not believing it will be. The pre-eminent way for the evangelical to answer this question in relation to any suggested doctrine is to ask whether or not the doctrine is either explicitly taught in the Bible or else is presupposed or implied by what is explicitly taught in the Bible" (1977, 90-91). By using this criterion Limited Inerrancy concludes that neither the concept of inerrancy, nor the dire consequences of departing from inerrancy, is to be held as doctrinal affirmations within Evangelicalism because they are not derived from the biblical texts they are said to support. The basic faith commitments of Evangelicalism must be derived from the Bible, not from the apologetic concerns of Complete Inerrancy.

4.3 The Basis for Limited Inerrancy

The position of Limited Inerrancy is based on two premises: (1) the specific

phenomena of the Bible; and (2) the historical perspective of the church. While

Conditional Inerrancy, too, appealed to the phenomena of the biblical text, Limited

Inerrancy pushes that even further, even to admitting that the specific phenomena reveal

errors in the text. The errors, and they are called that by some within Limited Inerrancy,

are obvious and cannot merely be overlooked. The historical perspective of the church

has on the one hand affirmed the authoritative status of the biblical materials, but on the

other has not asserted their absolute inerrancy. From these two basic premises Limited

Inerrancy constructs the arguments for its position which will be noted below.

4.3.1 The Specific Phenomena of Scripture

Unlike Conditional Inerrancy, which merely noted that there were some problems

with the biblical text but did not attempt to highlight them, Limited Inerrancy gives

emphasis to those textual phenomena which indicate that inerrancy cannot be ascribed to

the Bible. It will be helpful to identify some of the passages which are identified as

containing errors and to point out why they are viewed as errors by the Limited

Inerrantist. That Jude, in verses nine and fourteen, uses quotations from the non-canonical

books Enoch and the Assumption of Moses is claimed to be indicative of the reality that

the Scripture is not inerrant. The Jude 14 usage of material from the book of Enoch,

which is dated during the intertestamental period, is problematic because it indicates that

Jude accepted Enoch as a book dating from the lifetime of the Enoch of the Old

Testament whose prophecy was coming to pass in his day. In Jude 9, the quote from the

Assumption of Moses, another intertestamental book, Jude accepts as fact a confrontation

between the archangel Michael and Satan over the body of Moses, an incident which is

not mentioned in the canonical writings (Beegle 1973, 176-180). As posited by Limited

Inerrancy, Jude is simply in error in his approach to these two sources for his writing.

Limited Inerrancy also points to the difficulties with the length of reigns for the

Hebrew kings, especially Pekah (2 Kings 15:27) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1). The errors

noted in this regard have to do with the beginning of their reigns, the length of their

reigns, and the correlation of the biblical dating of their reigns with other kings of Israel

and Judah and the events surrounding their reigns (Beegle 1973, 180-186). It has long

been acknowledged that harmonizing the chronological details of the kings of Israel and

Judah was almost an insuperable task. For Limited Inerrancy the specific claims in the

biblical text for dating and tenure of many of them, especially Pekah and Hezekiah, are

simply in error.

The chronological lists in Genesis 5, with specific ages given for the birth of a

named son and the length of time lived by the father afterward, have been used to date the

age of the earth in the six-thousand year range. The Limited Inerrancy position

acknowledges on the one hand it was the intention of the biblical author that the specific

numbers in the chapter be understood literally and that this intent is clearly incompatible

with the geological evidence for an ancient earth. Beegle concluded from this apparent

conflict of materials that "obviously . . . the intent of the biblical writer can hardly be

accommodated to the scientific facts made available from generation to

generation"(Beegle 1973, 188).

Limited Inerrancy argues that the speech of Stephen in Acts 7 contains several

items about the history of Israel which are not in accord with the material in the Old Testament. For example, Stephen claims that Abraham left Haran after the death of his father (Acts 7:4), which is contradicted by Genesis 11:26, 32, which indicates that Abraham was 135 years old at the death of his father, and by Genesis 12:4, which states that he was only seventy-five when he left for Canaan. The Limited Inerrantist also suggests that Stephen was confused about the burial place for Jacob claiming it was in Shechem, while Genesis 50:13 states that Jacob was buried in Hebron.

In Galatians 3:16-17 Paul asserts that the length of time between the promise to Abraham and the giving of the Law to Israel at Sinai was 430 years. Limited Inerrantists point out that according to Exodus 12:40 that is the length of time Israel was in Egypt, to say nothing about the time which elapsed between Abraham and the entrance into Egypt under Joseph. Beegle observed Paul may have been following the Septuagint of Exodus 12:40, which would raise the question as to whether the Hebrew or Greek texts of Exodus is correct (1973, 191). Either way, Limited Inerrancy argues that this is another indication of the existence of errors in the text.

As an example of numerous difficulties found in comparing accounts in the Synoptic Gospels, Limited Inerrancy points to the prediction by Jesus of Peter's betrayal, which occurred during the trial of Jesus. Mark 14:30, 72 indicated that the betrayal would take place before the rooster crowed twice; however, neither Matthew nor Luke mentions the second crowing of the rooster, mentioning only that the rooster would crow. If Mark was written as condensation of the teaching of Peter, to whom the statement of Jesus was made, it is fairly certain that the mention of the second crow would have been in the writing, making Matthew and Luke less than accurate in their not mentioning it.

The factor which sets Limited Inerrancy apart from either Complete Inerrancy, which tries to harmonize and explain each of the discrepancies in the text, and Conditional Inerrancy, which acknowledges them only as difficulties, is that they are seen to be errors, indicative of the impossibility of ascribing inerrancy to the Bible. The proponents of Limited Inerrancy, however, are true to the Evangelical commitment to the Bible in that they see the text as inspired and authoritative, even though it does contain errors.

Limited Inerrancy calls for a renewed commitment to exegesis, seeing that as a never-ending task of the Christian community. The Scriptures must be studied with the best techniques available so that they might continue to speak with force in the debate about their inerrancy. Several of the passages which are used in support of the Complete Inerrancy position are reevaluated by Limited Inerrancy, the conclusion of which is to assert that they do not support the absolute inerrancy of the biblical text. For example, the study of Matthew 5:17-18, which records Jesus' words about the impossibility of the smallest aspect of the law passing away until it is all fulfilled, an assertion which is used in Complete Inerrancy to show Jesus' view of the inerrant nature of the text, reveals that that is not what the text suggests. Hubbard contended that "the heart of the argument . . . is not the accuracy of Scripture but the binding, persevering quality of the divine commands that Jesus did not abolish but fulfilled" (1977, 173).

The words of Jesus in John 10:34-36 about the impossibility of breaking the Scripture do not prove the absolute inerrancy of Scripture; rather, according to the Limited Inerrantists, they are "virtually an appeal on his part to what his Jewish opponents also believed. His aim was not to teach them new insights into the authority of

Scripture, but rather to remind them of what they believed about the authority and applicability of the Scripture – an authority that made it lawful for him to be called the Son of God" (Hubbard 1977, 173). The conclusion drawn by Limited Inerrancy from the study of 2 Timothy 3:14-17 is not that the Scripture is inspired, therefore it is inerrant; rather the conclusion is that the Scripture is inspired, therefore it is powerful and profitable. The re-examination of 2 Peter 1:20-21 indicates that Peter is asserting the divine initiative and the self-authenticating force of the Scripture and is not providing any definition of inerrancy at all.

While Limited Inerrancy does acknowledge that the phenomena of the Scripture reveal that there are errors in the text, they maintain that those errors are not related to the basis for Christian faith and practice. Davis identified six errors, from the many such in the biblical text, which for him had not been satisfactorily resolved by the provision of plausible answers and/or harmonizations. He noted that the details of the conquest of Canaan by Israel, with God giving the land to Israel and fighting for them, commanding Israel to kill every single Canaanite, and hardening the hearts of the Canaanites so that they would not make peace with Israel, to be in conflict with the nature of God (1977, 96-97). The inconsistency in identifying the causation for the census of Israel commanded by David which led to massive punishment upon Israel for David's action also troubles Davis (2 Samuel 24:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1). Did God, or Satan, incite David to this decision?

Davis also noted that the identification by Jesus of the mustard seed as being the smallest seed is clearly not correct in that there are, and were, smaller seeds than that of the mustard plant (1977, 100). Efforts to get around this difficulty by appealing to the

intent of Jesus are unsatisfactory in that whatever His intent He still indicated that the mustard seed was the smallest seed when it is not. The attribution of a quotation from the prophet Zechariah to Jeremiah by Matthew (27:9-10) is another difficulty which is virtually without explanation. The sense that Jude really believed that the words he quoted from the pseudepigraphal Book of Enoch were the words of the Enoch mentioned in Genesis is hard to reconcile with the dating of the Book of Enoch. Davis also noted that the instructions Jesus gave to the disciples before sending them on a preaching mission are in conflict. Mark 6:8 records Jesus commanding that they take with them a staff, while Matthew 10:9-10 and Luke 9:3 both specifically prohibit their taking with them a staff (1977, 105-106). These problems are called errors by Limited Inerrantists and they defy harmonization and easy reconciliation.

The specific phenomena of the biblical text reveal, for Limited Inerrancy, material which is errant. However, it must be noted that that reality does not cause the Limited Inerrantist to distrust the Bible when it speaks in the arena of faith and practice. The Bible is still a trustworthy record of what God intends for human beings to know in order to live in a manner which is pleasing to Him. The errors in the text are not associated with the main teaching foci of the Bible and do not detract from its authority.

4.3.2 The Historical Perspective of the Church

Complete Inerrancy takes great pains to provide evidence that the historical perspective of the church supports its view. Without attempting to dispute every historical allusion, Limited Inerrancy is based on a different view of the historical development of the church and its doctrinal affirmations. In referring to an affirmation of Augustine that

the writers of Scripture did not err in their writing in any way, Beegle posted the reminder

that "Augustine read Scripture in a Latin translation made from the Septuagint. This fact,

in conjunction with Augustine's belief in the inspiration of the Septuagint, makes it

difficult to read back into Augustine's declaration the modern interpretation of verbal

plenary inspiration" (1973, 137). It is not likely, in view of the texts to which Augustine

had access, that he had in mind the original autographs; rather, he was appealing, by

asserting that they did not err, to the authoritative status of the texts which were before

him for use in the life of the church.

Jack Rogers, after surveying the historical progression of the doctrine of

inerrancy, argued that "it is historically irresponsible to claim that for two thousand years

Christians have believed that the authority of the Bible entails a modern concept of

inerrancy in scientific and historical details" (1977, 44). The correct understanding of the

historical position of the church, Rogers averred, is that stress was placed on the truth that

God accommodated Himself to the limited thought and language forms of human beings,

through them producing adequately what human beings need to come into fellowship

with Himself.

The appeal by Complete Inerrancy to the history of the church focuses especially

on the positions taken by the Reformers. Bloesch argued that the position of the

Reformers did not support the position of absolute inerrancy and that the successors to

the Reformers are guilty of extending their views in the direction of such an absolute

view. He summarized his argument by asserting that the "concern of the Reformers had

been with the primacy and authority of Scripture, not its inerrancy. Protestant orthodoxy

continued to pay lip service to biblical primacy, but the emphasis was now on its

demonstrable infallibility. Reason was elevated as an authority alongside Scripture . . ."

(1994, 91). With the move to a more rational proving of the Bible, as contrasted with an

allowance for the work of the Holy Spirit to verify and apply the text to the believer, the

Scriptures were made subject to the necessity of empirical verification before being

accepted. This interposed a rational standard above the Bible, reducing the Scriptures to a

secondary status in the theology of the Church.

Jack Rogers and Donald McKim wrote an extensive expose of the manner in

which the doctrine of Scripture, especially the aspect of that doctrine which deals with the

inerrancy of the text, has been explained in the history of the church (1979). They

premised their investigation with the general observation that the discussion of this

concern grows out of the differences between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. The

Platonic-Augustinian side of this issue places the primacy on faith which leads to

understanding, while the Aristotelian-Thomistic side argues for the reverse order,

understanding which leads to faith. As they relate to the doctrine of Scripture, the

Platonic-Augustinian position argues that the Scriptures do not need to prove their

authoritative status in some rational fashion before they are accepted. The concept of

inerrancy, which could be used to verify their absolute correctness and thus their

authoritative status, is not important at all for this position.

On the other hand, the Aristotelian-Thomistic position, which starts from the

premise of understanding preceding faith, looks to rational effort as the ground from

which faith can be asserted and established. From this perspective the doctrine of

inerrancy is an important component of the doctrine of Scripture because it posits a

rational and verifiable descriptor about the text which can be the foundation for faith in

the authoritative status of the Bible.

These two perspectives, with various alterations and adaptations, describe the struggle within the church for understanding the concept of inerrancy. Until Protestant Scholasticism, and especially the time of its primary successor, Thomas Aquinas, the Platonic-Augustinian view was predominate, but with the rediscovery and renewed influence of Aristotle in the late medieval period that view began to exert influence in theology. The Reformers were solidly in the Platonic-Augustinian camp, but the period of Protestant Scholasticism reasserted the primacy of the Aristotelian-Thomistic position. The prime influence of this view upon American Evangelicalism was through the work of Francis Turretin, whose systematic theology text was used at Princeton by the Princeton Theologians to construct the modern view of Complete Inerrancy.

Limited Inerrancy holds that the proper understanding of the view of Scripture in the history of the church is that of the Platonic-Augustinian view which does not place primacy on the need to posit an errorless text in order to see the Bible as the Word of God. The movement toward absolute inerrancy, which grows out of the Aristotelian-Thomistic view, is not a restoration of the ancient position of the church, but is a digression from the main line of the church's understanding. Regardless of the specific verbiage used by the various figures in the history of the church, Limited Inerrancy argues that that history does not envision the scientific precision which is asserted by Complete Inerrancy. The history of the church supports the idea that the Scriptures are authoritative, trustworthy, reliable, and competent to reveal the plan of God for the redemption of humankind, but it does not support absolute inerrancy.

4.4 The Argument for Limited Inerrancy

The argument for Limited Inerrancy tracks fairly closely that made by the

Conditional Inerrantists. That which makes the argument different, however, is the basis

from which it is made. For Limited Inerrancy the biblical texts contain what can only

honestly be called errors and the historical perspective of the Church supports that

understanding. From such a basis, then, Limited Inerrancy argues in five ways for its

position: the inductive method is to be preferred over deduction in arriving at doctrinal

affirmations; the Bible must be seen also as a human book; the view of Jesus toward the

Scriptures is in line with that of Limited Inerrancy; the doctrine of Scripture, with

emphasis on inspiration, is not the essence of Christianity; and the term infallible is

preferable to the term inerrant in describing the Bible.

4.4.1 Induction is Preferred Over Deduction

Limited Inerrancy is firmly committed to induction as the proper approach to the

study of the Scriptures and to the creation of doctrinal affirmations from that study. This

appeal to induction as the proper scholarly approach is linked to the opinion that the

primary sources for any area of scholarly endeavor are superior to those which could be

designated as secondary. Beegle argued that "basic to the theory of modern research is the

principle that an investigation of a problem must begin with the data of the primary

sources dealing with the issue" (1973, 15).

Granting that both the deductive and inductive methods of reasoning have value,

the Limited Inerrantist asserts that the order in which they are employed is crucial to

arriving at conclusions which are appropriate and correct. Beegle asserted that "the best

results are obtained when induction precedes deduction" (1973, 17). The claim of the

primacy of induction in studying the Scriptures raises a number of problems for Limited

Inerrancy. For instance, detractors from this approach assert that without the aid of the

Holy Spirit understanding the biblical materials is impossible; therefore, to suggest that

one can come to the Bible with the intent to conduct an inductive study from which to

create doctrinal affirmations is folly. Dividing knowledge about the Bible into content

and experience, and allowing that faith and the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for

the experience aspect of knowledge of the Bible, the Limited Inerrantist claims that "at

the level of factual knowledge any intelligent person with proper methods of

interpretation and acquaintance with life in the ancient Near East can discern what the

Bible is all about" (Beegle 1973, 18).

Accompanying this charge against the inductive method is the recognition that

some have employed the inductive method to the destruction of the integrity of the

assertions of the biblical texts. Failing to accept that the experiences of the biblical

characters and writers are beyond those of the critic and refusing to allow the Bible to be

the theological treatise that it is, these inductive studies have chosen what to believe from

the Bible and what to discard. Limited Inerrancy, however, in the words of Beegle, claims

that the inductive method is "not an investigation of Scripture to determine whether or

not we will believe its message," but that it is "the first method to be employed in the

interpretation of the Bible" (1973, 19).

Limited Inerrancy also points out the inductive method is a necessary corrective

against the perpetuation of incorrect views because it allows the Scriptures to speak for

themselves (Beegle 1973, 19). If deduction alone prevails then the premises upon which

doctrinal affirmations are built can never be questioned because the conclusions reached

through deduction are elevated to a status beyond further investigation. Only the honest

inductive approach to the Scriptures can continue to ask about the validity of the

conclusions which are a part of a belief structure.

The argument for the use of the inductive method by which to arrive at doctrinal

affirmations is viewed as the antidote to the circular reasoning that complicates the issue

for Complete Inerrancy when deduction becomes the starting point. Limited Inerrancy ,

noting that inerrancy is, at best, an inference from and not an explicit teaching of the

Scripture, charges Complete Inerrancy with interpreting the phenomena of Scripture in

light of the prior choice of inerrancy as the standard of judgment. This, according to

Beegle, is "where there is an unconscious shift from the inductive to the deductive

method. The assumption that God had to reveal himself inerrantly becomes determinative

for interpretation" (Beegle 1973, 217). In this way the reasoning is circular, making a

claim and then interpreting the phenomena to fit the claim. Inductive reasoning, allowing

the phenomena to be what they are, is an escape from the clutches of the circular

approach.

In surveying the history of the church's handling of the doctrine of Scripture,

Hubbard saw the position of the Reformation, *sola scriptura*, as indicating "Scripture by

itself is clear, sufficient, and authoritative in bringing to us the news of God's salvation

and the way in which that salvation changes human conduct and human destiny" (1977,

152). This emphasis on the sufficiency of Scripture is both arrived at and sustained by the

inductive approach to the Bible; it is not a deduction from premises arrived at in an *a*

priori manner. If this slogan is accepted as having applicability for the modern

controversy about the inerrancy of Scripture, Limited Inerrancy asserts that since God has

spoken there is no a need for further proof of His authority. The living God does not need

human validation of the authority of His Word. That validation is to be found in the Word

itself, inductively studied and understood.

One of the ways the doctrine of inerrancy can be maintained is to posit a principle

that if the Bible is inspired, and it is, then it must also be inerrant. This deductive

approach is firmly rejected by the Limited Inerrancy position which argues that one

should come to the text of the Bible with an open mind and see what kind of Bible God

inspired and construct the doctrine of Scripture from that search. Davis asserted that "it is

unwise to try to tell God what kind of Bible he must have produced if he really wanted an

inspired Bible. The wiser course is simply to look and see what sort of Bible he has

produced. I would claim that an open-minded look at the Bible does support the claim

that it is inspired . . . and does not support the claim that it is inerrant" (1977, 63). This

inductive approach to the Bible yields a far truer picture of what God intended and what

He did than the deductive approach which starts from a premise and moves to examine

the Scripture in that light. This is not necessarily a limitation as to what God could have

done; rather, it is a positive affirmation, based on the inductive study of the texts of

Scripture, of what He did do.

In approaching the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture inductively the concern

is to take the Scripture's understanding of the concept rather than imposing the

understanding of the concept from the modern empirical world view. When the concern is

to hear the biblical understanding of the concept of inerrancy it will be seen that it

"connotes not impeccability, but indeceivability, which means being free from lying and

fraud" (Bloesch 1978, 67). Allowing this inductive approach to govern the study of the doctrinal affirmations about Scripture will alter not only the starting point but also the results of the study.

The starting point in arguing for Limited Inerrancy is the claim that induction is primary. To start with a general principle, or premise, and then move to see its fulfillment in the material being considered is inappropriate. It is tantamount to creating one's own reality by setting up the situation from the beginning so as to determine the outcome. The proper approach is that of induction; start with what God has provided and from that conclusions can be arrived at doctrinally.

4.4.2 The Human Authorship of the Bible

Limited Inerrancy argues that the Bible must be seen as both a divine and a human book. Beegle averred that the "whole history of God's redemptive activity is one in which the Holy Spirit has worked through imperfect means, both men and Scripture, without the means being a handicap" (1973, 308). The usage of human authors in the inscripturation process is not the result of accident; rather, God chose to use fallible humans and did not prevent their frailties from showing up in the text of the Bible. The proof that God's purpose to use errant human beings in the writing of Scripture has been accomplished without any detraction from the power of the gospel is that people have been brought into vital relationship with God through the Bible.

The approach to the Bible must include the according of full participation to the human authors in the process of writing the Scriptures. Rees asserted that "the Bible's human components and history are as honestly to be reckoned with as its divine origin

and preservation. He who cannot acceptingly live with its humanity will always be tempted presumptuously to distort its divinity. After all, God could have dropped the Bible ready-made from the skies in 2000 languages or more. He chose not to drop it but to develop it – over long periods of time and with the help of a lot of human agents. God didn't bestow it. He built it – piece by piece, event by event, writer by writer. If it was initiated and interpenetrated by heaven – and we believe it was – it was cradled and colored by earth" (1977, 11).

The writers of the Bible were persons of their own time employed by God in the process of producing what was to become Holy Scripture. Hubbard asserted that "at no time did God snatch the biblical authors from their settings; at no time did he transform them into other than what they were – citizens of an ancient time and place. Yet it is the wonder of his providence, the miracle of his power, that what they said and how they said it were precisely what he wanted" (1977, 162). The human authorship of the Bible cannot be overlooked when the doctrine of Scripture, with the possibility of including inerrancy in that doctrine, is formed.

Boer summarized the position of Limited Inerrancy about the Bible being a human book.

> However one may estimate its God-given character as revelation, it lies before us in the form of a thoroughly human product. It is a collection of writings which as literary entities have been produced by men in the same way in which any other book has been written. The fact of inspiration has much to say about the product of the writing; it in no way deprives the act of writing of its intellectual, emotional, and voluntary character. Inspiration leaves the inspired writer fully human; inspiration leaves his writing as mediated by his mind and heart and will fully human. (Boer 1977, 42)

The analogy between the incarnation of Christ and the full humanity of the Bible

is used by Limited Inerrancy to explain the manner in which the Bible must be viewed. As Jesus became fully human, partaking in the weaknesses and frailties of the human nature, so the Bible is to be accepted as being fully human, subject to the limitations that that entails. As there were those in the early church who were uncomfortable with the full humanity of Jesus and proposed a docetic understanding of His nature, so there are those in the contemporary scene who propose that the Bible is fully divine, or at the least the divine completely sanctified the human. Limited Inerrancy, using the analogy of the incarnation, asserts that the only correct view of the Bible is to allow for its humanity.

This analogy with the incarnation of Christ shows that "the Word of God written is a human book, the product of thought, investigation, planning, and composition like any other piece of literature" (Boer 1977, 46). For Limited Inerrancy this means, among other things, that the Bible is to be studied as one would any other literature and that it is liable to the limitations to which all other pieces of human literature fall guilty. While it is true that the Bible is also the Word of God and as such requires the element of faith in the reader/student for the full apprehension of its spiritual value, that spiritual force cannot be separated from the Bible's humanity. Boer declared his understanding of the humanity of the Bible most clearly by noting that "the books of the Bible as a collection of religious writings are as human as Pilgrim's Progress, Paradise Lost, or Spurgeon's Sermons" (1977, 76).

Limited Inerrancy attempts to position its view of the human authorship of the Bible between what it sees as the two extremes. The one extreme, comparable to the ancient Ebionite heresy, sees the biblical text only as the product of the human authors, while the other extreme, comparable to ancient heresy of Docetism, sees the Bible only as

a divine product. Bloesch argued that the "Bible is not partly the Word of God and partly the word of man: it is in its entirety the very Word of God and the very word of man" (1978, 52). The biblical writers were persons of the times in which they lived, charged with the responsibility of communicating the message of God to their times and, as is now apparent though it may not have been to them, to all times.

The limitations inherent in the human authors are not only seen in the reality that they were restricted to the historical and cultural milieu in which they lived, but it is also manifested in their limited theological and ethical ideas. Bloesch asserted that it is "only when their testimony is related to and refined by the self-revelation of Jesus Christ that it has the force of infallible authority" (Bloesch 1978, 68). The limitations brought to their task by the human authors are both manifest and obvious; however, they do not diminish the revelation of God in the Bible which is His power to lead humans to, and produce in them, His salvation. The centrality of the message of the cross of Christ and the salvation which it declares provides the proper measurement for the infallibility of the Bible, even though the Bible is a human-divine book.

The emphasis upon the human authors of the biblical text stands in opposition to the idea that those human authors are secondary authors to the primary author, God. This approach to reconciling the human and divine authorship of the Bible is dangerously close to a docetic view of the Scripture, reducing the human participation to the arena of appearance. Limited Inerrantists argue that the human authors must be seen as more than mere passive instruments of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture. Bloesch argued that the "persons who wrote and compiled Scripture were real authors and editors. Scripture is not simply the Word of God or human words but the Word of God in human

words" (1994, 87-88). This elevation of the understanding of the human authorship of the Bible includes the limitations which the human authors bring to the task, but would not allow for those human limitations to thwart the divine intent of providing an inspired and authoritative body of material for the benefit of the believer.

4.4.3 The Approach of Jesus to the Scripture

The argument from the activities of Jesus and the apostles to the inerrancy of the Scriptures, which is the hallmark of Complete Inerrancy, is denied by Limited Inerrancy. Joining Conditional Inerrancy, they assert that Jesus and the apostles made use of, without qualification, the texts which were available to them in their day and did not appeal to the autographs to bolster their claims (Beegle 1973, 164-165). Beegle opined that "they considered the Scriptures as the very message of God to them. They were not concerned about the autographs as such, nor were they exercised over the difficulties in transmitting the original text. What really mattered was the 'here and now' – the reality and power of the Old Testament copies they had" (Beegle 1973, 166). Limited Inerrancy extrapolates from this view of Jesus and the apostles the assertion that the modern scholar, too, should accept the contemporary texts as the power of God to speak to the concerns of this day without enforcing on them articles of belief that are unnecessary.

Limited Inerrancy agrees without question that Jesus considered the Scriptures which were sacred within the Jewish community to be authoritative in the highest expression of that concept. The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-19 and John 10:35, both of which affirm the inviolability of the Scripture, certainly assert their infallibility. The point at which Limited Inerrancy differs from Complete Inerrancy in understanding the

view of Jesus is to be found in how the concept of infallibility is to be taken. For Limited

Inerrancy Jesus' view was that the infallibility of Scripture consisted in the conformity of

the words of the texts to truth that only faith can discern correctly (Boer 1977, 92). Jesus'

view, then, did not appeal to the factual accuracy of the texts which He saw as

authoritative because He freely added to them His understandings, His explanations, and

His applications, but to the necessity of those texts being accepted in faith.

Limited Inerrancy rejects the use of Jesus' view to support the view that the

Scriptures are inerrant, especially in their autographs. One of the texts on which this point

of contention rests is Matthew 5:17-18, which records Jesus' words asserting the

inviolability of the Law. The Limited Inerrantist argues that what Jesus was asserting is

that the smallest item of the law is important and that it will continue to accomplish the

purpose for which it was given as long as the heaven and earth exist. Such a lofty view of

the value of the Law as Jesus expressed was placed on the extant copies of the Law to

which Jesus and His peers had access (Beegle 1973, 216).

4.4.4 The Essence of Christianity

The appeal to *sola scriptura* is a hallmark of American Evangelicalism, an appeal

which dates to the Reformation where it indicated that the Scriptures were the final

authority. Limited Inerrancy asserts that while this reliance upon the Scriptures as the

final authority is essential to Evangelicalism, it must not be seen as the essence of

Christianity. Bernard Ramm argued that Complete Inerrancy does position the doctrine of

Scripture as that which is the essence of Christianity, although, he noted, the founders of

the contemporary expression of that view, Benjamin Warfield and Archibald Hodge, were

careful to not fall into that trap (1977, 110-112). The movement away from the cautious

approach of Warfield and Hodge, which certainly claimed inerrancy for the Scriptures

while denying that that doctrinal affirmation was the most important doctrine of

Christianity, has led to the assertion of a particular concept of the doctrine of inspiration

and inerrancy as the essence of Christianity. Those who do not hold to that specific

understanding of absolute inerrancy are not considered to be faithful to Christianity. This

basing Christianity on one view of the doctrine of Scripture is, for Limited Inerrancy,

inappropriate.

The reduction of the essence of Christianity to a particular doctrine of Scripture

does not do justice to the Scriptures because it limits their power and effectiveness and

does not follow from the view of Christianity espoused by the Reformers (Ramm 1977,

113-114). In fact, Limited Inerrancy asserts that such a focus on the inerrancy of

Scripture as the very essence of Christianity leads away from the real intent of *sola*

scriptura, which saw Scripture as the highest appeal possible in theological controversies,

to a lowered view of the Bible which can be called bibliolatry (Ramm 1977, 116). Ramm

summed up the view of Limited Inerrancy about the essence of Christianity by saying

> The Christian view of Scripture is that there is a human and historical dimension
> to Scripture and therefore biblical criticism and textual criticism are necessary
> studies for the proper understanding of Scripture.
> But this is not all. Scripture is not the totality of all God has said and done
> in this world. Scripture is that part of revelation and history specially chosen for
> the life of the people of God through centuries. *Sola scriptura* means that the
> canon of Scripture is the final authority in the church; it does not claim to be the
> record of all God has said and done.
> Hence our concept of the essence, the *Wesen*, of Christianity must have an
> eye open to some larger considerations. Such a *Wesen* will then be in harmony
> with the considerations every theologian must make himself aware of in order to
> have a proper concept of the Scriptures themselves. (1977, 117)

Limited Inerrancy charges, as has been noted, that the elevation of inerrancy to the status of being the litmus test for belonging to the Evangelical camp is dangerous, unbiblical, and lacking in either scholarly or exegetical support. The essence of the Evangelical faith lies elsewhere. Hubbard argued that those essential faith affirmations include "the triune nature of God, the true humanity and deity of the Christ, his virgin birth, vicarious death, bodily resurrection, glorious ascension, and personal coming, the reality of the Spirit's mission in the church, the need for conversion and new life, and the call to discipleship and participation in the tasks of world evangelization and social action" (1977, 178). These affirmations should comprise what is needed for the maintenance of unity, not the divisive claim of absolute inerrancy for every aspect of the biblical text.

4.4.5 The Preference for the Term Infallible

Limited Inerrancy, admitting as it does that there are errors in the text of the Scripture, prefers to use the designation infallible, instead of inerrant, to describe the authoritative status of the Bible. Hubbard noted that the Reformation did provide Christianity with the important insight about the Bible being the infallible rule of faith and practice, a phrase, he asserted, found early in the Belgic Confession (A.D. 1561). Hubbard declared that this claim of the infallible status of the Scripture is made for their teachings as correctly understood by employing the best hermeneutical principles, which would identify which of the biblical materials were binding on the people of God for their faith and practice (1977, 170).

Hubbard summarized the preference of Limited Inerrancy for describing Scripture

as infallible:

> Whereas inspiration and authority apply, then, to all the parts of Scripture, the phrase infallible rule should be seen as pertaining to the doctrine derived from the Scripture when it is rightly understood. Scripture is not a collection of infallible rules to be laid willy-nilly on the church without regard to setting, context, and purpose: promises given in specific circumstances cannot be generalized for the whole church; proverbs used for raising children in an ancient society are not automatically binding on Christian youth today; testimonies of personal experience in the Psalms may not always be reproduced in the lives of God's people; apostolic teachings directed to the need of an early church cannot always be applied as law in our situations without some modification. (1977, 170-171)

The usage of the word infallible, as a substitute for the word inerrant, is not always the final answer that Limited Inerrancy wishes to put forth, because in one usage of the word infallible it can be a synonym of inerrant. Boer preferred that infallible be defined as reliable and trustworthy, but that those two words not be used as replacements for the term infallible. He argued that an "infallible message is, of course, a reliable and trustworthy message. But a reliable and trustworthy message is not necessarily an infallible one. The difference between infallibility on the one hand and reliability and trustworthiness on the other is the difference between the absolute and the relative" (1977, 79-80). The historic usage of the term infallible, Boer argues, has to do with the "unbreakable, ever valid revelation of the creation, redemption, and consummation of all things in Christ who is himself the Creator, the Redeemer, the Consummator" (1977, 82).

For Limited Inerrancy the phenomena of Scripture do not meet the objective standards of being called inerrant, or infallible defined as a synonym of inerrant. The effort to harmonize the disparate elements of the biblical data in order to make them appear to be without contradiction or error is doomed to failure because of the impossibility of doing so and the illogical extremes to which one must go in the attempt.

As the incarnate Christ could not be easily identified as the divine One among humans, so the Bible cannot be easily seen as the Word of God providing salvation for the human race. The key ingredient in both instances is the faith of the one who perceives either the Christ or the Bible. As Boer noted, "The true infallibility of Scripture is an article of faith ... the infallibility of the Bible cannot be demonstrated, cannot be proved. It can only be believed, experienced, known through one's acceptance of the gospel of Christ" (1977, 86-87).

Definitions of the terms being used are very important for those who debate the issue of the doctrine of Scripture. Davis provides a helpful delineation of terms as he argues the preference for using the term infallible to refer to the authority of the Bible. He argued that the "Bible is inerrant if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any topic whatsoever. The Bible is infallible if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice" (1977, 23). This linkage with the realm of faith and practice, which is typical of the manner in which Limited Inerrancy treats the concept of infallibility, is used to differentiate this position from the Complete Inerrantist view which would extend inerrancy to everything within the biblical materials.

To say that the Bible is infallible is not to replace the *a priori* of inerrancy with that of infallibility. Davis clearly noted that the claim of the infallibility of the Scripture is made on the experience of the scholar: "I do not claim *a priori* that the Bible is or must be infallible, just that I have found it to be so" (1977, 115-116). The evidence contained in the Bible is best interpreted by the concept of infallibility, a claim which is probable, not absolutely certain. The term infallible is, as Davis noted, "an adjective that aptly fits the Bible we read (1977, 119).

Limited Inerrancy finds in the words of the Lausanne Covenant an apt declaration

of their view of inerrancy: "We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of

both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God,

without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice"

(Bloesch 1978, 65). Bloesch readily agreed with this affirmation, but with the caveat that

that which is infallible is the doctrine, or message, of Scripture. He noted that the writers

of Scripture "did not err in what they proclaimed, but this does not mean that they were

faultless in their recording of historical data or in their world view, which is now

outdated" (1978, 65).

Though the Bible bears witness to the limitations brought to their task by the

human authors, Bloesch asserted that "it is not mistaken in what it purports to teach,

namely, God's will and purpose for the world. There are no errors or contradictions in its

substance and heart. It bears the imprint of human frailty, but it also carries the truth and

power of divine infallibility" (1978, 69). Limited Inerrancy sees the authority of the Bible

in its message and purpose and also argues that it is the message and purpose of the

Scripture which constitute its infallible nature. The errors which the human authors

introduced into the text do not in any way detract from the infallibility of the message of

the Bible.

The preference for the term infallible is clear in the Limited Inerrancy position.

With that alteration in focus, away from rigid inerrancy to the more flexible infallibility,

Limited Inerrancy wants to direct attention away from the rationalistic obsession with the

words of the text. Bloesch summed up this concern by noting that "it is not simply the

words of Scripture that make it infallible but the way in which these words are used by

the Spirit of God" (1994, 37). This emphasis on the relationship of the Spirit to the Bible, beyond the focus on the process of inspiration, is important in that it opens the door for more attention to be centered on the purpose of Scripture, the making of believers and disciples of the gospel.

4.5 Conclusion

Limited Inerrancy, making use of an inductive approach to the Scriptures, arrives at the conclusion that there are errors in the text and that those errors do not require harmonization before the Bible can be accepted as the authoritative Word of God to the present generation. Those errors are not merely the product of poor copying, inferior source materials, or the failure of the modern to understand the cultural milieu from which the Scriptures came; they are to be found even in the autographs as a part of the intent and purpose of God (Beegle 1973, 219).

To admit that there are errors in the text can lead to the assumption that the Bible is such a mixture of truth and error that it is either rendered without value or must be rescued from that status by the employing of human reason to determine which is true over against that which is false. Bloesch, however, argued that Limited Inerrancy does not fall into that trap.

> This must not be taken to mean (as in liberal theology) that the Scriptures are a mixture of truth and error and that it is human reason that therefore decides what can be believed. Because of the superintendence of the Holy Spirit we have in the Bible an accurate portrayal of the will and purpose of God. Yet we reverently acknowledge that the biblical writings are not uniform in their witness to Christ and that the kernel of the Gospel is always to a certain degree hidden in the husk of culturally conditioned concepts and imagery. Only reflection done in faith can grasp what is of abiding significance and what is marginal and peripheral. (1978, 69)

As has been observed throughout this chapter, Limited Inerrancy concludes that the Bible is essentially accurate and trustworthy and that this is not a limitation on the doctrine of Scripture, it is the doctrine of Scripture. Beegle concluded that "in all essential matters of faith and practice . . . Scripture is authentic, accurate, and trustworthy. It is the indispensable record of revelation, product of inspiration, and source of authority" (1973, 308). The difference between this approach, which arrives at a position which affirms the authority of the Bible, and the two previous positions which were considered has to do with the level of trustworthiness ascribed to the Scripture. In Limited Inerrancy the focus is on that which is essential in the text, whereas in Complete and Conditional Inerrancy the focus is on the totality of the text, albeit with differing levels of intensity as to the inerrancy of that text.

When pushed as to what is believed about the infallibility of the Bible, the Limited Inerrantist, as does Davis, asserts that "the Bible is infallible on matters of faith and practice and that it is amazingly reliable, but not inerrant, on all other matters" (1977, 74). This acknowledgment of the relation of the concept of infallibility to the essential nature of the Christian faith and practice is very important. In broad stokes it can be said that the Bible is essentially accurate, more so in relation to faith and practice, less so in relation to the other matters which are found within its pages.

CHAPTER 5

INERRANCY REVISITED

The doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible has evoked multiple responses within American Evangelicalism, both in support of and in disagreement with the concept. From the latter part of the nineteenth century to the present Evangelicalism has been a divided camp on this issue. During this period there have been times in which the issue was more hotly debated than others, times during which the issue was more prominently discussed, and seasons during which the issue seemed to be almost forgotten. There has not been a time, however, during which the issue of the inerrancy of the Scriptures was totally forgotten.

The furor which caused the division in the Northern Presbyterian Church and in Princeton Seminary, fueled the fires of Fundamentalism, and resulted in the creation of the National Association of Evangelicals has never created more heat than during the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Spurred on by Harold Lindsell with his books, The Battle for the Bible (1976), and The Bible in the Balance (1979), the issue of the inerrancy of the Scriptures not only was brought to the attention of Evangelicals but it also was elevated to the level of the essential doctrine which distinguished the movement. Among the many responses to the renewal of the conflict about the inerrancy of Scripture, both positive and negative, was the creation of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy in 1977 with

the purpose of "the defense and application of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an essential element for the authority of Scripture and a necessity for the health of the church" (Boice 1978, 9). The decade-long effort of the I. C. B. I. produced the <u>Chicago Statement</u> and a spate of monographs, some strident in defense of inerrancy and others more irenic in their approach to the subject (See also Geisler 1980, ix-x; Lindsell 1979, 366-371).

The furor about the inerrancy of Scripture has abated in American Evangelicalism, but it has not been either resolved or abandoned. The stridency and sharpness with which the debate was conducted twenty years ago has given way to a more irenic and gentle discussion. That should not be understood to suggest that passions on all sides of the issue have dissipated; rather they seem to have been muted for the sake of unity.

This study has approached the debate within American Evangelicalism with the intent to organize the debate into useful groupings so that from analyzing the groupings considerations could be found which would advance the debate toward resolution. This chapter will first summarize the arguments advanced by the Complete, Conditional, and Limited Inerrancy positions which have been considered in the three previous chapters. There will, of necessity, be some rehearsal of material which was presented in those chapters, but the intent here will be to present the salient arguments briefly so that the positions are highlighted in relation to each other. In the chapters which treated Conditional and Limited Inerrancy much of the critique which they use in their relationship with Complete Inerrancy, and with each other, was identified.

After summarizing the arguments of the three positions on inerrancy in American

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Evangelism the chapter will revisit the doctrine of inerrancy with the intent to restructure the doctrine in light of six major issues. These issues have arisen in the consideration of the spectrum of opinion in American Evangelicalism and are important for viewing inerrancy properly. They will provide the parameters within which the doctrine should be expressed.

5.1 A Summary of the Arguments Made By the Options Presented

5.1.1 Complete Inerrancy

The Complete Inerrancy position conceives of the inerrancy of the Scripture in absolute terms and extends the ascription of inerrancy to every aspect of the biblical material (e.g. Feinberg 1980; Hodge 1979; Hodge 1904; Warfield 1981). While admitting that the Bible is not primarily concerned with geography, history, geology, and the like, the claim is still made that when the Bible speaks in those areas it does so without any error. The notion of truth for Complete Inerrancy has to do with conformity to the empirical reality of the world as is known primarily by the twentieth-century scholar, which includes exactness and precision according to the scientific method (e.g. Hodge 1979; Hodge 1904). The entirety of the Bible is accepted as being inspired, although there is some variation among the proponents of Complete Inerrancy as to the whether all Scripture comes with the same instructional demand.

The proponents of Complete Inerrancy see their position as being the one which best maintains what could be called a high view of the Bible, one which best sustains the acceptance of the Bible as the authoritative source for faith and practice. Upon further analysis, it must at least be asked whether the exaltation of an apologetic and/or

theological rubric above the Bible with which to condition the doctrine of Scripture and by which to judge the nature of the texts really exalts the Scriptures themselves or not. This concern will be raised again later as the doctrine of inerrancy is revisited; here, however, it must be noted that Complete Inerrancy does claim to be a high view of the Bible.

The argumentation presented by Complete Inerrancy is quite involved; here it will be summarized so that it will be in mind as the main issues in the inerrancy debate are noted and a new approach to the doctrine is proposed. Complete Inerrancy argues that the concepts of inspiration and inerrancy must be held together very closely (Hodge 1979, 17-18). That is, if the Scriptures claim to be and are accepted as inspired, they must also be accepted as inerrant, because the claim of inspiration is also a claim of inerrancy. The Scriptures cannot be said to be inspired if they are not also accepted as inerrant, because inspiration means that God has so superintended the writing of Scripture that it is exactly what He wanted written. How could that which is said to be the product of the inspiring activity of God the Holy Spirit contain anything which is less than fully accurate? Basing their claims on 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:19-21, passages from which the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible is drawn, Complete Inerrantists assert that inerrancy is logically demanded by inspiration (Hodge 1979, 6).

The passages in 2 Timothy and 2 Peter are not the only ones to which the Complete Inerrancy position appeals in arguing for the inerrancy of the Bible. The argument also asserts that the Scriptures at every point claim to be inerrant. The supporting evidence for this argument is drawn from the multiple times the Scriptures claim to be recording the word of God, usually introduced with the formula, "Thus says

the Lord," or the like. To provide further evidence of the Scriptures' testimony to their own inerrancy Complete Inerrancy notes that introductory phrases like, "it is written," "the Scripture says," "the Holy Spirit said," and the like, are calls to see that material as the words of God (Warfield 1981, 283-332). Such an approach continues throughout the entirety of the text so that the conclusion is reached that the Bible is the Word of God; the human participation in the writing of the Scripture is not denied, but certainly is not emphasized. The final conclusion to be drawn is that if the words are from God they are necessarily inerrant.

The argument for Complete Inerrancy from the Scripture becomes more focused when the claims of Jesus and the apostles are considered, claims which understood to assert that the Scriptures are inerrant in their entirety. Citing Matthew 5:17-18, in which Jesus affirmed that none of the Law or the Prophets would fail until it is all accomplished, and John 10:34-35, in which Jesus said that the Scripture cannot be broken, among other passages, Jesus is interpreted as affirming the inerrancy of the Scripture. The apostles are viewed as extending the position of Jesus into the era beyond His life by the assertions in passages like 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21, 2 Peter 3:16, in which Peter assigns some, if not all, of Paul's writings to the category of Scripture, and 1 Thessalonians 2:13, in which Paul calls his message among the Thessalonians the word of God (e.g. Hodge 1983; Lindsell 1976; Packer 1958; Pinnock 1974; Wenham 1973).

One of the major difficulties faced by Complete Inerrancy is the reality that the present texts of Scripture contain material that is either in error or, at the very least, appears to be in error and contradictory to other materials. These phenomena in the Bible are observable in several places, none being more clear than the in Synoptic Gospels

where parallel accounts often contain information which is not identical. In the face of

this, the argument moves from asserting that the present texts are inerrant to making that

claim for the original texts, those written first by the authors. The assumption is that each

biblical book had at some point an autograph, a complete first edition from the hand of

the original author. These autographs, it is asserted, were without error though they still

may have contained material which is difficult for us so far removed from them to

reconcile (e.g. Archer 1978; Bahnsen 1980; Henry 1979; Montgomery 1974; Nicole

1980; Warfield 1983).

For the most part the material in the phenomena of the Bible which might be said

to be errant is the result of the copying process from the first autographs to the present

texts. Complete Inerrancy acknowledges that the inerrant autographs are not extant, so

none can be adduced to prove the argument. Typically they also note that there are not

any errant autographs available for examination either (Lindsell 1976, 37). One difficulty

with this argument is explaining why the same God who was so concerned for absolute

inerrancy in the autographs was not so concerned that that inerrancy be maintained in the

copying process. It must also be remembered that the process of the origination of

Scripture may have included multiple layers of complex interactions including

amanuenses, editors, redactors, and stages of development, all of which questions the

existence of one specific autograph for each biblical book (e.g Achtemeier 1980).

The argument of Complete Inerrancy really rests on the fully developed doctrine

of God as the factor which determines the character of the text of Scripture. The logic of

the argument would proceed from the assertion that the Bible is the Word of God, that

God is the author of Scripture, to the conclusion that the Bible must bear the

characteristic of perfection of the God who authored it (e.g. Young 1957, 88). The

doctrinal picture of God held by Complete Inerrancy is of His absolute perfection, which

demands His inability to be in error about anything. Given this conception of God, the

Scriptures which He authored must reveal the same characteristics: they, too, must be

without error in every respect. Appeals are made to several biblical passages which affirm

the perfection of God, including the word of Balaam, the erstwhile prophet, who

proclaimed that "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should

repent; has He said, and will He not do it?" (Numbers 23:19 NASB).

The question of whether the doctrine of God presented by Complete Inerrancy is

Hellenistic or biblical is beyond the concerns of this study. However, it is worthy of

questioning whether the starting point for constructing the doctrine of Scripture should be

the doctrine of God. Should not one should start with Scripture to construct a doctrine of

Scripture, allowing it to speak as to its nature and character, and to that of God? If so, the

result would be the inquiry into what kind of Bible God has provided instead of what

kind of Bible He could have provided.

Faced with the reality of difficulties within the present texts of the Bible, the

argument for Complete Inerrancy not only appeals to the autographs but it also asserts

that the difficulties in the present texts either can be harmonized or will be reconciled at

some point in the future. Refusing to call them errors, Complete Inerrancy confidently

offers explanations and qualifications designed to alleviate the appearance of problems

within the text. The harmonization process is sometimes strained, as in the attempt by

Lindsell to explained the denial of Jesus by Peter in relation to the crowing of the rooster

by positing six denials (see also Archer 1980; Henry 1979; Lindsell 1976, 175).

At other levels, however, Complete Inerrancy resorts to the correct admission that many of the difficult situations can be dealt with better by a more complete understanding of the historical and cultural milieu within which the biblical authors lived. Such specific literary conventions as loosely quoting sources, using approximate numbers, rounding numbers off for emphasis, allowing for differences in parallel accounts, and the like, are also appealed to in responding to the difficulties in the texts of Scripture (e.g, Feinberg 1980; Henry 1979; Nicole 1980; Packer 1958; Pinnock 1967; Pinnock 1971). The difficulties in the present texts are that, difficulties, and not errors. The Complete Inerrantist is confident that as scholarship continues to advance the understandings of the ancient world and as further archaeological discoveries are made, more of the difficulties will be removed. The text will continue to be shown to be inerrant.

5.1.2 Conditional Inerrancy

Conditional Inerrancy occupies the mediating position between the extremes on the one hand of seeing the Scripture absolutely inerrant, because of which they are authoritative, and on the other hand of seeing them as containing errors but still authoritative. Conditional Inerrancy restricts the application of the term inerrancy to the purpose and intent of the biblical materials, but calls for the retention of the term in that it does serve to highlight the value and importance of the Scriptures. It could be observed that, as do most mediating positions, Conditional Inerrancy is critiqued for either moving too far away from absolute inerrancy or not moving far away enough.

The parameters of Evangelicalism are not violated by Conditional Inerrancy as it affirms the full inspiration and authoritative status of the Bible. These benchmark

affirmations, inspiration and authority for faith and practice, are such that should they be infringed upon the view would be considered beyond the purview of Evangelicalism. However, Conditional Inerrancy, as do the other two views, holds firmly to those non-negotiable tenets of faith. In fact, Conditional Inerrancy affirms the descriptors of verbal and plenary relative to inspiration, but does not do so with the exactitude which characterizes Complete Inerrancy (e.g. Coleman 1984; Pinnock 1976; Pinnock 1984).

The argument in support of Conditional Inerrancy illustrates the different conclusions about the concept of inerrancy at which it will arrive: inerrancy has to do with the purpose and intent of the Scriptures. The first aspect of that argument is to posit a different approach to the relationship between inerrancy and the declarations of the Scriptures about their nature. Conditional Inerrancy argues that the doctrine of inerrancy is inferred from the Scriptures and is not the result of the direct assertions of the text (e.g. Erickson 1987; Harrison 1959; Johnston 1979; Pinnock 1984). Inerrancy is an inference from the doctrine of inspiration, not a direct and necessary concomitant to it.

While for most Conditional Inerrantists the inference from the claims of Scripture to the doctrine of inerrancy is a correct one, if it is an inference it is at least possible that another inference could be as valid. That which makes the inference of inerrancy the choice of Conditional Inerrancy is the vital role the Bible plays in accomplishing the purposes of God for making Himself known through them. The Scriptures accomplish the purpose for which they are given.

Conditional Inerrancy also argues that the concept of error must be seen more correctly if the discussion about inerrancy is to be advanced toward any possible resolution. The equating of error with the comparison with the real world, judged by the

precision of the scientific world, is not acceptable. Conditional Inerrancy argues that error must be defined as did the biblical writers and not as do the contemporary twentieth-century interpreters. To do this is to redefine error in terms of unfaithfulness, deceit, design to lead astray, misleading, and the like (e.g. Harrison 1959; Pinnock 1984; Pinnock 1987a). The movement is away from the modern understanding of error to that which is more typical of the world in which the biblical writers lived and wrote.

The different approach to the concept of error connects directly to a different understanding of inerrancy. The point of comparison, or judgment, which determines error, is whether the intent is to mislead or deceive (e.g. Erickson 1998; Harrison 1958; Nicole 1980; Pinnock 1987b). The manner in which error is conceived in Conditional Inerrancy moves away from the absolute demand that the verbiage be the focus of the judgment to the authorial intent of the material. This redirection, while helpful in that it considers the biblical texts in their milieu before attempting to judge them by the contemporary scene, must struggle with the difficulty of knowing fully the intent of the biblical writer. Is it possible to know with certainty what that design was, and if not, how can a judgment be made as to the faithfulness of specific material to that purpose?

To deal with this dilemma Conditional Inerrancy argues that the overall intent and purpose of the Scripture are the boundary lines within which all of the particular biblical materials are to be considered. Among the passages of Scripture to which appeal is made to identify the overarching purpose of the Bible is 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (NASB). The purpose of God in providing the Bible is that through it He might reveal

Himself to humanity in order to draw them into relationship with Himself, equipping them for His service (e.g. Fuller 1968; Pinnock 1984).

Inerrancy is defined as faithfulness to the intent of the Scriptures and is an adequate descriptor of the Bible because of its faithfulness to that purpose. The revelational and teaching foci of the Scripture, not conformity to the world as is known by the contemporary interpreter, are the ways in which to talk about inerrancy. This refocusing of the concepts of error and inerrancy toward the stated intent of the Bible is very helpful, but it does open Conditional Inerrancy to the charge that this bifurcates the Scriptures: some biblical materials lead to the accomplishment of the goal of the Bible and others do not.

The means of determining which is which becomes the task of human reason, which elevates reason above the inspired texts of the Bible. Conditional Inerrancy tries to side-step the issue by asserting that inspiration extends to the entirety of the text and inerrancy is ascribed to the revelational and salvific purposes of God revealed therein. The assertion of inerrancy, being an inference, though an important one, is not on the same level of consequence as the doctrine of the inspiration of the entire Bible. All Scripture contributes to the ultimate purpose of God, albeit at different levels and in different ways.

Conditional Inerrancy further argues that the biblical texts must be acknowledged as the product of human authors who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. At first glance this argument does not seem to be different from that which was made by Complete Inerrancy, but upon further examination the differences between the two become more obvious. Conditional Inerrancy is very concerned to recognize fully the

contribution of the human authors to the writing of the Scriptures. They were persons of

their times, limited not only by their times but also by their humanity, who wrote what

was to become the Bible out of, and in terms of, their own life-situations. Fearing the

approach to the authorship of the Bible which could be analogous to the Docetic heresy in

Christology, Conditional Inerrancy argues for the full humanity of the texts (e.g. Erickson

1998; Johnston 1979; Pinnock 1984).

The argument for the humanity of the Bible by Conditional Inerrancy also

attempts to avoid falling prey to the analogy with another Christological heresy,

Ebionism. The human authors and their contribution to the texts must be acknowledged,

but that does not render the Bible merely a human book. The inspiring activity of God

assisted the human authors so that what they wrote, even with all of the limitations

inherent in their humanity, was what was needed for the realization of the purposes and

intentions of God in giving the Bible.

Since the focus by Conditional Inerrantists is away from absolute conformity in

scientific precision to the real world to the purposes and intentions of God for providing

the Bible, they also argue that all conversation should be about the texts available to the

contemporary person and not merely about the autographs. In fact, Conditional Inerrancy

argues that the appeal to the autographs is not appropriate, not so much because they are

not extant but because of other considerations. For instance, Conditional Inerrancy takes

more seriously the contributions of amanuenses, editors, redactors, and the like,

suggesting that arriving at autographic material is much more difficult than the Complete

Inerrancy view had supposed. Further, the Conditional Inerrantist notes that when Jesus

and the apostles made statements of commitment and validation of the Scriptures, they

did so in relation to the copies (of copies?) which were extant in their day, not to the non-extant originals.

To further illustrate the argument regarding the texts of the Bible currently available, Conditional Inerrancy noted that the New Testament writers made abundant usage, both in direct quotations and in allusions, to the Septuagint, a questionable translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. There was no concern raised by the New Testament writers as to the originals in comparison to the texts with which they had to work. It can also be noted, in support of the concern to focus on the texts available at the present, that they have had through the centuries powerful influence in revealing God to people and in drawing them into the redeeming relationship with Him which He purposed (e.g. Pinnock 1984).

Rather than reading the claims of the Scripture through the lenses of the doctrine of God, Conditional Inerrancy argues that those claims must be allowed to speak for themselves. In so doing, the question to be considered is whether the Scriptures claim to be inerrant. While the Scriptures do claim, and steadfastly so, that they are inspired, they do not claim to be inerrant, at least not in the terms of the Complete Inerrancy view. Since they do not claim such inerrancy, Conditional Inerrancy argues that the inspiration of the Bible can, and must, be affirmed without the accompanying claim of absolute inerrancy (e.g. Carpenter 1984; Pinnock 1984).

5.1.3 Limited Inerrancy

Limited Inerrancy approaches the concept of inerrancy in the least doctrinaire fashion of the three views. It proposes that the term inerrancy not be used in regard to

describing the character of the Bible. This view acknowledges that there are errors in the

biblical texts, that those errors are not in the text because of a failure of God in the

process of either inspiring or transmitting the text, and that the Bible is the authoritative

source for faith and practice in the Christian church.

Limited Inerrancy does not merely intend to limit the areas in which inerrancy

may be ascribed to the biblical materials, it is convinced that the term inerrancy should be

abandoned in favor of a more accurate descriptor, infallibility (e.g. Bloesch 1994; Boer

1977; Davis 1977; Hubbard 1977). Limited Inerrancy presents formidable argumentation

in support of its position, argumentation with many similarities to the arguments used in

support of Conditional Inerrancy, but argumentation which reaches conclusions other

than those of Conditional Inerrancy.

Limited Inerrancy argues that the doctrine of inspiration must be understood

somewhat differently than the plenary-verbal inspiration position held by the other views.

In Limited Inerrancy far more variability in understanding inspiration is accepted. The

varying kinds of writings within the text of Scripture evidence varying kinds of

inspiration so that some of the biblical materials, the Gospel of John, for instance, bears

more evidence of inspiration than some other biblical materials, the book of Esther, for

instance. The allowance for variation in the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible avoids

the difficulties inherent in identifying from the plenarily inspired Scriptures which are

more applicable to the faith and conduct of the contemporary interpreter.

Instead of describing inspiration with the descriptor verbal, Limited Inerrancy

prefers the term organic with which to understand the operation of the Holy Spirit in the

inspiring of the Bible. The activity of the Holy Spirit was fully integrated within the

activities, thought patterns, and modes of expression of the human authors. Because of such organic interaction the human authors wrote a reliable and authoritative account of the revelation of God in history, accurately interpreting theologically those revelatory acts for the benefit of both their generation and future generations (e.g. Beegle 1973; Bloesch 1978; Davis 1977; Hubbard 1977).

Limited Inerrancy, after asserting that the inspiration of the biblical materials must be seen as a variable assertion, also notes that the concepts of truth and error must be redefined. In particular, Limited Inerrancy argues that the biblical materials neither explicitly nor implicitly claim that they are inerrant. Beginning with the claims of the text themselves, claims which do not include inerrancy, Limited Inerrancy dismisses the concept of inerrancy in favor of such concepts as trustworthiness, reliability, and indefectability.

In light of this, Limited Inerrancy also defines error differently from the way in which it is understood in Complete Inerrancy, but not so differently from that of Conditional Inerrancy. Refusing to accept the application of scientific precision and conformity to the world as known by the modern person as the standards by which to determine error, Limited Inerrancy appeals to the way in which error was viewed by the biblical writers. In so doing it argues that error has to do with unfaithfulness to the purposes and intentions of God. The saving message and purposes of God are to be that by which material is judged as to whether it is in error (e.g. Beegle 1973; Bloesch 1983; Bloesch 1994; Hubbard 1977; Mickelsen 1977; Rogers 1977).

Limited Inerrancy argues that Jesus and the apostles certainly held the Scriptures with which they worked in very high regard, seeing them as the accurate expression of

the will of God for them and their times. However, they did so for the texts which were

available to them, not for the autographs which were not extant, and they felt free to offer

a critique of those texts as the occasion warranted (e.g. Beegle 1973; Boer 1977). Cited as

an example is the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-48, in which He asserted His

understandings and applications of the sacred Scriptures were equal to them. The wide

range of citations and allusions by the New Testament writers, including some from the

Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and even from some of the apocryphal

and pseudepigraphal material, indicates that they were not as concerned for absolute

inerrancy as are the modern defenders of that doctrine.

As do the other positions, Limited Inerrancy also makes use of the texts of 2

Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. Instead of seeing there an affirmation of inspiration

which must be equated with inerrancy, Limited Inerrancy argues that those passages

uphold inspiration, as they define it, and are focused on the texts available to the apostles

at the time of writing (e.g. Beegle 1973; Bloesch 1994; Davis 1977). They do not assert

inerrancy and most certainly do not give any strength to the appeal to the autographs

which is common in Complete Inerrancy.

Limited Inerrancy also argues that the phenomena of the biblical texts must be

given as much consideration in the constructing of doctrine as their didactic assertions.

This means that the phenomena of the materials must be allowed to determine what

actually happened in the giving of the Scriptures, as opposed to drawing from the

teachings a doctrinal affirmation and then attempting to shape the understanding of the

texts to fit that doctrinal statement.

When the phenomena of the biblical texts are examined critically and honestly,

Limited Inerrancy argues, it will be shown that they contain material which is not

explicable by use of the standards of scientific precision and conformity to the real world.

Several such examples are cited, some of which are: the dating of the kings of Judah,

especially Pekah and Hezekiah; the theological problem of the conquest of Canaan by

Israel accompanied by the command of God to completely destroy the enemies; and the

statement of Jesus that the mustard seed is the smallest seed (e.g. Beegle 1973; Davis

1977). Limited Inerrancy does express confidence that the errors in the text of Scripture,

though numerous, do not concern any vital faith affirmations, and they do not detract in

any way from the overall intent and purpose of God in giving the Bible.

As did Conditional Inerrancy, Limited Inerrancy argues that the humanity of the

biblical texts must be acknowledged and honored. The human authors were that, authors,

and they reflected the limitations of their humanity. They were not so overcome by the

inspiring activity of the Holy Spirit that they were preserved from expressing things in

their own particular manner, revealing their biases and incorrect perceptions, and making

use of source material carelessly and, in some cases, inaccurately (e.g. Beegle 1973;

Bloesch 1978; Bloesch 1994; Boer 1977; Hubbard 1977; Rees 1977). God was pleased to

use those human authors as they were, making use of them and their limitations for the

accomplishment of His purposes. Their humanity did not frustrate or limit the working of

God through them for the purpose of giving an accurate record of His revelation to the

human race.

The final argument which is presented by Limited Inerrancy is that the term

infallible is a better term to use in describing the Bible than the term inerrant. Infallible

affirms that the biblical materials conform to the intention of God and accomplish the

purpose for which He provided them. The teachings of the Bible, correctly understood by the best hermeneutical principles, comprise that which can be said to be infallible. The geographical and historical materials do not necessarily come under the ascription of infallible, although they do form an important part of the revelation of God through the Bible.

This argument for the term infallible is said by Limited Inerrancy to be the way in which the Church throughout its history has really viewed the Bible. The rigidity which comes from the claims that every aspect of the texts is absolutely without error is a part of the modern argument initiated by the rise of the Aristotelian-Thomistic synthesis which influenced the Protestant Scholasticism of the seventeenth century, which, in turn, influenced the American scene through the theology taught at Princeton Seminary in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. That extremely rationalistic approach to doing theology allowed a doctrinal deduction, inerrancy, to override the more accurate theological approach of the mainstream of Christendom. Properly, then, the call for usage of the term infallible in relation to the Bible is a return to the correct way of approaching the Scripture, not in any sense a departure from orthodoxy (e.g. Beegle 1973; Bloesch 1994; Rogers 1977; Rogers 1979).

5.2 Revisiting the Doctrine of Inerrancy

The debate about the doctrine of inerrancy in American Evangelicalism has been expressed in the three major options which have been discussed: Complete Inerrancy, Conditional Inerrancy, and Limited Inerrancy. While there are multiple variations and adaptations of these three major positions, they do represent the spectrum in the

discussion. Their positions and arguments have been considered and now summarized. Now it is important to identify the main issues in the construction of the doctrine of Scripture, by which to continue the analysis of these three views and to begin to construct an understanding of the concept of inerrancy in relation to the biblical materials.

The doctrine of inerrancy has, in some ways, been a positive force within American Evangelicalism, a reality that even the most severe detractor from the doctrine must admit. At the turn of the twentieth century, American Evangelicalism felt threatened by the encroachment of Liberalism in the form of extreme expressions of the historical-critical method, which were feared to have the potential of reducing the Bible to the status of simply being an ancient document, written by human authors, the product of the same religious forces which produced other religious books. The doctrine of inerrancy served to be a defense against that extreme possibility and provided an avenue through which the Bible could continue to be viewed as the Word of God.

The doctrine of inerrancy has also functioned well within American Evangelicalism to maintain the understanding of the authority of the Bible in relation to faith and practice. Having the assurance that the biblical materials are without error provides additional rational support for allowing them to speak with authority in the living of the Christian life. The key in seeing the positive service of inerrancy to the church in regard to the maintenance of the concept of authority is in the rationality of the approach to the Scriptures. That is not to say that inerrancy is inherently rational, but it is to note that inerrancy appeals to rationality, affirming that the materials can be shown to be without error. Further consideration might well lead one to conclude that inerrancy could detract from the authority of Scripture, especially should evidence be amassed to

show that there are materials within the text which are at the very least difficult to reconcile with the idea of inerrancy; but the fact remains that for some the affirmation of inerrancy has supported the authority of the Bible.

The preceding, while emphasizing the positive service of the idea of inerrancy to the church, has introduced areas in which the contribution of the doctrine of inerrancy may have been negative. Christianity is a religion of faith and the biblical materials assert the need for persons to believe in God and His revelation in order for there to be a relationship with Him. The writer of Hebrews 11 argues this case with clarity and cogency. This would mean that the Anselmian dictum which places primacy on believing in order to create understanding should be the procedure which marks the direction of the community. The relationship between faith and reasoning in theology is one which is difficult to discern because both factors are important. However, the safer method is to maintain the primacy of faith and see reasoning and understanding growing out of that.

The doctrine of inerrancy, as held by Complete Inerrancy, asserting as it does that the biblical materials are completely without error and, therefore, can be believed, reverses the order, placing understanding, proven by inerrant texts, before faith. When rational proofs are so intimately tied to belief the result of a diminishment of the proofs can be the loss of faith. Instead of elevating the Bible for the faith of the community, the doctrine of inerrancy may well reduce the Bible to that which is within the control of the interpreter because they are able to verify its inerrant status.

The demand for the primacy of rationality over faith in the doctrine of inerrancy is also illustrated by the excessive efforts to harmonize biblical materials which are in conflict with each other. That some efforts at harmonization which employ better

interpretive methods, newer archaeological discoveries, and a more clear insight in the

milieu of the biblical world are helpful in improving the understanding of the Bible is

undisputably true. What is in mind here are the strained and contrived explanations

which, again, assert that understanding must precede faith and that harmonization must be

achieved at all costs, because unless it is faith cannot be maintained.

With the attention being focused on the Bible's inerrancy it is at least possible that

the Bible becomes the focus of worship instead of the God who reveals Himself through

the Bible. The claims of absolute perfection, claims which are more correctly made of

God, when made for the Bible create, at the very least, the appearance of an item of

worship. The fine line between seeing the Bible as directing humans to the God who

alone deserves all praise and worship, and seeing the Bible as the personification of God

and, thereby, worthy of worship, is one which must be maintained vigorously.

The doctrine of inerrancy also does not serve the church well in that it brings

negative attention to the Bible. By asserting that there are no errors at all in the biblical

texts the specter is raised as to the result of finding one error in the text. When the entire

edifice of belief is residing on there not being any errors in the Bible, and there are

materials which are difficult to explain, the structure of faith is built on ground which is

subject to failure should efforts to reconcile every possible difficulty not be successful.

The negative attention this focuses on the Bible does not contribute to the growth of faith

and the development of scholarship within the church.

The doctrine of inerrancy, as conceived strictly, is greatly problematic. A new

approach is needed. In working toward that new approach, six items, which are here

being called "main issues," will be discussed: (1) the nature of the doctrine of Scripture;

(2) the biblical understanding of the concept of truth; (3) the necessity of allowing the Bible to speak for itself; (4) the role of faith for the doctrine of inerrancy; (5) the role of the Holy Spirit for the doctrine of inerrancy; and (6) the role of the purpose of Scripture for the doctrine of inerrancy. These six concerns form the basic elements for a restatement of the doctrine of inerrancy within American Evangelicalism. As the three major options have been presented several basic concerns have surfaced, the responses to which should provide something of a framework within which to consider the primary goal of ascribing to the Scriptures the highest evaluation of their worth and authority and yet not falling into a position which has the potential of asserting more for the Bible than the biblical texts either claim for themselves or give evidence from which such claims can be made.

5.2.1 The Nature of the Doctrine of Scripture

In revisiting the doctrine of inerrancy the starting point is to raise the question as to the nature of the doctrine of Scripture, from which a discussion of the relation of the doctrine of inerrancy to that doctrine can be considered. The two affirmations are not being viewed as synonymous; they are two separate statements of faith and must be approached in that manner. The doctrine of inerrancy, however it is stated, is derived from the doctrine of Scripture, and that more by implication than by the direct statement of either the biblical materials or the doctrine of Scripture. In this section the status of the doctrine of Scripture must be examined; is it an essential doctrine for Evangelical Christianity? If it is not, what is its place in the arrangement of the belief-system? How are doctrinal affirmations discerned, and can they be ranked in order of importance? What

is the proper relationship of the concept of inerrancy to the doctrine of Scripture? Does

the role of apologetics impact the construction and expression of doctrine?

5.2.1.1 Is the Doctrine of Scripture An Essential Doctrine of Christianity?

The main proponent of Complete Inerrancy, Benjamin B. Warfield, carefully

asserted that the doctrine of Scripture should not be viewed as an essential doctrine in

Christianity. He argued that Christianity could continue to exist even if there were no

doctrine of Scripture (Warfield 1981, 209-210). However, the way in which the

contemporary consideration of the doctrine of inerrancy has been advanced by Warfield's

followers certainly elevates the doctrine of Scripture to the status of being an essential

doctrine. With statements which call for the separation of those who can be called

Evangelical from those who cannot based on the latter's non-acceptance of the absolute

inerrancy view of the Bible, it is obvious that an essential doctrine has been established

(See Lindsell 1976, 18, 23-26, 141-160).

The question must be raised as to whether any doctrine of Scripture, whether

containing inerrancy, infallibility, or the like, is an essential doctrine of Christianity in

general, and in American Evangelicalism in particular. Without question the doctrine of

Scripture is important; after all, Scriptures are the authoritative rule for faith and practice.

Does that affirmation demand that the doctrinal assertions about Scripture are essential

assertions of the faith of the Church?

The doctrine of Scripture, with its many variations and applications, is based

primarily on the two apostolic passages in 2 Timothy and 2 Peter. While by no means the

only passages which make up support for the doctrinal affirmation, they are the two basic

passages. That they assert that the Scripture is inspired, the product of the moving of the Holy Spirit upon the human writers, is not being questioned. All three of the major views in the debate agree that the Scriptures are the product of the inspiring activity of God the Holy Spirit. Should this valid and true doctrine be seen as an essential doctrine in Evangelical Christianity?

The use of the phrase "essential doctrine" implies that it is possible to arrange doctrinal affirmations in a hierarchy, with some being more foundational than others. Such consideration brings to mind several analogies which could be used. One could think of such a hierarchy as a pyramid, with the more important teachings at the top; or the picture of concentric circles could be used, with those in the center representing the more basic faith expressions. More important than the analogy which might be used to illustrate such a ranking is the question as to whether such ranking of the doctrines of the church is acceptable.

Christendom has dealt with the issue of organizing statements of faith according to their importance and/or relationship to the centrality of the revelatory activities of God in several ways throughout history. In recent times the Roman Catholic Church has struggled with this concern because of the decrees of the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II (1963-1965). In particular the Council, in the Decree on Ecumenism, chapter eleven, affirmed that "Catholic theologians engaged in ecumenical dialogue, while standing fast by the teaching of the Church and searching together with separated brethren into the divine mysteries, should act with love for truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrine, they should remember that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the

Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened for this kind of fraternal rivalry to incite all

to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ"

(Abbott 1966, 354). The openness to dialogue on expressions of doctrinal concern

granted by this statement has prompted a discussion within Roman Catholicism as to the

precise understanding of which doctrinal affirmations should be considered closer to the

foundation of the Christian faith.

Avery Dulles admitted that Roman Catholicism is replete with doctrinal

affirmations, the sheer number of which makes the task of evangelization and ecumenical

dialogue difficult. He correctly noted that the pronouncement of Vatican II, which

accepted the existence of a hierarchy of those affirmations, has helped this problem.

Dulles averred that "it is important that every article of belief be seen in relation to the

heart and center of the Christian message, which is surely God's work in Jesus Christ"

(1984, 631). From this central concern subordinate, or derivative, doctrines can be

understood and their relative importance assessed. The definition of the heart and center

of the Christian message, while in general terms understood as the Christ-event, has

continued to be an issue about which Catholic theologians debate in the wake of Vatican

II.

Making use of the same approach to understanding the hierarchy of truths as did

Dulles, George Vandervelde asserted that it "opens a window on the concentric nature of

the 'truth' of the Christian faith and on the referential nature of all Christian

'truths'"(1988, 74). Ecumenical dialogue is made more possible because of the

acknowledgment that doctrinal affirmations are not all at the same level of importance, a

problem which had rendered dialogue virtually impossible. Vandervelde noted that the

hierarchy of truths is dependent on the foundation of the Christian faith, the doctrines of

the Trinity and of Christ. Thus, in determining the arrangement of affirmations the

question is always, what is each affirmation's relation to this foundation? Answering this

question provides one with a grasp of the placement of a particular doctrine in the

concentric development of faith statements (Vandervelde 1988, 79-80).

George H. Tavard suggested that a hierarchy of truths could be established from

either a material principle (the presence of a truth in the Bible) or a formal principle (the

necessity of a truth for salvation). To illustrate his position Tavard noted that Luther

operated with a formal principle, "that which expresses justification by grace through

faith, although this was tied to the material principle of *scriptura sola*." Luther's Roman

Catholic protagonists, Tavard argued, appealed to the material principle, "that which has

been universally taught by the Church and the magisterium," as the counterpoint to

Luther in the establishing of a hierarchy of truths (1971, 283-286). The Decree on

Ecumenism from Vatican II proposed a formal principle without the correlative material

principle, "the nearness of a doctrine to the heart of the Christian mystery" (Tavard 1971,

288). Based on Tavard's analysis the hierarchy of Christian truths would be based on the

relation of each affirmation to the salvific message of the Gospel.

If the central message of the Christian faith is the salvation provided through the

life and death of Jesus Christ it is understandable that doctrinal affirmations should be

ordered in light of their relationship to this central confession of faith. Patrick O'Connell,

in a study of the literature which has been produced in response to the pronouncement of

Vatican II, concluded that "there is a definite consensus that the principal mysteries of

our religion are 'principal' because they have to do directly with our salvation" (1972.

111). The foundation of the Christian faith, to which the Decree of Ecumenism appealed as the basis of faith affirmations, is the proclamation of the church that in Jesus Christ God has acted redemptively on behalf of the fallen race of humans.

While not completely denying the centrality of the message of salvation, F. M. Jelly redirected the argument about the hierarchy of truth somewhat by asserting that the central mystery of the Christian faith is the incarnation, which allows for Marian doctrine and devotion to be understood within the context of that central mystery and related to other truths in some sort of hierarchy (1976, 221). Jelly noted that the declaration of Vatican II related the hierarchy of truths to the foundation of the Christian faith and that it proceeded "to identify the central mysteries of our Christian faith as the triune God and the Incarnate Son of God, our Lord and Redeemer." Other revealed doctrines "are to be considered in the context of the central mysteries of Jesus Christ and the triune God revealed in him" (1976, 226). Using the imagery of concentric circles, Jelly asserted that the lesser truths, which would be arranged further from the center of the circle, shed more light on the central truths and show how they can be applied in daily living.

The Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II is not without historical precedent. P. Smulders noted that the Council of Trent presaged the declaration about the hierarchy of truths made in the mid-1960s. Smulders asserted that Trent argued that "the focus of faith is God, as He revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, as the God of forgiveness and the promise of new life" (1970, 193). The Council of Trent asserted that "the real center of the faith, which is indispensable to justification, is the mystery of God's forgiveness and of His promise of salvation, as revealed in Christ. To this center, therefore, we may conclude, all other truths of Catholic doctrine should be related" (Smulders 1970, 195).

In surveying the multiple responses to the Decree on Ecumenism from its promulgation until 1987, William Henn concluded that the concept of a hierarchy of truths was an acceptable theological expression, but that agreement on the precise interpretation of the Council's declaration had not yet arrived (1987, 439-468). The themes which have been identified above are evident in the writings in response to Vatican II, but as yet no firm coalescing of precise definitions has taken place.

To illustrate further the acceptance of the concept of a hierarchy of truths in Roman Catholicism, Berard Marthaler, asserted that <u>Catechism of the Catholic Church</u> (1992), too, is built upon an acknowledgment of such an hierarchy. Marthaler noted that "the revelation of the Holy Trinity enjoys the highest priority in the hierarchy of truths, especially when it relates to the person and mission of Christ Jesus" (1994, 47). This central focus on Trinitarian theology and Christology is reflected in the presentation of the <u>Catechism</u>, which implies that some truths are based on others as of a higher priority and made more clear by them and not, according to Marthaler, that some doctrinal assertions are more important than others.

The concept of a hierarchy of truths has also been a part of Protestant theological thought. John Calvin argued that "the pure ministry of the Word and the pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, the sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist" (1960. IV.i.12). In the same context in which he asserted the correctness of "church" where these two criteria are met, Calvin set forth some doctrinal affirmations which may not be questioned: "God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like" (1960, IV.i.12). Because of the impact of sin on the life of humans, Calvin allowed

for some divergence, and divergence of expression, on what he called "nonessential matters," especially when it is admitted that "not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort" (1960, IV.i.12).

Calvin did not provide a definitive listing of which affirmations of the faith belong to the category of those which are fundamental and may not be questioned. The ones which are named above are examples of those which would be placed in such a grouping, but do not comprise the totality of such a list. That he does allow for such categories as "certain and unquestioned" and "nonessential matters" certainly affirms that the concept of a hierarchy of truth was a part of his thinking and acceptable to him. This points out that the church, both in its Roman Catholic and Protestant expressions, allows for some ordering of doctrinal affirmations around the central expression of God as the redeemer of fallen humans.

The other major Reformer, Martin Luther, while not providing a listing of faith affirmations ranked according to their importance, did give evidence of being open to some sort of hierarchy of truths. This is evidenced by his admission for preferences within the accepted books of the New Testament. The real nature of the Christian gospel is contained in but a few of the sacred books. Luther declared in his <u>Preface to the New Testament</u> that "in a word St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book of doctrine." In this same argument Luther concluded that "St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it" (1982, VI:444; 1989, 117). The

doctrine of Christ is clearly, in Luther's thought, the foundational truth of Christianity.

The possibility of Luther accepting a hierarchy of truths is also evidenced by his general approach to the Bible, dividing it into commands and promises, and giving prominence to the promises because they provide in Christ the power for their fulfilment. In A Treatise on Christian Liberty Luther argued that "the commands indeed teach things that are good, but the things taught are not done as soon as taught; for the commands show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do it: they are intended to teach a man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his 'powers.'" In contrast, "the promises of God give what the commands of God ask, and fulfill what the law prescribes, that all things may be of God alone, both the commands and the fulfilling of the commands" (1943, 5-6; 1982, II:317-318). Luther, in Introduction to the Old Testament, called the Old Testament a book of laws and the New Testament a Gospel-book which "teaches where one is to get the power to fulfill the law" (1943, 7-8; 1982 VI: 368).

Hendrikus Berkhof, a contemporary Dutch Calvinist, saw in the Decree on Ecumenism, which, as he understood it, asserted that the "encounter with God is the basis determining the weight of the different truths," a revolutionary thought (1979. 73). The revolutionary aspect of the Decree was not that it was unprecedented in the history of Christian thought, but that it articulated the tension between the singular (the self-revelation of God) and the plural (the varied truths) in Christianity. Berkhof argued that the starting point for the believer is not "the singular but with the plural, not in the center but at the periphery. From there we should then try to find the revelational content of the various themes" (1979, 73). It is in their relation to the central theme of the encounter

with God, His revealing of Himself, that the particular doctrinal affirmations can be arranged.

Some writers of the New Testament, too, supported the concept of some ordering of doctrinal affirmations around a central theme. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (NASB), points to central affirmations upon which others may be arranged. Earlier in this same letter to the Corinthian congregation, 1 Corinthians 2:2, in the face of their uncertainty as to his measuring up to their expectations in the setting forth of wisdom, Paul reminded them that he "determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (NASB). As Peter preached to the wondering crowd on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:14-36, the central themes of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the salvation which that work accomplished, are proclaimed as the church is inaugurated and its mission begun. Later, as Peter preached at the house of the Gentile Cornelius, Acts 10:34-43, the same central themes of death, resurrection, and salvation are reiterated.

The evidence is clear in support of the concept of some sort of hierarchy of truths within the expression of the belief system of Christianity. As yet no attempt has been made to assert definitively what that ordered arrangement would be, but it is appropriate to ask where a particular doctrine, the formal doctrine of Scripture, for example, fits in the doctrinal affirmations of the church.

To assert that the concept of an hierarchy of truths is valid evokes another concern: how are essential doctrines discovered? In that the Bible is not essentially a

doctrinal manual, though doctrinal affirmations within Christendom are based on biblical materials, and there are no other primary sources accepted by Protestantism for the establishment of doctrines, where does one turn for a prioritized listing of doctrines? It will be necessary to avoid the temptation to assert that one's favorite doctrinal affirmation is the one essential to Christianity on the one hand, and on the other to avoid the equally strong temptation to see as essential doctrines which are found within the Bible but may really be peripheral instead of central. How are the distinctions to be made?

The question being considered here has to do with the sources from which to draw, and upon which to base, the articulation of the faith of the believing community. Stanley Grenz has provided a helpful response to this concern by positing that theology must rest on three pillars, or norms. He argued that the ordered sequence should be, "(1) the biblical message, (2) the theological heritage of the church and (3) the thought-forms of the historical-cultural context in which the contemporary people of God seek to speak, live, and act" (1993, 93). In such an structuring of the norms for doing theology the biblical message takes primacy; the major factor in the development of the doctrine is "the trajectory of the proclamation of the story of God's salvific activity within the history of Israel, Jesus and the infant church" (Grenz 1993, 93).

This first step in answering the question of determining the essential doctrines for the church requires that whatever is to be considered essential must be drawn from the main teachings of the Bible. This clearly calls for essential doctrines to be supported by the clear majority teachings of the Bible and not merely by a few isolated texts. This first criterion in arriving at the essential doctrines looks to the main teaching foci of the biblical materials for guidance and direction.

While to some extent the determination of the main teaching foci of the biblical material does involve enumerating the texts which assert this or that doctrine, the concern is for more than merely counting how many texts mention what. Not only the number of times a doctrine is mentioned but also the importance assigned to a particular doctrine by the biblical writer in the context of the presentation of the material is to be considered. The context in which the writer discusses particular doctrines and the manner in which that discussion is set up and framed can indicate the degree of importance that should be assigned to the doctrinal affirmation.

Care must be taken when asking about the main teaching foci of the biblical materials that those materials be interpreted properly. Within American Evangelicalism, and indeed within all of Christendom, there is a tendency to use the biblical materials in a loose, proof-texting way, forcing them to support what one wants them to support. This superficial usage of Scripture fails to consider the important items of authorial intent, context, word usage, grammatical and syntactical usage, and the historical and cultural milieu from which the author wrote. The discerning of the overall teaching foci of the Bible requires intense effort, without which the doctrines which can be called essential to the church cannot be discovered.

As noted above, the New Testament writers focus on the central message of the passion of Christ. Not only does each of the Gospel writers provide details about the death and resurrection of Jesus but that message becomes the theme of the early preachers of the church. Peter declared the centrality of Jesus' passion at Pentecost (Acts 2:22-32), after the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful (Acts 3:12-26), at his and John's trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-12), as the spokesperson

for the apostles before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29-32), and at the house of Cornelius in Caesarea (Acts 10:34-43). In the epistles which bear his name, the theme of the death and resurrection of Christ is again a dominant one (1 Pet. 1:2, 11, 17-19; 2:4-8, 21-24; 3:18-20; 4:1-2).

Paul's preaching and writing, too, is filled with references to the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:16-41; 17:22-31; 26:22-23; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 5:6-21; 6:3-11; 8:11; 10:4-10; 14:9; 1 Cor.1:18-25; 2:2; 11:22-26; 15:3-9, 20-28; 2 Cor. 4:13-14; 5:14-15; Gal. 1:1; 3:1; 6:14; Eph. 1:18-23; 2:5-7, 11-22; 5:25; Phil. 2:5-11; 3:8-12; Col. 1:19-23; 2:8-15; 3:1; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:8-11; 2:8-13; and, Titus 2:11-14). The theme of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ in every way, including the effect for salvation of His being the High Priest and the sacrifice for sin (1:3; 2:9-18; 7:26-28; 9:11-28; 10:1-18; 13:12). The Epistles of John and the Revelation also focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus as primary themes of the Christian gospel (1 John 2:1-2; 4:10; 5:6; Rev. 1:5, 17-18; 5:9-14)

The abundance of references to the death and resurrection of Jesus points to the conclusion that this affirmation is central to the faith of the Christian community. While the numerous citations are impressive, far more impressive are the theological assertions contained in them. The passion of Christ is declared to be essential for the salvation of believing persons, indeed the resurrection is the evidence that the sacrifice for human sin has been accepted by the Father. Belief in the work of Christ in His death and resurrection, displayed through baptism, allows the individual to participate in the victorious life of Christ. The resurrection of Christ also assures the future resurrection of believers and the ultimate victory over all evil powers. Sharing the death and resurrection

of Jesus is a daily description of the believer's present life.

By contrast, the biblical mention of the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus is not as abundant nor given so much theological importance. The two narratives in which the birth of Jesus is described both affirm what is generally called the virgin birth (Matt. 1:18-25; Lk. 1:26-38). The other Gospels provide neither the narrative of Jesus' birth nor the affirmation of the miraculous aspects of that birth. None of the recorded sermons of the early church nor the writings of the New Testament Epistles reference the virgin birth or build important doctrinal assertions upon it. It would seem that the doctrine of the death and resurrection of Christ is far more essential to Christianity than that of the virgin birth.

Similarly, specific assertions about the written Word of God are confined to merely two in the Pauline and Petrine teachings in 2 Timothy 3 and 2 Peter 1. Those specific passages will be considered below, but here it can be noted that these two mentions do not rise to the level of importance as testified to by the multiple references to the death and resurrection of Christ. Whereas the references to the passion of Christ are replete with theological implications, those associated with the assertions about the writings are more practical.

As a vital aspect of the concern for the teaching foci of the biblical materials concern for the overall plan of God, that is, the purposes of the Triune God to provide and effect salvation through the Son for humankind, must also be considered. The major theme of the Bible, the *kerygma*, is the plan of God for the redemption of the fallen humanity. Doctrines essential to the church must have relationship to this major theme, which relates to the revelation of God's all encompassing plan. While it is foolhardy to

suggest that human rationality alone could grasp the overall intention of God for His dealing with the human race and this world, He has revealed Himself sufficiently so that His overall purposes can be discerned.

If the overall purposes and plan of God are available to humankind through the revelational activity of God, doctrinal affirmations which are most related to that central core of His design should be considered to be of essential status for the Christian community. To suggest that those doctrinal affirmations which most clearly and closely relate to the plan of God are more essential would not, at the same time, indicate that other affirmations less clear and less close would be of no value. Rather, it would indicate that the vital concerns of the Christian faith are those which are essential; other affirmations are important, even if they are not vital.

Determining which are essential doctrinal affirmations begins with hearing the major teaching foci of the biblical materials correctly and is furthered by giving attention to the tradition of the church. The manner in which the church through its historical development has responded to various challenges, and in so doing has formulated the expression of its beliefs is of great consequence in discovering what is essential to the Christian faith. It is of importance to examine which doctrines the church has given more consideration in confirming which are essential. Two of the earliest confessions of faith outside of the New Testament documents, those of Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 190) and Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200), affirm belief in the Trinity, the events of the life of Christ (virgin birth, passion, resurrection, and ascension) and their efficacy in the provision of salvation, and the future judgment to be effected by Christ, but neither establish a doctrine of Scripture (Leith 1982, 21-22). The precursors to the Apostle's Creed, the Interrogatory Creed of

Hippolytus (ca. A.D. 215), the Creed of Marcellus (A.D. 340), and the Creed of Aquileia

(ca. A.D. 404), likewise, affirm belief in the Trinity, the saving work of Christ, and the

Holy Spirit, but do not detail a doctrine of Scripture (Leith 1982, 23-24). The Apostle's

Creed, which was probably formalized in the present form around A.D. 700, affirms the

Trinity, the saving work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, "the holy catholic Church, the

communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life

everlasting" (Leith 1982, 24-25).

Similarly, the earliest concilliar creeds do not contain specific presentations of the

doctrine of Scripture. The Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) expresses the decision of the church

against the Arian heresy and affirms the Trinity and the work of Christ in the provision of

salvation. The Constantinopolitan Creed (A.D. 381) again affirms the Trinity, the church,

one baptism for sins, and the future resurrection of the dead. The Definition of Chalcedon

(A.D. 451) affirms the deity of the Christ and the necessity of believing in His two

natures (Leith 1982, 35-36). In examining the early tradition of the church, as expressed

in its creedal affirmations, it becomes clear that the belief in the Trinity and the saving

work of Christ was viewed as essential and that the formal statement of a doctrine of

Scripture was not.

A word of caution needs to be raised about considering the historical development

of doctrines, the same word of caution that was noted in regard to allowing the biblical

materials to be interpreted correctly. As it is easy merely to cite Scripture passages

carelessly without concern for properly interpreting them, so it is easy to move rapidly

through history choosing quotations without concern for the milieu in which they were

made. Such a process would allow one to prove whatever was wished. Grenz offered the

valuable reminder that the church, in struggling with the expressions of belief, did so in specific culturally conditioned situations. He correctly observed that "the church has continually sought to express its affirmation of faith in the context of the specific historical and cultural situations in which it has lived and witnessed to the revelation of God in Christ. . . . Consequently, our understanding of the heritage of the church as a norm for theology must be nuanced" (Grenz 1993, 95). With this caution in mind, a more careful approach which refuses to interpret the past in terms of the present can hear from the history of the church that which has been considered to be essential for the sustaining of the life and practice of the church.

A third concern in establishing doctrinal affirmations and considering which is essential, or central, as Grenz suggested, is "the contemporary context of the recipient of the kerygma" (1993, 97). This third norm for theology takes seriously the need for the beliefs of the church to be stated in terms which can be understood by contemporary society and to show the relevance of those belief statements to the developing body of knowledge which impact the modern era. In the effort to assist in the proclamation of the message of the gospel by the church to the world, a task which is complicated by the need to employ thought forms and expressions which are in use in the target audience, the theologian must frame belief affirmations in the idiom which can be understood. It is also true that the influence goes the other way, from the world to the theologian. Throughout history, the church has borrowed from the world to express itself more clearly. For instance, the various doctrines of the atonement, ransom, satisfaction, moral influence, and governmental, were influenced by the social and cultural worlds in which they were formulated.

With the teaching foci of the Bible, the tradition of the church, and the contemporary recipient of the kerygma in mind, the question to be considered is whether the doctrine of Scripture is an essential, or central, doctrine of Christianity. The question is not whether Scripture affirms its inspiration; it does. But, given that that affirmation is made in a relatively few passages and is not a theme which finds repeated mention, the doctrine does not meet the expectation of being a teaching focus of the Bible. It was noted above that there are doctrines for which the biblical writers claim central concern: that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus died for the sin of humans, and that Jesus was raised from the dead. Other themes find repeated expression in multiple books of the Bible, from varying biblical authors, and from varying periods of time in the development of the Scripture. The assertion of the doctrine of Scripture, while clearly made, is not testified to so abundantly.

When the testimony of the history of the tradition of the church about whether the doctrine of Scripture is central to Christianity is considered it is discovered that the church has not considered the doctrine of Scripture to be a central teaching. This would not be to say that the church has not considered the doctrine important, but that it was not viewed as an essential affirmation. Bernhard Lohse noted that "the first decision of the church which may be called 'dogma' in the sense of doctrinal confession, is the creation of the canon and of the creed" (1966, 23). The establishment of the canon of Scripture was in itself a doctrinal decision as it set the parameters within which the church would make its confessions. However, this important doctrinal decision did not include detailed statements about the nature, quality, inerrancy, and the like, of the Scripture.

Lohse correctly observed that the fixing of the New Testament canon "represents

a witness to the revelation of God in Christ, one on which all later doctrinal decisions are based and which, in fact, makes these decisions possible. The fixing of a given New Testament canon indicates that only from these Scriptures can the church gain valid and binding knowledge concerning the revelation in Jesus Christ" (1966, 29). This certainly indicates that the Scriptures, and not necessarily a structured statement of doctrinal beliefs about them, have significant status within the church, a status which requires all other doctrinal affirmations to be measured by their contents.

J. N. D. Kelly, in tracing the historical development of the doctrines of the church, agreed that the Scriptures, especially the New Testament, became early the standard for measuring other doctrinal affirmations. The process, as Kelly saw it, was that the early theologians affirmed that God, the author of revelation, entrusted the revelation to the prophets and apostles, the eyewitnesses, who passed it on to the church. When the early theologians were "asked where the authentic faith was to be found, their answer was clear and unequivocal: in a general way it was contained in the Church's continuous tradition of teaching, and more concretely in the Holy Scriptures" (Kelly 1960, 30). Through the mid-second century the church based its understandings of the faith on the Old Testament and the teachings of the apostles. From the mid-second century a shift is evident toward the teaching of the apostles and eventually to the writings which became the New Testament. Kelly summarized this growing dependence on the Scriptures by noting that "throughout the whole period Scripture and tradition ranked as complementary authorities, media different in form but coincident in content" (1960, 47). Upon such a foundation, with tradition being a vehicle for understanding the Scripture, the entire edifice of Christian doctrine was built.

The earliest creedal affirmations of the church, as noted above, do not contain specific assertions about the nature of the Scriptures upon which those affirmations are based. Lohse observed that the earliest creeds, the old Roman baptismal creed which was expanded into the Apostle's Creed, dated in the mid-second century, did not contain an affirmation about Scripture (1966, 33). Herman Bavinck observed that these early creeds were based on Scripture and more specifically, in the case of the Apostle's Creed, on the baptismal command of Matthew 28:19 (1956, 120). However, they did not include the doctrine of Scripture in their declaration of important truths. The same observations were made about the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325), the Constantinopolitan Creed (A.D. 381), and the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451). These creedal statements declare the position of the church on the Trinity, Christology, the saving work of Jesus, the church, and the Holy Spirit. They do not address the doctrine of the Scripture. (See also Bettenson 1963; Gonzalez 1987; Schaff 1931).

Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, in their study, The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible, noted that in the 1536 edition of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion there was no formal statement of a doctrine of Scripture. The treatment of Scripture was subsumed under the heading of "Faith" in the second chapter. In the final Latin version of the Institutes, 1559, Calvin dealt with the doctrine of Scripture in three separate sections: Book I, chapters six through nine; Book III, chapter two; and Book V, chapter seven (1979, 102-103). Though Calvin's treatment of theology in the Institutes is thoroughly biblical, and his literary contributions include commentaries on most of the biblical books, he felt no need to provide a fully developed doctrine of Scripture.

The heirs of the sixteenth-century Reformation promulgated several creeds to

detail their beliefs. Of the multiple expressions of the belief system of the Reformed

churches, twelve are recognized as being of major importance: Zwingli's Sixty-Seven

Articles of 1523; The Ten Theses of Berne, 1528; The Tetrapolitan Confession of 1530;

The First Confession of Basel, 1534; The First Helvetic Confession of 1536; The

Lausanne Articles of 1536; The Geneva Confession of 1536; The Confession of Faith of

the English Congregation at Geneva, 1556; The French Confession of Faith, 1559; The

Scottish Confession of Faith, 1560; The Belgic Confession of Faith, 1562; and The

Second Helvetic Confession, 1566 (See Cochrane 1966, 7-31; Leith 1982, 127-129). An

examination of these creedal statements indicates something of the development of the

doctrine of Scripture during this pivotal epoch of the Protestant church. While only six of

the statements have specific sections detailing the doctrine of Scripture (the First

Helvetic, Geneva, French, Scottish, Belgic, and the Second Helvetic), they all reveal the

usage of the Scriptures as the source for the belief structure which they espouse

(Cochrane 1966, 100, 120, 144, 177, 189, 224).

The sixteenth-century Reformed creeds emphasized the conviction that the

Scriptures are inspired of God. Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles were based on "the

Scripture which is called *theopneustos*," and affirmed that the Scripture "breathes God's

Spirit" (Cochrane 1966. 36, 44). The First Helvetic Confession recognized that Scripture,

which is the Word of God, is "inspired by the Holy Spirit and delivered to the world by

the prophets and apostles" (Cochrane 1966, 100). The French Confession affirmed the

revelation of God first in creation and secondly "and more clearly, in his Word, which

was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterward committed to

writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures" (Cochrane 1966, 144). Using the

2 Peter 1:21 assertion that the Holy Spirit moved the human authors to speak what became the Scripture, the Belgic Confession noted that the "Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man" (Cochrane 1966, 190). Not only was the Holy Spirit operative in the inspiring of the writing of the Bible, but two of these creeds, the Belgic and the French, affirmed that the Spirit also witnessed as to which ancient books were to be considered canonical (Cochrane 1966, 145, 191).

The Reformed creeds of the sixteenth century also affirmed that the Scriptures were authoritative. In his Sixty-Seven Articles Zwinlgi admitted that he could be corrected and instructed in relation to his misunderstandings of Scripture, "but only from the aforesaid Scripture" (Cochrane 1966, 36). The Tetrapolitan Confession asserted that the Holy Scriptures are authoritative in that they are "abundantly sufficient to confute every error" (Cochrane 1966, 87). The authority of Scripture is affirmed by the French Confession by noting that "the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men" (Cochrane 1966, 145). Similarly, the Scottish Confession argued that the authority of Scriptures is from God and does not depend "on men or angels" (Cochrane 1966, 178). The Second Helvetic Confession noted that the Scriptures were the true Word of God, having "sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures" (Cochrane 1966, 224).

As confessed by the sixteenth-century Reformed creeds the authority of Scripture is of such strength that they alone are sufficient for the life of the church. In the words of the Geneva Confession the Scripture alone is the "rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any other thing which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from

the Word of God" (Cochrane 1966, 120). The French Confession asserted that "we owe

such respect and reverence to the Word of God as shall prevent us from adding to it any

thing of our own, but shall make us conform entirely to the rules it prescribes" (Cochrane

1966, 141). Thus, "no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human

wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or

miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures" (Cochrane 1966, 145-146). The

Second Helvetic Confession expanded on the exclusive nature of the authority of

Scripture by affirming that "it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either

added to or taken from the same" (Cochrane 1966, 224), and that the Scriptures are

properly understood when the interpretation is "gleaned from the Scriptures themselves"

(Cochrane 1966, 226).

As confessed by the Reformed creeds of the sixteenth century, the authoritative

Scriptures set the boundaries within which the Christian life must be lived. The Ten

Theses of Berne affirmed that the "Church of Christ makes no laws or commandments

without God's Word. Hence all human traditions, which are called ecclesiastical

commandments, are binding upon us only in so far as they are based on and commanded

by God's Word" (Cochrane 1966, 49). The preaching of the Christian minister, according

to the Tetrapolitan Confession, must be "nothing else than is either contained in the Holy

Scriptures or hath sure ground therein" (Cochrane 1966, 56). The Belgic Confession

asserted that "it is unlawful for any one, though an Apostle, to teach otherwise than we

are now taught in the Holy Scripture" because "it doth thereby evidently appear that the

doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects" (Cochrane 1966, 192).

The very high view of the inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Scripture

expressed in these creedal statements is focused upon the functionality, the accomplishment of an intended purpose, of the Bible. The Tetrapolitan Confession noted that "if St. Paul has taught the truth when he said that by Holy Scripture the man of God is made perfect and furnished for every good work, he can lack nothing of Christian truth or sound doctrine who strives religiously to ask counsel of Scripture" (Cochrane 1966, 56). The First Helvetic Confession saw the function of Scripture to deal "with everything that serves the true knowledge, love and honor of God, as well as true piety and the making of a godly, honest and blessed life" because "the entire Biblical Scripture is solely concerned that man understand that God is kind and gracious to him and that He has publicly exhibited and demonstrated this His kindness to the whole human race through Christ His Son" (Cochrane 1966, 100-101). The French Confession noted that the Scripture contains "all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation" (Cochrane 1966, 145), and as such, according to the Scottish Confession, is "sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God" (Cochrane 1966, 177). The Scriptures were given, according to the Belgic Confession, "for us and our salvation" and "fully contain the will of God, and . . . whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation" (Cochrane 1966. 190, 192). The Second Helvetic Confession, similarly, asserted that in the Scriptures are "the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God" (Cochrane 1966, 224).

The earliest creedal affirmations of Protestantism certainly set forth a very strong claim for the inspiration and authority of Scripture. However, they do not establish the doctrine in great detail and do not employ the rubric of inerrancy as a defense for the inspired and authoritative Bible. In their examination of these creeds, Rogers and McKim

concluded correctly that the focus in regards to Scripture was on their authoritative status for salvation and the life of the church and not on the intricate nature of the concepts of inspiration and inerrancy (1979, 117, 125). The functional value of the Scriptures in leading to salvation and providing guidance for living the Christian life was seen in those creeds as being that which best spoke to the issue of the authority of the Bible.

On the bases that an essential doctrine must be drawn from major teaching foci of the Scriptures and that the tradition of the church should support the doctrine being held as central to the faith, the doctrine of Scripture is not to be seen as an essential doctrine. The doctrine of Scripture is, however, important because it is affirmed by clear biblical teachings. That it is not an essential element of the faith, though, indicates that there might be some variability allowed in the manner in which the doctrine is expressed within the community of faith. The variability is not unlimited; there are the boundaries of the biblical material which must be observed. The doctrine of Scripture must include the affirmation of God's activity in the process of communicating Himself through human writers, and doing so reliably and authoritatively.

While the doctrine of Scripture does not belong to the essence of Christianity, it does have a very close relationship to those doctrines which comprise that essence. It is beyond the focus of this study to identify the essential doctrines of Christianity, but they would include an understanding of God, His revelation, especially in the Son, and His plan for the redemption of humans and of all things. In that Scripture serves the crucial role of recording the revelation of God in an authoritative way and Scripture provides the source from which doctrinal affirmations are drawn, the doctrine of Scripture is very important for apprehending of the essential items of faith.

While it is correct to note that the doctrine of Scripture is not a central doctrine in Christianity, it is equally accurate to assert that the Scriptures are indispensable to the establishment of all doctrinal affirmations. Abraham Kuyper appropriately called the Scriptures the *principium* of theology, by which he meant that the Scriptures were the material principle of all knowledge of God, knowledge which He Himself had communicated (1968, 347). The Scriptures, which have arisen because of the revelation of God, are the source for theology. God is never passive, "so that all knowledge of God must ever be the fruit of self-revelation on His side" (Kuyper 1968, 348).

The affirmation that the Scripture is the *principium* of theology, and indeed all knowledge of God, is not a conclusion which has been arrived at through logical deduction from other premises. Rather, as Kuyper noted, it is "the premise from which all other conclusions are drawn" (Kuyper 1968, 562). It might be asked, how can a person be assured that the Scriptures are the *principium* for theology? Kuyper asserted it is not the result of the process of rational proof from the external effects of the Scriptures, but "the acceptance of this *principium* in the end cannot rest upon anything save the witness of the Holy Spirit" (1968. 387). Without the work of the Holy Spirit to bear witness that the Scriptures are the *principium*, such a conclusion cannot be reached nor maintained.

In a similar manner Grenz asserted that the Scriptures have a constitutional role in the formation of the church and of its doctrinal affirmations. They are the product of the foundational stage in the history of the church, thus reflecting the formation of the Christian identity at the beginning. So, they "hold primary status at all stages in the life of the church as constitutive for the identity of the Christian community"(Grenz 1993, 125). The Scriptures are foundational because everything else is built upon them. Grenz noted

that the Scriptures provide the categories for the Christian community, the paradigm for

life within the church, and orient the present both on the basis of the past and in

accordance with a vision of the future (1993, 126). By noting this important role for

Scripture Grenz is not asserting that the doctrine of Scripture is so essential that it must

be buttressed by multiple proofs. Rather, he noted that "we may simply assume the

authority of the Bible on the basis of the integral relation of theology to the faith

community. Because the Bible is the universally acknowledged book of the Christian

church, the biblical message functions as the central norm for the systematic articulation

of the faith of that community" (1993, 94).

The role of the Scriptures in the establishment of doctrinal affirmations is further

testified to by the inclusion of Scripture as a part of the prolegomena for theology by

most Protestant theologians. Hendrikus Berkhof noted that Protestant theology has done

this based on four important characteristics of Scripture: the divine authority, the

necessity, the perspicuity, and the perfection and sufficiency of the Scripture. To these

four characteristics Berkhof adds the concept of revelation as another characteristic of the

Scripture which evidences the important role Scripture plays in the church and in the

pronouncement of faith claims (1979, 43-44).

The Scriptures, as the product of the revelatory activity of God, are central to the

life and faith of the church. As they are witnessed to by the Holy Spirit they stand as the

standard, the authority, and the foundation for the faith and practice of the community of

faith. This demands that the Scriptures be allowed to provide the boundaries and modes

of expression for the doctrine of Scripture. However, the doctrine of Scripture, the

arrangement of information about the Scriptures in an orderly fashion for affirmation, is

not part of the central doctrine of the church. The Scripture, not the doctrine of Scripture, is the product of revelation and it establishes the boundaries and modes of expression for the doctrine of Scripture. The doctrine of Scripture cannot be the result of rational creation and support alone; it must be shaped by the biblical materials, moderated by the historical tradition of the church, and expressed in terms which the contemporary recipient of the doctrine may understand.

5.2.1.2 The Relationship of Inerrancy to the Doctrine of Scripture

If it is accepted that the doctrine of Scripture is not an essential doctrine of Christianity, the doctrine of inerrancy which is related to the doctrine of Scripture is not either an essential doctrine. The doctrine of inerrancy is, at best, derived from the doctrine of Scripture. A doctrinal affirmation which could be considered to be an essential doctrine would have a significant level of Scriptural proof, be well supported in the historical tradition of the church, and be capable of clear presentation to the present-day recipients. Doctrines which would be derived even from these essential doctrinal affirmations carry somewhat less force in regard to the expectation that they are accepted in a particular and/or non-negotiable form.

To illustrate what is being discussed, Complete Inerrancy not only asserts that the doctrine of Scripture is an essential doctrine for the Church, but it also asserts that the doctrine of inerrancy is equally essential, being explicitly taught in the same biblical materials which affirm the inspiration of Scripture and clearly asserted in the historical tradition of the church. The concept of inerrancy, as seen in this view, resides at the same level of importance as does that of the inspiration of the Bible. Both inspiration and

inerrancy are viewed as being essential doctrines. Conditional Inerrancy, which does not see the doctrine of Scripture as an essential affirmation for the Church, asserts that inspiration is, nonetheless, an important doctrine because it is drawn from the biblical materials. However, inerrancy is viewed as being derived from inspiration more through implication and inference than direct assertion; therefore, inerrancy, for Conditional Inerrancy, is seen as a less important doctrine.

Limited Inerrancy, too, does not see that the doctrine of Scripture is an essential doctrine for Christianity, but it does see inspiration as an important doctrine, albeit with the reformulating of the doctrine to accommodate more variability in its understanding. The concept of inerrancy, which, according to Limited Inerrancy, is neither explicitly taught nor implied by the doctrine of inspiration, is not to be viewed as a doctrinal affirmation. This language is somewhat strong and it should be noted that Limited Inerrancy does see the Scriptures as infallible in that they are inspired and faithful to the purpose and plan of God in providing them.

In that doctrinal affirmations need to have close relationship to the biblical teachings, doctrines which are to be accepted as vital to the life of the church must be clearly and explicitly expressed in the Bible. They must be aligned with the teaching foci of the biblical materials and be affirmed in a wide-spread fashion within the text. Doctrinal affirmations which could be designated as important but not vital to the life of the church would be those which are derived from, implied by, or inferred from the Scriptures and/or the doctrinal assertions which are crucial to the church. The inferential nature of the less vital doctrines indicates that though they do affirm what is to be believed, the specific manner in which that affirmation is to be held may not be

definitively and absolutely demanded.

The doctrine of inerrancy cannot be said to be an essential doctrine, vital to the life of the church. The biblical material cited in support of the doctrine is not near so clear as that which is used to assert that the Bible is inspired. The paucity of texts which can be adduced relative to inerrancy does not seem to reach the necessary level, either as to their number or their relation to the teaching foci of the Bible and the overall plan of God, to see inerrancy as an essential doctrinal affirmation. When the texts which are used are considered more carefully and critically, it becomes evident that a prior commitment to the doctrine of the nature of God as absolutely truthful, and the acceptance that the doctrine of God should produce the doctrine of Scripture, underlies the interpretation which allows their usage in support of inerrancy.

The commitment to understanding the nature of God as absolute truth is not in itself problematic. Such a commitment reflects His revelation in the interactions with His people, Israel, and in His final and perfect revelation in Jesus Christ. However, the question is, does a perfect God of necessity have to cause the record of His revelation, the Bible, to be inerrant? Or, to ask the question another way, should not the record of His revelation, the Bible, be examined to see the manner in which the revelation was recorded? G. C. Berkouwer noted that the perfection of God bespeaks the truth that God is reliable, and that provides the important understanding that the Scriptures, too, are reliable. The trust that is expressed in that reliability is a vital aspect of trusting in the Christ (1975, 241). Berkouwer also noted that the Scriptures are the servant of God; as a servant Scripture is not greater than the Master (1975, 209ff). James Barr was more emphatic, stating that "the Bible does not have the property of perfection, which belongs

to God himself"(1980, 55).

As a doctrine inferred from the doctrine of Scripture, inerrancy could be affirmed in a variety, but not an unlimited variety, of ways, and with numerous, but not infinite, qualifications and modifications. The limitations and qualifiers would need to be drawn from careful interpretation of the biblical texts which would set the parameters within which the concept must be seen. To allow for unlimited variety and infinite qualifications would deny that inerrancy had anything at all to say. It remains to say more below about the way in which inerrancy might be affirmed, but it is noted here that it should be viewed as a less important doctrine and not completely dismissed.

5.2.1.3 The Role of Apologetics in the Formation of Doctrine

From the earliest days of its existence the Christian church has made room for the role of the apologist in defending the faith and practice of the church against the charges from its opponents. Against the Gnostics, Marcionites, pagan philosophers, and others, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and others took quill in hand to give evidence that the Christian faith was both legitimate and correct. The efforts of the early apologists provided the framework within which the church could express and practice its beliefs. Their contribution to the historical development of Christian theology cannot be over-estimated.

The order in which the church developed its doctrinal formulations, and the content of those expressions, was influenced to a large extent by the opposition to which the church was responding. Specific assertions regarding the nature of God from the Ebionites, various expressions of Monarchianism, the Arians, and others, forced the

church to express its understandings about the Trinity. The positions taken by
Apollinaris, Nestorius, and others forced the church to declare that in one person, Jesus
Christ, there are two complete natures, divine and human. The role of apologetics, the
positive expression of what is believed in the face of opposition from Christianity's
antagonists, is recognized as a major contributor to the development of doctrinal
affirmations.

Apologetic reasons do play a part in the development of the manner in which
doctrinal affirmations are stated, but the question at hand is whether those same
apologetic reasons should be the controlling factor for creating and structuring doctrinal
assertions. In light of the present topic, the question is even more focused: is the doctrine
of inerrancy more an apologetic position than a doctrinal affirmation? Was the impetus
for the framing of the concept of inerrancy defense against inroads from views which
were perceived by American Evangelicalism to threaten the integrity of the faith, or
setting forth in a positive manner what was believed to be a teaching focus of the biblical
materials? The threat, real or perceived, faced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
century was that the biblical materials would be reduced to the level of all other ancient
books, thus robbing the Church of seeing the Bible uniquely and authoritatively. The
response was the assertion of the absolute inerrancy of the Bible, an apologetic approach
which turned to the biblical materials to find there the teachings to buttress the position
being taken.

Doctrinal affirmations within the Christian church should have, regardless of
whether they originate as an apologetic concern or not, the support of the testimony of the
biblical materials and the historical tradition of the church. Those two, the theological

formulations and apologetic concerns of the Church are not either mutually exclusive or antithetical to each other, but neither are they inherently the same. The theological expressions of the Church should have primacy over the apologetic concerns and should not be driven by them either in creation or expression.

5.2.2 The Biblical Understanding of the Concept of Truth

Central to the discussion of the inerrancy of the Scripture is the definition of the concepts of truth and its contrary. Before it is possible adequately to construct a doctrinal affirmation about the inerrant character of the Bible, what constitutes truth must be carefully delineated. The options for approaching this issue are either to begin with understandings of the concept which are current in the contemporary era or to ask more directly about what the concept meant in the teachings of the biblical writers and speakers. What is needed in the current discussion of the doctrine of inerrancy is a careful delineation of the biblical understanding of the concepts of truth and its opposite, which, as will be noted, is not error but unfaithfulness.

In the modern era there are two main ways in which the concept of truth is explained. In the first explanation, the correspondence theory of truth, statements are true if they correspond to the facts as they are known. Using this method to evaluate the biblical materials calls for the correspondence of that material to the facts of the modern era as they are known to the observer. The second approach to truth, the coherence theory of truth, sees a statement true or false "in accordance with the extent to which it coheres, or fails to cohere, with a system of other statements" (Thiselton 1978, 894-896). While these are not the only methods of evaluating truth, they are exemplary of the approach

which defines truth in terms of the contemporary era.

Complete Inerrancy, with its firm claim that the biblical materials are entirely without error, tends to define truth from the perspective of the contemporary world view. That world view has been influenced greatly by the rise of scientific precision and philosophical views which tie truth to conformity to reality as it is known by the investigator. With this approach the numbers in the biblical texts must be exact, the geographical descriptions must be precisely in line with the modern world's understanding of them, and the phenomena recorded must be that which conforms to the contemporary interpreter's grasp of the possible.

Both Conditional and Limited Inerrancy begin their approach to understanding the concept of truth with the biblical writers' understanding of that concept. That is, the question to be considered is what did truth and its opposite mean in terms of the Bible? This requires that that presentation be understood, as best as is possible from the distance of nearly two millennia, and that that understanding of truth be applied consistently throughout the discussion of the doctrine of inerrancy. The proper manner in which to define the concept of truth in relation to the biblical materials is to begin with the biblical view, instead of beginning with that of the contemporary interpreter.

The primary word used in the Old Testament which is generally translated "truth" is 'emeth, which denotes firmness and faithfulness (Brown 1968, 54). In Genesis 24:48, the servant of Abraham recounted to the family of Rebekah how the God of Abraham has dealt truly with him, guiding him in the right way to a bride for Issac, Abraham's son. In Joshua 2:12, Rahab requests from Israel's spies in return for her having hidden them from the king of Jericho that they give her pledge of truth, an indication that they will deal

faithfully with her when Israel conquered Jericho. The word is used in Nehemiah 7:2 as a description of Hananiah, the commander of the fortress of Jerusalem, who is said to be a "faithful man and feared God more than many" (NASB). The same concept in the usage of the word is noted in Exodus 18:21 which describes the men whom Moses should choose to assist him in judging the nation: " . . . able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain" (NASB). Truth, then, has to do with faithfulness and reliability; the opposite of truth would be unfaithfulness and unreliability.

E. C. Blackman asserted that in the Old Testament the concept of truth had to do essentially with "reliability, dependableness, and the ability to perform what is required" (1951, 269). The concept can also be expressed by the word faithfulness. A. C. Thiselton, agreeing with Blackman, noted that the majority of Old Testament scholars "claim that for the Hebrew writers 'truth' is close to faithfulness in meaning, suggesting the idea of stability, firmness, or reliability" (1978, 877). To further verify this line of understanding, Thiselton also noted that the Septuagint also uses *pistis*, faith or faithfulness, in translating from the Hebrew the words relating to truth and truthfulness. In studying the Hebrew word *'emeth*, Gottfried Quell asserted that it denoted that which is firm, solid, valid, and binding (see also Kittel 1964, 237; 1964, 232).

The contrary of truth is also depicted in the Old Testament, but not always in ways which correspond to the modern understanding of the concept of error. Walther Günther noted that in the Old Testament the concept of error had to do with wandering about somewhat aimlessly, or being led astray from the proper path. The best illustration of this understanding of the concept of error can be seen in the wanderings of Israel away from God (1978, 458). Kenneth Grayston noted that the concept of error in the Old

Testament is used in four ways: (1) to describe deviation from the right way; (2) to denote

the changed status of the agent: i.e., describing the guilty as contrasted with the innocent;

(3) to characterize rebellion against a superior, or unfaithfulness to an agreement; and (4)

to connote badness in general. The very essence of error, Grayston concluded, was the

breach of the covenant (1951, 227-228).

The concept of error in its biblical usage seems to carry a moral, or ethical, sense

instead of that of being out of line with the factual data of reality. Herbert Braun argued

that the ideas of leading, or going, astray, accompanied by the understandings of deceit

and vacillation are proper understandings of the ethical quality of error, the contrary of

truth (1968, 229-230). Wolfgang Bauder noted that the Septuagint used *paratonia* to

translate the Hebrew *ma'al*, both of which bespeak the deliberate commission of acts of

unfaithfulness. He concluded that error in the Old Testament denoted the conscious and

deliberate sinning against God – unfaithfulness (1978, 585).

The primary word used in the New Testament and translated "truth" is *aletheia*,

which carries the meaning of dependability and uprightness (Arndt 1957, 35). In Romans

3, Paul contrasted the unfaithfulness of human responses to the revelation of God with the

truth, the absolute dependability of God. He noted, in verse 7, that the truth of God was

only highlighted by its opposite, human unfaithfulness. Later in the letter to the church at

Rome, 15:8, Paul noted that he was a minister "on behalf of the truth God to confirm the

promises given to the fathers" (NASB). Again, the concepts of faithfulness and

dependability illustrate the meaning of *aletheia*.

Therefore, in the New Testament the usage of the concept of truth is very similar

to that of the Old Testament. Thiselton noted that the words translated true, or truth, are

more prominent in the writings of John and Paul than in the other writers of the New

Testament. In Paul the concept of truth has to do with the revelation of God, a revelation

which is true in contrast to all lying and deception. Similarly, John uses truth to contrast

starkly with the idea of falsehood and deceit (1978, 883-890). In both John and Paul the

concept of truth is used to refer to the faithfulness of God which is opposite to everything

which is deceptive and lying. Rudolph Bultmann preferred to compare the New

Testament understanding of truth to the concepts of veracity and reliability. In

Bultmann's understanding synonyms such as trustworthy, sincere, and honest are

accurate ways in which to grasp the meaning of the New Testament concept of truth

(1964b, 238-242). Blackman, in studying the Greek word *aletheia*, noted that it means

"the actual state of affairs as contrasted with a false report." The concept of truth,

Blackman concluded, had more to do with that which should be done than with merely

something to be contemplated. Truth was a stimulation to conduct (1951, 270).

In the New Testament, similar to the Old Testament usage, the contrary of truth

had to do with the theological meaning of going, or being led astray, from the truth, or of

being deluded or deceived (Gunther 1978, 459). Grayston similarly noted that error in the

New Testament had to do with the Godless, conscious contradiction of the law, or the

missing of the mark of God's expectations (Grayston 1951, 228-229). Bultmann observed

that the concept of error can indicate the unconscious mistake or, more often, the

misunderstanding which is not based on the lack of information and which is clearly

under God's judgment (Bultmann 1964a, 115-116). Braun observed that based on the

usage of the Septuagint, the New Testament presents the concept of error as transgression

against the revealed will of God and, more specifically, as instigation to idolatry. The

categories in which the contrary of truth is used are clearly religious (1968, 233, 243). Wolfgang Bauder further emphasized the religious nature of the usage of the concept of error by noting that it has to do with the deliberate act of abandoning the Christian faith (1978, 586).

The ultimate expression of truth in the biblical witness is the person of Jesus Christ. In answer to the question from Thomas as to the way to the Father's house to which Jesus was going, Jesus declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6 NASB). Thiselton noted that in this declaration Jesus affirmed that He is the revealed reality of God, that He, Jesus, is truth. Such a revelation of truth in the personal life of the Word made flesh indicated that His witness was valid and that He stood in opposition and contrast to that which is deceptive and false (See also Blackman 1951. 270; 1978, 891-892). This central affirmation that Jesus Christ is the truth is normative for the Christian faith. Hendrikus Berkhof argued that "the divine revelation in Christ is indeed normative, but not exclusive . . . that Christ is the truth does not mean that there are no truths to be found anywhere outside of him, but it does mean that all such truths are fragmentary and broken unless they have become integrated in him as the center" (1979, 48).

C. K. Barrett asserted that the concept of truth as expressed in John's Gospel had to do with the faithfulness of God, "but more characteristically is meant the Christian revelation brought by and revealed in Jesus" (1958, 139). To say that Jesus is the truth is to note that He is the means of access to God, He is the embodiment of the revelation of God (Barrett 1958, 382; Bruce 1983, 299). Leon Morris noted that in John 14:6 the "truth is surely the truth of the gospel, the truth that alone brings people to God, and here it is

coupled with the thought that Jesus may be relied on absolutely" (1986, 236). The inference seems to be very clear: as the truth Jesus declares that God no longer counts the sin of the world against it, that in Him God's forgiveness is made available. The opposite of the truth personified in Jesus would not be error, but would be the lie that God still holds the world accountable for its sin, that forgiveness is not available (See Bultmann 1955, II.18; Ladd 1974, 263f; Richardson 1958, 112f). To say that the biblical materials are true, then, is to assert that they tell the truth that God has been reconciled to the world (2 Corinthians 5:18-19), the opposite of which is the lie that God is still alienated from the world and cannot be appeased.

The biblical usage of the concept of truth and its contrary are certainly different from the modern usage of the concepts which are employed by proponents of seeing inerrancy as a description of the total factual perfection of the biblical materials. In fact, Grenz, in a summary fashion, stated that "most generally the biblical writers spoke of error as mistaken theological conceptions and moral wrong-doing (Ps. 95:10; Jas. 5:20), rather than in the modern sense of precision in factual details" (1994, 523). Berkouwer, also arguing that the biblical understanding of error is far from the modern usage of the term in the inerrancy debate, asserted that "what is meant is not the result of a limited degree of knowledge, but it is a swerving from the truth and upsetting the faith (II Tim. 2:18). The testimony of the Spirit stands opposite that erring, and the confession of the God-breathed Scripture could not be maintained with that kind of deception in view" (1975, 181-182).

The biblical view, influenced as it was by Hebraic thought, viewed truth in terms of conformity to the will and purposes of God, and error as deviation from that (Harrison

1959, 239). In that the will and purposes of God are revealed through the record of the Bible, the entirety of the Bible must be studied carefully in the attempt to discern how in those texts the will and purposes of God were revealed. The imposition of the Hellenized perspective of the nature of God is improper. Truth and its opposite are to be understood in terms of faithfulness, trustworthiness, dependability, and their opposites, to the will and purposes of the God who has revealed Himself, the authoritative record of which is in the Bible (See also Pinnock 1984, 152; Pinnock 1987a, 100). The truth of the Bible is found in its powerful message, personified in Jesus, that God no longer counts the sin of the world against it; the opposite of which is the lie that this is not the case. This clearly means that the biblical materials must be allowed to determine the nature of truth and its opposite and not have imposed upon them meanings which are foreign to them.

Not only is it clear that the biblical usage of the concept of truth stands in opposition to the concept of truth used in the claims for the factual inerrancy of the biblical materials, major figures in the history of the church can be adduced in support of the biblical position. In a series of letters between Jerome and Augustine some insight into the latter's view of the factual accuracy of the biblical materials can be found. Augustine noted that "it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books; that is to say, that men by whom the Scripture has been given to us, and committed to writing, did put down in those books anything false." He continued by defining the concept of "false" in terms of deception: "It is one question whether it may be at any time the duty of a good man to deceive; but it is another question whether it can have been the duty of a writer of Holy Scripture to deceive; nay, it is not another question – it is no question at all" (1956,

1:251-252). In subsequent correspondence Augustine opined that if Jerome would not

speak with "an intention of dissimulation and deceit, how much more reasonable is it for

me to believe, in regard to the Apostle Paul, that he did not think one thing and affirm

another" (1956, 1:351).

Augustine, in <u>Harmony of the Gospels</u>, accepted that the Gospels contained

differing accounts of the same events, that the word order was different, that different

words were used, that words were omitted, and that some events were omitted and others

added, but did not see that these detracted from the authority of the Gospels. Falsehood is

not that the words are not in agreement because truth is "faithfulness of doctrinal

teaching" (1956, 6:118). He summarized his position by stating that

> it is therefore a useful principle, and one particularly worthy of being borne in
> mind, when we are speaking of the concord of the evangelists, that there is not
> divergence from truth, even when they introduce some saying different from what
> was actually uttered by the person concerning whom the narrative is given,
> provided that, notwithstanding this, they set forth as his mind precisely what is
> also to be conveyed by that one among them who reproduces the words as they
> were literally spoken. From this we learn the salutary lesson, that our aim should
> be nothing else than to ascertain what is the mind and intention of the person who
> speaks. (1956, 6:119)

In recounting the remorse of Judas after betraying the Christ, Matthew 27:9-10

asserts, "Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying,

'and they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by

the sons of Israel; and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord directed me'"

(NASB). Commenting on this passage, Calvin said, "How the name of Jeremiah crept in,

I confess that I do not know, nor do I give myself much trouble to inquire. The passage

itself plainly shows that the name of Jeremiah has been put down by mistake, instead of

Zechariah, (xi. 13;) for in Jeremiah we find nothing of this sort, nor any thing that even

approaches it" (1949a, 272). Calvin felt that the quotation, taken very loosely from the Zechariah passage, was applicable to Jesus as it described the contemptuous and demeaning manner in which He was treated, His value being reduced to that of a common laborer.

Calvin noted that the writer of Hebrews 10:5 did not quote correctly the words of David from Psalms 40:6, "My ears Thou has opened" (NASB). The Hebrews citation reads, "But a body Thou hast prepared for Me" (NASB). He asserted that the writer followed the Greek translation, "for in quoting these words the Apostles were not so scrupulous, provided they perverted not the Scriptures to their own purpose. We must always have a regard to the end for which they quote passages, for they are very careful as to the main object, so as not to turn Scripture to another meaning; but as to words and other things, which bear not on the subject in hand, they use great freedom" (1948a, 227-228). Similarly, Calvin observed that Paul's usage, in Roman 3:4, of Psalm 116:11 was not in line with the intention of the Psalm passage. Paul argued that human failure does not detract from or deny God's faithfulness, but the Psalmist asserted that "all men are liars" (NASB). Again Calvin's explanation was that "Paul has followed the Greek version, which answered his purpose here even better. We indeed know that the Apostles in quoting Scripture often used a freer language than the original; for they counted it enough to quote what was suitable to their subject; hence they made no great account of words" (1947, 116-117).

The speech of Stephen at his trial before the Sanhedrin, recorded in Acts 7, contains several statements which are difficult to reconcile. In regard to the conflict between Acts 7:2 and Genesis 11 and 12 as to when God spoke to Abraham, Calvin noted

that the intent of Stephen was not to specify the time of Abraham's departure, but to show

"the cause of his departure, to wit, because he was commanded by God to flit into another

place" (1949b, 251). In Acts 7:14 Stephen asserted that seventy-five persons went into

Egypt, but Genesis 46:26-27 only mentioned seventy. Calvin's resolution was to note that

"this difference came about through the error of the writers which wrote out the books"

(1949b, 263-264). Stephen asserted that the patriarchs who went into Egypt and died

there were carried out when Israel left and buried in Shechem, Acts 7:15-16, but Exodus

13:19 and Joshua 24:32 indicate that only the bones of Joseph were carried by Israel from

Egypt. Calvin's response to this apparent discrepancy was to admit that

> I can affirm nothing concerning this matter for a certainty, save only that this is
> either a speech wherein is synecdoche, or else that Luke rehearseth this not so
> much out of Moses, as according to the old fame; as the Jews had many things in
> time past from the fathers, which were delivered, as it were, from hand to hand.
> And whereas he saith afterward, they were laid in the sepulchre which Abraham
> had bought of the sons of Hamor, it is manifest that there is a fault in the word of
> Stephen. For Abraham had bought a double cave of Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23:9)
> to bury his wife Sarah in; but Joseph was buried in another place, to wit, in the
> field which his father Jacob had bought of the sons of Hamor for an hundred
> lambs. Wherefore this place must be amended. (1949b, 264)

Rogers and McKim, in their analysis, asserted that for Augustine "error . . . had

to do with deliberate and deceitful telling of that which the author knew to be untrue."

Integrity of the biblical writer's intentions was the important factor, not "limitations of

knowledge, various perspectives in reporting events, or historical or cultural conditioning

of the writers" (Rogers 1979, 31). In summarizing the view of Calvin they concluded that

he was unconcerned with normal, human inaccuracies in minor matters. Technical errors

were viewed as a part of human communication and they enhanced the Scriptures

"because they were a part of God's gracious accommodation of himself to human means

and thus made the message more persuasive to human beings" (Rogers 1979, 109-111). The biblical writers never deliberately lied, knowingly told an untruth, nor participated in deception.

5.2.3 The Necessity of Allowing the Bible to Speak for Itself

5.2.3.1 The Bible Must Be Allowed to Speak for Itself

If the biblical materials, which record the revelation of God as to His nature and purposes, are to be consulted in the determination of the concepts of truth and its opposite, the connection between the second and third criteria for constructing a doctrine of inerrancy can be seen. The starting point in the constructing of any doctrinal affirmation must be the biblical materials, and they must be allowed to speak for themselves. It is inappropriate to begin with an *a priori* item and from it deduce what the Scriptures should teach about a particular expression of faith. The way in which the Scriptures do express themselves is of more concern than the way in which they should express themselves. Barr argued that the doctrine of Scripture must be built "from below," which means "we should read it for what it itself is and what it itself says, and avoid reading into it the 'evangelical' doctrine of Scripture" (1980, 88).

The two logical approaches of deduction and induction should not be set up as being antithetical to each other in the constructing of doctrine; they do function in a complementary manner. However, preference should be given in the order of usage to induction. Again, that is to say that the starting point is the way the Scriptures are and not the way they should be. Grenz argued that both deduction and induction should be employed and that "the inductive method yields the conclusion that adequacy for the

purpose of the author is of paramount significance for any useful concept of inerrancy" (1994, 522). Such a combining of induction and deduction will show that the biblical authors were not concerned with the modern concept of precision of detail. The phenomena of the texts must be examined carefully to discern the ways in which they record the revelation of God. From that careful examination doctrinal affirmations can be constructed, deductions can be made, and applications to the faith and practice of the community can be employed.

To allow for the Scriptures to speak for themselves requires that strenuous efforts be made to understand them as well as is possible. The best hermeneutical principles must be applied with consistency, with every effort being made to acknowledge the presence of pre-conceived ideas and beliefs in the mind of the interpreter. The complete abdication of all pre-conceptions may not be possible, but as they are honestly recognized their negative impact on the process of interpreting the Bible can be minimized. The ongoing interaction with views which differ from one's own is vital to exposing presuppositions which, if not recognized, have the potential of preventing the accurate hearing of the biblical message.

As has been noted at several points, there are two major biblical passages which are the focal point of the discussion about the doctrine of Scripture in general and the doctrine of inerrancy in particular: 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. Paul affirms in his letter to Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (NASB). Berkouwer noted that the term inspired, from the Greek *theopneustos*, "entails a positive description and relates

Scripture directly to God" (1975, 139). Given this, it is more correct to describe the Scriptures as "God-breathed," which points to the "unique origin and to a unique relation of Holy Scripture to God" (Berkouwer 1975, 140). The understanding of the origin of Scripture is not all that Paul desired to affirm in the passage. Berkouwer correctly noted that Paul points to the functionality of the God-breathed Word. "This self-witness of Scripture is not an independent 'proof' for the divinity of the truth that seems to precede faith in the message of Holy Scripture." Rather this understanding leads to a believing involvement with Scripture and its message, concretely with salvation and wisdom (Berkouwer 1975, 142-143).

James Orr observed that Paul refers to a collection of "sacred writings" known to Timothy from childhood, the Old Testament Scriptures, which were able to make one wise to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. "The Scriptures included in this collection were 'God-inspired' – more broadly, 'every Scripture,' which may include a Gospel like Luke's (cf. 1 Tim. v.18), or even Paul's own Epistles (cf. 2 Pet. iii. 15)" (1969, 161). These Scriptures were profitable for their function in the spiritual life of the hearer/reader. Orr concluded his treatment of this Pauline passage by noting that Paul "does not give any description of the nature or degree of the inspiration he attributes to the Old Testament (or other) Scriptures. He does not, e.g., say that it secured verbal inerrancy in ordinary historical, geographical, chronological, or scientific matters. But (1) it seems at least clearly implied that there was no error which could interfere with or nullify the utility of Scripture for the ends specified; and (2) the qualities which inspiration is said to impart to Scripture, rendering it profitable in so great and rich a degree, make it clear that the inspiration itself was of a high and exceptional kind" (1969, 162).

Karl Barth, commenting on the 2 Timothy 3 passage, observed that Paul based the message on the "clear and express remembrance of the fact that the Scriptures have already played a definite, decisive role in the life of his reader, that they have already given the proof of what they claim to be, that they have already shown their power, the specific power of instruction in the faith which saves him, and, concretely, in the faith which is founded on Jesus Christ, directed to Him, and actual through Him" (1975, I.2:504). Because of this, the Scriptures are expected to have a positive function in the on-going spiritual life of the hearer/reader. That which gives to the Scriptures this power to impact lives is to be found in the assertion of Paul that they are *theopneustos*. Barth noted that this means that they are "given and filled and ruled by the Spirit of God, and actively outbreathing and spreading abroad and making known the Spirit of God. . . . At the decisive point all that we have to say about it can consist only in an underlining and delimiting of the inaccessible mystery of the free grace in which the Spirit of God is present and active before and above and in the Bible" (1975, I.2:504).

Calvin observed that in this passage written to Timothy the apostle asserts the authority of the Scriptures on the basis of their being inspired by God. "Our religion is distinguished from all others in that the prophets have spoken not of themselves, but as instruments of the Holy Spirit; and what they have brought to us, they received by heavenly commission" (1948b, 248-249). The linkage between the Scriptures being inspired and being profitable, or functional, is also observed by Calvin: "God gave us Scripture for our good, and not to satisfy our curiosity, or to indulge our desire for showing off, or to give us material for babble and fable" (1948b, 250). Though Paul is clearly addressing the value of the Old Testament in this passage, Calvin included the

New Testament in the message because, "the writings of the apostles contain nothing that is not simply a natural explanation of the law and the prophets, together with a straightforward presentation of what they contain" (1948b, 251).

The second major Scripture passage used in the discussion of the doctrine of Scripture is 2 Peter 1:20-21: "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (NASB). Barth noted that in this passage Peter places the "prophetic word" alongside the visible manifestations which he had witnessed in the transfiguration of Jesus (2 Peter 1:16-17). The prophetic word is the light in a dark place for its recipients because it is the product of men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (Barth 1975, I.2:504-505). Barth noted that the decisive center to which both the 2 Timothy and 2 Peter passages point "is in both instances indicated by a reference to the Holy Spirit, and indeed in such a way that He is described as the real author of what is stated or written in Scriptures" (1975 I.2:505).

In commenting on the passage in 2 Peter, Calvin noted that Peter is asserting that the writers "did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments" (1963, 343). The prophecies are the oracles of God, not having been set in motion by the action or initiative of the humans who uttered and wrote them. They, the humans, were moved by the Spirit and dared not say anything of their own initiative. "They followed the Spirit as their guide and obeyed him to such an extent that their mouths became his temple, and he ruled in them" (Calvin 1963, 344).

Berkouwer argued that the Petrine affirmation of the prophets being moved by the Holy Spirit does emphasize the "dimension of authority, trustworthiness, and

immutability" of the Scripture. "This origin does not exclude the human character of it (men have spoken): but this 'from God' gives a unique quality of trustworthiness to these human words, which is essential for the God-breathed Scripture" (1975, 142). This passage affirms that in the Scripture one is faced with the reality that in the human words God has spoken, which, for Berkouwer, is the "deepest dimension of scriptural faith" (1975, 143).

The Bible extant when both Paul and Peter asserted that the Scripture was God-breathed, the product of the moving of the Holy Spirit, was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made in Alexandria, Egypt in the third and second centuries B.C. The mythology surrounding the creation of the Septuagint, fueled mainly by the Letter of Aristeas, which dates from 100 B.C. and claims to have been written about a century and a half earlier, includes the sending from Palestine, at the request of the Egyptian ruler, seventy-two rabbis who in seventy days completed the translation task. Later additions to the mythology had the seventy-two rabbis secluded from each other, each translating the entire Old Testament, and their products being exactly alike when the work was completed (See Bruce 1950, 141-144; Bruce 1988, 43-44; Muller 1996; Swete 1968, 1-28).

The need of the Jewish community in Alexandria for the Old Testament in their adopted language was far more the motivation for the translation than merely the desire of the Egyptian Ptolemy to expand the holdings of the world-class library there. F. F. Bruce noted that the language of the Septuagint suggests that the translators were Egyptian Jews rather than Palestinian rabbis imported for the task of translation (1950, 143). The several extant manuscripts of the Septuagint indicate that there was no single

Hebrew edition from which all translation work was done, which indicates that the Old

Testament canon was not absolutely set at the time of the writing of the Septuagint. The

Septuagint also included several additional books (fifteen books or parts of books) which

were not included in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), most of which are now called

the Apocrypha. While Protestantism later decided that these additional volumes were not

to be considered sacred, they were a part of the Bible for which Peter and Paul claimed

inspiration.

The writers of the New Testament, in quoting the Old Testament, make use of the

Septuagint, the Hebrew Old Testament, and either some other forms of the Old Testament

in Greek which are not extant or more free citations of the Septuagint. Bruce noted that

Luke and the writer of Hebrews made the most use of the Septuagint in Old Testament

quotations, while Matthew deviated the most from the Septuagint (1950, 148). The

principle source for Old Testament quotations in the New Testament was the Septuagint

(Swete 1968, 392). There are also Old Testament quotes in the New Testament which are

not found in the extant manuscripts of the Septuagint as cited by the New Testament

writers, which indicates that the authors cited the Septuagint quite freely. For example,

the quotation in Hebrews 1:6, "And let all the angels of God worship Him" (NASB),

though attributed in most reference editions to the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32:43, is

not to be found there as cited in Hebrews (Bruce 1950, 148). The citation by the writer of

Hebrews used "angels" instead of "sons" which is to be found in the Septuagint material

there.

The great usage of the Septuagint by the New Testament led the Jews to lose

interest in it and accuse the church of deliberately adopting the Septuagint. An example

of the concerns raised by the Jews against the church was the usage of the Septuagint in the Old Testament quotation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts15:16-18. The Acts quotation is favorable to the church's missiological movement toward the acceptance of Gentiles, noting that the re-establishment of the Davidic line was "in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old" (NASB). The Hebrew of Amos argued that the purpose for raising up the Davidic house was "that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name, declares the Lord who does this" (NASB).

The Bible of the New Testament era was the Septuagint (an inaccurate translation which uses words, phrases and sentences not found in the Hebrew text), from which the New Testament writers quoted frequently. The New Testament writers also quoted from Greek texts which are not found in the extant Septuagint. The Septuagint is acknowledged to have tendencies which appealed to the church and alienated the Jews, such as the missiological aim of using the Amos 9 text in Acts 15. The Septuagint includes books not accepted in the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament writers quote from some of them (e.g. Jude 9, 14-15). Yet, the Apostles certainly affirmed that in this body of material the Almighty God was speaking to provide His revelation to humans so that they could become fully equipped for accomplishing His purposes. Thus, they claimed inspiration for an inaccurate translation which included much that was not in the Hebrew Bible. They were certainly affirming that the concept of inspiration must be applied to the message of the revelation of God and not to the words employed in the writing of that revelation. That central message is that which must be said to be inerrant.

The limiting focus on a fixed body of autographs is also more difficult to maintain in the face of the picture of a more fluid situation in the state of the texts of the Scriptures.

The major biblical passages regarding the doctrine of Scripture affirm their origin and authority, but do not support the concept of their absolute inerrancy. The Complete Inerrancy position falls into the trap of approaching the Scriptures from established *a priori* positions, such as that the absolute perfection of God must be reflected in the absolute perfection of the Bible by being absolutely inerrant; thus the Scriptures are judged as to what they must be rather than as to what they are. Consistency should demand that if the Scriptures are to be allowed to speak for themselves, they must be allowed to do so without coming under the judgment of external criteria.

5.2.3.2 Affirm the Human Authorship of the Biblical Texts

The 2 Timothy 3:16-17 passage affirmed that the Scriptures are the product of the breath of God and 2 Peter 1:20-21 added that "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (NASB). Both passages affirmed that the Scriptures are the result of the working of God, a work in which the human authors spoke. It can be noted correctly that this work of God did not void the humans of their full humanity in the process. Any proposal about the doctrine of inerrancy must take seriously the reality that human authors were used in the process of writing the Bible. They were far more than mere recording instruments or puppet-like individuals superintended by God in the writing of that which was to become the Bible. They were authors who made use of their vocabularies, thought processes, and limited understandings.

The divine-human authorship of the Bible is being asserted. While that appears to

be a dual authorship, it must be remembered that the result of their writing was the

inspired Scripture, the word of prophecy made more sure. In a mysterious manner God

worked confluently with the human authors to the result that their writings served His

purpose and plan, doing so without violating the humanity of the authors. In a powerful

way God accepted their limitations of historical perspective, scientific knowledge, and

incomplete expressiveness and made use of them to accomplish His purpose in providing

an authoritative record of His revelation for all to see.

As noted above, the speech of Stephen, Acts 7, reveals several areas in which

either Stephen or the author of Acts presented information that does not accord with that

provided in the Genesis and Exodus records. Matthew 13:31-32 records a parable of Jesus

comparing the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed which is said to be "smaller than all

other seeds" (NASB). While the mustard seed is indeed a small seed, it is not the smallest

seed; that distinction goes to the orchid seed (Trever 1962, 3:476-477). In the accounts of

the burial of King Uzziah (2 Kings 15:7 and 2 Chronicles 26:23) the writer of 2 Kings

states that "they buried him with his fathers in the city of David" (NASB), but the 2

Chronicles account noted that "they buried him with his fathers in the field of the grave

which belonged to the kings" (NASB), indicating that Uzziah was not buried inside the

city as were the other kings. Matthew 27:3-10 attributes the death of Judas to his hanging

himself, but Acts 1:18 pictures Judas' death as the result of his jumping off of some

precipice and being killed. In Mark 1:2 a saying which seems to come from Malachi 3:1

is attributed to Isaiah. These examples of the limitations expressed by the human authors

of Scripture indicate that their humanness was not obliterated by the working of the Holy

Spirit through them in the writing of Scripture.

To describe this human and divine participation in the writing of Scripture,

Berkouwer preferred the term organic, which indicates "the human functionality in the

God-breathed Scripture" (1975, 153). The term can be used to describe the human authors

as no more than organs, or tools, in the hands of God, but Berkouwer strongly rejects that

meaning because it would be little different from the concept of mechanical inspiration.

The concept of organic inspiration denotes that "Scripture comes to us in words as they

are spoken by men" (1975, 155). The best analogy for expressing the human and divine

interaction is that of the moving of God upon the prophets in which the prophet's words

were theirs and yet God's. "The prophetic word is truly God's Word, not because human

words are transubstantiated into something divine, but because the word of the prophets

is truly God's Word addressed to men" (Berkouwer 1975, 146).

Several metaphors are employed in the attempt to explain the human-divine

interaction in the giving of Scripture – confluence, dictation, etc. Berkouwer argued that

the best metaphor to describe that interaction is that of continuity, which notes the "way

of the God-breathed Scripture which takes the living human being into service and does

not 'abstractly, supernaturally' float high above us" (1975, 171-172). The human authors

are taken into the service of God in witnessing to His revelation and their involvement is

honored, not ignored. This process of continuity in which the divine and human activities

are valued, neither obliterating the other, creates the Scripture which is time bound and

yet has eternal authority (Berkouwer 1975, 194).

The human-divine interaction in the writing of Scripture is maintained even more

stringently by Barth, who asserted that "in the Bible we meet with human words in

human speech, and in these words, and therefore by means of them, we hear of the

lordship of the triune God" (1975, I.2:463). By words of the apostles and prophets the Bible, as a witness of revelation, is a revelation to its readers. Barth maintained that the Bible is a human and temporal word, "and therefore also a word which is conditioned and limited" (1975, I.2:507). In a very controversial contention, at least for American Evangelicals, Barth stated, "to the bold postulate, that if their word is to be the Word of God they must be inerrant in every word, we oppose the even bolder assertion, that according to the scriptural witness about man, which applied to them too, they can be at fault in any word, and have been at fault in every word, and yet according to the same scriptural witness, being justified and sanctified by grace alone, they have still spoken the Word of God in their fallible and erring word" (1975, I.2:529-530). The humanity of the biblical texts cannot be ignored any more than can be the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Grenz, an American Evangelical, and not willing to go as far as did Barth in stressing the humanity of the biblical material, agreed that the role of the human authors must not be overlooked. He noted that while, as he viewed it, the concept of the inerrancy of the Bible serves to highlight the Evangelical commitment to the primacy of Scripture and to enhance reverence for it, it can lead to a devaluation of the human authors (1993, 110). However the doctrine of inerrancy is expressed, Grenz argued that it must include "a forthright acknowledgment that the divine Word in the Bible comes to us always and solely through human words with the result that such human words are the Word of God" (1993, 111). The maintenance of the tension between the human and divine aspects of the writing of Scripture is very difficult, but it is as important as it is difficult. The two elements are vital to the doctrine of Scripture and they must not be either overlooked or explained away. To fail to acknowledge the human aspect is to fail fully to understand the

Bible (Berkouwer 1975, 22-23).

Herman Ridderbos, in agreement with the vital role of maintaining the human and divine tension in the Scriptures, asserted that "inspiration consists in this, that God makes the words of men the instrument of his word, that he uses human words for his divine purposes" (1978, 25). The human words are used of God, and because of that they participate in the authority and infallibility of the Word of God. They remain, however, human words, but now they are in the hands of God and used for His purposes.

Another concept which is useful in describing the human and divine interaction in Scripture is that of accommodation. Calvin, who often spoke of the Word of God in terms of its being an accommodation to the human vessels through whom it came, noted that "the sublime mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven came to be expressed largely in mean and lowly words" (1960, I.viii.1). This accommodation of God to the limitations of the human authors prevented those whom Calvin called the impious from claiming that the force of the Bible is to be found in the quality of its verbiage. The force of the Scriptures is manifested by the working of the Holy Spirit to make the words of Scripture live in the believing reader/hearer.

Rogers and McKim noted that for Calvin accommodation "always had to do with the adaptation of the verbal message to the makeup of the persons being addressed, taking account of their situation, character, intelligence, and emotional state" (1979. 98). This usage of the concept of accommodation enabled Calvin to explain difficulties in the text of Scripture and to understand God's relationship with human beings. He expressed it in these terms: "For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us? Thus

such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness" (1960. I.xiii.1).

The concept of accommodation was also used by the other major Reformer, Luther. Rogers and McKim noted that "for Luther, the Bible's authority was in its content – Christ – and its function – bringing salvation. The Bible's imperfect form of human words was, for Luther, an example of God's gracious condescension. God was willing and able to clothe his Word in an adequate, though earthly form" (Rogers 1979, 78). That God was able to make use of the limitations of human speech and understanding in witnessing to His revelation enhances the recognition of His ability to accomplish His saving mission.

While the analogy of the incarnation of Christ to the divine-human authorship of the Bible has its limitations, it does serve to assist in explaining the need to affirm the humanity of the biblical materials. Berkouwer, while admitting that there is some usefulness to the analogy, expressed reluctance to make use of it (1975, 197-203). He observed that the confessions of the church did not use the analogy and raised several theological concerns about it. The church has consistently affirmed that Jesus was without sin, even though He was, because of the incarnation, both fully human and divine. That is not the same claim that either has been, or can be, made of Scripture. In the incarnation of Christ there was a personal union of the human and the divine. However, the confession that Scripture is the Word of God "does not say that Scripture originates from a union of divine and human factors, but points to the mystery of the human words as God's Word" (Berkouwer 1975, 203). Further, Berkouwer noted that the

Jesus Christ of the incarnation is to be worshiped, but that is not claimed for the Scripture.

Barth, admitting that the analogy of the incarnation is not a perfect one, saw some value in it. The analogy is flawed in that "in contrast to the humanity of Jesus Christ, there is not unity of person between God and the humanity of the prophets and apostles. Again, in contrast to the humanity of Jesus Christ, the humanity of the apostles is not taken up into the glory of God" (1975, I.2:500). The value in the analogy is to be found in the recognition that as Christ was neither divine nor human only, so the Scriptures are neither human nor divine only. As Christ, because of the incarnation, did not become a "third-something, " neither did the Scriptures become a "third-something" because of the interaction of the human and the divine. Barth averred that the Bible, because of that interaction, was "a witness of revelation which itself belongs to revelation, and historically a very human literary document" (1975, I.2:501).

Rogers and McKim argued that for Luther the accommodation of God in giving the Scripture is an incarnational style of communication, best understood by the use of the analogy with the incarnation of Christ. They noted that "Luther saw a divine and a human nature of the Bible just as there was a divine and human nature in Christ" (1979, 78). In his Christology Luther stressed the real humanity of Christ, and he accepted the full humanity of the Bible.

5.2.3.3 The Need to Honor the Texts of the Bible Available Now

Complete Inerrancy, wishing to contend for the absolute inerrancy of the biblical texts and yet being faced with the reality that the present texts contain areas of great

difficulty, appeals to the original writings, the autographs, as that which is absolutely inerrant. They admit that no inerrant autograph has been discovered, but assert that no errant autograph has been discovered either. The appeal to something which is not extant is problematic, despite the efforts of Complete Inerrancy to argue that there are good reasons to both posit their existence and their inerrancy. The problem remains, however, they are not extant; they cannot be examined so as to serve as witnesses on the question of inerrancy.

While the appeal for the inerrancy of the autographs is not an appropriate one, it should be noted that there must have been the first copies of the biblical texts at some point. From them the copies, and copies of copies, were made. There were not necessarily autographs written by the hand of the biblical writer, or the amanuensis of the writer, for each biblical book. The means by which the biblical books came to the condition in which they are now found were varied and complicated. There may well have been editing, redacting, and a process of composition, but at some point the first edition of the book as it is presently known was produced. In some ways that first edition of the book which would become a part of the Bible could be called the autograph.

The distance between the present, in which the copies are all that is extant for use, and those autographs is so great that it is not wise to suggest that the autographs were substantially other than what the copies are. To argue that the autographs were absolutely inerrant and to accept that the copies are not, is to assert that God either could not, or would not, preserve the record of His revelation in the manner in which it first existed. Would He have been concerned to provide absolute correctness in every aspect at the level of the first writings of the biblical material and then abandon them to the corruption

of the copyists? If so, how could it be posited that He was concerned about absolute

inerrancy at all? Perhaps it is wiser to accept that there were first editions of the biblical

material and they might be called autographs, but to not build the argument for inerrancy

upon them.

Correctly all three options about inerrancy in American Evangelicalism note that

Jesus and the apostles expressed a very high view of the Scriptures, seeing them as

authoritative and possessing the power of command. It could be said, correctly, that Jesus

and the apostles saw the Scriptures as inspired. But, only Conditional and Limited

Inerrancy observe, again correctly, that the Scriptures which Jesus and the apostles held

in such high esteem were those which were available to them in their day. At no point did

they ever appeal to autographs which they did not have. When using Jesus and the

apostles as the model for accepting the Scripture, and from that model constructing a

doctrine of inerrancy, it must be remembered that the copies of Scripture extant in His

day were that which He valued.

Kuyper noted that Jesus' view of Scripture accepted the Old Testament writings

as forming one organic whole and that within that organic whole a word or a fragment

was authoritative and could be appealed to (1968, 431-433). Jesus accepted the idea of

inspiration, which, as Kuyper understood it, meant "that God by His Spirit enters into the

spirit of man, and introduces into his spirit, i.e., his consciousness, a concrete thought,

which this man could not derive from himself nor from other men" (1968, 439). Such a

view of Scripture, which passed from Jesus to His followers, created a subjection in faith

to the witness of the Old Testament, not based on imposed rational and factual categories,

which allowed the New Testament to accept the Old Testament (Berkouwer 1975, 69).

The Bible for which Jesus and His followers claimed inspiration and authoritative status was the Septuagint. Berkouwer noted that the Septuagint was used in the early church without any reluctance or consideration of it as a secondary Old Testament, and that through the usage of the Septuagint the Apocrypha entered the church (1975, 98-99). Kelly observed that the first Bible of the church was the Old Testament and that it was accepted as a "Christian book which spoke of the Savior on every page" (1960, 52). That Old Testament was the Septuagint, which "always included, though with varying degrees of recognition, the so-called Apocrypha, or deutero-canonical books" (Kelly 1960, 53). Most of the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament are from the Septuagint (See also Berkhof 1979, 80-83; Berkouwer 1975, 221-228; Kuyper 1968, 450-451).

Through the centuries from the time in which the biblical authors wrote until the present the copies have served well to bring the record of God's revelation with force to bear upon the lives of human beings. Countless people have been influenced, and even changed, by the power of the message of the redeemer God, who by the revelation of Himself has provided the means by which fallen humans may be reconciled. If God has been pleased to make full use of the biblical materials which are currently available, materials in which there are areas of difficulty, that says much about the way in which He planned to work. Rather than seeing the difficulties in the texts as the evidence of departure from the perfection which is no longer extant, it is more accurate to suggest that what is, is what God intended for humanity to have, and that through it, difficulties and all, He is working to accomplish His good plans.

Instead of constructing a doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible based upon supposedly inerrant autographs which are not longer extant, it is suggested that the

doctrine of inerrancy should have applicability to the texts which are in use at the present. To do so will require the acceptance of the phenomena of the current texts, a refocusing of attention away from every detail of the texts, a better understanding of the concepts of truth and its opposite, and a dependence upon the faith in the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit engenders. Grenz noted that the authority of the Bible does not depend upon its inerrancy. "Indeed, most persons find translations of the Scriptures, which are definitely not inerrant, to be authoritative and profitable" (1994, 523). The focus in the doctrine of Scripture, and the doctrine of inerrancy in particular, should be on the texts available to the contemporary reader.

5.2.3.4 Admission of Difficulties in the Text of Scripture

Whatever doctrinal affirmations one makes about the inerrancy of the Bible, attention must be directed to the texts which are available at the present time. To base a doctrinal assertion upon non-existent autographs which cannot be examined is, as has been noted above, inappropriate. In that the present texts do contain difficulties, the proposed doctrine of inerrancy must be prepared to respond to those difficulties. Having granted that the human authors of Scripture must be acknowledged as real authors, the limitations expressed in their writings must be accepted.

Those areas of difficulties in the biblical texts should not be considered as errors as does Limited Inerrancy. The preference in this proposed approach is to acknowledge them as difficulties and not assign them the label of errors. Donald Bloesch argued that "the Bible contains the perfect Word of God in the imperfect words of human beings. It is better to speak of ambiguities and inconsistencies in the Bible, even imperfections, rather

than error" (1994, 115). It is true that at one level the point being made is one of semantic

differentiation which is made to maintain a commitment to the authority of the Bible.

However, it is equally true that if the previously suggested definition of the opposite of

truth is accepted, the designation of error would not accurately describe the difficulties in

the biblical texts. If the opposite of truth has to do with defection from the nature and

purposes of God, intent to deceive, and failure to accomplish the desired result of

bringing persons into relationship with the redeemer God, the descriptor of error is not

applicable to the Bible.

To prefer the word difficulty over error in relationship to the troublesome areas

within the Bible is not to attempt to overlook the reality that there are those very difficult

areas. There are discrepancies in parallel accounts, differences in numbers used to

describe the same account, theological and moral concerns about particular commands of

God and the actions of God's people, and historical and geographical descriptions which

are hard to reconcile with reality. A doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible must take these

difficulties seriously, admitting that it is not appropriate to suppose that every one of

them yields to a solution.

Some of the difficulties within the texts of the Bible can be understood when

further study is made of the biblical world from which they came. Better insight into the

accepted rules for writing in the period during which the biblical authors worked helps to

understand imprecise quotations and usage of numbers. Newer archaeological discoveries

bring insight about historical and geographical items which helps to understand some of

those apparent inaccuracies in the biblical texts. A better grasp of the biblical world view

assists in responding to some of the theological and moral complexities found in the

Bible. Broadening the focus of inquiry to the larger context of particular passages, even to including the context of the entirety of the Bible on occasion, opens a more clear understanding of some particular passages which were troublesome.

The difficulties within the Bible are not related to the essence of the biblical message and many of them do yield to further investigation and scholarly inquiry. The over-focusing on difficulties can lead to missing the message, the intent of God, which is not diminished by those difficulties. The doctrine of inerrancy, which is noting that the Bible is inerrant in that which it affirms, that which is revelatory of the intent of the redeemer God toward the creation, is not hampered by the difficulties in the texts.

That the difficulties in the text of the Bible do not impact the essence of the message and that some of those difficulties can be resolved by further and intense study of the texts and the times of the Bible, is true. However, there are difficulties which do not yield to such investigation, and that, too, must be admitted. It is possible that in the future they will be better understood because of advances in scholarship, but it is also possible that they will remain as complex puzzles without resolution. It is still being suggested, however, that they, unresolved though they are, do not detract from the overall plan of God, that in His providence He has allowed them to be a part of the authoritative record of His revelation, and that they do not alter the basic affirmation of the inerrancy of the Bible.

5.2.3.5 The Role of the Historical-Critical Method

Fear of the historical-critical method, fueled in part by the fear that its results might bring into question the absolute inerrancy of the biblical text, has dominated much

of American Evangelicalism, especially the proponents of Complete Inerrancy. The

conclusion that it is possible to extend the approach and results of the historical-critical

method toward a destruction of faith in the Bible has caused some to reject the totality of

the discipline and to see in it minimal positive benefits for biblical scholarship. However,

historical-critical exegesis is not the real enemy and its results are not necessarily

damaging to faith in the authority of the Scriptures.

Berkouwer clearly called for the employment of critical studies, noting that "for

the person who views the dualism between simple faith and biblical science as a real

danger, there is the inevitable problem of the function of all questions that come up in the

examination of Scripture" (1975, 16). In that the Bible is written in human words and

must be examined carefully to ascertain its meaning, the scientific approach is necessary

(1975, 20). Indeed, as Berkouwer argued, the scientific study of the biblical materials is

not only a right it is a duty because the God-breathed Scripture is accessible to humans in

human words. If destructive results occur it is the result of faulty presuppositions and not

fault in the scientific approach to the texts (1975, 363-364).

James Barr furthered the argument for the employment of historical-critical

exegesis by asserting that "the only way we can recover the sense of Scripture today is by

asking what it really means. It is the critical study of Scripture, and the critical theology

which accompanies it, that does this" (1980, 68). Barr carefully admits that he is not

desirous of forcing upon anyone any specific results of critical study, such as requiring

belief in the documentary hypothesis of the writing of the Pentateuch. What he does call

for is "the acceptance that these things are possible and that they are legitimate for use in

the church and in the teaching of Scripture" (1980, 89). Such a call certainly reinforces

the expectation that the fruits of a critical study of Scripture be sought.

The historical-critical method, whether it is acknowledged or not, has provided positive benefits to American Evangelicalism by improving the understanding of the world from which the Bible came, the writing processes and literary devices prevalent in that world, and by opening new vistas of understanding about the composition of the biblical materials. The need for constructing a doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture must respond to, among others, the criteria of determining the nature and purposes of God so that they can be seen as the standard for determining truth and error. The fruit of the approach of the historical-critical method, which can serve to assist in the interpretation of the Bible, can be a valuable asset in this quest.

Bavinck, in an effort to highlight the value of the critical approach to the Scripture, noted its great value in illuminating the process by which the biblical books were written and the circumstances which accompanied their writing. He observed that "on the long run such knowledge can only benefit the interpretation of the Word of God. We learn from it that the inspiration of the Spirit of God entered deeply into the life and thought of the holy men of God" (1956, 103). The call is very clear; instead of fearing the critical approach to Scripture, the doctrine of Scripture, and that of inerrancy, should seek for ways in which to employ it in the on-going study of the Bible. Such an opening to critical study will allow the texts of the Bible to speak even more clearly, revealing what kind of witness to His revelation God has provided.

The benefits of the historical-critical method are best achieved when the discipline is carried out within the framework of faith. Failure to allow faith to serve as the condition within which the discipline is carried on can lead to the destructive results

which are so feared by some in Evangelicalism. Without the maintenance of concern for a faith-perspective toward the Bible, the historical-critical method can treat the Scripture merely as a human book, to be analyzed as any other book would be. While the Bible is a human book, it is not merely a human book. There is a human-divine authorship to the Bible which gives to it a human-divine character. This, which may well be called a faith-perspective, is important to maintain and serves as the parameters within which historical-critical theology can function best to serve the Church.

If the Bible is to be allowed to speak for itself, as has been claimed, historical-critical exegesis can assist in hearing what the Bible has to say. The phenomena of the biblical texts must be accepted for what they are and the historical-critical method can aid the interpreter in coming to understandings about those phenomena. The doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible has direct relationship to the concepts of truth and its opposite, concepts which must be considered in light of the nature and purpose of God. Historical-critical exegesis, with its tools and techniques for analyzing the biblical material, can be of great value in the task of discerning the nature and purpose of God from the record of His revelation.

The historical-critical method is not to be feared, it is to be respected and used. Historical-critical exegesis is not to be rejected, it is to be adapted and valued as a means toward the end of understanding more completely God and His revelation. The historical-critical method is not to be allowed to run rampant over the record of God's revelation, it is to be brought under the perspective of faith. The results of historical-critical theology can be, and should be, of great value in the constructing of a doctrine of inerrancy. The third pillar for Grenz in the construction of theology, as noted above, is the contemporary

context of the recipient of the kerygma. This entails not only speaking in a manner that will be understood, but also taking "into consideration the discoveries and insights of the various disciplines of human learning and seeking to show the relevance of Christian faith for the quest for truth" (1993, 97).

5.2.4 The Role of Faith in the Doctrine of Scripture

Faith is an indispensable element in Christianity. The writer of Hebrews 11:6 asserted that "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (NASB). The necessity is laid upon humans to have trust in, to believe, to have faith in the existence of God and His faithfulness to His self-revelation. This assurance and conviction, based on the revelatory activities of God and not on that which the human rationality can contrive, forms the basis for the relationship with God in all of its expressions among humans.

Kuyper asserted that faith is necessary for apprehending the knowledge of God in Scripture.

> What God Himself does not bear witness to in your soul personally (not mystic-absolutely, but through the Scriptures) can never be known and confessed by you as Divine. Finite reasoning can never obtain the infinite as its result. If God then withdraws Himself, if in the soul of men He bear no more witness to the truth of His Word, men can no longer believe, and no apologetics, however brilliant, will ever be able to restore the blessing of faith in the Scripture. Faith, quickened by God Himself, is invincible; pseudo-faith, which rests merely upon reasoning, is devoid of all spiritual reality, so that it bursts like a soap-bubble as soon as the thread of your reasoning breaks. (1968. 366)

Such faith in the Scripture is quickened by God and, Kuyper noted, faith in God is quickened by Scripture. To depend upon any other assurance is insufficient. To depend on reasoning is to assert that either each person must reason to a sense of assurance, or

that a few will reason to that assurance for everyone else. Both options are equally impossible because, among other reasons, the objections will continue to come to all forms of reasoned assurances. Kuyper asserted that "faith gives highest assurance, where in our own consciousness it rests immediately on the testimony of God; but without this support everything that announces itself as faith is merely a weaker form of opinion based on probability, which capitulates the moment a surer knowledge supercedes your defective evidence" (1968, 366-368).

Barth argued that when one states a belief that the Bible is the Word of God that is precisely what the statement is, a statement of belief. Believing is "a clear hearing, apperceiving, thinking and then speaking and doing." It is a free act "conditioned and determined by an encounter, a challenge, an act of lordship which confronts man, which man cannot bring about himself, which exists either as an event or not at all." Thus, "belief that the Bible is the Word of God presupposes, therefore, that this overmastering has already taken place, that the Bible has already proved itself to be the Word of God, so that we can and must recognize it to be such" (1975, I.2:506).

It is important to emphasize that faith is necessary in the construction of the doctrine of inerrancy. However, Barth's reminder must be heard: "The Bible is God's Word to the extent that God causes it to be His Word, to the extent that He speaks through it" (1975, I.1:109). Human faith, important for hearing and receiving the Word of God, does not make the Bible His Word. "It does not become God's Word because we accord it faith but in the fact that it becomes revelation to us. But the fact that it becomes revelation to us beyond all our faith, that it is God's Word even in spite of our lack of faith, is something we can accept and confess as true to us and for us only in faith, in faith

as opposed to unbelief, in the faith in which we look away from our faith and unbelief to the act of God, but in faith and not unbelief, and therefore precisely not in abstraction from the act of God in virtue of which the Bible must become again and again His Word to us" (Barth 1975, I.1:110).

Rogers and McKim argued that for Calvin faith was necessary to accept the authority of Scripture (1979, 105). Faith, for Calvin, rested on the knowledge of God and His divine will which is perceived from His Word (Calvin 1960, III.ii.2, 6). "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Calvin 1960, III.ii.7). Rogers and McKim concluded that "faith was more than just an intellectual capacity, or a feeling capacity, for Calvin. It was a consent, a commitment of the whole person to a relationship of trust with a God who had proved Himself gracious in the person of Jesus Christ" (1979, 105-106). This faith, based on the knowledge of God, makes the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God possible.

Fideism, with its appeal to the acceptance of God and His revelation by faith, is important in approaching the Scripture. However, an extreme fideism which denies the value of and need for reasoning is not what is being suggested. There is a place for making use of the rationality which marks humans as humans. The critical faculties of the mind which are capable of synthesizing, critiquing, understanding, and analyzing are equally indispensable in the constructing of any doctrinal statement, including that of the inerrancy of Scripture. What is being called for is the allowance of faith to precede reasoning and to provide the parameters within which reason functions. The approach

being suggested is that of allowing faith to lead to understanding, a view which has a long

tradition in the Church. The relationship between faith and reason is more circular than

linear; faith leads to understanding, and understanding leads to faith.

Another way in which to consider the necessity of faith in the development of the

doctrine of inerrancy is to rephrase the concern in the form of a question: why does one

believe that the Bible is inspired of God? If the answer to the question is that its inerrancy

proves that it is inspired of God, the starting point is not faith but some form of

reasoning. That is, a rational process of determining that the texts contain no errors led to

a faith statement. On the other hand, the question can be answered by accepting that the

Bible is the Word of God because it claims to be, because the Holy Spirit has witnessed

to it in the consciousness of the believing community and through that community to the

individual, and then applying rationality in the process of understanding that faith

statement. This would be in keeping with allowing the perspective of faith to precede and

lead to that of reasoning.

Berkouwer noted that orthodoxy has deduced scriptural authority from criteria

related to a trustworthy transmission of revelation which are suitable to that position. A

rationally developed view of the infallibility, or inerrancy, of Scripture becomes the

foundation for such a view. From this approach Berkouwer demurred, arguing that "the

way of Christian faith is not one of a possibility becoming more clear on its way to the

reality of certainty, but a subjection to the gospel, to the Christ of the Scriptures; and

from this alone can a reflection on Holy Scripture proceed" (1975, 30-33). Lest it be

assumed that the faith being called for is a mere mental abstraction, Berkouwer clearly

asserted that the manner in which the commitment to faith in Scripture is known is by the

response of the individual to its testimony (1975, 35). Mere profession of faith in the Scriptures is not adequate; living response to their message and claims indicates the reality of the faith expressed in the Bible.

Faith accepts the manner in which God has revealed Himself through the texts of the Scripture without demanding that those texts prove themselves by their conformity to a rationally constructed external standard. The necessity to resolve every apparent, and real, difficulty in the text of the Bible before believing that it is the authoritative Word of God is to begin at the point of rationality. It is to require that the Bible conform to human rationality, to human expectations of perfection, before it can be accepted. The better perspective, that of faith, believes, based upon the revelatory activities of God, that the Bible is the Word of God. From this belief statement movement proceeds in the direction of understanding, whether that understanding ever is fully realized or not.

One major aspect of the biblical message is the call of individuals to express faith in the revelation of God which provides the path of reconciliation for humans. Faith is depicted as the means by which persons may know the revealed God and may live in accord with His expectations. In that faith has primary status in the creation and maintenance of the community faith should also be the perspective with which one approaches the doctrine of Scripture in general, and the doctrine of inerrancy in particular. The proposed doctrine of inerrancy includes the necessary element of faith, believing that God has revealed Himself and ordained an authoritative record of that revelation, one which is inerrant in relation to His nature and purposes.

5.2.5 The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Doctrine of Scripture

The claim that faith is an important part of the criteria for constructing a doctrine of inerrancy must be linked to this fifth "main issue" which calls for the recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in creating and sustaining the Bible and the faith to accept the Bible as God's Word. What is being called for is more than the human effort to believe or trust out of the determined commitment to the principle of God having revealed Himself; it is a call for the acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit's ministry within the church to bring this faith to fruition. Without the recognition of this vital aspect, the doctrine of inerrancy becomes a moribund confession maintained only by the determination to defend rationally that which is difficult to defend by the exclusive appeal to the empirical evidence. The role of the Holy Spirit in the doctrine of Scripture can be seen in three specific areas: in the inspiring of the writing of the Scripture, in the protection of the Scriptures in the process of transmission, and in the convincing of their authoritative status and assisting in their being understood by the contemporary reader. More attention will be given to the third of these functions of the Holy Spirit in this study.

The Holy Spirit was at work in the inspiring of the writing of the texts of the Bible. The Scriptures themselves claim to be inspired by God and written by humans moved upon by the Holy Spirit. Among the many descriptors which are used to speak of this work of the Holy Spirit is the term confluence. This term describes a work of the Holy Spirit through the human authors which gives full recognition of their humanness and yet allows for the product to be adequate to the purposes of God for recording His revelation accurately. Complete Inerrancy prefers to talk about the superintendence of God the Holy Spirit over the writing process, a word picture which seems to depict the

human authors as being used almost in a coercive way.

The apostolic word in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 asserts that the Scriptures are the product of the breathing of God, the moving of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit the writings of those humans became at the same time both their words and the Word of God. The pervasive activity of the Spirit was so gentle that the humanity of the authors was not violated and yet so powerful that the revelation of God is seen in their writings with complete faithfulness to that which God desired to have revealed. The human authors, as persons in relationship with God, were enabled by the Holy Spirit to participate in the purpose of God in making known His plan for the redemption of the world. The prophetic Spirit worked with and through the human authors' thoughts and words to the result that the Word of God was heard.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Scripture, though indispensable in causing the words of human authors to be the words of God, was more varied than merely being seen on one author for each biblical book. It is altogether possible that at least some of the biblical materials came into being through a process in which more than one author worked on the text, and perhaps they did so over a long period of time. Such a possibility makes the assignment of the designation autograph for a particular text more difficult. The inspiring work of the Holy Spirit, through whatever means, must be seen throughout the entire process, insuring that the message is the Word of God.

The process of the canonization and transmission of the Bible must also be seen as having been under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The strong assertion in Complete Inerrancy that the autographs were absolutely inerrant but that the copying process was

fraught with multiple errors suggests that God was not concerned for the transmission of the Scriptures through the centuries. That must be corrected with the affirmation that the same work of divinity which inspired the human authors to write also worked throughout the copying processes to preserve the Scriptures in accord with the nature and purposes of God.

The community of faith, the church, created by the message of the Old Testament and of Jesus Christ which later became the Bible, was guided by the Holy Spirit to recognize the books which faithfully communicated that message and were to be called sacred. The direction of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged in the work of the community of faith as it accepted most of the books which were considered sacred quickly and without major dissent, while the others were accepted more slowly and those to be rejected were gradually excluded from the life and usage of the church. Thus, they arrived at the limitation of the canon to those books which the church recognized to be worthy of acceptance (See Bruce 1950; Bruce 1988). The process of copying the texts did not degenerate into complete unreliability, not only because of the dedication of the copyists but also because of the quickening of the Holy Spirit upon their task. The same active God, through the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writing of the materials worked throughout the writing, transmission, and recognition processes to ensure that the revelation was not corrupted.

That the Holy Spirit is also at work today in confirming the Bible as the authoritative Word of God finds support from a number of theologians spread across the three-fold spectrum which has been identified in American Evangelicalism. John Calvin, who is cited by representatives of all three of the views, clearly argued that the testimony

of the Holy Spirit was necessary to convince one that the Bible is the Word of God.

Calvin was adamant in affirming that individuals "who strive to build up firm faith in

Scripture through disputation are doing things backwards" (1960, I.vii.4). He asserted

without equivocation that "the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason.

For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find

acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The

same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate

into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely

commanded" (1960, I.vii.4). The work of the Holy Spirit is to penetrate the human heart,

persuading the believer that the biblical writers have faithfully and correctly proclaimed

what God wanted dispensed through their writings.

Calvin understood that the Holy Spirit, in a manner which is mysterious and not

always obvious to the investigations of humans, moves within the believer to seal both

the truth that God has revealed Himself and that He has allowed a trustworthy record of

His revelation to be written by human authors. The majesty of the biblical materials is

obvious, but the work of the Holy Spirit is essential to create acceptance of them as the

Word of God. Calvin summarized his call for allowing the Holy Spirit to be the point of

proof for the authenticity and authority of the Bible by saying

> let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught
> truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticating; hence, it
> is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with
> us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. For even if it wins reverence for itself
> by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts
> through the Spirit. Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our
> own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human
> judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the
> majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by

the ministry of men. (Calvin 1960, I.vii.5)

For Calvin the Word and the Spirit must be kept inseparable. He declared that "by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit, so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word" (1960, I.ix.3). Calvin uses the analogy of the blind person who is unable to perceive the sun's light to describe humans who, without the work of the Holy Spirit, is unable to perceive the Word of God in the Bible (1960, III.ii.34).

Calvin asserted that Scriptures "obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard" (1960, I.vii.1). But such faith statements can neither be coerced by the church nor made dependent upon the good pleasure of humans. Rational proofs cannot precede faith. The "highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it" and the place to seek such confirmation is "in the secret testimony of the Spirit" because "the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason" (Calvin 1960, I.vii.4). External arguments for the Scriptures being the Word of God follow, as Calvin presented it, after the faith commitment is created by the work of the Holy Spirit (1960, I.viii.3).

Rogers and McKim noted that for Calvin the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit persuaded people to believe that God was the author of Scripture. Scripture was self-authenticated and should not be subjected to proofs and reasoning. They suggested that for Calvin argumentation about the Scripture could follow, but was not antecedent to, the

faith in Scripture which the Spirit created in the individual (1979, 104-105). "When Calvin spoke of the internal witness of the Spirit, he meant that the Spirit implanted in people's hearts a trust in Christ and at the same time a confidence in the Word through which they had encountered their Savior" (Rogers 1979, 182).

All three of the positions on the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible within American Evangelicalism make some reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture. The appeal in them, however, is not as definite as it is in Calvin for allowing the Holy Spirit to convince persons of the reality that the Bible is God's Word. Complete Inerrancy elevates the proof of inerrancy as that which convinces of the Scripture's authenticity, and both Conditional and Limited Inerrancy mention the necessity of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the doctrine of inerrancy. The work of the Holy Spirit in the creation of faith in the Scriptures in humans is a vital aspect of the understanding of the doctrine of inspiration.

The recognition of the vital role of the Holy Spirit in the confirmation of the Scripture made in Calvin is of great importance in the reconstruction of the doctrine of inspiration. Without the testimony of the Spirit the focus turns to the rational and empirical verification of the Bible, which is inadequate to convince of their authority.

However, the understanding of the Spirit's role, as expressed by Calvin, is individualistic and misses the value of seeing the work of the Spirit upon and through the community of faith, the church. Above it was noted that Calvin asserted that the Spirit penetrated "our hearts to persuade us, " "that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture," "that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds," and that the highest proof of Scripture is "in the secret testimony of the Spirit." It

is understandable in light of the conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, with its emphasis upon the authoritative status of the Church, that Calvin would de-emphasize the role of the Spirit through the church in favor of His role upon the individual. However understandable it is, the restriction of seeing the work of the Spirit to that upon the individual fails to take seriously enough the work of the Spirit in convincing the individual in and through the church.

Berkouwer noted the danger of separating the work of the Holy Spirit from Scripture, of making Scripture apart from its message the object of the Spirit's testimony. The Spirit's testimony must be related to salvation. Berkouwer clarified his position by stating that "the powerful operation of the testimony of the Spirit centers in the salvation that has appeared in Christ" (1975, 45, 49). This does not establish a dualism which separates the authoritative Scripture from the message it brings; rather it affirms that the message of salvation is heard precisely in the witness of Scripture. Borrowing a phrase from Bavinck, Berkouwer concluded that "we believe Scripture not because of but through the Spirit's testimony" (Berkouwer 1975, 52). Bavinck saw the role of the Holy Spirit extending beyond the inspiring of Scripture. He suggested that the Spirit enables believers to confess that the Word of God is truth (Bavinck 1956, 119). This is one of the real strengths of Christianity, that the Spirit gives certainty beyond that attainable through rational proofs. "The mystery of Scripture comes to us in its fullness, not of human views or authority, but with the empowering of the Spirit" (Berkouwer 1975, 164).

Consideration of the work of the Spirit in the acceptance of Scripture as the Word of God must continue to avoid the danger of creating a dualism in which the Word and the Spirit become separated. Hendrikus Berkhof called for seeing a mutual relation of

Word and Spirit (1979, 58). The authority of Scripture, he noted, has to do with an encounter; "the witness of our spirit follows upon and joins the witness of the Spirit." This encounter with God takes place in the Scripture because "nowhere else but in Scripture does the word of the primary witness to revelation come to us" (1979, 87). Similarly, Berkouwer noted that "a true confession of the Holy Spirit is possible only when one has yielded himself to the testimony of Scripture" (1975, 102). The concepts of the inspiration and authority of the Bible are not rationally and empirically verifiable, but they become real to the individual as the Spirit and Word witness to the revelation of God through the biblical words to the heart of the believing individual.

Kuyper argued that the witness of the Holy Spirit goes directly from "the Holy Spirit, as author of the Scripture, to our personal ego" (1968, 556-557). Kuyper referred to this work as a spiritual work, one which is neither predictable nor capable of being learned. The centrality of the Scripture as the *principium*, cannot rest, Kuyper asserted, "upon anything save the witness of the Holy Spirit" (1968, 387). The work of the Spirit, which effects salvation in the sinner, begins with binding the person "simply to the Scripture" (Kuyper 1968, 560-561). The work of the Spirit is vital to the acceptance of the biblical materials as the Word of God and, as a result, the salvation of the individual. This powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit is observable in the Christian community as individuals, influenced by His work in and through the community, express their commitment to the biblical message as the Word of God.

The Scriptures, because of the work of the Holy Spirit both in their inspiration and acceptance as the Word of God, have a self-authenticating force. Orr called this an "undeniable, self-attesting spiritual quality" (1969, 201). This quality of Scripture really

proves the inspiration of Scripture, to which the witness of the Spirit provides the

assurance. Whereas some, as has been noted, rest the entire weight of the certainty of the

inspiration and authority of Scripture on the assurance of the Spirit, Orr, appealing to the

Westminister Confession, broadens the base of support for Scripture to include the

testimony of the church and the character of the Scriptures themselves. Orr quotes with

approval from chapter one of the Westminister Confession:

> We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and
> reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the
> efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the
> scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes
> of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellences and
> the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence
> itself to be the word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and
> assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward
> work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts. (Orr
> 1969, 201)

Grenz, too, asserted the close relationship between the Holy Spirit and the

Scriptures based on the understanding that the Spirit is involved in the creation and

sustenance of the new life and that the Scriptures are instrumental in that (1993, 113).

This close relationship is also affirmed by Bernard Ramm, who noted that "the source of

our knowledge of divine truth . . . consists in an external principle – inspired Scripture –

combined with an internal principle – the witness of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are

the vehicle or instrumentality of the Holy Spirit through which he chooses to speak to the

people of God" (1959, 28). Arguing that the Spirit's roles in inspiration and illumination

are intertwined, Grenz asserted that the doctrine of Scripture should be treated in

systematic theology along with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (1993, 115). This is the

organizational structure of Grenz' Theology for the Community of God (1994). Grenz

asserted that the completion of the program of God in the world is the mission of the Spirit, that the Scriptures are an aspect of that program, and that the Bible is ultimately the Spirit's book through which He bears witness to Jesus, guides believers, and exercises authority in the church (1994, 495).

Calvin limited the work of the Spirit in the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God to the individual and emphasized the mysterious character of this work. This approach has been followed in Protestantism. What has been missed is the vital role the community plays in the work of the Spirit in convincing the individual. From the founding of the nation of Israel God made it very clear that He desired to work through a community which responded to His call and became His instruments (Genesis 12:1-3). Members of that faith entity were dealt with by God through the community as it responded to Him. Because of God's establishment of them as a faith community, they became instruments through whom He made Himself known to other people. Jesus, the fulfiller of the Old Testament, also created a community, the church, gathered through expression of faith in His gospel (Matthew 16:13-19). Paul further emphasized the importance of the church, using several analogies such as the body, a building, and the people of God (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 2:11-22). The church is more than a sociological accident of history; it is the express will of God through which He works.

The role of the Holy Spirit as a vital aspect of the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy must be seen in its ministry within and through the church and not upon the individual alone. While the message of the Bible is not from the initiative of the church, it can be correctly noted that the Bible is the church's book. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the church recognized the canonical books, and through the ministry of the same

Spirit the church affirms that the Bible is authoritative for it's life and practice. Individuals are confronted by the Spirit in the ministries of the church and in the fellowship of other believers, and moved to identify with the faith of the community, including its reverence for the Bible. In the proclamation and worship of the believing community persons are led to become believers. The mysterious and invisible working of the Holy Spirit becomes very visible and observable as the faith of the church is shared through the church gathered, and dispersed, for service to the Lord of the church. Believers are matured in their faith as they experience communion with fellow believers in the church. The faith in the Scriptures engendered by the Spirit within the community of faith, the church, is communicated by the same Spirit to the individuals through the witness of the congregation.

The church does become an authoritative agent of the expression of theology, not so much because it is an institution, but because it is created by the work of the Holy Spirit and is the arena in which, and through which, He works. The promise of Jesus to His followers before His passion was that the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send, would guide them into all the truth, bringing to their memories His words (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Working among them as a group of believers, the Holy Spirit would assist them in knowing what to believe and how to carry out their mission. That promise, and it's fulfillment, is the hope for the proper understanding of the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy.

The call for acknowledging the role of the Holy Spirit in the acceptance of the inspired and authoritative status of the Bible is a call for seeing that powerful work within the church, among the community of the faithful. Here the Spirit draws persons to faith

and matures them in that faith. Here the Bible is accepted as the Word of God, that which is reflective of the dependable and trustworthy God, who's revelation it is.

Crucial to the constructing of a doctrine of inerrancy, as has been observed, is a proper understanding of the biblical materials so that the nature and purposes of God can be understood. It has been emphasized that the usage of the best interpretive tools and techniques must be employed in the task of understanding the Bible. Lest that emphasis is interpreted to mean that the understanding of the Bible is a purely rational process, it must be noted that the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the texts and guided the process of recognition and transmission, also provides guidance and assistance in the understanding of the texts. This work of the Spirit must not, either, be seen merely in individualistic terms; the Holy Spirit guides the community of faith in its interpretation and application of the biblical materials to life and practice.

The faith which is a part of this proposed doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is created and maintained within the believing community by the work of the Holy Spirit, a work which must be acknowledged and anticipated. The Holy Spirit works within the believing community to bring them to the faith which accepts the Bible as the Word of God.

The doctrine of inerrancy is founded on the appeal to the work of the Holy Spirit to authenticate the Bible. That starting point is to be maintained, and in so doing the authority of the Scripture is asserted and the highest possible view of the Bible is assured. The same Holy Spirit operative in the process of inspiring Scripture bears witness of its inerrancy through the church to the believer. From that point onwards reason can work, in dependence on the Spirit's guidance, to struggle with the phenomena of the materials and

to hear there the message of God and His call to relationship with Himself.

5.2.6 The Purpose for Scripture As A Determinant of the Doctrine of Scripture

The term inerrant should be retained as a descriptor of the character of the inspired Scripture, but the focus of the claim is moved from the details of the texts to their intent relative to the purpose and plan of God. Inerrancy is being asserted for the Bible in that it is the faithful, trustworthy, and indefectible expression of the purpose of God to make Himself and His plan for redemption known. The entirety of the biblical materials serve this purpose of God.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 the apostle Paul sets forth the profitability of the inspired Scripture in terms which indicate the purpose and plan of God: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (NASB). Ridderbos, commenting on this passage, noted that the purpose of Scripture is to provide instruction for salvation and that "only by the light of such faith is the treasure of wisdom and knowledge of the Scriptures unlocked" (1978, 22). This purpose of Scripture is determinative for the doctrine of Scripture, for, as Ridderbos observed, "God speaks to us through the Scriptures not in order to make us scholars, but to make us Christians" (1978, 23). The intent of Scripture, the purpose and plan of God, is that humans be called into relationship with Himself and prepared for service in His kingdom. Inerrancy, then, affirms that Scripture is faithful, trustworthy, and will not deceive in relation to the accomplishment of this purpose of God.

In addition to the 2 Timothy 3:16-17 passage, the purpose of God in Scripture is

also set forth in Psalms 19:7-9; Luke 24:25-27, 44; John 6:63; 20:30-31; Acts 3:21-24;

10:43; 28:23-25; Romans 4:23-24; 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; 1 Timothy 1:18-19; and

Hebrews 3:7-4:12. These Scriptures affirm that the purpose of the revelatory activities of

God, including its inscripturation, was for the redemption of the fallen creation. Grenz, in

agreement, argued that "when taken as a whole the Bible intends to narrate the story of

the coming of the Messiah so that lost, sinful humans might have life through him"

(1994, 523). Berkouwer preferred to describe the purpose of Scripture with the term

scopus, a term which "indicates that the words are related to and tend toward a definite

goal," which, he asserted, was the knowledge of God unto salvation (1975, 184). With a

quotation from Bavinck, Berkouwer noted that "Scripture does not tell us what things are

like in heaven but rather how we get there" (1975, 125). The authority of the Scripture is

confessed against the background of it authoritative function in bringing humans to

salvation.

Orr also saw the purpose of Scripture in terms of the provision of salvation. He

argued that the Scripture is an "infallible guide in the great matters for which it was given

– the knowledge of the will of God for their salvation in Christ Jesus, instruction in the

way of holiness, and the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before

times eternal" (1969, 217). The real proof of the authoritative status of the Bible is to be

found in the life-giving effects of its message, and this ties back to the witness of the

Holy Spirit and the faith which that witness engenders.

The soteriological function of Scripture is further testified to by Barr, who argued

that "Scripture is fundamental to the church of God, not because it is a book of true facts

about God and about past events, but because it is built into the way in which salvation

itself was achieved" (1980, 53-54). The basis for asserting the authority of Scripture, as Barr understood it, is its function in creating a faith relation between God and humans. Barr pushed the conclusion further than most American Evangelicals would be willing to go by noting that in the 2 Timothy 3:16-17 passage "there is no word of its historical accuracy, no word of its being the foundation of faith, no word of its being the central criterion for truth withing Christianity" (1980, 119). Rather, the focus of Scripture is practical; Scripture is profitable for salvation.

This approach does not divide the Scripture into two parts, that which serves the intent of God to announce His redemptive plans and draw humans into that plan, and that which does not serve God's intent. This would require that decisions be made as to which parts of the Bible served God's salvific intent and which did not, decisions which would have to be made on the basis of external criteria brought to bear through human rationality. Berkouwer noted that the division into divine and human parts of Scripture tends to emphasize the divine over the human, which he called a misunderstanding of the God-breathed character of the Bible (1975, 358). Barth also asserted that the division between that which is human and that which is divine cannot be done because "always in the Bible . . . we shall meet both" (1975, I.2:531). What is being suggested is that the entirety of the biblical material serves the purpose and plan of God, albeit some parts do so more overtly and obviously than others. Care must be taken to discern the contribution every section of the Scripture makes to the desire of the redeemer God to receive humans into relationship with Himself.

One way to emphasize the unitary nature of Scripture in its accomplishment of the purpose for which it was given is to follow the suggestion of Grenz and place emphasis

on the faith of the reader of Scripture. This would accept a pietistic approach which suggests that Scriptures are given to provide life and the sustenance of that life, and that they are understood correctly only by those who respond in faith to their claims (1993, 111). This approach would acknowledge that the ultimate goal of the Bible is the spiritual formation of the reader, and that all of the aspects of the biblical material serve, in faith, that intent. Grenz contended that this approach is the emphasis of the biblical documents themselves. "The writers repeatedly bear witness that the primary, central purpose of Scripture is to foster in us a relationship with God – that is, to advance the reign of God, which is the establishment of the redeemed community" (1993, 113).

The phrase "the Scripture is the authoritative rule for faith and practice" is used frequently and it describes well the focus of the doctrine of inerrancy. Inerrancy has to do with the establishment by the Bible of the rule for faith and practice, the rule for learning of the ways of God and of His desires for human conduct. Again, the entirety of the Bible contributes to providing the rule for faith and practice, some parts more obviously than others. The entirety of the Bible can be trusted to never deceive one as to what God has done to provide salvation for humans and what He intends humans to do in response to His initiative.

5.3 Conclusion

The debate within American Evangelicalism about the inerrancy of the Bible has waxed and waned over the years. That debate has been summarized in the positions of three approaches to the issue: Complete Inerrancy, Conditional Inerrancy, and Limited Inerrancy. On a continuum the three views range from most rigid in supporting absolute

and entire inerrancy to least rigid in calling for replacement of the term inerrancy. In the middle of the spectrum Conditional Inerrancy argues for the maintenance of the term inerrancy, but redefines the terms truth and error and focuses the claims for inerrancy on the nature and purposes of God.

The doctrine of inerrancy should be a part of the larger doctrine of Scripture, but its expression should be tempered by a better understanding of the concepts of truth and its opposite and be focused on the nature and purposes of God. The difficulties in the biblical materials should be recognized, resolved where possible, and simply admitted when the resolution either would be too forced or is not possible at all. Those difficulties do not detract from the purposes of God, whether those purposes are clearly recognizable or not, and must not be dismissed easily or quickly. The activity of the Holy Spirit within and through the church in authenticating and affirming the nature of the biblical materials creates faith within the persons in the community that the Bible is the Word of God, that it authoritatively and accurately reflects the revelatory activity of the redeemer God. The importance of the faith approach, which is possible only because of the working of the Holy Spirit, cannot be stressed too much. Because of His activity it can be maintained that the Bible is inerrant in all of that which it affirms.

Though the term inerrant has serious liabilities to its continued use in relation to the Bible it still has value in affirming the authoritative status of the God-breathed Scripture. The term is most often linked with the view of Complete Inerrancy, a linkage which brings with it the problems associated with claiming that every aspect, theological as well as historical and geographical, of the Bible is without error. The term also refers to an attribute of Scripture which is not claimed explicitly in the biblical materials

themselves. The call for replacing the term with another which would be more acceptable is made with good reason, but finding a replacement term which equally and strongly asserts the high value of the Bible is difficult. The term inerrancy, as expressed in this study, best supports a view of the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God.

The call for maintaining the term inerrancy as a descriptor for the Bible is made with the understanding of the multiple difficulties which accompany the usage of the word. The term links to a literal and factual correctness which the phenomena of the biblical texts do not support. The difficulties of the textual materials have been alluded to at several points during this study and they cannot merely be overlooked. The strict and unyielding demand for accuracy measured by that which can be empirically verified is problematic. The concept of inerrancy, as is usually held in American Evangelicalism, is not to be found in the history of the church. The clear call of the tradition is to the authority and absolute trustworthiness of the biblical materials, not to their being without error in all that they contain.

The debate about the inerrancy of the Bible is, for the most part, a uniquely American Evangelical phenomenon. For the larger body of Christendom the issue of the inerrancy of the Scripture does not receive very much attention. In the larger church the Bible is held in great esteem, its authority and inspiration affirmed; but, the concern for arguing about its inerrant status is reserved mostly for American Evangelicalism. With this in mind, the term inerrant is almost lacking from the vocabulary of the larger church.

The term inerrant tends to detract from the centrality of faith, focusing instead on that which can be rationally verified. Such an approach sets up inerrancy above the necessity of a faith commitment to the revelation of God as that which allows one to

know the presence and person of God. The biblical message gets lost in the concern for technical accuracy. The continuing call for the use of the term inerrant as an affirmation about the status of the Bible in the church is not without problems.

Such a call in this study links to the solid tradition in the church which has defended, and defends, the authoritative status of the Bible over against all distracting assertions which encroach on the place of primacy for the Bible in the life of faith. The competing demands for allegiance which face the church regularly from society and scholarship alike need the continued rebuttal of the Reformation credo *sola Scriptura*, and the term inerrant is used here to summarize that claim for biblical supremacy in the faith and practice of the church. In the community of faith the Bible must be seen as the final authority because it is the revelation of God. Any diminishment of viewing the Scriptures in this light must be rejected. The use of the term inerrant is meant to support such a view of the powerful and positive role of the Bible in the church.

While the doctrine of Scripture is not an essential doctrine of the church, Scripture is essential to the life of the church and to all of its doctrinal expressions. The church has acknowledged, through the process of canonization, that the revelation of God recorded in the Bible is that upon which it will base its very existence. The Scripture is not viewed as one premise among others upon which the church stands; it is the premise. The term inerrant is being used to emphasize this primary and indispensable role for the Bible in the life of the Christian community. The church is the church because of its commitment to Christ, the revelation of God, and it has accepted the biblical materials as that through which that revelation is most clearly seen and experienced.

As defined by the writers of the biblical materials themselves, the concept of truth

and its opposite can best be expressed by the term inerrant. Moving away from demanding correspondence with reality as known in the modern scientific world and toward seeing truth as faithfulness and trustworthiness allows for the better understanding of the term inerrant to be seen. In this way the term inerrant does accurately express the faith commitment of the church to the Bible. It is completely faithful and trustworthy to the purpose for which God inspired human authors to write. It does not deceive or mislead in any way, rather it fulfills the purpose of revealing the plan of God for redemption and life in the community of faith.

Instead of leading to pride and assertions of perfection, usage of the term inerrant leads to a humility which approaches the Scriptures to learn what God says about how human beings need to live in order to please Him. The Scripture is the servant of revelation and of the work of the Spirit in bringing that revelation to bear on the readers. The Spirit-energized message takes priority, so when inerrancy is affirmed "we are confessing our faith in the Spirit who speaks his revelatory message to us through the pages of Scripture. In declaring its infallibility and inerrancy, we are actually affirming the trustworthiness of the Spirit whose vehicle the Bible is" (Grenz 1994, 524).

While there are numerous problems with the term, inerrant says something positive about the nature of the Bible, especially in American Evangelicalism where the term has become so important that any replacement is viewed as diminishing the doctrine of Scripture. It has the value of affirming that the Bible is reliable, that it does not deceive, and that it does accomplish the purpose and plan of God. The commitment to the value of Scripture is best maintained by using this strong word, inerrant, to call attention to the authoritative status of the Bible.

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